

Schools Report 2012



**Are schools delivering
for children and young
people with autism?**

www.AmbitiousAboutAutism.org.uk



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about Autism**

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Schools are experiencing many new challenges. Reforms require them to improve achievement and behaviour, navigate new funding and inspection arrangements, and consider new freedoms through the academies programme. But what impact are these reforms having on children with autism?

Currently around 71% of children with autism are educated in mainstream schools with the remainder in specialist provision.¹ Given the right support, children with autism can — and do — thrive and achieve at school.

This report brings together a number of key statistics to build a picture of what school is like for children and young people with autism in 2012. We will update the report each year to measure the impact of education initiatives on experiences and outcomes for children with autism.

We have looked at five key areas of children's educational experience:

1. support at school

2. exclusions

3. bullying

4. achievement

5. outcomes

1. Support at School

- While the number of children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs remains at 2.8%, the number of children whose statement lists autism as a primary need has increased by 5% since 2011.² The number of children at School Action Plus³ for whom autism is their primary need has increased by 12% in the last year.⁴
- 54% of all teachers in England do not feel they have had adequate training to teach children with autism.⁵

Although the total number of children identified as having special educational needs (SEN) is falling, the number of children identified with autism in schools is increasing. It is worrying therefore that over half of all teachers do not feel they have had the right training to teach children with autism.

Recommendation: Local authorities should ensure all schools have access to an autism specialist teacher to advise them on how to support children with autism.

2. Exclusions

- In a survey conducted by Ambitious about Autism, 43% of parents reported their child with autism had been formally excluded within the previous 12 months; only a quarter of these exclusions were one-off occurrences.⁶
- Pupils with a statement of SEN are 9 times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than those pupils without SEN; Pupils with SEN but no statement are 11 times more likely to be permanently excluded.⁷

While permanent exclusions among the general school population have reduced by 11.5% over the last year, exclusions for children with statements of SEN have gone up by 2.4%.⁸

This suggests our current education system is unable to cope with the learners that need the most support. Exclusion costs children dearly in terms of their educational progress and well-being.⁹ The lifetime cost to the state of a single permanent exclusion is estimated to be £65,000.¹⁰

Some children with autism display behaviour that challenges when they are not supported to communicate effectively, or are struggling to understand what is expected of them at school. Pupils with autism may also become distressed as a result of social or sensory issues related to their autism.

Recommendation: The Children and Families Bill should include a duty for schools to carry out a multi-agency assessment and review of support for children with SEN who are at risk of exclusion.

3. Bullying

- Over 40% of children with autism have been bullied at school.¹¹

Bullying can happen to any child at any time, but children with SEN are particularly vulnerable. 83% of children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs have been bullied.¹² For children with SEN such as autism, bullying behaviour often stems from the differences between them and other children in school — in the way they speak, look or act or how they are treated by adults.

Recommendation: Schools should have behaviour guidance that makes clear the action they will take to promote understanding of autism to staff and students and procedures for dealing with bullying fairly and efficiently.

4. Achievement

- 24.4% of pupils with autism achieved 5 A*–C GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2010/11, an increase of 2% from the previous year.¹³
- 58.2% of all pupils achieved 5 A*–C GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2010/11, an increase of 3% from the previous year.¹⁴

Children and young people with autism can and do achieve well in education given the right support. It is encouraging to see a year on year improvement for pupils with autism. However, the large gap in GCSE achievement, and smaller increase in improvement for learners with autism over the past year, suggests that this group of learners are not getting the quality support they need to achieve their potential.

GCSE grades are not the only measure of success. Access to further and higher education, employment and independent living skills are all important indicators of how well schools are serving young people with autism.

Recommendation: New Key Stage 4 and 5 destination measures published by the Department for Education should be broken down by disability, including autism. In addition the Government should introduce aspirational targets for numbers of young people with complex needs who are able to access further education, employment or independent living.

5. Outcomes

- Less than 1 in 4 young people with autism continue their education beyond school.¹⁵
- Young people with a disability are more likely to report being fairly or very dissatisfied with their life so far (17%) than young people without a disability (7%) at age 19.¹⁶
- Young people with a Statement of Special Educational Needs at 16 are twice as likely to not be in education, employment or training at 18 than those without SEN.¹⁷

Despite improvements in the education system for children with autism over recent decades, the outcomes these young people face are still woefully poor. Translating progress at school into employment and independence in adult life remains a huge challenge.

The lack of effective education options beyond school means there is simply no bridge from school into a positive adult life for many young people with autism. Our report Finished at School explores a range of proposals to improve the options for young people with autism once they finish school.

Recommendation: The Children and Families Bill must deliver a clear legal right to educational support for young disabled people up to the age of 25 to help bridge the gap into a positive adulthood.

Conclusion

While schools have made some progress around GCSE achievement levels for children with autism, there remain significant challenges in high levels of exclusions and bullying, and poor outcomes in adulthood for these young people.

The forthcoming Children and Families Bill provides a unique opportunity to influence how schools and local authorities support children with autism and other SEN. We — and your constituents — need your help to make the most of this opportunity.

Please support our recommendations as the Children and Families Bill goes through Parliament, to help improve the experience of young people with autism, and support them to learn, thrive and achieve.

To support our work on the Children and Families Bill, or for more information, please contact:

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Ambitious about Autism

Ambitious about Autism is the national charity for children and young people with autism. We provide services, raise awareness and understanding, and influence policy. We exist to enable children and young people with autism to learn, thrive and achieve.

Autism

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects 1 in 100 people in the UK. It affects the way a person communicates and how they experience the world around them.

Autism is described as a spectrum condition. This means that while people with autism, including Aspergers Syndrome, share certain characteristics, they will be highly individual in their needs and preferences. Some people with autism are able to live independent lives but others may face additional challenges, including learning disabilities, which affect them so profoundly that they need support in many areas.



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1 Department for Education (2012) Special Educational Needs in England
2 Department for Education (2012) Special Educational Needs in England
3 School Action and School Action Plus are levels of additional or different support provided to pupils who are not making progress through the schools usual differentiated approaches
4 Department for Education (2011) Special Educational Needs in England
5 NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus (February 2011)
6 TreeHouse (2009) Disobedience or Disability
7 Department for Education (2012) Permanent and fixed period exclusions from schools and exclusion appeals in England, 2010/11
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9 Office of the Children's Commissioner (2012) They never give up on you
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11 Batten, A et al (2006) Autism and education: the reality for families today, The National Autistic Society
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13 Department for Education (2012) GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England 2010/11
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15 Office for National Statistics (2001), Census Report & Data Service (2011), MI Reports — Regional Learning Disability/Difficulty Report
16 Department for Education (2011) The Activities and Experiences of 19 year olds, England 2010
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