

## Research and Development Board Newsletter



Welcome to the Spring  
Edition

### Well-being and Autism

Welcome to the Spring Edition of the Queensmill R&D Board. The well-being of pupils is fundamental to our work at Queensmill School with many strategies and activities integral to the curriculum. This edition of the newsletter highlights some of the research in the field and show cases some of our work at Queensmill to support well-being.

#### What is wellbeing?

The importance of supporting pupil well-being is now well established in schools in England. However, wellbeing is a complex, multidimensional concept and our understanding of what is meant by well-being and how practice in school can contribute to pupil well-being is less understood but evidence is emerging.

Currently, the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) defines well-being as comprising of three elements:

- Emotional well-being – being happy and confident, not anxious or depressed.
- Psychological well-being – being autonomous, problem-solving, managing emotions, feeling empathy, being resilient and attentive.
- Social well-being – forming good relationships with others, behavioural problems are absent.

To date there is very little research that has explicitly explored the notion of well-being for pupils with autism and how that might compare with those without autism. A review by Danker et al. (2017) found that eight themes around wellbeing emerged from four studies:

- diagnostic label,
- relationships,
- positive/negative emotions,
- professional support,
- teacher qualities,
- curriculum-related issues,
- environment,
- masquerade (anxiety and rejection experienced when attempting to appear “normal” to fit in).





However, all these themes are linked with the emotional and psychological aspects of well-being. For pupils with autism, the model in Figure 1 is from the Autism Toolkit and expands the concept of well-being by including, for example, health.



Figure 1 Supporting well-being for pupils with autism

Below are some examples of the activities we do at Queensmill to support and develop well-being for our pupils.

### Yoga

Yoga is growing in popularity as a complementary therapy for children with special needs and autism and at Queensmill complements the occupational therapy programme. Our yoga contains movement, breathing exercises, elements of mindfulness, relaxation, deep pressure massage, singing and rhythm, yoga games and partner yoga. Sessions are held in low arousal environments and supported by dimmed lights, calm music, yoga props (e.g. lavender eye pillows, bolsters, blocks).

### Sensory Integration (SI)

Many children with Autism have sensory needs. SI dysfunction can also influence self-regulation, attention and arousal levels. SI is localised in every classroom and there are a number of therapists working directly with the pupils around their well-being. SI supports physical development, social and emotional development and performance of purposeful activities. SI follows best practice in current research by offering:

- Long-term, holistic support with an overall goal of developing independence in meaningful activities.
- Occupational Therapy intervention as part of a comprehensive programme of other behavioural, educational and medical services to support the well-being students and their families.
- Support to families to develop their understanding of the life-long needs of an individual with Autism.
- Recommendations of environmental and task adaptation to support children's self-regulation.
- Sensory equipment (e.g. ear defenders, weighted vests, therapy balls) for students to access in the classroom.





### Rebound Therapy

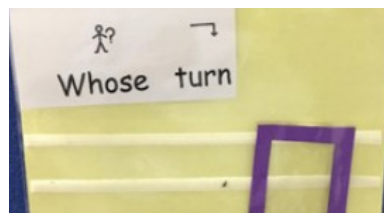
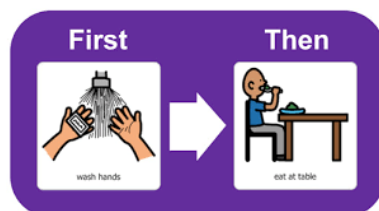
Rebound Therapy is used to facilitate movement, promote balance, promote an increase or decrease in muscle tone, promote relaxation, promote sensory integration, improve fitness and exercise tolerance, and to improve communication skills.

Some of the benefits of Rebound Therapy include the development and improvement of:

- Strength of limbs
- Co-ordination
- Independence
- Self-confidence
- Self-image
- Relaxation
- Sense of achievement
- Body awareness
- Trust and confidence in assistant
- Fun and enjoyment

### SCERTS

The SCERTS framework and methodology informs our practice. This allows us to chart in detail the progress of children and young people with their social communication and emotional regulation. Thus supporting them to cope with the world around them and in turn giving them independence and sense of achievement.



### Trips and residentials

As part of our extended school offer and curriculum we organise two annual residential trips for secondary students. These trips offer the opportunity for young people to experience the world outside of Queensmill, try new activities and skills, develop their independence skills and to spend short periods of time away from home.

*"Four of our secondary students ventured out to the great seas last June on our annual boat trip. Beginning in Portsmouth, the students put their boating skills to the test and helped the skipper navigate to Buckler's Hard. While in Buckler's Hard, the group enjoyed nature walks and sightseeing, along with watching the Euro Cup at the local pub. From Buckler's Hard, they sailed to Isle of Wight for more sightseeing and football. This trip brought out the true sense of independence and adventure in each participant!"*  
Neeta - Mars Class Teacher.







## Special Interests and well-being in autistic adults

Research confirms special interests are key to the well-being of autistic adults.

Special interests are a core feature of autism. However, to date there has been limited research focusing on the role of special interests in the lives of autistic adults. A study by Grove et al. (2018) looked at the relationship between special interests and a range of quality of life conditions including subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction.

### Findings

About two thirds of the participants reported having a special interest, with more males reporting a special interest than females. Special interest topics included computers, music, nature and gardening. Most autistic adults engaged in more than one special interest, highlighting that these interests may not be as narrow as previously described. There were no differences in subjective well-being between adults with and without special interests. However, for autistic adults who did have

special interests, motivation for engaging in special interests was associated with increased subjective well-being.

### Conclusions

This indicates that motivation may play an important role in our understanding of special interests in autism. Special interests had a positive impact on autistic adults and were associated with higher subjective well-being and satisfaction across specific life domains including social contact and leisure. However, a very high intensity of engagement with special interests was negatively related to well-being. Combined, these findings have important implications for the role of special interests in the lives of autistic adults.

