

Asperger Syndrome

Children with Asperger syndrome display similar characteristics to those of autistic children. They have problems with communication, social relationships and making imaginative responses. However, they are often more articulate than autistic children and may be keen to speak at great length on their own personal topics of interest.

Children with Asperger syndrome may find large groups of people, including a room full of children, daunting or even threatening. They don't like to be the focus of others' attention and respond negatively, sometimes aggressively to any situation they don't understand. When challenged, they may seek to hide in a small, enclosed space, such as a cupboard or a toilet cubicle. Aspers requires a multi-professional diagnosis, usually from a paediatrician and a speech therapist.

Key Characteristics:

Children with Asperger syndrome may:

- Have difficulty understanding jokes, idioms or figures of speech – everything is taken literally, making it difficult for them to make friends, understand some oral instructions and follow parts of literacy.
- Respond aggressively.
- Find it hard to interpret body language and facial expressions.
- Tend to avoid eye contact.
- Seem to respond inappropriately to other people's feelings, due to a lack of awareness of others' emotions or reactions.
- Become obsessively interested in a hobby and/or be especially talented at something like music or art.
- Tend to talk obsessively about topics of their own interest in an expressionless tone of voice.
- Need to follow routines exactly, to the point where they become rituals, and be very upset at any changes in normal home or school routines.
- Follow any instruction or statement literally.
- Have difficulty thinking in abstract terms.
- Find it hard to make and keep friends because they have difficulty relating to the needs of others.
- Feel aggravated and confused by the brightness or buzzing sound of some lighting.

Strategies we use in the classroom:

We may need to:

- Provide an area in the classroom where they can have their own personal space and avoid distractions, perhaps facing the wall and possibly screened off.
- Ensure that the classroom has an element of continuity – not too many changes at one time.
- Prepare them well in advance for any changes in school routine, if possible, as this can be very distressing for them. This may be done using a **Social Story** (see below).
- Use a daily visual timetable.
- Keep instructions clear and simple, checking that they understand by repeating the instructions to them individually, as they do not understand that general instructions are for them unless their name is used.

- Use ICT to support their learning in a variety of ways.
- Use visual and concrete materials to support understanding of conceptual vocabulary.
- Explain jokes, idioms and figures of speech.
- Teach children explicitly how to interpret social signals e.g. facial expressions, gestures.
- Use games and activities to teach social conventions and interaction e.g. turn taking.
- Give them the opportunity to explain their anxieties.
- Give a logical explanation when asking them to do something new.
- Ensure that they understand that school and classroom rules apply to them.
- Speak to them in a calm and motionless manner.

Specific Interventions we provide at Claremont School (see below for an explanation of each)

- Social Stories.
- Lego Therapy.
- Sensory Circuits.
- Drawing and Talking.
- The incredible 5 point Scale.
- Circle of Friends.
- Play Skills.

Useful Websites

- www.autism.org.uk/Aspergers