

# Autism Policy

This policy was written by PHS staff, parents/carers and young people.

## **Rationale**

As part of our vision of 'One Peebles', our school has a culture where young people, staff, parents/carers and partners work collaboratively to support the diverse needs of all learners. We are committed to creating an inclusive learning environment where every young person can thrive.

The Peebles High School (PHS) core values of 'Work Hard', 'Show Kindness' and 'Contribute' are central to our approach to meet individual needs, cultivate empathy and respect and encourage everyone to participate in building a positive and supportive school community. Through inclusive policies and practical strategies, PHS aims to remove barriers, celebrate neurodiversity and empower autistic learners to be their authentic selves and achieve their full potential.

## **Neurodiversity paradigm**

Whilst this policy focuses on supporting autistic learners, it is recognised that there are many students who have been diagnosed as having various neurodevelopmental conditions and acknowledges the diverse population of students in PHS. The aim of the policy and training is to 'shift' from an approach which labels individuals with 'disorders' and 'abnormalities' towards an inclusive approach which recognises that there is no 'normal' and to support an understanding of the range of neurodiversity.

Other neurodivergent categories and labels include:

- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyscalculia
- ASC- Autistic Spectrum Conditions
- PDA- Pathological Demand Avoidance/ Pervasive Demand Avoidance/ Extreme Demand Avoidance
- ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- ADD - Attention Deficit Disorder
- DLD- Developmental Language Disorder
- FASD- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

The neurodiversity paradigm is about accepting that neurological difference is part of the natural diversity of being human. In changing mindsets and adopting

the values, approaches, strategies and supports outlined in this policy, the needs of all individuals in Peebles High School will be met.

## Introduction

There are approximately 44,000 autistic people in Scotland (i) and in session 2024/25, 6% of the Peebles High School (PHS) roll either had a diagnosis of autism or were in the referral process - we expect this to increase.

Engagement in education can prove challenging for autistic young people and it is therefore important that we raise awareness of the needs of autistic learners and work with school staff, parents/carers and partners to meet these needs so that autistic learners can reach their potential. We want to understand the unique challenges of autistic learners and celebrate their strengths.

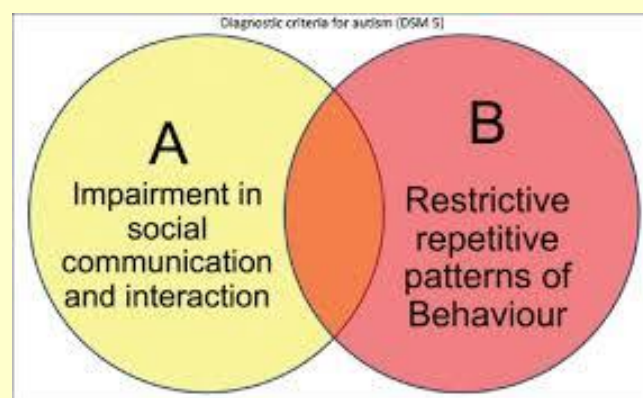
The Scottish Government definition of autism:

"Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder more commonly referred to as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) but also known as autism spectrum condition\* (ASC). ASD affects people differently with some individuals being able to live independently. Others will need very specialist support." (ii)

\*Peebles High School (PHS) will use the term Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) rather than Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) because this is the terminology the autistic community wish to use - ASD is the diagnosis.

## Background Information

Autistic people have certain difficulties in common. These fall into two areas of functioning, sometimes referred to as the dyad of impairments:



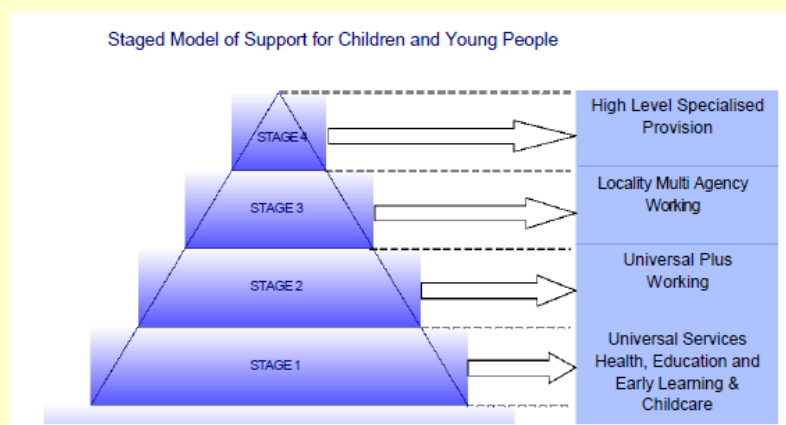
- Communication and reciprocal social interaction - verbal and non-verbal communication e.g. difficulties with use and interpretation of voice intonation, facial expressions and other communicative gestures; and the ability to understand what someone else might be thinking in a real-time situation and to understand the need for social 'give and take' in conversation and overall interaction
- Restrictive, repetitive and stereotypical routines of behaviour - these may involve enthusiasms held by a person with autism (which may be very restricting for their family, friends and colleagues but may also be psychologically distressing or inhibiting for the individual with autism).

