

Autistic Spectrum Disorders are characterised by a triad of impairments in social relationships, social communication and imaginative thought. They may show themselves in the following ways:

- difficulties in attuning to social situations and responding to normal environmental cues;
- evidence of emerging personal agendas which are increasingly not amenable to adult direction;
- a tendency to withdraw from social situations and an increasing passivity and absence of initiative;
- repressed, reduced or inappropriate social interactions extending to highly ego-centric behaviour with an absence of awareness of the needs or emotions of others.
- impaired use of language, either expressive or receptive; this may include odd intonation, literal interpretations and idiosyncratic phrases and may extend to more bizarre expressive forms and limited expression, reducing the potential for two way communication;
- limitations in expressive or creative peer activities extending to obsessive interests or repetitive activities.

Lower levels of difficulty may be indicated by:

- participation in most aspects of ordinary classrooms, but with some difficulties in following instructions, classroom routines and in maintaining attention on task;
- a reliance on teacher support and careful structuring of activities to enable pupils to engage successfully in group work and/or social activities;
- a tendency to display obsessive behaviours and/or inappropriate language likely to result in pupils losing friends or distracting teaching staff;
- progress within the curriculum, but can be greater in some areas than in others because of difficulties in particular aspects of learning such as writing, language or practical activities.

Higher levels of difficulty may be indicated by:

- difficulties in following instructions, classroom routines and in maintaining attention on task which make it impossible for pupils to participate in most ordinary classroom activities without a high level of adult support and structure;
- highly atypical behaviour, such as: obsessive, challenging and/or withdrawn behaviours, an inappropriate use of language, difficulties in motor imitation and control, abnormal responses to sensory experiences and signs of distress or emotional disturbance without obvious cause;
- inappropriate social behaviour leading to rejection by peers and social isolation;
- little or no progress within the curriculum, except, perhaps, in very specific areas of strength.