2.4. Knowledge of autism spectrum disorders (ASD)

- An ability to draw on knowledge that:
  - rates of ASD diagnosis have increased over time, probably due to better screening and broader diagnostic criteria, with increasing numbers of people with a normal-range IQ being recognised as autistic
  - ASD is a spectrum that encompasses individuals with a wide range of functioning, abilities and disabilities (many of which will not be obvious)
  - learning disability and ASD co-occur in about 30% of people with an ASD diagnosis (and most people on the autism spectrum have an IQ in the normal range)
  - girls and young women may be less likely to receive a diagnosis of ASD, perhaps reflecting a gender-specific presentation (which does not fit with the current male-based conceptualisation of ASD) and a greater capacity to camouflage or mask autistic characteristics

- An ability to draw on knowledge that ASD affects children/young people in different ways and to different extents, and that common features include:
  - difficulties with social communication, e.g.:
    - difficulty interpreting verbal and non-verbal language (e.g. gestures or tone of voice)
    - taking things literally and not understanding abstract concepts
    - needing extra time to process information or answer questions
    - speech that is unusually repetitive (e.g. echoing phrases they have heard)
    - speaking in a somewhat stereotyped manner (using stock phrases that are frequently repeated, often with the same intonation each time)
    - unusual intonation (e.g. talking with little variation in tone or pitch)
  - difficulties in social interaction e.g.:
    - problems with back-and-forth social relating (e.g. with two-sided conversation, initiating social interactions or responding to social approaches)
    - limited or unusual non-verbal communication (including limited or unusual gestures, facial expression, eye contact or body language)
    - struggling to adjust their behaviour to reflect their situation or who they are interacting with
    - difficulty reading other people's feelings and intentions
    - difficulty expressing their own emotions
    - appearing to be insensitive to others
    - seeking out time alone when overloaded by other people
    - finding it hard to gain comfort from other people

- behaving 'strangely' or in a way thought to be socially inappropriate
- finding it hard to form friendships

- reducing anxiety through repetitive and restrictive behaviour, e.g.:
  - adhering to routines (and resisting change) to reduce unpredictability, e.g.:
    - always travelling the same route to and from school or work
    - wearing the same clothes
    - eating the same food for meals
- over- or under-sensitivity to light, taste and sound, e.g.:
  - finding background sounds unbearably loud, distracting or overwhelming
  - avoiding everyday situations that expose them to sensitivity issues
- intense and highly focused interests

- An ability to draw on knowledge that co-occurring mental health problems are very common in children/young people with ASD, and that they:
  - will be very anxious in social situations or when facing change
  - will have difficulty recognising and recognising and regulating their emotions
  - may have serious mental health issues
  - may have ADHD and other neurodevelopmental difficulties, including motor problems and specific and general learning difficulties
  - may have difficulties with executive function (i.e. difficulty planning and organising their behaviour in pursuit of a goal)
- An ability to draw on knowledge that when overwhelmed, children/young people with ASD can:
  - temporarily lose behavioural control (verbally [e.g. shouting, screaming or crying], physically [e.g. kicking or lashing out] or both)
  - shut down (as a protective measure)