PUPILS WITH AUTISM

UNIT 19

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH COLLEAGUES WITHIN SCHOOL AND WITH OTHER AGENCIES

Learning outcomes

Trainees will:

- Understand the key components which are likely to lead to effective practice across the school in relation to pupils on the autism spectrum
- Have knowledge of the qualities and skills of staff which are likely to be effective in working with pupils on the autism spectrum

ONLINE RESOURCES

The content and tasks throughout these PDFs are supported by online resources that are designed to facilitate and supplement your training experience.

Links to these are signposted where appropriate. The resources use graphics and interactive elements to:

- Highlight salient points
- Provide at-a-glance content summaries
- Introduce further points of interest
- Offer visual context
- Break down and clearly present the different stages and elements of processes, tasks, practices, and theories

The online resources offer great benefits, both for concurrent use alongside the PDFs, or as post-reading revision and planning aids.

Please note that the resources cannot be used in isolation without referencing the PDFs. Their purpose is to complement and support your training process, rather than lead it.

You should complete any learning or teaching tasks and additional reading detailed in this PDF to make full use of the Advanced training materials for autism; dyslexia; speech, language and communication; emotional, social and behavioural difficulties; moderate learning difficulties.

To find out more about the resources, how they work, and how they can enhance your training, visit the homepage at: www.education.gov.uk/lamb

The first resource for this unit can be found here:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/collaborative-working/intro

It is vital that the knowledge and expertise within a school about the autism spectrum and individual pupils is shared widely and does not remain the sole responsibility of the SENCO, the class or form teacher or the teaching assistants. Mechanisms need to be put in place whereby each school year, the school staff as a whole becomes much more knowledgeable about autism and the implications for teaching and learning. Some schools have nominated an autism champion or a lead person who coordinates and disseminates information about autism, a role that could be taken on by a specialist teacher for the autism spectrum in a school. Their role is to consider how the school can enhance its practice year on year in relation to this group. The school effectiveness checklist within this section can be used as a guide to check the extent to which practice is widely shared and where the school is at in terms of whole school practice.

People involved in the school life of a pupil with autism

See online resource:

www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/collaborative-working/school-staff

Schools are complex systems and one of the key areas of difficulty in autism is social understanding and social interaction with peers and adults. As pupils with autism are likely to meet many different people within the course of a school week, it is important to know which adults a pupil is likely to meet and to ensure that these staff have basic awareness training on autism and are given key information on each pupil on the school roll. Staff that teach the pupil need more in-depth training in autism and to be given specific information on the pupil to ensure strategies are used across the staff team to support the pupil. Creating a passport for the pupil, which can be shared across these people, can be a very effective way of giving people vital information about individual pupils. (See the unit on identifying the needs of pupils on the autism spectrum)

The list below shows the people who might interact with a pupil in the classroom or within the school.

Class teacher/Form teacher

Learning Support Assistant

Classmates

Head teacher

SENCO

Other teachers

Lunchtime supervisors

Clerical staff

Caretaker

Drivers and escorts

Visiting professionals

Other visitors

Volunteers

Each of these groups is likely to need and to acquire different types and amounts of information. This raises questions as to who needs to know what and why and who should decide on this. Clearly, the parents, the class teacher and the pupil himself/herself are the people who should have the main say.

See online resource:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/collaborative-working/info-sharing

Task 1:

Write down the names of all the people that a particular pupil may have contact with in the course of a week. Consider what information, at a minimum, you think they should know about the pupil and what you might tell them. In doing so, you should consider why it would be useful for them to know this.

It would be useful to share:

- that the pupil will have difficulties in communication and may not understand what is said to him/her, even though his/her own speech and language might be quite good

- ways of interacting with the pupil that are not anxiety provoking

- how to make themselves understood to the pupil

- how to respond when the pupil behaves inappropriately

- that the pupil is likely to find it difficult to understand what other pupils and adults do and say

- that the pupil may say and do things which appear to be personally insulting, but that s/he will lack the usual inhibitions and tend to say what s/he sees and feels, with little idea of the impact on the people around.

