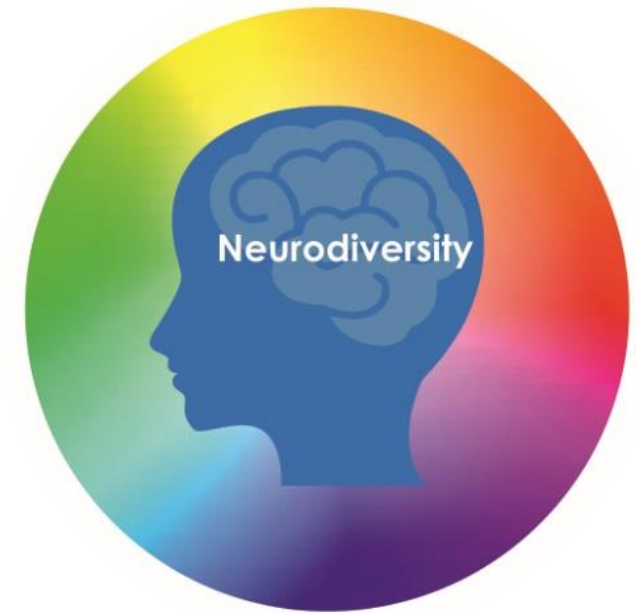


Supporting Autistic Learners: Upper Primary & Secondary School Audit Tool

Autism is.....

A lifelong neurodevelopmental difference of communication, socialisation and flexibility in thinking and behaviour, which involves a different way of processing information and seeing the world.



What is the secondary school audit tool?

It is a list arranged into different categories. It includes the aspects of school life that autistic learners find difficult.

This 'audit' means to carry out a systematic consideration of. This 'tool' means a way to help to be systematic in thinking about the current practises and arrangements and identify ways to improve.

Why use the secondary school audit tool?

Individuals with Additional Support Needs, including autistic learners are entitled to have reasonable adjustments made to reduce as many barriers to learning and wellbeing as possible. Barriers will differ depending on the individual. Many of the adaptations made will benefit a whole range of learners. With the right support, autistic learners can access the curriculum well and make good progress in all their skills. This can be used to think generally about the shared needs that autistic learners will have within a secondary school. It can also be used to think about individual autistic learners to develop a more detailed profile of supports for them.

Who should use the secondary school audit tool?

It can be used by any member of staff. It might be used by an individual member of staff to consider a particular classroom or area of the school. It is best if a number of staff are involved in using the tool to look at various classrooms and areas of the school (eg. to make particular consideration of a department or look at the multiple areas of school that an individual autistic learners or group of learners will access). Where possible, used as a whole staff, this can work towards having a highly inclusive autism friendly school building and community).

When to use the secondary school audit tool?

It can be used at any-time. There are autistic learners in all our schools. It is best to use the tool periodically (eg. annually) or if many changes are being implemented to use it as a way to review those changes. Where possible it should be used pro-actively to prepare for autistic learners (eg. starting attending the school, changing year group, accessing different classrooms/areas of school from previously).

Staff who undertake the Level 1 (introductory training) available from Falkirk Educational Psychology Service and NHS Forth Valley Speech and Language Therapy Service will be made aware of the tool. Staff who have engaged in training to raise their knowledge about autistic learners will be prepared to understand the contents of the tool.

How to use the secondary school audit tool:

The different categories in the audit tool mean that you can consider them all at once or select a few at a time to consider.

Read each statement in the section. Make an **honest judgement** about whether **current practises/arrangements** are:

● (poor/not in place) ● (inconsistent/could be improved) ● (positive/needs maintained)

The **notes column** can be used to record:

- any evidence for your judgement that will help in making improvements
- any specific considerations for the department or area of the school that may not have as much relevance in other departments or areas of the school
- ideas for making improvements
- any purchases that may be required to make improvements

It is best if you can **reflect and discuss your judgements** with a small group of colleagues. This helps to:

- identify if there are differences of opinion
- share ideas or resources that may be available in different departments/areas of the school

It is best if you can **share** your audit tool response with the **senior management team**. This will help to:

- identify consistencies or inconsistencies of need across the school
- prioritise areas of action
- make decisions about purchasing resources or additional assistance to make improvements

The **electronic version** of this Secondary School Audit Tool is available (INSERT LINK).

