Supporting Pupils with Autism in Mainstream Schools (KS2 - KS4)

and those with:

- Social Interaction and Communication Difficulties
- Poor Flexibility of Thought
- Sensory Differences

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Autism is a lifelong condition that affects how people communicate and interact with others. No two people with autism are the same; each has their own unique personality and each varies in the extent to which they see, hear and experience the world differently from people without autism. It is estimated that just over 1 in every 100 people in the UK has autism. More boys and men are diagnosed with autism than girls and women but it's now thought girls and women may manage the condition differently and are therefore underdiagnosed. People with autism have difficulties with communication and social interaction, social imagination and flexibility of thought and sensory processing. However, many other children and young people also have difficulty in one or more of these areas. This guidance can be used for pupils with autism and also with pupils with specific difficulties in one or more of these areas. It is aimed at pupils at Key Stage 2, 3 and 4 who attend mainstream settings.

Many children and young people with autism experience high levels of academic and work-related success. Among many positive characteristics, people with autism often have high levels of persistence and focus, good attention to detail and high self-expectations. Settings are expected to respond to their children and young people according to the needs they present, rather than to a diagnosis. This response will be a ‘Graduated Response’ as outlined in the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Code of Practice.

- The needs of many children and young people with autism are met through high quality teaching and support at 'Universal Support Level'
- Children and young people who require more focused, targeted help will be supported at ‘SEND Support Level’
- A few students whose needs are complex, severe and long term and which cannot meet from within the resources of the school will require support at a ‘Statutory Level’ and these will be issued with an Education, Health and Care Plan. A few of these students may require support from, or in, specialist settings.

At each stage, settings should adopt a cyclical model of intensifying support for pupils consisting of ‘ASSESS, PLAN, DO, REVIEW’ cycles of support. The support outlined in this guidance largely falls within the ‘Universal Support Level’ and ‘SEND Support Level’ of provision.

This booklet was originally prompted by:
- A request from parents, at a termly Local Authority’s ‘Time to Talk’ event, for guidance for educational settings regarding supporting pupils with autism and those displaying aspects of autism who do not have a diagnosis.
- Recent research; ‘An Evidence-Based Guide to Anxiety in Autism’ (The Autism Research Group, November 2018) showed that whilst around 10-15% of the general population have an anxiety disorder at some point in their life (Kessler et al., 2012), around 40% of autistic children, adolescents and adults are thought to have at least one and often more anxiety disorders (van Steenselet al., 2011). It is important to appreciate that anxiety disorder is not simply a part of autism but an independently co-occurring disorder.
- Research showing that pupils with autism are three times more likely to be excluded from schools than pupils with no SEND. (https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2015-to-2016).
- The duties placed on schools to make reasonable adjustments to enable all pupils to fully participate in all aspects of school life and to ensure that those with a ‘disability’ are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled pupils. Although many people with autism do not see their condition as a ‘disability’, the Equality Act 2010 (The Act) notes that this includes conditions such as autism.
- The implementation of the ‘Development and Behaviour Pathway’ across Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.
The purpose of this booklet is to provide guidance to settings and parents to support children and young people with autism (or some features of autism) in order to:

- Improve attainment
- Reduce exclusions
- Improve mental health and wellbeing
- Reduce unauthorised absence
- Meet needs in mainstream settings

Useful Links:

**Autism Education Trust** – Free and downloadable resources including:

- Progression framework
- Schools’ autism standards
- Post 16 autism standards
- Schools’ autism competency framework
- Joint working with parents

[https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/](https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/)

**Autism Education Trust (AET) Booklets:**

- School stress and anxiety – how it can lead to school refusal and impact on family life
- Successful reintegration of autistic pupils following school exclusion
- Steps to avoid the exclusion of autistic pupils
- A guide to help governing boards comply with equality law when considering a head teacher’s decision to exclude an autistic pupil
- A guide to help parents navigate equality law, rights and entitlements when their autistic child is excluded or at risk of exclusion from school


**Nasen: Girls and Autism: Flying under the Radar**


**Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting pupils on the Autism Spectrum** – 2 free online training packages – Primary and Secondary

[https://www.idponline.org.uk/psautism/launch.html](https://www.idponline.org.uk/psautism/launch.html)


**Underlying Difficulty**

**COMMUNICATION**

**General**

All pupils with autism have some difficulties with language and communication. Many other pupils also have similar communication needs.

- Pupils may be very articulate but do not assume they have an equivalent functional understanding.
- Pupils may have "hyperlexia", where there is a mismatch between high-level decoding skills and poor comprehension and functional use of reading skills.
- Pupils may have weak higher order language skills, such as inference, deduction, problem solving and consequential thinking.
- Difficulty identifying key information.
- By the time you get to the end of the instruction pupils may have forgotten about the beginning.
- The individual pupil may not apply instructions given to the whole class to him or herself.

**Presentation**

- The pupil may be confused by instructions and only respond to part of the instruction.
- After the instruction is given the class responds but the individual pupil does not, so that they may appear confused, unresponsive or inappropriate in their response, stuck on persisting with a previous set task or stuck on a task or preoccupation of his or her own choice.
- The pupil may only respond to the part of the instruction that he or she has heard.
- Pupils may be copying the actions of their peers rather than having understood the instruction (often people with poor communication skills are visual learners and rely on visual information).
- The pupil may not appear to be listening even when they are. This may be because:
  - They do not make eye contact because they find this over-stimulates them.
  - They avoid eye contact to give them time for processing a set task or a preoccupation.
  - They may reduce anxiety and uncertainty by “fiddling” or keeping on with a private task.

