



### 1. INTRODUCTION

Eagle House Group is committed to responding to the needs of and delivering exceptional services to children and young people with autism, special needs and their families. Our mission is to unlock the potential of all our pupils and our autism policy outlines our unique approach (the *Eagle House Approach*), which provides a flexible framework designed to support children and young people with autism spectrum disorders.

The Eagle House Approach, starting with the individual at its core, builds through the following layers to produce a unique and distinctive multi-dimensional framework:

- Environment
- Multidisciplinary working
- Personalised learning
- Autism specific teaching and learning approaches
- Differentiated specialist curriculum
- Integrated National Curriculum
- Formative and summative assessment of progress

### 2. OUR AIMS

The aim of Eagle House Group provisions is to provide:

- An autism specific environment for all pupils
- Best practice teaching and interventions for pupils with an ASD
- A holistic, tailored education for all our pupils based on a sound knowledge and understanding of each pupils' needs
- An environment that supports children and young people with ASD to develop independence, social and emotional wellbeing and academic skills.

### 3. WHAT IS THE EAGLE HOUSE APPROACH TO AUTISM

The Eagle House Approach sets out an agreed system of values and practices, which work across Eagle House Group schools. Based on best practice, experience, innovation and research, the Eagle House Approach gives us a recognisably unique and distinctive ethos.

The Eagle House Approach provides a highly specialised learning and social curriculum that is:

- Communication based
- Visually based
- Sensory based
- Practical, functionally meaningful to develop independence skills (promoting “real” learning situations)
- Intrinsically motivating

## 4. CREATING AN AUTISM ENVIRONMENT

The Eagle House Group autism specific environment consists of 4 main elements:

1. The Physical Environment
2. The Symbolic Environment
3. The Sensory Environment
4. The Social Environment

### 1. The Physical Environment

We aim to provide a clearly structured, calm and organised environment, which is distraction free but without being “sterile”; that is to say, low stimulation rather than no stimulation.

### 2. The Symbolic Environment

We make use of objects and artefacts, photos, pictures, drawings, symbols, signing and the written word to provide visual support throughout the school in order to:

- a) support the pupils’ communication; and
- b) support the pupils’ understanding

### 3. The Sensory Environment

We aim to provide an environment, which takes account of the pupils’ individual sensory needs and sensitivities. This is achieved by providing specialist equipment and by ensuring that pupils have regular opportunities to self-regulate their levels of sensory input.

### 4. The Social Environment

Eagle House Group staff aim to create an environment which maximises opportunities for communication and social interaction and where the pupil is regarded as a communicative partner at all times. Opportunities to share, turn take and co-operate are built into the school day.

## 5. A STRONG FOCUS ON MULTIDISCIPLINARY WORKING

In Eagle House Group we use the expertise and professionalism of the *whole school team* working within an innovative multidisciplinary framework.

The Eagle House Group multidisciplinary framework provides the maximum opportunity to integrate professional input through an in-house team of therapists in order to provide a holistic approach to meet the individual needs of each pupil.

At Eagle House Group, all teachers, learning support assistants, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, behaviour support specialists, psychologists and other therapists, work together as an integrated multidisciplinary team. We aim to liaise closely with, inform and involve parents/carers in the education of their child wherever possible.

Our multidisciplinary approach is a *partnership* approach where all those involved with the child/young person for a particular issue (whether it be curriculum planning or delivery, target setting, behaviour management, sensory issues, etc.) work in partnership, each giving their unique contribution and providing a seamless, consistent “joined up” approach to bring a team around the child.

Our multidisciplinary approach ensures:

- That the young person is at the heart of everything
- Staff work in a holistic manner
- Collaborative working between school and families/carers
- Professional input within the classroom and the wider environment
- Professionals working effectively as a close (seamless) communicative team to one common aim, sharing goals, ideas, knowledge and targets
- A joined up and creative problem-solving approach
- Professional input embedded throughout the curriculum

## 6. OUR APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

We use three main models to support pupil's learning.

### 1. Ziggurat Model

We use the Ziggurat Model to underpin all teaching and intervention (see Appendix A). This model provides a process and framework for designing individualised, comprehensive intervention plans for individuals with ASD. It also promotes collaboration and communication among parents/carers and professionals.

A key premise of the Ziggurat Model is that the underlying needs and characteristics related to autism must be addressed.

