

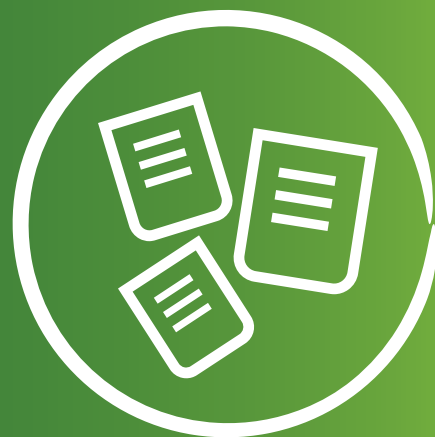


**Autism  
Education  
Trust**

[autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://autismeducationtrust.org.uk)

# Good Autism Practice Report: Practitioner Guide

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**ACER**

AUTISM CENTRE FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH



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## About the guidance

These guidelines are a summary of a more detailed report commissioned by the AET (Guldberg *et al.*, 2019). They are designed for all those working in education in early years settings, mainstream and special provision and in the Post-16 sector. Readers are advised to read that report as it provides the evidence as to why each of the eight principles within this guidance is important. The full report and this guidance links to eight case studies developed by Jo Briscoombe and Claire Phillips from Integra Services in South Gloucestershire and further references are given within this guidance to show how settings can adapt their practice to meet the needs of autistic children and young people.

## Acknowledgements

With thanks to all the staff in Early Years, Schools and Post-16 settings that agreed to share their practice. Thanks also to the AET Youth Panel for their views and to all those working in the AET training hubs who gave suggestions on which settings might provide some good practice examples.

## About the Autism Centre for Education and Research

The authors are members of the Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER). ACER is based in the Department of Disability, Inclusion and Special Needs (DISN), at the School of Education, University of Birmingham. ACER's research recognises the diversity of the autism spectrum population and the need to adopt an eclectic person-centred ethos. Members of ACER work have worked collaboratively within the AET partnership since the AET's inception. ACER members led on the development of the initial School-based programme, and the Early Years programme and on the Parents and Carers Guide.



# Introduction

These guidelines outline eight key principles that provide a framework for the development of good quality education for all autistic Children and Young People (CYP) and their families. They set out the principles that should inform good autism practice in education across Early Years Settings, Schools (5 to 16) and Post-16 settings. They should be consulted alongside statutory guidance. These principles have emerged from an examination of the current evidence base from research and practice, as well as key policies and the perspectives and insights of autistic children and adults.

The underpinning ethos and values focus on the need for mutual adaptation on behalf of the autistic CYP *and* those who live or work with the CYP. Settings and practitioners have to reflect on the dynamic relationship between the CYP and those around them, and understand the way the CYP processes and experiences the world and find ways to give the autistic CYP control over their learning. There are several ways of approaching the development and delivery of good autism practice, and more than one solution or approach to an intended outcome. The approach that is chosen and how this is delivered should therefore be sensitive to the wishes and needs of the individual CYP concerned and their family. It should also be within the skill set of those who work with the CYP. The process of achieving an outcome is also crucial and the views of the CYP and their parents and carers and key professionals involved on what they feel would work should be sought.

## The Autism Education Trust

The AET was launched in November 2007 with support and funding from the Department of Education in England and consists of a unique partnership involving the voluntary, public and private sectors. It is dedicated to coordinating, supporting and promoting effective education practice for all children and young people on the autism spectrum. Central to this has been the development of the AET Schools, Early Years and Post-16 programmes, which offer professional development for all staff working with Children and Young People (CYP) on the autism spectrum.

There are five main elements of the AET programme for the three age phases (Early Years; 5 to 16 and Post-16). All of these, apart from the training materials are free to download from the AET website and there are many resources attached to these.

1. Professional development materials on autism delivered by training hubs throughout England (see [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk) for details of your nearest hub).
2. AET Autism Standards which set out the key areas of practice and provision within a setting that underpin good practice in autism.
3. AET Autism Competency Framework which sets out the key understandings and knowledge required by staff working with children and young people on the autism spectrum
4. AET Progression Framework which enables staff to record and monitor a CYP's progress and to set learning intentions.
5. AET Parent/Carers Guide to be completed by parents and carers to identify what they feel is most important for their son or daughter's education.



## New Ofsted Inspection Frameworks

Ofsted has recently revised its frameworks for Early Years, Schools and Post-16 settings and these will be implemented from September 2019. The full inspection frameworks can be found by searching on the government website. ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)). The Education Inspection Framework sets out how Ofsted inspects maintained schools, academies, non-association independent schools, further education and skills provision and registered early years settings in England.

## Terminology

Terminology is a widely debated issue in the autism field and there is no single way of describing autism. Terms that are used include *autism*; *autism spectrum condition*; *autism spectrum disorder* and, *on the autism spectrum*. The authors of this report see autism as a different rather than deficient or disordered way of being. So, the term 'disorder' is not used when describing people with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum.

Whether to use 'person first' language or not is also widely debated (e.g. autistic person or person with autism). In a study which elicited the views of different stakeholders it was found that the term 'autistic' was preferred by a large percentage of autistic adults and their families, with the term '*on the autism spectrum*' being endorsed by the majority of professionals (Kenny *et al.*, 2015). Many autistic individuals see autism as a core part of their identity, and view themselves as autistic rather than 'with autism'. However, not all autistic individuals view their autism in the same way. There are some young people who would prefer the term 'with autism'. In this report, the terms 'with autism' and 'autistic' are used interchangeably to acknowledge different perspectives and includes all those who have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum.

## The autism spectrum

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that affects how people perceive, communicate and interact with the world. Autism is referred to as a spectrum because while there are similar core areas affected, each child or person diagnosed will experience them differently. To make a diagnosis, there must be evidence of difference (from typical development) in the following core areas and evidence that the person's everyday life has been and continues to be affected by these:

1. Social communication and interaction (including non verbal communication and the ability to use and understand body language, eye contact, facial expression and gestures; and the development and maintenance of friendships and relationships).
2. Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities (including repetitive speech or movements; adherence to routines or resistance to change; or intense interests).
3. Sensory perception and responses.

In education, this leads to four areas of difference that can impact on learning:

- Interacting, playing and developing relationships with others
- Processing information
- Taking in and perceiving sensory information
- Communicating, understanding and using language.



Like all children and young people, individuals will vary in terms of their intellectual ability, their personality, their profile of strengths and needs, the presence of other conditions (e.g. learning disability; ADHD; epilepsy) and their life experiences. No two individuals on the autism spectrum are the same as their profile interacts with their life experiences, the environment and the support they receive. So autistic CYP have different needs from each other and this should be reflected in the way teaching staff work.

## Subgroups within the autism spectrum

Since autism was first identified, there have been a number of attempts to define different subgroups in recognition that not all autistic individuals share the same characteristics. For example, there have been three terms used to describe CYP who do not have a learning disability, thought to make up two thirds of the autistic population (MacKay *et al.*, 2018). These are Asperger syndrome, High Functioning Autism and Able Autism, the latter two terms being used for those people who were language delayed in childhood, whereas those with Asperger syndrome developed speech at the usual age. However, research has shown that it is very hard to separate out these three groups in adulthood as many who were delayed as young children learn to speak fluently and become very articulate as they get older. The terms High Functioning Autism and Able Autism have also been criticised as autistic CYP individuals rarely perform at a high level across all areas of everyday life and learning. Their profiles are often much more uneven than in the typical population, with peaks of ability and talent, and areas where ability and functioning is much lower than one would expect relative to their intellectual ability.

## Pathological Demand Avoidance

A further subgroup, Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA), has also been suggested as part of the autism spectrum. This was first suggested by Professor Elizabeth Newson (Newson *et al.*, 2003). As a very experienced clinician with several years experience of assessing autistic children, she identified a group who were similar to those with autism but who were much more avoidant than autistic children and who did not appear to respond to some of the educational approaches found to be effective in autism. Since that time, clinicians and researchers have been attempting to establish whether there are clear and distinct differences between PDA children and those with autism. As yet, there is insufficient evidence and PDA has not met criteria for acceptance as a separate diagnosis (MacKay *et al.*, 2018). That said, different strategies have been developed for

CYP with a PDA profile, there is an increasing literature on PDA (e.g. Dura-Vila and Levi, 2018; Fidler and Christie, 2019) and the Government's current review on their autism strategy has included PDA. There is also a website developed by the PDA society which gives details of resources developed for this group ([www.pdasociety.org.uk](http://www.pdasociety.org.uk)).