**Support**

- Cue the student in by saying their name before the instruction.
- Keep instructions clear and unambiguous.
- Break instructions down into steps.
- Give pupils time to process (as much as ten seconds) instructions. Do not be tempted to repeat until this is done.
- Unless you realise you have given too complex an instruction, do not rephrase the instruction when you repeat it. This may require the student to process the instruction again from scratch.
- Support speech with visual cues so that, where possible, the information needed can be gained from the stronger visual channels.
- Differentiate work, using simple clear instructions supported by visual cues and tick lists.
- Offer fiddle toys/doodle pads etc. while listening
- Do not insist on eye contact
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<th>Underlying Difficulty</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Alexithymia - Difficulties identifying and describing your own emotions</strong></td>
<td>Pupils are described as ‘going from 0 to 10’ on emotional regulation scales in seconds, when in fact the child or young person has not noticed the changes in their body.</td>
<td>You can use a traffic light system, visual thermometer, or a scale of 1-5 (such as ‘The Incredible 5 Point Scale’) to present emotions as colours, pictures or numbers (a green traffic light or a number 1 can mean 'I am calm'; a red traffic light or number 5, 'I am angry'). Help the pupil to understand what 'angry' means and how it feels physiologically. For example, ‘When I'm angry, my tummy hurts/my face gets red/I want to cry’. Once the extremes are better understood, address the emotions in between.</td>
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<td>Many autistic people (around 50%) have difficulties identifying and describing their own emotions. This is called ‘alexithymia’ and it raises pupil’s anxiety in two ways:</td>
<td>Pupils suddenly become overwhelmed by their emotions following seeming small triggers or no noticeable triggers.</td>
<td>Teach and use ‘The Zones of regulation’ system.</td>
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<td>• Firstly, alexithymia has been linked to difficulties in accurately sensing the internal signals of arousal that often accompany emotional experiences, such as changes in heart rate or a rush of adrenalin (Gaigg et al., 2018). This can make internal sensations confusing and unpredictable.</td>
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<td>Trial the use of a heart rate monitor to help the pupil recognise early signals that they are becoming agitated.</td>
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<td>• Secondly, alexithymia is thought to contribute to anxiety by making it more difficult for autistic individuals to regulate their emotions. As a result, people with alexithymia often try to suppress and ignore their feelings in an attempt to push the confusing feelings away. This usually makes general feelings of anxiety worse in the long-run.</td>
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<td>Discuss, trial and use strategies to help pupils know what calming strategies are options to them when they are becoming anxious. Reinforce these with lists or visual prompts. (e.g.: access to a calming box, or quiet area, use of an exit card with a 5 minute timer, sensory activities, walking away, writing in a diary). Write these options on a wallet sized card for reference.</td>
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<th>Having a literal understanding &amp; difficulty with idioms, irony, jokes and sarcasm:</th>
<th>approaches which help by increasing awareness of the thought patterns involved in anxiety.</th>
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| • Pupils with autism often have a literal understanding of language. As a consequence:  
  o They may not know the subtler meanings of common expressions and idioms, such as “She hit the roof”, “Keep your hair on”.  
  o They have difficulty with ambiguous language, such as “tidy up”, “Calm down”  
• Pupils may find slapstick and visual humour easier to follow.  
• Pupils generally do not understand sarcasm, or know it is an attack on them, and may not be able to respond appropriately or in kind. | • Mindfulness approaches. |
| • The student may become upset or anxious, particularly if others are laughing and he or she cannot understand why.  
• Pupils may appear confused.  
• Pupils may display inappropriate reactions such as laughing too loudly or too long and hitting out at others.  
• The distress and anxiety of the situation may cause obsessional behaviours to occur. | • Say what you mean and mean what you say.  
• Be aware of your own use of language, and explain idioms (using visuals where possible) if necessary.  
• Give clear, explicit, instructions. For example; rather than saying; “Tidy up” say; “Put the XX back in the box and then put the box back on the shelf by the window.”  
• Avoid irony and sarcasm wherever possible, even if you think the class is ‘used to your ways’.  
• Encourage pupils to ask/signal (agree a subtle signal/help card) if they do not understand, and be prepared to explain again. Use a buddy system.  
• Consider changing your style for the whole class – this will probably result in a higher general level of understanding of and learning from your lessons.  
• Be aware of and responsive to the pupil’s reactions.  
• Make special arrangements for exams where |
### Poor awareness of facial expression, body language, gesture and intonation:

- Pupils may have poor awareness of their own facial expression, body language, gesture and intonation, and may use them inappropriately or within a restricted range.
- Pupils may be unable to interpret body language and emotions in themselves and/or others.
- The pupil, adult and peers may find interaction difficult due to the poor interpretation of social signals on both sides.
- These difficulties leave the pupil vulnerable to bullying and teasing. Boys with autism are especially subject to homophobic bullying, because they are not generally good at joining in “laddish” banter or horseplay and their interests may be different from those of their peers.

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<th>Solutions</th>
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<td>The pupil may not respond to the underlying ‘meaning’ of gesture and body language. This may lead to their responding inappropriately.</td>
<td>Make sure that your facial expression, intonation and gesture match your spoken message.</td>
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<td>Pupils may not pick up signals that you or others are becoming cross/frustrated and so be slow to adapt their behaviour.</td>
<td>Be explicit about messages you think would be conveyed non-verbally. (“I am getting cross now”/”It is time to be quiet and focus on work now.”)</td>
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<td>Uncertainty about misinterpreting social communication may make them anxious and distressed.</td>
<td>Teach the use and interpretation of body language, facial expression and gesture in individual or small group sessions. This may well be a topic that should be raised in PHSE with all students – but students with communication difficulties are likely to need individualised help.</td>
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<td>Pupils may misinterpret social signals. They may interpret friendly gestures as hostile or vice versa.</td>
<td>Be aware that the non-verbal message the pupil is communicating may not match with their intended communication or feelings and behaviour perceived as insolence may be an attempt to make things better or be due to the pupil not knowing the appropriate reaction (they may be copying what they have seen others do).</td>
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<td>Pupils may use inappropriate facial expressions or body language conveying a meaning that they do not intend. (For example, they may smile when they are being told off as they are trying to appease). This often makes the other person think they are not being taken seriously or think the pupil is being defiant.</td>
<td>Allow for social conventions varying for different groups and being subject to change. The pupil with communication difficulties may encounter difficulties through being, for</td>
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<td>Pupils may misinterpret others’ behaviour as bullying when it is not intended as such. (But this is a group which is very prone to be bullied. Check carefully. Do not give</td>
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needed, such as allowing a support worker to clarify any ambiguous language in an exam paper.
false reassurance. Remember that pupils with literal language are usually good witnesses, if poor interpreters.)

