



early years autism standards

acer Autism Centre for
Education and Research

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

 **Birmingham City Council**


Puzzle Centre
Education, support & research
for early years autism

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A. What is the purpose of these AET early years autism standards?

The [autism education trust](#) developed this set of national standards for early years settings with funding from the Department for Education in England, to describe the key factors common to good practice for children with autism. The standards have been designed to enable practitioners to ascertain the extent to which the needs of children with autism are addressed. The evidence produced by completing the standards can be used for a number of purposes (e.g. to consider how the needs of children with autism are addressed and how the provision might be enhanced; to determine practitioner training needs; to feed into a development plan; to consider environmental adaptations; to build parent/carer confidence; to submit as evidence to Ofsted and other external agencies). Ultimately, it is hoped that work on these standards will improve outcomes for children with autism in the early years by developing provision and meeting individual needs.

Differences in children with autism

The development and learning style of children with autism differ from those of typical children. In Development Matters in the EYFS (DES, 2012, p.2), it is stated that

'Children are born ready, able and eager to learn. They actively reach out to interact with other people, and in the world around them.'

For children with autism, however, it is very important to know that they are not as able to reach out to interact with others and some children with autism actively avoid this. As teaching and learning in the early years is done largely through interactive play and communication with adults and children, practitioners have to use a different approach with children with autism. Autistic adults explain that they share the same world, but are often attending to different parts of it (the non-social, physical, sensory

and material world) and find interaction with others difficult and stressful. An autistic adult who was late to be identified and diagnosed with autism, illustrates this very powerfully, in describing her early years:

'I found much social interaction with peers painful and confusing, but I loved solitary activities and was particularly 'switched on' to colours and patterns. Knowing this would have enabled relevant professionals (e.g. in school) to use this information in creating a physical and social environment that motivated me to engage – when I was at school many of the motivational techniques were social (extra playtime for successful completion of learning tasks, chance to sit next to best friend etc) Had my social and sensory skills been measured it may have been possible to use other motivational factors for me to increase my incentive to engage and learn. (e.g. 'If you complete this learning task you can sort the books ... you can tidy the painting area ... you can play in the water etc).'

A separate framework – **the AET early years autism competency framework** sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills that practitioners require to work with children with autism.



B. Why have these AET early years autism standards been developed?

Autism can be hard to detect in some children and their actions might be misunderstood. Using these standards will help staff to better understand these children and to identify their needs. Some children in early years settings will already have a diagnosis but others will not. These standards will give staff ideas on how to support and work with children with autism both before and after diagnosis.

C. Who should read and complete the AET early years autism standards?

These standards are for any person who works with children in the early years. Children with autism in the early years will attend a range of different settings. Most children of five and under attend preschools or nurseries and Children's Centres. Some children attend special preschools, some are home educated and other children will be with childminders or attend playgroups and mother and toddler groups.

Some children will already have a diagnosis of autism or Asperger syndrome. Other children will not yet have been diagnosed, as autism is often not detected until after the age of five years. These standards have been written for all preschool and early years settings for children with autism from birth to 5 years. The standards can be completed by an individual member of staff, by a small group of staff, by the whole staff and/or by an external professional (e.g. autism outreach service; educational psychologist). The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012), is underpinned by a new Inspections Framework. In summary, there is stronger emphasis on three prime foundations: Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Communication and Language and Physical Development. The first two areas are significant areas to focus on in relation to autism and will affect the child's ability to engage in early years activities. The areas of learning specified are literacy, mathematics, expressive arts and design; and understanding the world.

D. What is covered in the AET early years autism standards?

There are 34 standards in total and it is highly unlikely that any setting – even one which specialises in autism, will have ALL these standards well established as it takes time for staff to discuss, develop and resource these. The aim is that over time, a setting will increase the number of standards rated as established and enhanced.

The AET early years autism standards are divided into 4 main groups which focus on:

1. **A unique child** (how to understand and address each child's strengths and needs)
2. **Positive relationships** (with staff; parents/carers; other agencies and peers)
3. **Enabling environments** (how to create good indoor and outdoor environments for children with autism).
4. **Learning and development** (priorities in autism; adjustments that can be made to activities)

Each standard is linked to resources which show how a setting might evidence the standard. Users can click on the link and the resource will open if you are on the Internet. These resources include published papers, photographs, other guidance and reports on the autism spectrum, accounts from individuals with autism and short video clips.

These standards have been developed referencing the [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years \(2014\)](#) introduced as a result of the [Children and Families Act \(2014\)](#), however because these standards were developed during a period of transition some of the resources linked to in these standards may reflect the previous code.

