



words first
Multidisciplinary services for schools

Autism Diagnostic Clinics

Information for Families | Schools | Referring Professionals

Introduction to Words First Ltd



- Words First Ltd was set up by our Founder and Director, Amanda Davis, in 2009 as a Company to support schools in London. The Company has grown to be one of the largest independent Practices in the UK employing 68 Speech and Language Therapists, 11 Occupational Therapists, 2 Educational Psychologists, a Counsellor and a Therapeutic Play Practitioner.
- Words First is commissioned directly by schools but over the years, Amanda received many calls from parents asking for support for their child. Eventually, she could no longer ignore the calls for support and decided to convert her house into a centre for families.
- The Kids First Centre was therefore opened in February 2017 as a special home away from home for children and families.
- At the Kids First Centre, our therapy team offers wrap-around care for children struggling with different aspects of their development. The multi-disciplinary approach offers the professional expertise of highly skilled therapists and comprehensive intervention service.
- Kids First Centre is a part of Words First Ltd.

Introduction to Autism



- Autism, also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC), is classed as a neurodevelopmental disorder.
 - It refers to a group of developmental disabilities that affects each individual differently
 - Autism is characterised by social, communication and behavioural differences in the individual
- The current term, ASD, has been around since 2013 and is still the term used in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5).
- Autism is a lifelong disability, meaning that Autistic individuals may communicate and interact differently with their surroundings than their neurotypical peers throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
- The first ever clinical account of autism was published by Dr. Leo Kanner in 1943. Since then, increased research and understanding of the condition has reshaped how Autism is diagnosed and supported.

Introduction to Autism



The term 'spectrum' is important to note, as each individual can experience mild to severe levels of impact on their functioning. Each Autistic individual presents with different levels of ability and disability. There is also increased recognition and research into understanding the difference in presentation between Autistic males and females.

Other areas may also be affected in Autistic individuals, including:

- Different responses to **sensory experiences**, such as noise sensitivity or sensitivity to touch or lights
- Difficulties in **regulating emotions** due to heightened sensory sensitivity
- Difficulties in **understanding another person's perspective**, or understanding implied meanings or sarcasm

As part of our assessment process, we will explore your child's unique profile- taking into account his/her individual sensory needs, strengths and challenges.

Our Assessment Process



At Words First Ltd, **our aim is to always put the child and family first.**

- We offer a robust assessment process to allow us time to **get to know your child, understand your concerns** and the concerns of the school (if applicable), gather sufficient evidence to **identify Autism in males and females**, and offer **tailored recommendations** following the assessment.
- We understand that life is busy and it may seem like there is a lot of paperwork involved in our assessment process. Rest assured that we have collated a battery of assessment measures in line with our service aims, **offering you a truly bespoke service.**
- We are available to help you with the pre-assessment procedures, and will always do our best to answer any questions you may have. We will endeavour to **work with families** to ensure a comprehensive information-gathering process.

Our Assessment Process



Our assessment process involves:

- a **pre-assessment** online family consultation,
- **information gathering** procedures,
- a **developmental history** completed online by our Paediatrician,
- a **diagnostic assessment process** at our private Clinic in Kenley,
- additional **SALT/ OT assessment subtests** (if indicated),
- a **full diagnostic report** for the family, and
- multidisciplinary diagnostic **feedback** to discuss the outcome of the assessment.

Our Assessment Measures



Step 1: Pre-assessment family consultation

- **Our Words First Ltd Quick referral form**

- This form will help us get an idea of your main areas of concern, and help us start to build a picture of your child. We will use this information to allocate you to the most suitable Team member for your online pre-assessment family consultation, if required.
- Should you proceed with the full autism diagnostic assessment with us, the quick referral form will help our Team ascertain which questionnaires to send to you as part of our information gathering process.

- **Online pre-assessment consultation**

- This is an optional service available to families who have additional questions regarding the assessment process, or who might be unsure whether a full autism diagnostic assessment is right for them.
- You will be able to meet with our Speech and Language Therapist or Occupational Therapist online for 30 minutes, and should you wish to proceed, we will then proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: Information gathering process

- **Our Terms and Conditions**

- Prior to the confirmation of your appointment, we will require a fully completed and signed copy of our Words First Autism Diagnostic Clinic Terms and Conditions.

