

Acknowledgement

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Introduction

Hampshire County Council, through its education department, has a proven record for providing quality staff training and making good provision for school aged children with autism/autistic spectrum disorders (asd). Several Hampshire schools have had their expertise in autism recognised by OFSTED, one with the subsequent award of Beacon status.

A county -wide training programme for teachers in meeting the needs of children with autistic spectrum disorders, which was developed in partnership with the University of North Carolina, (the seven day PAATHS course -**Providing Approaches to Autism for Teachers in Hampshire Schools**) is run annually with places frequently sought by those working outside Hampshire.

Recently Hampshire County Council has increased its focus on children under five. Several county-wide initiatives have been developed to support joint ways of working for children with asd including:

- the EarlyBird Programme, the National Autistic Society's recommended first intervention for children with asd and their families
- the highly valued county Portage home visiting service which receives annual training in autism through the "Advanced Portage Training in social communication impairment/autistic spectrum disorders" (recognised and evaluated by the National Portage Association)
- an outreach support service for pre-school settings involving experienced Portage personnel
- the THOMAS initiative to support the education of the under fives with asd.

The THOMAS training and guidelines offer support and training for those meeting the needs of children with asd in the home and local mainstream school and pre-school settings. The THOMAS training was developed to promote a consistent approach between those living and working with the child with asd, whatever the setting, both in the home and local community. The aim is to support the inclusion of children in their local pre-school settings and to develop a consistency of approach to ease transfer into school. This booklet is about THOMAS.

The letters of THOMAS stand for:

The **H**ampshire **O**utline for **M**eeting the needs of the under five's on the **A**utistic **S**pectrum. Although this is rather lengthy it is easy to remember because many children on the autistic spectrum are fascinated by the other Thomas i.e. Thomas the Tank Engine.

The THOMAS curriculum guidelines and training programme were developed in consultation with parents. Pre-school practitioners with experience in asd, drawn from health and education, educational psychologists and school inspectors worked together to gain the maximum benefit from their expertise. The development of THOMAS was supported by Standards Grant funding from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).

The THOMAS initiative consists of:

- 1 a four day training programme (spread across three to four months) for those living/working with the under five's with social communication impairments/asd. Parents/carers and those working in any Hampshire pre-school/early years setting are welcomed to the training events which are delivered by a team made up of parents, teachers, Portage workers, speech and language therapists, school inspectors and educational psychologists. Each day provides an opportunity to share practice and develop skills. Each day has a separate focus namely:

DAY ONE - Visual structure and the environment

DAY TWO - Communication

DAY THREE - Play

DAY FOUR – Behaviour
- 2 regular access to follow-up support groups provided across the county by the Portage service
- 3 this booklet which outlines the central THOMAS principles, expectations of practice and underpinning theories.

The aims of this booklet are to:

- 1 clarify the terminology used in THOMAS
- 2 provide an introduction to the nature of autistic spectrum disorders
- 3 outline the intervention strategies offered in the THOMAS training
- 4 recommend a curricular focus for children under five with asd

- 5 provide examples of planning formats to support the development of programmes for individual children
- 6 offer examples of weekly experiences for children with asd
- 7 suggest evaluation structures
- 8 list useful materials
- 9 raise continuing issues.

For those living/working with children preparing for school entry the Hampshire County Council's booklet 'The Autistic Spectrum- Approaches to Facilitate Inclusion in Mainstream Schools' offers further reading. (This is available from the SEN Service on 01962 846252).

Terminology

There are many different views about how helpful it is to label a child's difficulties with terms such as autism or Asperger's syndrome. Some parents and practitioners find it more helpful than others. Towards the back of this booklet is a glossary of commonly used terms.

In all of the THOMAS materials and in this booklet the terms, 'children with autism', 'children with autistic spectrum disorders (asd)' and 'children with social and communication impairments' are used interchangeably. This reflects the THOMAS philosophy that children are children first and secondly may have a special educational need. This flexibility in the use of terms aims to be inclusive. The principles and strategies outlined in THOMAS make a useful contribution to the education of many children whether or not they have a diagnosis of autism.

Children experiencing social communication impairments/autistic spectrum disorders

There are many books and articles written about autism and autistic spectrum disorders (asd). Several are listed in the reference section of this booklet. The THOMAS training is based on the current understanding of autism, namely that:

- autism (asd) has a biological basis
- children with asd have impairments affecting social understanding, social interactions and relationships, language and communication, play and imagination

- children with asd commonly have specific areas of interest
- frequently children with asd experience additional difficulties such as learning difficulties
- many children with asd experience anxiety in unfamiliar settings
- many children with asd, at times, show obsessional or ritualistic behaviour
- it is not unusual for children with asd to experience rapid changes in emotions
- sensory development is often affected with consequent effects on learning and every day life
- children with asd tend to learn more effectively through visual rather than verbal means
- it is likely that children with asd may learn a new skill in one situation but not be able to apply that learning generally
- many children with asd have difficulties with attention
- children with asd may have well developed memories in certain areas e.g. rote learning and very poor memory skills in other areas e.g. recall of social situations.

The THOMAS approach emphasises the need to work with parents/carers to provide a programme which develops each child's strengths and addresses identified areas of need. Many of the parents/carers who have attended the THOMAS training have happily agreed to the inclusion in this booklet of information about themselves and their children.

Early intervention

Over the past 10 years there has been a marked growth of understanding about autistic spectrum disorders (asd). The impairments associated with autism are now being identified in some children as young as two years of age. People working with very young children are increasingly likely to include children with autistic spectrum disorders in their pre-school settings.

The DfEE research report, "Educational Interventions for Children with Autism : A Literature Review of Recent and Current Research" by Jordan, Jones and Murray (1998), highlighted a common and unacceptable gap between early diagnosis and early educational opportunities. The THOMAS training aims to bridge that gap by providing:

- joint training days for parents and practitioners in appropriate intervention strategies
- local skilled support groups

- curriculum guidelines
- clear expectations about appropriate provision in pre-school settings and in Year R in school.

THOMAS builds on the realistic optimism currently offered by research into outcomes for people with asd. The DfEE research report asserts that appropriate education can make a marked difference to every young person with autism. THOMAS builds on a basis of research and recognised good practice in Hampshire. It focuses on the home, pre-school and Year R settings.

Early Learning Goals

The THOMAS curriculum concurs unreservedly with the stated principles and aims of the Early Learning Goals (1999) published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). It draws attention particularly to several of their principles, namely:

- effective education requires both a relevant curriculum and practitioners who understand and are able to implement the curriculum requirements
- early learning experiences should build on what children already know
- to be effective, an early years curriculum needs to be carefully structured
- practitioners must be able to observe and respond appropriately
- practitioners need to ensure that all children feel included, secure and valued
- children, parents and practitioners must work together.

