



Tips for Teaching Students with an Autism Spectrum Condition in Secondary School

Issues are most likely to arise from the challenges students experience regarding their social communication, social interaction and rigidity in thinking. Many students with an ASC also have difficulties with sensory processing and may feel highly anxious in the classroom and wider school environment. Sensory difficulties may help to explain 'out of the blue' outbursts.

Recommendations include:

Seat the student in the lowest level distraction area of the classroom. Working alongside a good role model is helpful. Being sat near the door can be helpful if the student needs to leave the room with minimal disruption

Identify a quiet place where the student could go to if the activity and noise levels are either distressing or distracting.

Before giving a verbal explanation / instruction ensure the student is cued in, e.g. "Jim, you need to listen now". Writing it down / showing an example will support and reinforce the verbal explanation / instruction and provide a concrete permanent reminder for the student.

Students with an ASC have great difficulty sustaining their listening skills for any great length of time. Always check they have understood by asking, "Jim, tell me what you have to do" rather than "Do you understand / have any questions?"

Give the student time to process the information and make a response.

Give the student a written list of equipment they will need to bring to your lesson each week.

Where possible, break down the steps in the task either on the board for all to work through or go over to the student once the class is settled to recap instructions, writing them down in bullet points for him/her to work through. Encourage them to tick off/cross out when completed each step, giving a sense of achievement in addition to reminding them where they are up to.

Use visual learning styles as much as possible.

Give clear direct instructions. Avoid ambiguous language and make clear implied meaning such as, "I am waiting!" but really mean "Jim, look this way please" / "It's very noisy in here" but really mean "Please be quiet".

Sarcasm and humour may not be processed and received as intended. Make explicit the behaviour you do want as opposed to what you do not want.

To encourage participation in class discussion, ask a factual question first. Memory for facts is likely to be good whereas the student is likely to be uncertain about giving an opinion or answer around a more abstract idea.

Factual and structured tasks are best suited to students with an ASC. They are likely to require help with generating ideas and organising their thoughts during more open ended or imaginative tasks. Visually mapping out ideas can be helpful.

The student may lack motivation to start work or engage in an activity. Use the student's interests to reward work or if possible as a way of introducing them to the new skill being taught.

Most students with an ASC will have a preference to work individually. Paired and group work will help promote interaction skills but is likely to be challenging if roles are not defined and guidelines provided.

Give the student clear rules and boundaries for their behaviour. Just because you have told them does not mean they understand. Check and teach.

The student will need to be made aware in advance of any changes to the expected routine, e.g. classroom, teacher, timetable.

Make sure the student has written down their homework correctly and understands the expectation. If possible, put a copy of the task in their homework book with an example where appropriate.