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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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This policy outlines Outcomes First Group aims to ensure effective & consistent practice throughout the school that maximises learning opportunities and achievement through the highest quality teaching for every student at Higford.

**Implementation:** It is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that staff members are aware of and understand this policy and any subsequent revisions.

**Compliance:** This policy complies with all relevant regulations and other legislation as detailed in the *Compliance with Regulations & Legislation Statement*.

***“...intervention in autism should be tailored to the needs of the individual and should recognise the features of autism. As such, intervention should reduce anxiety, enhance motivation, enhance concentration, and/or remove distraction... based on developing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the individual and building a rapport with that individual... Rapport and commitment- the development of a relationship with the person and persistence to achieve- are essential to the implementation of personalised approaches.”***

**National Autistic Society (2011)**

## 2.0 GENERAL

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### Aims of Practice

1. To facilitate and maximise individual progress and attainment for all our students, through effective understanding of their needs as a learner with autism and complex needs and the effective implementation of appropriate teaching strategies that maximise the potential for engagement and achievement for each individual.

2. To increase students' adaptive functioning: their everyday functioning and skills in the areas of social communication, play and imagination, and in their ability to learn and access an appropriate curriculum.
3. To reduce or eliminate problematic behaviours, especially those that impact on the quality of life of the individual and their ability to engage in learning
4. To improve or enhance the quality of life of the individual and their ability to engage in learning through reducing anxiety, meeting sensory needs, enhancing motivation, enhancing concentration and / or removing distraction

### **Effective Learning**

Options Higford recognises that people learn in many different ways and that we must develop strategies to most appropriately meet the learning needs of our students. In order to meet these wide ranging learning needs all students access a personalised curriculum which is structured around their EHCP outcomes and yearly targets. Our practice aims to recognise and respond to these individual needs by personalising our use of approaches and strategies which are proven to be effective with learners with Autism and complex needs including the use of the SPELL framework.

Options Higford also recognises that students' ability to learn is highly influenced by their levels of engagement and arousal and, therefore, ensure that the students' sensory and emotional needs are met to provide a solid base for learning.

### **3.0 EMOTIONAL REGULATION**

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**“the ability to balance awareness of sensations with the ability to remain calm ... is the most basic building block of emotional, social, and intellectual health. Without it we can't learn, we can't develop relationships with others, we can't survive in our highly stimulating world.”**

**The Interdisciplinary Council on Development and Learning- DIR Floortime Model (2016)**

If students are not in a calm-alert state of arousal, then they will not be able to engage fully in their learning. Options Higford recognises that self-regulation is the foundation of all learning and is the most crucial area of development a student can make. Self-regulation enables students to develop greater independence, particularly when they encounter sensory dysregulation and allows them to become more active participants in their learning journey. Options Higford recognises the importance of ensuring students are regulated before they engage in more structured learning and prioritise this.

### **4.0 SPELL**

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Our practice aims to recognise and respond to each student's individual needs by personalising our use of approaches and strategies proven to be effective with learners with autism and complex needs. We use the SPELL framework to underpin all of our teaching approaches used to support the students.

The SPELL framework is based on five key values or principles:

- (1) It is **'individual'** - personalised for each student
- (2) It is **'hopeful'** – there is a positive emphasis on what can be achieved rather than dwelling on what cannot
- (3) It is **'honest'** – it encourages staff to work with others to find the best way forward for students they are supporting, with an open-minded but cautious approach to approaches and interventions

- (4) It is **'respectful'** – it acknowledges the right of each student to be an individual
- (5) It is **'ethical'** – interventions are based on thorough assessment and on the principles that include: 'least restrictive' approach, equality of opportunity, positive practices, that aid inclusion in the wider community.

There are five core elements to the SPELL framework:

### **Empathy**

In order to successfully support our students and implement positive approaches it is essential to develop empathy for each individual. We need to develop an understanding of how they think, communicate, learn and experience the world.

