A decorative border consisting of a grid of small, stylized clock faces. Each clock face has a yellow dial with black dots for hour markers and a red hand. The border is composed of 100 clock faces arranged in a 10x10 grid.

SUPPORTING PUPILS WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS IN THE LITERACY HOUR

A guide for teachers

Leicestershire LEA
Autism Outreach Team

AUTHORS

Leicestershire LEA

Autism Outreach Team

Specialist Teaching Service, Western Annexe

County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester, LE3 8RF.

Tel: (0116) 265 6496 Fax: (0116) 265 6690

Sara Cooper

David Edwards

Liz Hardie

Helen Joy

Emma Kehoe

Mo Potter

Educational Psychology Service

Philip Whitaker.

Thanks to:

Heather Clewley,

Autism Outreach Team

Bristol City LEA

George Thomas

Learning and Autism Support Service

Leicester City LEA.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS BOOKLET

This booklet was written in response to requests for advice about how to cater for the needs of children with autistic spectrum disorders in the context of the Literacy Hour. Taking each of the Literacy Hour activities in turn, we have tried to identify the specific demands which they make on the child with an autistic spectrum disorder and then offer practical tips and suggestions.

The booklet is not intended to be read from cover to cover and we have adopted a consistent format to help readers identify the pages which are of most relevance. Each section of the booklet is set out in the following way:

- A title which identifies the problem
- A brief 'vignette' that tries to capture the core of the particular difficulty that the child may experience or present.
- **'Making sense of it'** tries to explain how impairments that are specifically (or commonly) associated with autistic spectrum disorders may contribute to that difficulty.
- **'Things to try'** suggests practical strategies for dealing with the problem. Even if the child you are involved with cannot cope with all the demands of the Literacy Hour, and has to be withdrawn for some, or all, of the time, we hope that these suggestions will still be helpful in developing the child's literacy skills.

Autistic spectrum disorders

All people who are described as having autistic spectrum disorders have some degree of difficulty in the following areas: **social interaction; social communication; lack of flexibility of thinking**. For a diagnosis to be made, specific types and degrees of difficulty need to be present in each of the three areas. There is a good deal of variation in the way in which these difficulties may be manifested. To complicate matters, there is also a good deal of variation in where the boundaries are drawn and the specific diagnostic 'label' that is used. In this booklet we have chosen to use the term 'autistic spectrum disorders' to refer to the whole 'family' of related difficulties (including Asperger syndrome, 'atypical autism', high functioning autism etc. etc.)

Autistic spectrum disorders also shade into various language and communication difficulties. Some of the suggestions may be helpful for children with these kinds of difficulties.

The Literacy Hour

With better identification of difficulties at the milder end of the autistic spectrum, and inclusive approaches to children with special needs, mainstream schools are catering for increasing numbers of children with autistic spectrum disorders. The introduction of the Literacy Hour offers a

range of challenges and opportunities for these children – and the staff responsible for teaching and supporting them:

- A significant proportion of children with autistic spectrum disorders seem to acquire word recognition skills with apparently little effort (and almost accidentally). This may be linked to the relatively strong visual skills that are often a feature of people with autism.
- The predictability and structure of the Literacy Hour are features that may well suit the learning style of the child with an autistic spectrum disorder: short sessions on a given activity, with clear time limits and transitions are often recommended for these children.
- Working and responding as a member of a small group or whole class may make substantial demands on children with autistic spectrum disorders. Listening to, and taking in, instructions can be especially difficult when these are directed to the whole group. Group activities may also put significant social demands on these children and make very great demands on the child's attention and personal organisation.
- Reading is obviously about much more than just word recognition. Problems with communication are at the core of autism, and language comprehension difficulties are commonly experienced by children with autistic spectrum disorders. The child's ability to make sense of stories may be seriously affected by these broader problems.

Contents of this guide

The hour is divided into four key sections. The particular issues relevant to pupils with autistic spectrum disorders are listed underneath each section.

Where specific areas of difficulty cover more than one section of the Literacy Hour, these are cross referenced in bold type in the text.

