

Approaches to learning

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children)

The majority of our pupils are taught in the mainstream classrooms, however some who need more structure are organised according to the principles of TEACCH in The Ark. These classrooms provide a highly structured learning environment and are divided into clear areas, for example, teaching table, (independent) workstation, group time and messy area. Screens are used to separate these areas where necessary. As individuals with autism are easily distracted, rooms are kept organised and tidy so pupils are able to concentrate.

Visual Timetables and Other Visual Support Materials

Individuals with ASD are often highly visual learners and have receptive language difficulties so our pupils with ASD use a visual timetable. This informs each pupil of the area they need to go to and reduces anxiety about not knowing what happens next. It also aids each pupil with independent transition. Visual timetables are also used to structure activities such as dressing, toileting and hand washing to help pupils work as independently as possible.

Social stories

Social stories are short factual descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity and include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why. We use social stories to help children learn new skills, understand social situations or cope with changes or unexpected events.

Interventions

LEGO Club (Speech and Language Programme)

LEGO Club takes advantage of the inherently rewarding nature of LEGO activities for many children, with ASD. The approach uses a number of important elements;

- Children participating first learn a set of clear 'LEGO Club' rules and develop LEGO brick building skills, including collaborative building.
- The group meets on a regular basis (twice a week) for ~20 minutes and during that time engages in collaborative LEGO brick building activities tailored to the skill level of the participants.
- The tasks are analyzed and different responsibilities are assigned to group members (typically these roles 'architect'; 'supplier'; and 'builder').
- The team works together to assemble the project with an emphasis on verbal and non-verbal communication, joint attention and task focus, collaborative problem-solving, sharing and turn-taking (switching roles each session).

– During the LEGO Club sessions, social conventions can be directly instructed or prompted, based on the needs of the peers. For example, if two peers are arguing over a LEGO element, the adult can redirect the children to use language, negotiation, and compromise to settle their dispute.

Attention Autism (Gina Davies Programme)

There are four stages to the intervention, developing skills in the following areas:

Attention skills – particularly within a group

Switching attention between tasks

Following adult-led task

Using verbal/non-verbal language to show involvement and understanding of activity

Social skills in group setting

All of these are practiced in a motivating and inspiring way, encouraging pupils to engage and communicate about what they are learning.

The stages are:

- Attention grabber – Focusing attention on one person with one activity for 3/4 minutes
- Attention builder – Sustaining attention for a longer time, shifting from one adult led activity to another. Developing simple language and anticipation
- Interactive activity – Developing turn taking skills, understanding that they don't always get a turn, increasing language skills
- Independent task – Recreating adult led task, spontaneously using language celebrating learnt skills.

Social Skills Sessions

A range of different programmes have been used in The Ark to support pupils with different needs, these include *Time to Talk*, *The Feelings Art Book* and *The Communication Toolkit*.

Sessions are run either individually or in small groups depending on the needs of the individual.