Autistic Spectrum Condition
and Complex Learning Difficulties
and Disability Curriculum Policy

Contents.

- Introduction.

- What is Autism Spectrum Condition?

- A Definition of Complex Leaning Difficulties and Disabilities

- Supporting the Curriculum

- Teaching and Learning.

- A Holistic Curriculum.

- The Core Curriculum.

- The Specialist Curriculum.

- The Enrichment Curriculum.

- Curriculum Planning.

- Professional Support.

- Individual Education Plans.

- Considerations for Assessment.

- Considerations for Transitions.

- Types of Transition.

- Supporting Transition.

- Supporting Parents and Carers.

- Equal Opportunities.

- Health and Safety

Introduction.

The impact of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD) on children's development and learning can be pervasive and complex. This document recognises these complexities and describes some of the modifications required to the curriculum to support children's learning and understanding at the Milestone School. This is not a 'stand alone' document and should be viewed alongside all other policy documents produced by The Milestone School.

In the writing of this policy we have made references from documents produced by:

- Autism Education Trust
- Baston House School.
- Dept for Children, Schools and Families
- National Centre for Autism Studies, University of Strathclyde.
- Scottish Autism Service Network

What is Autism Spectrum Condition?

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) is a term used to describe a neurological difference in brain development that has a marked effect on how a person develops. ASC can be described as a spectrum of conditions because those on the spectrum vary greatly from mild to severe (NAS 2005). Over recent years there has been an increase in the number of individuals being diagnosed with ASC and most studies indicate that the condition affects 1 in 100 people in the UK

There is no cure for autism but there are a number of well researched, evidenced based approaches which are proven to provide individuals with ASC increased opportunities to access a full broad and balanced curriculum in school. These approaches can also be successful for pupils who do not have autism but display similar characteristics to those on the spectrum. Therefore this document can be used in conjunction with children and young adults who have tubular sclerosis, fragile X syndrome and foetal drug and alcohol syndrome as well as any pupil who may not have a formal diagnosis of ASC.

In addition ASC can occur with other so called co-morbid conditions; for example, up to a third of those on the spectrum also have epilepsy and a quarter have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Jones 2012). Autism can occur in conjunction with any neurological or physical disorder (Jordan 2011). As a school, Milestone is seeing increasingly complex students within our population. This document aims to reflect this change by looking at the specific needs of pupils with ASC and Complex Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD).

A Definition of Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD).

Pupils with Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (CLDD) have conditions that co-exist. These conditions overlap and interlock creating a complex profile. The co-occurring and compounding nature of complex learning difficulties requires a personalised learning

pathway that recognises children and young people's unique and changing learning patterns. Pupils with CLDD present a range of issues and combination of layered needs e.g. mental health, relationships, behavioural, physical, medical, sensory, communication and cognitive. They need informed specific support and strategies which may include transdisciplinary input to engage effectively in the learning process and to participate actively in classroom activities and the wider community. Their attainments may be inconsistent, presenting an atypical or uneven profile. In the school setting learners may be working at any educational level, including P Scales and national Curriculum. This definition could also be applicable to learners in Early Years and post-school settings. (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust 2011).

Supporting the Curriculum

The Milestone School Mission Statement.

"Removing obstacles and enabling access to learning"

- We will provide an aspirational, effective and inspiring school.
- We will provide an environment that allows our children to develop academically, socially, physically and emotionally.
- We will use our expertise and resources to offer pupils access to as broad a curriculum as relevant to each individual, which incorporates aspects of the National curriculum.
- We will promote the school as **part of** the educational continuum, not apart from it.

The Milestone School Guiding Principle Aims.

The School will:

- Use the curriculum as a learning process not a content or structure.
- Lead its own learning for pupils and staff with the focus on 'learning to learn', active learning and experiential learning.
- Having the individual as the central focus, not the curriculum.
- Enable, facilitate and allow pupils **time** to learn.
- Adopt a transdisciplinary, holistic approach with all agents involved with the child – including parents.
- Develop 'interest appropriate' approaches as well as age appropriate approaches.
- Have high expectations of pupils and staff.
- Provide opportunities for all staff to develop skills and expertise so providing a high standard of teaching matched to the needs of pupils.
- Engage positively with the local community and utilise it as part of the learning experience.
- Continuously review and evaluate all aspects of the school and set innotive targets for development.
- Prepare pupils for an adult life with a focus on being able to communicate and be understood, problem solve and cope with new situations.

