



What is ASD?

ASD is an acronym for Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Autism is the name for a range of similar conditions that affect a person's social interaction, communication, interests and behaviour.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people. If you are autistic, you are autistic for life; autism is not an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. Often people feel being autistic is a fundamental aspect of their identity.

Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties, but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people also have learning disabilities, mental health issues or other conditions, meaning people need different levels of support. All people on the autism spectrum learn and develop. With the right sort of support, all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing.

Taken from the NHS & the National Autistic Society 2016.

Common signs of ASD

The characteristics of autism vary from one person to another. Generally autism is common in children who have had persistent difficulties with social communication and interactions as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests since their early childhood, to the extent that they may 'limit and impair everyday functioning'.

Persistent difficulties with social communication and social interaction:

Social communication:

Children with autism have difficulty interpreting verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice. They can have a very literal understanding and may believe that people always mean exactly what they say. They may struggle to understand or use facial expressions, tone of voice and sarcasm or jokes. Some children may also be non-verbal or late developers in their language. Others may be well developed in their communication but struggle with the expectations of conversation and may repeat what their peer has said (known as echolalia) or talk about their personal interests at length.

Social interaction:

Children with autism may also struggle to understand others, they may not be able to 'read' them or understand how they may be feeling. By being this way they may seem insensitive, they may seek out time alone, not require comfort from others and/or may seem as if they are acting 'strangely' or being socially inappropriate. Autistic children may find forming friendships quite difficult.

Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, activities or interests:

Repetitive behaviour and routines:

Autistic children often like to follow a routine daily such as travelling to school the same way or having the same food for breakfast. The use of rules can also be important as some autistic children may find it difficult to take a different approach to something once they have been taught the 'right' way to do it. Children with autism also may not be comfortable with the idea of change.

Highly focused interests:

Many autistic children can have highly focused interests, often from a young age. These can change from time to time or be lifelong.

Sensory sensitivity:

Autistic children may also experience and over or under sensitivity to smells, tastes, sounds, lights, colours, pain or temperatures.

Identifying ASD and Diagnosing

From the beginning of Early Years, we will carefully monitor the children who are failing to achieve age-related expectations in all areas of their learning especially those who are struggling to achieve in their personal, social and emotional development. We will monitor this through teacher assessments and external agencies such as Freemantles to seek support if necessary. Any concerns that arise by members of staff will always be mentioned to the inclusion leader and discussed with parents. Staff will never make any kind of referral without first consulting with parents.

Staff may recognise and flag up signs that suggest social difficulties/learning difficulties, however cannot make any diagnosis.

A diagnosis, being the formal identification of autism, is usually made by a multi-disciplinary diagnostic team, often including a speech and language therapist, paediatrician, psychiatrist and/or a psychologist.

If you feel that your child is displaying any of the behaviours associated with ASD, please speak to your class teacher.

Approach to Autism at Beeston Fields:

As a school we support all children as individuals, addressing their unique needs and supporting their unique strengths. To support children with Autism, we:

- Use visual timetables in all classes across the school
- Use further resources to break down learning for those who require it e.g. using now and next boards or task ladders
- Use sensory support resources (sensory toys, wobble cushions, chewllery)
- Provide nurture-based interventions to support emotional and social development
- Provide speech and language based interventions in line with advice provided by speech and language therapists
- Have regular whole-school training in areas which children with ASD commonly find difficult e.g. executive functioning

Links to other useful sites:

www.autism.org.uk/

www.autismspeaks.org

www.we-shine.org.uk

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/>