CONTENTS

SECTION 4

Plenary

- 4A. Taking over
- 4B. Not taking part

Page 27

Page 29

SECTION 1

Shared Text Work

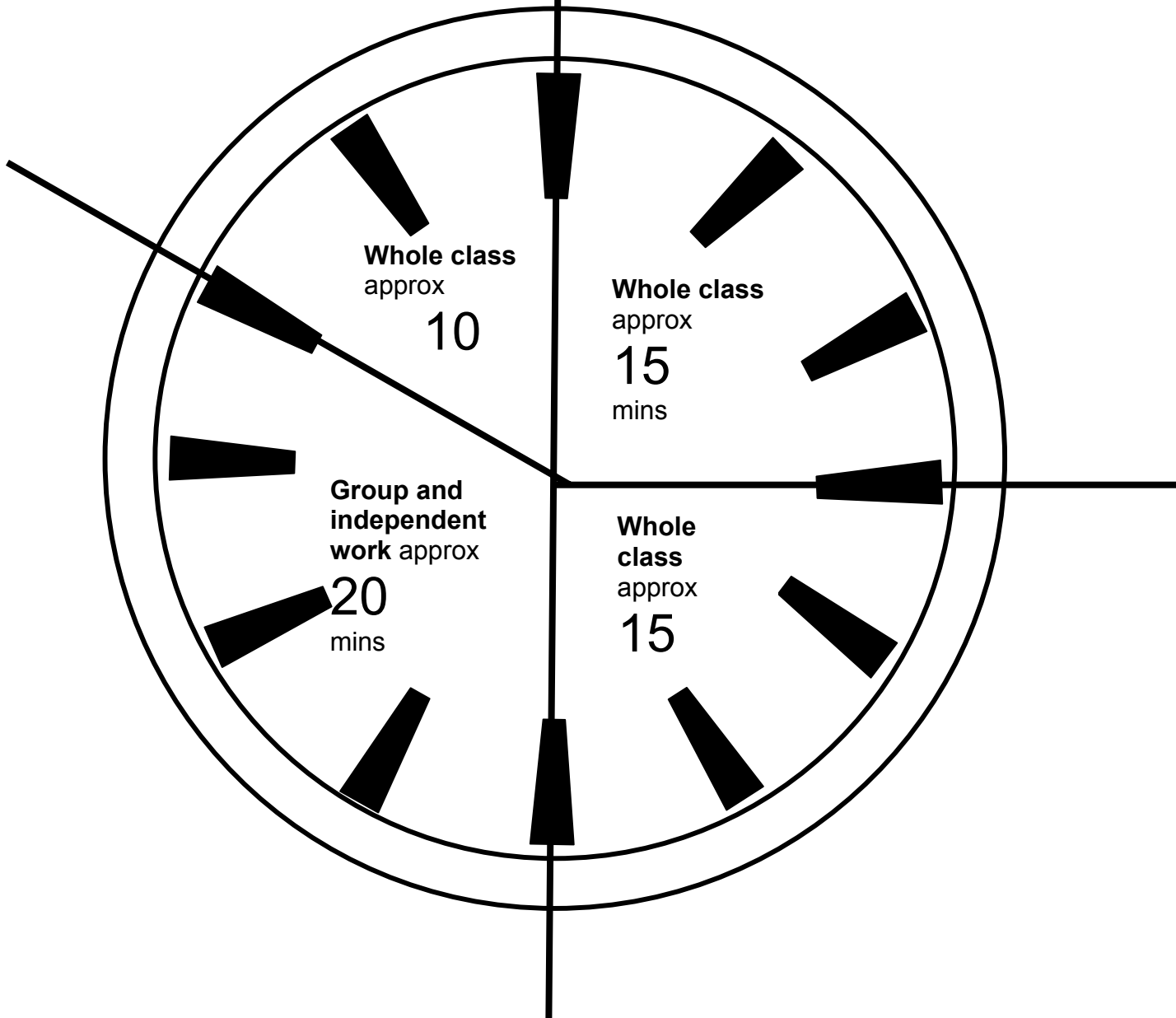
- 1A Being part of a group,
- 1B Paying attention,
- 1C Understanding the language,
- 1D Contributing and responding to questions,

Page 5

Page 6

Page 8

Page 10



SECTION 3

Independent work.

- 3A Knowing what's expected,
- 3B Producing imaginative work,
- 3C Fine motor skills,
- 3D Drafting and re-drafting,

Page 19

Page 21

Page 23

Page 25

SECTION 2

Focused word/sentence work and

guided reading

- 2A Making sense of sentences and stories
- 2B Using and understanding intonation and expression,
- 2C Literal interpretation

Page 12

Page 16

Page 17

SECTION 1

SHARED TEXT WORK

1A. BEING PART OF A GROUP

James sometimes takes ages to join everybody on the carpet. Then when he does he climbs over people to get to “his” place.