The QCA outlines a **broad** foundation stage curriculum (covering the pre-school years and Year R) drawing on six identified areas of learning:

- personal, social and emotional development
- language and literacy
- mathematical development
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

The foundation stage curriculum outlines the breadth of experiences that will be on offer to all children in pre-school settings and on school entry. The impairments common to autism, including a narrow range of interests, can make such broad and varied experiences an

uncomfortable challenge to children with asd. Consequently there is a fundamental role for early years practitioners in not only developing each child's strengths, but also in planning experiences which enable the child with autism to engage in a range of unfamiliar activities including many involving social interaction.

Although there is little doubt that autism is a lifelong condition appropriate education makes a difference to every young person with autism. Rita Jordan, Glenys Jones & Dinah Murray (1998: p135) highlight positive outcomes for many on the autistic spectrum:

“successful adults with asd are living independently and that is usually possible because their skills and abilities have been built upon, it does not come from a sole concentration on their difficulties”.

The THOMAS principles

THOMAS is based on the following principles:

- early appropriate intervention makes a difference to all children and their families
- the education of young children starts in the home and at its best continues in local, inclusive pre-school settings
- each child's learning and development is enhanced when those living and working with the child work together
- children with asd experience a range of similar impairments but each individual has unique needs. Individual programmes are needed for individual children. The THOMAS approach is an eclectic approach with each programme drawing from the range of interventions outlined in the THOMAS training
- a problem solving approach to meeting the needs of individual children. Problem solving sessions have a greater chance of success when they combine skilled professional and parental judgements with the recommended strategies
- each programme is unique in its targets for individual children and in its curricular balance. However each programme emphasises the development of social interaction, communication and play
- consistent approaches across Hampshire ease transition between pre-school and school and lessen anxiety for parents/carers, children and practitioners, thereby enhancing learning
- parents/carers have a lead role in the education of their child. The THOMAS approach promotes the shared involvement of all the people who live, work with and support the child with asd. The THOMAS training and support groups are open to parents, carers, grandparents and practitioners
- early interventions in asd are not limited to children with statements of special educational needs, indeed the majority of pre-school children with asd will not have statements.

The THOMAS curriculum

The DfEE research report, “Educational Interventions for Children with Autism : A Literature Review of Recent and Current Research” by Jordan, Jones and Murray (1998: p135), argues for a relevant curriculum and an efficient use of time:

“it is important that we do not squander the child’s time and energy when it is so needed to enable the child to make sense of, and gain acceptance in, a very confusing world”.

The THOMAS training programme repeatedly speaks of “*opening doors*” for children. It promotes a systematic cycle of joint observation, planning, implementation and evaluation to enable the child with asd to firstly experience and eventually gain mastery over an increasing range of experiences, whether these are playing with a new toy, sitting closer to another child, working or playing in a different room or visiting the supermarket.

Appropriate targets

Central to the THOMAS approach is an emphasis on the purposeful, pleasurable and planned use of time in the home and in inclusive early years settings. The aim is for every child’s play plan (individual education plan) to identify targets, strategies and success criteria in each of the following areas:

- social interaction
- language and communication
- play
- the child’s tolerance of the wider every-day environment
- the development of behaviour supportive to learning
- early academic skills
- the generalisation of skills
- the child’s strengths.

Profiling children’s skills

A helpful tool for recording the learning and development of many pre-school children with asd is currently being revised. “The Hampshire Early Years Profile For Children with Social Communication Difficulties/asd” (Hampshire Early Years Profile) is available from the educational psychology service. This profiling tool

supports the recording of the child's current skill levels and enables appropriate targets to be set. It encourages joint problem solving in the child's specific area of need. Importantly it seeks to identify the development of the child's ability to generalise his or her learning. It is recommended that the child's progress is reviewed formally at least termly.

Working on the triad of impairments

The THOMAS training and curriculum guidelines place high priority on developing each child's skills in social interactions and relationships, language, communication and play. Several early years programmes take pre-academic skills as their primary focus. e.g. counting, sorting, colour matching. However in the THOMAS approach the curricular balance emphasises work on the core impairments of autism. Rita Jordan (1998: p135) supports this curricular focus writing:

“There is some doubt whether learning about aspects of subjects such as history, geography or a modern foreign language is really a curricular priority for a pupil whose bizarre behaviour and lack of social understanding is far more likely to lead to problems in adjustment in life later on, than will any lack of academic qualifications.”

Social interaction/social relationships

Many young children with social communication impairments/asd have had few consistent/pleasurable social experiences with a range of adults or other children. Commonly the child's discomfort in social situations, or the unpredictability of his or her responses, has led to parents/carers adjusting their family life around their child and limiting their social experiences. THOMAS takes the perspective that developing the child's early toleration/enjoyment of social interactions will lead to greater long-term quality of life. As the child grows he/she will need to make friends, share a home and work and learn with others.

THOMAS focuses on the first steps needed to develop the child's social abilities, namely to be able to:

- tolerate, for brief periods, a widening range of social situations
- play with, sit with and work alongside, a range of adults
- play with, sit with and work alongside another child/other children.

The following levels of social interaction provide some starting points for those living/working with a young child with asd.

Developing social interaction - areas to work on:

- **Proximity:** increasing the child's ability to be near one familiar child, a range of individual children/pairs or small groups of children/larger groups
- **Looking:** increasing the child's ability to watch his or her peers and notice things about them
- **Turn taking:** increasing the child's willingness to engage in turn taking activities with a range of adults/other children
- **Simple rules and routines:** developing the child's understanding of the simple rules and routines in social situations, such as sitting to eat lunch
- **Practical co-operative work (other than play):** developing the child's ability to work with another, such as carrying a box with another child
- **Co-operative play:** developing the child's ability to play alongside/with another child in increasingly less adult structured and directed situations
- **Sharing:** developing the child's ability to share space, toys and equipment
- **Gaining attention:** developing the child's ability to gain the attention of an adult or child in socially appropriate ways
- **Reciprocal social interaction:** developing the child's ability to apply many of the above skills almost intuitively in relaxed social interactions.

Language and communication

Children with asd vary enormously in their language and communication skills. The range includes children who:

- use wide vocabularies and talk in long and detailed sentences
- ask questions over and over again
- don't communicate verbally, but communicate with gesture
- communicate very little and appear not to understand the purpose of communication
- find eye contact aversive
- copy word for word chunks of video or the speech of nearby adults (echolalia)
- understand some single words
- understand whole sentences when given in a predictable context
- can do all of the above but do not understand the need to.

The THOMAS approach places emphasis on the development of meaningful communication. The planning and delivery of THOMAS reflects joint working between education and speech and language therapy services. Emphasis is placed on:

- the development of meaningful, purposeful spontaneous communication. No emphasis is placed in the THOMAS training on teaching children to imitate, in rote ways, the language of adults. In contrast, the THOMAS approach focuses on providing children with ASD with the motivation and the means to initiate communication spontaneously
- adults working together to plan, do and review agreed programmes for children
- the need to maintain the communication skills and enthusiasm of the adults living/working with the child. It is easy for the communication skills of the adults to fade away when the child has a communication impairment and makes little response.

