



Alameda Middle School

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Newsletter - Issue 7 - Summer 2026

SENDCo Update

Hello all,

It has been 'busy, busy' as always in the High Needs Team. I am hoping it is not becoming an annual occurrence, but this spring I was once again off having an operation, so apologies to all those who had APDR meetings cancelled. We appreciate your understanding and patience. A big thank you from me to Miss Hiscocks and the rest of the High Needs Team for being, as always, amazing in my absence. We will be having our next cycle of reviews in June – please see below for further details. Additionally, we will be hosting another Parents' Event, which will be a talk/discussion about the mental health and wellbeing of children with SEND, followed by, a 'meet the SENDCo' event for the parents of any Year 4 children coming up in September. We hope to see lots of you there.

APDR Meetings WC. June 16th and 22nd June

We will be holding our summer Assess, Plan, Do, Review Meetings for all children on the SEND Register who have a SEND Support Plan. These meetings are an important opportunity to discuss your child's SEND provision.

Please contact Mrs. Mann on her working days (Monday, Wednesday or Thursday) to make an appointment. Please note if you have met with Mrs. Horner recently to discuss your child's plan, you need not make another appointment.

If you are unsure whether your child is on the SEND register, please contact the office or Mrs. Mann who will be able to check for you.

Mrs. Esther Horner SENDCo ehorner@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk	Miss Abby Hiscocks Assistant SENDCo Ahiscocks@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk	Mrs. Lucienne Mann SEND Admin Sendadmin@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk	Mrs. Leni Demmers-Derks EHCP Coordinator Hdemmers-derks@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk
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Fidgets

Fidgets in mainstream classrooms can enhance focus, reduce anxiety, and support self-regulation for students, particularly those with neurodivergent needs like ADHD. However, they can cause distraction if not managed properly. Effective use requires clear rules, such as using them only during independent work, ensuring they are silent, and avoiding fidgets that require visual attention.

Therefore, to support a focused and productive learning environment, we do not allow fidget toys in school unless they are on our approved list and they are on a child's SEND plan, or it has been agreed with the pupil's Heads of Year. To ensure consistency and fairness, we maintain a clear set of acceptable items that are quiet, unobtrusive, and appropriate for classroom use. This list includes

- Small pieces of Blu-tack
- Small smooth pebbles
- Worry stones
- Small pieces of cloth
- Doodle books/paper - plain paper – only provided by teachers.
- Chew toys (to be worn under uniform)

Children should have one of these and **not** a collection, as again, these can then become a source of distraction. If any fidget is causing distraction or disruption, it will be removed by the teacher. We appreciate your support in reinforcing these expectations and helping us maintain a calm and effective learning space for all pupils. If you have any further questions, please discuss with Mrs Horner or your child's Head of Year.



SEND Parents' Event

Mental Health and Wellbeing (4:00-4:45)
All Alameda Parents (including Year 4)

followed by

Meet the SENDCo – Year 4 Parents Only

4:45 – 5:30

Monday 22nd June

We will start with a talk about Mental Health and Wellbeing, including tips for supporting children's mental health at home, and how we support children with SEMHD in school. This will be followed by a Q&A session. Year 4 parents will then have the opportunity to meet myself (Esther Horner SENDCo) and Miss Abby Hiscocks (Assistant SENDCo).

Please register your interest by using the google link below or by phoning the school office on 01525 750900. We look forward to seeing you then.

[Click here](#)

Jargon Buster	Lego Therapy!!!
Ever wondered what on Earth your SENDCo is talking about? This feature will try to decode some of the language of SEND. SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. ASD/ASC – Autism Spectrum Disorder/Condition ADHD- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. APDR – Assess Plan Do Review – the cycle of SEND support. SpLD – Specific Learning Difficulty/Difficulties These include: Dyslexia – difficulties processing written language Dyscalculia – difficulties with numbers Dyspraxia – difficulties with coordination and spacial awareness Learning Difficulty/Difficulties - A broader term indicating more widespread needs.	We are looking for donations for our intervention that will help children with Speech and Language Needs and Autism. If you have any complete small/medium size Lego kits (with instructions!) that are no longer used, please bring them to the office. Many Thanks!!! 