We develop empathy through:

- Building connections
- Recognising individual communication styles
- Utilising Intensive Interaction throughout the day
- Developing a greater understanding of a student through removing preconceptions
- Recognising individual learning differences including processing time.
- Careful assessment, with support of our clinical team, based upon our knowledge of the individual combined with our knowledge of autism and complex needs.
- Being aware of their sensory processing needs.

### **Positive Approaches and Expectations**

Positive approaches and expectations are key to our practice at Options Higford and are about

- not leaving the individual to their own devices
- sensitively and actively intervening to reduce the disabling effects of autism
- providing physical, emotional and educational support
- enhancing self-confidence and self-esteem through encouragement

We support our students to try new things and to engage in age-appropriate, meaningful activities and relationships. We support our students to replace challenging behaviours with adaptive and functional behaviours (see Options Higford Positive Behaviour Policy and Positive Behaviour Support Plans). We work on the basis that our students can and will achieve if we give them the support to do so through positive and non-aversive experiences. We see using natural reinforcers or rewards as important e.g. walk to local pub for drink and back rather than just going for a walk with no clear purpose.

Our practice includes:

- accurate assessment of student's level of functioning, areas of need and areas of strength, through observational assessment and the support of clinical assessments as appropriate
- persistent and sensitive engagement to increase level of interaction and motivation, such as using Intensive Interaction, and the supported rehearsal of difficult tasks
- utilising special interests to aid motivation, such as computer games
- effective Positive Behaviour Support Plans (see Higford Positive Behaviour Policy)

Our positive approach is facilitated by staff skilled in facilitating each individual student to be engaged in meaningful activities including interactions with others. This includes being willing to try new things with students and to learn from the experience. Our role as education staff is to work out what our students like, need, want, feel and how they communicate in liaison with our multi-disciplinary team and to ensure that information is shared with everyone in that student's life.

## Low Arousal

*“The constant change of most things never seemed to give me a chance to prepare myself for them. Because of this I found pleasure and comfort in doing the same things over and over again.”*

Donna Williams

A low arousal approach is not the same as no arousal, and includes interactions as well as the environment, with particular consideration given to the specific sensory sensitivities experienced by the individual student. Our low arousal approach involves:

- Calm, focused, planned intervention
- Awareness of environmental / sensory impact
- Removal or reduction of aversive or distracting stimuli
- Improving discrimination concentration
- Non-confrontational style of interaction
- Supportive rehearsal of potentially aversive event

Our practice includes:

- Assessing each student’s sensory motor profile (see above)
- Staff using reduced verbal language and using visual supports for communication
- Classroom being well-ordered and clutter-free
- Wall-displays on clearly defined boards
- Being aware of student’s energy levels and responding appropriately.

## Structure

*“Reality to an autistic person is a confusing, interacting mass of events, people, places, sounds and sights. There seem to be no clear boundaries, order or meaning to anything. A large part of my life is spent trying to work out the pattern behind everything. Set routines, times, particular routes and rituals all help to get order into an unbearably chaotic life. Trying to keep everything the same reduces some of the terrible fear.”*

Therese Jolliffe

Structure helps us to make sense of the world and therefore it helps to reduce our anxiety and be calm and confident. It helps us to take part in activities, make choices and learn and it makes us less dependent on others. Structure is the cornerstone of our autism-specific approaches and includes addressing structure in the environment, routines and programmes, in the presentation of tasks and activities and in how we interact with and communicate with our students. Structure makes the world more predictable for our students and therefore reduces their anxiety: it plays to their visual strengths and works on the level of concrete rather than the abstract. Our students are likely to have problems with sequencing; using structure can help to overcome these problems and speed up their processing of information. Structure also helps with the formation of relationships with our students by clarifying expectations and timescales and avoiding confrontation.

