

HIGH FUNCTIONING PUPILS WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS ON AUTISTIC SPECTRUM
– LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS –
IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MODERN LANGUAGES

Factors to take into account Pupil characteristics which may affect learning	Effect on Foreign Language learning Pupil may have difficulty with the following	Teaching/learning strategies Incorporating these strategies into FL classroom practice may help	Additional support Support may need to include the following
<p>Impairment in social interaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of awareness of unspoken social rules ▪ May appear [to peer group] aloof and disinterested ▪ Pressure to interact with others may cause anxiety ▪ Unstructured time in class may be difficult <p>May well be lacking in empathy and be unable to see a situation from another point of view</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working in groups or pairs and doing role-plays. This pupil may become withdrawn or very anxious ▪ Sharing personal information with others ▪ Being self-restrained if classroom rules are broken by another pupil. This pupil will readily tell tales on others, possibly leading to bullying outwith lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage social interaction in class through group or pair work, but don't insist on it if pupil appears very reluctant ▪ Allow pupil to work alone if this produces best result ▪ Encourage withdrawn pupil to respond to subject or support teacher rather than class peers ▪ Sit pupil beside peer who is good role model in FL and can initiate questions in target language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness-raising of social deficits in autistic spectrum disorders [when pupil absent] may lessen teasing and lack of sympathy in class ▪ The few pupils who may show inappropriate behaviour in class should be temporarily removed to a quiet room or SfL base. If classroom lay-out allows, a separate work station facing the wall may help de-stress the pupil
<p>Impairment in social communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difficulties in modifying speech ▪ Lack of ability to read or show appropriate body language ▪ May find it difficult to hold eye contact ▪ Tendency to interpret language literally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderating volume and speed of delivery of FL ▪ Showing appropriate body language and reading others ▪ Listening while a fellow pupil speaks FL ▪ Holding eye contact ▪ Interpreting literally what others say (in English) may lead to misunderstanding ▪ Speaking to teacher in appropriate register 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use other pupils as models of correct volume and speed in FL ▪ Avoid prolonged eye contact with those who find it disturbing ▪ Encourage good listening skills and praise pupil when comprehension proves this has been done ▪ Allow reluctant speakers to use other means of communication such as writing, drawing, signs, computer, whispering to SfL teacher 	<p>Where this impairment proves a real barrier to progress in MFL, a SfL or specialist a.s.d. teacher could help by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring evidence of pupils comprehension [from his writing, drawing, whispering etc] ▪ Scribing as appropriate ▪ Prompting him to regulate volume or speed of FL ▪ Giving extra practice in base or help catching up using computer ▪ Use card with oui/non + appropriate graphics to increase communication with reluctant speaker
<p>Inflexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can become upset if normal routine not observed ▪ May have [very individualised] obsessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Any omission of daily greetings and instructions ▪ Sitting in a different place [without prior preparation] ▪ Being forced to use something e.g. pencil rather than pen ▪ Leaving a task incomplete or imperfect. This may cause some pupils to become agitated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vary classroom greetings, questions & instructions regularly ▪ Prepare pupils for changes in seating or routine ▪ Allow for certain eccentricity in writing materials etc. It may be extremely important to this pupil! ▪ Specify finishing time of task & offer motivation to complete it. (E.g. plan time for his special interest at end of class?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SfL/specialist a.s.d. Support teacher can anticipate problems arising from this area [e.g. regular teacher absent] & also assist with time monitoring of class tasks by setting finishing times for each task & even providing small clock for pupils desk. ▪ Motivators such as computer at lunchtime?