- Provide an education that uses real experiences as a foundation for learning.
- Understand the benefits of learning and growing in a calm, friendly, stable and structured environment.

The Milestone School Objectives.

Each pupil and member of staff will:

- Know what is expected.
- Feel appreciated and valued.
- Have structure to his/her day – with consistency and continuity as needed.
- Enjoy success and learn that making mistakes and getting things wrong are positive learning opportunities.
- Achieve high personal standards.
- Be supported to communicate their needs.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are fundamental to the Milestone School. Our pupils with ASC/CLDD have a wide range of complex needs. This requires us to adopt and develop a range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

However, we are not only concerned with the gaining of knowledge and skills but also with the development of the whole child. We believe in the importance of giving our pupils a positive self image and the confidence to enable them to function effectively in their environment.

We believe pupils learn best when they:

- Are happy
- Are interested and motivated
- Achieve success and gain recognition
- Are given tasks which match their abilities and experiences
- Clearly understand the task and what is expected from them
- Are confident, feel secure and aware of boundaries.

Teaching and learning at the Milestone School is the practice carried out by all staff to ensure all pupils acquire knowledge, skill and understanding. Learning is the process through which the pupils can develop their knowledge, skills and understanding to the point where they have retained and generalised what has been taught (embedded learning). Teaching and learning is carried out in a context which is relevant and meaningful to all pupils with ASC/CLDD to ensure effective learning and appropriate accreditation.

All staff work in such a way that the learning environment is one which is calm and consistent, visually clear and structured, with clear communication to students about what is expected of them, both as individuals and in small groups. This ensures maximum information processing throughout each day allowing pupils to realise their full potential

To support teaching and learning the Milestone School pays significant attention to the National Autism Standards provided by the Autism Education Trust (2012). The Autism Education Trust emphasise the following considerations to support teaching and learning for pupils with ASC and CLDD

There are **four main areas of difference** (Supporting The Core Curriculum) that are particularly important for staff in school to understand and pay attention to because most pupils with ASC and CLDD will have individual educational needs to be met in these areas. Pupils with ASC and CLDD will have different levels of support needs in relation to:

- **Understanding the social interactive style and emotional expression of staff and peers (PSED) –** just as it is difficult for staff and peers to understand the social and interactive style and emotional expression of pupils with ASC/CLDD.
- **Understanding and using communication and language (Communication) – both verbal and non-verbal**(e.g. gesture, facial expression, tone of voice etc.)
- **Differences in how information is processed (Sensory & Cognition)** can lead to a strict adherence to routines and rules and/or difficulties in planning and personal memory.
  Pupils may have difficulties in predicting what will happen when a familiar timetable or activity is changed. Conversely, such styles of processing can lead to strengths and abilities in a number of areas (often related to factual memory or areas of interest and motivation).
- **Differences in the way sensory information is processed (Physical & Motor)** often leading to over-sensitivities (often to external stimuli such as lighting, smells, or sounds), and under-sensitivities (often not noticing internal feelings such as pain, body awareness and hunger, until they becoming overwhelming). It should be noted that sensory sensitivities can lead to extreme levels of stress and anxiety in unfamiliar or over-stimulating environments.

To support the **four main areas of difference** there are **four key themes** to consider in relation to teaching and learning pupils with ASC/CLDD. These are:

- **The individual pupil** - how to understand and address pupils individual needs and strengths.
- **Building relationships** - with staff; parents/carers and peers.
- **Curriculum and learning** – adjustments to the way in which activities are presented, selection of priorities and modifications to the timetable.
- **Enabling environments** – how to create good classroom and school environments for pupils with ASC/CLDD.

