

Case Study:

Shoreham Academy



How Shoreham Academy implemented strategies to support pupils with Autism Spectrum Condition

A key principle of SEND practice this case study exemplifies:

Leaders should reflect on how teaching assistants and learning support assistants can best support pupil progress, and ensure any interventions they deliver are carefully considered, monitored, and linked to the classroom.

At a glance

- In response to growing need, leaders at Shoreham Academy implemented two strategies to better support pupils with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC):
 - Creating an *ASC Intervenor*, a dedicated role to provide targeted support for pupils with autism.
 - Utilising the *Autistic and OK* programme, a toolkit which empowers older autistic pupils to run peer-led sessions for their younger peers.
- Since implementing these strategies, pupils' attendance and confidence has improved.





Background information

Shoreham Academy is a large, mainstream, non-selective secondary school in West Sussex. It is part of the United Learning Trust.



Shoreham Academy
The best in everyone™
Part of United Learning

What challenges were you trying to address?

Shoreham Academy aims to support all pupils with special educational needs and disabilities to:

- Reach their full potential.
- Be included fully in the life of the school.
- Make a successful transition to adulthood.

Over the past three years, the number of pupils with a confirmed ASC diagnosis at Shoreham Academy has risen significantly, from 58, to 71, and currently to 104, with more pupils awaiting assessment. This means that approximately 6% of the total school cohort now have a confirmed ASC diagnosis, nearly double the figure from two years ago.

Leaders had two aims with new strategies aimed at supporting pupils with ASC:

1. To meet the growing needs of pupils through bespoke interventions, and:
2. To make more strategic use of the highly skilled teaching assistants. Recognising the valued contributions of teaching assistants, leaders aimed to prioritise structured professional development and clearer pathways for career progression, ensuring they are both empowered in their roles and equipped to have an even greater impact on pupil outcomes.





What challenges were you trying to address? (continued)

How the project started :

Prior to launching the ASC Intervenor role and the Autistic and OK programme, the school was already delivering targeted interventions for pupils with autism, led by keyworkers and a member of staff, who would later become the appointed Intervenor. While these initial efforts had a positive impact, the rapid growth in ASC diagnoses, alongside an increasing number of pupils with emerging needs, highlighted the need for a more structured and strategic approach.

The school decided to explore an **ASC Intervenor role** as a way to have a dedicated team member who could develop deep expertise in autism and a bespoke understanding of individual pupils' needs. Leaders intended for the ASC Intervenor role to centralise a responsibility that had previously been shared across multiple staff members, improving consistency and deepening relationships with pupils.

Leaders were introduced to the **Autistic and Ok programme** through their relationship with the local authority, West Sussex, and their regular liaison with the West Sussex Social Communication Team.

What challenges were you trying to address? (continued)

How the project started :

The programme includes a free, downloadable toolkit which is available to mainstream secondary schools, special schools and youth groups, or schools can apply for a more comprehensive set of resources.

The school decided to apply for the *Autistic and OK* programme after reviewing the materials as they recognised the programme could have the following benefits to their setting:

- It includes comprehensive step-by-step checklists and detailed delivery plans, enabling leaders to incorporate the programme effectively into their existing ASC intervention schedule.
- It includes resources and session materials which are highly adaptable, allowing for their continued use in supporting additional pupils beyond the initial implementation period.

- It is highly pupil-centred and would support them to develop a strong sense of responsibility among older pupils.
- It is well-established and reputable, with information on reach and impact elsewhere available.

The school applied for the programme and participated in an interview to access the full package of resources. Once they were successful, they were sent the materials and assigned a case worker, who supported them during the implementation of the programme.

When in post, the ASC Intervenor role played an active role in shaping the direction of the *Autistic and OK* programme from the outset, participating in interviews and leading communication with the *Autistic and OK* team.





What challenges were you trying to address? (continued)

The approach:

ASC Intervenor role

A key influence on the design of the **ASC Intervenor** role was the Education Endowment Foundation's guidance on *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants and Deployment of Teaching Assistants*. In particular, the recommendations:

- Teaching assistants can support pupils effectively through structured interventions, however these need to be carefully considered, monitored, and linked to the classroom to ensure positive outcomes.
- Teaching assistants and teachers should be supported to engage in bridging practices that connect learning to the classroom.

Therefore, leaders designed the ASC role as a progression opportunity for a teaching assistant, whose responsibilities include to:

- act as a key adult for high-needs pupils, and ensure a coordinated approach to interventions.
- enable the creation of personalised learning plans, which are shared with all staff to promote meaningful inclusion in the classroom.
- strengthen relationships with families and ensured that pupil voice was regularly captured and reflected in planning.
- draw on their specialist knowledge and training, to deliver tailored ASC interventions, supporting pupils to develop personalised strategies for navigating school life and learning more effectively.

What challenges were you trying to address? (continued)

The approach (continued):

ASC Intervenor role

The *Autistic and OK* programme offers a peer-led model of support. It is led by a Year 10 pupil with ASC, who offers mentoring. This model aims to allow younger pupils to receive support from someone who understands their experiences, while also developing confidence and skills in the pupil leader.

The ASC Intervenor plays a central role in delivering the *Autistic and OK* programme as part of a joined-up, strategic approach. Sessions are collaboratively planned and resourced by a member of staff, the Intervenor, and their line manager. Plans are shared in advance with the lead pupil to ensure transparency and preparation ahead of each session. Sessions are observed, supported, and reviewed to maintain quality and relevance.



What does it look like in practice?

ASC Intervenor role

Leaders developed a detailed job description to formalise the responsibilities of this new post. The role involves close liaison with pupils, parents, and staff; updating Individual Learning Plans; supporting keyworker-led sessions; running daily social groups; assisting pupils with attendance concerns; and regularly feeding back to the inclusion leadership team and pastoral teams.