This involves addressing each of the following 5 areas in a hierarchical structure when carrying out interventions:

- Biological and sensory needs
- Reinforcement
- Structure and visual/tactile supports
- Task demands
- Skills to teach

Each level of the Intervention Ziggurat impacts the others, and all levels must be addressed in order for an intervention plan to be comprehensive. If needs on each level of the Ziggurat are not addressed, the intervention will be ineffective and skills will not develop.

### 2. The TEACCH® approach

We use TEACCH principles to provide structure across all areas of the school. TEACCH also emphasises the importance of identifying underlying strengths and needs related to autism. It is therefore based on understanding the learning characteristics of individuals with autism and the use of visual supports to promote meaning and independence.

TEACCH identifies a “culture” of autism as follows:

- Relative strength in and preference for processing *visual* information (compared to difficulties with auditory processing, particularly of language)
- Frequent attention to *details* but difficulty understanding the meaning of how those details fit together

- Difficulty *combining* ideas
- Difficulty with *organising* ideas, materials, and activities
- Difficulties with *attention*. (Some individuals are very distractible, others have difficulty shifting attention when it is time to make transitions)
- Difficulty with concepts of *time*, including moving too quickly or too slowly and having problems recognising the beginning, middle, or end of an activity
- *Communication* problems, which vary by developmental level but always include impairments in the social use of language (“pragmatics”)
- Tendency to become *attached to routines*, with the result that activities may be difficult to generalise from the original learning situation and disruptions in routines that are upsetting, confusing, or uncomfortable
- Very strong *interests and impulses* in engaging in favoured activities, with difficulties disengaging once engaged
- Marked *sensory* preferences and dislikes.

### Principles of TEACCH

- Understanding the culture of autism
- Structuring the physical environment
- Using visual supports to make the sequence of daily activities predictable and understandable
- Using visual supports to make individual tasks understandable
- Emphasis on independence
- Meaningful individualised programmes
- Ownership
- Predictability to manage anxiety
- Encouraging and managing flexibility
- Increasing ability to process information
- Working with strengths to overcome weaknesses – past skills, emerging skills
- Structuring for success
- Teaching the concept of ‘finished’

### 3. ‘the little group’ Approach©

The Eagle House Approach work on attention stems from the philosophy of ‘the little group’. This assumes that in order for an individual to learn from another, they must first pay attention to the adult’s choice of activity; this needs to be taught explicitly since shared attention does not come naturally to people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. This approach focuses on enhancing attention, and providing communication and practical, functional and meaningful experiences in learning.

Working on attention development is continuous, as without it there are no foundations on which to build new skills and teach other areas of learning. Many pupils are in the early stages of their attention development, i.e. they can pay rigid attention to their choice of activity but struggle to lend their attention to someone else’s; they can do just one thing at a time. Attention control is

extended through a structured and visually delivered approach so that the individual gradually learns to focus their attention on the learning opportunity, thus broadening and extending their skills in all areas.

Although the initial stages of developing good focused attention may be acquired in the early years, the need to consistently address this area is ongoing and appropriate across the autism spectrum and throughout the individual's educational journey irrespective of age. Therefore, attention development is always at the heart of every learning opportunity.

'the little group' Approach to attention development is to:

- Assess the pupil's true level of attention development and work forwards from there
- Work within an environment of controlled overall stimulation in order to reduce competing stimuli and increase the incidence of success
- Entice the individual to lend their attention by presenting exciting and motivating activities where the reward is in taking part
- Gradually increase the length of time for which an individual lends their attention by expecting just a little more at every opportunity
- Gradually increase the level of demand by presenting slightly more complex activities when the individual displays increased focused attention
- Work within a group setting so that the individual learns to focus in a group where both the social demand and the level of sensory information are increased compared to the 1:1 situation
- Present activities that are intrinsically motivating and fun in order to offer an irresistible opportunity for learning

## 7. A PERSONALISED LEARNING APPROACH

Whatever the diagnosis or label, it is important to remember that every child or young person is an individual and shows the autistic aspects of their behaviour uniquely. We feel that it is vital therefore to make sure that we know everything about that individual and use this information when planning rather than relying solely on a general *one size fits all* approach.

Following assessment the approaches and strategies we use with individuals are selected from a *portfolio* of recognised autism specific approaches and other intervention strategies.

Within the Eagle House Approach, each pupil will have a *personalised* learning programme, which is reflected in daily lesson planning, target setting, the Individual Education Plan and the Behaviour Support Plan.

