

Larwood School

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Dan Login
Chair of Trustees

Pierre van der Merwe
Executive Headteacher

AUTISM AND SENSORY RELATED PRACTICE POLICY

A rectangular box containing two handwritten signatures. The top signature is "DT Login" and the bottom signature is "P. van der Merwe".

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Version Control

V1.1	April 2025	Version Control Added Changed from a trust policy to individual schools. School information added Assessment and Review – Autism Accreditation added in First three paragraphs added in section: Our Approach to Autism and Sensory Related Needs.

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SCHOOL INFORMATION (LARWOOD)

Larwood School is a primary day school for boys and girls with social emotional and mental health related difficulties. The school is funded for 123 pupils, of whom up to 16 can be catered for in a specific unit for SEMH pupils who also have autism as part of their overall needs. This unit is called The Space Hub. Currently, the school has 105 pupils on roll, with an additional 18 pupils on site as part of the pathways satellite provision.

The school is named after Harold Larwood, the English fast bowler famous for his part in winning the Ashes. The name Larwood was chosen because Harold was a workingman who became a sporting hero through effort and hard work. Harold's daughter Enid and her husband have visited the school.

Although the exact number varies, on average it tends to be between 60% of the school population. There are up to ten class groups across the age range; each class has a class teacher and a full time learning and support assistant.

The school has developed a broad and balanced curriculum based on the National Curriculum with literacy and numeracy as key elements. Religious Education is based on the Hertfordshire framework and a range of sporting, recreational and cultural activities and opportunities are provided. We have developed a thematic curriculum mapped to the National Curriculum, providing an existing opportunity for challenging cross-curricular studies.

THE STAFF TEAM AT LARWOOD CONSISTS OF:

- Executive Head teacher
- One Head of School, one Assistant Headteacher
- Central Trust team - Head of Finance and Operations (Trust), HR & Administration Manager, Finance Administrator, Operation and Finance Administrator, Site Manager
- Mental Health and SEN Lead
- Fourteen full time Teachers
- Twenty eight Learning and Support and Behaviour Assistants
- Administration, Catering and Site Manager
- Family Support Worker

The School team is further supported by visiting and attached professionals including Educational Psychologist, Advisory Teacher for Autism, Speech and Language Therapist, School Nurse and Attendance and Inclusion Officer. In addition, therapy may

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be arranged such as Animal Assisted Therapy.

In 2020, the Trust expanded and now includes a secondary SEMH school-Brandles.

During 2020, we were fortunate to have a range of therapeutic services co-located on our site. This is called The Butterfly Rooms and they offer services for us, alongside our other school-Brandles and for other children/adults within the Stevenage area

LARWOOD SCHOOL VISION AND PURPOSE

Our vision and approach to the leadership and management of our pupils is underpinned by a philosophy that is guided by our pupils, parents, and staff. It is challenged and supported by our Board of Trustees. We also ensure that we are compliant with the various groups that we work with (For example, Hertfordshire County Council, The National Autistic Society and Ofsted).

Therefore:

OUR PUPILS WILL:

- Be encouraged in a variety of ways to engage in all activities to promote their progress, improve their behaviour, and make the necessary changes to engage in their own education. They will achieve!
- Experience consistent boundaries and expectation with staff trained in Hertfordshire Steps. We expect them to make changes!
- Value themselves and others and be able to set themselves realistic goals, and targets. We believe that our pupils can improve, and we aim to help them believe this as well!
- Develop a sense of pride in themselves, their work and being part of 'Team Larwood.' They know that we enjoy working with them and hope they enjoy working with us!
- Go onto become life-long learners!
- Become more resilient as young people, moving forwards to secondary schools and further/higher education.
- Have their work and achievements praised and rewarded in a variety of ways to help develop their own self-esteem, alongside their social and emotional development.
- Experience success! They will achieve, believe, expect, and enjoy!

OUR STAFF WILL:

- Be encouraging, empathetic, well trained and love working with our pupils.

