

Summary of Results

The survey was completed, in whole or part, by 803 parents overall. The following summary will focus mainly on the completed results from all respondents. However, any significant differences or similarities between identified cohorts will also be highlighted;

1. How old is your child with autism/Asperger syndrome now?

Total respondents = 803

Age of child

17+ = 66 or 8%

11-16 = 314 or 39%

6-10 = 314 or 39%

0-5 = 109 or 14%

The majority of parents (78%) who responded had children who were of either Primary or Secondary school age. This is the age range that the parents guide is designed to cover and represents a good sample to inform the development of the resource.

2. At what age was s/he diagnosed?

Total respondents = 789

Age of Child

17+ = 3 or 1%

11-16 = 82 or 10%

6-10 = 272 or 34%

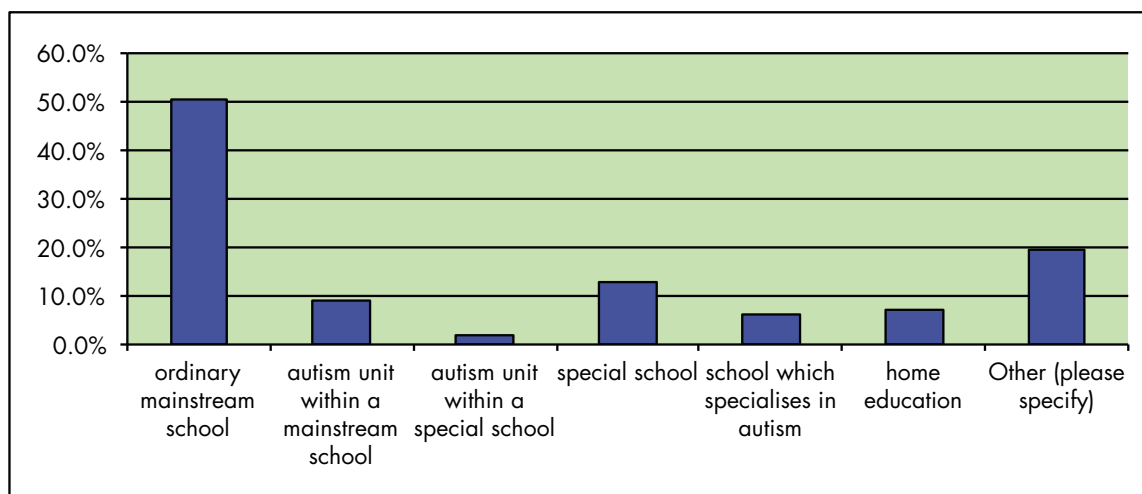
0-5 = 432 or 55%

The majority of children (55%) were diagnosed either in the early years (aged 0-5) or at Primary School age (34%). This is in line with national statistics.

3. Type of School your Child attends now?

Total respondents = 803

The overwhelming majority (50%) of parents indicated that their children are attending a mainstream school. The next highest group were those children and young people educated in other settings (20%) which mainly reflected a range of Early Years and Post 16 settings, including the workplace.

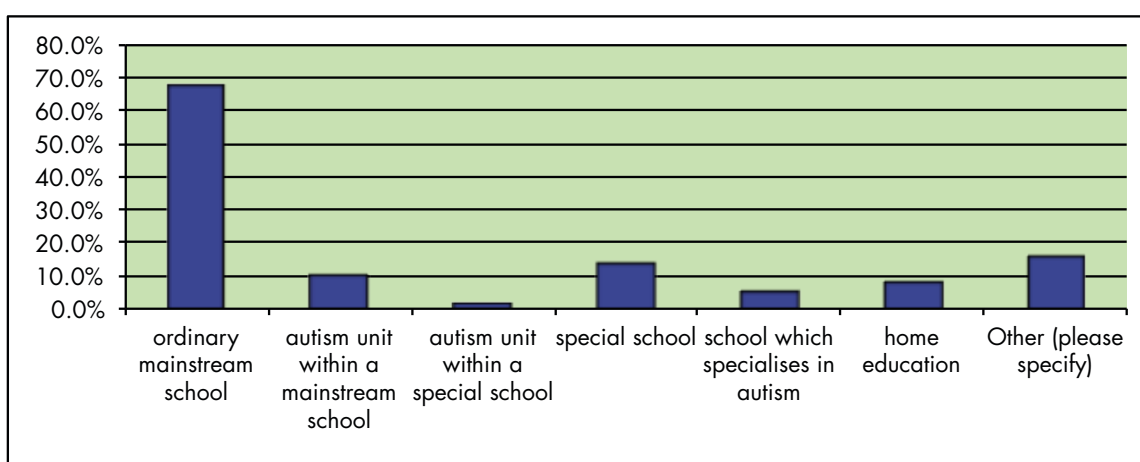


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4. Type of School setting your child has attended in the past 3 years?

