

The Infinity Hub (DSP) at The Halley Academy



Admissions to The Infinity Hub are made through the Royal Borough of Greenwich SEN Department. The Infinity Hub has capacity for 16 students.

The criteria is:

- Students have a diagnosis of ASD
- Students can access up to 50% of mainstream lessons with support
- Students have support from SaLT, Outreach services, EP and other professionals

The Halley Academy contains a specialist provision for 16 students on the Autistic Spectrum in KS3 and KS4, whose primary need is identified as ASD. Students are supported by specialist staff (two teachers and four Learning Support Assistants) within the provision which comprises two main classrooms and two small intervention rooms. It also has a kitchen area to support the development of life skills, a toilet and a sensory room. Students are able to use their own outside open space, separate from the main Academy playground.

Aims

The Infinity Hub aims to provide its students with the best possible learning environment to meet their individual needs, and for students to leave us with the social, independence skills and qualifications relevant to their next steps.

We strive to provide the resources, trained staff, and specialist support to maximise the student's ability to:

- communicate and interact with others
- develop and improve social skills
- access the curriculum
- improve independence
- develop literacy and numeracy skills
- learn within the mainstream environment
- gain appropriate qualifications for future employment
- develop the life skills to participate and be included in the wider community, and make friends and enjoy the company of others

Approaches

We work closely with a range of professionals to ensure we have a holistic picture of each student, and to ensure that there is a common approach in our work with them. Multi-disciplinary provision can include Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, the ASD Outreach Service, CAMHs, Hospital Outreach, Children with Disabilities Team and health professionals.

We believe it is vital to work closely with parents/carers in planning the education of our students, and phone calls, visits and meetings form a regular part of our home academy links. Where appropriate we also use home academy books to provide a daily dialogue. As well as working with parents/carers to address areas of difficulties, we contact parents/carers regularly to report on successes and achievements.

We aim to provide a tailor-made learning environment and curriculum that matches individual needs as closely as possible. These approaches include:

1. Structured Learning

- Students have visual timetables to show them the structure of the day or week, and lesson schedules where appropriate
- Work areas are clearly defined for specific students
- Work is clearly structured with additional visual support where possible

2. Positive Learning

- Use of knowledge of individual students to reduce anxiety
- Thorough and sensitive engagement with students to promote interaction and communication
- Students use a 'work first, then choose' system to promote motivation and acceptance of work times. The balance between work time and reward periods is carefully monitored and varies from student to student.
- Trips form an integral part of the curriculum, and where appropriate, students use the community as part of learning life skills.
- Successes are celebrated at every opportunity. All students work towards rewards as part of the mainstream academy, and some students have additional reward schemes in place to support their specific needs.

3. Empathy (seeing the world from the student's perspective)

- Thinking: understanding that the students can have rigidity in their thought and behaviours
- Learning: understanding that the students are predominantly visual learners. Tasks are broken down into visual steps where appropriate
- Communication: understanding the student's level of expressive and receptive language, and keeping verbal language to a minimum where necessary
- Interests: using students' interests is a key tool in supporting and motivating students
- Phobias/fears: Aversive events eliminated or carefully managed
- Self-esteem: understanding that many students feel vulnerable and isolated, and need structured and planned opportunities to develop confidence and friendships.

4. **Low Arousal Approach**

- The environment is kept visually calm and ordered
- Non-confrontation style of intervention used by staff
- Student's 'voice' is listened to (whether through their words or actions), and time allowed to deal with difficulties with sensitivity and at their pace
- Outside stimuli kept to a minimum through effective blinds and sound proofing
- Opportunities for quiet time throughout the day for students to enjoy time on their own during an activity of their choice, in order to be able to cope with the demands of work at other times.

5. **TEACCH Approach** (National Autistic Society)

Where appropriate this approach has been adapted and used within The Infinity Hub to support learning for individual students.

6. **Social Stories**

Where appropriate, social stories are used to support students in coping with change, understanding events, or developing appropriate behaviours. These are simple stories to describe a particular event to a student, and explain what they need to try and do when this event happens. Stories are designed to suit the individual and are differentiated in the content and detail they contain.

Staff Continuous Professional Development

The Infinity Hub places high value on staff training, and we aim to develop highly skilled staff that are empowered to take responsibility for key areas of teaching, and managing the learning environment.

All learning support assistants receive training in ASD, and where possible, complete an online accredited training course. ASD training is also offered to mainstream staff.

Throughout the year, staff are encouraged to attend a range of professional development opportunities. These have so far included visits to the Child Development Centre to observe the assessment procedures for diagnosis of ASD, visits to other specialist provisions and DSPs, behavioural management courses, sensory integration, TEACCH, Low Arousal Approaches, Makaton, safeguarding and an accredited 5 day course in ASD.

Once a module, the coordinators of Greenwich DSPs meet to share good practice.

Curriculum

Where possible students are educated within mainstream lessons and work is accessible and structured.

Where more appropriate, students are supported in accessing the curriculum within The Infinity Hub. If the timetable allows, mainstream teachers offer small group teaching (currently in English, maths, science, PE, global citizenship, humanities and food technology).

In addition, students are supported in developing communication and language skills through both 1:1 sessions and social skills groups. The speech and language therapist takes a lead role in supporting these lessons, which are based on targets following assessment.

Where appropriate, students are also supported in both small groups and 1:1 to increase their literacy and numeracy skills.

Students who are not independent travellers take part in the Assisted Travel Scheme – either 1:1 or in small groups. We have a highly successful record of supporting students in becoming more independent.

Social Skills Development

As well as delivering focused sessions planned with a speech therapist, we aim to provide a learning environment that continually supports the development of social skills. Students take part in Lego therapy, sensory circuits, Attention Autism and fine motor skills sessions where appropriate.

Students engage in a range of sports based activities that develop key skills and also support wellbeing. We also offer a range of lessons that aim to provide a structured learning environment to develop social skills. Many of these lessons have a focus on cooking and practical activities, which also support students in developing their independence and tolerance to new sensory stimuli.

The Infinity Hub is also open and supported by our staff at lunch time and break time, and a range of structured social activities are offered. We are always keen for mainstream peers to be involved in these activities, both to support other vulnerable students in the academy, and to provide a range of opportunities for The Infinity Hub students to meet new people, and make new friends.