Within these four main areas the Milestone School is developing the following provision:

The Individual Pupil:

- Developing the safeguard and well-being of pupils with ASC/CLDD by recognising that they are predisposed to high levels of stress, anxiety and depression and that these can be prevented or reduced if needs are recognised and met.

- Recognising the particular vulnerability of pupils and safeguarding against actual and perceived episodes of teasing and bullying including cyber bullying.
- Understanding the pupils individual needs, their interests and how they like to be supported in school to support their learning and emotional well-being.
- Developing teaching and supporting pupils with ASC/CLDD to develop and use effective communication systems.
- Developing suitable environments where pupils can be away from other pupils and adults, if requested or needed.

Building Relationships:

- Establishing strong relationships between staff and pupils, seeing this as the starting point for mutual understanding and support for pupils learning and well-being.
- Understanding building effective relationships requires active listening to pupils and their parents/carers, promoting opportunities for the exchange of information and ideas.
- Engaging with parents and carers of pupils with ASC/CLDD to ensure that staff are open and approachable to discuss issues with the pupil's family.
- Accessing professionals in health, social care and the voluntary and independent sectors and working effectively with them.
- Establishing links with other settings and active in disseminating expertise in ASC/CLDD to other practitioners.

Curriculum and Learning:

- Developing a curriculum that captures not only the learning needs of pupils with ASC/CLDD (including styles of learning and uneven ability profiles) but also addresses their social, emotional well-being, their communication needs and life skills.
- Developing individualised visual supports to ensure that the sequence of activities during the day is understandable and predicable.
- Developing activities that are well organised, structured and planned, and ensures that, where possible, advance warning is given of any changes to familiar routines in a way that is meaningful to the pupil.
- Establishing flexibility in making adjustments to activities, lessons, timetables and their delivery, as necessary for pupils with ASC/CLDD.
- Established trained key staff in the use of a range of communication strategies to facilitate two-way communication.

Enabling Environments:

- Establishing a general ethos to adapt the setting to the needs of the individual pupil rather than making the pupils fit the setting.
- Developing clearly defined spaces/areas for personal equipment and places of safety for pupils with ASC/CLDD.
- Developing a variety of cues (e.g. tactile, visual, and auditory) to help pupils understand and navigate the environment.
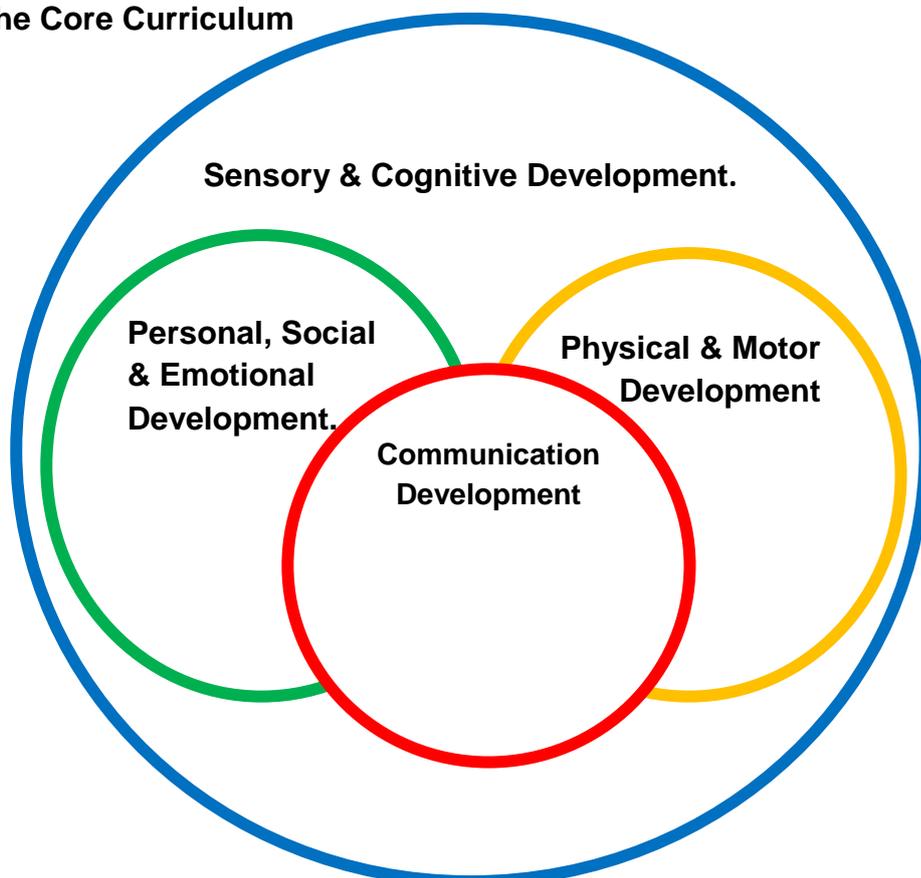
A Holistic Curriculum