Shared understandings between the staff

Good communication systems between staff within a school are essential for the welfare of all pupils and not just for those with autism. Pupils with autism are likely to be more vulnerable to gaps or flaws in the school's communication system than others.

See online resource:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/collaborative-working/systems

Poor communication is likely to lead to inconsistency and inappropriate action by staff and pupils. Staff need to understand the nature of the specific needs of a pupil with autism and the rationale for the strategies used so that they interact with and manage the pupil effectively and support rather than undermine their colleagues' work. Without this understanding, the pupil's behaviour may be viewed as naughty and a teacher's responses 'soft' or 'unfair'. Staff have to decide together in which areas of school life the pupil might need to be treated differently from others and that priorities for the pupil with autism might be different from those of pupils of the same age. It may help to generate a list of dos and don'ts for adults in a supervisory role when they first start working with a pupil. Positive reports on the pupil from others are likely to be conducive to success.

Knowing a pupil is on the autism spectrum and receiving general information on autism directs staff to the way in which such pupils view the world and how they think and learn, but does not give information on how each individual pupil will react or behave within their school. So in addition to this background knowledge, the staff need information on the needs of the particular pupil or pupils with autism that attend(s) their school.

At a minimum, the pupil's class teacher or subject teacher(s) and learning support assistant (if allocated) should be given information on autism and its implications for the pupil. However, it would also be valuable if other staff that may meet the pupil receive information. Within the school's special needs policy document, it would be helpful to have a section on the specific needs of pupils with autism. In addition, the

School Governors, who may need to advise on matters raised by staff or parents in connection with the pupil, should be given this information.

Information for staff might be in written form - a basic outline of autism and then information on the particular characteristics of each pupil and what s/he enjoys or dislikes and how s/he communicates. If in-service sessions on autism are arranged, then it is helpful to invite as many adults in contact with the pupil, as possible. It may be helpful to generate a set of rules for staff to use in relation to the pupil in order to manage particular situations consistently (e.g. repetitive questioning; greetings; dress; inappropriate behaviour).

The need for a named staff member for each pupil with autism

Within the school, it is important that a member of staff, with whom the pupil has frequent contact, is identified as having a particular responsibility for that pupil. In a primary school, this is likely to be the pupil's class teacher. In a secondary school, this could be the pupil's form teacher or the head of year. This teacher would develop an understanding and relationship with the pupil and act as an advocate. They would also be responsible for collating and facilitating the information exchange between members of staff and relevant others. They should not, however, be seen as the person with sole responsibility for the pupil - responsibility and care should be shared. As the pupil's ability to understand and negotiate develops, s/he should be consulted and closely involved in the decisions made and actions taken. In the past, much of what has been arranged for pupils with autism has been done without asking their opinion. Things have been done to them rather than with them. Interventions introduced in this way, without discussion, are likely to fail and may be unethical.

The role of the learning support assistant

Some pupils with autism may be allocated support from an adult who may work within the classroom or elsewhere. They may have childcare qualifications or may not have any relevant qualifications at all. Some are appointed by the school staff and others are allocated to the school by the Local Authority. Much thought and discussion should occur to determine how and when the learning support assistant (LSA) should work with the pupil. A very useful report on the work of LSAs across the range of SEN has been produced by Peter Blatchford and colleagues[1]. It is possible to envisage a scenario where the LSA is almost always the person who

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[1] Blatchford, P. et al. (2009) *Deployment and impact of support staff project*, London: DCSF

supports the pupil in an activity and other people in the classroom (i.e. the class teacher and the other pupils) may be unwittingly excluded. It is possible too for the LSA to be the pupil's only social partner. This then limits the knowledge and understanding of the pupil that others develop and, equally important, it can feel very burdensome for the LSA. The knowledge and understanding about the pupil with autism should be shared throughout the classroom and beyond and not remain solely with the LSA.