- **Comprehensive Multidisciplinary Case History Form**

- We will provide you with a detailed case history form which you will need to complete prior to your appointment. The case history form has been specifically designed to capture information regarding your child's overall development, communication and interaction skills, and activities of daily living to help guide our assessment process, and offer you individualised recommendations in our feedback and report.

- **Monteiro Interview Guidelines for Diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorder (MIGDAS-2) questionnaires**

- The MIGDAS-2 comprises a Parent/Caregiver questionnaire and Teacher questionnaire. The questionnaires provide detailed sets of questions, which are designed to offer a comprehensive narrative of the child being assessed, from the perspective of the parents/caregivers and teachers.
- The questionnaires can be completed independently where respondents write their responses directly on the questionnaire for review by the diagnostic team.

We require all completed documents to be signed and sent back to us at least 48 hours prior to your appointment.

Our Assessment Measures



Step 3: Developmental History/ Assessment

(undertaken by Dr. Ranjini Mohan (*Paediatrician*))

- **Online developmental history consultation**
 - The online consultation is done via a zoom link with parents and will last for 30 minutes, including a detailed developmental history.
 - If convenient to parents, the session would also include a 15 minute session of observing the child with everyday toys around the home, such as building blocks, jigsaw puzzles or shape sorters and books – also done online.
 - The timing of this assessment can be flexible and can be done on Saturday mornings or at another mutually convenient time.

Step 4: Diagnostic Assessment process

(undertaken by Chevonne du Plessis (*Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist*) and Jessica Wilson (*Occupational Therapist*))

- **MIGDAS-2 Diagnostic interview**
 - The MIGDAS-2 offers detailed, concrete guidelines for conducting interactive diagnostic interviews with children, adolescents and adults suspected of having Autism Spectrum Disorders/ Conditions (ASD/ ASC). These guidelines allow the Team to document samples of the child's behaviour across 3 areas of development affected in ASD/ASC, namely Sensory Use and Interests, Language and Communication, and Social Relationships and Emotional Responses.
 - The MIGDAS-2 Diagnostic Interview emphasises the use of sensory materials and encourages discussion of areas of high interest to the child.
 - Separate interview guidelines are provided for individuals with limited to no verbal fluency, children and adolescents with verbal fluency and adults with verbal fluency.
- **Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS-2)**
 - The ADOS was developed by Dr. Catherine Lord as a way to observe and understand the behaviours, strengths and difficulties in social communication, interaction and play that are important for the diagnosis of Autism.
 - The ADOS uses semi-structured activities and conversations to provide diagnostic information.

Our Assessment Measures



Step 5: Additional assessments

- Our therapists aim to offer the best service possible to each of our clients. Should we feel that additional subtests would be useful as part of the diagnostic process, we will discuss this with you and amend your appointment time to allow for this.
- Should you require additional assessment subtests during the assessment process for any reason, please do inform the Team members of this as soon as possible and we will aim to assist you. We offer the following additional assessments:
 - Speech and Language Therapy:
 - receptive and/or expressive language assessments or assessment subtests (1-2 per client)
 - Occupational Therapy:
 - 1-2 assessments or assessment subtests for one developmental area of particular concern.
 - Our Occupational Therapist will also be able to use this time to discuss any sensory needs with you, and will assist in referring you to Sensory Integration trained therapists should you require this service after the diagnostic assessment.

Our Feedback



Step 6: Diagnostic Feedback

- This will be arranged at a suitable time for families.
- You will receive an online 30 minute consultation with our full team to discuss the findings of our assessment with you.

Step 7: Diagnostic Report

- The full diagnostic report will be sent to you within 10-14 days after diagnostic feedback has taken place.
- You will then have time to read through the report, ask for clarification, or request amendments from the team.
- Once any amendments have been agreed and updated, a final signed copy of the report will be sent to you.

An Informed Decision



- At Words First Ltd, our approach is to offer the **right option at the right time** for each of our clients.
- We are happy to **discuss our other follow up services** at Kids First Centre after you have received feedback or a diagnosis from the Autism Diagnostic Team, and will be able to **signpost you to other services** to support you and your child.
- Our Paediatrician is available to provide online follow up consultations, although families are also welcome to access their own local private/ NHS paediatricians.
- Where any medications are indicated, postcode hospitals will be referred to within the diagnostic report for families to review.
- **We welcome our reports to be used for EHCP applications;** this is highlighted in each of our assessment reports.