ABBREVIATIONS USED: FL Foreign Language, SfL Support for Learning, a.s.d. autistic spectrum disorder

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<p>Transitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difficulty making transition from 1 location, subject or task to another, resulting in inability to get started on tasks and withdrawn, flustered or upset behaviour ▪ May be ill at ease when having to make own choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Settling into FL lesson, particularly at start of day or week ▪ Getting out appropriate equipment for FL lesson ▪ Processing verbally given instructions ▪ Picking up where lesson is up to, if arriving late for any reason ▪ Getting homework written down ▪ Switching between the FL activities of listening, reading, speaking and writing [jotter/worksheet/computer] games or other activities used ▪ Choosing, if appropriate, which 'fun' tasks to do e.g. at end of term. This may be confusing and upsetting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make clear at start of year which equipment is needed daily on desk ▪ Once equipment is on desk, give short, clear instructions for each task, reinforced by writing them on board ▪ Give details of homework at beginning or end of the class ▪ Brief a pupil arriving late of tasks done and work in hand by referring him to the board for details ▪ At end of term allow him to do a solitary activity, go on computer, make up his own board game for a recent topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If there is a support teacher with the pupil, she can prompt & prepare him for next activity and help with the organisational issues around transitions [getting a pencil & jotter ready, finding page number in textbook] ▪ The support teacher may also have to encourage pupil to switch from an unfinished task to the next activity and devise a way this can be completed at another time
<p>Sensory input</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sensory overload can be a barrier to learning for a few people ▪ Hypersensitivity in some to noise and touch particularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coping calmly with sudden, loud noise [e.g. fire alarm] or just buzzing in sound system or strip lighting ▪ Getting too hot in class ▪ Being touched unexpectedly particularly from behind ▪ Tasting 'foreign' foods [e.g. cheeses, pâté] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A calm quiet classroom with little pupil movement around room would provide this pupil with an ideal learning environment ▪ Avoid expecting this pupil to work in the middle of tightly packed rows of pupils or go into a strange crowded environment without preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If a sound from fixtures and fittings annoys you, then it will probably upset this pupil too. Ask a technician or janitor to see if it can be fixed ▪ Decide on a strategy with support teacher if pupil needs to run out of the room when the fire alarm goes off ▪ A few pupils may require to go to the toilet urgently

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Self-organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bringing equipment and homework to school ▪ Getting out at start of lesson all equipment needed for lesson ▪ Packing up at end of lesson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Getting out jotter, worksheets, book & writing tools on desk quickly, or changing into PE kit ▪ Doing homework, particularly if a 'vague' learning task (Parent [s] may have other important issues to deal with at home, and non-specific homework may not be a priority) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Give clear instructions on the classroom rules, equipment to be on desk, and time scales to work to ▪ Be specific about homework tasks, and write it on board to be copied into homework diary. If homework is not being done, check that pupil is writing it down ▪ Explain exactly what you expect pupil to be able to do when giving 'learning' homework, such as vocabulary or verbs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss any problems on organisational matters with SfL teacher. Avoid continual confrontation in front of class with this pupil or punishment exercises to be done at home – this can exacerbate the situation. ▪ SfL may be able to organise opportunity to catch up in quiet location during lunch hour, if this will realistically be difficult to do at home
Associated non-autistic impairments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difficulties of a dyslexic type which affect phonological processing, memory, auditory and visual discrimination, processing and sequencing information ▪ Low cognitive ability. e.g. pupils with moderate learning difficulties ▪ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ADHD. Pupils may display behavioural difficulties and lack of concentration 	Dyslexia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pronunciation, recognition of words, reading ▪ Repeating & remembering ▪ Listening & sound recognition ▪ Copying & spelling ▪ Responding to instructions ▪ Differentiating within the FL Low cognitive ability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding & responding appropriately ▪ Extending & applying the language in a different context ▪ Following other than simple instructions ADHD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Concentrating quietly & calmly on activities ▪ Completing tasks appropriately ▪ Not distracting other pupils 	Dyslexia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allow time for processing verbal instructions ▪ Give lots of practice & reinforcement of new work ▪ Use multi-sensory strategies where appropriate ▪ Encourage writing & reading as well as other activities Low cognitive ability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Give short, simple instructions ▪ Differentiate curriculum to simplify & reduce language content, & use multi-sensory strategies where possible ADHD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Give short interesting tasks which get marked quickly ▪ Give praise frequently ▪ Offer 'bribes' [computer at end] to motivate completion of task 	All <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SfL department will work closely with pupils showing these different impairments differentiate pupils' tasks to help them access the FL curriculum ▪ SfL and MFL teacher will need to liaise to differentiate pupils' tasks, to help them access the FL curriculum ▪ Simple games and multi sensory activities will help all groups ▪ Most respond well to using ICT as integral part of their learning

