RIVERSIDE SCHOOL

FLEXIBILITY OF THOUGHT GUIDANCE

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This guidance was reviewed and agreed at a meeting of the Governing Board on:

30 January, 2020

(Policy to be reviewed triennially).

Next review date – Spring term, 2023

Introduction

This document outlines the school's approaches to developing flexibility of thought for Riverside students with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC).**(see below).* It identifies our aims, objectives and strategies used.

Rationale

Flexibility of thought 'allows us to imagine situations outside our immediate daily routine' (National Autistic Society). We recognise that students with ASC can have difficulty with flexibility of thought, may have associated difficulties in the development of play skills and social imagination and may not easily grasp that other people have thoughts and emotions of their own.

Differences with flexibility of thought can manifest themselves in obsessive, repetitive routines and behaviours. People with autism often have a strong preference for routines and sameness and may find security in rigidity or ritualistic behaviours. These behaviours are not seen as behaviours that always need eliminating; we would only consider this if they were impeding the student's daily life, safety or education. We would seek to modify the behaviours necessary to the individual.

How students with ASC may experience things differently

Students with ASC may have a compromised ability to think flexibly, to problem-solve and predict outcomes on a day-to-day basis. If anxiety levels are heightened for whatever reason, the ability to make or accept choices, problem solve, make decisions and negotiate is impaired.

Specifically, differences with flexibility of thought mean students with ASC may find it hard to:
- *Understand and interpret other people's thoughts, feelings and actions*
- *Predict what will happen next, or what could happen next*
- *Understand the concept of danger*
- *Engage in imaginative play and activities: student with autism may enjoy some imaginative play but prefer to act out the same scenes each time*
- *Prepare for change and plan for the future*
- *Cope in new or unfamiliar situations*
- *Generalise skills across different settings*
- *Multi-tasking*
- *Decision- and choice-making*

These differences in flexible thinking may present a barrier to learning for students with autism, and may present as:

- *Challenging or inappropriate behaviour*
- *Repetitive behaviours (such as; lining up objects, pacing up and down, repetitive questioning or activities etc.)….*

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* (note – historically having an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was applied to people with autism. However, over time, this was found to be inappropriate by those concerned and the term Condition became preferred. It is accepted that organisations working with people with autism will substitute ASC for ASD in their documentation in a phased fashion).

- *A difficulty in empathising with others*
- *Limited ability to problem-solve*
- *Limited ability to accept others' viewpoints*
- *Restricted play skills*
- *Withdrawal from unfamiliar people, activities or places*
- *Obsessive interests*
- *Reliance on routines*
- *Resistance to change (desire to preserve sameness)*
- *Difficulties with self-organisational skill*
- *Difficulties managing unstructured times and transitions*
- *Limited imitation skills*
- *Lack of social imagination*

Managing change

Change is a contributing factor to causing anxiety. A person with ASC can find any kind of change difficult, however significant or insignificant it appears to others.

There are many changes that require attention and support such as:

- *Changing position of (classroom) furniture*
- *Changing the timetable*
- *Changing teaching staff*
- *Eating different foods*
- *Eating and drinking from different containers*
- *Wearing different clothing*
- *Seasonal changes*
- *Changing travel routes*
- *Micro and macro transitions*
- *Crisis management*
- *Environmental changes*
- *Change to structure and routine*
- *Community outings*

Implementation

At Riverside School we address differences with flexibility of thought through various teaching strategies: these strategies are identified and recorded in a variety of formats. Some of the daily teaching techniques are listed below. This however, is not an exhaustive list and we will always seek new and other ways to meet individual needs.

- *Visual timetables and schedules*
- *Alternative and augmentative communication systems*
- *Choice-making boards / systems to support students to make choices*
- *Offering limited choices and sabotaging events (to encourage problem-solving and seeking*
  /alternatives)
- *Teaching across different settings to encourage generalisation skills*
- *Teaching to ask for help*
- *Teaching to request breaks, identifying time out, promoting self-regulating behavior*

- *Using a surprise symbol on the timetable (pre-planned changes)/ 'oops' symbol on PODD pages and ALDs*
- *Behaviour techniques and management strategies (see behaviour policy)*
- *Opportunities to negotiate throughout the day (now/next schedules / token boards e.g. I am working towards…)*
- *Building sensory activities into the daily routine to reduce anxiety (e.g. sensory toys, cycling, softplay)*
- *Effective transitions between activities is embedded into daily routines so that unexpected change can be managed (teaching the concept of 'finished')*
- *Social stories (where relevant)*
- *Social skills teaching*
- *Setting clear and consistent boundaries for the behaviour (limiting frequency of object / time or place)*
- *Exploring alternative, more appropriate activities that have the same function as the repetitive behaviour*
- *Using obsessions to motivate and reward so to develop skills, increase social opportunities and improve self esteem*
- *Relaxation techniques*
- *SMILE therapy to encourage students to be aware of how their actions and what they say in specific situations will impact on others.*

Special interests

Special interests can provide great motivations for pupils on the autistic spectrum. Riverside School often use the special interests to motivate our pupils. We do not view a student's special interest as something we need to eradicate (unless there are H&S reasons).

Use of special interests books, for students to record information/pictures they find about their special interest, are encouraged. Students are also encouraged to make presentations about their special interests in assemblies.

Planning and recording

Information relating to a student's difficulties in relation to rigidity and flexibility of thought may form part of the following records

- *Annual review and person -centred review targets*
- *A student with ASC may have individual Key Skills targets addressing issues related to the condition not addressed in every day classroom activities. These are recorded and evaluated in Solar*
- *Individual Behaviour Programmes*
- *Individual meal time plans (some students eat separately)*
- *Communication and Sensory Profiles*

Staff training

All staff receive ongoing training on all aspects of autism including use of visual structure, preparing for transitions, special interests and diagnosis of ASC.

In addition, primarily for students in Team 3, many staff are trained in Attention Autism.

Monitoring

At Riverside School we ensure that opportunities for developing flexibility of thinking, choice-making   and problem solving are pursued and evaluated. This is done through:

- *Annual reviews / transition plans*
- *IEP recording sheets*
- *Lesson evaluations*
- *End of term assessments*
- *Monitoring communication systems*
- *Certificates recognising progress in this area are stored in folders in class*
- *Monitoring class planning files*

Links to other areas of learning

Flexibility of thought links into all areas of learning, all areas of the curriculum and supports policies   and programmes such as:

- Behaviour Management policy
- Behaviour Plans
- Communication Policy
- Communication and Sensory Profiles
- PSHEE Policy
- Intimate Care Policy

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