Making sense of it

- Children with an autistic spectrum disorder often have a difficulty functioning as a member of a group.
- They may be reluctant to move from what they are working on, transitions being particularly problematic for some children.
- Many youngsters can be extremely rigid about routines etc. and this can lead to a desire to always sit in the same place.
- A lack of social empathy can lead to the child behaving inappropriately, in this case climbing over peers to reach his goal. Sitting with the group may be difficult for the child – problems with close proximity, sensory difficulties, or poor body posture leading to fidgeting.

Things to try.

- A one-minute warning of impending carpet time may help the child to make a smoother and quicker transition. Make sure you deliver the cue directly to James as well as to the whole class.
- James may concentrate better if allowed to sit in the favoured place. If possible make sure this is near the front of the group with a clear view of visual material and within reach of the teacher or learning support assistant.
- Marking the carpet visibly where you want James to sit (using either a carpet square, taped square or photo) may help to reduce proximity problems. Consider whether there may be any auditory or visual input which may be disturbing James, e.g. ventilators, heaters, strong sunlight. Compensate for poor posture by positioning James where he can lean against a cupboard or wall.
- Give him a visual means of knowing what is expected e.g. symbol prompt cards for non-readers (look, shh, sit down etc.) or a list of simple written rules for readers (e.g. look at teacher, listen, hand up etc.)

1B. PAYING ATTENTION

Sarah sits happily with the other children but I'm aware that she's not really listening. She will sit with her back to me and never answers any questions.

Making sense of it

- Children with autistic spectrum disorder maintain attention better if there is a visual element as well as auditory. Sometimes children will appear not to be listening when they are. They have not learned the importance of actively letting you know that they are listening through body posture and eye contact.
- Children with autistic spectrum disorder will rarely put up their hands to answer questions directed to the whole class. They are more likely to answer a question directed to them by name.

Things to try

- At KS1 if the "Big book" does not hold the child's attention try using a small version with the child during group time. If available, the learning support assistant can prompt Sarah's attention to the appropriate sentence or picture.
- Teach "active" listening skills (face the teacher, maintain eye contact) and practice in various situations. Prompt the child with "Let me know that you are listening" rather than "You're not listening" or you may be taken literally and start an argument!
- Be aware that Sarah may be susceptible to distractions which may not be noticed by other children (e.g. long hair, the noise of heating outlets) and be prepared to move her to a less distracting space.
- Ask the learning support assistant to prompt Sarah to raise her hand to answer a question. The learning support assistant may need to quietly prepare her to be ready to answer the question.
- Use Sarah's name occasionally to ensure that she is aware that what is being said is also for her.
- Try structuring the listening time with younger children by using an object (e.g. bean bag, pen) to hold when it's their turn to talk.
- Try going through the text with Sarah before the whole class session, so that it is familiar to her. Children with autistic spectrum disorder often like

repetition and as a result it may hold Sarah's attention more.

- Try giving her some key words to listen out for during the group session.

1C. UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE

Michael doesn't seem to be able to follow the story. He drifts off or becomes distracted by other things in the classroom.

Making sense of it

- Michael may have problems processing language. Many students with autistic spectrum disorder have better expressive than receptive language.
- A poor auditory memory may add to problems with processing language.
- Students with autistic spectrum disorder will have a poor grasp of the flexibility of language. They may be confused by idiom, metaphor or subtle language codes such as sarcasm or irony.
- The effort of trying to process longer sequences of speech may make Michael tired or disruptive as he fails to see the sense of the story and consequently loses the will to pay attention.

Things to try

- The learning support assistant can be asked to rephrase and simplify language Michael may misunderstand.
- Point out picture cues to help make sense of the language in the text.
- Share in advance with Michael, the specific object of the lesson or activity, so that he sees the point of what he has to do.
- Seat Michael beside the learning support assistant or an appropriate peer who can act as a "role model" and quietly provide appropriate verbal and physical prompts.
- Use a little version of the "Big Book" with Michael during group time. The learning support assistant can prompt Michael's attention to the appropriate sentence or picture. (This is not usually advocated but may be necessary if the student is to be part of the session).

- The teacher and support staff can use non-verbal signs to reinforce their speech. An index finger touching corners of eyes can mean, “look”. A hand cupped over an ear can mean “listen” and a finger to the lips – “quiet”.
- When speaking directly to the student, try to avoid idiom, e.g. expressions such as “in a minute”, “what’s up”, or sarcasm, e.g. “it would be nice if you could be quiet”. Try to remember his literal comprehension and be explicit in your instructions.
- Where possible, match the content of the shared text session to Michael’s experience.
- Give clear explanation as to the genre (fact/fiction) of the work under consideration.
- Give Michael a set of words or phrases in advance that he has to listen out for in the story.
- Try reading the story with the learning support assistant before, to help him become more familiar with it, and therefore more interested.
- Re-read the book in a small group, or 1:1 with learning support assistant after the whole class story.