Total respondents = 803

The results indicate that a higher percentage of children attended mainstream school over the last 3 years than currently attend (67% as opposed to 50%). Some of this change will be accounted for by children entering post 16 provision. However, it is likely that some of the change is a result of children coming out of mainstream provision into either specialist or home education.



5. Which four aspects of school do you feel it is most important to 'get right' for your child?

Total respondents = 803

Broad themes evolved from an analysis of the results. These are categorised and ranked in order below. Staff Knowledge and training in autism and an awareness of their child's needs was seen as a priority.

1. Staff knowledge, training and understanding of autism and how it affects their child.
2. An autism friendly environment and awareness of sensory issues affecting their child.
3. A differentiated and personalised curriculum which takes the learning style of their child into account and uses autism specific approaches.
4. The inclusion of their child socially and academically at school.

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6. How important are the following in terms of guiding parents when looking for a school?

Total respondents = 803

Answer Options	Very important	Quite important	Not very important	N/A	Rating Average
Key staff have knowledge of autism	767	24	5	1	1.04
Keeps parents well informed	761	22	3	1	1.04
School is willing to make adjustments	737	54	2	1	1.07
Is willing to have more contact with parents, if requested	726	56	5	0	1.08
Pays attention to the sensory issues my child has	630	126	26	7	1.23
Facilitates social inclusion with peers for play	538	204	34	10	1.35
Provides a room or space as a safe haven for my child	535	184	54	17	1.38
Facilitates social inclusion with peers for work	531	220	31	8	1.36
Enables my child to follow his/her special interests	384	329	66	8	1.59
Offers speech and language therapy	384	223	139	43	1.67
My child is taught together with typical peers	318	309	140	22	1.77
Has after school activities	152	297	311	30	2.21
Holiday activities	117	215	401	60	2.39
School achieves very good exam and test results	105	365	292	32	2.25

The results indicated that staff knowledge of autism is very important for parents when identifying a school for their children. This relates closely to the findings in question 5 where staff knowledge and training was seen by parents as being of primary importance for meeting the needs of their children. Awareness of sensory issues, the environment in terms of providing a safe space, willingness to make adjustments and social inclusion also scored relatively highly, which is again in line with the previous findings. A key difference was the importance parents placed on the schools communication with them and keeping them informed of their child's progress when looking for a school. These findings were consistent across all respondents and not dependent on age of the child or setting they attended. The lowest score in the very important category was for schools that achieve very good exam and test results though this option came top of the quite important section. This may indicate that many parents had a much broader view of what makes a good school for their children rather than relying solely on academic performance.

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7. If and when things have not worked well for you and your child at school, what happened and what would have helped to prevent this?

Total respondents = 709

There was some broad consensus from parents when they reflected on the things that had not worked well for them and their child at school. These are listed below but are not ranked.

- Lack of communication with parents
- Lack of staff training and awareness of autism
- Lack of staff understanding or acceptance of their child's needs
- Bullying of their child
- Difficulty getting a diagnosis
- Lack of differentiated or personalised curriculum

Broad themes also emerged when looking at the things that would have helped to prevent the above issues. These are listed below and again not ranked.

- Better training for staff
- Better communication with parents
- More inclusive and accepting school ethos (especially by senior management)
- More autism specific strategies and educational approaches
- Better support for parents and their child when things went wrong (rather than being blamed)

There were some parental responses that recognised things had worked very well for their child and they had got the right support at the right time from school. A parent commented that "My son's school have an open door policy and his TA's are always happy to talk in person via email or on the phone. If we have ever had an issue it is dealt with swiftly and positively."

However, the majority of parental responses showed that they or their child has had a negative experience at school. A parent reflecting on what could be improved summed up many similar comments "A willingness to do things differently. A willingness to take a child's 'invisible' disability seriously. A willingness to see behaviour as communication and their responsibility in that to."

8. In hindsight would you choose your child's current school again? If not, why not?

Total respondents = 803

The overall results showed that there was a fairly even spread of those parents who would choose their child's current school again as opposed to those who would not;

Yes = 53%

No = 47%

The reasons for not choosing the current school again reflected the same themes that emerged from the responses in question 7 e.g. a lack of staff training, a lack of understanding of their child's needs and a lack of communication with parents.

However, the figure for parents who would choose their child's current school again rose significantly for those children who attended a specialist provision;

Yes = 82%

No = 18%

Consistent themes that emerged from parental responses were that;

- Many felt they had no real choice over where their child went to school
- Their child had been through several schools before finding one that worked

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9. What three factors made you decide on your child's current school?