This audit tool has been produced with reference to the following sources:

Scottish Government/Education Scotland/National Autism Implementation Team (2019). Autism Toolbox web resource: www.autismtoolbox.co.uk

Falkirk Council Children with Disabilities Team/Occupational Therapists (2015). [Making Sense of Sensory Behaviour: A practical approach at home for parents and carers.](#)

Falkirk Council Children with Disabilities Team/Occupational Therapists (2015). [Autistic Spectrum Disorder: A practical approach at home for parents and carers.](#)

Falkirk Council Children with Disabilities Team/Occupational Therapists (2016). [Life Skills for Teenagers: a practical approach at home for parents and carers.](#)

Autism Education Trust. (2020). [Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms.](#)




Autism Education Trust. [Sensory assessment checklist.](#)

National Autism Implementation Team. (2020). [An Autism Lens on the Six Principles of Nurture.](#)




The Western Isles Educational Psychology Service & Principal Teachers of Learning Support. (2016). [Autism Spectrum Disorder Friendly School Guidelines.](#)




Milton Keynes Council (2010). [Checklist for Social Communication Difficulties Friendly Classroom.](#)




Queen Margaret University, NHS Lothian and City of Edinburgh Council (2015). [CIRCLE Framework: Secondary.](#)




<h1>Language and Communication</h1>	<p>Communication happens when one person sends a message to another. This can be non-verbally or verbally. Autistic learners' have differences in their understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication. Autistic learners differences in language and communication also impacts on their use of spoken language.</p> <p>Autistic learners can often give the impression that they have 'mastered' communication. It is important that we understand the need for autistic learners to have approaches to take account of and practise to develop their language and communication skills.</p>	
	  	Notes <i>(Is more information needed? Ways to improve this? etc.)</i>
Keep communications are concise as possible.		
Intonation is used to emphasise key words in communications.		
Literal language and visuals used to aid understanding.		
Avoid using figures of speech/figurative language unless a required part of the curriculum or where used, explain them.		
Chunk longer communications into parts.		
Where curricular vocabulary becomes more complex, additional exposure, practice and explanations are given.		
Extra time is given to process instructions and questions.		
Avoid sarcasm unless the learner has a developed understanding of this.		
Instructional language is explicit and in the positive (ie. 'what to do', rather than 'what not to do').		
Consider comprehension (unlikely to be as strong, even if vocabulary used and oral communication skills may suggest).		
Avoid using 'always' 'never' unless there are specific circumstances (eg. safety). Use 'usually', 'sometimes', 'might' 'often'.		




Social Interaction	Interaction happens when two people respond to one another. This is two-way communication. A core difficulty for autistics is the combination of social interaction skills needed for this two-way communication. This includes difficulties understanding others have different feelings and thoughts to them. This links to their difficulties inferring what others mean and predicting others' behaviours and reactions. Undeveloped understanding of social rules and the non-verbal parts of social interactions also impact considerably. Young people with autism require additional understanding, practise, patience and tolerance to encourage and support their interaction. Social interaction skills are so critical to friendships; some young people desire friendships that may have variable successes and challenges while others prefer to limit social contact at specific times of the day or more widely. Management of the amount of social interaction demands across the school day is needed. Adults can be easier for autistic young people to interact with as they tend to be more predictable and can adapt their social interaction skills to accommodate differences.	
	● ● ●	Notes <i>(Is more information needed? Ways to improve this? etc.)</i>
Ways to aid recognition of people and their role(s).		
Ensure attention is engaged without expectation of eye contact.		
Non-verbal forms of communication are observed for and accepted.		
Reduce number of questions used overall.		
Extra time given for responses.		
Explain how someone is feeling rather than expect this to be recognised or understood.		
Alternatives to group work are enabled (eg. partner or independent) where social interaction demands or other factors will impact on success and wellbeing.		
Opportunities to assist development of social understanding are considered.		
There are agreed approaches in place for the learner to seek support (likely need to be individualised).		