1D. CONTRIBUTING AND RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS

Rachel just doesn’t seem to get this right. She either shouts out the answers or ignores me entirely when I ask questions.

Making Sense of it

- Rachel may not understand the social rules of the classroom see page 5 **being part of a group.**
- She may not pick out the significant social features of the classroom situation, e.g. the expectation to look at the teacher.
- She may rigidly stick to rules that can be relaxed e.g. “complete quiet now”
- Students with autistic spectrum disorder will have difficulty with non-verbal communication as well as spoken language. They may not pick up a non verbal cue (e.g. point or eye contact asking someone to contribute).
- Many students with autistic spectrum disorder have difficulty with imagination. They may see little point in fiction and especially stories, that involve improbable events such as talking dogs and so on Rachel may

have difficulty distinguishing between fact and fiction.

- Many students with autistic spectrum disorder find it hard to understand abstract ideas. They have difficulty talking about how they think, what they feel and how others may feel. Questions such as “What did you do to work out this word?” or “Why did Simon do what he did?” may be very difficult or result in concrete answers such as “I thought about it”, or “He didn’t really do it. It’s a story”.

Things to try

- Use “social stories” to teach appropriate behaviour to ask and answer questions. Information about social stories is available from the Autism Outreach Team.
- Use Rachel’s name before asking her a direct question. You can make sure that you include her by doing this.
- Reward Rachel for remembering to put her hand up.
- Ask Rachel “concrete” questions at first, that she will understand and have a chance of a successful response.
- Rachel may need to be taught explicitly about fiction and why it is entertaining. Use the learning support assistant to find stories about Rachel’s interests. Compare these with factual books. Talk about which ones are “real” and “pretend”.
- Rachel may be able to contribute well when factual texts are used and more concrete questions asked. Encourage her to share her knowledge with others.
- Allow time at the end of the session with the learning support assistant for Rachel to ask her questions. If able she could write them down.
- You can provide structure to the Question and Answer session by saying you will always ask Rachel the 3rd and 4th question for example. This will help to keep her attention.

SECTION 2

FOCUSED WORD/SENTENCE LEVEL WORK AND GUIDED READING

1A. MAKING SENSE OF SENTENCES AND STORIES

Philip can read the words – but he doesn't seem to be making sense of the stories. He might just as well be reading a telephone directory.

Making sense of it

- Children with autistic spectrum difficulties often develop remarkably good word recognition skills (apparently with little effort) – and there is often a gap between word recognition and comprehension skills.
- Some of the problems with Philip's reading comprehension may reflect wider difficulties in language comprehension – either in terms of his understanding specific items of vocabulary or more complex grammatical constructions.
- Be aware that children with autism often learn highly specific (and sometimes idiosyncratic) meanings for particular words – just because they use a word or seem to understand it in a certain context does not mean that they will always understand someone else's use of the word.
- Children with autism seem to have a more general difficulty in putting together "bits" into meaningful wholes. This can apply to visual material as well as to language.
- Understanding text doesn't involve understanding words and sentences – new information has to be integrated into an overall picture and it may also be necessary to link this to Philip's own experiences and previous learning.
- Philip may not appreciate that he needs to actually make sense of what he's read. There are often general problems of self-awareness: the child may not be aware of whether or not he is making sense of what he is reading.
- To understand many stories, you need to understand the people in them: their beliefs, feelings, motives, wishes. Stories often depend on these 'human' elements to build the plot and create interest. A core difficulty for people with autism is understanding what makes other's tick – why they do what they do. Without this understanding, the plot may make no sense, or hold no interest, for Philip.

Things to try – general points to consider

- It may be necessary to **teach the meaning** of specific words or sentence forms. This will be particularly important if specialist vocabulary is used. It will also be important if language is used in a non-literal way. Just think about the phrase “Once upon a time...” You might need to explain: this tells you it’s a made-up story; the story is set quite a long time ago.
- **Factual material may be easier** for Philip to understand – and it may be more motivating. This is particularly the case if the content can be linked to some aspect of the ‘real world’. Something which Philip has experienced, which he already understands or which can be represented visually will be more meaningful for him. Consider whether it is really essential to use fiction.
- Although there have been few studies specifically of the reading comprehension difficulties of children with autism, one study did find that **peer tutoring** was helpful in improving comprehension (as well as word recognition) skills.