The THOMAS approach builds on the need to enhance and maintain the communicative skills shown typically by parents and babies in their first interactions. It links closely with the National Autistic Society's 'EarlyBird' programme. Additionally, for many children on the autistic spectrum it is recommended that spontaneous two-way communication is initially taught through the use of PECS, the Picture Exchange Communication System. The focus is placed on developing the child's understanding of communication and on the spontaneous functional use of language. In the THOMAS programme, language and communication skills are not taught through drills but are taught in appropriate meaningful contexts.

Play

THOMAS is committed to the daily right of the child to play and learn about play:

“The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purpose as education: society and public authorities shall endeavour to promote the employment of this right.”

(United Nations, 1948: Principle 7)

For the purposes of the THOMAS training play is taken to include:

- the play which the child might choose to do in periods of recreation e.g. carefully and repetitively inspecting just one toy; repetitively spinning a top or lining up cars
- play which is typical of other pre-school children e.g. representational play in which a toy object such as an apple represents the real object, symbolic play in which a non-

representative object represents the real object e.g. a brick is used as an apple and role play/sociodramatic play in which the child takes on a different role in a make believe play story with other children or an adult.

Working from a developmental perspective, the THOMAS training invites participants to accept the challenge of working directly on the play skills of very young children with autism. This is a new area for many and indeed there are few acknowledged experts. Recent work by Professor Gill Boucher (1999) highlights the need to focus on play so that the child with autism can:

- be included in normal childhood activities
- experience peer interaction
- learn about the social world around them i.e. their culture
- learn and practise new skills in safe surroundings
- develop their thinking skills
- experience the fun of play.

The work on play is based on careful observations of the child's play skills. The Hampshire Early Years Profile helps guide this. Interventions include adult directed play experiences and child led approaches. THOMAS also emphasises the importance of including the child with asd in a peer group with higher levels of play skills. The THOMAS training outlines the range of roles which the adult needs to adopt if they are to develop play.

Developing tolerance

Working on the child's ability to tolerate a range of pre-school experiences holds a key position in the THOMAS approach. Limited interests and a liking for things to remain the same are common features of young children with autism. For some children the anxiety levels generated by changes in routine and the introduction of new experiences can lead to extremes of behaviour including screaming, biting, hitting, running away, hand flapping or, indeed, self injurious behaviour in which children hit themselves, bite themselves or head bang. This is very distressing to all and commonly leads to a lessening of the experiences offered to the child. Whilst this may be appropriate in the immediacy of the upset, the THOMAS approach emphasises the need for systematic planning to develop the child's ability to tolerate a wider range of pre-school experiences.

Working on strengths

Many children with autistic spectrum disorders have particular interests and strengths. For some children these outshine many of their skills in other areas and also stand out amongst their peer group. THOMAS stresses that these skills should be recognised and nurtured in the pre-school/early years setting. It is important that the child reaches his/her potential in these areas of strength and receives positive feedback from adults and other children. It is, however, important that obsessive interests do not consume too much of the child's important learning time. A balance needs to be struck with time managed sensitively.

Early academic skills

The THOMAS approach places emphasis on the achievement of pre/early literacy and numeracy skills and the exploratory problem solving skills which underpin early learning. As with all successful early years programmes the expectation is that each child learns best through carefully planned and matched first hand experiences. The teaching of early academic skills combines the visual structures common to TEACCH (The Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children) with the behavioural approaches common to Portage.

It is recommended that each child should receive daily periods of focused, small step skill teaching. Additionally time is set aside to secure, not only the independent completion of tasks, but also the application and generalisation of the newly learnt skills to other learning situations.

Generalisation

'Being able to generalise' is not usually listed as a curriculum area. However the THOMAS approach specifically emphasises this area of work. The Hampshire Early Years Profile for children with asd provides a system for recording the development of generalisation. THOMAS places emphasis on the meaningful and functional consolidation of skills. Generalisation is taken to be the ability of the child to demonstrate their learning:

- using a range of different equipment
- in different locations
- with different adults
- in the company of different children.

Working on behaviour

It is important that the child with social and communication impairment learns many of the conventional behaviours common in early years settings such as:

- sitting to look at a book
- sitting on a chair or the carpet
- listening to another child/adult
- completing a task chosen by self or adult
- remaining calm when a loud noise is heard
- attending to a task chosen by self or adult
- touching and using a range of pre-school materials and tools e.g. paint, sand, water, playdoh, paper, pencil, scissors
- sitting with a group to sing
- asking and answering questions
- eating/drinking in an environment outside the home.

For many children with asd these skills are not learnt incidentally by watching and copying their family members or other small children. It is important to ease transfer into group learning settings by focusing on the development of behaviour conducive to learning.

The THOMAS strategies

The THOMAS strategies are summarised by the acronym **VIP: Very Important Practice**. VIP is made up of a range of compatible strategies which have a proven record of success for young children with social communication difficulties.

VIP: Very Important Practice

V

- visual structure to the environment and to individual activities

I

- individual programmes developed to match each child's individual needs and strengths
- individual periods of 1 : 1 skill teaching using behavioural approaches
- interaction games and opportunities
- inclusive environment

P

- partnership with parents and professionals
- plan, do, review
- play and communication
- positive behaviour management.

V....

The backbone to VIP is provided by the use of visual structure. Drawing on the TEACCH approach the THOMAS training outlines the central importance of:

- a well planned, uncluttered environment which provides information to the child, visually, about what to do and where to do it
- clear daily routines
- visually clear outlines to each session so that all children, including the children with asd, know what to expect. e.g. visual timetables or schedules using objects of reference, photos, symbols or words
- visually clear activities which enable the child to understand the nature of the task, especially what has to be done to finish it.

This visual clarity supports the implementation of individual daily programmes to meet each child's needs and builds on his or her strengths.



The THOMAS training guides practitioners to include the essential elements of VIP in the child's daily programmes. All children should experience:

- **Individual programmes** matched to their needs and strengths. These should focus on developing the child's interests and special skills whilst also working on the core areas of difficulty:
 - social interaction
 - language and communication
 - play.
- **Individual behavioural sessions** focusing on the early learning of skills and their generalisation. The THOMAS training introduces the behavioural approaches common in Portage. This involves all relevant adults in setting targets, analysing tasks, teaching tiny sub-skills and the appropriate use of rewards. THOMAS is different from many other programmes which currently use behavioural methods. THOMAS, whilst emphasising the need for daily sessions devoted to 1 : 1 skill learning, places more emphasis on activities which focus on the communication skills and social development of the child.
- **Interaction and communication opportunities** that are planned and delivered according to the child's needs. The range of activities will vary according to need, e.g. playing peep-bo with a familiar adult, a 1 : 1 singing session using a familiar action song, turn-taking in a group of three/four other children, joining in the supporting actions with a group of ten children enjoying a story.
- **Inclusive education** Enabling the child with an asd to learn alongside other typically developing children has proved very successful for many children in Hampshire. Parents and practitioners have valued the outcomes for their children in these settings.

