**Identifying Barriers to Learning and Planning Reasonable Adjustments.**

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| **Barriers to Learning** |
| Communication and Interaction – Autism Spectrum Conditions **ASC (Neurodivergent)– huge range of ability and need.** |
| 1. **Social understanding and communication difficulties:** **Differences in social understanding and communication mean that autistic pupils can find it difficult to know how to engage in social interactions with others. They can experience other people as unpredictable and this can result in feelings of anxiety, frustration, and anger.**  Difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication. Not understanding common gestures and facial expressions. Inability to initiate conversations. They may have limited or no speech. They may find it difficult to express their own emotions / feelings. Difficulties in understanding “social rules”. May not pick up social clues - facial expressions and intonation (sarcasm) and knowing when to speak or listen or taking turns. May not understand the feeling of other. They may lack empathy and may appear that they don’t think of others. Some may prefer to work alone and find working in a group, difficult. Difficulties in making friends. Unaware of different social situations.
* **Strengths**

When speech has developed, some pupils are very articulate with excellent vocabulary. The pupil can have strong and loyal connections to others, particularly family members. The pupil can be very knowledgeable about a particular topic and be able to talk about their special interest at length. A pupil who is non-verbal can still become very good at communicating their wants and needs by using sounds, pointing, gestures, body language, photos, pictures, and symbols.1. **Flexibility, information processing and understanding. What is happening now and next can be unpredictable. This can result in an increase in anxiety, frustration, and anger.**

Inflexible in their thinking. May become preoccupied with wanting to do something. Can become repetitive in what they say. Preferring fact and logic to make belief, storytelling or any abstract thinking. They may find it difficult to generalise information. Often finds any unexpected change and transitions difficult. “Obsessive” and may have a limited set of interests and activities. * **Strengths.**

Being highly motivated by their interests. Processing information differently, leading to creative solutions. Being able to keep their attention on something for long periods when motivated. Having a good memory for factual information. Having a good eye for detail. Being analytical thinkers. Having exceptional memory. Focusing in depth on an area of interest and becoming an expert on this.1. **Sensory processing and integration:** Being over-sensitive – not coping with strong smells/noisy environments. Being under-sensitive – not responding to pain, hunger, or thirst. Having difficulty filtering out irrelevant sensory information. Difficulties in taking in and responding to sensory information. Reduced body awareness – difficulty coordinating themselves and planning and may seek out additional movement or heavy work play/activities.*Pupils will not simply have an over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity. They can fluctuate between the two.*
* Speech and Language and Communication Needs:
* Listening and attention
* Understanding receptive language. Difficulties in understanding what has been said.
* Expressive language difficulties.
* (Pathological Demand Avoidance is a relatively new diagnosis and not recognised by all Educational Psychologists. Linked to ASC and not SEMH)

NB Increasing diagnosis or ASC and ADHD**. Co-occurrence of needs.** |
| **Quality First Teaching: Reasonable Adjustments in the Classroom** |
| **Social understanding and communication difficulties** * Communicate in a calm and quiet environment.
* Visual support / dual coding to support verbal instructions. Key words on a plain board.
* Start conversation, question with the person’s name to gain attention.
* Limit the number of words. Short clear sentences. For example, rather than saying, ‘Come here, Sam, it is time to put your coat on’, you could say, ‘Sam, coat on.’
* Staff modelling intonation and being explicit about emotions.
* Test their understanding of what has been asked of them.
* LSAs to facilitate peer discussion rather than being the partner.
* Allow the pupil time to process what you are saying and to respond to you.
* “I can see you are upset / angry” rather than “why are you upset/ angry”. I.e., validating their feeling.
* May need lots of reassurance.
* Social stories: making expectations clear for social situations and practicing these
* Embed Zones of regulation so that pupils can self-identify their feelings.
* Plan for emotional regulation activities to support any targeted support.
* Integrate their interests - but not all the time!
* Only ask one question at a time.
* Say what you mean and avoid using sarcasm or metaphors.

**Flexibility, information processing and understanding.*** Ensure the person you are supporting is clear about what is happening next; Now and next visual prompts.
* Warning and preparing pupils of change any changes. Provide structure and preparation for changes and transitions.
* Establishing routines and expectations. Support routines with visual reminders, timers etc
* Provides a sense of safety and security and reduces stress and anxiety. May need a time out card if in a heightened state.
* Supporting unstructured times – breaks and lunches but also within lessons.
* Be mindful that any transition between activities or environments, however small, may cause anxiety.
* Build on strengths. Use special interests to engage in learning.
* Enable multiple ways to process information and learning.
* Use pictures, signs, or symbols to support all of the above.

**Sensory*** Conduct a sensory audit. In addition, find out what their individual sensitivities are. Talk to the pupil and find ways of understanding the pupil’s sensory differences and make simple changes to reduce anxiety and stress.
* Classroom environment: Avoid too much stimulation (visual or auditory) ear defenders.

 Provide additional stimulation – sensory balls, wriggle cushions. * Take sensory issues into account when planning lessons.
* Provide breakout rooms or places the autistic pupil can go to where they feel safe.
* Provide a quiet area outside, away from the noise.
* Be very mindful that vestibular (movement, inclusive of spinning) activities can be very alerting and some pupils can find it very hard to modulate this input.
* An autistic person may find it uncomfortable to listen and make eye contact at the same time, so don’t think a pupil is being rude when they don’t look at you when you speak.
* Twitching, fidgeting, and agitation can all be signs that the pupil is beginning to experience sensory overload, so reduce the sensory information, e.g. stop talking (and reduce any other noise), don’t touch them, reduce the light.

**NB Knowing your pupils well** – what are their strengths? What are their individual barriers to learning. What are their behaviours telling you?  |