

# Using Visual Supports

## Good practice guidelines

Highland Council  
Autism Outreach Education Service in  
collaboration with NHS Highland &  
Inshes Primary school



*The guidelines in this document are intended to support a whole school approach and were collaboratively produced with reference to the following:-*

*Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*  
(Paris:UNESCO, 1994)

'Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all: moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children'

'The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, where possible, and that ordinary schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students while having a continuum of support to match these needs. Inclusive schools are the most effective at building solidarity between children with ASN and their peers.'

*(A Manual of Good Practice in special educational needs.)*

'An inclusive society must ensure that the potential of each individual is fully developed through education and that their attainment and achievement are valued and respected. It is on the realisation of this potential that inclusiveness depends; an inclusive society and education system will therefore strive to ensure that it creates the range of approaches and opportunities to ensure that this is brought about.'

*HMIe report Education for Pupils with ASD 2006*

Recommendation 5

'Schools should ensure that they maximise opportunities for pupils with ASD to be included socially and educationally with mainstream peers.'

*SIGN (Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines)*

*Recommended:*

'Adapting the communicative, social and physical environments of children and young people with ASD may be of benefit (options include visual prompts, reducing requirements for complex social interactions, using routines, timetabling and prompting and minimising sensory irritations).'

*PHIS report (Public health Institute of Scotland. December 2001)*

'the most inclusive services are primarily focussed on addressing the impact of ASD in order to resolve the root of the person's exclusion'

Thanks to those in the working group.

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With additional thanks to New Struan House, Alloa and Val MacKenzie- S&LT  
team, NHS Highland

## Why use visual supports ?

Visual supports enhance understanding of the environment, help to organise information and ourselves. Visual supports stay in sight long after the spoken word has gone.

Children with ASD, learning and communication difficulties tend to be visual learners. Visual supports therefore utilise their learning style.

*They understand what they SEE better than what they hear.*

Visual supports can help children to understand and anticipate what's going to happen. They provide structure and predictability and promote independence. Visual supports enhance children's understanding therefore can reduce anxiety and enhance the child's ability to learn.

What do Visual Supports look like?

- Concrete objects
- Drawings
- Colour –coding system
- Objects of reference
- Photos
- Environmental plans
- Written words-lists, steps of plans, reminders
- Picture illustrations
- Symbols
- Gesture
- Clear room layout

All staff could have access to a key chain with relevant symbols to support communication around the school.

# **Basic Strategy**

## **Say Less and Stress Go**

## **Slow and Show**

You can adjust the way you communicate to enhance a child's understanding.

**Say Less** Simplify what you say. Give all instructions in clear, simple words. Use short, clear labels and sentences to give the child the most essential information. Avoid long, complex and ambiguous sentences.

**Stress** Exaggerate key words. Put key words at the ends of sentences.

**Go Slow** Pause between words or phrases. This gives a child time to process the information they hear and time to come up with a response.

**Show** Show with real objects, actions and gestures, symbols/pictures and the written word.

(Sussman, 1999)

## VISUAL TIMETABLES

### WHY?

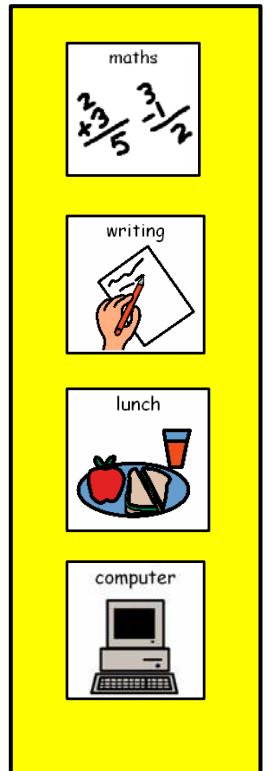
- To help the young people predict what will happen
- To support spoken instruction regarding transitions
- To provide a constant reminder
- To support their understanding of the sequence of events
- To introduce new activities in the context of familiar activities
- To introduce planned change to their daily, weekly routines
- To support pupil

### independence WHEN?

- The young person needs structure
- The young person struggles to self-occupy
- The young person has limited sense of his day
- The young person needs help to predict or organise

### his day HOW?

- Choose the visual system e.g. concrete objects, photographs, symbols, written word
- Organise and sequence timetables, before the start of the school day/evening
- Keep the timetable in a recognisable place for each young person
- Keep the timetable portable. When the young person makes any physical transitions, help them retrieve their timetable
- Use the timetable to emphasise clear beginnings and ends to lesson/activities
- Go slow and show, say less and stress
- Actively show and reinforce when each activity is finished by an action e.g. posting the symbol, ticking a list
- Gradually reduce adult support to promote independence
- TIMETABLES – will run from top to bottom



	9.00		11.00	11.20		12.30	1.30	2.15
Monday  <b>P o i n t s  M o n i t o r</b>	LANGUAGE • Homework • Reading • Diary		<b>B r e a k</b>	MATHS 	<b>L u n c h</b>	MUSIC 	RELIGIOUS & MORAL EDUCATION / PERSONAL & SOCIAL EDUCATION	
	LANGUAGE • Current affairs • Spelling	HEALTH - Mrs Brown 		PROJECT		SWIMMING 		
	LANGUAGE • Writing • Spelling • Grammar			MATHS 		LANGUAGE • Reading	PROJECT / ASSEMBLY PRACTICE / DRAMA / ART	
	MATHS 	LANGUAGE • Reading 		P.E - Mrs Brown 		COMPUTING 	PROJECT	
	LANGUAGE • Spelling groups 	FRENCH / COMPUTING		MATHS 		ASSEMBLY	GOLDEN TIME / PERSONAL & SOCIAL EDUCATION	

## TIMETABLE

### Monday

9.15	Registration 		
9.30	Group 	Work at desk 	
10.35		Morning break 	
10.50		Work at desk 	
12.00		Lunch 	
12.50		Cooking 	
1.50		Afternoon break 	
2.00		Cooking 	
3.00		Home 	

## WORK STATION SYSTEM

### Why

- To minimise distraction
- Lower stimulation
- To encourage independent work
- Provide a structured routine for working

### When

- When the child or young person is completing familiar tasks on their own
- When a child/young person is receiving one to one support to learn a new skill

### How

- Work station systems will run left to right System
  1. Take the work station symbol from the visual timetable
  2. Match this to the work station system
  3. Take 'number 1' from the work station system and match it to the number on the tray
  4. Complete the task in the tray and place the completed work in the 'finished' box on the right
  5. Take the number 2 and repeat the sequence until all the numbers are removed from the work station system
  6. Go back to the visual timetable and check what the next activity is.



MINI SCHEDULES - For practical skills.  
e.g. art, music, cooking.

Work from left to right.

WHY?

- To help the young person break down daily/weekly tasks into small, sequenced steps e.g. arriving at class, getting ready for lunch, using the toilet
- To support the young person's independence
- To provide a clear beginning, middle and end to a task
- To provide clear explanations

WHEN?

- Implicit information needs to be explicitly given and taught
- The young person is unaware of what is

expected HOW?

- Choose the most appropriate visual system e.g. concrete objects, photographs, symbols, written word
- Use 'Go slow and show, say less and stress'
- Reduce your language to the key words – let the pictures, gestures explain the steps



## VISUAL FEEDBACK/REVIEW

### WHY?

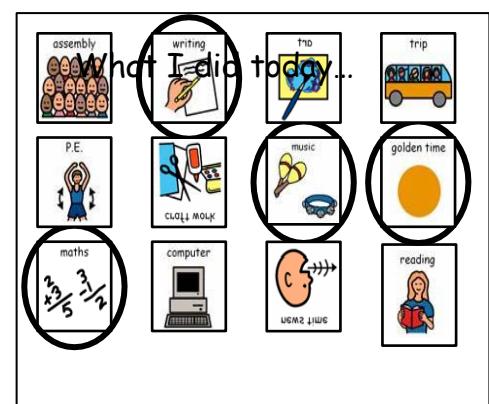
- To provide a visual record/pattern of experiences to aid the young person's reflection
- To build the young person's sense of his day
- To support the young person's understanding of his personal involvement in aspects of his day
- To provide a focus for communicating and sharing details of his day with others
- To link key language (spoken and written) with immediately recognisable experiences

