

Priory Lodge School Autism Strategy January 2020:

**Socially inclusive and strength based
community, empowering individuals**



Welcome to our new autism strategy

The most fundamental role we undertake in school is to safeguard our students. This is particularly so when we are supporting students who may be vulnerable because of additional learning needs. Safeguarding underpins everything that we do.



Making a difference requires the integration of the best available research, practical expertise in the classroom, and the insider perspective within the context of individual characteristics, cultures, values and preferences.”

**Professor Karen Guldborg (2019) Inaugural Lecture
University of Birmingham**

We strive to aspire to excellence in our autism practice

Three key questions need to be addressed to develop excellence in autism research and practice:

- 1. How can we develop a more holistic understanding of autism by drawing on different disciplines?**
- 2. Why do we need closer alignment between research and practise in autism education?**
- 3. What are the implications from the answers to the previous two questions for the teaching approaches and methods that are needed in the classroom?**

This strategy will outline how we can fully understand autism and how we can draw on a number of domains of knowledge.

At Priory Lodge School, we believe that autism is a ‘difference’ and not a ‘deficit’, and therefore our response outlines how we can most effectively work with a population who perceive, communicate and interact with the world in a different manner.

This work is based upon the research of Damian Milton’s ‘Double Empathy Theory’ and the ‘intersubjectivity’ between people with autism and without. Milton outlines that people with autism often lack insight about non autistic perceptions and culture, however it is equally true that non autistic people lack insight into the minds and culture of people with autism. Our curriculum and approaches recognises these fundamental differences and addresses them from both perspectives, whilst celebrating diversity. Narratives from autistic people often state that it is not the autism itself that causes difficulties, but the expectations, interactions and responses they get from other people.

Our core mission, model and themes

Our core mission is to empower our students to achieve their ambitions through positive educational experiences and equal opportunities. We achieve this via a community which is socially inclusive and recognises the strengths of all members of our school and college. Our pedagogy is developed from this.

There is no unified theory on learning emerging from the educational community, the power of education as a discipline comes from its potential to understanding learning from the perspective of the individual learner as well as the context (Hodkinson et al).

Our model is based on the Autism Education Trust Framework, The Autism Centre for Education and Research, The SEN Code of Practice, The Ofsted common inspection framework and the 8 principles of good autism practice, which emerged from research evidence, practice and policy by Professor Guldberg (2019). These are:

- 1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person**
- 2. Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions**
- 3. Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people**
- 4. Workforce development to support autistic children and young people**
- 5. Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice**
- 6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum**
- 7. Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum**
- 8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote well being and success for autistic children and young people**

We will use these against four key themes:

- **Understanding the individual with autism and enabling them to have a voice**
- **Positive and effective relationships across our community between all peers and staff**
- **Enabling environments which support inclusion**
- **Effective implementation of plans to enhance and support academic learning, vocational skills, emotional wellbeing and development of lifelong learning skills**

We believe that this strategy will support our school and college to be a positive, meaningful and constructive learning environment for both students and staff.



Priory Lodge School

Autism Strengths Based Model



Understanding the individual with autism and enabling them to have a voice

It is important that we understand what is distinctive for students with autism. We need to know the areas of difference and co-occurring difficulties. We need to understand the often uneven development and the sensory differences which may present unique challenges. It is also vitally important that we identify the most appropriate and developmentally relevant means to enable social communication.

Positive and effective relationships across our community between all peers and staff

As a community we must be skilled at signposting students and their parents/carers to appropriate services and support. We must fully embrace the unique needs and challenges, and be mindful of the impact of stress on the whole family. Our staff must be highly skilled in understanding autism as a lack of knowledge in staff impacts negatively on the school experience of our students. A philosophical shift is needed with access for all staff to high quality training and workforce development.

Enabling environments which support inclusion

We must restructure cultures, policies and practices in our setting which matches the current cohort of students, as this will allow us to enact statutory obligations to create enabling environments. We must also take proactive steps to reduce formal and informal exclusions and increased the attendance of those with high absenteeism. We must provide structured, understandable and predictable learning environments, as well as using a variety of means to communicate. We must also promote and nurture positive relationships with peers.