Put simply, autistic brains work differently to non-autistic brains, this is known as neurodiversity. Autistic people see and experience the world differently to non-autistic people. They are born with the condition and have it their whole life - autistic children grow into autistic adults. Around 1 in 100 people in Scotland have a diagnosis of autism but no two autistic people are the same so strategies that work for one person don't necessarily work for another. The impact of autism varies depending on environment, sensory sensitivities, the person's interests, supports and resilience levels. It is important that our whole school community understands what autism is - and what it isn't. We also need to be mindful that autistic people often 'mask' their difficulties and others are waiting for an identification.

### **Informed Practice**

PHS uses the suite of policies and guidelines which sit within Scottish Borders Council's approaches for supporting inclusion. (iii) SBC practice is also informed by guidance from the General Teaching Council of Scotland. (iv)

The Scottish Borders Framework for Staged Intervention is used to meet the additional support needs of young people in PHS.



In addition, we are committed to the *Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)* principles of providing all young people with the right support so that they can reach their full potential. (v)

The PHS Autism Policy will be used in conjunction with the PHS Autism Toolkit to support staff to meet the needs of autistic learners so that they can achieve, attain and be all they can be. Teaching and support staff are made aware of the needs of young people through the PHS Whole School Tracker and a flag on the school information management system (SEEMiS).

**How autistic learners present can be categorised in four areas:**

*Social Communication* – autism impacts verbal and non-verbal communication. It can affect the ability to understand, process and use language. Some autistic young people can have very good language skills but may struggle to understand the nuances of conversation such as tone of voice or non-verbal language such as gestures and body language. Other autistic young people may have limited language or are non-speaking. For these young people, communication aids such as pictures, Makaton and some apps can enable them to communicate their choices, needs and preferences.

*Social Interaction* – some autistic young people may find forming friendships and relationships challenging. However, this does not mean that they are not social or lack the desire to form relationships. Sometimes understanding the feelings and intentions of others can be tricky, as can arranging to meet people. This could be because the person is worried that they won't be accepted for who they are, or they are not sure how to initiate conversation in an unfamiliar context. Socialising can be difficult and can cause considerable anxiety for some, and for others they may thrive in social situations where they can share their experiences, identity and interests.

*Social Imagination* – the idea of social imagination is complex; it is not limited to creative, aesthetic or play activities. We are required to use social imagination in many aspects of daily life. Differences in this area of processing may mean that an autistic person finds it hard to adjust to different social situations, switch focus or attend to lots of things at once. They may benefit from preparation and support to understand what to expect and what might be expected of them in a particular situation.

Sensory Processing - autistic young people may process sensory information differently. They may experience differences in how they process sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures or pain. Being in an uncomfortable sensory environment can cause great anxiety or even pain to some young people e.g. some young people can't filter sound so hear everything at the same volume, even background noise. This can lead to young people being overwhelmed in school because of the lights, sounds and smells. Small, manageable adjustments to these environments can make the space more accessible for autistic young people.

### **Masking**

Masking is when autistic young people hide parts of who they are to fit in and can be used as a way of not seeming different. Autistic young people can learn to mask from a very early age so that they are less isolated. It can be very difficult to tell if someone is masking as the whole point is that others don't know. In Peebles High School, we are committed to increasing our understanding of masking and supporting autistic learners to feel comfortable to drop the mask. We will do this by building positive relationships with autistic learners as well as through practical strategies as detailed in the Peebles High School Autism Toolkit.

"When people feel valued and accepted as their authentic self, they do not have the same need to suppress or hide aspects of who they are." (vi)

### **Stimming**

Some autistic young people stim to regulate. Stimming is any action which provides stimulation e.g. playing with hair, tapping, shaking, rocking, flapping, making sounds etc. Internal stims can occur too, such as replaying songs or phrases in the young person's head. PHS staff understand the need for some autistic learners to stim and will not attempt to stop them doing so.