example, the only person who actually complies with uniform regulations, or the only person who says “good morning” to teachers and other students.

• Teaching pupils to watch what certain other young people do is hard but useful.

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<td><strong>Using language in an appropriate way for the situation, context and listener:</strong></td>
<td>• The pupil may sound rude or inappropriate when speaking to staff. This may not be intentional. They may be using language and gesture that they have heard in other situations. Sometimes however, it is. Able students with autistic spectrum conditions often do not suffer fools gladly and do not avoid putting right staff who have it wrong or who they perceive have made a mistake/acted unfairly. • Pupils may use gesture, words, or intonations which are used by other pupils outside the class and to each other, but which are not fitting in an adult/student interaction. • Words and topics heard outside school might be inappropriately brought into class.</td>
<td>• Ensure that all staff are aware that the pupil may unintentionally speak to them in what seems to be an inappropriate manner. Point this out to the pupil in a calm way and give an appropriate model. • Teach appropriate phrases to open and close conversations. • Consider teaching staff a different rule rather than trying to impose on the pupil a rule, which is not understood. It can be less problematic if they use social conventions appropriate to peers with the head teacher than the other way round. • Point out inappropriate language and behaviour in a calm way and teach a better approach. For example, explain directly that when the young person needs some help, they could say, “I can’t understand this. Please will you help”? • Use Social Stories to explain the context.</td>
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Children and young people with communication difficulties may have difficulty in choosing the appropriate language for the situation and audience.

They may own up to things or ‘tell’ on others without any understanding of the consequences.
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<td>SOCIAL INTERACTION</td>
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<td><strong>Fitting behaviour to the demands of the situation</strong></td>
<td>Pupils with social interaction difficulties are at a higher risk or social isolation and bullying.</td>
<td>Explicitly teach pupils to consider what might be expected and unexpected behaviours in different scenarios and how their behaviours might be perceived by others. Also support pupils in understanding the social communication and intention of the actions of others. Michelle Garcia Winner has produced a useful website and resources to support ‘social thinking’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social interaction is one of the key difficulties for a pupil with autism but can be an area of difficulty for many pupils.</td>
<td>Pupils are likely to experience high levels of anxiety and quickly resort to ‘flight, fight or freeze’ responses.</td>
<td>Ensure all staff take steps to safeguard the pupil from teasing and bullying.</td>
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<td>Pupils with social learning challenges do not intuitively learn social information the way other children do. Instead, they have to be taught how to think socially to help them develop their social competencies.</td>
<td>Girls may mirror the behaviour of others and or affect different personalities. This social imitation is emotionally exhausting.</td>
<td>Ensure that all staff are aware of the individual needs of pupils and understand and manage the pupil’s behaviour from the pupil’s perspective - that is, as a pupil with social interaction difficulties/autism.</td>
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<td>• Behaviour, which is appropriate for family members and friends, may not be appropriate in other settings or situations.</td>
<td>Pupils may invade the personal space of others – adults and peers.</td>
<td>Ensure that staff are aware of the strategies that calm the pupil and support the pupil in</td>
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<td>• Behaviour may also not be age appropriate – it may be “too young” or “too old”.</td>
<td>Pupils may stand too close, touch, stroke, smell/sniff, and fiddle with clothes or jewellery of others.</td>
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<td>Pupils may make personal comments.</td>
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<td>Children and young people may be too</td>
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<td><strong>• Pupils may need to be taught socially appropriate behaviour. This needs to be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Pupils may have difficulty differentiating between their own and others’ possessions.</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Pupils may ‘spread over’ others’ work as well as their own.</strong></td>
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<td>• Pupils may not understand what levels of personal detail it is appropriate to share with different audiences, making them vulnerable to exploitation and bullying.</td>
<td>• Pupils may try to impose scripted and controlling play on others.</td>
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<td>• Pupils with social interaction difficulties and particularly girls are more likely to respond to e-communications and comply with demands, making them more vulnerable to grooming and online bullying.</td>
<td>• Pupils may have difficulty differentiating between their own and others’ possessions.</td>
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<td>• Pupils may need support to develop their self-advocacy and to understand that they have a right to say ‘no’. They may also need additional teaching on e-safety.</td>
<td>• Use a stress scale to turn emotions into more concrete concepts. The Incredible 5 point scale is a well-regarded resource.</td>
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<td>• Build the pupil’s own age-appropriate understanding of autism or their own particular profile of strengths and needs.</td>
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<td>• Use Social Stories to explain the context.</td>
<td>• Use Circle of Friends systems (where appropriate)</td>
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<td>• Different settings require differing levels of interaction. For example, older children need to be more independent of adults, and issues of personal space are more critical.</td>
<td>• As pupils become older, they may need sensitive teaching regarding sex, education, relationships, privacy and touching ‘rules’. For example, what it means to be a girlfriend/boyfriend.</td>
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<td>• Pupils may need support to develop their self-esteem and confidence.</td>
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- Pupils may need support to develop their self-esteem and confidence.
### A lack of awareness of their audience’s response:

- A pupil with social interaction difficulties may not know how to initiate or maintain a conversation.