## Key priorities

Key priorities include the need for teaching staff to find ways to:

- Enhance their understanding and knowledge about autism and ways to consult and support autistic CYP
- Reduce exclusions from schools and other education settings
- Address mental health and wellbeing
- Increase awareness of gender differences and cultural and linguistic diversity
- Promote social and emotional development and reduce bullying
- Become better at planning and following through transitions.

## Why is it important to reduce rates of exclusions?

The exclusion of children on the autism spectrum in schools in England is of particular concern. Every region in England has had an increase in the number of school exclusions for CYP on the autism spectrum of between 45% and 100% in the last five years (Cooke, 2018). The AET has produced a number of booklets on different aspects of exclusion which can be downloaded from the AET website.

## Why focus on mental health?

From a young age through to later adult life, autistic individuals are more likely to have a mental health condition and experience poorer mental health than the general population. In a UK questionnaire in which 1500 people responded, for example, the highest priority for autistic people, parents and practitioners was that they wanted to know how to improve mental health in people with autism. Understanding how to reduce anxiety was also a high priority (Autistica, 2016).

## Why do we need to understand more about how gender affects children and young people on the autism spectrum?

All cultures, races, ethnicities and genders are represented within the population of those diagnosed with autism. Recent research on the implications of gender on autism indicates that females often do not receive accurate or early diagnosis or appropriate support in educational settings. This can have an impact on their experiences and can lead to a lack of engagement in education.

Autism used to be viewed as a largely male condition with ratios of between 4 and 10 males to 1 female. However, many more girls and women are now being identified and diagnosed and recent studies suggest the ratio may be as low as 2 males to 1 female (MacKay, 2018). There are a number of areas in which differences are thought to exist between the experience and presentation of women and men with autism. At the current time, more research is needed to establish what these differences are. There is an increasing number of books and papers published which focus on girls and women on the autism spectrum, many of these being accounts written by autistic women and girls. Several authors have contributed to an edited book published in 2019 entitled *Girls and Autism* edited by Carpenter, Happe and Egerton.





## What are the issues facing cultural and linguistically diverse autistic children and young people and their families?

Research on the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse pupils with autism and their families has found that minority populations are under-represented in research studies, and there is little understanding of how different cultures and beliefs influence the educational needs of autistic pupils from diverse backgrounds. Culturally and linguistically diverse families also find it difficult to access the information, help and resources they need and to navigate the education system.

## Why there is a need to focus on friendships, peer relationships and bullying?

Autistic CYP experience a higher frequency of bullying than non-autistic peers. This indicates the need for education staff to receive training on how to reduce bullying whilst facilitating quality and lasting peer relationships. Friendships and peer relationships are ways to promote social and emotional understanding and development. It is important to ascertain the CYP's social preferences and to increase their social understanding in everyday situations.

For those in education, labels serve as a signpost and can be helpful, but for all CYP, teaching staff and parents should base their actions and strategies on the needs of the CYP which are identified by close observation and assessment across settings and situations and in consultation with the CYP concerned, wherever and whenever possible.

## Perspectives from the AET Young People's Panel

There is now clear recognition of the value and importance of asking autistic children and adults for their views on what is offered and provided. In this work, the Autism Education Trust Young People's panel offered their perspectives on what they deemed to be good practice in autism education.

They were asked to comment on the environment, the staff and the peer group. In relation to the *environment*, they highlighted the importance of safe spaces, classrooms, queuing and transitions. It was felt to be important to have more than one breakout room, as just having one space defeated the object of the space. In the playground area there needs to be quiet places to go, away from the noise. Classrooms should be large, where possible, and fluorescent strip lighting should be taken out. Rooms are often cluttered with displays and the panel felt that displays should be limited to communal areas. Queuing with other people was an issue, particularly in the canteen as it was hard to cope with the noise and the smells that can be overwhelming for some autistic students. Transition to secondary school needs to be supported and opportunities for meeting new staff should be given. The panel recommended that all autistic students are given a map of the school before they start which is colour coded according to subjects. Fire alarms and end of lesson bells should be demonstrated and have different sounds. In one school, bells were not used for the end of lessons, the staff merely kept the time on their watch.

The panel highlighted the importance of staff understanding autism and sensory issues, the importance of pastoral staff and adjustments to the curriculum. The first point made was that staff should have training and understand autism, including how to understand and manage meltdowns, shutdowns and behaviours that challenge. The panel also highlighted that sensory issues need to be taken into account when planning lessons, as work with





textiles, food and design and technology can pose problems with different smells and textures. The panel would like pastoral staff available all of the time. Having a counsellor or someone that knew them well was incredibly helpful. They would also like to choose which member of staff was their mentor. Supporting students to access the curriculum should be given more priority than the exam grades they achieved. The panel also wanted praise for low marks or grades as it can be very disheartening to students when they do less well. They would like more extra-curricular activities to ‘escape from exams and homework.’ The panel also wanted better careers advice that was specific to autism.

In terms of the peer group, the panel addressed the issue of relating to other CYP with autism. Some on the panel felt they had been pressured to help other autistic students or to run groups. Although this might work for some autistic students, some felt overwhelmed and emotionally drained by the experience. The panel also said that support groups or classes that only had autistic students within them could be problematic. These may trigger behaviours in each other and the needs of each student may be very different. The panel said that it is hard to know what to do at lunch and break-times if they did not have a friendship group. Being given the opportunity to share their diagnosis with their peers can be helpful in enhancing their understanding.



# Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice

Eight principles emerged from research evidence, practice and policy, and the perspectives and insights of autistic children and adults. The eight key principles are presented within the four themes developed by the AET:

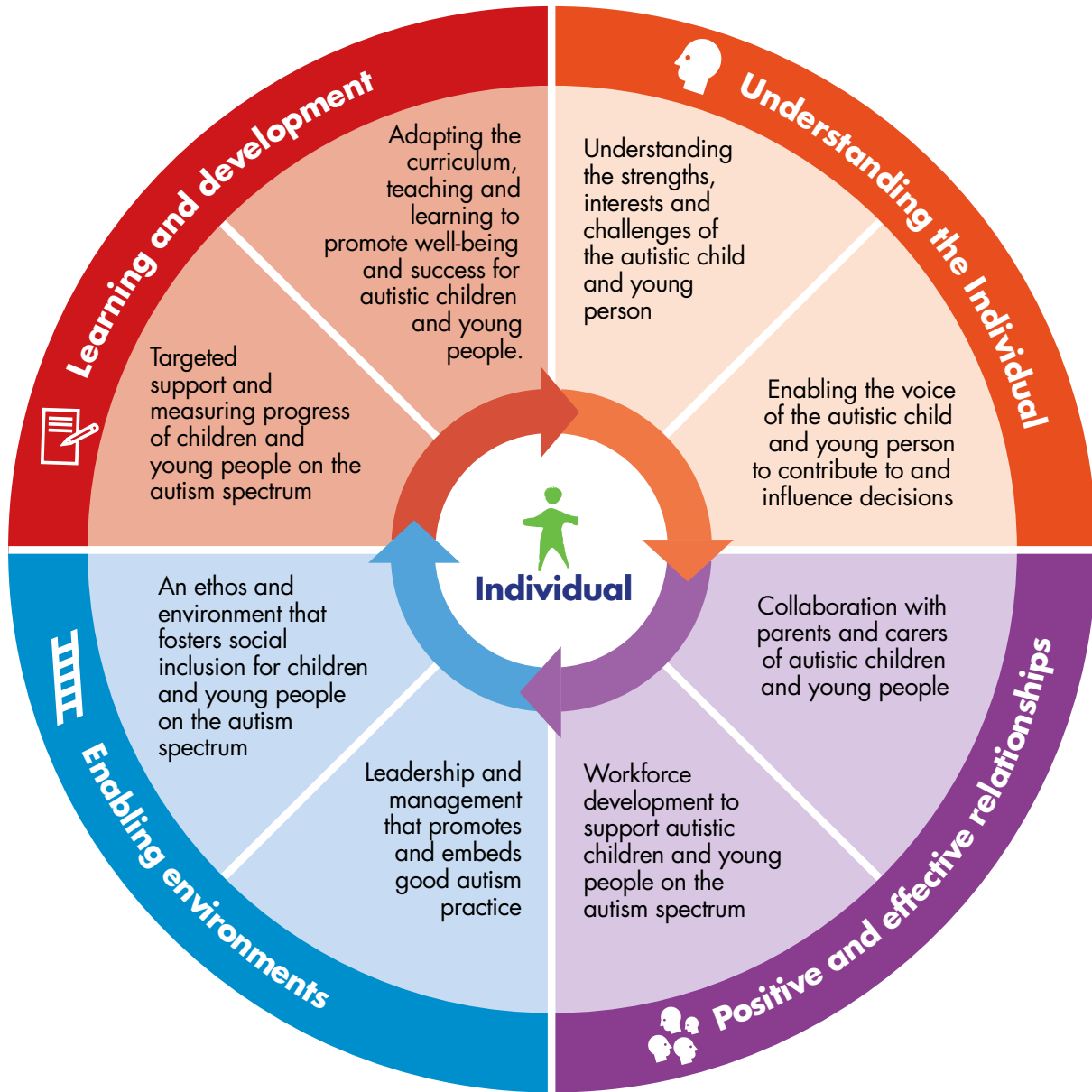
- Understanding the individual with autism
- Positive relationships
- Learning and development
- Enabling environments