### **How autism is identified**

Autism is diagnosed by medical professionals from the Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS). It is usually identified in childhood, but some people are not diagnosed until adulthood. Referrals can be made to CAMHS by GPs, other health professionals and schools. Medical diagnoses are based on behaviour and developmental differences, and various therapies can be used to

address challenges e.g. speech therapy for communication difficulties, occupational therapy to help with sensory and motor skills and behavioural interventions to develop coping strategies and adaptive behaviours. The medical model considers the autistic young person to be disabled by their impairment. The Scottish Government is committed to the social model of disability. This sees the barriers created by society such as negative attitudes towards autistic people as the cause of disadvantage and exclusion, rather than the impairment itself. PHS is committed to removing the barriers that isolate, exclude and so disable our autistic young people.

## **Support for Complex Autistic Learners**

### **The Glen**

Peebles High School is committed to ensuring that complex autistic learners experience meaningful participation, wellbeing and progression within an inclusive and nurturing environment. We recognise that these learners may experience differences in communication, sensory processing, cognition and emotional regulation, alongside additional conditions that shape how they learn and interact with the world. In line with Education Scotland guidance, our approach is highly personalised, compassionate and evidence informed. At The Glen, learning is intentionally structured, predictable, and flexible enabling young people to regulate, engage, and develop independence. A total communication environment underpins all practice, valuing spoken, signed, visual and technological communication equally so that every learner can express themselves and be understood. This personalised learning offer is built around each learner's strengths, interests, sensory needs and communication preferences, ensuring meaningful participation and authentic belonging.

Our approach is strengthened through continuous professional learning, collaborative planning and reflective practice. All staff working with complex autistic learners engage in ongoing training in autism understanding, sensory regulation, communication and inclusive pedagogy, enabling them to create calm, trusting environments rooted in kindness and empathy. Each learner's plan is co-created with families, Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs), and health professionals, with shared responsibility for ensuring consistent, holistic support. Staff work closely with Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Educational Psychologists, and social care partners. The Glen team contributes

to practice across the wider school to support continuity. Progress is recognised through individual milestones and observational assessment, with feedback informing continuous improvement. Through this integrated and values-driven approach, PHS ensures that complex autistic learners are valued, respected and empowered to contribute meaningfully to school life and achieve their fullest potential.

## **Legislation**

Neurodivergent people, including autistic people are protected against discrimination, harassment and victimisation by the Equality Act (2010). (vii) Autism is regarded as a disability because autistic people have "a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term (12 months or more) adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities." (viii)

The Act requires public authorities such as education to make reasonable adjustments. Education can have a major positive impact on the ability of an autistic young person to flourish but schools can also be difficult environments for these young people. Adjustments can ensure school is manageable. In Peebles High School, we will embrace the strengths that autistic learners have and identify any difficulties they may experience as opportunities, not detriments. Autistic learners do not need 'fixed'. Autism is something to be understood and supported. Adopting this approach will empower our autistic young people.

"The world needs people who think differently. In a world where everyone thinks the same, nothing would ever change". (ix)

Peebles High School is a Rights Respecting School and as such, we promote young people's rights as detailed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (x). The articles contained in the treaty pertinent to this policy are:

Article 3: The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

Article 12: Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

Article 29: Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full.

## References

- (i) The Scottish Strategy for Autism 2011 - [The Scottish Strategy for Autism - gov.scot](#)
- (ii) Part 1: Reach and definitions: who should the Bill include? - [Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill: consultation - gov.scot](#)
- (iii) SBC Includes - Inclusion Policy [FRAMEWORK FOR STAGED INTERVENTION Revised Jan 2022.docx](#)  
<https://scotborders.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/IntranetContent/INCLUSION%20FRAMEWORK%20FINAL%20Jan%202020.pdf#search=inclusion%20framework>  
<https://scotborders.sharepoint.com/sites/intranet/IntranetContent/Inclusion%20Policy%20March%202020-FINAL.pdf#search=inclusion%20framework>
- (iv) Meeting the Needs of Autistic Learners: A Professional Guide for Teachers, [GTCS \(2021\)](#)  
[Understanding Diversity in the Context of Equality and Inclusive Practice: A Professional Guide for Teachers, \[GTCS \\(2021\\)\]\(#\)](#)
- (v) <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>
- (vi) [Different Minds | Autism Scotland](#)
- (vii) [Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK](#)
- (viii) Part 1: Reach and definitions: who should the Bill include? - [Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill: consultation - gov.scot](#)
- (ix) [Different Minds | Autism Scotland](#)
- (x) <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk>