



Equality Relevance Assessment

1. Details of proposal	
Policy title	Balbardie PS Autism Resource Base – Integration Policy
Lead officer	Greg Welsh – Head Teacher
Date relevance considered	7 th July 2015
2. Does the council have control over how this policy will be implemented?	
YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you have evidence or reason to believe that this policy will, or may potentially:	
General Duties	Impact on equality (Yes or No)
Reduce or increase discrimination, victimisation or harassment against people covered by the equality protected characteristics?	Yes
Reduce or increase equality of opportunity between people who share an equality protected characteristic and those who do not?	Yes
Provide opportunity to improve good relations between those who share an equality protected characteristic and those who do not?	Yes
4. Equality impact assessment required? (Two Yes above = full assessment necessary)	
YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Decision rationale	
<p>The introduction of an integration policy is expected to reduce discrimination and increase equality of opportunity for children with Autism at Balbardie Primary School's Autism Resource Base (ARB). The policy sets clear guidance for all staff and further establishes the responsibility of mainstream staff in the process of integration, where appropriate. The policy will provide clear guidance on managing expectations and consulting with parents/carers in decisions concerning the child.</p> <p>It is expected that clarifying and standardising the approach to integration will ensure that the educational and support needs of the child are best met when making decisions around the integration of children attending the ARB into mainstream classes, activities and excursions.</p> <p>The policy also ensures that pupils attending the ARB have access to the same number of excursions (1 per year) and special events. This is expected to reduce discrimination and further equality of opportunity by ensuring the children attending the ARB are provided with a broad education, as they would in a mainstream class. This is, in turn, expected to improve good</p>	

relations between children attending the ARB and children attending mainstream classes as there will be no perception of unfairness if ARB pupils were able to participate in more excursions or special events.

Furthermore, the integration of ARB pupils into mainstream classes or activities, where appropriate, should foster understanding, acceptance and good relations between the two groups.

A full impact assessment is recommended.

- **Assessment required – continue to next section**

Equality Impact Assessment

1. Details of proposal	
Details of others involved	Greg Welsh – Head Teacher Heather McDonald – Principle Teacher, Autism Resource Kenny Selbie – Equality Officer Lorna Kemp – Equalities Analyst
Date assessment conducted	7 th July 2015
2. Aims of the proposed change to council policy or resources	
<p>Although integration is an existing procedure at the school, the introduction of a written policy aims to formalise and standardised this procedure to ensure a fair and consistent approach to all pupils and parents/carers who are involved in the integration process.</p> <p>The policy sets clear guidance for all staff and further establishes the responsibility of mainstream staff in the process of integration, where appropriate. The policy will provide clear guidance on managing expectations and consulting with parents/carers, and will advise on the involvement of the child when making decisions around integration.</p>	
3. What equality data, research or other evidence has been used to inform this assessment?	
<p>Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder, commonly referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Individuals may be anywhere on the 'autism spectrum' with widely varying levels of both IQ and levels of functioning. As such, individuals with ASD are affected in different ways to different extents. Some may require specialist support but many live independent and relatively normal lives.</p> <p>People with ASD often experience problems with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication – both verbal and non-verbal, e.g. difficulties with use and interpretation of voice intonation, facial expressions and other communicative gestures;• Reciprocal social interaction – this includes 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 ASD (which may be very restricting for their family, friends and colleagues but may also be psychologically distressing or inhibiting for the individual with ASD). <p><i>(The Scottish Strategy for Autism, Scottish Government, 2011)</i></p> <p>For a child with ASD in a primary education setting, these issues might translate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problems developing peer relationships and friendships• Limited imaginative and imitative play and solo or parallel play in place of group play• Difficulties in picking up on social cues, particularly in group activities• Unpredictable emotional responses (e.g., anxiety, outbursts) for no apparent reason	

- Delayed language development without nonverbal compensation and problems starting/sustaining conversations
- Difficulty with transitions, changes in routine and unexpected events
- Less likely to pick up on the 'gist' of a situation or activity
- Over or under reaction to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment

(AET Report: What is Good Practice in Autism Education, 2011)

There are a range of different types of school available for children with ASD to attend though not all options will be available everywhere. These options include mainstream schools with or without a set number of hours for extra support; a base or unit within a mainstream school where the pupils access the mainstream school when appropriate and are educated in the base or unit for the rest of the time; and special schools specifically for children with additional support needs.