Things to try – modifying the text

- Consider providing additional pictures or try to represent the main points in the text in the form of a diagram or a cartoon sequence.
- Photocopy the text and then present it with additional titles and sub-headings. Use them as ‘signposts’ which direct the child’s attention to the main points and developments in the story line.
- Highlighting text that is especially important to the meaning
- Provide summaries of the ‘story so far’.

Things to try – preparing the child

- Try to **prepare** Philip, before actually getting down to reading. The aim is to encourage Philip to actively ‘process’ the text to build up the meaning and continually ask himself ‘what sense does this make?’
- Discuss the story: what has happened so far; what do the illustrations and the title suggest is happening; what might be happening next?
- Try to make links to any knowledge or personal experiences that Philip might already have – you’re trying to ‘activate’ any stored information that might help him to make sense of the text.

- Highlight key questions to be answered as Philip goes along – you may need to phrase these in language that mirrors that of the text (and you may have to stick to a fairly literal level).

Things to try – ‘active’ reading

- Encourage Philip to **actively process the text** as he goes along. You may well find some resistance to this – getting to the end of the page or the book can become a bit of an obsession.
- You may need to ‘schedule’ your interruptions so that Philip gets used to being asked certain sorts of questions at certain points whilst reading.
- Encourage Philip to ‘think in pictures’ as he goes along, trying to represent the main events in cartoon-style images. Try getting him to describe a specific picture he has created for a particular scene – one of you could try to draw the scene.
- Remind Philip of any links between what he is reading and his own knowledge or experience (especially if you managed to identify these when preparing him for the text).
- Ask Philip to re-tell the main points ‘in his own words’ and then make a guess at what might happen next.
- Encourage Philip to ask himself (and you) questions about the content of what he is reading.

Things to try – specific comprehension activities

- Give Philip experience of activities where he has to make sense of single sentences: follow a written instruction, match a sentence to an appropriate picture or say what’s silly about a nonsense statement.
- Have Philip work on getting literal level information from a text – who, when, where and what questions can be worked on specifically (and are much easier than why questions).
- Getting Philip to predict missing words or phrases can also be used to help literal (and higher level) comprehension. At a more advanced level he can be asked to predict the way that the story or chapter might end.
- Although much more difficult to do, it is also possible to train relatively simple inference skills – where Philip has to go beyond the information given and reach a conclusion about some aspect of the story or material.

This can start with the study of specific sentences. One example used (with non-autistic children) was the sentence “Sleepy Tom was late for school

again!” Youngsters were asked to draw conclusions about his age, why he might have been late, whether this had happened before etc. etc.

Things to try – pulling the threads together

- Even Philip manages to make sense of individual sentences or pages, he may find it difficult to **integrate the separate events** in the story or the individual items of information, and make sense of the whole. Try working on simple sequences, starting with events that have to happen in a certain order (a sequence in time, such as making a cup of tea, or a cause-effect chain, such as something being knocked over and breaking).
- There are a number of common frameworks that underlie early stories and factual texts: To begin with ... and then and finally; the characters ... what they were intending/trying to do .. what actually happened (often a surprise) how it all turned out. It can be helpful to draw attention to these story ‘frames’ when summarising the story for Philip (and when asking him to do so).
- Try to give Philip a short summary of the overall plot before you start reading.

2B. USING AND UNDERSTANDING INTONATION AND EXPRESSION

During guided reading I have noticed that Robert smiles when there is a sad piece of text, his voice does not change at all, it is rather monotonous.

Making sense of it

- People with autistic spectrum disorder have difficulty in understanding how to react to various situations requiring empathy.
- Changes in facial expression and vocal tones are a problem for the pupil with autistic spectrum disorder, as well as understanding body language.
- Volume and pace is also something children with autism find hard to control, some talk/read far too loudly or too quickly.
- Often children with autism read mechanically without much understanding or sense of the text.

Suggested Strategies

- Practise stopping at full stops teaching Robert a clear strategy to use for himself, e.g. count to 3 in silence when you come to a full stop.

- A timing device could be introduced to slow down the pace of reading if it is being rushed.
- When Robert's voice becomes too loud point to a visual prompt to help him, e.g. a card bearing the sound "shh" or just 'quiet reading', if he is unable to respond to a simple verbal reminder.



- Real life books that can be used to discuss anger, joy, sadness, etc. are helpful in teaching how to react to various social situations. Also photos and magazines are a useful tool as discussion points for aiding understanding of emotions.
- Listening to a tape and enjoying what's been heard can help in teaching vocal expression.

2C. LITERAL INTERPRETATION

I gave Jake an ink stamp with a picture of a racing car on it that we had discussed in our shared text time and I asked him to describe it. When I checked his work he had written a detailed description of the ink stamp and not what we'd been discussing beforehand!