- Pupils may not monitor others’ interest in what is being said but go on talking while their own interest in a topic is sustained.

- Pupils may find it difficult to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal cues, or understand such cues given by others. They may not pick up on the non-verbal cues showing others have lost interest, such as turning away, yawning, avoiding eye contact, or looking at their watch.

- Pupils may miss verbal cues, for instance, when the other person tries to interrupt or raise points.

- They may not recognise someone trying to change the subject, nor see this as legitimate if they have not finished.

### Explicitly teach what kinds of information can be shared with different audiences including on the internet and what to do if they think they are being bullied online.

- Don’t reply
- Save the evidence
- Tell someone: encourage young people to tell a trusted adult

### Encourage pupils to join clubs relating to their areas of interest and provide support for setting these clubs up if they do not exist.

- Give explicit feedback about repetitive or boring talk. For example, “You’ve told us a lot about that. We'll move onto something else now”.

- In lessons where the pupil has a lot of knowledge, suggest that they give you just two facts about the planets, for example.

- Consider use of an agreed signal, depending on the situation. For instance, the classroom teacher may use linked visual and verbal prompts, like raising a hand and saying, “That was great. Thank you”.

- The adult may need to have a more discreet non-verbal signal for use in a social situation such as touching your mouth with your finger.

- Comic Strip Cartoons may be used to clarify
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<th>Poor awareness in social situations:</th>
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<td>Pupils with difficulties with social interaction are at a disadvantage because they do not understand the ‘hidden curriculum’. They inadvertently break the rules and either get in trouble with adults or become ostracised by peers.</td>
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<td>Pupils with difficulties in this area tend not to be aware of how they are perceived by others and may not be aware of what are expected and unexpected behaviours in different situations.</td>
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<td>The Hidden Curriculum includes how to dress, how to act, what to do, what not to do, and who to talk to and who to ignore.</td>
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<td>The pupil may talk constantly, not allowing for breaks or pauses in the conversation.</td>
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<td>Pupils may misinterpret signals of friendship as being romantic signals.</td>
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<td>These situations and events.</td>
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<td>Provide explicit teaching about romantic relationships and appropriate comments, communication and touch.</td>
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<td>Pupils may not be aware of fashion trends and the subtleties of dress.</td>
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<td>The pupil is perceived by their peers as obviously different.</td>
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<td>Pupil is often ‘set up’ by others.</td>
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<td>Pupil may perceive himself or herself as the victim and may not understand the banter.</td>
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<td>In unstructured situations, the pupil may avoid social contact. They may have to be first in and out of lessons to avoid the crush, or to find a quiet corner away from people at break times.</td>
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<td>The pupil may like to be first or last in a queue to help provide order and predictability.</td>
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<td>They are rarely chosen by peers as partners or team members in a class situation.</td>
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<td>Many people with autism have poor motor and spatial skills and have particular difficulties in team games.</td>
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<td>Pupils may not see the point of team and competitive games. Team games may be</td>
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<td>Teach pupils to consider how their actions might be perceived by others and what are ‘expected’ and ‘unexpected behaviours in given situations.</td>
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<td>Make use of buddy systems to enable the pupil to join in with peers, especially at breaks.</td>
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<td>Use videos to predict the actors’ non-verbal and verbal communication. Clips from soaps are often good for this.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use the pupil’s strengths to improve their position with their peers. These are often in such areas as computers, videos, maps and timetables.</td>
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<td>Teacher choice rather than peer choice of groups is often better for this group. Peer choice, especially in games, is hurtful to many children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allow the child or young person to go in an agreed place in the line or allow them to go slightly early/late to avoid the crush.</td>
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difficult due to working collaboratively and the unpredictability of other’s.

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| **A lack of motivation to work on targets chosen by others** | - The pupil fails to finish a piece of work, or may even fail to start.  
- They may be easily distracted because they cannot differentiate the relevant information.  
- They may have difficulty in changing from one activity to another, and understanding the need to do so.  
- They may engage in work avoidance tactics.  
- They may respond to the task literally. For example, they may not be able to take on imagining a situation but be able to show the same skills in a real or more concrete task. | - Be explicit about goals and expectations. For example if there are 6 points for an answer the student may need to make 6 arguments in their answer.  
- Give reassurance if a task is to be completed over more than one lesson/chunk into sections.  
- Teach that it is more important to attempt the whole piece of work than to attain perfection in part of it.  
- Give clear visual cues to the time/structure of the task, such as use of a timer; tick list, a written plan or framework. Give advanced warning of the end of tasks  
- Ensure that the pupil has appropriate systems for getting help if required.  
- Be aware of and tackle any problems of organisation of equipment.  
- Change the nature of the task to suit the interests of the student. For example, create a game, make models.  
- Provide alternative strategies for note-taking, like; providing a skeleton outline of ideas, preparing notes so the student fills in the spaces, giving suggested beginnings to written work and using visual prompts. |
| - The pupils’ general difficulty with social interaction and empathy may make usual motivators ineffective (They are less eager to please the teacher or impress their peers). More defined reward systems may be needed, with less reliance on social reinforcement.  
- Some activities may be over-stimulating in themselves and pupils may have difficulty moving on from them.  
- Pupils may be reluctant to participate in a task for which they see no relevance.  
- School systems of delayed positive and negative consequences may not have any meaning to the child or young person. |  |  |

