



Policy for meeting the needs of individuals

Status: Recommended
Audience: Parents/Carers
Children and young people
Local Authorities
Staff
Directors

Rationale

Individual students, parents and placing authorities all have very different priorities and preferences and it is essential that staff and managers are able to respond positively and constructively to all reasonable requests and demands. This policy considers some of the areas where usual responses may have to be modified to take full account of individual needs, and illustrates The Shires' commitment to valuing the contributions of all, and to maintaining open and effective lines of communication.

Meeting the needs of students with EHCPs

All students who attend The Shires have an individual EHCP of special educational needs. They also have autism, severe learning difficulties and challenging behaviour. The EHCPed needs of individual students are the basis for drawing up individual education plans and care plans, and for evaluating the level of therapy that is required. On arrival, staff closely scrutinise and analyse the new student's EHCP so that he/she can be placed in the most appropriate class group. An annual review of each student's EHCP is held in accordance with statutory requirements, and takes account of input about the student's health, welfare, education and care. A termly meeting is held to review each student's individual education plan. The meetings involve parents, teaching staff and carers from The Shires. Monitoring visits from placing authorities are welcomed, and parents have free access to visit their children so that they can assure themselves that their children are safe, happy and secure.

Communicating with non-verbal students

Most of the students who attend The Shires are non-verbal and rely on other means of communication to express their needs and feelings. The Shires employs a speech and language therapist who has extensive experience of working with autistic students, and who, with staff, has devised a whole-school approach to communication. The Shires recognises the need for students to have consistency in communication and so the TEACCH type schedules that operate in school also guide the daily routines of students within the care setting. Emphasis is placed on developing spoken language, and sign supported English is used for all students to reinforce key commands and requests, and to extend essential vocabulary. Verbal requests by staff are short, and students are given ample time to process information before a request is repeated. Symbol/photo cards are used for exchanges where students find this helpful. The communication of some students is augmented by switches and technology such as 'Go Talk'. Staff are trained to follow gestural and physical prompts by students so that students are able to make their needs known.

Reflecting the views of students who have no functional verbal language

Because the majority of students who attend The Shires have very little verbal, functional language, it is difficult to seek and respond to their views. The Shires employs a part-time advocate, who spends time with each student on a regular basis, evaluating the provision from the student's perspective, and challenging elements of the provision where necessary. Students are invited, through the advocate, to pass their views on formally through reviews and informally on a daily basis through the advocate's reports. The advocate understands the need to look at the provision 'through the eyes of the student' and her reports are an excellent measure for Shires' staff of what is going well and what could be done even better.

Meeting the needs of students and parents whose main language is not English

The Shires' students tend to have little verbal language because of their autism and severe learning difficulties and consequently it is very easy to accommodate and meet the needs of a student whose family language is not English. The Shires employs a wide range of staff from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Several staff have English as a second language, and The Shires can use the staff's individual linguistic strengths to communicate with families or family members who have little or no English. Currently staff can offer Polish, Czechoslovakian, Ndbele, Zulu, Shona, Tswana, Zambian, French, Urdu, Afrikaans, Ibo, Yoruba, Arabic and Portuguese. If the situation arose where there was no member of staff who could translate and interpret for families for whom English was not the main language, The Shires would work closely with the placing authority to find a means of ensuring effective communication, perhaps by bringing in an external translator as and when necessary.

Celebrating and taking account of cultural differences

The Shires welcomes students and families from all backgrounds and actively celebrates diversity. The pre-admission questionnaire that is completed with parents/carers, focuses in detail on aspects such as what students eat, how they dress, their home routines and their cultural and religious preferences. The cooks at The Shires enjoy making dishes from around the world, and are happy to incorporate new recipes, follow suggestions and requests from parents, and to respond positively to religious and cultural observances and practices. Within the care plans of individual students there is good reference to the students' religious practices, and these are adhered to as closely as possible. Cultural preferences with regard to matters of personal hygiene are followed, and staff liaise closely with families so that individual needs are fully met. In school, major cultural celebrations are shared, and staff willingly share their own customs and traditions to enrich and enliven learning.

Meeting the needs of students and visitors who have disabilities

The Shires registration is for students with autism, challenging behaviour and severe learning difficulties. The school caters very well for students with visual impairment and those who are deaf. Staff are very experienced in working with these groups of students, and a high percentage of staff are competent in using BSL (British Sign Language). Because most of the students are extremely challenging, The Shires is unable to accept students who are physically immobile because of the risk posed by the other students.