Making sense of it

- Literal interpretation is a common difficulty for most people with autistic spectrum disorder, and therefore, instructions such as the above example may be taken literally and the autistic pupil may work well and demonstrate good spelling skills, but unfortunately the points of the exercise will have been misunderstood.
- Humour, sarcasm, metaphor and idiom can cause problems for pupils with autism.
- Often we give instructions but phrase them as questions e.g. "Can you write about....?" Jake may just treat them as questions and give us a simple yes/no answer.
- Autistic people find it difficult to see hidden meanings in conversations and may not understand the motives behind the questions they are being asked.

Suggested Strategies

- Jake may work well and effectively when instructions are presented to him in a format that he can understand without having to process lots of information. Use short direct sentences that cannot have a double meaning.
- If problems persist it may be necessary to provide visual instruction alongside minimal written instruction to avoid misinterpretation. Using a simple 3 step plan – introduction, method, conclusion, is a way of presenting instruction clearly, e.g.,

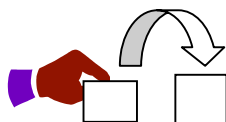
1) Stamp picture on paper (making sure there is a clearly defined area for the picture to go in).



2) Fill in the missing words (a cloze procedure exercise may be appropriate for many pupils), giving examples.



3) Finished – put in green box (always have a ‘finish’ place to conclude the work), check timetable, or go to Mrs. Jones for help.



Asking for help is an important step forward in realising a misunderstanding has occurred – a ‘help’ card for Jake may be useful.

SECTION 3 INDEPENDENT WORK

3A. KNOWING WHAT IS EXPECTED.

Shamima can find it difficult to start her independent work. She gets confused about what she is supposed to be doing. It's as if she's following her own set of instructions rather than what she's been asked to do. She often asks what she is expected to do even when it has been explained to her.

Making sense of it

- Many people with autistic spectrum disorder have problems taking in whole class or group instructions. They may not perceive themselves as part of the group and as such don't understand that the instructions are also meant for them.
- Deciding which information is important can also be a difficulty for people with autistic spectrum disorder. Shamima may not be able to prioritise which information she needs for her independent work.
- Difficulties with receptive communication, particularly verbally presented information, are a feature of autistic spectrum disorders. Consequently Shamima could have problems accessing the instructions presented to her. She may also have picked up on 'bits' of information rather than getting the whole picture and as a result she might get confused about what is expected of her.
- Some people with autistic spectrum disorder have developed the strategy of appearing to listen by the way that they use their body language but are actually having problems taking in the information. Some also develop a coping strategy of copying what other children are doing therefore appearing more able than they actually are. As a result the final piece of work may not be as accurate as expected.
- Shamima may find it difficult to 'filter out' irrelevant stimuli and become distracted by insignificant detail. Consequently it is difficult for her to make sense of what is being asked of her or to focus on what she is expected to do.
- Due to an impairment of imaginative skills Shamima may have problems making sense of abstract information which leads her to wrongly interpret information and instructions.

Things to try

- Check that Shamima has understood what she is to do before she starts and continue to check at intervals throughout the session (refer to

Section 1C 'Understanding the Language', page 8)

- In a 1:1 situation with adult support provide instructions that are clear and concise. Later a peer can be used to provide this type of support. Shamima can also progress from 1:1 support to small group and then independent work.
- Provide Shamima with visual aids alongside the verbal instructions. These can be written instructions if she can read then Shamima can then refer back to them at any time instead of having to repeatedly ask an adult.
- Work should be differentiated and individualised.
- Clear beginnings and endings to work will allow Shamima to understand how much work she is expected to produce. Examples include:
 - let Shamima know how many lines she has to write,
 - put a start dot and a finish dot on the page to show where to begin and end,
 - tell her how many questions she has to answer
 - provide a visual timer (e.g. egg timer) so that she can see how long she has to work for.
- Make sure all instructions are clear and not too abstract to be correctly understood.
- Shamima may benefit from working in a distraction free (or limited distraction) work area. This could be a table in the classroom that is facing a blank wall away from distractions such as computers or other children. It may be possible to have screens on either side of the table to block out visual distractions.
- Practical activities may be more understandable and motivating for Shamima.
- Provide small, achievable amounts of work to raise her self esteem and confidence.
- Avoid open-ended work. Try to present independent work to Shamima in a carefully structured way with explicit instructions.

3B. PRODUCING IMAGINATIVE WRITTEN WORK.