<h1>Wellbeing/ Emotional Regulation</h1>	<p>Autistic learners experience poor mental health and anxiety more than the general population. This further impacts their differences in communication, socialisation, flexible thinking and ways of processing information and seeing the world. Autistic learners are often fairly resilient and may 'mask' as a coping strategy (it may not be apparent that they are having difficulties) and this then leads to an accumulation of stress and more extreme emotional distress at a point or place in time where they are most comfortable (eg. home) or when they cannot contain it any longer. When autistic learners become emotionally dysregulated they are likely to need higher levels of assistance to use and apply the strategies and supports available to them. The opposite of anxiety is trust. Providing continual investment in fostering trust and a nurturing environment will help to reduce the frequency and severity of wellbeing and emotional regulation difficulties.</p>	
	  	Notes (Is more information needed? Ways to improve this? etc.)
Proactive nurturing approaches are in place to assist and maintain positive wellbeing and emotional regulation for all learners.		
Awareness of and observing for early signs that increased wellbeing or emotional needs are emerging.		
Expectations and levels of support can be adjusted and responsive to changing wellbeing/emotional regulation needs.		
A range of factors are considered (eg. time of day, significant events etc.) in managing the combination of wellbeing and curriculum needs/ design daily.		
Access to 'most trusted' adults proactively and responsively as required.		
Calming activities or objects are available.		
Reduction in verbal communication and expectations of social interaction when learner is emotionally dysregulated.		
Staff are confident in use of language that supports co-regulation when needed.		
Calm, safe space, low arousal is accessible in-situ or nearby.		
There is a pre-prepared plan for assisting emotional regulation (coping approaches) in situ.		
There is a pre-prepared plan for the learner leaving the environment if needed.		

<h1>Transitions, Routines & Changes</h1>	<p>Multiple transitions occur in the course of each day. Transitions are varied in nature and combine multiple changes happening at once. As such they are a frequent cause of increased stress and anxiety for autistic learners. Some transitions are considered 'macro' (eg. moving into a new school/stage of school) and some 'micro' (eg. moving from one class to another; moving from class to breaktime; changing from an independent task to a groupwork task in class). Autistic learners need extra adjustment time for all transitions. The extra time required will mainly be linked to the scale of the transition but wellbeing/familiarity will also be factors and the quality of the preparation that is provided for the transition. Autistic learners need structures and emotional support to manage transitions. Routines are events that happen in the same way with regularity. Daily routines help maintain a degree of order & consistency for autistic learners and assist them to anticipate what happens next. Strong routines maintains their wellbeing. Social routines help maximise engagement and pleasure of time spent with others. Change is a normal part of life. Autistics can be too 'rule dependent' and their inflexible thinking means that they apply even at times when contextual factors may mean these rules need adapted or do not apply. Providing supports for autistic learners is an opportunity to develop their resilience and over time assist them to be more skilled and emotionally regulated when changes occur.</p>		
	  	Notes <i>(Is more information needed? Ways to improve this? etc.)</i>	
Additional time to navigate as required and/or alternative routes, with emphasis on consistency and managing stressors.			
Arrival and settling into an area or room is considered – pace, communication, welcome 'tuning in'/'re-engaging'.			
Shifting 'modes' of learning, eg. from listening to independent work to partner work are clearly defined.			
Early preparation for next transition (eg. movement to next class) is provided (information checking and emotional support).			
The physical layout of the classroom/area of school is consistent. If changing preparation is provided.			
Advanced warning is given of known changes.			
When unanticipated changes are experienced clear explanations are given.			
When unanticipated changes arise, close monitoring of emotional wellbeing guides responses			