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- Go the 'extra mile' to help pupils make the changes they need to make.
- Appreciate that they are preparing pupils for jobs that do not even exist right now!
- Promote the values of respect, responsibility, honesty, hard work, equality, and appreciation of differences.
- Provide pupils with the opportunity to express themselves in a safe, productive, and reassuring manner.
- Promote educational development in the widest sense including intellect, creativity, and physical development.
- Promote the role of the family-whatever shape or form that may take.
- Provide a well-resourced, safe, and welcoming environment for everybody.
- Use Hertfordshire Steps as a behaviour management process to enable our pupils to become able to self-regulate more often and with independence.
- Enable and encourage a love learning for fun!
- Model the behaviour that we expect from pupils so that they can undertake the future roles that they would like and make a meaningful contribution to their communities and society.
- Liaise with parents, and other professionals to promote the very best outcomes for all our pupils.

OUR VALUES:

Our school ethos encourages a range of values, to support our vision and purpose. This applies to all pupils both in day and boarding and includes:

Honesty Equality Resilience Empathy Determination Democratic Processes

Being responsible Respect for others Tolerance Respect for the law

Such values are seen in our day-to-day interactions (Class based and in boarding), such as assemblies, class discussions, play times, lunchtimes and via our curriculum provision.

Larwood School will help our pupils believe, achieve, expect, and enjoy! We succeed where other schools cannot and for that reason, our school is a special place to learn and develop.

DEFINITION OF NEEDS:

The Special Educational Needs Code of practice gives clear guidance in relation to how children may have such needs and requirements. At the moment children who have such needs are described as:

- Have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or

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- have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the Local Authority (LA)
- Are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would so do if special educational provision were not made for them.

(The above definition of SEN is taken from Section 1.3 of the SEN Code of Practice.)

All pupils at Larwood School have an Education Health Care Plan or EHCP. Many pupils have several different needs and they are grouped into areas of social, emotional or mental health or possibly a combination of some/all of these. Staff therefore plan and teach to meet the individual needs of pupils within their class.

During the last few years, we have seen the number of pupils being referred to Larwood entering the school with a more complex and challenging needs. This includes:

- Autism
- A range of medical conditions which require controlled medication.
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Oppositional Defiance Disorder
- Low self-esteem and family related issues

NB-PLEASE NOTE THAT COVID 19 AND THE ASSOCIATED DIFFICULTIES HAS ADDED TO THE PRESSURE ON SOME PUPILS AND FAMILIES DURING THIS TIME.

ASSESSMENT AND REVIEW

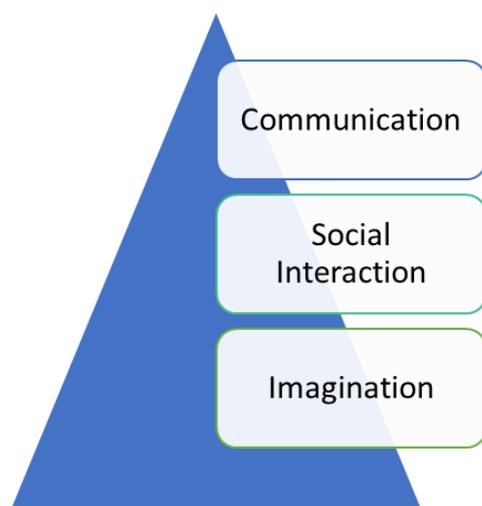
All pupils have a statement of educational needs which is given to School before they arrive. Upon entry, pupils undertake baseline assessments, which provide more information about their academic/social levels and needs. Pupils are then given a behaviour plan and targets within their statement are tracked by class teachers. Objectives and the full statement are reviewed on an annual basis, involving the pupil, parent, class teacher, member of the leadership team (where appropriate) Local Authority SEN Officer and any other services that may be involved. In November 2024, Larwood School achieved reaccreditation from the National Autistic Society (NAS) as an advanced accreditation school. This prestigious recognition validates our commitment to excellence in autism practice and demonstrates our ongoing dedication to providing outstanding support for pupils with autism spectrum conditions. The advanced accreditation status reflects our school's expertise in implementing evidence-based

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practices and creating an environment that effectively supports the needs of pupils with autism.