The curriculum at the Milestone School is holistic and specifically designed to meet of pupils with ASC/CLDD. The curriculum approach consists of three key areas: the core curriculum, specialist curriculum and enrichment curriculum

The Core Curriculum

The core curriculum focuses upon enabling access to vocational areas (life skills), accreditation and individual learning programmes. The core curriculum is not a 'stand alone' structure and is only effective when supported by specialist and enrichment curriculum focus. This approach is flexible and focuses upon meeting pupils academic needs in a way that takes into account their social, emotional and development profiles. This ensures learning is relevant and meaningful and promotes the application of skills in a manner which allows optimum levels of achievement.

The Core Curriculum

Sensory & Cognitive Development.

Personal, Social & Emotional Development.

Physical & Motor Development

Communication Development

The four areas within the core curriculum can provide the basis for pupil target setting supporting Individual Education Plans (IEP's) and curriculum subjects. They also reflect the key areas in pupil's statements.

Important Considerations.

Sensory and Cognitive Development – Individuals with ASC/CLDD often experience the world one sense at a time (Cassanova 2011). Therefore care should be taken not to overload

students with a multi –sensory experience which could cause hyper-stimulation. Instead the teacher should seek to provide pupils with single focus sensory experience aimed at increasing the pupil's interest and joint attention without causing sensory overload (Lawson 2012).

Communication Development – up to half of young learners with ASC/CLDD will be non-verbal (NAS 2005). It is vital to acknowledge any attempt by the individual to communicate. This includes turning towards, eye contact, gesture, nodding and pointing as well as Makaton Signing, use of symbols, Picture Exchange Communication (PECS), communicating using technology (speech generating devices) as well as attempts to vocalise and speak.

Physical and Motor Development- those pupils with ASC/CLDD require regular exercise in order to enhance their well-being, fine and gross motor skills and levels of fitness. Staff should be mindful of sensory needs when selecting physical activity. Eapen (2011) estimates that 95% of those children with ASC have sensory perception difficulties. When the correct form of exercise is selected however it can lower cortisol levels and induce a calm/alert state in the pupil (McDonnell 2011).

Emotional and Social development – social and emotional difficulties are common for pupils with ASC/CLDD (Wing 1979). Individual pupils with these conditions may require intensive training in how to respond appropriately to social situations and deal with their own emotions and those of others (Gray 2011).

The Specialist Curriculum

The specialist curriculum structure is a supportive structure that enables students to manage the effects of their needs ASC/CLDD as independently and effectively as possible and therefore remove barriers to their learning potential and life success. Below is a list of examples of specialist curriculum activities and approaches which can be used and adapted to provide personalised learning opportunities for children at the Milestone School. For more information on each of these approaches please refer to The Milestone School Autistic Spectrum Condition and Complex Learning Difficulties and Disability Tool Box which accompanies this document.

- Access to therapeutic intervention including Speech and Language Therapy, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Music Therapy, Sensory Processing Assessments and Advice.
- Total Communication including Intensive Interaction, Makaton Signing, Picture Exchange Communication (PECS), Visual Supports (Objects of Reference, Photographs, Pictures, and Symbols), Key words and Phrases, Spoken Language and specialist technology (speech generating devices).
- Structured Teaching and Visual Supports.
- Team Teach
- Individual Behaviour Support Plans
- Individual Education Plans (IEP's).
- Communication in Print.
- Social Stories

- Regular Physical Activity.
- Anxiety Management and Relaxation Support.
- Access to low distraction environments/work place – where children can be away from the group if this is causing anxiety or stress.
- Access to quiet spaces to enable pupils to withdraw if they need to take breaks during their day reducing anxiety and stress.