Next Steps



If you are interested in our service, appointment availability or have any questions, please call us on 0208 050 1491 or email h.heerey@wordsfirst.uk

We are available to provide you with expert advice on our services and the options available to you at Words First Ltd/ Kids First Centre.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Meet Our Team



Chevonne du Plessis

Hello, , my name is Chevonne. I studied at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa and completed my bachelor's degree in Speech, Language & Hearing Therapy in 2013. While working full-time in hospitals and special needs schools, I also completed my MSc degree in Speech-Language Pathology (cum laude) at the University of Cape Town before moving to the UK in 2019. In 2020, I completed my PG Diploma in Developmental Neuroscience & Psychopathology (with distinction) from University College London.

I work as a Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist in two schools, focusing on supporting students with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. I also have a special interest in neurodevelopmental disorders such as Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). I am currently the Words First Clinical Specialist for ADHD and run the ADHD Pathway to develop other therapists' knowledge and skills in this area.

In addition, I am the Speech and Language Therapist at our Words First Autism Diagnostic Clinics, having completed my ADOS-2 training in July 2021. I work collaboratively with a Paediatrician and Occupational Therapist to offer monthly diagnostic clinics at our private clinic in Kenley. I enjoy working within a multidisciplinary team to explore various perspectives and factors that influence a child's access to learning, communication and social interaction, aiming to help each child and every family to find the right support at the right time.



Dr Ranjini Mohan

Hello, my name is Ranjini. I trained in one of the top institutions in India, St. John's Medical College Hospital, graduating with merit in MBBS (undergraduate) in 1999. I then completed my internship in India, before completing my postgraduation in the UK, training and working in paediatrics since 2000.

I developed a special interest in endocrinology, working at the adolescent part of Great Ormond Street Hospital, at UCLH. I have published research articles on various topics in the Archives of Diseases of Childhood and presented a paper at New York as a trainee on growth hormone in achondroplasia, and published in hot topics in Current Diabetes Reviews. I have presented with merit at Royal Society of Medicine.

I worked with the eating disorders team at Oxford health as a paediatrician for a few years, before joining Warwick hospital as a community paediatrician, as I realized that a lot of feeding difficulties were a result of undiagnosed autism spectrum disorder. My current interest is in all aspects of autism and I have been a part of the ARFID pathway being developed in Warwickshire. I have worked with children with autism for the last few years, dealing with associated medical problems like gut issues, sleep and restrictive eating etc.

I continue to work as a general paediatrician within the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust (Paediatrics) at the Horton Hospital.



Jess Wilson

Hello, my name is Jess, and I work as an Occupational Therapist at Words First. I completed my Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy at the University of Cape Town, graduating in 2019. Following my graduation, I gained valuable experience working at a hospital in South Africa for a year before relocating to the United Kingdom in 2021.

I work as an Occupational Therapist in a special needs school in London to support children with diverse needs. I work alongside several other healthcare professionals to provide holistic and child-centred care to the students. Working in this environment has helped to develop my passion and interest in the areas of Sensory Integration, as well as different neurodevelopmental conditions, such as Autism Spectrum Conditions. The experience I have gained working in such a setting has shaped my view that every child is unique and has individual needs, interests, and potential, which I believe are all important factors to acknowledge when assessing and working with any children.

I also work as part of a multidisciplinary team at our Words First Autism Diagnostic Clinics, alongside a Speech and Language Therapist and a Paediatrician. These clinics run monthly at Kids First, a private clinic located in Kenley. I completed my ADOS-2 (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) training in July 2023, further enhancing my assessment skills and ability to contribute to a thorough understanding of individuals' strengths and challenges. My overarching aim in all aspects of my work is to foster independence, well-being, and active participation in meaningful daily activities.



Words First offers a multi-disciplinary service to mainstream schools and specialist provisions:

- * Speech and Language Therapy
- * Occupational Therapy
- * Educational Psychology
- * Play Therapy
- * Counselling
- * Social Communication Outreach Services
- * Complex Needs Specialist Services
- * Dyslexia assessments
- * Autism Diagnostic Service