Although the principles are presented in numerical order, they do not indicate the order or importance and all interrelate with each other. The eight principles are as follows:

1. Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person
2. Enabling the voice of the autistic child and young person to contribute to and influence decisions
3. Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people
4. Workforce development to support autistic children and young people
5. Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice
6. An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum
7. Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum
8. Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children and young people.



Figure One: Four themes and eight principles





# Principle One: Understanding the strengths, interests and challenges of the autistic child and young person

## Key points

- Key areas of difference in autism influence the way in which CYP learn and experience educational settings. Autism is a spectrum condition leading to wide variation within the autistic population. Staff need to get to know the specific individual and how autism affects them.
- CYP with autism have an uneven profile of abilities (e.g. may be more or less advanced in different areas of academic, social and emotional functioning, which may affect the development of independence and life skills).
- Other conditions often co-occur with autism and knowledge of these conditions should influence educational planning. Practitioners need to take into account potential disturbed and erratic eating and drinking, sleeping and personal care routines.
- Autistic CYP are likely to experience high levels of anxiety and stress and this will impact on their wellbeing and mental health, their learning and on their levels of interaction and communication.
- Autistic CYP have strengths and interests which need to be recognised and built upon within their educational programmes
- The needs and abilities of an individual CYP will change over time and vary across settings so regular review of these is required with appropriate action taken.

## Implications for practice

Good Autism Practice requires an understanding and awareness of how the main areas of difference impact on the learning, participation, independence and emotional state of autistic CYP. Settings need systems in place to identify the individual strengths, interests and challenges of individual CYP as a starting point to understanding and meeting their needs. Information can be gathered through observations and/or discussions with the CYP, discussions with their caregivers and other professionals who have worked with them or from reports and supporting documents. In addition, staff should prioritize the strengths and interests of CYP on the autism spectrum to support their engagement, learning and motivation. Key information should be regularly updated and shared through appropriate means, such as pupil profiles or passports, with strategies identified to promote inclusion and progress. A flexible educational approach should be adopted, based on an understanding of the individual requirements of CYP on the autism spectrum within their setting. For example, adjusting the timetable, where the CYP sits in class, how and when they do their homework, facilitating their inclusion with peers in a way that respects their preferences and reducing social demands, are some of the ways in which CYP can be helped to feel comfortable in an educational setting. Consideration must be given to the impact of the sensory environment and the identification of ways to reduce and manage this. This might include conducting an audit of the sensory environment and providing a designated safe/quiet space within a setting.



## SEND Code of Practice recommends

“A detailed assessment of need should ensure that the full range of an individual’s needs is identified, not simply the primary need. The support provided to an individual should always be based on a full understanding of their particular strengths and needs and seek to address them all” (p.96).

## Links to the Teacher Standards

Teachers must have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities). They need to demonstrate an awareness of the physical, social and intellectual development of children, and know how to adapt teaching to support pupils’ education at different stages of development.

## Key question for practitioners

**How does your setting identify the strengths, interests and challenges of children and young people on the autism spectrum?**

## Links to the AET Standards

### Early Years

Section One, Unique child, Standards 1 to 4

### Schools 5 to 16

Section One, The individual pupil, Standards 1 and 3

### Post-16

Section One, The individual, Standards 1, 2 and 3

## Links to the Case Studies

**Case Study A:** This is set in a mainstream primary school and gives details of the work that staff did with advice from the Autism Advisory teacher to ascertain the strengths and challenges of an 8 year old autistic boy. Details are then provided as to how the staff adjusted the environment to address his needs and how they built his interests and strengths into the curriculum.

**Case study E:** This is a secondary mainstream school for pupils aged 11–16. Within the case study is an interview with a Year 9 pupil called Max who describes his positive experiences at the school.

**Case study H:** This is a mainstream primary school for children aged 3–11 years which has a unit for 10 children with moderate learning difficulties. The work done to enable a four year old autistic child to adjust to and succeed within the school is described. Ascertaining the child’s profile of strengths and needs was paramount to the success achieved.

## Relevant resources and references

Carpenter, B., Happe, F and Egerton, J (Eds) (2019) *Girls and autism, educational, family and personal perspectives*, Abingdon: Routledge

Miller, A (2018) All about me: a step by step guide to telling children and young people on the autism spectrum about their diagnosis, London: Jessica Kingsley

Priestley, M, Fitzpatrick, M and Swift, G (2008) A year in the life of learners with ASD in mainstream courses in a Further Education College: lessons learned, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 9, 1, 52–56

Individual profiles and passports for autistic children and young people: examples can be downloaded from the AET website for all three age groups (EY; School and Post-16). [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk)

[www.gdmorewood.com](http://www.gdmorewood.com) is a website which contains resources developed by the staff in Case Study E for children and young people with autism.



## Principle Two: Enabling the voice of the autistic child and youngperson to contribute to and influence decisions

### Key points

- Include and consult the CYP in decisions about their education (e.g. day to day activities and tasks, social preferences, review meetings and transition planning).
- Regularly discuss current and future needs and wishes with the CYP (e.g. by arranging times to 'discuss' the support they receive and what might help; and reviewing their pupil passport or profile).
- Identify the most appropriate and developmentally relevant means for CYP to communicate their views. This may involve the use of alternative and augmentative forms of communication.
- Work with the CYP to develop their understanding of the way autism affects them, when parents and the young person consent to this (e.g. individual or group work with other autistic CYP).

### Implications for practice

Good Autism Practice promotes a partnership approach to decision-making based on building positive relationships between staff and autistic CYP. There should be flexibility in the curriculum to give CYP regular opportunities to be involved in giving feedback on their experiences and in decision-making, and the skills needed to do so. The most appropriate and developmentally relevant means should be identified and used to enable them to communicate their views. For some CYP, this will involve the use of alternative and augmentative forms of communication whilst others may be able to discuss issues directly with the staff who work with them. This could include using a photo-voice approach where CYP take photographs of the places where they felt listened to and the people who they felt listened to them.

Educational approaches need to consider the preferences of CYP on how they can best be supported in their day-to-day activities. Staff should proactively listen to the voice of CYP across the range of activities in which they engage, not only at points of transition or review meetings. This should include the nature and level of one-to-one adult support; the use of technology for academic and learning needs; planning, organisation, and time management; and the social aspects of their education (e.g. working as part of a group and peer relationships; understanding and managing their emotional state and the need for time alone when needed; managing sensory needs and times of transition or change).

### SEND Code of Practice recommends

“Children have a right to receive and impart information, to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them from the early years onwards. Their views should be given due weight according to their age, maturity and capability (Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).” (p.20).



## Links to the Teacher Standards

As part of their responsibility to promote good progress and outcomes, all teachers should guide pupils to reflect on the progress they have made and their emerging needs.

### Key question for practitioners

**How does your setting gain the views of children and young people on the autism spectrum and enable them to participate in decision-making about their educational experience?**

## Links to the AET Standards

### Early Years

Section Two, Positive relationships, Standard 3

### Schools 5 to 16

Section One, The individual pupil, Standards 7 and 10

Section Three, Learning and development, Standard 9

Section Four, Enabling environments, Standard 2

### Post-16

Section One, The Individual, Standard 10

Section Two, Building relationships, Standard 9

Section Three, Curriculum and learning, Standards 7 and 8

Section Four, Enabling participation, Standard 10

## Links to the case studies

**Case study F:** This is a community special school for pupils aged 3–19 years. Pupil voice is promoted across the school. Staff use Talking Mats ([www.talkingmats.com](http://www.talkingmats.com)), MAPS (Making Action Plans) (O'Brien and Pearpoint) and ideas based on the ideal self technique (Moran, 2008). Every pupil has a PowerPoint presentation that they help to produce for their Annual Review.

**Case study G:** This is a specialist, all age academy for students on the autism spectrum aged 5–19 years. Staff are currently piloting a research-based threepronged approach to capturing the autistic voice. This includes a visual bulletin board where students post a message on one of three topic boards, creating their own scrapbook of poems, pictures, and diary entries and the use of a secret box where students can post anonymously.

## Relevant resources and references

Honeybourne, V (2016) Girls on the autism spectrum in the classroom: hidden difficulties and how to help, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 11–20 (reports on the views of 67 autistic women about their school experiences)

Moran, H. (2006) A very personal assessment: Using a Personal Construct Psychology assessment technique (Drawing the Ideal Self) with young people with ASD to explore the child's view of self, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 7

Muggleton, J (2012) *Raising Martians from crash landing to leaving home*: London: Jessica Kingsley (the account of a young man with Asperger syndrome on his experiences of school and leaving home to attend University)

Sainsbury, C. (2000) *Martian in the playground*, Bristol: Lucky Duck Publishing (a book written about her school days by a woman on the autism spectrum)

Williams, J., & Hanke, D. (2007). 'Do you know what sort of school I want?': optimum features of school provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. *Good Autism Practice Journal* 8(2), 51–63. – can be accessed from the AET website in the National Standards for Schools and gives a template for discussing the Ideal school with autistic pupils.





## Principle Three: Collaboration with parents and carers of autistic children and young people

### Key points

- Proactively engage with parents and carers to establish and develop ways to communicate and share information, ideas and progress.
- Signpost parents and carers to appropriate services and support and, if they are seeking diagnostic assessment, inform them about the referral pathway in their local area through the Local Offer.
- Understand the needs of parents and caregivers who themselves may have autism, as well as families from a diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Co-ordinate and disseminate important information from all key stakeholders (including parents/carers and other family members) and ensure this information is shared with all, including the CYP.
- Parents and carers of autistic CYP should be signposted to helpful local services such as those set out in the authority's Local Offer and to parent autism support groups.

### Implications for practice

Good Autism Practice means that staff should actively seek ways of engaging with parents and carers of all autistic CYP to share concerns, ideas and strategies. Staff must be mindful of the impact of stress on caregivers and establish a positive approach to autism and the individual CYP they support. This is especially important at points of transition between year groups or educational settings. Providing information and support in the early years and timely support and information to parents and carers on possible post-16 options and post-18 education and training can help to reduce some of their anxiety around transition into adulthood.

Staff should ask caregivers what the priorities are for their child and agree effective ways in which to communicate and to whom. The AET developed a parent and carer's guide designed specifically for this purpose – *'Working together with your child's school'*. This recognises that caregivers' concerns are often as much about their child being safe, secure, accepted, respected, valued and nurtured as they are about curriculum issues.

Creating a pupil profile or passport that contains key information on the CYP should be done collaboratively between caregivers and staff. A partnership approach should be established through planned opportunities for informal communication and more formal review meetings. Settings should consider whether staff need to adapt the way they communicate with individual parents and carers to enable them to fully participate and engage in their child's education (e.g. always providing written confirmation of any actions agreed verbally). Settings can provide a forum where caregivers can meet together to share information (e.g. through training events or signposting parents and carers to support groups and other services via their local offer). Creating a wider network of support and help has been shown to be beneficial for addressing parental stress and isolation for families. This can be particularly helpful for caregivers of newly diagnosed children and young people.



## SEND Code of Practice recommends

“Local authorities, Early Years providers and schools should enable parents to share their knowledge about the child and give them confidence that their views and contributions are valued and will be acted upon. At times, parents, teachers and others may have differing expectations of how a child’s needs are best met. Sometimes these discussions can be challenging but it is in the child’s best interests for a positive dialogue between parents, teachers and others to be maintained, to work through points of difference and establish what action is to be taken.” (p.21).

## Links to the Teacher Standards

A key expectation is that teachers should work with parents in the best interests of their pupils.

## Key question for practitioners

**How does your setting work in partnership with parents and carers to enhance your knowledge of the autistic child and young person and to inform effective support?**

## Links to the AET Standards

### Early Years

Section Two, Positive relationships Standards 1 and 4

### Schools 5 to 16

Section Two, Building relationships, Standards 2 and 8

### Post-16

Section Two, Building relationships, Standards 1 and 9

## Links to the Case Studies

**Case study D:** This is a primary special school for autistic children aged 3–11. The school demonstrates a commitment to parental involvement through an extensive training programme. They run 40 workshops a year for parents. The school’s Family Support Worker, Middle and Senior leaders and Speech and Language Therapists and the Occupational Therapist run these. They focus on topics that particularly link to life at home and they share strategies used at home and school.

**Case study E:** This is a secondary mainstream school for pupils aged 11–16. Within the case study is an interview with the mother of a Year 9 pupil who describes the school as a ‘*beacon of excellence*’.

**Case study F:** This is a community special school for pupils aged 3–19 years. The school won an award from NASEN (National Association for Special Educational Needs) for its creative ways of working with parents, being nominated by the parents themselves.

**Case study H:** This is a mainstream primary school for children aged 3–11 years which has a unit for 10 children with moderate learning difficulties. It describes the very gradual inclusion of a four year old child into the nursery. The close involvement and collaboration with his mother was an essential element to their success.



## Relevant resources and references

Boorn, C. (2010) Parents' responses to having a child on the autism spectrum: Issues, challenges and ways to address these. *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 11(1), 58–68

Bradley, R., Jones, G., & Milton, D. (2014) *AET working together with your child's school*, London: Autism Education Trust – can be downloaded free from the AET website

Elley, D (2018) *Fifteen things they forget to tell you about autism: the stuff that transformed my life as an autism parent*, London: Jessica Kingsley



## Principle Four: Workforce development to support children and young people on the autism spectrum

### Key points

- All staff new to the workforce (including non-teaching staff and governors) receive autism training as part of their induction (e.g. new staff attend AET Making Sense of Autism training in their first year).
- Every setting has access to an autism champion/lead practitioner who coordinates support and information between CYP, staff, parents and other services.
- Settings regularly audit staff confidence levels, understanding and knowledge of autism and link this to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the Performance Management system (e.g. settings use the AET Competency Framework to audit staff skills and identify areas for staff development).
- Leadership and management have a commitment to an ongoing programme of CPD in autism to update the knowledge, skills and practice of their workforce.

### Implications for practice

Good autism practice means that settings provide access to professional development on several levels to meet the range of needs of autistic CYP and the staff who work with them. This requires leadership and management to understand the professional development and resourcing requirements of staff, for instance, using the AET National Standards and Competency Frameworks to identify the CPD needs of all staff. The impact of any professional development on the learning and wellbeing of autistic CYP and staff confidence and ability to meet their needs should also be considered, for example, through performance appraisal and management. There should be a focus on developing an understanding of autism and how this might affect the learning of individual autistic CYP, how specific approaches may address one or more areas of development such as communication and social inclusion and effective engagement and partnership with parents and carers.

CPD can include a wide range of activities such as self-directed learning, mentoring and coaching, discussion and collaboration with colleagues, internal and external training courses, such as the AET Programme, and studying for accredited qualifications. It is essential that all those working within a setting receive basic awareness training in autism as autism affects the way in which CYP understand and interact with their environment and other people. This should be included as part of the induction programme for new governors and all staff, and focus on understanding autism as a difference rather than a deficit. Enhanced professional development would enable staff to adapt teaching and learning to meet the needs of individual CYP and provide more opportunities for the development of shared practice and strategies. At a specialist level, professional development will support the skills and knowledge needed for staff taking a lead role in co-ordinating the support of CYP in their setting (e.g. having a lead autism practitioner or autism champion. Having an identified lead for autism would enable a more co-ordinated approach between staff, CYP, families and other services whilst providing ongoing opportunities for identifying and meeting professional development needs within a setting.



## SEND Code of Practice recommends

“The local authority must set out information in its Local Offer on securing expertise among teachers, lecturers or other professionals to support children and young people with SEN or disabilities. This should include professional development to secure expertise at different levels.” (p.68).

## Links to the Teacher Standards

All teachers must take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development as part of fulfilling their wider professional responsibilities.

## Key question for practitioners

**How does your setting provide Continuing Professional Development on autism and how do you measure the impact of this?**

## Links to the AET Standards and Competency Frameworks

### Early Years

– see the *AET Early Years Competency Framework* for staff working in Early Years

### Schools 5 to 16

Section Two, Building relationships, Standards 3 and 7

Section Three, Curriculum and learning, Standard 5

Section Four, Enabling environments, Standards 7 and 10

– see the *AET Schools Competency Framework* for staff working with CYP 5 to 16 years

### Post-16

Section Two, Building relationships, Standard 10

Section Three, Curriculum and learning, Standard 10

Section Four, Enabling participation, Standard 2, 7, 8 and 9

– see the *AET Post-16 Competency Framework* for staff working with CYP 16 to 25 years

## Links to the Case Studies

**Case study B:** The setting is a mainstream academy for children aged 3–11 years. A whole school ethos has been developed and visual prompts are used throughout the school to remind staff on how to enable communication. A coaching model is used to support staff in developing their practice.

**Case study D:** The setting is a primary special school for autistic children aged 3–11 years. There is a strong commitment to whole school training and to having a highly trained staff who then train staff across the school.

**Case study E:** This is a secondary mainstream school for pupils aged 11–16. The school employs its own Educational Psychologist, Speech and Language Therapists and a Psychotherapist to address the needs of pupils with SEND, including pupils with autism. In addition to individual assessment and therapy work, these professionals work with groups of pupils and also train the staff who attend the groups.



**Case study H:** This is a mainstream primary school for children aged 3–11 years which has a unit for 10 children with moderate learning difficulties. Training for all the staff was given high priority and this was seen as crucial to the success of the work done in enabling a four year old autistic child to be successfully included.

## Relevant resources and references

Bradley, R. (2018) *AET Early Years Competency Framework*. London: Autism Education Trust (sets out the skills and knowledge staff require when working with autistic children in the Early Years) – (free to download from <http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk>)

Daly, M., English, A. & O'Brien, A. (2016) *AET Schools Autism Competency Framework*. London: Autism Education Trust (sets out the skills and knowledge staff require when working with autistic students Post-16) – (free to download from <http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk>)

Gerland, G (2013) *Secrets to success for professionals in the autism field*, London: Jessica Kingsley (written by a woman on the autism spectrum)

Kossyvaki, L, Jones, G and Guldborg, K (2012) The effect of adult interactive style on the spontaneous communication of young children with autism at school *British Journal of Special Education* 39,4, pp.173–184.

Morewood, G. D., Humphrey, N., & Symes, W. (2011). Mainstreaming autism: making it work. *Good Autism Practice Journal* 12(2), 62–68.

## Websites

Inclusion Development Programme: Autism (free to access at (<http://www.idponline.org.uk>)). This is a free online set of materials about pupils with autism aged 5 to 16 in schools commissioned by the Department for Education in 2008.



## Principle Five: Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice

### Key points

- Leaders create an inclusive educational environment through changing attitudes and behaviours towards CYP with SEND, including autistic CYP
- Leaders enact their statutory obligation to create enabling environments through making reasonable adjustments. Learning and working environments that do not accommodate such differences will disable young people on the autism spectrum.
- Leaders recognise the needs of autistic CYP and take proactive steps to reduce formal and informal exclusions.
- Leaders promote the use of the AET National Standards to identify areas of good autism practice and areas that need development (e.g. EY, School or Post-16 settings use this information as part of the development plan for their setting).

### Implications for practice

Good autism practice means that leadership and management have a commitment to inclusive values and to meeting the needs of all CYP on the autism spectrum within their settings. Enabling environments through making reasonable adjustments is a statutory obligation in disability law and leadership and management, including the governing body, must ensure that this is applied to autistic CYP. They have a responsibility to establish an inclusive culture and ethos towards autism through influencing the attitudes and beliefs of staff, CYP, their families and the wider community. For example, delivering a whole school assembly on autism, inviting autistic speakers to present, or creating a lead practitioner role to lead and co-ordinate autism support across their setting. Having high expectations for all learners and a strong commitment to equal opportunities means

that leadership and management enable staff to proactively meet the needs of autistic CYP through making reasonable adjustments in their practice. This requires a commitment to an ongoing programme of CPD so that staff, including themselves and governors, have the appropriate skills and knowledge to support CYP on the autism spectrum.

To ensure that actions are integrated, sustained and monitored for impact, it is important that a commitment to addressing the needs of autistic CYP is referenced within improvement plans, policies and practice. For example, leaders and managers can use the AET Standards to identify areas of good autism practice and areas that require development and then use this information as part of the development plan or Equality Duty objectives for their setting. Specific consideration must be given to the management and reduction of exclusions. Leaders and governing bodies must be aware of the different forms of disability discrimination and their setting's legal duties under the Equality Act (2014). For example, sharing and discussing the AET's *'Guide to help Governing Bodies comply with equality law when considering a Headteacher's decision to exclude an autistic pupil'* at a full Governors meeting. In considering whether exclusion is an appropriate and proportionate measure and whether alternatives have been explored, they must understand how autism affects an individual CYP (including levels of anxiety and stress) and whether reasonable adjustments have been made to support them.





## SEND Code of Practice recommends

“The leaders of Early Years settings, Schools and Colleges should establish and maintain a culture of high expectations that expects those working with children and young people with SEND to include them in all the opportunities available to other children and young people so they can achieve well. There is a significant overlap between children and young people with SEN and those with disabilities and many such children and young people are covered by both SEN and equality legislation.” (p.27).

## Links to the Teacher Standards

The Teachers’ Standards set a clear baseline of expectations for the professional practice and conduct of teachers and define the minimum level of practice expected of teachers in England. Leadership and management should use the Teachers’ Standards to improve standards of teaching, by setting minimum expectations and assessing performance against them.

## Key question for practitioners

**How does the leadership and management team promote and support the inclusion of children and young people on the autism spectrum?**

## Links to the AET Standards and Competency Frameworks

### Early Years

– see the AET Early Years Competency Framework for staff working in Early Years which sets out the knowledge and skills needed by staff when working with autistic CYP

### Schools 5 to 16

– see the AET Schools Competency Framework for staff working with CYP 5 to 16 years which sets out the knowledge and skills needed by teaching staff when working with autistic CYP

### Post-16

– see the AET Post-16 Competency Framework for staff working with CYP 16 to 25 years which sets out the knowledge and skills needed by teaching staff when working with autistic CYP

## Links to the Case Studies

**Case study A:** The setting is a mainstream primary school and details are given on how a whole school consensus was developed on how to understand and communicate with a very anxious 8-year old autistic boy.

**Case study B:** The setting is a mainstream academy for children aged 3 to 11 years. Senior staff maintain that it is the people and practice that have to change (and not the pupils) and illustrations are given on how they aim to achieve this.

**Case study E:** The setting is a mainstream secondary school for pupils aged 11 to 16. The SENCo and Director of Curriculum support, Gareth Morewood, has developed many links with professionals and researchers outside the school to inform and enhance practice and inclusion. In a similar way, Sarah Parsons and colleagues at the University of Southampton have set up a network of practitioners and researchers which aims to improve the flow of ideas between the two groups (Parsons and Kovshoff, 2019).



## Relevant resources and references

Miller, P., Hards, M., Gore, N., & Brady, S. (2013). The Autism Champions Project: strengthening capacity within and across schools. *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 14(2), 33–37.

Morewood, G. D., Humphrey, N., & Symes, W. (2011). Mainstreaming autism: making it work. *Good Autism Practice Journal* 12(2), 62–68.

Parsons, S and Kovshoff, H (2019) Building the evidence base through school research partnerships in autism education: the Autism Community Research Network @ Southampton (ACoRNS), *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 20, 1, 5–12

[www.gdmorewood.com](http://www.gdmorewood.com) – a website which contains resources developed by school staff and others for children and young people with autism.



## Principle Six: An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for children and young people on the autism spectrum

### Key points

- Reasonable adjustments are made to remove barriers to participation and that enable autistic CYP to access the curriculum, break and lunchtimes, extra-curricular activities, residential trips, work experience or exams.
- Learning environments are structured, understandable and predictable. This includes providing a clearly organised environment, a variety of means to communicate with CYP on the autism spectrum and an environment which encourages and facilitates communication.
- Policies and proactive strategies are in place to reduce the increased risk of bullying to CYP on the autism spectrum.
- Autistic CYP are supported to develop positive relationships with their peers. Developmentally appropriate autism awareness sessions are delivered to peers to increase understanding and promote a supportive attitude to CYP on the autism spectrum.
- Staff consider the accessibility of the learning environment for autistic CYP by taking into account potential physical barriers and processing difficulties as well as social demands of working with or being with their peers.
- Policies and proactive strategies are in place to reduce the increased risk of bullying to autistic CYP and to minimize possible adverse effects on peers.

### Implications for practice

Good autism practice means settings are aware of the increased risk of social exclusion for autistic CYP and have proactive strategies in place to support their inclusion and to develop peer understanding and friendships. This requires a multi layered approach based on improved autism awareness for everyone within the setting, strong partnerships with parents and the local community and implementing strategies that enable autistic CYP to engage socially and be better understood by their peers. Social inclusion requires settings to make reasonable adjustments and to adapt systems and structures to remove barriers to participation. This can, for example, include additional planning and accommodations to enable individuals to access and enjoy break and lunchtimes, extra-curricular activities, residential trips, work experience and exams. This may require adaptations to the curriculum or physical environment and in the attitude, expectations and language of staff. The SPELL approach (Structure, Positive approach and expectations, Empathy, Low arousal and Links) developed by the National Autistic Society is a useful framework to consider for the development of environments and for thinking more widely about what society needs to do to become a place where autistic individuals can feel comfortable and accepted.

A whole setting priority should be around the development of effective anti-bullying policies and practice that supports the social inclusion of children and young people on the autism spectrum. Anti-bullying policies are most effective when all school staff understand



the principles and purpose of the school's policy, its legal responsibilities, how to resolve problems, and where to seek support. Leadership and management should ensure that staff are given information and training to raise the profile of this issue for autistic CYP and integrate it into their practice. For example, using the Anti-Bullying Alliance materials on bullying and autism to inform the settings anti-bullying strategy.

CYP on the autism spectrum will need specific guidance on how to recognise the signs of bullying and what they should do if they feel they, or others, are being bullied. This should include information on cyber-bullying and how to stay safe online whilst recognising the benefits of technology in enabling many CYP on the autism spectrum to increase their social contact and networks through activities such as online gaming and social media. Some settings have a system where children can report incidents to staff anonymously via an online site, which is likely to increase the reporting rates. The implementation of approaches to develop the mutual understanding, communication and support between CYP on the autism spectrum and their peers will help promote social inclusion and lessen the risk of bullying (e.g. introducing peer mentoring programmes autism awareness sessions or setting up lunchtime clubs based on shared interests).

### SEND Code of Practice recommends

“Public bodies, including further education institutions, local authorities, maintained schools, maintained nursery schools, academies and free schools are covered by the public sector equality duty and, when carrying out their functions, must have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between disabled and non-disabled children and young people.” (p.17).

### Links to the Teacher Standards

Teachers should establish a safe and stimulating environment based on mutual respect and consistently demonstrate the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of learners. This includes having a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit an individual's ability to learn, and how best to overcome these.

### Key question for practitioners

**How does your setting reduce bullying and promote the social inclusion of autistic children and young people and respect the social preferences and needs of each individual?**

### Links to the AET Standards

#### Early Years

Section Two, Positive relationships, Standard 2

Section Three, Learning and development, Standard 2

#### Schools 5 to 16

Section One, The individual pupil, Standards 2 and 8

Section Two, Building relationships, Standard 9

#### Post-16

Section One, The individual, Standards 8 and 9

Section Two, Building relationships, Standards 3, 4, and 5



## Links to the Case Studies

**Case study B:** The setting is a mainstream academy for children aged 3–11 years. A number of different safe spaces have been created and these are described, explaining how these aim to address the needs of some of the autistic children on roll.

**Case study D:** This is a primary special school for autistic pupils aged 3–11. The whole environment has been designed with the needs of autistic young people in mind and with input from the staff.

**Case study F:** This is a community all age special school for pupils aged 3–19 years. The staff make detailed assessments of the pupils' sensory needs and have developed strategies to address these. The school is also enhancing their knowledge and practice in relation to autistic girls.

## Related resources and references

Andras, M (2012) The value of LEGO® therapy in promoting social interaction in primary-aged children with autism, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 13,2, 18–25

AET (2018). A guide to help governing boards comply with Equality Law when considering a headteacher's decision to exclude an autistic pupil. London: Autism Education Trust (free to download from <http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk>)

Bradley, R. (2016). 'Why single me out?' Peer mentoring, autism and inclusion in mainstream secondary schools. *British Journal of Special Education*, 43(3), 272–288.

Caldwell, P (2007) *From isolation to intimacy: making friends without words*, London: Jessica Kingsley

MacKay, T and Greig, A (2013) The Homunculi: a flexible CBT approach to social and emotional wellbeing in children and adolescents on the autism spectrum, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 14,1, 62–69



## Principle Seven: Targeted support and measuring progress of children and young people on the autism spectrum

### Key points

- When assessing progress towards learning goals, data is collected on social and emotional awareness, communication, social understanding and inclusion, daily life skills, independence and autonomy (working in partnership with parents, carers and other professionals).
- A graduated approach and the 'Assess, Plan, Review and Do' cycle should ascertain the process and quality of the learning experience (not just outcomes) from the perspective of the autistic CYP.
- ICT (Information and Communication Technology) is used as a tool for communication and leisure for the autistic CYP and to enhance their learning experience.
- Autistic CYP are given opportunities to increase their independence and facilitate their transition to adulthood (e.g. develop and practice their knowledge and skills in a range of real life situations in the community and the workplace).

### Implications for practice

Good autism practice means settings that provide a flexible curriculum that promotes social inclusion, wellbeing and prepares autistic CYP for transitions between educational stages and into further education or the workplace. This should ensure that all learning environments and teaching methods are adapted to enable learners on the autism spectrum to participate and succeed in both academic and non-academic areas. Such an approach could benefit other learners without lessening the importance, or the im-

portance, of strategies for CYP on the autism spectrum. For example, a whole class approach to using the zones of regulation to identify and monitor emotional wellbeing in a Primary school. Or the use of visuals to support an understanding of the order of daily activities for all learners. This requires teaching staff to take responsibility for the teaching and learning of all autistic CYP in their class, including planning for the work of support staff. This would allow more opportunities for direct teacher input and rather than educating autistic CYP with Teaching Assistants outside the classroom.

As part of the graduated approach, settings must embed effective assessment processes to identify progress for CYP on the autism spectrum across non-academic areas as well as on attainments in academic areas. This can include, for example, using the AET Progression Framework to identify the impact of a social communication programme for learners in a secondary school rather than focusing solely on outcomes, staff should actively involve autistic CYP as part of the Assess, Plan, Review and Do cycle to better understand the learning experience from their perspective. This process will be enhanced through engagement with parents, carers and other services such as Speech and Language Therapy Autism Advisory Team and Educational Psychology.