Once in post, the ASC Intervenor engages in regular professional development focused on autism, including bi-weekly meetings and training with the SENCO. This is complemented by online training courses, such as those provided by the social communication team and West Sussex, as well as engagement with relevant research into ASC. The Intervenor also benefits from ongoing guidance from the inclusion and learning support team and has access to external specialists, including speech and language therapists and occupational therapists, to further enhance their practice.

All teaching assistants take part in weekly SEND-focused professional development, led by the SENCO and other team members with specialist expertise. This commitment to professional development extends to all teaching and support staff through whole-school INSET days, twilight sessions, and bespoke departmental training.

Autistic and OK programme

Leaders used a range of approaches to identify pupils who would benefit most from this targeted support. This included monitoring weekly attendance, gathering pastoral and teacher feedback, reviewing transition information, and maintaining regular communication with parents. Priority was given to pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans, recent ASC diagnoses, or those experiencing significant challenges with social interaction. The school trialled the programme with one older Year 10 pupil, a peer mentor, and five Year 7 pupils.

The programme includes four peer-led sessions on the topics of anxiety, depression, OCD, and bullying. The ASC Intervenor supports the Year 10 pupil to utilise pre-prepared resources for these sessions:

- Session plans.
- PowerPoint presentation slides.
- Worksheets for individual and group work.
- Peer facilitators guides.

Shoreham Academy work with the West Sussex social communication team each term to review pupils' provision and have built a strong relationship to co-develop and embed the programme effectively.



What does it look like in practice? (continued)

Financial implications

Both strategies require investment in staff training, the printing of resources such as visual supports and the purchasing of sensory tools. Leaders also engaged with external professionals, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and autism consultants. Restructuring teaching assistant roles to incorporate the ASC Intervenor position included salary changes and running a recruitment process.

Leaders allocated funding to support the delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of the Autistic and OK programme. The school received £500 to participate in the full programme, which was reinvested to support its implementation. This included resourcing sessions and ensuring the programme remained effective and responsive to the needs of pupils through ongoing evaluation.



What has been the impact?

This support has played a key role in reducing barriers related to attendance and anxiety for pupils with SEND. As a result, attendance data shows a 1% improvement from the previous year, placing the school 4% above the national average. This represents a significant achievement, particularly given the school's context and the increasing complexity of pupils' needs.

The strength of the school's SEND provision is consistently recognised by staff, pupils, and parents. Leaders and teachers have observed significant growth in confidence and engagement from the Year 10 pupil leading the programme, while participating pupils report feeling more included, understood, and connected to their peers.

Leaders report that the introduction of the intervener role has:

- Raised the profile of this area of need across the school.
- Provided staff with a key point of contact who offers additional expertise about both the pupils and their needs, complementing the work of the Inclusion team.
- Helped to strengthen communication between parents requiring immediate support and classroom teachers - teachers are now able to highlight concerns about pupils or specific issues related to the area of need and receive timely support and guidance.

This inclusive ethos was also highlighted in the school's most recent Ofsted report, which praised the Academy for ensuring that pupils with SEND "benefit fully" from its rich and varied opportunities.

Next steps

Leaders are planning to:

- Continue refining the ASC Intervenor role using their expertise to support primary schools locally and lead parent workshops to better equip staff and families.
- Expanding the Autistic and OK programme so more pupils can benefit from peer mentoring. The programme will be delivered to 15 additional pupils (across three social groups) during the summer term.
- Strengthening links with primary schools to support early identification and transition of pupils with ASC.
- Finding opportunities to celebrate the successes of pupils with ASC, whether academic success, higher attendance, a calm lunchtime, a new friendship, or increased communication skills.





The key factors that make it work

Leaders have identified the following key behaviours and content which have made this approach effective in their setting.

- **Continuous professional development.** Leaders aim for all staff at all levels, from teaching assistants to experienced teachers, to benefit from a comprehensive training offer. Through targeted training, thoughtful role development, and opportunities for growth, they aim to ensure everyone has the tools and confidence to support pupils with ASC.
- **Buy in from senior leadership.** Leaders report how the Headteacher places inclusion at the heart of every decision, and that this contributes towards a school culture where meeting the needs of all learners is a shared responsibility.
- **Shared responsibility.** The success of any inclusive strategy depends on the shared commitment, insight, and compassion of the adults in the school.

Advice for school leaders

Shoreham Academy have shared lessons that could help other school leaders exploring strategies to support pupils with an ASC need. Leaders believe that the key to pupil success lies in the collaboration and transparent communication of all stakeholders, including:

The local authority:

Whether for diagnosis pathways, funding decisions, or specialist advice, leaders report that collaboration has been key to delivering joined-up support.

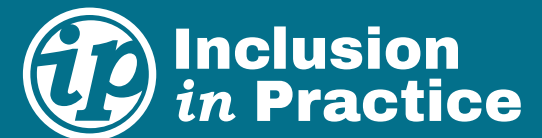
Parents:

Parents of children with autism bring valuable insights, shaped by their hopes, concerns, and experiences with the system. Building strong communication, mutual understanding, and trust helps create a positive partnership, particularly when aligning parental expectations with what can be achieved in a mainstream setting.

Further reading and resources

Leaders have shared some examples of resources they consulted throughout this process, which they would recommend other school and trust leaders to consider in their own contexts.

- See [Autistic and Ok programme](#) if you would like to find out more about the programme Shoreham Academy implemented.
- See the [EEF's guidance on deployment of teaching assistants](#) for recommendations that leaders referred to.



inclusioninpractice.org.uk