P....

Parent and professional partnerships

The THOMAS approach provides parents and professionals with the opportunity to work together to promote socially appropriate behaviour, learning and play.

Plan, do and review

Parents and professionals working together to regularly 'plan, do and review' each child's individual programme is a key aspiration of THOMAS. Problem solving together is the central way that individual programmes are developed to meet the needs of the individual child.

Play and communication

The emphasis on play as a learning tool for children with social communication impairment, although in its relative infancy around the world, is highly valued in Hampshire. Detailed work is ongoing to build on the existing expertise in play development. This is part of the THOMAS training and enables practitioners to recognise and develop their own skills and that of the child.

A quarter of the THOMAS training focuses on tools and strategies for assessing and developing play. Local video material introduces a range of positive strategies showing adults working with children in several ways.

The adult roles include:

- observer/record keeper and joint problem solver
- environmental planner, planning and organising the toys and the children in the space provided
- play reflector, giving a non-directive verbal commentary on the child's self-selected play activities
- play prompter, guiding the play and promoting interaction using verbal and visual prompts
- play director, arranging the props, narrating the story, assigning the roles, detailing the behaviour
- play coach, teaching new play skills and supporting their transfer into appropriate social situations
- play model, demonstrating appropriate play behaviour
- play partner, joining in the child's play, following the child's lead

- questioner, posing questions to lead the play on
- social guide, teaching the child about the social conventions of play, such as how to invite a peer to play
- fortuitous time-keeper/moment snatcher, seizing the moment when the opportunity for play presents itself and recognising the time when it is appropriate for play to end.

The THOMAS approach involves families and practitioners selecting, according to need, from this range of directive and non-directive play strategies.

Formats for recording the progress of play skills are provided during the THOMAS training.

Positive behaviour management

THOMAS training outlines a positive approach to managing behaviour. The approach, based on the work of LaVigna & Donellan (1968) & Schopler (1995), underpins the work in many Hampshire schools. This promotes consistency across settings and most importantly on transfer to school. The approach recognises fundamental links between the communication impairments of children with autism and inappropriate behaviour i.e. that a child's behaviour might reflect the child's attempt to communicate his or her needs, albeit in a way described by adults as difficult, challenging, or inappropriate. The THOMAS training focuses on:

- assessment of the environmental contribution to inappropriate behaviour and the development of interventions which modify the environment to minimise inappropriate behaviour and maximise appropriate behaviour
- assessment of those factors in the environment which the child needs to develop a tolerance of, in order to learn
- assessment of what the inappropriate behaviour may be communicating
- development of interventions which teach the child new skills, e.g. more appropriate ways to communicate their needs
- assessment of positive reinforcers to develop a broader range of socially appropriate reinforcers.

The THOMAS approach focuses particularly on three areas for intervention:

1 The management of the environment

Making the environment clear and predictable for the child through the use of visual structure is a central THOMAS strategy.

Predictability is seen to lessen anxiety and increase appropriate behaviour for many children.

2 **Increasing the child's tolerance**

Increasing the child's tolerance of people, materials and work-demands is a useful focus in the pre-school years.

3 **Teaching new and useful skills**

Many young children with asd have relevant skills but have difficulty applying them appropriately. Others have yet to develop specific useful skills such as turn taking on a structured task. Parents and practitioners are keen to enhance appropriate skills which support learning. THOMAS begins to address that need.

Underpinning research

The THOMAS training has drawn on many of the interventions outlined in the DfEE report (1998) which details the range of early interventions in asd under six headings. The THOMAS training builds on that review and offers a range of compatible, pertinent interventions. The six types of intervention highlighted in the report are:

Integration approaches. These models are committed to the inclusion of children with asd in mainstream settings. One integration model developed by Strain and Cordisco (1994) has been carefully evaluated in the USA over a period of 16 years showing positive outcomes for children. Integration models highlight the importance of play, the advantages of mainstream role models, the close involvement of parents and the importance of systematic skill learning with planned generalisation opportunities.

THOMAS is committed to inclusive experiences for all pre-school children. Play is a particular area for detailed observation and intervention. The need to develop skills through repeated small step learning and generalisation is fundamental to the THOMAS model. Parents and pre-school workers are offered regular additional support in this area from the Hampshire Portage Service.

Visual structure. This approach has been largely developed by Lord and Schopler (1994) working for Division TEACCH in North Carolina. It emphasises that children with autism learn better in a structured learning environment in which the routines of the day and the visual clarity of the environment address the child's need for predictability.

The THOMAS training makes use of Hampshire's officially accredited TEACCH trainers. It promotes the use of visual structure to help the child understand the expectations of the pre-school setting, predict the day's activities and lessen his/her anxiety about change. Visual structure is recommended as a fundamental intervention for all children with asd. Using visual structure children are introduced to aspects of the day including times to play, communication groups and a sociable snack time.

Interactive approaches. These emphasise the importance of developing good relationships with significant adults at home and in the pre-school/early years setting. Interventions focus on these relationships as a foundation for further learning and communication. Interactive approaches place the adult in responsive mode, following the child's lead, imitating the child's words and actions, building on the child's responses to develop turn taking routines.

The THOMAS training includes strategies for developing communication and play, which build directly on the interactive model.

Approaches focusing on communication. These interventions focus on developing the child's ability to initiate communication.

The THOMAS training introduces the Picture Exchange Communication System known as PECS developed by Bondy and Frost in 1994 and emphasises the need to develop communication/turn taking games and routines. Guided by speech and language therapists, the THOMAS training acknowledges the differences in the communication skills of children with asd. Of core importance in the THOMAS approach is the need to maintain and develop communication as a) a two-way process and b) fun. A motivated child engaging in spontaneous communication is the aim.

Daily Life Therapy. This model combines the eastern philosophy which emphasises a relationship between the child's body, mind and spirit with the Japanese tradition of group education. It values clear routines, teaching delivered to a group of children with autism and regular and frequent sessions of intense physical exercise.

The THOMAS approach emphasises the importance of routine and regular physical exercise for all pre-school children.

Behavioural approaches. Behavioural approaches work systematically towards the achievement of skills. Each skill is broken down into sub-skills which are taught and practised until the child has mastered each one. These activities are often referred to as drills in which a stimulus for learning evokes a successful response from the child with consequent reward e.g.

- **stimulus** (the learning activity): child to sort 12 counters, 6 red and 6 yellow into two bowls
- **response** (the child's response): the child correctly places the counters in the two bowls
- **reward** (what happens next which increases motivation and learning): the child is rewarded socially e.g. with a smile or with a tangible reward e.g. part of a crisp.