There should be a focus on identifying and addressing barriers to learning in areas, such as, communication, play, social understanding and sensory issues. Many of these may be addressed through quality first teaching and making reasonable adjustments whilst others



may require ‘small step’ planning and more personalised support to provide the structured development and understanding of skills. This may involve the use of specific interventions or approaches that have been identified as likely to be most effective in meeting an individual’s needs through the ‘assess’ stage of the graduated approach. Staff should draw on the latest research about the likely impact of particular interventions and consider the views of children and young people as part of this process.

A priority should be on developing their sense of agency and ability to carry out tasks with lessening support from adults providing appropriate scaffolds and strategies to achieve this. Technological advances have opened up many new possibilities in this regard. For example, educational apps on iPads can be adapted to accommodate different learning styles, whilst the number of repetitions of material to be learned, the quantity and type of scaffold to support learning, and the level of difficulty can all be adjusted automatically based on the learner’s response.

Good Autism Practice means settings have systems to identify, monitor, build and maintain the mental and emotional wellbeing of CYP on the autism spectrum. Opportunities exist to develop and promote social and emotional skills through relationships and sex education (RSE), personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), as well as in the wider curriculum. This should include programmes of social and emotional learning adapted for autism that have the potential to help CYP acquire the skills they need.

Autistic CYP should be taught about sex, gender and relationships, friendships, bullying and online safety, using autism friendly and developmentally appropriate materials.

Continued Professional Development programmes should focus on the wellbeing, good mental health and resilience of CYP on the autism spectrum.

## SEND Code of Practice recommends

“Early years providers, schools and colleges should know precisely where children and young people with SEN are in their learning and development. They should ensure decisions are informed by the insights of parents and those of children and young people themselves; have high ambitions and set stretching targets for them; track their progress towards these goals; keep under review the additional or different provision that is made for them; promote positive outcomes in the wider areas of personal and social development, and ensure that the approaches used are based on the best possible evidence and are having the required impact on progress.” (p.25).

## Links to the Teacher Standards

Teachers must have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils’ ability to learn, and how best to overcome these. This includes making use of formative and summative assessment to secure pupils’ progress and using relevant data to monitor progress, set targets, and plan lessons.

## Key question for practitioners

**How does your setting measure outcomes and reflect on and evaluate the processes by which tasks and goals are taught to autistic children and young people?**





## Links to the AET Standards

### Early Years

Section One, Unique child, Standards 1 to 4

Section Three, Learning and development, Standard 3

### Schools 5 to 16

Section Three, Curriculum and learning, Standards 6 and 7

### Post-16

Section Three, Curriculum and learning, Standards 6 and 9

## Links to the Case Studies

**Case Study B:** The setting is a mainstream academy for children aged 3 to 11 years. This case study describes the ways in which staff ascertain the strengths and the challenges of the autistic pupils from early years to when they leave at 11, and make adjustments accordingly.

**Case study D:** This is a primary special school for autistic children aged 3 to 11 years. The school initially operated a subject-based curriculum but realised this was not meeting the needs of their students or leading to success. Staff identified they had three types of learner which they characterised as leaves, trunks and roots. The curriculum was therefore modified into these three strands which are described in the case study.

**Case study F:** This is a community special school for pupils aged 3 to 19 years. The school measures the impact of their interventions through a series of questionnaires. Learning objectives are printed on students' work using symbols and words. The school uses MAPP (Mapping and Assessing Personal Progress) which is a suite of materials developed by Mike Sissons at the Dales School in North Yorkshire. The case study also gives details of how students work is accredited by external bodies, such as ASDAN.

## Relevant resources and references

Farrell, S., Fidler, R., Christie, P., & Lyn-Cook, L. (2017) AET Progression Framework. London: Autism Education Trust

Henault, I (2005) Asperger's syndrome and sexuality: from adolescence through adulthood, London: Jessica Kingsley

Hendrickx, S (2008) Love, sex and long-term relationships, London: Jessica Kingsley  
Lawson, W (2005) Sex, sexuality and the autism spectrum, London: Jessica Kingsley

O'Reilly, C (2019) An evaluation of the Autism Education Trust's Progression Framework in three mainstream primary schools, Good Autism Practice Journal, 20,1,29–40

Part 2 of MAPP, the Continuum of Skill Development can be found at <http://www.thedalesschool.org/article/assessment-progression-mapp/275>. ASDAN <https://www.asdan.org.uk/courses>



## Principle Eight: Adapting the curriculum, teaching and learning to promote wellbeing and success for children and young people on the autism spectrum

### Key points

- Staff provide a broad and balanced curriculum that addresses not only the learning needs of CYP with autism (including preferred styles of learning and unevenability profiles) but also addresses their social, emotional well-being, communication needs and life skills.
- The emotional wellbeing of CYP on the autism spectrum is monitored and prioritised alongside their academic progress. (e.g. CYP are taught about staying safe, sex, gender and relationships, online safety and bullying, using autism friendly materials and resources).
- Staff work with CYP, their families and other services to identify triggers for anxiety and stress (e.g. staff observe and assess the potential sensory challenges, both indoors and outdoors, and consider how to address these).
- CYP on the autism spectrum are taught how to identify, understand and regulate their emotional state.
- Staff understand the potential vulnerability of CYP on the autism spectrum to abuse and neglect (e.g. staff have specific training on safeguarding CYP on the autism spectrum).
- Staff consider how to reduce the academic pressures on autistic CYP when needed, especially around tests and public exams and ensure that appropriate adjustments and accommodations are applied for and implemented.

### Implications for practice

Good autism practice means settings have systems to identify, monitor, build and maintain the mental and emotional wellbeing of CYP on the autism spectrum. Opportunities exist to develop and promote social and emotional skills through dedicated relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE), and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), as well as the wider curriculum. This should include programmes of social and emotional learning that have the potential to help children and young people acquire the skills they need to have good mental health and wellbeing, as well as benefitting their academic progress<sup>(10)</sup>. Targeted learning opportunities should focus on emotional understanding and regulation across all ages. Furthermore, autistic CYP should be taught about sex, gender and relationships, friendships, bullying and online safety, using autism friendly and developmentally appropriate materials. Continued professional development programmes should focus on the wellbeing, good mental health and resilience of children and young on the autism spectrum. This will support staff to prevent, identify and meet needs through effective practice in settings and work with children and young people, their families and specialist services (e.g. Educational Psychology, Autism Advisory Teams and CAMHS).

### SEND Code of Practice recommends

“Early years providers, schools and colleges should know precisely where children and young people with SEN are in their learning and development. They should: promote positive outcomes in the wider areas of personal and social development.” (p.25)



## Links to the Teacher Standards

Teachers must have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils' ability to learn, and how best to overcome these. This includes making use of formative and summative assessment to secure pupils' progress and using relevant data to monitor progress, set targets, and plan lessons.

## Key question for practitioners

**How does your setting adjust the curriculum, teaching and learning to meet the needs of children and young people on the autism spectrum?**

## Links to the AET Standards

### Early Years

Section Two, Positive relationships, Standard 3  
Section Three, Learning and development, Standards 1, 2 and 4  
Section Four, Enabling environments, Standards 1 to 4

### Schools 5 to 16

Section One, The individual child, Standard 7  
Section Two, Building relationships, Standards 7 and 9  
Section Three, The individual child, Standards 1, 4, 7, 8, 10  
Section Four, Enabling environments, Standards, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

### Post-16

Section One, The individual, Standard 5  
Section Two, Building relationships, Standard 7  
Section Three, Curriculum and learning, Standards 1, 2, 4, 5  
Section Four, Enabling participation, Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 10

## Links to the Case Studies

**Case Study C:** This is a primary special school for autistic children aged 3 to 11. The school has introduced a number of interventions which the staff feel are very successful for children on the autism spectrum. These include Yoga, a Forest school and outdoor learning, the SCERTS approach (Prizant *et al.*, 2006), the Attention Autism approach (<http://www.attentionautism.com>) and Colourful Semantics (Bryan, 1997).