Pupils may become very upset if asked to more on from a task before they have finished.
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<td><strong>IMAGINATION AND FLEXIBILITY OF THOUGHT</strong></td>
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| **Resistance to change/Fear of Failure** | • The pupil may become anxious about changes in the routine or unexpected events.  
• The pupil appears unwilling or anxious in what may be perceived as ordinary circumstances and which seem to place no special demands on them. These can be as “ordinary” as changes in timetable, staff, room, task, font, or the colour of paper used.  
• Anxiety may occur as peer behaviour changes; trends change as the pupil matures, in fashion, phrases or a change of friendship pattern in the group. These reactions may be more severe if the pupil is already stressed  
• Choice can be very stressful (as making a decision means that there is a risk of getting it wrong).  
• Challenging behaviour is displayed when the student is asked to stop working on something they have not finished.  
• High levels of anxiety and resulting | • Provide explicit teaching on why exams and tests are important without increasing stress near exam times.  
• Provide the pupil with individual, laminated pocket size timetables so that any changes can be highlighted for the day/week.  
• Give warning about any changes in routine if possible, such as supply teachers, fire practice, trips and theatre groups.  
• Use ‘Memory Cards’ if a pupil needs to finish an activity so that they know when they can come back to it at a mutually acceptable time.  
• Have a ‘brief’ for supply teachers which includes information on the pupil and a basic “hints list” of “must do” and “never do” items.  
• Make a base, for instance in Learning Support, with familiar staff available at the beginning of each day and when required for reassurance.  
• Give frequent signals and reminders about changes, including pre-warnings just prior to the change.  
• Be explicit about what you expect and set time limits for the task. |
| Resistance to change is a basic difficulty for a pupil with autism. Often a small change is as distressing as a major one.  
• Attention shifting is difficult for these pupils. For instance, they may find it hard to shift attention from completing a written task to listening to the teacher for further direction.  
• Pupils with autism can be perfectionists and have very high expectations for themselves. This makes making any mistakes challenging.  
• Pupils with autism like to finish what they have started.  
• Transitions into new classes, new schools and to post 16 options can be very challenging. | | }
behaviours are displayed before, during and after changes of class, or setting, or when the young person is moving into employment.

- Keep choices simple and provide support through the process. ‘Behaviour contingency maps’ support positive choice by depicting the two choices the pupil can make regarding their behaviour and the likely consequences of each, via a simple flow chart.

- Teach and model the scientific process and how scientists test theories and learn from getting things wrong. Model a ‘Growth Mindset’ and praise attempts.

- Provide pastoral support or a particular staff member who the student can go to when they have concerns or are feeling anxious.

- Organise familiarisation visits to a new class, school, college/university or employer. These can be staggered, e.g. a trip to outside the setting and then separate trips to go inside, perhaps initially when there are no other students.

- Meet and take photos of any key people and places. Make a book of photos and information to which the pupil can refer. Consider a phased entry into the new setting.

- Have the new setting staff visit your school to meet specific pupils and where possible organise peer support.

- Arrange visits from pupils/employees who are already at the future setting or place
of employment.

- Ensure that careers education and planning programmes form part of the young person’s transition plan and appropriately reflect their individual requirements. Help pupils to choose goals that are realistic and achievable, but which maximise their potential and skills.
- Post 16, use the ‘Finished at School’ guidance from ‘Ambitious about Autism’ and the DfE which supports young people with autism to move from school to college.

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| **Displaying repetitive actions** | - Examples include repetitive hand movements, rocking, head or leg movements, repeated banging of hand on chin, hair tugging/twisting, going certain routes, sitting in certain places, touching certain objects repeatedly.  
- Organising equipment in lines or perfect patterns.  
- Continually asking the same question or saying a repeated word, phrase or noise.  
- Repetitive fiddling with the same object or piece of equipment. | - Unless this is a problem, do nothing.  
- Plan your response carefully; reward the behaviour you want, not the behaviour you do not want.  
- If it is a problem, look at the function of the action and try to teach an alternative that serves the same purpose for the child or young person, or agree an appropriate time or place. For instance, car noises are fine in the playground (though they may not be socially fine when others notice them – see above) but not in the classroom.  
- If the pupil repetitively asks a certain question, either agree to answer the question a set number of times, give them another way of checking the answer, or look for alternative ways of satisfying them. |

- Repetitive actions serve a purpose for the child or young person, such as releasing stress, blocking out unwanted thoughts or sensory sensations, or for enjoyment, or relaxation.
  - Repetitive actions may be for a physical purpose. For example, flicking fingers near their eyes may serve a visual purpose, by helping them focus, or it may control the level of sensory input.
  - The repetitive action may be verbal. This may be because the child or young person enjoys hearing the same pattern of sounds or finds a familiar answer calming.
### Obsessive interests

Many pupils with autism will have areas of particular interest that become an obsession and exclude other topics and activities.

- Interests can include trains, timetables, maps, cartoons or other films, number patterns, electrical gadgets – but can relate to anything. Often girls’ areas of interest are more socially acceptable (such as celebrities or music).
- The obsession can be all-encompassing, in which case the pupil cannot be talked out of it by rational discussions and explanations.
- The obsession can be an area of special interest, which can be directed or redirected into part of the curriculum.
- The pupil may bring his or her own interest into every piece of work.
- Conversation or behaviour may return continuously to the same topic, despite attempts to move on.
- The student remains oblivious to the fact that others are not interested.
- The child or young person may become distressed if they are not allowed to continue to pursue the obsession.

- Agree that the pupil can have some time for their own interests after they have completed the work satisfactorily.
- Make ‘deals’ about work and expected standards.
- Make ‘deals’ about the right time and place for the obsession.
- Give clear signals that they are becoming boring to others and help them to learn to respond to these.
- Remember that, for the student, these are genuine, valid, interests, like your own. Do not devalue them as “only” obsessions.
- Use the ‘interest’ in work activities to motivate the pupil.