The AET does not promote any specific approaches to education intervention for children and young people on the autism spectrum, our programmes, research and materials illustrate/include a wide range of good practice.





E. How is each standard rated?

For each standard, the user can evaluate the extent to which this standard is in place within the Early Years setting using the ratings:

- **Not appropriate**
- **Not yet developed**
- **Developing**
- **Established**
- **Enhanced**

Definitions of these headings

Not appropriate

This category can be used for one of two main reasons. In Early Years settings where there are only one or two children with autism, some aspects of practice might not be necessary or relevant to those particular children, OR staff may have good reasons to know that a focus on this may be a source of distress and anxiety for these children. **Whenever this box is ticked, staff should provide the rationale for this decision.**

Not yet developed

Work will be done to consider how to develop practice in this area.

Developing

Work has started on this area of practice.

Established

This is established in some areas and is now being spread across the whole setting.

Enhanced

Work is well established across the whole setting and/or being shared with other settings.

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F. How will an early years setting show that it has reached the levels within each standard?

In deciding the extent to which a standard is met, staff should aim to show **Documentary evidence (D)** (e.g. policy document; accounts from children, staff or parents; records on training events); for relevant practice to be **Observable and obvious (O)** within the early years setting; and for staff, parents and/or children to be able to **Verbalise** (talk about) the **policies and procedures within the setting (V)**, if asked.

G. What are the Next Steps/Actions to be taken after completion of the standards?

On the basis of the responses to this document, staff within the setting can discuss and decide which standards are well established and require little work, just regular review, and which standards are not yet fully in place. Decisions can then be made as to which standards in the latter group should take priority. These are likely to be those where a change in practice could have the most benefit to children with autism. Staff in the setting could then construct a plan and timescale to show how work on these standards will be developed. It would be useful to decide on the priority level for work on each standard, as follows:

HIGH

MEDIUM

LOW

The last column for each of the standards enables staff to enter the priority level for work on the standard based on the needs of the current population of children on the autism spectrum and the current level of the standard.





H. What is the evidence base for the standards?

Most other standards and principles of practice are based on the expertise and opinions of people who have worked in the field of autism for several years, and take account of current research. Research is complex due to differences between children with autism and assessment issues. The recent NICE guidance on approaches for children with autism found that many research studies were not robust enough to make firm recommendations. These early years autism standards have therefore been written largely on the basis of expert opinion and the views of parents, carers, practitioners and autistic adults. A list of the groups and key people involved in producing these early years autism standards is given at the end of this document.

I. What these standards are NOT

These standards are not intended as a guide to the different approaches that staff might use. However, the guidance will help the user to understand the areas of development which are likely to require assessment and action for the majority of children with autism.

There are other sets of standards in Early Years education that staff are required to consult and use (e.g. Professional Development standards; SENCO standards; Ofsted framework; other standards for other SEN). These Autism standards are not intended to replace these, nor are they intended to be used in isolation. The AET standards can be used to complement and support the use of existing frameworks and Early Years settings may cross reference between sets of standards.

J. Early Years Foundation Stage documents

Recent key Early Years Foundation Stage documents and reports can be accessed through the online version of these standards. These include:

- [British Association of Early Childhood Education, Development Matters](#)
- [Department for Education \(2013\) Early Years Outcomes, London: DFE](#)
- [Department for Education \(2014\) Statutory Framework for The Early Years Foundation Stage, London: DFE](#)
- [Nutbrown, C \(2011\) Mapping the Early Education and Childcare Workforce: A Background Paper](#)
- [Nutbrown, C \(2013\) Nutbrown Review: Foundations for Quality: The Independent Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications](#)
- [Standards and Testing Agency \(2014\) Assessment and Reporting Arrangements: Early Years Foundation Stage](#)
- [Standards and Testing Agency \(2014\) Early Years Foundation Stage Profile: Handbook](#)
- [Inclusion Development Programme \(IDP\) Supporting children on the autism spectrum in the Early Years](#) - A very useful, free, self study online resource.



The AET early years autism standards can be used to complement and support the use of existing frameworks.

