



Inclusion Newsletter

24th March 2023

Welcome to this term's Inclusion newsletter. Our focus this term is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as Monday 27th March marks the beginning of World Autism Acceptance Week for 2023.

Riverside has a specialist provision for children with significant ASD, which is fully integrated within the mainstream classes. We also have lots of other children throughout the school with a diagnosis of Autism. We believe it is really important that everyone in our school learns about the condition, so that they are aware of the various ways in which we can support Autistic people, and can show understanding when children with ASD are finding things difficult or feeling overwhelmed. Next week, all children will be taking part in an ASD awareness assembly and other activities inspired by this, so please do ask them at home to share what they have learned.

There is lots of support available locally for parents of children with ASD (either diagnosed or suspected/under investigation), including a Medway Support Group run by the Kent Autistic Trust, which offers opportunities for parents of children with ASD to meet and chat to others with similar experiences. You can find out more about what they offer by visiting the website at <https://www.katfamilysupport.co.uk/home>. I would also like to mention 'Club Ausome', a charity which was founded by a parent whose daughter attended Riverside's specialist ASD Provision a few years ago. This organisation aims "to offer the children and their families lots of different opportunities to learn, to socialise, to have fun and be with others that won't judge." They provide a wide range of activities for Autistic children and their families, including coffee mornings, youth clubs, sensory play sessions and day trips to places like wildlife parks and theatre shows. You can visit <https://clubausome.appimize.app/home> to find out more. Finally, I would highlight the Family Action 'Small Steps' service, which provides a variety of support to families both pre- and post-diagnosis. Find more details here: <https://www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/medway-small-steps-service/>

I have listed some other websites overleaf which will be useful for finding out more information about ASD and sourcing support and advice.

As always, if you have any queries or concerns about your child's additional needs, or any other aspect of SEND or Inclusion, please don't hesitate to contact me at the school.

Mrs Z Huggett
Assistant Headteacher/Inclusion Manager

The logo features a cartoon character holding a spotlight that illuminates the text "Spotlight on... ASD".

Spotlight on... ASD

Autism is a lifelong disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others. It is a spectrum condition, meaning that different people with ASD will be affected in different ways, and will need varying levels of support. There are a wide range of behaviours associated with ASD, but the most common traits include:

~ difficulties with social communication – interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language. They may need help or extra time to process what is said to them, and may not understand gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice or body language. It is common for children with ASD to have a speech and language delay.

~ difficulties with social interaction – being able to empathise with other people and express their own emotions appropriately. They may find it hard to form friendships and may easily become anxious or overwhelmed.

~ difficulties coping with changes to routines, often displaying repetitive behaviours or having obsessions and fixations.

~ difficulties with sensory processing – being either over- or under-responsive to sounds, smells or textures.



Around 1 in every 100 children in the UK has a diagnosis of Autism. It appears to be more common in males than females, although there is research to suggest that females are better at 'masking' their difficulties and therefore are diagnosed.

~ People with ASD benefit from having clear, simple instructions to follow. It is often helpful to minimise the use of language and use familiar pictures or keywords instead.

~ Try to keep things consistent, and make sure that wherever possible they are warned in advance of any changes to their normal routine. Visual timetables and the use of 'first... then...' can help.

~ Give them safe ways to express themselves when they are feeling overwhelmed. Children who tend to lash out could have a bean bag or pillow to squeeze instead; children who prefer to withdraw could have a blanket to wrap themselves in, or a tent in which to hide. Developing their own '5 Point Scale' (see link below) can increase awareness of their own emotions and feelings and helps to support calming.



www.autism.org.uk

Useful Websites:

www.childautism.org.uk

<https://childmind.org/guide/parents-guide-to-autism/>