Understanding Masking in Neurodivergent Students

What is Masking?

In educational settings, neurodivergent students (those whose cognitive processing differs from what is considered “typical,” including individuals with autism, ADHD, dyslexia and other conditions) often engage in a behaviour known as ‘masking.’ Masking refers to the conscious or unconscious suppression of natural behaviours and the adoption of socially acceptable ones to fit in with peers and meet institutional expectations.

Why Do Students Mask?

Masking is typically a response to environmental pressures. Schools are highly social, structured environments with implicit norms around communication, behaviour, and performance. Neurodivergent students quickly learn (through feedback, correction, or even exclusion) that their natural ways of interacting may not be accepted and so ‘learn’ how to fake social norms. Common drivers of masking include:

- **Desire for social acceptance:** Avoiding bullying or isolation
- **Fear of negative consequences:** Discipline, misunderstanding, or being labelled “difficult”
- **Internalized expectations:** Belief that they must behave “normally” to succeed
- **Lack of support or awareness:** When staff are not trained to recognize neurodivergence

What Does Masking Look Like?

Masking can take many forms in schools. A student might force eye contact despite discomfort, mimic classmates’ social behaviours, rehearse conversations, suppress stimming (self-regulating movements such as hand-flapping or fidgeting), or remain silent to avoid drawing attention. In academic contexts, it can include overcompensating through perfectionism or rigid rule-following to avoid scrutiny.

I have often had people say to me ‘we all mask a little bit though’ like ‘putting on a brave face’ when we are having difficulties in our personal life or hiding our dislike of a family member etc. However, a neurodivergent person is masking so much more than uncomfortable feelings or dislikes. Masking is

managing... but a neurodivergent person has a lot more to mask, they may be struggling with social understanding, attention, focus, sensory issues, emotional regulation, learning difficulties and more... so while these behaviours may help a student navigate the school environment without immediate conflict, they often come at a significant cognitive and emotional cost.

I have been a SENDCo now for many years and I cannot tell you how many times the parents of a child with diagnosed or suspected neurodivergence has sat before me describing behaviours they see at home which are the polar opposite to those we see in school. It can be that the child is a 'model student' and at home they are experiencing extreme anxiety/overwhelm and exhibiting challenging behaviours. They have been 'managing' all day but get home and it all comes out! So, what does masking look like? It is hard to spot when it is happening - that's the point - but the fallout, the exhaustion and burnout is very obvious though not always to all. Although masking can appear adaptive on the surface, it is often associated with long-term negative outcomes:

- **Emotional exhaustion:** Constant self-monitoring depletes cognitive resources
- **Anxiety and burnout:** Sustained masking is linked to heightened stress levels
- **Identity confusion:** Students may struggle to understand or accept their authentic selves
- **Delayed identification:** Masking can obscure signs of neurodivergence, particularly in girls and marginalized groups, leading to late diagnosis and lack of evidence for diagnosis.

Importantly, a student who appears to be "coping well" may still be experiencing significant internal distress. Without careful observation and inclusive practices, educators may overlook the effort behind these behaviours.

Supporting Neurodivergent Students at Home: The Role of Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers play a critical role in buffering the effects of masking and helping children maintain a strong sense of identity and wellbeing. Because masking often intensifies in school, home can become the primary space where children decompress and where their distress becomes visible.