K. What is autism?

Autism is a term used to describe a neurological difference in brain development that has a marked effect on how a child develops. There are four areas of difference that are particularly important for staff to understand and pay attention to as most children with autism will have individual educational needs to be met in these areas. Children on the autism spectrum will have different levels of support needs in relation to:

- **Understanding the social and emotional behaviour of staff and peers** - much as it is difficult for staff and peers to understand the social responses and emotional expression of children on the autism spectrum.
- **Understanding and using communication and language** - both verbal and non-verbal (eg gesture; facial expression; tone of voice)
- **Differences in how information is processed** can lead to a strict adherence to routines and rules and/or difficulties in following a sequence within a task or dividing their attention. Children on the autism spectrum have difficulties in predicting what will happen when a familiar timetable or activity is changed. Conversely, such styles of processing can lead to strengths and abilities in a number of areas (often related to factual memory or areas of interest and motivation).
- **Differences in the way sensory information is processed**, often leading to over-sensitivities (often to external stimuli such as lighting, smells, or sounds), and under-sensitivities (often not noticing internal feelings such as pain, body awareness and hunger, until they become overwhelming). It should be noted that sensory sensitivities can lead to extreme levels of stress and anxiety in unfamiliar or over-stimulating environments.

Further details of each of these four areas are given on page 32.





L. Further resources, references and websites

In addition to the resources linked to the standards, there is a themed list of resources, references and websites which can be accessed by clicking on the link when you are viewing these standards online. Some resources may refer to older children on the autism spectrum as opposed to children in early years settings- these have been included because the content and approaches remain relevant.


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A unique child

Autistic adults and children tell us that it is vital for staff to get to know them as individuals and to find out from them what their interests and needs are and how they would like to be supported in the early years setting. An autistic adult suggests that,

“A professional observing me at home would have thought me much more verbally proficient and socially aware than someone observing me in a less familiar environment (eg nursery).”

| | Standard | Rating (Your setting) | | | | | Resources which illustrate the standard | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|---|--|--------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|----------|---|--------------------|--|
| |  A unique child | N/A State reason why | Not yet Developed | Developing | Established | Enhanced | | H M L | If N/A please give reason why D = Document O = Observed V = Verbal report |
| 1 | Staff in your setting understand that children with autism do not learn and relate to adults and children in the typical way. They adjust their practice to engage them in activities that promote their happiness and well-being. | | | | | | Gina Davies Autism Centre – videos available to purchase on understanding behaviour: www.ginadavies.co.uk Reactickles website Phoebe Caldwell, see films AET Teachers Guide AET early years competency - 8 | | |
| 2 | Staff in your setting promote the attitude that all children, including those with SEN and autism, have the same right as other children to access all the activities usually provided. | | | | | | Equality Act (2010) AET early years competency - 18 | | |
| 3 | Staff observe and assess the child's social and emotional understanding, communication and language, and ability to cope with change. | | | | | | 4 key areas of difference Universally speaking Wiltshire Early Years SENCo Toolbox for autism AET early years competency - 1 | | |

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| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Resources which illustrate the standard | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|---|--|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|-----------------|------------------|
| | A unique child | N/A | NYD | Dev | Est | Enh | | | |
| 4 | Staff in your setting assess the child's sensory needs and consider how these might be addressed. | | | | | | <u>Sensory Profile</u> <u>Sensory checklist to assess the setting</u> <u>Leicestershire sensory processing resource pack for early years</u> AET early years competency - 7 | | |
| 5 | Staff in your setting observe and assess the child's communication and language needs and consider how these might be addressed. | | | | | | <u>4 key areas of difference</u> <u>Universally speaking</u> <u>Wiltshire Early Years SENCo Toolbox for autism</u> <u>Sensory Profile</u> <u>Leicestershire sensory processing resource pack for early years</u> AET early years competency - 4 | | |
| 6 | Staff in your setting create a profile of each child, setting out key information (eg their likes, dislikes, interests, fears and form of communication) based on close observation and information given by parents/carers and use this to inform plans and practice. | | | | | | <u>Our family, my life (Early Support)</u> <u>Profile of a girl</u> <u>AET Person-Centred Planning</u> AET early years competency - 10 | | |

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| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Resources which illustrate the standard | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|----|--|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|-----------------|------------------|
| | A unique child | N/A | NYD | Dev | Est | Enh | | | |
| 7 | Staff in your setting know that children with autism may find physical contact difficult and know to use this sensitively when playing and working with children. | | | | | | <u>Insights as an adult with autism</u> <u>Legal guidelines from DoF</u> <u>Low arousal factsheet (Bell, 2013)</u> <u>Fact sheet on physical intervention</u> AET early years competency - 5 | | |
| 8 | Staff in your setting understand that children with autism often focus on the non-social, sensory, physical and material things rather than people. Staff provide opportunities for the child to interact and play with others using favourite activities. | | | | | | <u>Debbie Waters video talking about her son Joe as a baby – on Early Years IDP.</u> <u>Observation Early Years checklist (Cumine, Stevenson and Leach)</u> AET early years competency - 11 | | |
| 9 | Staff in your setting understand that children's actions need to be understood in terms of the four key areas of difference in children with autism. | | | | | | <u>4 key areas of difference</u> <u>Autistic lens</u> <u>Fact sheet on physical intervention</u> AET early years competency - 9 | | |
| 10 | Staff in your setting ensure that the perspective of the child is taken when making decisions on how to engage and work with him/her and that they create opportunities for the child to make choices. | | | | | | <u>I want to choose too</u> <u>Talking mats</u> <u>Photos of activity symbols</u> AET early years competency - 9 | | |