Establishing links with other agencies outside the school: Other education providers and consultants

In addition to the school staff, some pupils with autism are also assessed and supported by people working in education services employed by the Local Authority – in particular by Autism Outreach services or Inclusion Services or by Educational Psychologists. Professionals within these services will often work with the staff and the family rather than directly with the pupil and will require good evidence from staff as to how the pupil functions within a school context. Increasingly, as Local Authorities have less control over how the schools operate and which services they purchase, a range of other providers are developing to meet the needs of pupils with SEN including autism. Some pupils with autism can find attending school full-time very difficult and so there are now providers of alternative provision who can offer part or full-time placement. Most of these pupils will remain on roll at the school.

Establishing links with other agencies outside the school: health professionals

Some pupils with autism, but not all, may be seen for assessment or monitoring by other professionals outside the school employed by health. This includes clinical psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, paediatricians and psychiatrists. It is important that the school has an up to date list of those who have ongoing involvement with the pupil and communicates important and relevant information to them in a timely way.

Computer software has been developed at the University of Valencia in Spain by Gerardo Herrera and colleagues which allows professionals across health, social care and education to input data and actions planned into a central place for each pupil who is part of the system – so that any professional and the family can see at a glance who is involved and what their plans are. This includes photographs of the professionals working with the pupil and family. This centralization of information potentially avoids conflict and confusion and repetition of services and advice. There are often issues between health, social care and education about sharing information

across agencies in the UK, but the principle is a sound one and agencies could communicate far better with one another than they do currently.

See online resource:
www.education.gov.uk/lamb/autism/collaborative-working/school-staff

Task 2

Developing a whole school approach to effective practice for pupils on the autism spectrum

Potential indicators of effective school practice in relation to the autism spectrum (Compiled by Glenys Jones and Annette English, based on the DfES Good Practice Guidance in ASD, 2002)

Look at the check list below.

In relation to your own school for each of the items, rate on a four-point scale, as follows:

1. **well-developed practice**   2. **working towards this**
3. **little or no work on this**   4. **don't know**

You could also rank these in terms of how important you think these aspects are, as follows:

E   **essential**   **H**   **highly desirable**   **D**   **desirable**

Suggestions on how this checklist might be used

- Consider the extent to which each statement is true.
- Is the practice evident across the whole school/unit or service?
- Is it implemented or followed by just some or all the staff?
- Are there ways in which it can be further developed or elaborated?

    You could also
- Add in other items which you feel are important
- Modify the wording of items to clarify more exactly what is meant
- Use it as an instrument to generate debate on your working practice and its rationale

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Complete the Whole School Effectiveness Checklist below and ascertain which areas are very well developed and which areas your school could work on over the next 12 months to enhance the practice in relation to pupils on the autism spectrum. List 3 actions that would need to be taken to start this process and by whom.

Number	Aspect of practice	Rating	Comments	Importance
1	Staff are aware of referral routes if they suspect a pupil is on the autism spectrum			
2	There is a named person in the school/service, to give general information on the autism spectrum and specific information about individual pupils			
3	Information-sharing occurs between staff within and outside school/service			
4	There is an up to date bank of resources on the autism spectrum			
5	There is a policy on working with pupils on the autism spectrum			
6	Data is kept on staff training on the autism spectrum and conference attendance			
7	External agencies are consulted when drawing up policy/provision on the autism spectrum			
8	Pupils on the autism spectrum are involved in decision-making			
9	Activities, timetables and their delivery are modified as necessary for particular pupils			
10	Generalisation opportunities are provided			
11	The environment has been modified to take account of sensory issues			
12	Families and staff work closely together			
13	Staff provide support to families out of hours			
14	Good communication systems exist with health, education, social and voluntary			