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<td>Difficulty in applying knowledge to different situations</td>
<td>The pupil may be able to list the school rules (better than the head teacher can!) but be unable to interpret them in any particular situation.</td>
<td>Make links to previous learning explicit. Say, ‘This is what we were talking about in history yesterday’. Teach the same skill in a range of settings</td>
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## Organising, sequencing and prioritising

Some pupils with autism may find organising, sequencing and prioritising difficult. A pupil may have difficulties with:

- Processing information
- Predicting the consequences of an action (if I do this, what will happen next?)
- Understanding the concept of time:
  - Have a poor understanding of how long something will take
  - Have difficulty pacing their work
  - Take too long over certain aspects
- ‘Executive function’ (i.e. they may be detail-focused and less able to see the whole

### Spectrum conditions. This can result in their failing to apply what they know to different settings and situations, on different days, or with different individuals.

- The pupil may be unable to generalise previously learned skills and knowledge. This may result in behaviour that appears to be inappropriate, but in fact is due to lack of understanding and/or an inability to transfer information.
- The pupil may have fixed ideas about how, where and when certain activities should take place. For example, schoolwork should be done at school and not at home.

### The pupil may be unable to change to a new task, and want to be secure in what they have done already.

### The pupil may be unable to perform at the same level with a different teacher.

### Pupils' achievements may be shown to different degrees in different settings.

### Pupils may be unable to repeat performances in school that they have achieved at home, or vice-versa.

### Challenging behaviours regarding ‘homework’

### Do not assume that if pupils have learned a skill in one situation, they will be able to transfer it to a different one. Point out the links.

### Look at school rules together and discuss what they mean in different situations.

### Provide time for homework to be done at school and consider what is absolutely necessary.

### Students may quickly feel overwhelmed if given a multi-step task or instruction or when given several tasks to complete at the same time – i.e. a number of homework tasks, or ‘independent project work’.

### Difficulty prioritising work.

### Difficulty planning how much time to spend on different aspects of a task and working to a deadline.

### Students may spend a large amount of time on one aspect of their work and then run out of time.

### Students may not have what they need for the lesson and find it difficult to

### Provide pictures, written lists, timetables and calendars.

### Use colour coding. Colours can be used to indicate the importance or significance of tasks and so help students to prioritise them.

For example, work highlighted red or in a red tray or file could be urgent, green pending, blue optional. (System could also be used for homework)

### Recording messages/information on a talking tin, Dictaphone or smartphone, can be useful auditory reminders of tasks, work deadlines or calming strategies.