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| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Resources which illustrate the standard | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|----|--|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|-----------------|------------------|
| | A unique child | N/A | NYD | Dev | Est | Enh | | | |
| 11 | Staff in your setting consider whether children with autism may have other conditions (e.g. visual or hearing impairment, learning disabilities, dyspraxia, ADHD, and speech, language and communication difficulties) and know how to access advice on these. | | | | | | <p><u>NICE guidance on autism, ADHD, epilepsy and OCD</u></p> <p><u>Gascoigne paper on meeting the needs of children with SLCN in integrated services</u></p> <p><u>Universally speaking</u></p> <p><u>It's not what you do; it's the way that you question: that's what gets results</u></p> <p><u>ican</u></p> <p><u>AET early years competency - 11</u></p> | | |

Positive relationships

Parents of autistic children tell us that listening to them and working positively together is essential to meeting their child's needs. A parent explains,

“I nurtured the strongest parent partnership I could offer, always showing a united front to my child. It wasn't always easy and we didn't always agree, but the communication channels between us were strong...The support was positive and I believe a key to our success.”

(Blackburn, 2003, Good Autism Practice Journal, 4,1. p. 27)

| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Examples of practice within settings | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|----|--|-------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|----------|--|-----------------|---|
| |  Positive relationships | N/A State reason why | Not yet Developed | Developing | Established | Enhanced | | H M L | If N/A please give reason why D = Document O = Observed V = Verbal report |
| 12 | Staff in your setting welcome parents and carers and listen to their concerns. Staff have a means of finding out what each parent would like them to work on, what their child enjoys at home and how best to comfort the child when distressed. | | | | | | <u>How helping works</u> <u>Parents' views on what is important in early years provision</u> <u>Structured conversations with parents (Achievement for All)</u> <u>Thomas the tank painting</u> <u>Ty and the spaceships video</u> <u>Make a deal</u> AET early years competency -12 | | |
| 13 | Staff in your setting have a number of different ways of involving and informing parents/ carers (eg staff-parent diaries, reports, training, email, DVD, photos, joint training events) Staff in your setting give parents a regular summary of their child's progress which includes social development, emotional well-being, communication and academic progress. | | | | | | <u>Jackie's story</u> <u>Home setting diary</u> AET early years competency -12 | | |

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| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Resources which illustrate the standard | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|----|--|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|-----------------|------------------|
| | Positive relationships | N/A | NYD | Dev | Est | Enh | | | |
| 14 | Staff in your setting talk sensitively to parents about their initial concerns. Staff know that they are not able to make a diagnosis but are able to signpost/refer parents to appropriate services. | | | | | | National Autism Plan for Children SIGN Document 98 on the identification of autism NICE Guidance on diagnosis of autism AET early years competency -13 | | |
| 15 | Staff understand that when a supportive adult works with the child, this is used to promote independence and their inclusion with peers. Staff help children to develop friendships with other children within the setting whilst respecting the child's social differences and preferences. | | | | | | Blatchford report on support from teaching assistants Nutbrown reviews IEP 1 IEP 2 Examples of targeted plans AET early years competency - 30 | | |
| 16 | Your setting encourages good and open communication across all the staff that work with the child. Your setting ensures that supply staff and new staff are informed about the needs of the children with autism. | | | | | | AET good practice report The Child's voice – all about me Profile of a girl AET early years competency - 15 | | |
| 17 | Staff in your setting know how to access professionals in education, health, social care and the voluntary and independent sectors and work effectively with them. | | | | | | Gascoigne paper on meeting the needs of children with SLCN in integrated services AET early years competency - 16 | | |


Enabling environments

All children are entitled to a broad and relevant curriculum. Children on the autism spectrum have specific learning needs and styles that must be addressed if they are to access the curriculum in a meaningful and successful way.

An adult with autism suggests that,

“With the appropriate understanding, support and accommodation of such differing learning styles, the individual with autism, and the world, can only blossom.”