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Generalised ability in language and reading	This pupil should have average (or above) ability in learning sound patterns of the MFL for speaking and listening and in spelling MFL for writing and reading Comprehension may be less good	Use concrete <u>not</u> abstract and figurative language Avoid personal questions as pupil may become uncomfortable or withdrawn Use modelling of language by peer group	Be aware of barriers which cause stress, as these may prevent pupil reaching his potential in MFL. Increase social contacts using ICT skill by establishing pen-pals who can be e-mailed Support teacher may need to check correct homework instructions are entered in notebook
Good rote memory for factual information	Ability to learn numbers, vocabulary lists, phrases, verbs. Increase cultural awareness by encouraging research into facts about foreign countries / using encyclopaedias / atlases & internet etc	Keep information to be rote learned separate to other work Give simple written instructions on what pupil should be able to do when work learnt	Interest in factual knowledge can be encouraged at lunchtime or if time out from class temporarily is required in support base
Skill in adopting or mimicking a foreign or non-local accent	This pupil may copy an accent and sounds specific to that MFL in a literal and quite unselfconscious way, producing an excellent accent	Keep pupil near front of class if peer-groups mock his enthusiastic attempts for a good accent	Encourage them to be recorded on audio or video cassette (they prefer former)
Highly individualised pockets of academic ability – e.g. in Maths and Music	Utilise these as and when they occur as they will vary with individuals e.g. use high level of ability in numeracy in practising, skills of speaking, listening, for spelling and use ICT or games to practice	Differentiate work programme to motivate the individual, utilising his areas of ability, use promise of a song, or numbers game as end of class motivator	Where cross-curricular liaison is viable in lesson planning, use other departments expertise – e.g. music for ‘ au clair de la lune’

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Interest & skill in ICT	Can be used in many ways to increase motivation, as many prefer interacting with a computer to people. Use CD roms to practice language while having fun Encourage written skills by word processing letters, designing café menu	Give clear instructions for task and set time deadline for completion Use computer as bribe to complete less favoured task such as paired work or written exercises	Design individualised MFL programme for certain pupils based round ICT. This may have calming effect on stressed pupil, allows him to work alone and slightly separate from others (e.g. facing blank wall)
Personalised interests and obsessions, where encyclopaedic knowledge is amassed	His specialist knowledge in one area (e.g. French trucks) will allow him to shine in class & increase his self-esteem Acknowledging his obsessions and incorporating them into the lesson will give MFL some extra meaning to pupil and increase his level of interest	If pupil is showing little (or flagging) interest in MFL, try individualising part of his course to include elements of his special interest, or extend a chapter (e.g. public transport) with activities such as maps, researching vehicles of the country, ways of crossing the Channel etc	A Sfl teacher could work with the pupil on a project incorporating his special interest (using the MFL) – e.g. the planets, transport systems, hamsters, by research in library, use of dictionary skills
Liking for routine and sameness	Pupil responds readily to phrases for meetings and greetings and quickly reaches automaticity Pupil is prepared to repeat words and phrases verbally Pupil likes others in class to conform and observe rules of MFL class e.g. speaking target language as required	Use their willingness to repeat to over-learn new work Inform a teacher covering your absence of any daily routines Give pupil warning of any major change of strategy	A few pupils may become too dependent on class routine and be resistant to any change. Keep an element of unpredictability in lessons. Don't allow this pupil to become the class 'vigilante' about rules