The structures used are personalised for each student at Higford, based on their needs as an individual, and looks different for each student. The organisation of our classroom environments, routines, work-systems and schedules are based upon the needs and preference of the individuals for whom they are designed. Our practice includes:

- clearly organised and well-ordered classroom spaces that support students in knowing which activities take place where, including use of individual work-stations and group areas
- individual portable schedules with objects of reference, photographs or symbols as appropriate to depict a sequence of activities
- clearly labelled rooms and cupboards
- personalised timetables that can be responsive to the changing needs of the individual

The structures put in place are also helpful for staff in order to prepare and provide confident support to our students. However, we need to beware of imposing our own ideas of structure upon our students; it is important to know the individual in order to judge what useful structure would be.

At Options Higford we see structure as essential; a lack of structure would signify a lack of understanding of autism. However, it must always be an individual approach as what works for structure for one student may not work for others.

## **Links**

Our practice needs clear 'Links' to ensure consistency of approach for our students and to ensure that their views are listened to. Our students at Higford are supported by education, care and clinical teams and have a network of family members, acquaintances, professionals and others. As we communicate and work together in partnership is crucial in ensuring we best support each student. Links is also about access to and inclusion within the community, such as leisure facilities, and the thematic links we make through our approach to curriculum planning to promote meaningful learning (please see Options Higford Curriculum Policy for more information). We also aim to promote our student's involvement in decision-making that affects their lives.

Our practice includes:

- High quality Individual Education Plans with shared targets, supported through our regular individual impact reviews and child centred planning multi-disciplinary team meetings
- Effective communication between school and families through a wide range of formats including telephone, email, formal reports – personalised to the needs and wishes of each individual family
- High quality support across our school and care setting, including families, by our clinical team to support a high level of consistency of approach and shared planned interventions

## **5.0 EFFECTIVE TEACHING**

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At Options Higford we have high expectations of our students and recognise that they benefit most from a range of teaching approaches.

Teaching approaches including Intensive Interaction, PECS, TEACCH and Makaton are all drawn upon to create a personalised approach relevant to each student's needs. The opportunity for individual, partner and small group work is provided through a range of activities.

Higford recognises the importance of contextualised learning and real-life learning opportunities which are explored and utilised on a continual basis. Education staff also appreciate that the interests of students impacts greatly on motivation to learn and will make use of these where appropriate, adapting plans on a continual basis where a students' interests are directing learning towards alternative, but valuable, learning opportunities.

## **6.0 PLANNING**

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Teaching staff create Individual topic overviews, medium term planning and daily planning which support the teaching and learning of all students. This planning allows for individualised approaches and also highlights the opportunities for ongoing sensory regulation and fluidity needed. See the Curriculum and Planning Policy and the Assessment, Recording and Reporting Policy for further information.

## **7.0 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

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The learning environment at Options Higford is developed in accordance with the SPELL framework, with a focus on structure and low arousal. There are defined areas for specific activities as well as organised and clear resources and displays. We encourage students to take responsibility and care for their learning environments and resources.

Each classroom has a quiet room and some students benefit from an individual workroom. Within each classroom there are clearly designated work areas and a shared space for engagement as a group.

## **8.0 STAFF ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

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Each class at Options Higford has a teacher, tutor and learning support assistants. Appropriately high staffing levels allow the students to access an individualised curriculum consistently. All education staff support teaching and learning throughout the day. We recognise the high levels of training and expertise our staff have in supporting the students effectively and utilise these at all opportunities.

Support staff are fully involved in the delivery of lessons, taking a shared responsibility for the learning of the student they are supporting that day. All staff engage in ongoing assessment of students to support assessment for learning.

## **9.0 TRANSITION – POST 16**

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Higford recognises the great changes which will take place when students leave our provision at 19. The Post 16 department, therefore, focuses primarily on life skills, independence, communication and community access to prepare our students as best as possible for their adult lives. The ASDAN qualifications, Personal Progress and Personal and Social Development provide a framework from which to teach these skills.