Lawson, W. (2001) Understanding and working with the spectrum of autism: an insider's view. London: Jessica Kingsley

| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Examples of practice within settings | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|----|--|-------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|----------|--|-----------------|--|
| |  Enabling environments | N/A State reason why | Not yet Developed | Developing | Established | Enhanced | | H M L | If N/A please give reason why D = Document O = Observed V = Verbal report |
| 18 | Staff in your setting observe and assess the potential sensory challenges to children with autism both indoors and outdoors and consider how to address these, using the experiences of autistic adults to assist in this, where possible. | | | | | | <u>Sensory Profile</u> <u>Audio of John Simpson talking re sensory issues</u> <u>Sensory checklist to assess the setting</u> AET early years competency - 20 | | |
| 19 | Staff in your setting understand the key areas of difference for children with autism and adjust the environment and activities to reflect this. Staff take into account the external and environmental factors when assessing the actions of children that concern others. | | | | | | <u>Fact sheet on physical intervention</u> <u>Wiltshire Early Years SENCo Toolbox for autism</u> <u>Means, reasons and opportunities</u> <u>Views of autistic adult on being misunderstood</u> <u>Autistic lens</u> AET early years competency - 27 | | |
| 20 | Your setting has clearly defined spaces/areas for personal equipment and quiet places of safety for children with autism. Staff in your setting use a variety of cues (e.g. tactile, visual, auditory) to help children with autism to understand and travel around the environment. | | | | | | <u>Objects of reference devised by Coventry LA</u> <u>Swimming toolkit</u> <u>Portable communication aids from AET Tools for teachers</u> AET early years competency - 21 | | |

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| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Resources which illustrate the standard | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|----|--|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|-----------------|------------------|
| | Enabling environments | N/A | NYD | Dev | Est | Enh | | | |
| 21 | Your setting encourages staff to adopt a calm, quiet and relaxed approach, and gives children with autism time to process and respond to instructions. | | | | | | <u>Principles of adult communicative style</u> AET early years competency - 26 | | |
| 22 | All staff in the setting respond in a consistent way in terms of how they relate to children and parents. | | | | | | <u>Principles of adult communicative style</u> <u>McAteer paper on adult style</u> AET early years competency - 15 | | |
| 23 | Staff in your setting combine different methods to communicate with the child to make their message clear (eg objects, photos, speech, gestures, signing). | | | | | | <u>Adding meaning to communication – Norwegian clip from EY IDP video</u> <u>Other ways of speaking</u> AET early years competency - 23 | | |
| 24 | Staff in your setting provide individualised tools and opportunities for the child to initiate communication. | | | | | | <u>Means, reasons and opportunities</u> <u>Objects of reference devised by Coventry LA</u> <u>Other ways of speaking</u> <u>Portable communication aids from AET Tools for teachers</u> <u>I want to choose too</u> <u>Talking mats</u> AET early years competency - 6 | | |

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| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Resources which illustrate the standard | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|----|---|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|-----------------|------------------|
| | Enabling environments | N/A | NYD | Dev | Est | Enh | | | |
| 25 | Staff in your setting provide individualised, visual supports to ensure that the sequence of activities during the day is understandable and predictable based on the child's level of understanding (eg objects, photos, pictures). | | | | | | <u>First/Then resource from the AET tools for teachers</u> AET early years competency - 24 | | |
| 26 | Staff in your setting work hard to ensure that they are consistent in their use of language for everyday events and objects (snack; drink; play; story). They ensure that children are not confused by the spoken and written language used or by illustrations. They share communication strategies with parents and carers so language and systems at home and the early years setting are similar. | | | | | | <u>Clown worksheet</u> <u>Phrases that may confuse</u> <u>Confusing world of words</u> <u>Misunderstood</u> <u>Other ways of speaking</u> AET early years competency - 25 | | |
| 27 | Staff in your setting support children with autism to choose activities both inside and outside, taking their interests and social preferences into account. | | | | | | <u>First/Then resource from the AET tools for teachers</u> AET early years competency - 19 | | |


Learning and development

Adults supporting children with autism should adapt the environment to the needs of the individual child rather than making the child fit the setting. As a parent of a child with autism suggests,

“Children with autism can achieve. By being open-minded and reflective in your practice, you can make a difference.”