<h1>Environment</h1>	<p>The environment considers the physical layout of the space and the furniture and resources within it. It also considers the ethos and atmosphere of the environment as this will impact on the social experience of autistic learners. The environment can place a lot of demands on autistic learners. The behaviours of others within the environment has the potential to support the learner as positive role models help them feel comfortable and have additional cues to assist their understanding. Maximising the methodical nature of the environment. Autistic learners benefit from not having to store and recall additional information they need. Reminders in the environment help reduce that cognitive load.</p>	
	  	Notes <i>(Is more information needed? Ways to improve this? etc.)</i>
The environment is orderly and uncluttered.		
The impact of wall displays are considered (colours and content is managed and useful).		
There are information and directional signs to help navigate the space.		
Seating positions are considered to assist engagement and support.		
There are labels/signs/visuals to indicate where key resources are.		
There are visuals to indicate classroom rules/expectations that are referred to and consistently applied.		
There are approaches to assist engagement in learning for all learners.		
A distraction reduced area is available as required.		

Pedagogy	The methods and practises of teaching that support autistic learners support the learning of all learners whether they have additional support needs or not. The learners in each classroom will have a wide variety of needs. Strong pedagogical approaches will ensure engagement and learner outcomes.	  	Notes <i>(Is more information needed? Ways to improve this? etc.)</i>
A variety of visual and concrete resources are used to support teaching and learning.			
Provide clarity about what and how prior learning links to current tasks.			
Expectations are broken down and clear.			
Critical information is generally provided in written format as well as auditory.			
Emphasis placed on key information needed.			
Explanations are chunked and language used is considered.			
The pace of information giving is manageable.			
When repeating information given attempt to remain consistent (avoid paraphrasing unless the quality of your initial communication needs improved).			
The sequence/process required to undertake a task is given or jointly planned			
Work tasks take account of special interests.			
Work tasks likely to raise anxiety are carefully timed and supports considered.			
Work tasks differentiated accordingly.			
Opportunities to assist understanding of language & communication are considered.			
Alternatives to group work are enabled (eg. partner or independent) where social interaction demands or other factors will impact on success and wellbeing.			
Additional resources are available when required, where sharing and negotiating use with others will impact on success and wellbeing.			
Feedback is formative, overt and regularly given (discrete if 'public praise' difficult to receive).			
Reviewing and summarising the learning is provided.			




<h1>Flexible Thinking</h1>	<p>Autistic learners' particular thinking and perceptions of the world and other people is a critical consideration. Their 'context blindness' means that they lack awareness of the context of situations. As such, they do not notice all the information required to fully understand a situation. They may misunderstand or misinterpret the context; they may be unable to hold multiple pieces of information or perspectives in mind at once; and/or the emotions and intentions of other people are not able to be fully understood. It can sometimes seem that an autistic person lacks empathy, however, it may be because they are unable to put themselves in 'others shoes'. Three psychological theories that help us understand autistics incomplete context awareness are the differences they have in: Theory of Mind – lack full understanding other people's thoughts, feelings, beliefs and experiences and are unable to take this into account in considering own and others' actions. Central Coherence – often described as 'weak' in this skill as they focus on specific details rather than notice all relevant details ('the big picture'). Executive Function Skills – difficulties here include being unable to hold attention, organise thoughts and actions, managing impulses, sequencing, general organisational skills.</p>	
	  	Notes <i>(Is more information needed? Ways to improve this? etc.)</i>
Use of name where use of 'everyone' 'all' does not evoke a response.		
Be overt in pointing out different thinking from different people in class discussions.		
Limit number of choices when this is difficult for the learner.		
Point out details that are important in tasks/texts etc.		
Give coherent instructions in the order to be carried out.		
Written or pictorial sequences for regularly undertaken tasks/routines or more complex tasks.		
Reduce amount of information being held in mind simultaneously by using written/visuals.		
Point out important observations that should be made/things to notice in the environment.		
Be mindful that might omit important information as they presume you already know it.		
Be mindful that might overemphasise information that is irrelevant.		
Be aware of absorbing interests and how this might influence and distract thinking.		
Ensure language used with multiple meanings is clarified so that the meaning in use is clear.		
Problem solving tasks differentiated in various ways with use of modelling, concrete resources/visuals		


Sensory processing

It is worthwhile to consider this area generally as sensory processing can significantly enhance or hinder the learning process for all learners (eg. feeling too hot to concentrate; light-glare on a whiteboard etc.) even where their sensory processing is not overwhelmed.