Creating a Safe Space to Unmask

One of the most protective actions a parent can take is to ensure the home environment allows the child to be fully themselves without judgement or correction. As a neurodivergent person myself, my family know that sometimes, when I return home, I do not want to interact and need to retreat to my safe space and decompress. My family understand this is not about them but due to me being exhausted after navigating a challenging environment all day. It is important that parents understand this in students and help them recognise and create their own safe spaces and activities to decompress after a day in school. Also:

- **Validate their experiences** (when they are ready to communicate): Acknowledge that school may feel effortful, even if teachers report things are "fine." Listen and do not judge or project your perspective on to them.
- **Allow natural behaviours:** Stimming, reduced eye contact, or quiet time should be accepted as regulation, not discouraged.
- **Reduce demands after school:** Avoid overscheduling and lots of after school activities; build in recovery time.
- **Build emotional literacy and self-advocacy:** Help children to label their emotions and bodily signals (e.g., "That sounds exhausting,;" "Your body might be telling you it needs a break"). Encourage them to express their preferences and boundaries. Practise scripts or strategies for asking for help in school.
- **Supporting identity and self-esteem** Masking can lead children to believe that their authentic self is "wrong" or unacceptable. Counteracting this is essential. Learn together about neurodivergent role models and use neuro-affirming language.
- **Collaborating with school:** A key parental role is bridging the gap between home and school experiences. Share insights with school staff, advocate for adjustments and understanding; teachers may not see the effort behind a child's behaviour. Providing context about after-school distress is crucial. Consult with the SEND team to write a one-page profile for your child (if they are on Level 1 Support) or have a clear outline of their needs on their SEND Support Plan.
- **Monitoring for burnout:** Prolonged masking can lead to autistic burnout or chronic stress states in other neurodivergent profiles. Parents should remain attentive to sudden loss of skills; increased difficulty with tasks; heightened anxiety or school avoidance or persistent fatigue that does not resolve with rest. If these patterns emerge, reducing demands and seeking professional guidance may be necessary.

The goal is not to eliminate masking entirely (some level of social adaptation is part of life) but to ensure the child is not masking constantly without relief. Over time, the goal is to build your child's ability to advocate for accommodations rather than defaulting to masking.

In conclusion, masking in neurodivergent students is widespread but often invisible and while it may help students navigate immediate social and academic demands, its long-term impact can be significant. Parents, alongside school staff, play a pivotal role in reducing this burden. By working together through validation, advocacy, and intentional support, we can help neurodivergent students move toward environments where authenticity is not only accepted but valued.

Who you gonna call?

We know it can be tricky to navigate communication with the different departments in school, so we have put together this chart to help you know who to call for what.

Issue	Who do I call?
Lost equipment/clothes, lockers, lunches, dinners, any issues with pupil premium or similar queries.	Our office staff on the usual school number.
General worries (child didn't sleep etc.) and friendship problems (not bullying or behaviour related), or informing us about home issues – serious illnesses, deaths in the family for example.	Your child's form tutor is the best person to inform of these kinds of issues. They will then pass this on to anyone else who needs to know in school.
Concerns about progress in subjects or that your child's SEND Support Plan is not being followed.	Subject teachers in the first instance and Subject Leaders if you still have concerns.
Any behaviour issues – bullying etc.	Heads of Year
New information or any changes about your child's SEND – new diagnosis etc. Concerns your child's SEND plan/EHCP is not meeting their needs. You think your child has SEND and have spoken to their teachers about it previously. Information and advice on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities support available in school and in the wider community.	SENDCo/Assistant SENDCo/SEND Admin (all contact details above)

Useful Websites

- for information on what is available in Bedfordshire for children and young people with SEND:

<https://localoffer.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/kb5/centralbedfordshire/directory/home.page>

Advice on young people's mental health:

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

ADHD Information and Support:

<https://adhduk.co.uk/>

<https://www.additudemag.com/>

Autism Spectrum Disorder Information and Support.

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism>

Zones of Regulation Information:

www.zonesofregulation.com

www.weareteachers.com/zones-of-regulation-activities

<https://www.theottoolbox.com/?s=zones+of+regulation>

There are more links on the website – SEND tab.