(Blackburn, 2003, Good Autism Practice Journal, 4,1 . p.28)

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| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Examples of practice within settings | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|----|---|-------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|----------|---|-----------------|---|
| |  Learning and development | N/A State reason why | Not yet Developed | Developing | Established | Enhanced | | H M L | If N/A please give reason why D = Document O = Observed V = Verbal report |
| 28 | Staff in your setting are flexible in making adjustments to activities, materials and their delivery for children with autism. | | | | | | <u>Differentiation strategies</u> AET early years competency - 9, 26 and 27 | | |
| 29 | Staff in your setting understand that group activities such as sharing news or story time can be very difficult for a child with autism and take steps to support the child at these times. | | | | | | <u>Lego therapy paper by Miranda Andras</u> <u>Group working: clear roles</u> AET early years competency - 33 | | |
| 30 | Staff in your setting carefully prepare children with autism for transitions (between activities, groups, areas and settings). Staff create a detailed profile of the child's skills, strengths and key areas of need to pass on to the next setting and prepare the child and parents (eg visits; photos; staff exchange; parent discussions). | | | | | | <u>AET transition toolkit</u> <u>Moving class</u> AET early years competency - 36 and 37 | | |

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| | Standard | Rating | | | | | Resources which illustrate the standard | Priority rating | Type of evidence |
|----|---|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|-----------------|------------------|
| | Learning and development | N/A | NYD | Dev | Est | Enh | | | |
| 31 | Staff and parents work together on eating, drinking, dressing and toileting skills and share goals and ideas. | | | | | | Dr. Gillian Harris Selective Eating Gina Davies Autism Centre – videos available to purchase on understanding behaviour: www.ginadavies.co.uk www.leics.gov.uk/autism_resources.html AET early years competency - 34 | | |
| 32 | Your setting creates time for staff to reflect on, discuss and evaluate their practice in relation to children with autism and the rationale that underpins practice, to create a consensus and consistency across the setting. | | | | | | McAteer paper on adult style Blatchford report on support from teaching assistants Practitioner views on what makes a good EY setting Peeters and Jordan paper on what makes a good practitioner AET early years competency - 14 | | |
| 33 | Staff in your setting have received training in autism and all staff, including support staff and non-contact staff have taken part. | | | | | | www.aet-idp.org.uk IEP 1 IEP 2 AET early years competency - 17 | | |
| 34 | Staff in your setting design and teach play activities linked to the child's interests, to develop their skills. | | | | | | www.attentionautism.com AET early years competency - 31 | | |

K. Next steps action plan

| Standard | Standard numbers with highest priority | Next steps (including who is responsible for the action) | Time scale |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|------------|
| A unique child | | | |
| Positive relationships | | | |
| Enabling environments | | | |
| Learning & development | | | |

O. Glossary of terms

| Term | Definition |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| ASC | Autism Spectrum Condition is a term used in some areas in preference to ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). |
| ASD | Autism Spectrum Disorder is the term used in much of the literature but there is debate as to whether the word Disorder should continue to be used as it has negative connotations. |
| Asperger syndrome | A pupil of average or above average intelligence with autism who was not significantly delayed in learning to speak. |
| Atypical autism | A category used to cover those who have characteristics in common with autism and Asperger syndrome but who do not quite meet the criteria for either of these categories. It is also referred to as pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). |
| Autism | A diagnostic category which may also be referred to as autistic disorder, Kanner's autism and classical autism. |
| Autism outreach | Many authorities have a team of staff who support schools and families in their work with pupils on the autism spectrum. These are often referred to as autism outreach teams, communication teams or specialist teams. |
| Autism spectrum | Term given to cover the whole range of subgroups including autism, Asperger syndrome, atypical autism and PDD-NOS. |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development – covers the training that teaching staff access after they have qualified. |
| Differentiation | Sessions can be variously differentiated by: outcome (learning objective), task, process (the method of teaching), child grouping, tailoring the content of the session for the individual child (personalised learning), provision (access to specialists), choice and self-direction, learning style. |
| EYFS | Early Years Foundation Stage |
| Educational psychologist (EP) | A psychologist who ascertains the educational needs of pupils in discussion with parents, carers and staff and makes recommendations on strategies and provision. |
| Expressive language | The use of words and sentences, vocabulary and grammar. |
| High functioning autism | A child who is of average or above average ability but who was delayed in learning to speak |