## 8. OUR BEST PRACTICE PORTFOLIO – TAKING THE BEST APPROACHES TO AUTISM

The Eagle House Approach adopts an eclectic approach to specialist intervention which is underpinned by an in depth knowledge of:

- Autism spectrum disorders and the distinct way of thinking (known as the cognitive style) which characterises them

- The individual
- Latest thinking, practices and research
- Learning theory, i.e. what we know about how we learn

In addition to our three main approaches, we make use of a number of other approaches and strategies, including:

- Intensive Interaction
- Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) including Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD), Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS) and Makaton
- Applied Behaviour Analysis
- Communication books
- Sensory diets
- The ALERT© Program
- Social stories
- Comic strip conversations
- Physical exercise
- Music
- SPELL (National Autistic Society)

## 9. OUR SPECIALIST ASD CURRICULUM

The **core** features of our curriculum are:

- A focus on developing the key areas which characterise autism spectrum disorder (the Triad of Impairments plus sensory needs)
- To promote a healthy individual
- To promote the individual's social and emotional wellbeing
- To promote the individual's independence skills
- To promote the individual's academic skills at an appropriate level for their cognitive abilities
- To provide opportunity for regular exercise as part of the daily routine
- To develop the individual's sense of self within the community
- To support and empower parents and carers to improve day to day life through knowledge and consistency

Our specialist areas include:

- Communication
- Flexible thinking and learning
- Sensory Processing
- Independence
- Social understanding & social interaction
- Behaviour
- Academic achievement

## 10. COMMUNICATION

Communication is recognised as underpinning all aspects of the whole child approach for pupils with autism spectrum disorders. Functional and meaningful communication is an essential component in building the skills needed for a fulfilling and enjoyable life. The interventions ensure that pupils achieve communicative independence at the optimum level with respect to the individual's spectrum of difficulties and strengths. (see *Communication Policy*).

Speech and Language therapy within the Eagle House Group is integrated at all levels into a whole child educational approach. The Speech and Language Therapists support the team around the child to ensure:

- An educational setting that communicates its purpose and function clearly
- All staff appreciate that the pupil does not have a natural understanding of social communication expectations or boundaries
- A curriculum that offers learning opportunities and experiences that motivate and build communication from the individual's current level
- Curriculum delivery that is modified and adapted at all levels to ensure the child's access and inclusion is not limited by their communication difficulties
- That every opportunity is exploited to promote and develop communication
- A means of communication suitable for each child and young person is made available, enabling each individual pupil to use their abilities in meaningful ways at an optimum level.
- A curriculum which actively develops and teaches attention control, as a primary target (to ensure access and motivation to learn)

The Eagle House Group specialist curriculum therefore includes direct and indirect teaching in the following areas:

- Developing communication skills (expressive, receptive, non-verbal and use of language skills)
- Developing self-knowledge and self-awareness
- Developing social interaction skills and social understanding
- Developing skills to enable pupils to:
  - identify needs
  - state choice/preference
  - evaluate and reflect
  - know their rights
  - exert influence

## 11. FLEXIBLE THINKING AND LEARNING

The Eagle House Approach strives to address the underlying issues related to poor flexibility of thought (one of the areas of the diagnostic Triad) in children and young people with autism spectrum disorder. This also takes account of the implications in relation to independence.

Difficulties associated with poor flexible thinking include:

- Rigidity in thought and behaviour
- Intolerance of change and transition
- Poor decision making and problem solving
- Selectivity and/or narrow focus
- Difficulty with executive function (or thinking, planning and doing)
- Poor imaginative play
- Poor understanding of abstract concepts

The Eagle House Approach to flexible thinking is to:

1. Create a safe environment (and thus reduce stress and anxiety), ensuring consistency, predictability and routine
2. Work *with* the autistic learning style (using visual structure, rule-based approaches, etc.)
3. Explicitly teach coping strategies and new skills
4. Provide opportunities to develop “flexibility” e.g.:
  - Play based problem-solving activities
  - Creative activities
  - Social problem-solving activities
  - Choice making & decision making
  - Strategies which encourage tolerance of change and transition

## 12. INDEPENDENCE

The development of independence is a primary focus of the Eagle House Approach. Closely aligned with the development of flexibility, developing independence skills is subsumed into all aspects of the Eagle House Approach, including:

- Daily living skills / self help skills
- Independent living skills
- Functional communication skills (to satisfy needs)
- Self expression (having a voice)
- Functional use of skills within the environment (including the curriculum)
- Self monitoring and self regulation of emotions and behaviour

## 13. SENSORY PROCESSING (*see Sensory Policy*)

Sensory integration is the ability to take in, co-ordinate, interpret and make sense of information from the senses: tactile (touch), gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), visual (sight), auditory (hearing), vestibular (movement/balance), and proprioception (body awareness/ judgement of force/ attention/ concentration).