John finds creative writing activities extremely difficult. He can re-tell stories fairly accurately but has great problems writing his own original work. If John is asked to write a piece of imaginative work he writes about his favourite, factual subject or an incident that has happened to him. It's as if he doesn't know where to start or what the point is to this type of work.

Making sense of it.

- People with autistic spectrum disorder have problems with using their:
 - imagination
 - flexibility of thought
 - predicting future events
 - taking the perspective of another person
 - understanding that others may see the same event in a different light.
- As all of these skills are necessary for imaginative writing activities it is easy to see that John will have real difficulties in this area.

Things to try

- Provide lots of experiences of other people's creative writing in different forms e.g. stories and poems.
- To build confidence start by asking John to re-tell familiar stories. As he gets more confident provide alternative endings to stories for him to choose from. Later he can make up his own endings.
- It will be easier for John to write about his own experiences rather than imagined ones so it is important to provide him with lots of opportunities to use these in his written work.
- With cut out pictures or sentences encourage John to sequence familiar stories. Once he is confident with this activity miss out pictures and ask John to provide his own. This can later be done with less familiar stories.
- In a 1:1 session an adult can write a sentence and ask John to follow with his own sentence. A story can develop co-operatively and with the guidance and support of an adult. This can later be extended to co-operative work with a peer.
- Play sessions with visual objects and adult support can later be written up as a story.
- The work could be written on computer, spoken onto a tape or presented on video if possible as an alternative to written work. This may also be motivating for John.
- Providing some suggested characters and settings for John to choose from may provide the beginnings of a story that he can then continue.
- Be realistic, many children have difficulties with imaginative writing, try to remember that imagination is a core impairment of children with autistic spectrum disorder.

3C. FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Nathan finds it really difficult to write neatly. When I ask him to read something back to me, I still can't make any sense of what's written.

Jasmine can not get anything down on paper if she has to think about what she is writing. It's almost as if she can do only one thing at a time, think about what she is writing or think about the act of writing it.

Making sense of it

- Many children with an autistic spectrum disorder also experience difficulties with fine motor skills.
- Nathan may have problems with confusions over top/bottom or left/right etc.
- Nathan and Jasmine may need to concentrate on the 'mechanics' of handwriting. If they need to think about what they are writing then how they are writing may suffer.
- Nathan may find it difficult to appreciate that other people cannot read his writing. He knows what it says, so everyone else must know it too!
- The level of anxiety that Nathan and Jasmine experience leads directly to a deterioration in fine motor skills
- They may suffer from fatigue and so their fine motor ability may deteriorate as the lesson or the day progress.
- Nathan and Jasmine may have a difficulty in transferring their gaze from the board or text book to paper, so often they do not look at what they are writing.
- Jasmine may ignore time limits or be constantly checking how much time she has left. She would find it difficult to keep to time limits or to finish off a piece of work.
- Remember visual memory is generally stronger than auditory in those with an autistic spectrum disorder

Things to try

- It is important to separate fine motor skills, which are being used during this activity and any other skills that are being assessed at the same time. Just because Nathan finds writing difficult does not mean that he has nothing to say!

- Alternative forms of recording that by-pass potential fine motor difficulties include:

Cloze passages	Labelling a diagram or drawing
Dictation (either to a peer or to an adult)	Rubber stamps or stickers to fill in
The use of a dictaphone or a computer	Cut and stick
- Whatever alternatives are chosen a balance between the differing methods will need to be found so that improvement can be attempted across a range of skills. In particular, any fine motor skills that are not developing will need to be worked on specifically at some other time.
- The use of pre-formatted frameworks may help Nathan and Jasmine to organise their thoughts
- Be clear in your own mind about what exactly is the purpose of the writing and make sure that this can be accomplished first. Indeed, if you are asking Nathan to demonstrate knowledge or retention of ideas, then other equally valid ways may be explored.
- Be explicit about exactly how much work is expected. Nathan and Jasmine will find it difficult to know what you are expecting them to do. (e.g. “Start at this dot”, “and finish at this one” “ or (answer five questions only)”
- Be realistic about how much you can expect them to record using writing. Be aware of anxiety and try to reduce it as it develops whenever possible.
- The use of an external timer (egg timer, piece of music, electronic timer...) can often be used as visual and auditory reminder of time passing and the need to finish their work in time.

3D. DRAFTING AND REDRAFTING

David is never happy with his work. He continually rewrites his work improving it, but will not accept that it will never be perfect. If you try to take his work away or to move him on to a final copy he will screw up his work and throw it away.

Simon refuses to look at his work once he’s finished it. He’s ‘done’ the work, why should he have to do it again?