Total respondents = 795

General themes emerged from the parental responses on why they chose their child's current school. These are ranked below in order. There was a fairly even spread across the first three factors. However, it is concerning that 18% of parents felt they had no choice about their child's current school.

Reputation and Ethos of the school = 28%

Near to home = 25%

Autism specific setting or strategies = 23%

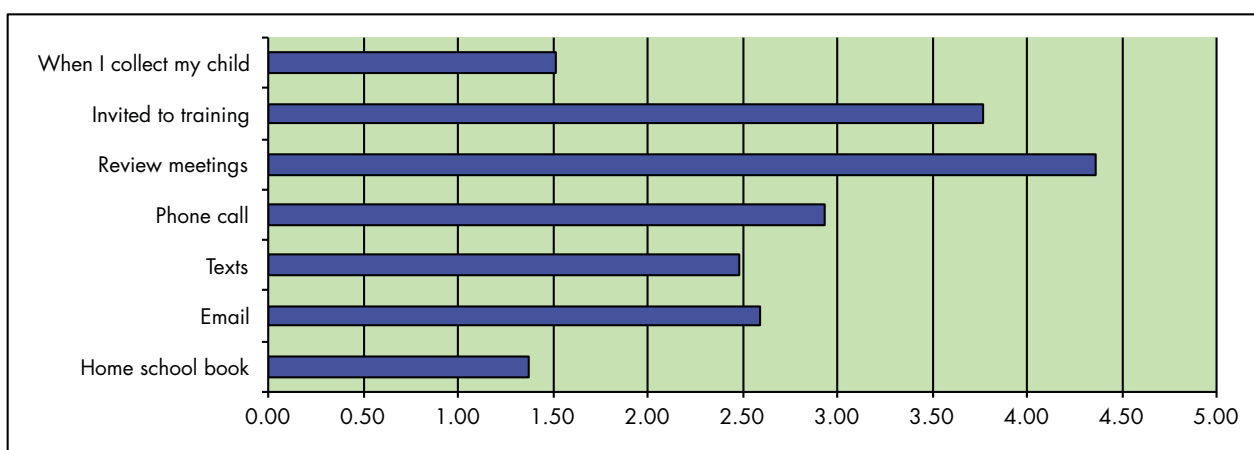
No choice = 18%

Choice of child = 1%

Other = 5%

10. Which forms of contact do you have with the staff and how often?

Total respondents = 756



Home school books were the most common form of daily communication between parents and staff. This changed to emails, texts and phone calls for weekly communication and to review meetings for half-termly and termly communication. There was a mixed picture in terms of the detailed response from parents about communication with schools.

Common themes that emerged were:

- The need for communication to be a two-way process between parents and staff was essential.
- The need for an agreed and consistent system of communication that suited both parents and school.
- Parents with positive experiences had an open and regular system of communication with schools and felt listened to. One parent commented that "I have a very open and honest communication with my son's school and we communicate in varying ways daily."
- Parents with negative experiences felt they were not listened to and had to initiate communication with schools which was not always reciprocated. They also felt schools only contacted them when things had gone wrong or there had been an incident involving their child. One parents commented "Communication is supposed to be daily as this is specified in the statement. However, in practice communication is hostile and sporadic."

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11. Is there any other type of communication or involvement that you would like?

Total respondents = 548

The majority of parents who responded to this question did express a preference for another type of communication or involvement:

Yes = 67%

No = 33%

Common themes that emerged are listed below. These are not ranked.

- More consistency in the use of current communication systems e.g. use of home school books or emails.
- To be involved in training at school. Either parents training staff or parents being part of staff training sessions on issues related to their child.
- More information about after-school activities and holiday clubs that their child could be involved in.
- Sharing of information on resources, strategies and curriculum.
- To be able to observe their child in school.
- To have positive feedback about their child when they have achieved/made progress.

12. What advice would you pass onto parents looking for a school for their child with autism or Asperger syndrome?

Total respondents = 748

Key themes that were consistent across all respondents were;

1. Look at a wide range of schools including mainstream, special and specialist
2. Speak to parents of children who attend those schools
3. Go on your instincts when you visit the school
4. Ensure the school has a good understanding of autism
 - have staff had autism training
 - What is the staff attitude (particularly the SENCO and senior management) towards children with autism
 - How many children with autism does the school currently have on roll
 - What specialist therapeutic and pastoral support can they offer
 - Are they flexible around the curriculum they can offer
 - Does the school have an autism friendly environment and/or are they happy to adapt this e.g. creating a safe space
 - Do they have structured activities at break and lunchtimes
5. Establish a positive system of communication and collaboration with the school
 - Share as much information as possible with the school about your child
 - Be open and honest about your child's needs
 - Identify a key member/members of staff who you can liaise with
 - Discuss how the school would meet the needs of your child
 - Don't be afraid to ask questions