Skill teaching using behavioural approaches requires regular brief one to one learning sessions. These are needed to develop the new skills, consolidate the skills being learnt and reinforce past learning. Additional planning and intervention time needs to be set aside to enable the child to apply each skill in a range of different settings. Without this generalisation the child's learning is unlikely to become useful.

THOMAS promotes the teaching of skills using a behavioural approach based on the philosophy and practice of Portage. This enhances consistency across the county and across different settings for children and their families.

The THOMAS approach promotes the regular and systematic application of behavioural approaches in daily 1 : 1 learning sessions. Such sessions are likely, initially, to be both brief and frequent. This enables the child to develop appropriate learning behaviour little by little. As the child begins to enjoy skill learning, the time spent in 1 : 1 sessions is increased. The THOMAS training is not prescriptive about the amount of time spent in 1 : 1 sessions, but recommends an approach which develops individual programmes for each child dependent on the examination of up-to-date evidence about their learning.

The THOMAS approach promotes the need to work broadly and intensively with each child to enhance development in the core areas of impairment alongside the attainment of early academic skills. Sessions focusing on skill teaching are carefully balanced with other strategies including interaction games, play, group activities and planned opportunities for generalisation.

The approach does not support prolonged periods of 1 : 1 behavioural learning common in some other approaches (e.g. Lovaas 1981). It does not support any approaches to learning which fail to promote the active engagement of the child in meaningful learning experiences and which ignore/condone distressing the child in the interest of lengthy periods of drill.

A balanced approach

THOMAS draws further on the findings of Dawson and Osterling (1997). Following their review of eight programmes for children with ASD they identified several elements commonly associated with success:

- parental involvement
- early onset of intervention
- a high level of structure, including the use of visual cueing and prompting
- a highly supportive teaching environment, including high staff ratios
- a selective curricular content including imitation, attention to task, language development, play, social interaction and preparation for the school setting

- skill teaching, including the application of behavioural techniques and the transfer of learning into situations involving other people and other settings
- the intensity of intervention, most involved 20 hours per week
- a focus on generalising new skills
- a focus on transition into school.

The THOMAS programme recognises these findings and adds to them. In the Hampshire approach very specific focus is placed on:

- the triad of impairments, including play skills
- the child's strengths
- the development of early educational skills
- the generalisation of learning
- the development of the child's tolerance of a range of experiences common to family life
- the development of the child's tolerance of a range of experiences common in pre-school and Year R.

The THOMAS programme is committed to working purposefully and intensively with children across home and pre-school/early years settings. This is achieved by focusing on clear shared targets for the child developed through the use of agreed appropriate strategies. THOMAS recognises the importance of families and professionals working in partnership, each playing their part in meeting the needs of the pre-school child.

The THOMAS training, which is open to all those living and working with the pre-school child, offers ongoing regular support and consultation groups during training and when training is over.

Evaluation

During the first year of operation (i.e. 1999 – 2000) initial evaluations were made of the THOMAS training including:

- 1 **Course evaluation** forms were distributed at the end of each day's training.
- 2 **Review and reflection** notes were gathered from participants. Each training day allocated time for participants to exchange information about their changing practice. They were invited to identify any changes which emanated from the THOMAS training. Parents and practitioners eagerly shared the practical applications of their learning.
- 3 **Video material** was gathered in a sample of pre-school settings and analysed for changes in practice.

During the first year those delivering THOMAS were pleased with the developing practice.

The second year of the THOMAS training will be supported by further evaluations namely:

- a question sheet for parents pre and post training (Resource Sheet 2)
- a pre-school setting checklist (Resource Sheet 1)
- a progress log for individual children (Resource Sheet 3).

The Resource Sheets are in the back of this booklet.

Hampshire children and their pre-school experiences

As in any large geographical area Hampshire has an assortment of pre-school education settings and services including:

- the home
- the local playgroup/pre-school
- Hampshire County Council (HCC) nurseries (inclusive settings and those providing solely for children with special educational needs)
- private nurseries
- opportunity groups
- nurture assessment groups
- early years classes in schools catering solely for children with identified special educational needs
- Portage home visiting service
- Portage outreach service
- outreach from special schools/early years centres
- children's centres.

Some of these are run in partnership with other agencies such as health and social services.

The families and staff who attended the initial THOMAS training were involved in this full range of settings. They have provided samples of the experiences of Hampshire children. (The names of the children have been changed to preserve confidentiality).

Mark (supporting transition into mainstream school)

Mark is four and a half years old and working towards full-time attendance at his local mainstream primary school. Individual support and transition plans are in place. The three main services involved are the Portage service, the mainstream school and the outreach service from a Beacon Special School.

Mark receives one and a half hours/week Portage home visiting from his Portage worker and a further one and a half hours/week home visiting from the learning support assistant based in his local mainstream school. He attends school one hour/day. The Portage

home visitor, learning support assistant, mainstream teacher, the special school outreach teacher and the educational psychologist meet regularly to plan his learning programme and manage the gradual transition into full time schooling. Currently Mark receives approximately 18 hours provision/week which is gradually building up to full time school attendance.

The Portage worker has undertaken the Advanced Portage Training in autistic spectrum disorders, the learning support assistant is also Portage and THOMAS trained, as is the classteacher. All the adults have been amazed by Mark's progress.

Oliver (a pre-school and a special needs nursery support each other)

Oliver is three years old. He attends a HCC special needs nursery setting three mornings/week and two further days in a local pre-school where he stops for lunch. The HCC nursery provides outreach to the pre-school and two key pre-school staff have received THOMAS training. The rest of his week is spent at home.

David (a pre-school and family working closely together)

David's mother works closely with the pre-school. David attends five sessions and David's mum, the pre-school leader, a speech and language therapist and an educational psychologist all worked together on the THOMAS training. Pre-school staff and David's mother frequently problem solve together. David's mum is well supported by family and friends and her best friend has also received THOMAS training.

Julia (working with grandparents)

Julia's grandad, pre-school teacher and speech and language therapist all attended the THOMAS training together. Julia spends three sessions at pre-school, spending the rest of the week between mum/dad and grandad.

Jason (inclusive nursery and parents learning together)

Jason spends five mornings in a HCC inclusive nursery and five afternoons with his mother. His teacher is experienced in working with children with autism, his mother attended THOMAS training with a learning support assistant from the nursery.

Michael (works/plays in a variety of settings)

His mother, the pre-school staff and his Portage home visitor all attended THOMAS training and offer a consistency of approach.

This is Michael's weekly diary:

Monday	a.m. Pre-school p.m. Daily walk for up to an hour.
Tuesday	a.m. Homestart visitor takes Michael out for a walk and to the park for one - two hours p.m. Mum works with Michael at home
Wednesday	a.m. Pre-school p.m. Portage home visit
Thursday	a.m. Daily walk p.m. Mum works with Michael at home Local Gym Club
Friday	a.m. Pre-school p.m. Pre-school – mum joins the pre-school over lunch time

Celebrations

Edward

Edward's teacher writes about her use of visual structure and song when including Edward in an inclusive setting

Edward is a three year old boy with an asd (no diagnosis) who has been attending an inclusive nursery with 35 children in the afternoons since January. He particularly enjoys sand and water. He initially allowed adults and peers to play alongside him and has gradually, over a term, let them participate in his play e.g. he will turn take with the sand wheel with another child.