Andrea takes so long to write her work. She forms every letter very carefully and becomes very anxious if she misspells a word or makes another kind of mistake.

Making sense of it

- It is very common for people with an autistic spectrum disorder to insist upon perfection and anything less being unacceptable even though they may experience great difficulty in living up to their own, unrealistic expectation
- Some will repeatedly rub out or throw away work that does not fulfil their expectation.
- Often an insignificant yet “interesting” part of the activity will be concentrated upon.
- Leaving their work unfinished or imperfect may cause anxiety.

Things to try

- Encourage David, Simon or Andrea to copy their peers (thus, also raising their social awareness)
- Make explicit the “routine” of drafting and redrafting, emphasising the time element involved, set a limit to the number of errors they are allowed to correct or erase
- External timers can be used to make the ending of the drafting or redrafting session.
- Andrea may be motivated by the promise of a few minutes with a motivator at the end of the session or after a particular piece of work has been completed.
- Make clear all beginnings and endings by using visual and audio cues (traffic lights on the page, schedules)
- Plan targets or small amounts of work to engender success at completing work, thus building up self-confidence and raising self-esteem.
- Use a social story with David to show that it’s O.K. to make mistakes and the potential benefits that can be drawn from them
- Teach a planning framework so that less redrafting may be necessary such as “Introduction method conclusion” in Section **2C Literal Interpretation Page 17, more useful strategies can be found.**

SECTION 4

THE PLENARY SESSION

4A. TAKING OVER

When it's time for the plenary session Adam dominates the class, all he seems to want to do is to ask questions and doesn't want to listen to anybody else.

Making sense of it

- Students with an autistic spectrum disorder may have problems perceiving themselves as being part of a group and so won't relate to a group instructions to listen to each other.
- The student may have problems understanding the 'rules' of group discussion. They may have difficulty understanding the verbal and particularly non-verbal cues of when to start and finish talking in a discussion.
- Lack of understanding of other people's thoughts and motives means that the student may find it hard to understand the relevance of other people's opinions and they may not realise that there is another point of view than can be offered for the same question.
- Group situations may cause the student to feel anxious and inappropriately asking questions, may be a way of coping with this..

Things to try

- Social stories to help Adam understand the purpose of the plenary session and the behaviour expected during the session. This could also be presented in the form of a script or set of instructions.
- Comic strip conversations may be useful in helping Adam to understand that other people may have thoughts and opinions that differ from his. This could be worked in a separate session with his learning support assistant. [Further information on social stories and comic strip conversations can be obtained from the Autism Outreach Team].
- Adam could be taught visual cues to help him to time his responses e.g. finger on ear indicates time to listen, finger on lips indicates time to finish talking – **see being part of a group page 5.**

- Adam could be helped to limit his contributions by having a set number of question cards to be exchanged with his teacher, when they are finished his questions must finish.
- Adam could be given a fixed slot or time to talk about his piece of work. This may help him to listen to others when it is their time to talk.
- It may be helpful for Adam to be given a visual clue, for example, using a timer to mark the duration of the session.

It is important to include the student with an autistic spectrum disorder in this section of the literacy hour as it marks the finish of the lesson and provides a marker for the start of the next session.

4B NOT TAKING PART

Jonathon doesn't contribute to the plenary session and he gets upset when attention is directed towards him.

Making sense of it

- Some students with an autistic spectrum disorder find being with a large group of people difficult and having to sit in close proximity to others can be a very anxious experience from them so they try and minimise their involvement.
- As children with an autistic spectrum disorder have great difficulty in understanding their own personal involvement in past events they may not have the skills to reflect on and explain what they have learnt.
- The student with an autistic spectrum disorder may not see the relevance of presenting their ideas if they don't understand that their point of view could be different to other peoples.

Things to try

- Jonathon may need to be gradually de-sensitised to being in a large group. At first it could be enough just to expect him to sit at the edge of the group then as he becomes more comfortable expectations could be raised as to his level of involvement. **See Being part of a group, page 5**
- It may be helpful for Jonathon to talk first with his learning support assistant and write out possible contributions before the session begins, then with support from his learning support assistant he could read out his contribution from this visual clue.
- Jonathon could be given a specific responsibility that doesn't require him to give personal comments or ask questions e.g. time-keeper to say when

it is time for the session to begin, choosing the children to contribute from those with their hands up.

- With Jonathon's agreement beforehand a plan could be drawn up of expectations for his contributions in the plenary session, i.e. over a period of a month the expectation could be for him to ask one question a week. It would be important to set goals that are easily achievable at first then raise expectations.