**Case study D:** This is a primary special school for autistic children aged 3 to 11 years. The staff now use Skills Maps to ascertain progress, as well as other measures. These maps form the scheme of work for the children. An example might be a 'using my hands' skills map. This starts off with touching textures and builds in a progression all the way up to writing.

**Case study E:** This is a mainstream secondary school for pupils aged 11 to 16. There is a person on the staff responsible for exploring adjustments for exams and she explains her role and what has helped the autistic CYP.

**Case study G:** This is a specialist, all age academy for students on the autism spectrum aged 5 to 19 years. Examples are given on the Key stage 4 curriculum which prepares students aged 16 and over for further education and employment.



## Relevant resources and references

Autism Education Trust (2017). *Post-16 National Autism Standards*. These set out the key elements of a Post-16 setting thought to lead to effective autism provision (free to download from <http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk>)

Ambitious About Autism (2017) A guide to the use of the AET Post-16 programme by local authorities, support services and colleges, London: Autism Education Trust (free to download from <http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk>)

Autism Education Trust (2018). AET exam accommodations guidance to support students with autism at GCSE. London: Autism Education Trust (free to download from <http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk>)

Chown, N., Baker-Rogers, Hughes, L., Cossburn, KN., Beardon, L and Leatherland, J. (2018) The achieving more in college project: support for autistic students attending Further Educational Colleges, *Good Autism Practice Journal*, 19, 1, 50-59

O'Brien, A. (2015). *Finished at school guide*. London: Ambitious About Autism – can be accessed free from <http://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/>

O'Brien, A. (2018) AET Post-16 Autism Standards. London: Autism Education Trust

O'Brien, A. (2018) AET Post-16 Autism Competency Framework. London: Autism Education Trust

Vermeulen, P (2014) The practice of promoting happiness in autism, in G. Jones and E. Hurley (Eds). *Promoting happiness, wellbeing and mindfulness with people with an autistic spectrum condition and their families*, Birmingham: BILD



## Concluding points

The way in which autistic CYP are understood by others has implications for the approaches taken in Early Years, Schools and Post-16 settings. The performance and actions of an individual CYP depend very much on the context, in addition to their profile of skills and understanding. One can create an environment where the CYP feels uncomfortable and anxious and excluded or one where they feel relaxed, included and confident where they can learn. The type of environments created for typical individuals are often very difficult for autistic CYP to operate within. Without knowledge of this fact and of autism, generally, and the CYP as an individual, teaching staff and others can unwittingly create serious problems for autistic CYP.

These guidelines serve to give those working in education the key principles that should underpin their work together with references and real life examples from the eight case studies and published literature. It is hoped that the guidelines will inspire those working with autistic CYP in Early Years, Schools and Post-16 settings to develop their understanding of autism and to make adjustments in their current settings to the physical, sensory and social environments and to adapt what they offer and how autistic CYP are supported to enable all those on the autism spectrum in their setting to flourish and succeed.



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Williams, J., & Hanke, D. (2007). 'Do you know what sort of school I want?': optimum features of school provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. *Good Autism Practice Journal* 8(2), 51–63. – can be accessed from the [AET website](#) in the National Standards for Schools and gives a template for discussing the Ideal school with autistic pupils.

## Websites

Autism Education Trust ([www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk))

[www.gdmorewood.com](http://www.gdmorewood.com) is a website which contains resources developed by the staff in Case Study E for children and young people with autism.

Ofsted Frameworks (<http://www.gov.uk>)

Inclusion Development Programme: Autism (free to access at (<http://www.idponline.org.uk>)). This is a free online set of materials about pupils with autism aged 5 to 16 in schools commissioned by the Department for Education in 2008.





# Appendix 1: About the authors

## Professor Karen Guldberg

Karen Guldberg is Professor in Autism Studies, University of Birmingham and Director of the Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER). Her research focuses on educational approaches and practice, the training needs of practitioners, and technology enhanced learning for autistic pupils. Karen runs the first year of a Masters programme in autism studies by distance learning. She has also been involved in producing a number of online training resources, for educators as well as health practitioners. She led the development of the Autism Education Trust partnership school-based training and the adaptation of this to Early Years. She has been principal investigator on research projects working in partnership with schools, practitioners and parents. Recent international research includes leading an Erasmus Plus strategic partnership (2014–2017) to research good autism educational practice in Greece and Italy and conducting research for the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) on how to improve autism education in Qatar.

## Dr Ryan Bradley

Dr Ryan Bradley is a manager for the Communication and Interaction Team in Oxfordshire. This service supports the inclusion of children and young people with communication and interaction needs in schools, including those on the autism spectrum. He has collaborated extensively with ACER on various research projects and on the development of training programmes for the Autism Education Trust. He was a lead author of the AET schools and Early Years programmes and recently revised the Early Years training materials, National Standards and Competency Framework. Ryan also developed the AET ‘Receiving and Understanding a Diagnosis’ materials on autism and co-wrote the ‘AET Parent Guides’. He worked as a Research Associate with ACER on the Erasmus Plus strategic partnership project to research good autism educational practice in Italy and Greece and on the project to develop autism education in Qatar for the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE).

## Dr Kerstin Wittemeyer

Dr Kerstin Wittemeyer has been a lecturer in Autism Studies at the School of Education, University of Birmingham for a number of years. She led on the campustaught autism programmes at the School of Education. Kerstin’s PhD was an evaluation of an eclectic early intervention approach for children with autism in Toulouse, France. Since joining the Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER) in 2009, Kerstin has taken part and led on several projects funded by the AET, including the report on “Educational provision and outcomes for people on the autism spectrum” in 2011 and the development of a Professional Competency Framework in 2012. For a number of years, Kerstin was part of a unique project in London called the Pan London Autism Schools Network (PLASN) Research group, a partnership project between specialist autism schools and autism researchers from different universities.



## Jo Briscoombe

Jo Briscoombe (BEd (Hons), MA Education) has worked in education for 26 years in education. She is a Teaching and Learning Adviser for Integra and is the service and team leader for Integra's Inclusion and Behaviour Support teams. Jo's role involves advisory work with schools and covers a wide range of activities including school improvement; school review; moderation; and online safety support and technology. As the lead for professional development for School Support in Integra she oversees a comprehensive programme of conferences and events. She is also a Lead Moderator for KS1 and KS2 and an accredited assessor for the ICT and online safety marks. Previous national work has involved the delivery of the National College Strategic Leadership in ICT programme, as well as delivering Lead Teacher training and producing materials for the Primary Strategy.

## Claire Phillips

Claire Phillips (BEd (Hons) and MEd Inclusion and Autism) has worked in education for 33 years and is South Gloucestershire's Local Authority Autism Adviser through Integra. She is the Autism Education Trust (AET) Training Hub Lead for South Gloucestershire and Bristol. Her role involves work with mainstream and special schools across all age groups, providing expert advice and training around autism to teachers, teaching assistants, SENCOs, head teachers, senior leadership teams and parents. Claire has also trained and supported parents and carers extensively through Cygnet, NAS EarlyBird Plus (parents' programmes) and through Integra's Autism South West service, which provides autism support, conferences and networks for professionals and parents. She is commissioned by the Local Authority to provide guidance and advice around autism and she also sits on a multi-agency local autism group. Claire is also Vice Chair of Governors at a Free School for autistic pupils.

## Dr Glenys Jones

Dr Glenys Jones is a Chartered Psychologist and an Honorary Lecturer within the Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER) at the University of Birmingham. She has been engaged in research into educational interventions for autistic children and adults for over 30 years and is Editor of the Good Autism Practice Journal, published by BILD. She currently works within a diagnostic service in the West Midlands set up to assess adults who are thought to be on the autism spectrum. For the Autism Education Trust, she led on the work in 2008 which identified the issues and challenges in the education and also on the Standards in Autism Education for schools and educational settings (5–16). She was also involved in producing the AET Parent/Carers' Guide. Glenys has been a member of the AET Programme Board since its inception and is a Trustee of Autism West Midlands which provides services for autistic adults and supports and advises families, carers and children and young people.



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