The Enrichment Curriculum

The enrichment curriculum is a supportive structure that promotes the development of individual resources and capabilities. It enables pupils to apply knowledge, understanding and skill in a manner that enables success in society and facilitates patterns of life-long learning and active citizenship. Examples of enrichment activities may include:

- Life Skills Programmes.
- Work Related Learning.
- School Council
- Social Use of Language Programmes (SULP)
- Participation in the Local Community.
- Mainstream/Special School Participation and Inclusion Programmes.
- Links with Further Education.
- Enterprise Programmes.
- Healthy Eating Programmes.
- PSHE Focused Activities.
- Citizenship Programmes
- Sex and Relationship Related Education.
- Enrichment Groups

Curriculum Planning

Depending on the age and individual needs of pupil, teachers develop the curriculum through the use of the following and other working related documents:

- Milestone School Schemes of Work.
- Milestone School Curriculum Policies.
- Accreditation Performance Criteria
- National Curriculum
- Individual Pupil Progress (Yellow Files and Classroom Monitor)
- Individual IEP's.
- Development Matters (Early Years Foundation Stage).
- Inclusion Development Programme.
- Autism Education Trust Standards.
- Routes for Learning.

It is recognised that the use of visual strategies, such as visual timetables produced through the use of objects of reference, photographs, pictures and Communication in Print

(depending on individual children's understanding) is an extremely effective way to support the pupils identifying the sequence, focus and intended learning objective within each lesson/activity. This will enable the pupils to know what is expected of them, understand the relevance of what is being learned, and identify and celebrate achievement within the sessions.

Teachers start their planning by looking at Individual pupil progress and relevant records, relevant schemes of work and accreditation specifications depending on their Key Stage. They adapt planning documents in line with individual Key Stage guidance.

Professional Support

Professional colleagues have a significant role to play in the curriculum of our pupils and may include:

- Speech and Language Therapists.
- Occupational Therapists.
- Physiotherapists
- Music Therapists
- Educational Psychologists
- Medical and Health Professionals
- Respite Services
- Local Authority Professionals
- Social Services and Key Workers.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

These are highly significant in planning for and ensuring pupils' development. IEP targets for individual pupil development and skill areas that are 'additional and different' to whole-class provision are written termly. Parents are regularly consulted and informed about their child's targets and progress is discussed at parent's evenings and at the pupils Annual Review of their Statement of Special Educational Needs

IEPs for pupils with ASC and CLDD should:

- Raise achievement.
- Be seen as a working document.
- Use a simple format and be jargon free
- Be shared with parents, relevant staff and, where appropriate, pupils.
- Include pupil's views where appropriate.
- Accommodate uneven profile of pupils with ASC and CLDD.

Considerations for Assessment

Assessment is a crucial element in meeting the needs of any pupil; however for pupils with ASC/CLDD it is even more important to establish an accurate pupil profile on which to base educational targets. Assessment for pupils with ASD/CLDD is not achieved through a tick list or prescriptive set of tasks. It is individual to each pupil and relies on careful observation,

identification of concepts or skills which require further exploration, dialogue with parents and other professionals, and reflective interpretation of this information.

Factors that will be important in relation to assessing pupils with ASC/CLDD

- Assessment should ideally be carried out in a range of environments. Pupils may perform well in a given situation but may not transfer or use the skill in another. Such inconsistencies may be attributed to changes and variations in the environment, personnel or resources used.
- Assessment process may need to be an eclectic mix of information from different sources which can be collated to form a holistic profile. A range of professions may be involved to supplement the knowledge and information gathered by classroom staff.
- Information from home and parental perspectives is vital. Parents have great deal to contribute to both the informal and formal assessment process. Parents may face quite different challenges to the adults in the education setting.
- The developmental profile of pupils with ASC/CLDD can be mixed or spiked. They may have strengths and abilities in keeping or beyond their developmental age.
- Assessment should also incorporate and value wider achievements. Such achievements may be non traditional, however it is important to acknowledge and develop success or ability in a range of areas. (Scottish Tool Box).
- Routes for Learning may be useful for pupils with P Levels between 1 and 4.
- MAPP is an assessment tool which The Milestone School is currently piloting in some classes.
- The Special Schools Academies Trust Engagement Profiles is an assessment tool which The Milestone School is piloting in some classes.