There is an ongoing debate between advocates of mainstreaming children with ASD into 'regular' schools and advocates of specialist schools for children with additional support needs. However parents of children with ASD are fairly evenly split between mainstream schools, special schools and resource bases in mainstream schools as the best option for their child. This indicates that there is no 'one size fits all' solution and is reflective of the highly diverse support needs of children with ASD. Often parents who feel their child would benefit from being in a mainstream environment find there is a lack of training or support available for their child so a specialist school becomes the only viable option (NAS, 2006). However, research has shown that mainstreaming provides benefits for both students with ASD and their 'mainstream' classmates.

The Autism Education Trust's report into good practice in autism education (2011) found that one of the shared ethos of Outstanding and Good with Outstanding Features rated schools (a mix of special schools, ASD schools and mainstream schools with an autism resource base or centre) was the ambition for pupils to be included, both in mainstream school and broader society. In mainstream schools this meant taking part fully in all school activities and developing strategies to promote the skills the children and young people needed in order to achieve this.

Egel et al. (1981) found that observing classmates perform tasks improves the performance of students with ASD because they are imitating their classmates' responses. In addition to the benefits of students with autism being exposed to more socially acceptable behaviour, other students learn to be accepting of those who are different from them (Kellegrew, 1995). Similarly, children with disabilities and their classmates interact socially, which would otherwise not be possible had they been taught in a separate special education classroom. Guralnick & Groom (1988) found that mildly developmentally delayed students engaged in a much higher rate of social interactions with their classmates when participating in mainstreamed playgroups when compared to a specialised classroom setting.

However, Myles et al. (1993) found that some children with ASD did not interact with others regardless of whether they were surrounded by their peers or not, possibly because the general education classroom can be overstimulating. Children with ASD may find the noise of the regular classroom to be distracting or painful, the class materials to be overstimulating, and the physical organisation of the classroom to be ill-equipped for them to identify where to go and what to do (Mesibov & Shea, 1996). This highlights the importance of considering each individual child's

support needs when making decisions about their education and care.

Consideration should also be given to social groupings and personalities, ideally providing good social role models. In a badly handled setting, children on the autistic spectrum are often 'wound up', or victimised by peers which creates additional barriers to learning (*AET Report: What is Good Practice in Autism Education, 2011*). Research by Batten and Daly found that over a third of children with autism have been bullied at school (NAS, 2006).

Scottish school pupils have a right to be consulted on all matters which affect them. The Scottish Government's Strategy for Autism (2011) recommends that consideration is given to the specific supports needed for the more able individuals with ASD and that people with ASD, and their families and carers, should be involved at all levels in decision making. Furthermore, the Scottish Government's Autism Toolbox (2009) states that "meaningful involvement of pupils can potentially enhance their learning and enhance experiences for pupils and staff". The toolbox highlights that adjustments are likely to be required in order for the pupil to make a contribution due to the barriers that pupils on the autism spectrum face when it comes to formulating and expressing opinions. These barriers do not mean the child doesn't have an opinion, just that more planning is necessary to allow time to adapt processes. Booth and Ainscow (2002) suggest that inclusive schools are those where policy, practice and culture promote both the presence and active participation of all pupils. Similarly, the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2008b) states that "All children and young people should experience personalisation and choice within their curriculum, including identifying and planning for opportunities for personal achievement in a range of different contexts. This implies taking an interest in learners as individuals, with their own talents and interests."

