

Adjusting Provision for Autistic Pupils Returning to Education Settings



Hello and welcome to the autism education trust. This short briefing is for leaders who will be responsible for adjusting provision to meet the needs of autistic pupils as they return to education settings.

Content

- Be aware of the basic reasonable adjustments you should put in place and others that you could consider.



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We hope that by the end of this briefing you will:

A quick reminder.....

Autism is a difference not a deficit.
Autistic children and young people experience differences in 4 key areas:

- Communication
- Social Understanding
- Sensory Sensitivities
- Information processing and planning



Difficulties with communication and with interpreting social cues means that an autistic child or young person may not know how to respond or behave in social environments and is likely to take them longer to understand the expectations and social rules of a new environment or social situation. Until they become familiar with what is expected they may feel very anxious.

The sensory processing differences that many autistic children and young people experience can also contribute to the difficulties associated with transition periods as the individual may quickly become overwhelmed with sensory stimulus in a new or changed environment. The prospect of coming into contact with certain sensory stimulus will cause distress and will lead to an increase in anxiety that the autistic CYP experience when they transition.

Being in a state of anxiety will hinder the autistic child or young person's ability to process information and, as a result they will have a strong desire to stick with what is familiar. This is why it will be important to focus on what is familiar throughout the transition process where possible e.g same classroom, same chair, same teacher, same routine.

Change or transition of any kind is particularly difficult for autistic children and young people and can be a source of anxiety. This is because autistic people can find the world a confusing place because it is hard for them to predict what is going to happen next and to understand what is expected of them.

Reasonable Adjustments



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Under the [Equality Act](#) there is a duty for every school to make reasonable adjustments to both its policies and to its practices for any disabled pupil.

Where a school does something that might put a disabled pupil at a substantial disadvantage compared with non-disabled pupils, schools must take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is an anticipatory one. Schools need to think in advance about what an autistic pupil might require.

For further government guidance on reasonable adjustments please click on the following links:

[Equality Act Section 20](#)

[Equality Act Guidance](#)

[Equality Act Advice for Schools](#)

[Statutory Guidance on Exclusions](#)

[Changes to the School Exclusion process during Covid-19](#)

Reasonable adjustments – The basics

- Allow time for a re-familiarisation stage.
- Structure their return in a way that reduces the amount of direct demands made and gradually build upon these.
- Avoid testing in the early stages.
- Enable the pupil to spend some time with familiar (and favourite) staff at the beginning of transition

Allow additional time for autistic pupils to get used to the school environment again and plan how you will make reasonable adjustments for managing their distressed behaviours. It is important to remember that distressed behaviours are likely to be the CYP communicating their worries and frustrations in the only way they know how.

If a flexible timetable is in place, consider removing parts of the day that will cause more stress and introduce these gradually. This will take a lot of coordination but will support a successful transition and the pupil should settle quicker.

It might be more important to review learning from previous terms in order to consolidate what learning may have been lost rather than arranging tests in the early stages of transition.

Could the children go back to their original class teachers for a brief time limited period and undertake a planned transition at that point with support from the familiar adult?

Reasonable Adjustments – The basics

- Focus specifically on rebuilding skills for learning e.g. tolerance to sitting and listening.
- Utilise outdoor space.
- Create quiet and safe spaces.
- Allow the pupil/parent voice to contribute to your plans.

It is likely that autistic children/young people may require re-teaching and further support in skills for learning such as: - how to work again in a pair/group, how to sustain attention on an adult directed task, how to follow a sequence of instructions and how to work for extended periods.

Autistic pupils are likely to benefit from additional, frequent and regular opportunities for exercise and outside activities.

Create safe, clearly marked spaces with low sensory stimulus and give pupils permission to go to them whenever they are feeling overwhelmed, anxious or distressed. Ensure that all staff working with the pupil are aware that they may need regular breaks and provide the pupil a means of requesting this.

Every autistic pupil is different, so knowledge of the individual is essential when deciding the best approach to take. The briefings we have created for the SEND Team, provides useful tools to gain the pupil/parent voice.



Reasonable adjustments – consider doing

- Consider a staggered return: Which aspects of school might it be best to start with or avoid /Which lessons/activities would provide a calmer/quieter start?
- Carry out a sensory audit of the environment for autistic pupils.
- Provide extra time for staff to reflect and share information.

Consider when the first day 'will happen' for those pupils identified with greater needs in relation to the return to education setting.

Have you carried out a sensory audit of the environment since the changes made as a result of Covid-19? This should take into account the general classroom appearance, organisation and lay out, considering how these things could have an impact on autistic pupils and their ability to focus and learn. Make notes and actions for areas to improve.

Ensure all relevant pupil information is shared with staff who will support that child and that they have had additional time to discuss needs particularly where these may be complex or where a CYP's needs have changed significantly during lockdown.

Do consider how you will plan for and manage staff anxiety and well-being so that they feel adequately supported and are resilient to the expected challenging times ahead.



AET Resources...

- Covid-19 Information Centre:
<https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/covid-19-information-centre/>
Where you will find our latest Tools for Teachers Covid-19 edition booklet and a wealth of support materials from our partners across England.
- All of our Covid-19 content is free to access and download. The full Tools for Teachers, consisting of 44 tools, is available to purchase for £35.99 here:
<https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/shop/>

The AET are here to help you support autistic children and young people during the Covid-19 pandemic and transition back to school.

Please visit our Covid-19 information centre where you will find a range of useful information. The information centre contains a range of support materials, including a Covid-19 specific collection of 6 Tools for Teachers resources. There is also further information on strategies to support autistic children and young people during times of heightened stress and anxiety. It also features links to changes to SEND legislation, examples of social stories and articles by autism education specialists and training partners.

All of our Covid-19 content is free to access and download. Our popular Tools for Teachers resource, consisting of 44 tools, costs £35.99.