| Term | Definition |
|---|--|
| IDP | Inclusion Development Programme |
| Multi-agency | Groups from different professions or disciplines. |
| Neurodiversity | A term favoured by autistic adults which sees autism as a different way of being and their neurodiversity being a positive and not a negative. The term is also used in relation to other conditions such as dyslexia and Tourette's syndrome. |
| Neurotypical | A term given to individuals without autism |
| Non-verbal communication | Communication through the use of facial expressions, gesture and body language. |
| Occupational therapist | A therapist who ascertains a pupil's sensory needs and ability to perform everyday tasks and self care skills. |
| Pathological demand avoidance syndrome | A term given by some clinicians for individuals who have some of the characteristics of autism and Asperger syndrome, but who find it extremely hard to follow other people's demands or agendas. |
| Pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) | A term used in diagnostic systems to group together certain clinical conditions. All the autism spectrum disorders (autism, Asperger syndrome and PDD-NOS) fall into this category. In addition, it includes Rett's syndrome and Heller's syndrome (childhood disintegrative disorder), which are generally not included within the autism spectrum because of their characteristics and prognosis. |
| Pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) | Those who have characteristics in common with autism and Asperger syndrome, but who do not quite meet the criteria for either of these categories. It is also referred to as atypical autism. |
| Preverbal | Description given to a pupil who has not yet developed spoken language. |
| Receptive language | Understanding what is communicated or written, including vocabulary, grammar, stories and non-verbal communication. |
| Quality-first teaching | High quality provision for all pupils from all teachers and teaching assistants. Wave 1 should be on offer to ALL pupils. Such teaching will be based on clear objectives that are shared with the pupils and returned to at the end of the lesson; new vocabulary is explained; visual and kinaesthetic methods are used as well as auditory/verbal learning. These approaches are the best way to reduce the number of pupils who need extra help. |

early years programme

| Term | Definition |
|--|---|
| Speech and language therapist (SALT) | A therapist who assesses an individual's ability to communicate and their speech and language skills and devises programmes to develop these. |
| SEND | Special Educational Needs and Disability |
| Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) | A programme designed to enhance understanding of the importance of the social and emotional aspects of learning. |
| Special educational needs (SEN) | A term used to describe a pupil who is deemed to require additional or different educational support from others of the same age. |
| Special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) | A person within the Early Years setting or school who is responsible for coordinating information and action for pupils with special educational needs. |

P. Guide to the resources contained within the standards

Each standard has a set of resources which illustrate how some Early Years settings have addressed that area or there are papers and reports which highlight key issues and ideas. These are not the **ONLY WAY** to address the standard. They are examples only. Some of these are suitable for the majority of young children with autism and others will be more suited to a particular group depending on their intellectual and verbal ability. In the list below, a short description of each resource is given.



Q. Details of the four areas of difference found in autism

Understanding the social interactive style and emotional expression of staff and peers

Most children with autism find social interaction with adults and peers very effortful. Children with autism are not easily able to understand commonly used social messages and may find it hard to understand or relate to how social rules change with context, or what is considered socially 'appropriate' (ie what is appropriate to say and do in some situations is inappropriate in other situations). It is difficult for children on the autism spectrum to easily and quickly read and understand the emotional intentions of staff and peers, but it should also be remembered that this can be a 'two-way' difficulty. The actions of children on the autism spectrum are often misidentified as intentionally insensitive or defiant. When wanting to play with peers, or join a group activity, children with autism are likely to need support or help in doing so.

Understanding and using communication and language - both verbal and non-verbal

Children with autism at all levels of intellectual ability have difficulties in understanding the communication and language of adults and peers and in communicating effectively themselves. About 40% of children with autism are delayed in learning to speak and some children develop little or no speech. It is likely that most children with autism will need support and strategies to help teach them how to communicate with staff and peers in order to have their needs met. This can involve the use of alternative means of communication (e.g. objects of reference, visual symbols, photos, gestures, spoken word, or a combination of means). It should be remembered that an approach to communication for a child should be consistent across the Early Years setting and at home.

Differences in how information is processed and adjusting to unpredictable changes in routine

Children with autism find change much more difficult than other children as they are not easily able to predict what will happen instead or what to do in the changed situation. Some children with autism develop special interests in a topic or activity which may occupy a great deal of their thought and time. Such interests can be used to very good effect as part of the learning process and can be broadened into related areas and act as a very effective motivator. Children on the autism spectrum have an uneven profile of abilities. Staff may assume a child should be able to complete a task because of their skills in another area, but this may not be so. It is therefore of paramount importance to assess each child to gain an overall profile of their strengths and needs.

Differences in the way sensory information is processed

Children with autism can be over-sensitive to sounds, sights, touch, texture, smell and find some situations overwhelming. This can greatly affect their ability to engage in activities and they may actively avoid the area concerned. They may also be under-sensitive and not notice internal feelings of pain and hunger. It is very important that staff regularly check the health and well-being of these children as they may not report their distress to others.

