SCERTS as a useful framework to support the development of core difficulties associated with autism spectrum conditions

SCERTS stands for Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support and is an evidence based framework with the aim of alleviating some of the core difficulties associated with autism spectrum conditions. It is an inclusive model which allows the incorporation of many good practice, evidence based interventions that are widely used. SCERTS is a strong advocate of collaborative working with parents and carers, providing a holistic view of the person whom everybody is supporting.

SCERTS can be used in parallel with the National Curriculum as an assessment tool which highlights strengths and needs, and is a means of monitoring progress of core features of autism where the National Curriculum may not. So often staff comment that a pupil has gained skills in a particular area, such as being able to cope better with change, increased response to facial expressions or intonation, more frequent initiations of interaction, and so on. These are profound skills that are great achievements for some people with autism, made measurable as developmental achievements by SCERTS. SCERTS is suitable for people of all ages and abilities and can be introduced in a variety of settings.

SCERTS is divided into 3 domains, each of which have 2 subcategories:

**Social Communication (SC):** The ability to feel effective and engage successfully in reciprocal interaction and conversation, to be a competent communicator and be an active participant in social activities and social relationships. The two subcategories within Social Communication are Joint Attention and Symbol Use.

**Emotional Regulation (ER):** the ability to regulate emotional arousal so that the child can adapt to and cope with inevitable and uniquely individual daily challenges. These are subcategorised into Mutual Regulation and Self-regulation.

**Transactional Support (TS):** Adjusting Learning Supports and Interpersonal Supports which create a positive learning environment and promote positive learning outcomes.
There are 3 levels where differently abled people can benefit from SCERTS, and these are called Partner Stages:

- Social Partner,
- Language Partner,
- Conversational Partner.

The assessment process has 5 simple questions to determine which Partner Stage someone is at and, from there, the observations forms can be completed which give a detailed overall profile of skills and what areas of need can be addressed.

One of the pupils we have used SCERTS with is a girl called Jane*. Jane has a diagnosis of severe autism, anxiety disorder, acute tiptoe walking, bowel problems, sensory dysregulation, sleep dysregulation, and queried trigeminal neuralgia.

Jane started attending The NAS Robert Ogden School in December of 2011 for one hour per week. She was 8 years old and had been home educated since leaving nursery. Jane is now 11 years old and attends school four mornings per week.

Initially Jane had three staff supporting her; a senior teacher, educational psychologist and the speech and language therapist for the hour that she was initially in school. The transition into school was one that caused great distress to Jane. She would be dropped off by her father, but did not want to get out of the car. Many different strategies were used to support Jane to physically get into school and the successful ones revolved around meeting her sensory needs, e.g. movement and rocking to familiar music and videos, e.g. Toy Story, a favourite of Jane’s.

Jane would also resort to self-injurious behaviour if she wanted something in her environment to change. An element of this was seen as learned behaviour which was functional yet inappropriate, and other times it was pre-intentional communication and Jane’s way of coping with severe distress. Since September 2012 Jane has been supported by a specialist teaching assistant with whom she has developed a strong and trusting relationship, and she continues to be supported by the Multi-disciplinary Team.

Jane’s SCERTS assessment in September 2013 indicated that she is at a Social Partner Stage within the SCERTS framework. The criteria for Social Partner Stage is when a child is using fewer than three words or phrases (which may be spoken, signed, pictures, written words or other symbolic system) referentially, regularly and with communicative intent. Following this, a profile was completed at Social Partner Stage that covered each area of SCERTS, yielding Jane’s strengths and needs.

In her school career Jane has moved up from P Level 2 to P Level 3; however, this alone doesn’t do justice to the skills that she has developed. Jane has shown steady progress within all subcategories of SCERTS for the academic year of 2013-2014. Some of these measurable outcomes include:

- Her ability to cope well with other pupils around her at break times.
• Accessing class during registration.
• Consistently using appropriate non-verbal communication rather than self-injury to have an effect on her environment.
• Acceptance of changes and demands.
• Rare self-injurious behaviour.
• Calmly transitioning in and out of school to access the community successfully.
• Recognition of visual supports.
• Increasing independence in meeting her own sensory needs.
• Increase in length of her school day.

SCERTS is a valuable framework that helps to identify strengths and needs, what areas of development to focus upon, and breaks down essential skills into achievable goals. The profiling of measurable progress allows clear illustration to staff, families and other agencies of the development of core skills needed to be a competent social communicator.