	agencies			
15	Work is done to ensure smooth transitions within and between classes and schools			
16	Staff have knowledge and links with other providers offering similar services to consider similarities and differences/ strengths and weaknesses/sharing of resources (e.g. all types of provision for pupils on the autism spectrum in the area)			
17	Visual cues and systems are used to aid communication and understanding			
18	Staff acknowledge the effort involved for pupils on the autism spectrum in trying to understand our social rules and systems			
19	Staff have high expectations and give high levels of support to pupils on the autism spectrum			
20	Staff know that physical intervention is particularly difficult for pupils on the autism spectrum and would never use this except in exceptional cases.			
21	Activities are well organised and planned and individuals given advanced details of these and warned of any changes to familiar routines			
22	Pupils on the autism spectrum are given time to follow their special interests and activities			
23	Staff view challenging behaviour as the result of an interaction of factors, relating to the environment and the demands made on the pupil			
24	Pupils on the autism spectrum are given time to be alone in the school day			

25	Staff let knowledge about the autism spectrum and the pupil determine their response			
26	Staff acknowledge the importance of play			
27	Staff are able to get to know individual pupils very well			
28	Staff have considered how to reduce stress for staff and pupils			
29	Staff accept difference and do not hold the view that the only acceptable way of being is to 'pretend to be normal'			
30	Staff are committed to including pupils in activities with mainstream peers			
31	Staff share information with other staff in a formal way when they return from conferences and courses			
32	There have been discussions on how staff work with parents			
33	The general ethos is to fit the school/service to the pupil rather than changing the pupil to fit the school/service			
34	Staff adopt a calm, quiet approach and give pupils lots of time to process and respond to instructions			
35	Staff use minimal speech and provide visual cues to make their requests clear to pupils			

36	Staff have opportunities to discuss how they work with pupils and aim for a consensus in certain key areas of practice			
37	Staff know that pupils on the autism spectrum are more likely to be teased and bullied than other pupils and take steps to prevent this			
38	Pupils on the autism spectrum are given clear instructions on what to do in 'free' time during lessons and at break-times			
39	Strategies and support provided for pupils continue for as long as is needed as pupils move from one class or school to another			
40	Staff new to the school are given documents which describe key policies and principles which underpin the school's practice and are given opportunities to observe other staff			
41				
42				
43				

Staff training on the autistic spectrum

The number of professionals with knowledge of the autism spectrum has increased tremendously in the last few years. However, there are still many who require training. Often the staff who have most contact with the pupils are those with the least training and experience. There are instances where staff are naturally talented and do excellent work, without any formal training. Even so, they would usually welcome and benefit from information on autism. Many education authorities are now addressing the training needs of teachers and Learning Support Assistants (LSA) and setting up courses specifically for them. In most cases, though, the training is rarely given before the member of staff starts working with the pupil. Training can take several forms, from within-school courses, external courses on single interventions to accredited courses. Research and practice continue to identify new approaches, so all

professionals need updating. In addition, staff within schools and services change posts and so an establishment has an on-going need for training.

A web-based course has been developed at the University of Birmingham for people with experience of working with pupils or adults with autism (e.g. parents, LSAs, residential care staff), but who have few formal qualifications. This can be studied at a distance by computer from home or the workplace (see www.education.bham.ac.uk). Attendance at courses on particular approaches can be valuable, but these need to be supplemented by training on autism so that the rationale of the approach can be understood in the context of a general understanding of the autism spectrum. Where staff do attend training events, it is important they feed back to colleagues. Before new interventions are introduced, adequate training is needed for all staff concerned, so that the rationale is understood and the intervention is implemented in the way intended. It can be the case that a pupil has used a system successfully in one class (e.g. PECS; a visual timetable), only to find that staff in their next class do not know how to use this or do not see its value and so it is not continued and is denied to the pupil.

Assessment of training needs within a school or unit

It is important that training addresses the particular needs of participants and the setting within which they work. An assessment of training needs is therefore essential before money is invested in professional development. Ascertaining the training needs of individual staff, in the context of considering what needs to be developed on a whole school basis, is important. Where external trainers are involved, they need to have knowledge of the work and systems used within the school and the staff's level of understanding of these, to match the training delivered to the needs of the staff. Otherwise, the impact of the training is likely to be diminished. Evaluating the outcomes of training in the workplace is also to be encouraged.

