

Al Karamah School and Training Institute

Autism Strategy

May 2022

'Making a difference requires the integration of the best available research, practical expertise in the classroom, and the insider perspective within the context of individual characteristics, cultures, values and preferences'

Professor Karen Guldberg (2019) Inaugural Lecture University of Birmingham

The most fundamental role we undertake in School and our Training Institute is to safeguard our students. This is particularly so when we are supporting students who may be vulnerable because of additional learning needs. Safeguarding underpins everything we do.

Al Karamah's socially inclusive approach enables all children, young people and students the opportunity to be part of a community. We celebrate diversity and allow all members of this community to develop an understanding and recognition of differences.

Al Karamah School and Training Institute recognise that any learner may require additional support at some stage. Learners participate in school and classroom communities, a common curriculum, systems of assessment, and social and extra-curricular activities. This contributes to the development of an increasingly inclusive, empathetic and more just society.

We strive to aspire to excellence in our autism practice.

Three key questions need to be addressed to develop excellence in autism research and practice:

1. How can we develop a more holistic understanding of autism by drawing on different disciplines?
2. Why do we need closer alignment between research and practise in autism education?
3. What are the implications from the answers to the previous two questions for the teaching approaches and methods that are needed in the classroom and workshops.

This strategy will outline how we can fully understand autism and how we can draw on a number of domains of knowledge.

At Al Karamah School and Training Institute we believe that autism is a 'difference' and not a 'deficit' and therefore our response outlines how we can most effectively work with a cohort who perceive, communicate and interact with the world in a different manner.

This work is based upon the research of Damian Milton's 'Double Empathy Theory' and the 'intersubjectivity' between people with autism and without. Milton outlines that people with autism often lack insight about non autistic perceptions and culture, however it is equally true

that non autistic people lack insight into the minds and culture of people with autism. Our curriculum and approaches recognises these fundamental differences and addresses them from both perspectives whilst celebrating diversity. Narratives from autistic people often state that it is not the autism itself that causes difficulties, but the expectations, interactions and responses they get from other people.

Our core mission is to empower our students to achieve their ambitions through positive educational experiences and equality of opportunity. We achieve this via a community which is socially inclusive and recognises the strengths of all members of our School and Training Institute. Our pedagogy is developed from this.

There is no unified theory on learning emerging from the educational community, the power of education as a discipline comes from its potential to understanding learning from the perspective of the individual learner as well as the context (Hodkinson et al).

Our model is based on the Autism Education Trust Framework, The Autism Centre for Education and Research, The SEN Code of Practice, The OfSTED Common Inspection Framework and the 8 principals of good autism practice which emerged from research evidence, practice and policy by Professor Guldberg (2019) which are:

1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person
2. Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions
3. Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people
4. Workforce development to support autistic children and young people
5. Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice
6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum
7. Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum
8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote well being and success for autistic children and young people

We will use these against four key themes:

- Understanding the individual with autism and enabling them to have a voice.
- Positive and effective relationships across our community between all peers and staff
- Enabling environments which support inclusion.
- Effective implementation of plans to enhance and support academic learning, vocational skills, emotional well-being and development of lifelong learning skills.

We believe that this strategy will support our School and Training Institute to be a positive, meaningful and constructive learning environment for both students and staff.

Al Karamah School and Training Institute

Strengths Model





SAFEGUARDING

Understanding the individual with autism and enabling them to have a voice.

It is important that we understand what is distinctive for students with autism. We need to know the areas of difference and co-occurring difficulties. We need to understand the often uneven development and the sensory differences which may present unique challenges. It is also vitally important that we identify the most appropriate and developmentally relevant means to enable social communication.

Positive and effective relationships across our community between all peers and staff

As a community we must be skilled at signposting students and their parents/ carers to appropriate services and support. We must fully embrace the unique needs and challenges and be mindful of the impact of stress on the whole family. Our staff must be highly skilled in understanding autism as a lack of knowledge in staff impacts negatively on the school experience of our students. A philosophical shift is needed with access for all staff to high quality training and workforce development.

Enabling environments which support inclusion.

We must restructure cultures, policies and practices in our setting which matches the current cohort of students as this will allow us to enact statutory obligations to create enabling environments. We must also take proactive steps to reduce formal and informal exclusions and increased the attendance of those with high absenteeism. We must provide structured, understandable and predictable learning environments as well as using a variety of means to communicate. We must also promote and nurture positive relationships with peers.

Effective implementation of plans to enhance and support academic learning, vocational skills, emotional wellbeing and lifelong learning skills.

It is vital that we address and identify and address barriers to learning. It is also extremely important that we collect data on social and emotional awareness, communication, social understanding and inclusion, daily life skills, independence and autonomy. ICT should be used as a tool for learning. Our students need a broad and balanced curriculum that addresses the learning needs of autistic pupils and their social, emotional well-being, communication needs and life skills. They must be involved in plans to prepare them for adulthood. Staff must also understand the potential vulnerability of students with autism to abuse and neglect.

Priory Lodge extended curriculum offer outlines the many and varied ways in which bespoke programmes can support in all areas of learning. This exists alongside the more formal curriculum offer, and behaviour strategy.