OUR APPROACH TO AUTISM AND SENSORY RELATED NEEDS



Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) are complex neurodevelopmental conditions characterised by differences in social communication and interaction, sensory processing and integration, flexible thinking and behaviour patterns, and information processing and cognitive patterns. Core behaviours are thought to be underpinned by fundamental difficulties in both flexible generation of ideas and the understanding of, and thinking about, other people and other situations. Common sensory needs include either hyposensitivity or hypersensitivity, and unusual interests in some sensations, such as the feel of clothes, as well as mental health disorders, especially anxiety and attentional difficulties. These major impairments can often be referred to as the 'triad of impairments' which strongly affect social interaction, imagination, and communication.

This can cause children with autism to have a number of difficulties with forming friendships, understanding spoken language, taking what is said literally, unpredictable emotional responses, maintaining attention, sensory overload, poor comprehension, and difficulty in picking up social cues. It is essential to recognise that autism is a natural variation in human neurology rather than solely a deficit-based condition, and that autistic individuals may have unique strengths and abilities alongside their challenges. Our approach acknowledges the importance of understanding and supporting individual differences, and we strive to provide an environment that is inclusive and supportive of all pupils, regardless of their neurodiverse needs.

In line with current research and best practice, we have updated our understanding of Autism Spectrum Conditions to include the latest insights into sensory processing, executive functioning, and mental health. We recognise that autistic individuals may experience

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differences in interoception, proprioception, vestibular processing, and multiple sensory processing patterns, and that these differences can impact their daily lives. We also acknowledge the high co-occurrence of anxiety and other mental health conditions, and the importance of emotional wellbeing support.

Our approach to supporting pupils with Autism Spectrum Conditions is centred on providing a structured, positive, empathic, and low-arousal environment that meets the unique needs of each individual. We use a range of evidence-based approaches, including structured teaching, sensory integration strategies, social communication support, emotional regulation tools, environmental modifications, and technology-aided instruction when appropriate. We also conduct regular sensory audits, provide flexible learning spaces, quiet zones, and regulation areas, and use clear visual supports and signage to support our pupils.

By recognising and supporting the unique needs of pupils with Autism Spectrum Conditions, we aim to provide an inclusive and supportive environment that enables all pupils to reach their full potential.

The approach to Autism awareness at Larwood School complies with the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 as referred to in the Provision's Equality and Diversity Statement.

All pupils at Larwood have an EHC plan. The proportion of pupils with diagnosed ASC varies each year with intakes that also vary according to age group and numbers. Larwood school tends to have approximately 60%+ of its cohort with such a diagnosis each year.

Some of our pupils may display the following types of characteristics:

- Difficulties in non-verbal and verbal communication, social understanding, and social behaviour
- Thinking and behaving flexibly (rigidity of thought) according to the situation
- Sensory perception and responses.

Pupils with ASC commonly experience unusual sensitivity to sound, touch and visual stimuli. Reference to 'a spectrum' of difficulties is made because there is a change in their needs over the years of an individual's development and their difficulties vary.

This document explains our aims, principles, and strategies for the education of pupils with an autistic spectrum condition at both schools in the trust, by highlighting the expected practice that staff should model and follow. We want to develop the best possible policy and practice for all pupils and will endeavour to meet the needs of those with ASD/Sensory related issues as part of our ongoing school development process.

RATIONALE

To ensure that pupils on the autistic spectrum are able to access the broad,

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balanced and relevant curriculum offered, the additional difficulties characteristic of Pupils on the autistic spectrum needs to be considered. This includes the school environment, planning, teaching, and learning objectives.

AIMS

To ensure the following key principles underpin our practice to enable us to provide the best possible education for pupils with an autistic spectrum condition:

- Knowledge and understanding of autistic spectrum condition for all staff that work at Larwood School.
- Knowledge, understanding and implementation of established interventions and approaches.
- Knowledge and understanding of general and specific behaviours and behaviour management approaches.
- The schools staff are kept up to date with current research relating to the education and wellbeing of pupils with an autistic spectrum condition.
- Provisions of pupils on the autistic spectrum are continuously monitored and evaluated as part of the self-evaluation process.
- Provision of a low arousal environment
- Provision of individual, bespoke learning programs
- Provision that incorporates individual's special interests and strengths
- Provision that develops a pupil's self-awareness of their ASC and sensory related needs.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Pupils with an autistic spectrum condition may be taught in classrooms in an environment that is welcoming and autism friendly, using our normal ratios of two staff to approximately eight pupils. They may also be taught in small groups basis, experience intervention programs on a 1-1 basis or they may be based in POD learning.