Visitors to school who have limited mobility are accommodated on the ground floor of the building where there is some access for wheelchairs, some wide entrances and a disabled toilet. Where it would not be possible to accommodate a visitor, The Shires has an arrangement with the hotel over the road which has easily accessible meeting rooms with full disabled access.

(See accessibility plan for additional information)

Supporting parents who have no transport

The Shires is situated in the rural village of Stretton. Although there are regular trains and bus connections to Peterborough, the last lap of the journey is more difficult to achieve on public transport. To encourage parents to maintain strong links with their children, The

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Shires does as much as it can to help with transporting students to and/or from home for holiday periods or weekend breaks.

When arranging termly individual education plan meetings, LAC meetings and annual EHCP review meetings, The Shires does its utmost to schedule these meetings on days and times that make it easier for parents to travel. If there are no other viable solutions staff from The Shires will drive over to parents' houses to collect them for key meetings or will work with placing authorities to find out what parents are entitled to from their local authority.

Parents are kept fully involved in all arrangements to do with their child's health and well-being. Most medical appointments are scheduled at the local surgery, and parents do not usually attend routine appointments. However, if a student requires assessment at a venue some distance away from school, or treatment that involves an anaesthetic or invasive procedure, The Shires does what it can to support parents without transport, and will readily pick up and drop off parents at the relevant times.

Meeting the needs of students who have specific health needs

The Shires is committed to ensuring that students stay safe and healthy. Very good links have been established with the local GP who is always willing to make home visits if it is difficult to get a student to the surgery. If a student has a known medical condition on entry to the school, for example, epilepsy, then prior to admission, staff are given information and training about the condition so that they know what to expect and what is expected from them before the student joins The Shires. If parents of students who have an existing medical condition wish to maintain links with existing doctors and specialists, The Shires will do its utmost to work with them, providing transport and staff for appointments when required. The Shires' kitchen staff are happy to meet individual dietary needs of students and are happy to liaise with parents who have particular requests or preferences.

Meeting the needs of students with severe learning difficulties in an age appropriate way

The Shires aims to present age appropriate activities/materials for students who are working at a level significantly below their chronological age. However, students are also encouraged to make choices, and their 'motivators' are often activities and resources that reflect their cognitive level. The school and care settings aim to achieve a balance of activities, but staff accept that students often show preference for less 'age appropriate' activities and resources and that these activities and resources are often the most motivating. The priority for staff is to promote a 'readiness for learning' amongst the student group using the most effective motivators. The Shires works closely with its therapists to ensure that 'age appropriateness' is at the forefront of planning and implementing activities.

Meeting the needs of students who have a limited diet by choice or because of religious/cultural reasons

Students at The Shires all have autism. Many have a limited diet through choice. In some cases students will not eat food of a particular colour or texture – for example one student will not eat any yellow food – this rules out sweetcorn, butter etc and any snack food that comes in a yellow package.

The Shires' policy is to give students wholesome food which is presented attractively and which is varied and nutritionally well balanced. The students' likes and dislikes are taken into

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account when preparing food, and staff understand that the priority is for the students to eat well and regularly. At times this means going against popular parenting beliefs. For example, the notion of a child who does not eat his/her dinner forfeiting his/her dessert is widely held. In The Shires this kind of logic cannot prevail. The majority of students have little or no understanding of the idea of bargaining and if they refuse their main meal and will only eat their dessert this is infinitely more preferable than them going hungry.

Extensive research has been carried out into the effect of gluten and casein on children with autism. Whilst it is generally accepted that there may be an impact the evidence is not conclusive. Staff at The Shires work with parents as best they can to meet individual dietary requirements. Any child who joins The Shires who has a gluten or casein free diet would continue with this regime if the parents wished and if the practice did not go against medical advice.

Some students enjoy the experience of eating out and whenever possible this will be encouraged. Whilst many of the students enjoy fast food such as burgers and chips this type of food is offered in moderation. Eating out often celebrates cultural events – for example students access a local Chinese restaurant to celebrate Chinese New Year. Cultural festivals are celebrated through food – for example as part of assemblies students share Eid food. Students who come from different cultures and traditions are encouraged to prepare ethnic food and to share it with other students and indeed with staff. The Shires works closely with parents to ensure that religious customs and practices associated with food are observed carefully – for example one student eats only Halal meat and this is sourced from a local supplier.

It is the intention of The Shires that all students enjoy their food and that their difficulties relating to food because of their autism are recognised and accepted.