Effective implementation of plans to enhance and support academic learning, vocational skills, emotional wellbeing and lifelong learning skills

It is vital that we address and identify, and address barriers to learning. It is also extremely important that we collect data on social and emotional awareness, communication, social understanding and inclusion, daily life skills, independence and autonomy. ICT should be used as a tool for learning. Our students need a broad and balanced curriculum that addresses the learning needs of autistic pupils and their social, emotional wellbeing, communication needs and life skills. They must be involved in plans to prepare them for adulthood. Staff must also understand the potential vulnerability of students with autism to abuse and neglect.

Priory Lodge School's extended curriculum offer outlines the many and varied ways in which bespoke programmes can support in all areas of learning. This exists alongside the more formal curriculum offer, and behaviour strategy.

Priory Lodge School Extended Curriculum Offer

Areas

- Expressive and receptive language: ability to understand and formulate grammatically correct responses/sentences
- Non-verbal communication: eye contact, facial expression, posture, voice, distance, touch
- Social skills: understanding social expectations in different contexts
- Ability to initiate and maintain conversation, turn-taking, recognising and accepting different viewpoints
- Dealing with non-literal language: sarcasm, idioms, jokes
- General understanding of a social world

Techniques and Strategies

- Talkabout
- ELKLAN
- Word Aware
- Social stories
- Comic strips
- Social thinking
- The Zones of Regulation
- LEGO therapy

Specific Conditions

- Social communication difficulties
- Speech production difficulties: intelligibility
- Dysfluency
- Voice disorders

Areas

- Postural control
- Gross motor skills
- Bilateral motor coordination and sequencing
- Crossing the midline
- Balance
- Motor Planning (Praxis)
- Fine motor skills
- Handwriting difficulties
- Sensory Processing and Modulation
- Visual-perceptual Skills
- Executive Functioning (task initiation; planning; organisation; problem solving)
- Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and functional life skills

Techniques and Strategies

- Sensory Integration Therapy
- Neurodevelopmental Therapy
- Handwriting Without Tears
- Speed Up Handwriting Programme
- The Alert Programme
- The Zones of Regulation
- Pilates
- Relaxation
- Handwriting Groups

Specific Conditions

- Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)
- Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)
- Dyspraxia
- Low muscle tone
- Hypermobility

Areas

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Anger management and managing frustration
- Preventing/Managing meltdowns
- Managing difficult or new feelings/situations
- Self-esteem
- Decision making/Problem solving
- Assertiveness training
- Resilience
- Moral dilemmas
- Behaviour
- Behaviours that challenge
- Bullying
- Coping strategies
- School refusal
- Managing transitions
- Transitioning *
- School refusal
- Acceptance of ASD and their special needs

Techniques and Strategies

- Counselling
- Visual strategies
- The Zones of Regulation
- The Incredible 5 Point Scale
- Reinforcement strategies
- Desensitisation programmes e.g. EMDR*
- Alternative skills teaching
- Behavioural Contracts
- CBT
- DBT*

Specific Conditions

- Autism
- PDA
- Anxiety
- Tourette's Syndrome
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Eating Disorders
- Gender issues
- ADD/ADHD

*provided by external professionals

Preparation for Adulthood

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- Employment
- Independent living
- Community inclusion
- Healthy lifestyle

SALT

OT

Emotional Support

Life Skills
Coping mechanisms
Emotional and social wellbeing

WELLBEING

Wellbeing

- Daily wellbeing walk
- Classroom stretches
- Sensory diet
- Self regulation, including breathing techniques
- Mindfulness
- Relaxation
- Counselling
- Mentoring
- Lunchtime clubs
- Student council
- Pupil/parent/staff feedback forms

Contact us today

To find out more about Priory Lodge School in Roehampton, South West London, and the unique services we can offer to young people with autism, please contact us today.

Call: 0208 392 4410

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