Eagle House Group recognises that many individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders may have difficulty processing sensory information and therefore, may become over or under aroused with certain sensory input/experiences. This may lead to possible stress, confusion and anxiety, which can influence the individual's independent living skills and/or behavioural responses.

We typically use a sensory profile to assess pupils' sensory needs; however different sensory assessments/tools can also be used depending upon the individual needs of pupils. The occupational therapists support the team to develop a tailor made "sensory diet" for pupils, which takes account of their individual sensory needs.

A sensory diet is a therapeutic intervention that is designed to help individuals to:

- Achieve optimal levels of arousal and attention
- Support a more appropriate emotional response during social and environmental interactions

Wherever possible our approach is to integrate sensory experiences and sensory-based intervention into the classroom or home setting within everyday, functional activities throughout the day.

#### **14. SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING & SOCIAL INTERACTION**

Social understanding and social interaction are a key focus of the Eagle House Approach specialist curriculum. Taking aspects of the "Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)", the focus is on developing self-awareness, motivation, empathy and social and interactive play skills and in supporting children and young people to recognise and manage their feelings.

Our multidisciplinary approach means that all professionals can contribute to this area, each providing their own particular expertise to support the development of social understanding and social interaction skills. For example, when teaching the recognition and management of feelings, teachers, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists work as a cohesive team to support the individual to communicate feelings, understand and regulate the sensory processes, understand how to recognise feelings in themselves and others and to apply this knowledge functionally.

#### **15. BEHAVIOUR (*see Behaviour Policy*)**

Eagle House Group uses school-wide Positive Behaviour Support, which places the emphasis on behaviour change within the wider picture of overall intervention. The approach provides a "whole picture" which has a clear focus on understanding the functions of behaviour and on employing pro-active strategies which prevent difficulties from arising, rather than simply reacting to or coping with behaviours as they occur.

The school has a Behaviour Support Specialist who holds a BCBA qualification. As such a number of aspects of the ABA approach to behaviour are used as part of the school wide positive approach to behaviour. This includes the use of functional analysis of behaviour.

Each pupil has an individualised Behaviour Support Plan, developed by the class team, Curriculum Access Team and wherever possible, parents/carers and pupils. Each plan clearly sets out the pro-active and reactive strategies for each pupil. Each plan aims to change rather than stop an inappropriate behaviour, thus ensuring that the pupil is able to use a more appropriate behaviour

to fulfil the same function as the original behaviour. The behaviour support plan ensures consistency in addressing the behaviour and in teaching the pupil different, more appropriate behaviour.

## 16. ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The Eagle House Group curriculum is a curriculum in the *broadest* sense comprising specialist areas related to autism and the requirements of the National Curriculum and Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum.

Accepting that every pupil has a different learning style, we offer a *flexible* curriculum, which is learning focused rather than content focused using the curriculum to support the development of a set of skills rather than as an end in itself.

Our approach is to apply the core and foundation subjects of the National Curriculum and Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum in a way that is tailored to the needs of every pupil and that is fun and meaningful.

We arrange and design the organisation, resources and curriculum around the needs of the learner, matching the aims of the National Curriculum to the areas of a child's learning profile, not vice versa

The Eagle House Approach aims to maximise opportunities for the generalisation of concepts and skills across environments and throughout a range of learning and social experiences.

Where appropriate pupil's can gain nationally recognised accreditations and examinations to demonstrate their academic achievements.

Assessment in its widest sense is an essential element of the Eagle House Approach and occurs at all levels. The school undertakes both formative (ongoing) assessment and summative assessment. There is a focus on multidisciplinary assessment, which informs planning, personalised learning choices and supports the evaluation of progress in all areas.

## 17. SPECIALIST CURRICULUM

We make use of a number of specialist assessment tools to ensure a personalised learning approach. These are used to inform decisions on which strategies and approaches are used with each child and young person, to aid target setting and monitoring of progress. Assessment tools include:

- IEP targets
- Communication based assessments
- Sensory profiling
- Social skills profiles
- Formal and informal behaviour assessments – e.g. observations, data collection as required
- Assessment of motor skills / independence

## 18. NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Our schools make use of B squared to provide a framework for measuring progress within the academic/ National Curriculum.

