

According to recent studies, 1 in 100 children in the UK is on the autistic spectrum which means that you and your children are likely to know someone who is autistic. An autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong developmental disability that effects the way a person communicates and relates to the people and world around them. People with autism will share 3 main areas of difficulty and the condition will affect each one in different ways and to varying degrees. The three main areas of difficulty are known as the "triad of impairments".

- The impairment of imagination (also known as inflexibility of thought)
- The impairment of communication
- The impairment of social understanding.

In addition, many children on the autism spectrum experience some form of sensory processing difficulties.

In January the staff at Benson received some excellent training from the Autism Education Trust as we looked to increase our understanding of the condition and to explore a range of teaching strategies to help children with autism in their learning. We feel that as whole school community; parents, children, teachers and support staff that it is important to cultivate an understanding and respect for others and especially those who face extra challenges such as autism. Often such a disability is invisible to the eye and an autistic child can easily be misunderstood and perceived as troublesome.

"We know that indifference, intolerance and hostility towards autistic people and their families leads to extreme social isolation, mental illness and profoundly unhappy lives. But, we also know that helping young people - as well as teachers - to understand autism as they grow up will equip a new generation with the knowledge to accept and empathise with autistic people." (The National Autistic Society)

The following extract are words from an author who through the means of her writing has tried to give a voice to a boy called Anthony who is unable to communicate what it feels like to have an autistic brain.

If too much is happening at once, I can get into trouble. If I'm counting the square tiles on the kitchen floor (180), I'm in my Numbers Room, but if my mother starts talking to me, I have to go into my Ears Room to hear her. But I want to stay in Numbers because I'm counting, and I like to count, but my mother keeps talking, and her sound is getting louder, and I feel the pressure to leave Numbers and go inside my Ears Room. So I go in the hallway, but then she grabs my hand, and this surprises me and forces me into Hands, which isn't where I wanted to go, and she's talking to me but I can't hear what she's saying because I'm in my Hands Room and not in Ears.

If she lets go of my hand, I can go into Ears. She's saying, Look at me. But if I look at her, I have to have to leave Ears and go into Eyes, and then I won't be able to hear what she's saying. So I don't know what to do, and I'm wondering the halls, and I can't make a decision on where to go and I'm In Between, and that's when I get into trouble.

Taken from the novel "Love Anthony" by Lisa Genova

Whilst these are the words of a boy with severe autism they made me stop and think about the complexities of this somewhat hidden disability. It is impossible to get into the mind of a person with autism but I am convinced that if we could, just for a moment, we would be both amazed and humbled.....and perhaps a lot more understanding of those who live with the condition.

Mrs Catherine Boddy (SENCO)