For autistic learners, this is an area that requires some additional personalised information sharing, thinking and planning.

Our senses are constantly operating to make sense of the environment. Sometimes we are aware or this is happening and at other times this is sub-conscious. Many autistic learners experience 'hyper-sensitive' (over sensitive) processing of some or all of their senses (overwhelming and more intense than others' experience) or 'hypo-sensitive' (under sensitive) (may not notice or be aware of sensory information you would expect them to). If sensory information is not processed smoothly, either too much attention is given to unnecessary sensory information or not enough attention to the necessary sensory information. Difficulties interpreting sensory information can impact on how autistic learners feel, think, behave or respond. Sensory overstimulation and overload can cause acute stress/anxiety, enacting a 'flight, fight, freeze' response. When we know what sensory experiences are positive, these can help us calm. Some autistic learners use sensory-based behaviours (eg. repetitive movements) to regulate themselves or as a sign of distress.

	  	Notes (<i>Is more information needed? Ways to improve this? etc.</i>)
Are there specific considerations based on the classroom/area of the school or curricular subject in relation to sight/light/visual .		
Are there specific considerations based on the classroom/area of the school or curricular subject in relation to sound .		
Are there specific considerations based on the classroom/area of the school or curricular subject in relation to smell .		
Are there specific considerations based on the classroom/area of the school or curricular subject in relation to touch .		
Are there specific considerations based on the classroom/area of the school or curricular subject in relation to taste .		
Are there specific considerations based on the classroom/area of the school or curricular subject in relation to awareness of body position/movement & co-ordination .		
Ways to minimise and reduce background noise.		
Space and approaches to reduce sensory overload as & when required.		

<h1>Additional Support & Getting it Right for Every Child</h1>	<p>Information sharing and partnership working are critical factors in understanding the needs of autistic learners and responding to any emerging needs in a timely and effective way. Individuals with Additional Support Needs, including autistic learners are entitled to have reasonable adjustments made to reduce as many barriers to learning as possible. With the right support, autistic learners can access the curriculum well and make good progress in all their skills.</p>	
		<p>Notes (<i>Is more information needed? Ways to improve this? etc.</i>)</p>
<p>Access to information about learners' additional support needs is available (ie. a child's plan or personal learning plan or individualised education plan).</p>		
<p>A system exists for providing feedback and key information to the child's named person/pastoral or management link within the school.</p>		
<p>The views of the learner(s) are used to inform what they need and what works well for them.</p>		
<p>There is a focus and shared responsibility on building independence and skills for life beyond school.</p>		
<p>Approaches are in place to assist partnership working between practitioners working in the same or across environments to support learners (eg. teacher and support for learning assistant in a classroom; subject teacher and pupil support department).</p>		
<p>There is an inclusive culture created and expectations for respect and rights are strong.</p>		
<p>Individualised support is provided in a way that still maximises inclusion for learners so that they do not feel 'singled-out'.</p>		
<p>Additional Support Needs arising from factors other than Autism Spectrum Disorder (eg. learning difficulties, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder etc.) are known and taken account of for learners.</p>		

THIS PAGE IS FOR USE WHEN MULTIPLE AUDITS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED AS A WAY TO ANALYSE THE INFORMATION COLLECTED.

CATEGORY	MONTH/ YEAR	TALLY/SAMPLE SIZE		
				
Language and Communication				
Social Interaction				
Emotional Regulation/Wellbeing				
Transitions, Routines & Changes				
Environment				
Pedagogy				
Flexible Thinking				
Sensory Processing				
Additional Support and Getting It Right For Every Child				

Differences of opinion that require clarification or more information	
Priority areas for development	

Reflections on the audit information	
Some of the factors you will think about when identifying next steps and improvements	