R. What is the 'difference not deficit' debate in autism and current terminology?

There is often an assumption that children on the autism spectrum need to behave and live like those without autism. Many adults on the autism spectrum take exception to this assumption and the fact that much of the literature on autism uses medical terms such as deficit, disorder, and intervention. They argue that such terms are both inaccurate and stigmatising and based on an incorrect notion of what humanity and normalcy entail. They argue that such notions can further disable people on the autism spectrum, and if internalised can lead to crises in self-identity, esteem and worth. On the other hand, there are others that argue they are severely impaired and want to retain the term disorder to explain their experience. In recognition of this debate, much of the literature now just refers to autism or autism spectrum and not autism spectrum disorder or condition. It is the case that a significant number of children on the autism spectrum will experience relatively few difficulties in their school lives and into adulthood IF their needs are recognised and appropriate support is given.

Although different subgroups have been identified (e.g. Asperger syndrome, high functioning autism, 'classical' autism, atypical autism, semantic pragmatic syndrome), it is current thinking that such distinctions are not accurate, and there are indicators that they will be merged into one category of autism in future diagnostic criteria that are set. The term autism spectrum was created by Lorna Wing in 1996 who suggested that it is simpler to state that all individuals affected in the four areas are on the autism spectrum, rather than trying to group them under other specific groups. Increasingly, across education, social care and health, the short-hand term of autism is being used to refer to all individuals on the autism spectrum.



S. How many children and young people on the autism spectrum are there?

It is estimated that there are approximately 1 in 100 children and adults on the autism spectrum. Autism is hard to detect in some children, particularly in girls, and so there may be children in your Early Years setting who are not yet diagnosed. However, identifying and addressing the educational needs of a child does not depend on having a diagnosis, whether that is autism, a literacy problem, or a social and communication difficulty, for example. Staff should not focus all their efforts on 'getting a formal diagnosis' as they can address the needs of the child without a diagnosis. They can find out by observing the child and talking to parents/carers what their needs are and gaining ideas what might be causing their difficulties. This information then informs what staff might do to help.

T. How many children with autism have exceptional skills or talents?

A significant number of children with autism have good knowledge and skills in a specific area, relative to their skills in other areas. They often have a much more uneven profile of skills and difficulties than other children, so it is important that staff do not assume that because a child has difficulty in some areas, then they have no areas of strength – and conversely because a child shows talent in an area, this does not mean that there are not aspects of the Early Years setting that they find difficult.

U. Which conditions often co-occur together with autism?

It is estimated that about one third of children with autism also have learning disabilities, and two thirds of the autism population are of average or above average intellectual ability. Commonly associated problems with autism are sleep disturbance, limited diet and/or erratic eating and drinking times/constipation and gut problems. Some children with autism develop epilepsy which can be hard to detect. All of these additional difficulties can have an adverse effect on a child's ability to focus on tasks and it is vital that good information from parents/carers and from staff who have taught them in the past is gathered and passed on to new staff.



W. Useful websites

www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

www.researchautism.net

Provides information on the evidence of different interventions in autism

www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

www.autism.org.uk

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

Provides support, information and materials on how to support children with speech, language and communication difficulties.

www.early-education.org.uk

www.foundationyears.org.uk

www.nasen.org.uk

www.asdinclusion.info

www.talkingmats.org.uk

www.communicationmatters.org.uk

www.dysl.org.uk

www.csie.org.uk

Index for inclusion

www.leics.gov.uk

www.northants.gov.uk

www.dyscovery.org.uk

www.bild.org.uk

Website for BILD (British Institute for Learning Disabilities) Resources on children and adults with learning disabilities

www.education.gov.uk

www.dfe.gov.uk

www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/asd

www.achievementforall.org.uk

www.dotolearn.com

Several resources for children and staff

www.tda.gov.uk

www.acer.bham.ac.uk

Autism Centre for Education and Research

www.crae.ioe.ac.uk

Centre for Research on Autism and Education

<http://teacch.com/about-us/what-is-teacch>

<http://www.pecs.co.uk>

<http://www.phoebecaldwell.co.uk/>

early years autism standards

acer Autism Centre for
Education and Research

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

 **Birmingham City Council**


Puzzle Centre
Education, support & research
for early years autism

genium
www.geniumcreative.com

To find out more please contact:

AET, c/o National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG, UK

The programme has been developed by Genium for the AET with members from the Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER) at University of Birmingham, Birmingham City Council Communication and autism team and Puzzle Centre in consultation with a range of partners. The development team include Project manager: Martin Kerem, Core authors: Dr Glenys Jones, Damian Milton and Ryan Bradley. Consultant authors: Dr Karen Guldberg, Andrea MacLeod, George Thomas, Pam Simpson and Alex Stanyer AET Advisor: Ann Wiseman