**Malkara Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Framework**

**Introductory statement**

Malkara Specialist School staff are committed to meeting the education and social needs of each and every student. In 2013, led by the Autism Professional Learning Team, we developed a whole school approach to meet the needs of the approximately 30% of our students who have a diagnosis of ASD. Some of these students are in classrooms with a diverse range of learners and some are in autism-specific class groups. These classes are located both on and off site.

**Rationale**

While the core characteristics of ASD are consistent, no one child with a diagnosis of ASD will have the same pattern of strengths and needs as another. Most students with ASD benefit from the use of visual content to enhance communication and help organise daily experiences. Programs tailored to target the core characteristics of ASD are more likely to be successful in meeting the educational goals of students with this diagnosis.

**Core characteristics of ASD are:**

* **Communication**

Difficulties in reading meaning into communication, lack of interest in communicating and a reduced ability to understand the significance of communication.

* **Socialisation**

Difficulties in developing reciprocal social understanding and skills in social interactions.

* **Behaviour**

Restricted interests and repetitive behaviours which may indicate high levels of anxiety, difficulty processing information and the management of change.

* **Sensory Processing**

Over or under reaction to sensory input.

* **Information processing/learning style**

Students with ASD are highly individual learners with particular strengths, motivations, interests and needs. Students may experience difficulty in generalising learning and establishing meaningful connections.

**Essential learning environment considerations**

The following elements are to be considering when profiling each student and preparing individual programs and everyday interactions:

*It is imperative to begin all preparation of learning and individual programs by collaborating with parents and therapists, as well as reviewing all documentation and reports that provide information and insights about the student.*

1. **Classroom accommodations**

Staff must:

* group students according to learning needs, wherever possible
* clearly identify behavioural expectations
* clearly define learning areas for individual tasks, groups activities and play
* provide a neat, orderly and predictable environment
* use multi-modal communication to accommodate individual learning styles
* maintain structured routines
* provide regular opportunities to satisfy individual sensory needs
* identify goals for the level of engagement of each student

1. **Presentation of lessons**

Teaching staff must:

* provide visually clear expectations
* use familiar activities to introduce a new concept
* identify and use motivating incentives
* allow adequate processing time for each student
* break down tasks and present in a visually ordered manner
* show clear visual connections when developing and presenting information in all subject areas
* demonstrate a functional approach for individual goal setting

1. **Routines**

Staff must:

* follow consistent routines to support positive behaviour
* present routines in a clear, consistent visual format
* provide opportunities to develop and practice independence.

1. **Organisational strategies**

* Classroom and individual schedules must be used consistently, including beyond the classroom, such as gym, pool, assembly, walks, excursions, fire drills.
* Schedules are to be developed to demonstrate a process with a clear beginning and end.
* Schedules are to be used with the goal of fading adult support and increasing independence
* Staff must use visual supports and familiarisation stories to assist students to understand expectations and experiences.

1. **Communication strategies**

* Staff must consistently use Aided Language Displays and visual cues to encourage and facilitate communication.
* Explicit teaching of initiation of communication is a priority for many emerging communicators with ASD.

**References**

* Positive Partnerships
* Monarch Centre for Autism
* Implementing Programming for students with ASD, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005
* Centre for Developmental Disability Studies- Review of the research to identify the most effective models of best practice in the management of children with ASD, 2004
* Behaviour Support Matrix- Positive Partnerships

**Useful Resources**

Therapy ACT Autism Intervention Team

TEACCH

Positive Partnerships

Malkara Familiarisation Stories – ‘G’ drive

Sue Larkey Publications

Autism Spectrum Quarterly

CASPAR Facebook

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)