### WHEN?

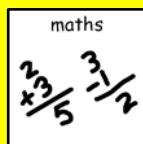
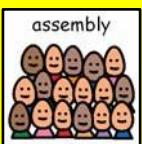
- To enable the young person to share information about a lesson and activities out with the context of the lesson
- To enable the young person to initiate an interaction and engage others
- To provide feedback and linkage to parents/carers with a view to generalising learning experience

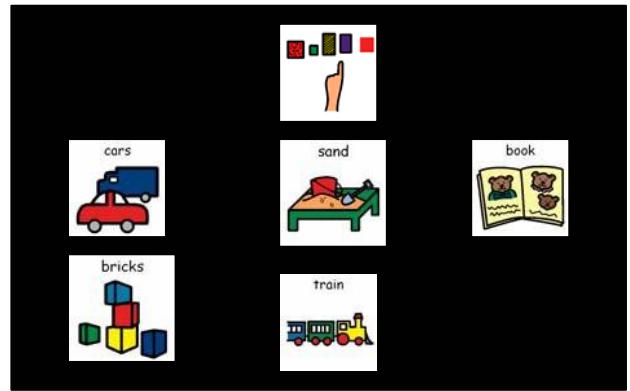
### HOW?

- Take digital or Polaroid photos of the young person engaging with the materials and/or people
- Take a video recording of the young person engaging with the materials and/or people
- Involve the young person (where appropriate) in the process of downloading from the cameras to support their understanding of the sequence of steps e.g. from activity computer visual evidence of activity
- Establish a personal photo album of experiences for the young person to access
- Establish a symbol/photo/written diary to help the young person transfer information home to support the young person's communication.
- Create times when the young person can communicate this information to others outwith the activity.



What I did today...





## CHOICE BOARDS

### WHY?

- To provide a structure for times of free-choice and self-occupation
- To develop the young person's skills in making (guided) independent choices
- To provide opportunities whereby the young person has control over his situation
- To provide a tangible reward/incentive
- To develop their special interests in a meaningful way
- To provide opportunities for pupil-led vs adult-led activities
- To show what is available and unavailable on certain days

*Children with ASD can have difficulty making choices.*

### WHEN?

- When the young person 'chooses' the same activity all the time
- As a planned extrinsic motivator, during the young person's timetable, if required

### HOW?

- Have appropriate visual supports e.g. concrete objects, photos, symbols, words etc to support the young person's understanding and to teach and practise requesting
- Make visual supports meaningful e.g. do they know the construction symbol = Lego, blocks, Logiblocks, Jenga, multilink etc.
- Offer 2 or 3 carefully planned options, rather than 6 unchanging choices. This helps make an informed choice
- Assess the young person's areas of motivation. Offer individually tailored choices that use and develop pupils' learning styles
- Offer choices that offer breadth and balance
- Have a clear end point for the choice e.g. 3/2/1 more turn, timer, clock. Give a countdown to the end of choice, if required.
- Ensure choices are realistic within the timetable

## CALENDARS

### WHEN?

- More visual information is required in addition to the daily timetable
- Before a 'big event', in order to provide prior warning and support
- Countdowns ease anxiety, rather than increase anxiety
- A young person is locked into repetitive questioning about a

### 'happening' HOW?

- Have it accessible. Keep in a designated place
- Review the calendar at a set time e.g. as part of the information sharing meetings, individual work times
- Encourage the young person to actively use the calendar by ticking off/posting the days, leading up to an event
- Make sure the format of the calendar matches the young person's cognitive abilities
- Link any decoration with special interests and make it age and stage appropriate.

(child's name)						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	 swimming			 Brownies		
Monday	 swimming	Wednesday	Thursday	 Brownies	 shopping	Sunday
Monday	 swimming	Wednesday	Thursday	 Brownies	 party	Sunday
Monday	 swimming	Wednesday	Thursday	 Brownies	 visit Granny	Sunday