Characteristics of effective practitioners for pupils on the autism spectrum

As the work with pupils with autism is increasingly documented and discussed, it is possible to make generalisations about the type of teaching style that is likely to be effective[2]. These include being calm, being attracted by difference, an ability to give without getting the usual thanks, a willingness to adapt one's style of communication and interaction and never being satisfied with how much one knows. Attitudes and values are as important as knowledge and skills. It can be

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2 Peeters, T and Jordan, R (1999) What makes a good practitioner in the field of autism? In G. Jones (Ed) *Good Autism Practice*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham

particularly hard for mainstream staff to appreciate a pupil has difficulties, when at times s/he appears normal and speech and academic work is age appropriate or better. Even parents report they sometimes doubt their pupil's diagnosis, as there are times when it is really not that evident. Where staff believe a pupil is intentionally misbehaving, a power struggle can ensue, which exacerbates the situation and can lead to a total breakdown in the relationship and the placement.

Systems for sharing information within a school

Individual staff are likely to need different types of information. There are questions of who needs to know what and why, and who should decide on this. In a large secondary school, a subject teacher might teach over 300 pupils a week. Some staff might have difficulty in putting a face to a name, so a strategy where the pupil presents the teacher with written information on his or her needs might have more impact[3]. The teacher-in-charge of a base within a mainstream secondary school, gives written information on the pupils to staff[4] (Parker, 2000).

Much time is spent in helping staff understand and manage the behaviour of the pupils. Their TAs become experts at recognising the signs of stress and changing the situation to avoid challenging behaviour. Parker (2000) maintains that the pupils' presence in the school has enabled other pupils to be aware of difference and broadened the professional experience and skills of mainstream staff.

Having a named staff member

It can be useful when a member of staff takes particular responsibility for a pupil. In special schools, there is often a keyworker system, where a teacher or LSA takes responsibility for two or three pupils. In a primary school, this is likely to be the pupil's class teacher and in a secondary school, the keyworker could be the pupil's form teacher, SENCO or head of year. This teacher can develop an understanding and relationship with the pupil, and act as an advocate and be responsible for collating and facilitating the information exchange between members of staff and relevant others. As the pupil's ability to understand and negotiate develops, s/he can be consulted and closely involved in decisions. Any strategies for self-assessment can be facilitated in sessions between the keyworker and the pupil.

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[3] Barber, C. (1996) The integration of a very able pupil with Asperger syndrome into a mainstream school, *British Journal of Special Education,* 23, 19-24

[4] Parker, M. (2000) Setting up a secondary base for secondary-aged pupils with an ASD within a mainstream secondary school, *Good Autism Practice Journal,* 1, 2, 62-70

Observation by colleagues of individual teaching sessions

It is very useful to obtain feedback on sessions from colleagues to identify positive features and aspects which might be done differently. In particular, signals from the pupil which might be missed can be identified and taken into account next time. Although sharing video records can be anxiety provoking, it can be extremely valuable, and one could argue that it should be a routine part of everyday school practice. It is important for senior staff to acknowledge the anxieties, which might arise and have give advice on how to use video in school, in a way which preserves the self-esteem and confidence of staff. He unit on Lesson Study provides important guidance on using video constructively to develop classroom skills. Video Interactive Guidance has been used very effectively to boost the confidence and skills of parents and staff. In this technique, video recordings are edited so that they only show the positive interactions between parent and chid or teacher and pupil, with a view to showing their success as parents or teachers and suggesting they build on the type of interactions which appear to engage the pupil. Video records are also very useful in monitoring and evaluating a pupil's progress. Each pupil could have a personal videotape, which is added to and used at reviews, to show the parents examples of progress, strengths, interests and any areas of concern.