Several areas of best practice were identified by the Autism Education Trust around training. One such example is where senior staff place great emphasis on training. The importance of regular, ongoing training was identified as important for all staff, including administrative and support staff, school bus drivers and catering staff so that, "where possible, knowledge and understanding of autism and approaches to support the learning and behaviour of pupils with autism went beyond an introductory level" (*AET Report: What is Good Practice in Autism Education, 2011*). This approach also addresses any issues around staff turnover.

The report identified that in some mainstream schools with specialist bases the autism specialist staff provide the training for the staff and pupils in the mainstream school area. In addition, a broader range of education and care providers could benefit from autism expertise and experience where schools and autism units provide training to other schools in their local area and to the wider community.

4. Details of consultation and involvement

The policy was sent out to parents/carers of children attending the ARB. The level of response was poor. An informal discussion around the policy took place at the parent network and feedback was considered resulting in additions the content of the policy.

Following further minor amendments (as detailed in section 8), the policy will go to the parent council AGM and to Capability Scotland for comment.

It was considered whether pupils attending the ARB should have involvement in the development of the policy. It was concluded that the policy itself would be too complex to meaningfully consult ARB pupils but that pupils would have involvement in decision making regarding their own integration, where it was deemed appropriate.

5. Issues identified and 'protected characteristics' impact

(Covering: age; disability; gender; gender identity; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief and sexual orientation equality)

The evidence suggests that integration, where appropriate to the pupil's support needs, is beneficial to children with Autism in furthering their communication and social skills, and enabling them to mix with mainstream children who they might have otherwise been unable to socialise with or learn from. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that mainstream pupils learn acceptance of those different from them by spending time interacting together in the classroom. It is also clear from the research that not all pupils will be able to integrate and some pupils will only be able to integrate for certain events depending on their needs and the policy clearly lays out factors that should be considered when making decisions around integration.

Education providers are under a duty to provide a broad, general education. The policy should be clear to ensure that there is the removal of duplication in the education of ARB pupils and to ensure that the child attends the excursion/special event found to be most appropriate to fulfil his/her educational and social development while considering any additional support needs. In any case, the school lacks the resources to support ARB pupils to attend excursions and events with both their ARB class and their mainstream class. Allowing ARB and mainstream pupils to attend one of any event ensures all of the children at Balbardie Primary School can continue to benefit from excursions/special events in the setting most appropriate to their needs.

This will also foster good relations between the ARB pupils and those in mainstream, by removing any perception of unfairness that might arise from ARB pupils attending more excursions or events. It was acknowledged that there may be a very small number of occasions where ARB pupils attend another integration school might attend duplicate events without staff at the ARB being aware though this risk should be minimised.

As mentioned in the evidence, Scottish school pupils have a right to be consulted on all matters which affect them. The Scottish Government's Strategy for Autism (2011) recommends that consideration is given to the specific supports needed for the more able individuals with ASD and that people with ASD, and their families and carers, should be involved at all levels in decision making. Furthermore, the research suggests that the school experience and learning are enhanced through involving pupils in decisions that affect them.

The policy should clearly outline exactly how parents and pupils will be consulted, though it will not always be appropriate for the child to have involvement, depending on their ability to understand and contribute to the discussion.

6. What measures are in place to monitor the actual impact following implementation?

If further changes are made to the policy following review, the Equality Impact Assessment will be revisited.

7. Recommendation

- Implement proposal with no amendments
- Implement proposal taking account of mitigating actions (as outlined below)
- Reject proposal due to disproportionate impact on equality

8. Mitigating actions and additional outputs

Minor changes required to the wording of the policy to achieve the following:

- Residential experiences to be added to excursions and whole school/stage events for clarification of which events policy applies to
- Clarify in policy that children will attend up to one of each type of event, either with their integration class or ARB class, to ensure a broad, general education
- Highlight that integration decisions will be different depending on the event, as well as the child
- Change wording to emphasise the involvement of the parents/carers in decisions affecting the child
- Highlight that children are to be involved in integration decisions affecting them, where appropriate.

- **Equality impact assessment completed**