### Lists are a good way to register achievements (by crossing something off
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<td><strong>Emotional problems may not be shown in the situation causing them</strong></td>
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<td>- Pupils may learn a rule; for instance, that it is inappropriate to show strong emotional reactions in school. However, they may still have very strong feelings about a situation. Often this can result in feelings experienced at school being acted out at home. This can also happen the other way around.</td>
<td>- Often the disparity in behaviour between home and school will be detected through parental report. A young person who seems to be happy or, at least “getting on all right” at school will be reported to be unhappy, disruptive, or acting out at home. - Children and young people may have behaviour problems at school, but not at home. - Young people will observe and copy the behaviour of other pupils in order to fit in, make friends and avoid bullying.</td>
<td>- Recognise that problems at home are real and may have school roots. - Talk to parents and believe them. - Talk to the young person and believe them. - Do not automatically congratulate yourself on the absence of problems in school being the result of your good handling of the child or young person or the parents’ mishandling. - Discuss ways to help the situation, with parents and the child or young person themselves. - Set out very clearly what is agreed. Very simple rules, backed up by visual prompts and so on, help school staff as well as the young person and the family. - Reinforce that we are all different and that we respect each others differences.</td>
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<td><strong>Camouflaging</strong> has been proposed as a common experience for autistic people in their navigation of the non-autistic world (Bargiela et al. 2016; Hull et al. 2017). ‘Camouflaging’ is a term used to describe behaviours that hide or mask aspects of oneself from others, or to ‘pass’ as normal in everyday social interactions (Hull et al. 2017). The effort needed to camouflage is exhausting and has shown to have negative impacts upon mental wellbeing.</td>
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| **SENSORY DIFFERENCES** | - Becoming overwhelmed/anxious in busy environments  
- Becoming overwhelmed/anxious in environments where there are subtle sensory triggers such as the smell of cooking, the buzz of a light a flickering bulb.  
- Agitation can build gradually without the child or young person being aware until they hit a level where they cannot cope, triggering fight, flight or freeze responses. Adults might report; ‘They seem to go from 0-10 in a second’. | - Carry out a *sensory audit* of the pupil’s learning environment and social areas.  
- Consider whether *reasonable adjustments* need to be made to the environment, seating arrangements, timetable or school policies – such as the uniform policy.  
- Ensure that staff are aware of the sensory needs of the student and either warn the student of events or adapt lessons accordingly.  
- Anticipate the reasonable adjustments needed for events such as trips, celebrations, and the use of specialist equipment in lessons/demonstrations.  
- Be aware that pupils may be able to ‘contain’ resulting stress at school but it may come out at home. If parents report that they are struggling at home, put strategies in at school to alleviate stress throughout the day.  
- A sensory diet is a carefully designed, personalised activity plan that provides the sensory input a pupil may need to stay focused throughout the school day. It is designed by an Occupational Therapist. |
| People with sensory processing difficulties often have difficulty coping with sensory stimulation that others find ordinary. This may result in behaviour that, when understood, can be seen as: |  
- Helping them to keep stimulation at a level they can bear.  
- Controlling the number of channels of sensory stimulation they are coping with.  
- Increasing the level of sensory stimulation to keep themselves “switched on”.  
Sensory input is often incomplete or ambiguous and therefore our brains do not only simply receive information but also try to make predictions about what is most likely going to be experienced next. This sensory prediction is very important for helping us make sense of the world around us. This can be difficult for people with autism making the world less predictable and increasing anxiety. | |
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| Proprioception         | - Pupils may appear clumsy. They may sprawl across desks, and twist their legs around their chair legs. They may find it hard to sit appropriately on the carpet and find an appropriate space to sit (they tend to sit with their knees tucked under them). They may frequently bump into others or stand too close.  
- Pupils' books are likely to be messy as pupils may use the incorrect pressure when writing or rubbing out work and may tear pages when turning them.  
- Pupils may hug others too tightly and exert too much or little pressure in handshakes, high fives and ‘play fights’.  
- Pupils who have hypo-sensitivity (under-sensitive) in this area are likely to seek out more sensory input to their joints by stomping about, banging body parts together (such as banging hands together banging their jaw with their hand, squeezing objects and biting on or sucking, their fingers, pencils or pens.  
- Pupils will enjoy rough and tumble play but can be excessively rough with others.  
- Pupils may prefer to run, jump or stamp heavily when he/she should be walking. | - Offer practical assistance and simple guidance. For example allocate them a place to sit on the carpet perhaps using a carpet square or a certain chair.  
- Teach all pupils about personal space.  
- Seek OT advice regarding input to the muscles and joints: this can be both calming and alerting so consideration is needed about how and when to use it.  
- Provide opportunities for movement including:  
  - Weight-bearing activities e.g. crawling or push-ups  
  - Resistance activities e.g. pushing/pulling. Heavy lifting e.g. carrying books  
  - Cardiovascular activities e.g. running, jumping on a trampoline  
  - Oral activities e.g. chewing, blowing bubbles  
  - Deep pressure e.g. tight hugs  
- The frequency of the activities will depend on the individual sensory needs of the student.  
- Activities do not need to be lengthy. Short, frequent activities are often more beneficial. Some activities can be completed in 30 seconds, while others may last several minutes. Many such as; hand pushes, chair push ups, squeeze objects can be done in |
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<th>activities.</th>
<th>the pupil’s seats.</th>
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<td>• Observe the student and monitor when he/she reaches the calm alert state. This will then guide how long and how often activities need to take place.</td>
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<td>• If using the activity to calm an anxious student, try to introduce the activity before he/she becomes anxious and distressed by identifying trigger points for anxiety and implementing the proprioceptive input before these times. Activities can then be incorporated into the student’s timetable or visual schedule.</td>
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<td>• If using the activity to provide increased input in order to alert an under-responsive or sensory seeking student, identify the times when he/she tends to be disengaged or seeking input, and incorporate proprioceptive activities at these times. This will often be before and after sitting to do quiet/independent work.</td>
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<td>• Some pupils may be able to recognise when they are losing attention or becoming restless, and can then request a break for proprioceptive activities to re-engage attention.</td>
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<td>• If the teacher notices pupils becoming lethargic or restless, carry out activities with the whole class.</td>
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| **Vestibular**        | - Some pupils may be under-responsive to vestibular input. These pupils may have low muscle tone and may tire quickly. They may have a hard time sitting upright and they may slump on their desks. They may bump into things and appear uncoordinated. A pupil may constantly move in his/her chair if craving enhanced movement input to ‘switch on the brain’ and increase alertness. Although it may appear that the pupil is not listening and attending, he/she may be moving constantly in order to enhance concentration. Pupils who are under-responsive to vestibular input may:
  - fidget, rock or swing in their chair
  - leave their chair to walk/run around classroom
  - engage in fast and impulsive movements
  - lose attention when seated for prolonged periods |
|                       | - Some pupils may be over-responsive to or avoid vestibular input. These are the pupils who dislike swinging, climbing, or any activity where their feet might be off the ground. They tend to walk around the playground instead of engaging with any of the equipment. They may get motion sickness and may hate leaning their head back to get their hair washed. |
|                       | - It is vital that extreme caution is taken when using vestibular activities as some students can have strongly aversive responses to sensory input. If a student is over-responsive to vestibular (movement) input, seek advice from an occupational therapist. |
|                       | - Always respect the student’s refusal to participate in a movement activity and do not try to persuade or coerce. In particular, backward and rotary movements should be avoided if the student is over-responsive to movement. |
|                       | - Some students may also experience gravitational insecurity, meaning they become extremely anxious on unstable surfaces or when off the ground (e.g. walking on a balance beam, climbing ropes). It is important that these students always have a stable base of support. |
|                       | - For under-responsive students who swing and rock on their chairs, ‘move and sit’ cushions and their equivalents and ball chairs may be useful. They may also benefit from a planned sensory diet. |
Some over-responsive pupils refuse to participate in P.E. and playground games because they dislike the sensation of the movement involved. They will particularly dislike fast movements (e.g. being pushed in a play car), backwards movements (e.g. on a swing) and spinning movements (e.g. on a roundabout). They may also dislike sudden changes in movement and so will avoid chasing games and many team sports. Pupils may refuse to use equipment which involves feet being off the ground as they experience gravitational insecurity.

