

## **ASD Breaking down barriers - Students**

### **What is ASD?**

An ASD is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. 'Spectrum' means that, while all people with an ASD share three main areas of difficulty, their condition will affect them in different ways. With support, some young people with an ASD are able to live relatively typical childhoods but others may have an accompanying learning disability and need continuous specialist support at school, and for the rest of their lives.

The three main areas of difficulty (sometimes known as the 'triad of impairments') are:

### **Social interaction**

Children with an ASD often have difficulty recognising or understanding other people's emotions and feelings, and expressing their own. They may not understand the unwritten social rules which most children pick up without thinking. They may appear insensitive, prefer to spend time alone and behave in ways that seem 'strange' or inappropriate. Not understanding how to interact with their peers can make it hard to form friendships.

### **Social communication**

Children with an ASD have difficulties with both verbal and non-verbal language. Many have a very literal understanding of language and may find it difficult to use or understand facial expressions, tone of voice, jokes, sarcasm and common idioms. Some children with an ASD may not speak, or have very limited speech, while others may have good language skills but still find it hard to understand the give-and-take nature of conversation.

### **Social imagination**

Many children with an ASD find it difficult to understand and predict other people's intentions, thoughts, feelings and behaviour and to imagine situations outside of their own routine. They may find it impossible to predict what will or could happen next, may not understand the concept of danger and may have difficulty with imaginative play. This can be accompanied by a narrow, repetitive range of activities and an inability to cope with new and unfamiliar situations.

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Children with an ASD may also experience some form of sensory sensitivity or under-sensitivity, for example to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours. This can make the hustle and bustle of the school environment frightening and even painful.

### THE TRIAD OF IMPAIRMENTS