Edward has an extensive repertoire of songs and can imitate a variety of rhymes such as 'Baa Baa Black Sheep'. His interest in songs has provided a wonderful way of encouraging him to join circle time. When he doesn't want to join the group, the children sing his favourite song and he will then come and join them. All the children love this!

Edward has a structured afternoon, which helps to reduce his anxiety. As soon as he arrives his schedule directs him to a favourite activity. He uses a picture to remind him of where he is going as it is easy to get lost in a busy nursery. With a visual clue always in his hand, he is beginning to move around the nursery independently. It is a useful way of bringing him in from the garden as well!

Edward is able to imitate a number of words and phrases. We are encouraging him to make requests by using PECS, which is used at home and nursery. Recently, after a slow start he has begun to exchange symbols eagerly. Everyone, at both home and nursery are thrilled with this momentous step. Things don't always happen immediately; we have learned to be patient. Everyone involved with

Edward liaises regularly to share successes and any concerns. We try to implement programmes at home to ensure consistency in Edward's life. This not only benefits the family but ensures that new skills Edward has learned at nursery are not forgotten in the holidays.

(Edward's mother and learning support assistant attended the THOMAS training.)

Georgie

Georgie's keyworker writes about the effects of PECS on enhancing communication

Georgie has been a member of our nursery for just four months. Her progress has been remarkable during this time. She quickly became popular with her keyworker group.

The children want to be her friend and accept that the expectations for Georgie are different. They have been quick to help discourage her love for inappropriate climbing. In February, we set up a schedule for Georgie. In a short while she was able to use it effectively, giving structure to her day. In addition to this, we introduced the use of PECS; once again it was quickly successful.

Only recently, Georgie decided my response was not quick enough during our snack session. As I was speaking to another child, she chose to exchange her PECS card with Emily who spontaneously and confidently said,

“Thank you Georgie - you want cake”.

Emily broke a piece off, handed it to Georgie, and then placed the cake symbol back in the PECS book. What a pleasure to see and share. Georgie is a happy, fun loving rewarding child. We are so pleased that she is part of our group.

(Georgie's father and keyworker attended the THOMAS training together).

Damien

Increasing visual structure to solve problems

Damien's mum, the pre-school leader and the educational psychologist sat together at the end of a pre-school session. The item on the agenda was how best to develop Damien's play. A recent development had been Damien's joy when tickled by three playmates on the floor cushions. The problem was that the pre-school leader had also hoped to develop some turn taking games in this area using pop-up toys. This was proving really difficult because every time Damien was approached in the floor cushion area he lay down for a tickle.

Thinking about the importance of visual clarity and Damien's favourite pop-up toy the pre-school leader decided to have a mat in a different part of the room for turn taking play. She also put a photo on the wall of Damien and a grown-up playing nicely. Just this simple bit of visual structure made a lot of difference.

(The pre-school leader and Damien's mother have attended THOMAS training).

Ben

Ben's Portage home visitor reports how a non-directive approach promoted communication

Ben receives Portage home visiting and is rapidly developing many of the skills listed on the cognitive checklist. He can sort colours, match pictures and count. However Ben's mum felt that she and Ben never really had fun together and that Ben's life (and hers) were all work. With her Portage worker she began using a non-directive play approach based on 'Special Time', an approach developed by Helen Cockerill.

For the first time Ben engaged in meaningful eye-contact, quietly and verbally communicated and appeared to relax. Ben's mum commented that 'this wouldn't be right for all families' but it is for us.

(Ben's Portage home visitor learnt about non-directive play in the Advanced Portage Training, held in Hampshire).

John

John's keyworker describes a range of play experiences and an invite to a party

We started by introducing John to new toys in his structured 1 : 1 teaching time. Once he knew how to use them they were taken into the nursery for him to play with there. We also introduced 'Special Time' through the daily schedule. This takes place in a quiet area on a special mat. John enjoys this time. He has his favourite toys and explores them without any pressure on him. John particularly enjoys flicking cards, any cards he can find. We have had to gradually limit these as they can stop him accessing anything else. He loves being outside in the garden in all weathers. He has had great fun playing hide and seek with the other children.

A thrill for his family and us this term was John's first invite to a party. How exciting . . . and he loved it.

(John's keyworker and mother had attended the THOMAS training).

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*(NAS) - available from the Publications Department of the National Autistic Society: 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG. UK

** (WP) - available from Winslow Press, Telford Road, Bicester, Oxon OX6 0TS. UK

Helpful addresses for support/advice

Hampshire Autistic Society, 1634 Parkway, Solent Business Park, Fareham PO15 7AH – Tel. No. 01489 880890

National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NE – Tel. No. 020 7833 2299

Central Hampshire Portage Team, Shepherds Down School Staff House 1, Shepherds Lane, Compton, Winchester SO21 2AJ – Tel. No. 01962 715074

Fareham & Gosport Portage Team, Haven Early Years Centre, Harris Road, Gosport PO13 0UY – Tel. No. 01329 283498

Farnborough/Aldershot Portage Team, Fernhill School Block F, Neville Duke Road, Farnborough GU14 9BY - Tel. No. 01276 38331

Havant Portage Team, Mill Hill Early Years Centre, Mill Road, Waterlooville PO7 7DB – Tel. No. 023 9226 1057

New Forest Portage Team, Room 10, Child Development Service, Ashurst Hospital, Lindhurst Road, Ashurst, Southampton, Hants – Tel. No. 023 8029 3768

North Hants Portage Team, C/o Beech Down Primary School, Gershwin Road, Basingstoke RG22 4HQ – Tel. No. 01256 359002

Petersfield Portage Team, The Petersfield School, Cranford Avenue, Petersfield GU32 2LX – Tel No. 01730 233679

Dave Reid, Parent Partnership Officer, Education County Office, The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UG – Tel. No. 01962 845870

Early Education and Childcare Unit, The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UG – Tel. No. 01962 846452

SEN Service, County Education Office, The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UG – Tel. No. 01962 841841

Fleet Local Education Office, Birch House, Barley Way, Fleet GU13 8YB – Tel. No. 01252 812333

Havant Local Education Office, River Way, Havant PO9 2EL – Tel No. 023 9249 8200

New Forest Local Education Office, Winsor Road, Bartley, Southampton SO40 2HR – Tel No. 023 8081 2113

Winchester Local Education Office, Clarendon House, Romsey Road, Winchester SO22 5PW – Tel. No. 01962 869611

Glossary

The following terms are commonly used in relation to autism.

