



Education and Lifelong Learning

Policy for Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Who We Aim to Provide Services For

An autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability that affects the way a child or young person communicates and relates to people around them. We use the word spectrum because in autism the underlying impairments can vary significantly between individuals. Some children with ASD may have severe impairments across several areas, may show extreme social withdrawal or repetitive, stereotyped behaviour, and may also have learning difficulties. Other children may have more subtle impairments, such as those found in Asperger syndrome. Despite the wide ranging differences, everyone with ASD has difficulty in social interaction, social communication and imagination.

ASD is currently estimated to affect approximately 91 in every 10 000 children. This means that in Bristol approximately 500 children in our school population may be somewhere on the autistic spectrum.

Not all of these school-aged children will require specific provision. Some, at the highly able end of the spectrum, may be achieving very well and fully accessing the type and amount of social interaction with which they are comfortable. For these children, it will be debatable whether a process of diagnosis and intervention will be helpful. Another group of children do need to have their difficulties identified and understood by all those who work with them in school; for these children understanding of their ASD can be all that is needed to **prevent** problems arising. A further group of children will require specific school-based plans and interventions to help them learn and develop. A final group will need specific provision which enables them to access small group teaching using particular approaches which work for autism.

Children diagnosed with ASD in the pre-school years are likely to need an active intervention. The LEA bases decisions on actual services required by pre-school children on the information provided by the Health services and by parents.

For school-aged children, whether specific services are required will depend on the regular processes and stages of the SEN Code of Practice. We expect schools, working closely with parents, to decide whether whole-staff awareness of the nature of the child's difficulties will initially be sufficient, whether specific 'school-based' planning and support is required, or whether advice from outside agencies is needed ('school plus' planning and support). Currently, the level of training in ASD which most school staff have had is such that specialist advice from outside will very often be required.

Some children with ASD will require provision over and above what the ordinary school can provide at school action or school action plus stages. These children will need a statutory assessment and a Statement of Special Educational Needs. We use clear criteria (Appendix A) to help us gather evidence and make decisions on when a statutory assessment is required.

We do not believe, however, that we should **only** engage in joint assessment with other agencies (such as Health and Social Services) through the Statutory assessment/Statementing process. We believe we should aim to make all our assessments for children with ASD multi-disciplinary. Nor do we believe the LEA should only provide specialist advice to schools on ASD via a Statement. We want to be able to provide as much advice and support as we can at the earlier stages of the Code of Practice, and through training and information which reaches as many school staff as possible.

Aims and Principles

The principles and aims of our overall SEN Policy are as relevant to ASD as to the other types of Special Educational Needs: **working towards the ultimate goal of inclusion, working in partnership with parents/carers, working to raise the attainment of all children.** Some principles and aims from our overall SEN policy are of **particular** importance and relevance to ASD - notably the principle of **co-ordinating our work with that of other agencies, and early intervention.**

We work within the following additional aims and principles for ASD:

- C That all educational staff who come into contact with children identified with ASD should have training to help them understand the nature of the condition - either at an awareness level (appropriate, for example, for a headteacher or school meals supervisory assistant), a hands on level (for a class teacher with a child with ASD in the class, for example) or an in depth level (for staff working in specialist classes for children with ASD or in Central Support Services).
- C That all schools with children with ASD should be able to access advice or support from teachers who have in-depth knowledge at the specialist level of training.
- C That if the right form of advice or support available are available, at the right time, to adults working with a child with ASD, it is possible to prevent some of a child's potential autistic behaviours from developing or becoming entrenched.
- C That staff working with children with ASD should be able to network with each other for the exchange of information and mutual support.
- C That specialist advice, support and networking for parents of children with ASD is equally vital for the child's development, and that education staff should play their part in support for parents, alongside colleagues in Health and Social Services - though not as the lead agency or main means of support.
- C That interventions for children with ASD should be **evidence-based**, that is based on approaches which have a proven track record of success, and allow ongoing evaluation.
- C That our provision for children with ASD should incorporate the best of what has been shown to work for these children:

- < Challenging and confronting the autism by teaching appropriate strategies and skills for social interaction,
 - < Maintaining a relaxed environment that promotes interaction,
 - < Maintaining a physical environment with visual clarity, low levels of stimulation and spaces dependent on function,
 - < Maintaining the structure and routines that are needed by pupils with autism spectrum disorders,
 - < Focusing on communication skills,
 - < Specific teaching programmes for personal and social education including independent living skills.
 - < Specific attention to stress and anxiety reduction, for example by providing for 'time out' from social situations.
- C That while for some children these key features of a successful programme can be delivered in a mainstream classroom, for others there will continue to be a need for specialist classes - wherever possible located in or alongside mainstream schools.
- C That specialist provision should be local; whilst we do contribute from time to time to the costs of residential provision, we want to work with colleagues in Health and Social Services on a strategy which seeks to re-invest the large sums that are currently spent on residential out of city provision for a few children into better local services which can provide what families and children need.

Early Years - Key principles.

We believe that all families of children diagnosed with ASD should be able to access an immediate group support programme which will help them understand the nature of autism, come to terms with the diagnosis, and learn about the ways in which they can best support their child, and about the range of early intervention programmes available. We believe there is a need for statutory agencies to work together, in partnership with the voluntary sector, to find ways of funding and arranging such a service.

We believe that every child should be entitled to an appropriate early intervention programme, which should have the following features:

- C Early intervention - as soon as possible after diagnosis.
- C Parental involvement and empowerment - parents, pre-school nursery nurses and teachers, other workers all working to the same goals at home and in other settings.
- C A home visiting service where appropriate, to help parents develop the skills they need to work effectively with their child.
- C Programmes and interventions which are 'proven' and have evidence of effectiveness behind them.
- C A range of different programmes and interventions, to meet the differing needs of children and their families.
- C Programmes and interventions which can ultimately be accessed without the complex bureaucratic process involved in the current statementing system.
- C At least part-time inclusive placement in an ordinary early years setting

(playgroup, nursery class, nursery school etc) where there are additional specialist skills or expertise in autism.

- C Concentration of skills/expertise in at least one such setting in each of Bristol's districts - with 'outreach' to other settings.
- C Training for all staff who will come into contact with the child.
- C A multi-agency approach - any programme or provision to be part of a coherent multi-agency plan for the child.
- C Objectives set in the plan used to determine specific teaching and learning targets and strategies, which are then monitored and reviewed for effectiveness.
- C From education, resources and provision that offers parity with that for other non-autistic children - that is, over the school week and school year.
- C Provision that is uniform across the city in quality and accessibility, and which can be equitably accessed.

Primary Years - Key principles

- ! For some children who receive a late diagnosis, there will be a need for concerted multiprofessional specialist input which takes place as soon as possible after diagnosis and actively involves parents, just as there is in the early years.
- ! There will be a need for a team approach in which parents, teaching and support staff and other professionals share aims and plan together, and in which the child's peers can play an active part.
- ! Approaches should use programmes and interventions which are 'proven' and have evidence of effectiveness behind them.
- ! All staff who will come into contact with the child should have an appropriate level of training in ASD, and access to ongoing support from external specialist teachers.

Secondary Years - Key principles

- ! Where later diagnosis occurs, families should have parity of access to information services and support as outlined in the early years section, at an age appropriate level. This to include a range of different programmes and interventions.
- ! Appropriate support for children to access a secondary curriculum.
- ! Some pupils will require an emphasis on communication, interaction and social skills teaching.
- ! Pupils will have access to careers service, work experience placement and further education opportunities.
- ! All pupils capable of achieving external examination accreditation will have access to appropriate courses.

Available Provision

We provide a continuum of provision for children with ASD, ranging from peripatetic support teachers working in mainstream schools, through resource bases in mainstream nurseries and schools, to special classes within our special schools. The following pages show what is available.

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