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<td><strong>Sound sensitivity</strong></td>
<td>Pupils may cover their ears.</td>
<td>Be aware that school halls, toilet areas, and corridors, can be loud and confusing places. Let pupils who find this difficult, move around school at somewhat quieter times, sit at the side in assembly if this is quieter, or away from the serving hatch in the dining hall.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils with sensory processing difficulties may show sensitivity to certain sounds and pitches. People report that some sounds are very distasteful, or actually painful to them. (Like the way that many people feel about nails on a chalkboard, but generalised to a wider range of sounds, and/or felt more extremely.)</td>
<td>They may appear in pain, grimacing or flinching at some sounds.</td>
<td>Provide a place pupils can go to if distressed that is quiet or has predictable sound levels.</td>
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<td>They may avoid noisy situations or those with unpredictable changes in sound.</td>
<td>Music is helpful to some pupils but should be low-stimulation. Some music which is sold for relaxation has a low rate of change and can be helpful. Some pupils with sensory processing difficulties find music</td>
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<td>They may anticipate a sound they know is going to be painful, and show signs of distress.</td>
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the teacher’s voice.
- Background music may be very distracting.
- Pupils often like loud sounds when they are in control of the sound but cannot cope with this when the sound is not within their control.

with a strong repetitive beat relaxing. The reason is probably again that it has high predictability from moment to moment – so it provides an unchanging focus of attention. Some students will find music distracting.
- Warn of loud noises such as fire alarms if possible.
- Let them work in the quietest part of the classroom, away from “traffic”.
- Consider the use of ear-defenders.

Underlying Difficulty | Presentation | Support
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**Visual perceptual differences**
Some people with sensory processing difficulties report a number of visual perceptual differences:
- Some have difficulties with depth perception. This may relate to clumsiness and other spatial problems common in this group.
- Some say they find peripheral vision more reliable than looking at something straight on.
- Some visual stimuli (brightness and pattern) may be overstimulating and disrupt concentration and attention.
- Some people with visual perceptual difficulties report visual disturbance when reading.
- Students may have difficulty walking down stairs, or using climbing apparatus, as part of a general physical timidity.
- Pupils may have problems with technology, because of spatial perception difficulties, or with handwriting.
- Pupils may look at things out of the corner of their eye. (This may have to do with controlling the level of stimulation they get.)
- Pupils may find visually “busy” classrooms harder to cope with.
- Pupils need good classroom lighting. They may find the flicker of fluorescent lighting disturbing and may be affected in classrooms where the light level varies greatly from area to area.
- Let pupils walk down stairs at a less busy time. Give them more time to do this and a situation where they can hold the rail if necessary.
- Do not insist on pupils looking at something straight on if they are more comfortable with peripheral vision. This includes looking directly at members of staff.
- Let pupils work at a table not surrounded by displays or artwork.
- Encourage working in a part of the room where they find the lighting comfortable.
- Using a lower contrast paper, for instance, buff rather than white helps some pupils. Using a coloured filter over reading material also helps some pupils.
- If any pupil (whether they have an autistic
### Smell and Taste

Some pupils are very sensitive to certain tastes and smells. Some children and young people find particular tastes or textures of food repellent. On the other hand, some may eat or chew things others would find unpalatable.

- A smell may distract them from concentrating on work.
- The pupil may choose a very limited diet.
- The pupil may go through a period where they eat the same things for weeks at a time. They may notice small changes in the way a product tastes which are unpalatable to them.
- Inappropriate items may be chewed, licked or eaten.
- Pupils may find seeing other people eat distressing.

#### Underlying Difficulty

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<th>Touch sensitivity</th>
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<td>Pupils with sensory processing difficulties may have difficulty in dealing with feedback from their own senses. This can affect touch just as much as other senses.</td>
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<td>Pupils may not like to change into clothes which feel different, for PE.</td>
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<td>Pupils may hang on to outdoor clothing inside, or put on too much or too little clothing to go outside.</td>
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<td>Pupils may hit out at, or be</td>
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<td>Consider ‘reasonable adjustments’ to the setting’s uniform policy.</td>
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<td>Change only the essential clothing for P.E. and gradually build up to a full change.</td>
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<td>If there is a very serious problem with changing, try very hard to make</td>
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• Pupils may find certain textures intolerable.
• Pupils may find it hard to identify a feeling such as whether they are hot or cold.
• Pupils may over-react if another pupil touches them, deliberately or accidentally.
• Some people with autism have poor body image.
• Pupils find it hard to process sensory inputs, which show where the parts of their body are, in terms of position, or in relation to other objects and people.
• Some people with touch sensitivity find the feedback from the touch of their clothing uncomfortable all the time.
• Quite a lot of people with autism have difficulty in maintaining posture or have features in common with people with dyspraxia.
• Some pupils may be hypo-sensitive to pain (have a very high pain threshold) or hyper-sensitive to pain (have a very low pain threshold).

“disproportionately” concerned about another pupil who has touched them.
• Pupils may find it difficult to take part in any messy activities.
• Pupils may get into trouble for being “fidgety”.
• Pupils may get into trouble by infringing other people’s space, because of poor body awareness.
• Pupils may need to lean or appear “sloppy” in an attempt to achieve a stable posture.
• The child or young person may not notice when they are hurt or poorly.

opportunities for physical activity available which do not necessitate this. (However, some students with autism love P.E., although very few become “team players”.)
• Remember that the problems about changing for many pupils with autism are essentially physical – about staying comfortable when change is very uncomfortable or about changing being slow and awkward because of clumsiness or poor coordination.
• Ensure there is sufficient space for the pupil when a group is gathered together.
• In adolescence, young people with autism may have more than usual difficulties with the changes of puberty. Sexualised or coarse talk and horseplay in changing situations may be particularly off-putting for them and often strays into bullying. These pupils need changing situations to be well supervised.
• Let pupils avoid jostling by standing at the back or front of lines.
• Ensure there is sufficient working room at a table.
• Encourage use of tools for messy tasks and do not insist on “getting stuck in” if it is not necessary.
• Many pupils with autism will need continuing help with handwriting into KS3 and KS4.
- Provide alternatives to handwriting for recording if speed and accuracy of handwriting are an issue.
- Adults need to be aware that child or young person may be hypo or hyper sensitive to pain and ensure that they are well and check any injuries carefully.

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