ENVIRONMENT

Many Pupils with an autistic spectrum condition have sensory difficulties which can result in unusual or uncomfortable perception of sound, sense, touch, sight, and smell. This means that many pupils are unable to focus upon teaching activities and are distracted by noise and visual or other stimuli. This has a profound effect upon their ability to learn and impacts behaviour when sensory input causes extreme discomfort or pain.

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Pupils on the autistic spectrum also have difficulties with flexibility and require clear visual support to understand routines and expectations. Therefore, we try to reduce environmental anxiety and distress by the following:

1. Providing an environment which is calm, as distraction free as we can make it, and has a low level of visual and auditory stimulus.
2. Providing Pupils with a high degree of visual and physical structure
3. Providing Pupils with a means of requesting a break from the lesson when their levels of anxiety become raised.

APPROACHES AND INTERVENTIONS

The teaching philosophy at Larwood School embodies the rationale of various research related to ASC but combines this with the fact that we are designated an SEMH School. Therefore, we do provide a structured, positive, empathic, and low-arousal environment with good links between School, home, and outside agencies. However, to meet the needs of all pupils across the spectrum we use a mix of established and researched approaches and interventions, drawing on best practice and continuously monitoring and evaluating their use.

ASSESSMENT

All pupils are assessed using a variety of ways and the information is tracked and used to inform our practice and how we may adjust future practice, interventions, curriculum, and staffing. This includes the use of:

- Academic mentoring, which tracks academic progress, attendance, behaviour, and personal development skills.
- Half termly testing using a Larwood School assessment system.
- Ongoing review of plans (Behaviour/EHC etc.)
- Assessment of sensory related issues via sensory profiling
- Assess, Plan, Do, Review
- Brighter Futures Education Trust Positive Behaviours and Personal Development

CURRICULUM

Underpinning all teaching and learning is an emphasis on the development of independence, social interaction, social understanding, and social communication. Lessons are planned to facilitate development in these areas. We believe in providing many 'real life' opportunities, for example, educational visits are used to help reduce rigidity, develop appropriate social skills such as waiting in shops or having snack in a café and learning about road safety. Pupils all access a full differentiated curriculum,

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delivered in a way that addresses the triad of impairment and sensory issues.

BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour is a means of communication and we endeavour to understand the function behind the behaviour. Specific strategies are used to reduce anxiety and promote feelings of well-being, modify unwanted behaviours, and promote more appropriate ones. All staff are trained to use the Herts STEPS approach as part of a holistic approach to positively manage behaviour. The values enshrined in the STEPS training model are entirely consistent with the ethos of Larwood Academy Trust. STEPS training is designed to provide a consistent approach to behaviour management, working with all classroom staff, teachers, leadership, and management to actively reduce/eliminate restraint.

We have added a range of items for specific sensory related behaviour patterns that help pupils to manage their own behaviour. Each classroom is equipped with a sensory box and pupils are encouraged to use this when it is helpful for them. We also have a sensory room whereby pupils can access the space with a member of staff. It is used as a programmed intervention and can be used.

TRAINING

Staff are trained in autism-specific practices and interventions. All our staff attend internal training on autism-awareness and good practice as part of the Brighter Futures Education Trust Learning program.

SENSORY ROOM (LARWOOD)

We have a dedicated room that can be accessed by pupils throughout the day. It is used in a variety of ways which includes:

- As part of a child's day to day sensory plan
- As an introduction or end to an event/day to help reduce anxiety
- As an intervention during the day as strategy to support the individual

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

At Brighter Futures Education Trust we have a robust system of evaluating all that we do. This includes:

- Annual review in the style of 360 style reports
- Individual pupil progress review as part of annual reviews and EHC reports

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- Weekly leadership meeting on a Friday morning that reflects upon a wide range of indicators for the previous week. We ask the question =‘What can we do for the next hour/day/week to support the pupil have a better week next week’.
- Governing body visits, meetings, and days where various parts of school progression and performance are reviewed and challenged.
- Use of a Hertfordshire Improvement Partner or HIP
- Use of Local Authority staff (specialists such as lead practitioner for ASD)
- Autism Accreditation process and checks
- Ofsted visits and monitoring

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