

M.I.C.A.S.

Dyce Academy, Aberdeen

Mainstream Integration of Children on the Autistic Spectrum



The MICAS base at Dyce Academy is a specialist unit for ASD pupils with Asperger's Syndrome or High Functioning Autism. It operates within a mainstream secondary school.

The aim of the base is to:

- **Enable pupils to access as much of the standard curriculum within mainstream classes as they are able to, with support. (Usually between 65 and 95% of full timetable)**
- **Teach them in the MICAS base the skills they require using a specially designed ASD curriculum, individually tailored to meet their needs.**

Since its inception in 1997, 100% of the pupils have moved on to positive destinations such as further education or employment.

MICAS creates an ASD-friendly environment where the pupils can flourish and achieve their full potential. We want the pupils to be able to understand themselves and also understand other people. We promote the positive aspects of having an ASD and work on building up their self-esteem. We work towards creating a fine balance between academic achievement and personal and social achievement. We cannot take away their ASD but we can help these pupils to develop coping strategies in order to help them function in and understand the society in which we live. We can also help their peers to understand and value them for who they are.

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Teacher In Charge, MICAS

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SPECIALISED CURRICULUM - TAUGHT WITHIN MICAS.

The pupils spend anything from 65—95% of their time in mainstream classes and the rest of the time in the specialist base. Here they follow a curriculum which has been specifically designed to cover not only the Triad of Impairments, but to specifically target individual's areas of deficit. It aims to teach them the appropriate skills they require in order for them to take their place in society. Using the principles of 'Cognitive Behaviour Therapy', many skills are taught:-

- 'Theory of Mind' skills
- The unwritten rules of society
- Conversational skills
- How to read facial expressions / body language
- How to understand and recognise emotions, ambiguous language, idioms, metaphors, irony, sarcasm and teasing

The full curriculum covers:

- Feelings & Emotions
- Conversation Skills
- Social Problem Solving
- Life Skills
- Study Skills
- Language Skills including understanding humour & jokes.
- Health and Hygiene (unit being developed)

Initially, their day needs to be highly structured throughout, and they need to be coached on how to make choices. Some of the mainstream homework is carried out in the unit, to enable the pupils to access the staff support if required. Many pupils on the spectrum do not see the relevance of carrying out consolidation work in the form of homework. However, over time, if it is introduced slowly and carefully, they do learn to carry out this task. A form of 'Client Centred' assessment and therapy is on-going throughout each pupil's time in MICAS. ASD behaviours are assessed initially soon after entry, and subsequently every 2 years. It has become clear that behaviours decrease once the pupils have been taught appropriate methods of having their needs met.

The efficacy of the curriculum is formally assessed annually against pupil progress, from the perspective of both parents and teachers.

STAFF

MICAS teaching staff work with the pupils in the base and teach them lessons from the ASD curriculum. The Pupil Support Assistants help the pupils carry out their individual programs and accompany them into the mainstream class to support them.

The Teacher In Charge holds a Masters Degree in teaching children with Autism and two of the PSAs hold the Post Graduate Certificate in Autism.

MAINSTREAM - WITH SUPPORT

Prior to entry into mainstream classes the pupils are individually assessed for areas of interest and strength, as it is important for them to achieve initial success in classes.

All mainstream staff receive a pupil profile pamphlet, to enable them to have an understanding of the difficulties each pupil has, the behaviours to expect, and how to deal with them appropriately. The profile is updated annually as the pupil progresses, to ensure the information is always current.

The mainstream staff attend CPD sessions on ASD run by Mrs Parker. The staff are secure in the knowledge that the individual pupil will be supported in the classroom by a PSA until it is deemed no longer necessary by all parties. The ultimate goal for each pupil is independence in class. The pupils are also encouraged (and supported if deemed necessary) to join their peers on field and school activity trips. The developing of friendships within their own peer group is actively fostered and encouraged.

ACCOMMODATION

Disabilities are reduced when the physical environment is adapted for, or responsive to the needs of the people with a disability.

(Booth. T. et al)

From reading literature written by various people, some of whom have Asperger's Syndrome, it would seem that the educational environment is of great importance.

The two rooms, which form MICAS, are specially designed to limit visual distractions, to eliminate superfluous noise, to cater for students with 'scotopic sensitivity' and to allow for the individuals' need for space and sameness.

The principles of TEACCH are carried out within MICAS i.e. visual timetables, organisation of rooms, labelling of cupboards etc. However, TEACCH booths are not installed as they are neither required nor helpful for these pupils.

RESOURCES

Many of the actual resources used for teaching and understanding the pupils in the unit, come from the numerous publications written about, and for, pupils with an ASD. Other material comes from a variety of sources, not necessarily ASD related, but deemed to be particularly suitable for teaching particular skills. MICAS staff also design and make their own resources to suit the coaching of particular skills. A close working relationship is developed with parents, as they also can be a valuable resource.

ACTIVITIES WEEKEND

The pupils annually attend an activities weekend at an Outdoor Adventure Centre. This is to:

- Foster an interest in different sports
- Teach the importance of working as a team.
- Encourage them to think of others.
- Teach life skills e.g. bed-making, packed lunch preparation, organisation and other independence skills etc.
- To have fun!!

The Teacher in Charge attends each year along with two mainstream teachers

CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION

MICAS was established in 1997, specifically to cater for pupils who had either High Functioning Autism or Asperger's Syndrome. This remains true today, as they are the pupils who benefit most from this provision.

It must also be decided by the A.C.C. 'Admissions Panel' that these pupils would benefit from being placed in a mainstream school, and that they are academically and cognitively suitable. MICAS also accepts pupils who have secondary disorders to their ASD e.g. ADHD.

IN THE WORDS OF A MICAS STUDENT:

"The MICAS base is a specialist base for students with High Functioning Autism or Asperger's Syndrome. The unit has many special features for students.

They are:-

1. You get your own large amount of desk space.
2. There is a quiet room, which the students can use if they are upset, angry or need quiet/counselling.
3. The teachers and staff in MICAS are trained so they have a better understanding of you than other teachers.
4. You learn to cope with everyday life.
5. The number of pupils in each room is kept to a minimum.
6. The rooms in MICAS are specially decorated so that they are calm and quiet.
7. This was the first base of its kind."