Considerations for Transitions

Transitions can be very problematic for pupils with ASC/CLDD mainly due to their cognitive processing of the environment and need for predictability. Pupils are likely to have difficulties with:

- Interpreting the thoughts/feelings/expectations of new people.
- Understanding or establishing appropriate new routines.
- Planning and organisation.
- Sensory processing.

All of the above can provoke high levels of anxiety and may result in unusual behaviours or responses such as:

- Fear
- Inappropriate reactions due to lack of social understanding and what behaviour is expected.
- Attempts to keep environment the same or negative responses to transition interfering with existing structures.
- Non compliance

- Behaviour that adults find challenging.

Pupils need to know...

- Where they have to be
- Who might be there
- What they/should be doing.
- What behaviour is expected
- How much they have to do
- How will they know they are finished
- What they will be doing next.   (Division TEACCH, 2006).

Types of Transition

There are numerous types of transition that occur throughout the day, the school term, and year. It is not always major transitions that have the most impact for pupils with ASC/CLDD and all need to be considered as potential stressors for pupils and their families. The following are common transitions.

- From one activity to another.
- From one educational placement/environment to another (new room, new building, new people, new structures etc.)
- From Key Stage to Key Stage.
- Home to school
- Different/new staff.
- Home issues (new house/new baby/bereavement/holidays etc.).
- Personal transitions as a result of maturation and development.

Whatever the scale of complexity of the transition the most important factor is to consider the situation from the perspective of the pupil taking into account their strengths, difficulties and past experiences.

Supporting Transition

These are some of the approaches used at the Milestone School to support individual pupils with transitions.

- Visual supports (photographs, symbols, schedules, timetables etc.).
- Home to School Diary
- Social Stories.
- Adapting environments taking into account the pupils sensory processing difficulties.
- Allowing plenty of time e.g. breaking the transition into smaller steps, allowing the pupil to visit the new activity/environment beforehand.
- Identifying key resources required to support the transition including staff training and awareness.
- Providing new activities in the new environment/situation as part of a small group (or individually) led by a familiar adult.

- Providing supporting documents e.g. Communication Passports, Transition Packs and Transition Guides which provide key information on individual pupils.

Supporting Parents and Carers

Parents/Carers are a valuable resource to the school and their knowledge of their children is central to planning in school. What parents/carers can offer the school is a unique, detailed and in-depth knowledge of their child over time. Providing a two way communication between home and school can reassure parents that we are interested in their child, their individual concerns and that we value their contribution. We recognise that effective communication is a two way process that can improve outcomes for the child and family.

Communication is facilitated by:

- Face to face meetings to discuss strategies and progress.
- Home to School Diary.
- Regular phone contact to share information.
- Email contact to share information.
- Opportunities for parents/carers to visit the class
- Parents workshops.
- Information Evening.
- Coffee Mornings.
- Parents Evenings
- Annual Review Meetings.
- Parents Evenings
- School Newsletter
- School Website
- School handbooks.

Equal Opportunities

We aim to actively promote, through teaching, both discreetly, and in direct ways, the rights of all individuals to receive the optimum of opportunity in all facets of school life. This is an integral part of the school's ethos and practices. We aim to promote acceptable values and attitudes in this area for all of our pupils

Health and Safety

(Please refer to the Milestone School Health and Safety Document).

A central aim of this document is to ensure working, learning and play conditions are safe and secure at all times, including outside trips and journeys. We realise that successful learning cannot take place without a safe environment.

Reviewed: January 2017
Next review date: January 2018