## 19. TRAINING

To ensure that we maintain the highest quality of teaching, we offer regular training in all our key approaches and strategies to all staff.

## 20. POLICY REVIEW

The Group recognises the need to monitor the effects of policies, procedures and practices in order to assess achievement and statutory compliance.

The Chief Executive will monitor the effectiveness of this policy by routinely monitoring and reporting any necessary issues directly to the School Improvement and Strategy Group.

Based on these monitoring reports, this policy and associated procedures and guidance will be kept under review, and action taken to readdress any areas where the Policy has not been applied or where risks have not been managed effectively.

## 21. RELATED POLICIES

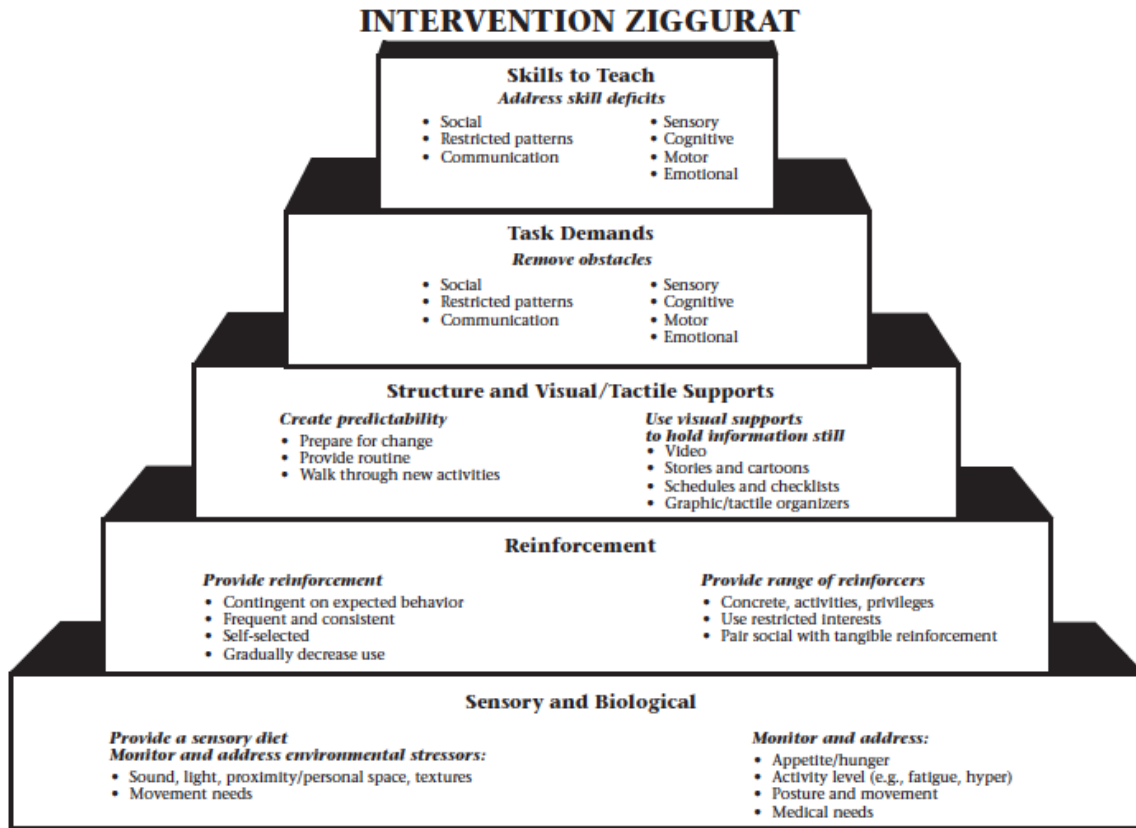
- ❖ SEN Policy
- ❖ Curriculum Policy
- ❖ Communication Policy
- ❖ Teaching and Learning Policy
- ❖ Sensory Policy
- ❖ Behaviour Policy

### Appendices:

- *Appendix A: Ziggurat Model*

|                       |               |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| Document:             | Autism Policy |
| Date adopted/written: | May 2015      |
| Written by:           | Jenny Alvarez |
| Last Reviewed:        | August 2016   |
| Next review:          | August 2018   |
| Version:              | Final         |

**Appendix A**  
**Ziggurat Model**



From Aspy, R., & Grossman, B. G. (2008). *The Ziggurat Model*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company; www.asperger.net; used with permission