Asperger's syndrome

A condition with strong similarities to autism, but where the individual's early language development is not delayed and may even be precocious. Language, however, is still used in a stilted and stereotyped manner. Intellectually, individual's with Asperger's syndrome usually function in the normal range of ability.

Atypical autism

A diagnosis usually reserved for those individuals who display the characteristics of autism in two of the three key areas.

Developmental receptive language disorder

A disorder characterised by a difficulty in understanding speech and language.

Echolalia

A term referring to the repetition of words or phrases. Echolalia may occur immediately after the phrases have been said, or may be delayed and occur some time later.

Elective mutism

A disorder characterised by mutism in specific situations (ie the child speaks only in certain circumstances). Often there is evidence of extreme shyness and sensitivity.

Epilepsy

A group of conditions resulting from abnormal electrical discharges in the brain which can produce seizures and disturbances of consciousness.

Fragile X syndrome

An inherited chromosomal abnormality that leads to learning difficulties.

Hyperlexia

The ability to read fluently and often with correct expression, but without understanding the meaning of the text.

Pervasive developmental disorder

This is a term often used synonymously with autism when there are insufficient features for the diagnosis of autism.

Pragmatics

Are defined as the rules governing the use of language in a given context or culture. The individual with pragmatic difficulties lacks awareness of these rules and of the needs of their conversational partner.

Savant abilities

Having special talents, often in music, drawing or calculation, much in advance of other skill levels.

Semantics

Are defined as 'understanding the precise meaning of words'. Semantic difficulties involve failing to understand words and to differentiate meaning.

Specific language delay

Where language is delayed in relation to overall development.

TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren)

An educational intervention programme, which uses structured teaching, visual and systematic systems to develop independent working.

Resource materials

Resource Materials

Development of Social, Semantic and Pragmatic Language/Communication

Materials Title, Authors, Publisher	Description of Use	Concept/Skills	Evaluative Comments (e.g. ease of use, interest to pupils, presentation of visual materials)
Why? Because – LDA	To develop knowledge /understanding of cause/effect relationships		
Photo Emotions – LDA 48 colour cards	To develop ability to interpret and label facial expressions & associated emotions, causes etc		
What's Wrong? – LDA 68 colour cards	Building skills in explaining similarities/differences and recognising visual absurdities		
Things That Go Together – LDA	Developing skills of association, vocabulary/ word finding, classification, explaining		
Source book of pragmatic activities: Revised – Psychological Corp	126 lessons. Topicalisation, register, conversation, syntactic forms, effective language		Some very useful ideas for all children with social communication problems – clear
Verbal Reasoning Assessment – Canterbury and Thanet Speech and Language Therapy Department	Assesses skills in defining, cause and effect, deduction, inference, word recall, analogy, similarities/ differences, reasoning		Useful in pinpointing more exact areas of difficulty (probably more so for speech and language therapists)

Materials Title, Authors, Publisher	Description of Use	Concept/Skills	Evaluative Comments (e.g. ease of use, interest to pupils, presentation of visual materials)
Colorcards: Sequencing Social Situations – Winslow	Cards showing everyday social situations – for sequencing and discussion	Sequencing, social skills	Good quality photos
Face Race - Early Learning Centre	Set of face cards – some monsters, some people, vinyl facial features	Awareness of facial features	
Mr Face – NES Arnold	Velcro eyebrows, eyes and mouths which can be put on 'Mr Face' wall hanging to show happy, sad, angry faces	Awareness of emotions and facial expression	

Resource Sheets



Resource Sheet 1

Addressing the needs of children with social communication impairments/asd in pre-school and early years settings

A prompt sheet for self-reflective practitioners and those visiting their settings

Circle as appropriate

No Partially Yes

The environment

- 1 Is the playroom organised into clearly defined areas...
2 Are the toys/equipment stored together by function or type...
3 Are the toys/equipment appropriately labelled using various methods...
4 Are the individual activities presented in a visually clear manner...
5 Is there a visual timetable for all the children and an individual timetable for the child with social communication difficulties?

	No		Par- tially		Yes
The curriculum					
Content					
1 Does the setting offer a wide range of pre-school/early years experiences in keeping with the foundation stage?	0	1	2	3	4
2 Does the curriculum include daily opportunities to focus on the development of:					
a social interaction	0	1	2	3	4
b language and communication	0	1	2	3	4
c play	0	1	2	3	4
d the child's strengths	0	1	2	3	4
e early academic skills	0	1	2	3	4
f the use of skills in a range of contexts	0	1	2	3	4
g the child's tolerance of the wider everyday environment i.e. the introduction of new toys, equipment, sensory experiences	0	1	2	3	4
h the development of behaviour supportive to learning e.g. sitting, looking, attending, listening?	0	1	2	3	4
3 Does the curriculum provide the child with regular opportunities to 'relax', 'just be'?	0	1	2	3	4
Curriculum delivery					
1 Is there a routine to each session and is that routine referred to regularly, either visually or verbally?	0	1	2	3	4
2 Do adults support their communication with the children by using simplified language, gesture, pictures, demonstration?	0	1	2	3	4

	No		Par- tially		Yes
3 Is there a variety in the size and type of learning groups?	0	1	2	3	4
4 Does the child receive a daily period of 1 : 1 teaching?	0	1	2	3	4
5 Are the child's learning aims and learning targets set and reviewed co-operatively with parents and other professionals?	0	1	2	3	4
6 Do all adults know what the targets are?	0	1	2	3	4
7 Does the child know what the targets are?	0	1	2	3	4
8 Does the setting offer a balance of adult lead and child selected activities?	0	1	2	3	4
9 Does the setting:					
a name a key worker	0	1	2	3	4
b work systematically towards familiarity with more than one adult?	0	1	2	3	4
10 Is there a written play plan/IEP for the child with targets focusing on relevant areas?	0	1	2	3	4
11 Do the staff apply behavioural approaches to skill teaching?	0	1	2	3	4

Quality of interactions

1 Is there a balance between independent playing and playing with others?	0	1	2	3	4
2 Is the setting actively engaging the child with asd in action-songs/singing games?	0	1	2	3	4
3 Are the adults sensitively promoting peer interaction for the focused child e.g. by prompting/coaching peers in how to play with the child with an asd?	0	1	2	3	4

	No	1	2	3	4
4 Do the adults provide the child with planned opportunities to receive positive feedback on his/her behaviour and work? e.g.:	0	1	2	3	4
i the High Scope 'Plan Do Review' procedure					
ii the use of Special Time techniques, such as making a running commentary on activities					
5 Do adults talk to each other about the child's play and how to move it on?	0	1	2	3	4
6 Do adults join in with the child's play?	0	1	2	3	4
Parental/professional involvement					
1 Does the setting formally seek to identify/share/solve problems with others as part of a plan/do/review process?	0	1	2	3	4
Adults' Skills/Knowledge/Reflective practitioner					
1 Have the staff experience/training in language impairment or asd?	0	1	2	3	4
2 Do the staff have planned time to:					
a observe and note children's developments	0	1	2	3	4
b plan programmes	0	1	2	3	4
c review progress and practice?	0	1	2	3	4
Managing Behaviour					
1 Do the adults in the setting offer consistent responses to behaviours?	0	1	2	3	4
2 Can those working in the setting name the rewards which individual children value?	0	1	2	3	4

