



Steps to avoid the exclusion of autistic pupils





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Introduction

Autistic children and young people can find school challenging and each individual has different needs and abilities. This resource considers the challenges pupils on the autism spectrum face in school, and offers suggestions for ways in which they can be supported to avoid exclusion.

Training

The National Autistic Society offers a range of [training opportunities for professionals](#) working with children on the autism spectrum, including how to adapt ways of working, the support provided, including useful strategies.

Teachers and educational professionals can also sign up to The National Autistic Society's [MyWorld campaign](#) and receive free information and resources by email.

The Autism Education Trust offers a national face-to-face [modular training programme](#) for all professionals working in all school settings.

SEN Support

The statutory government guidance on exclusion says:

“Early intervention to address underlying causes of disruptive behaviour should include an assessment of whether appropriate provision is in place to support any SEN or disability that a pupil may have...”

Schools have a legal duty to do their best to meet the special educational needs (SEN) of pupils through SEN Support. This support should develop from a four-part cycle, so that decisions and actions are revisited, refined and revised, leading to a growing understanding of the pupil's needs, and what interventions help the pupil.

SEN Support four stages of the cycle are:

- Assess – individual assessment to understand barriers to and gaps in a pupil's learning
- Plan – consideration of the strategies and interventions that can overcome barriers to accessing education
- Do – implementation of the plan
- Review – regular (ideally termly) review of the pupil's progress and the strategies and interventions.

It's important to remember that each autistic pupil is an individual and what works for one child may not work for another, but some of the [strategies for teachers](#) on The National Autistic Society's website might help. You can also find many [resources for teachers](#) on the Autism Education Trust website. In addition, you may want to consider getting specific advice from specialists outside the school, for example an educational psychologist, an autism outreach specialist or a speech and language therapist, who can give advice and provide assessments.

Involving the child and child's parents in decisions made about SEN Support is vital. The [SEND Code of Practice](#) says that parents know their child best and it's important to listen to and understand parents' concerns. Schools should work collaboratively with parents and the Autism Education Trust has published a guide for parents and carers: [Working together with your child's school](#).

Understanding difficulties

The statutory government guidance on exclusion says:

"Disruptive behaviour can be an indication of unmet needs. Where a school has concerns about a pupil's behaviour, it should try to identify whether there are any causal factors and intervene early in order to reduce the need for a subsequent exclusion..."

Trying to cope with the school day can lead to autistic pupils displaying challenging behaviour. This behaviour is often due to an underlying anxiety, frustration or sensory sensitivity. It's not always clear what has triggered it, which makes it difficult to identify useful strategies. Keeping a [behaviour](#) diary/ABC chart to see if you and the pupil can start to recognise when anxiety or frustration occurs can be helpful. If possible, talk to the pupil about what help and support they would like.

Pupils on the autism spectrum may also have difficulties in school with:

- relating to others
- communicating
- change
- organisational skills
- sensory sensitivities
- anxiety.

They may have particular difficulties during unstructured times, such as break and lunch times. The [SEND Code of Practice](#) says that autistic pupils may have needs across all areas, including particular sensory requirements.

Making reasonable adjustments

The statutory government guidance on exclusion says:

“Under the Equality Act 2010, schools must not discriminate against, harass or victimise pupils because of sex; race; disability; religion or belief; sexual orientation; pregnancy/maternity; or gender reassignment. For disabled children, this includes a duty to make reasonable adjustments to policies and practices...”

“Schools must also ensure that their policies and practices do not discriminate against pupils by unfairly increasing their risk of exclusion. Provisions within the Equality Act allow schools to take positive action to deal with particular disadvantages, needs, or low participation affecting one group, where this can be shown to be a proportionate way of dealing with such issues”

A diagnosis of autism would generally be considered a disability in accordance with the Equality Act, but you don't have to have a diagnosis to be considered a disabled person. [The Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\) Technical Guidance for Schools](#) explains schools' legal duties under the Equality Act and provides helpful examples. Chapter 4 of the guidance explains how the Equality Act requirements fit in with exclusions regulations.

The Equality Act requires schools to make reasonable adjustments to avoid placing a disabled pupil at a substantial disadvantage compared with non-disabled peers. Schools must take positive steps to ensure that disabled pupils can fully participate in the education provided, and are able to have access to benefits, facilities and services provided for all pupils. The National Autistic Society website offers further information about [disability discrimination](#) in schools, which includes examples of reasonable adjustments schools can make for autistic pupils.

Education, Health and Care Needs assessment

The statutory government guidance on exclusion says:

“The head teacher should also consider the use of a multi-agency assessment for a pupil who demonstrates persistent disruptive behaviour...”

If, despite providing appropriate SEN Support and/or making reasonable adjustments, an autistic pupil remains at risk of exclusion, schools should consider requesting an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment from the local authority.

The EHC needs assessment is a detailed multi-disciplinary exploration to find out what a child's special educational needs are and what provision should be put into place to meet them. This assessment may lead to the issue of an EHC plan, which is for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through SEN support. The local authority's [‘Local Offer’](#) should include information about how to request an EHC needs assessment.