	No	Partially		Yes	
3 Is a controlled amount of time planned into the session for the child to engage in repetitive behaviour where appropriate?	0	1	2	3	4
4 Are there agreed targets and a systematic plan to increase the child's tolerance of identified situations e.g. sitting with a group on the carpet/playing a small group game?	0	1	2	3	4
5 Do parents and professionals problem solve together, sharing successful ideas?	0	1	2	3	4
6 Does the setting have a list of principles guiding problem solving?	0	1	2	3	4
7 Are adults' voices in the setting calm and respectful?	0	1	2	3	4
8 Are there agreed systems within the setting to manage change/prepare for change?	0	1	2	3	4

Adults' skills/Knowledge/ Reflective practitioner

Min

Max

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Managing behaviour

Min

Max

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

Moving on

Date _____

- A Look at each potential area for development. Realistically what score would you like your setting to achieve in 6 months time?

The environment

The curriculum

Curriculum delivery

Quality of interactions

Parental/Professional Involvement

Adults' skills/Knowledge/Reflective Practitioner

Managing behaviour

B Look through the checklist again and name three actions which can be taken in your setting in the next 6 - 8 weeks

1

2

3

C How are you going to remember your plan of action?



Question sheet for parents

Parent's name _____ Date _____

1 How do you let your child know what is going to happen each day?
(please tick)

tell them

draw pictures

show photos

use objects e.g. wave swimming trucks to indicate swimming

use symbol cards

other

2 What three phrases or sayings do you think you say most to your child?

- _____

- _____

- _____

- 3 Approximately how much time each day do you spend having fun with your child?

What do you do in this time?

- 4 How confident do you feel about
- a explaining your child's difficulties to others (*please circle a rating number*)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
totally lacking in confidence totally confident

- b your understanding of the reasons behind some of your child's unusual behaviours?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
totally lacking in confidence totally confident

- 5 What one target do you think/hope your child will achieve in the next month or two?

- 6 Apart from yourself, who else knows this is your target?

Thank you for completing the six questions.

Your answers will be kept confidential and only used in the evaluation of the THOMAS training.



Resource Sheet 3

The THOMAS tracking tool

Please circle to show which statements best describe your child's skills

Child's name _____

Start date _____

Starting THOMAS	After THOMAS	List of statements	Starting 'THOMAS'	After 'THOMAS'
(circle below)			Examples	Examples
1a	1a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plays on task chosen by self 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> accepts redirection to a task chosen by adult 		
c	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plays for 5 mins on task chosen by adult 		
d	d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can be redirected to a range of tasks (approx 5) chosen by adult 		
2a	2a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> will sit at a table to work for 1 min 5 mins 10 mins 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sits in a 1 : 1 situation with adult for 1 min 5 mins 10 mins 		
3a	3a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tolerates 1:1 singing activity but does not participate 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participates in singing/action songs in 1 : 1 		
c	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participates in singing/action songs in group of 3-4 		
d	d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participates in singing/action songs in groups of 10 		
e	e	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> remains calm during group (3-4) singing for 1 min 5 mins 10 mins 		

Starting THOMAS	After THOMAS	List of statements	Starting 'THOMAS'	Finishing 'THOMAS'
	(circle below)		Examples	Examples
4a	4a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> will move to an area/activity guided by an object of reference 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> will move to an area/activity guided by a representative picture e.g. picture of cup for tea-time/snack-time 		
5a	5a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> indicates wants and needs verbally by crying/screaming 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> indicates desires non-verbally 		
c	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> will turn to his/her name 		
d	d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> comes in response to his/her name 		
e	e	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> follows simple 1-step directions e.g. coat on 		
f	f	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> indicates wants and needs unprompted using recognisable words 		
g	g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> makes verbal greetings and farewells 		
6a	6a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explores toys (approx 5) using appropriate sensory investigation e.g. looking, touching 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explores toys (6 plus) using appropriate sensory investigation e.g. looking, touching 		
7a	7a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bangs objects together in typical manner e.g. 2 bricks 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> builds a tower of 3 bricks 		
c	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> places one object into another e.g. bricks into dumper truck, spoon into cup 		

Starting THOMAS	After THOMAS		Starting 'THOMAS'	Starting 'THOMAS'
	(circle below)	List of statements		Examples
8a	8a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'self pretends' using toy objects on himself e.g. uses miniature brush to brush own hair 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'doll pretends' using toy object on doll or teddy e.g. feeds teddy with spoon 		
c	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sequences pretend play activities using toy objects e.g. feeds doll then self 		
9a	9a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pretends that one object is another e.g. a block is a biscuit 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pretends that a toy object has real properties e.g. the toy stove is hot 		
c	c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pretends that a toy person has feelings e.g. dolly is tired/hurt 		
10a	10a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joins an adult in a familiar/predictable make-believe play routine e.g. making a cup of tea, driving the train to the station 		
b	b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joins an adult in an unfamiliar make-believe play routine which offers unpredictability 		

Starting THOMAS	After THOMAS	Starting 'THOMAS'	Starting 'THOMAS'
	(circle below)		Examples
11a	11a		
b	b		
c	c		
d	d		
e	e		
f	f		
g	g		
h	h		
12	12		

- List of statements**
- watches other children from a distance of 5 metres
 - watches other children from a distance of 1 metre
 - moves closer to other children to watch their play (unprompted)
 - plays near others but is unaware of them
 - plays in parallel with other children (unprompted)
 - plays **with** other child(ren) in adult structured situation e.g. board game
 - plays **with** other(s) in unstructured situations e.g. lets chase
 - plays **with** others in pursuit of common goal e.g. lets build a house

- child spends more time calm than emotionally aroused.

After THOMAS

- 1 Looking back to the start of THOMAS what developments are you most pleased with?
- 2 What did you do that led to this progress?



Resource Sheet 4

**Individual play plan – target summary sheet
– autistic spectrum disorders**

Name of child _____

Date _____

Name of setting _____

The most recently agreed targets are

Area of Development	Target
1 social interaction	
2 language and communication	
3 play	

Area of Development	Target
4 the child's tolerance of the wider everyday environment	
5 the development of behaviour supportive to learning	
6 early academic skills	
7 generalisation of skills	
8 the child's area of special interest (where appropriate)	
These targets will be reviewed on :	

In keeping with the SEN Code of Practice, focus will be placed on only 2/3 targets at any one time and records of actions undertaken are kept in _____



Resource Sheet 5

Monitored action plan

Child's Name: _____ Date: _____

Specific Target: _____

Activities planned	Dates implemented	Comments

