Supplementary guidance:
Autism Spectrum Disorder

January 2019

Estyn

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ⌕ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ⌕ primary schools
- ⌕ secondary schools
- ⌕ all-age schools
- ⌕ special schools
- ⌕ pupil referral units
- ⌕ independent schools
- ⌕ further education
- ⌕ independent specialist colleges
- ⌕ adult community learning
- ⌕ local authority education services for children and young people
- ⌕ teacher education and training
- ⌕ Welsh for adults
- ⌕ work-based learning
- ⌕ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ⌕ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others
- ⌕ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

What is the purpose?
To provide guidance to inspectors on the considerations to be given in respect of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
For whom is it intended?
All inspectors of maintained and independent schools and post-16 education.
From when should the guidance be used?
From January 2019.

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Supplementary guidance

The key Estyn documents that guide inspection activity are the inspection guidance handbooks for each sector. However, we also produce supplementary guidance to help inspectors to consider specific aspects of education and training further.

The supplementary guidance documents set out some key principles, considerations and resources for inspectors. They relate to all sectors that Estyn inspects, unless they state that they are for a specific sector. They expand on certain aspects of education/training (e.g. the inspection of literacy) or on ways of conducting inspections (e.g. the use of learning walks) or specific inspection arrangements (e.g. guidance on inspecting church schools).

The supplementary guidance documents do not aim to be comprehensive. Inspectors are not required to work through them exhaustively when covering any specific aspect on an inspection. However, inspectors may find them useful when responding to specific emerging questions that arise during inspections or when they wish to reflect or investigate further.

The supplementary guidance documents may help providers gain an understanding of Estyn's inspection arrangements. They may also be helpful to providers in evaluating specific aspects of their own provision.

Our inspection work is based on the following principles:

- Inspectors will approach inspection with a positive mindset to ensure it is the best possible professional learning experience for the staff in each provider
- Inspectors will take a learner-focused approach to inspection
- Inspectors will always focus strongly on the quality of teaching and learning
- Inspectors will seek out well-considered innovative practice
- Inspectors will tailor the inspection activities according to the circumstances in each provider as far as possible
- Inspectors will be agile and responsive to emerging findings and will use the increased range of inspection tools and approaches available
- Inspectors will consider everything in the inspection framework, but will only report on the key strengths and weaknesses within each provider

Estyn has consulted with the National Autistic Society (NAS) Cymru in order to develop this guidance.

1   Introduction

The information contained in the following sections complements the information contained in the supplementary guidance on additional learning needs (ALN). The information that follows is specific to a particular additional learning need and/or disability.

The reporting inspector will be aware of the ALN profile within a school and will make suitable provision during the inspection for the following enquiries to be made. All members of the inspection team need to be aware of the general considerations for effective classroom practice and should judge the effectiveness of pupils' standards and teaching in relation to pupils' individual education plans (IEPs), individual development plans (IDPs) or statements of SEN.

Inspectors should also take account of advice to educational settings from the Welsh Government guidance on ASD in 'Support for Children and Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Educational Settings' (Welsh Government, Crown Copyright, January 2019). Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

2   Definitions

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a pervasive developmental disorder characterised by deficits in social interaction and communication and by restricted and repetitive behaviour including sensory differences, which limit or impair everyday functioning. (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th edition DSM-V, 2013)

- ASD is a medical diagnosis and assessment is recommended in the document by NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) 'Autism Spectrum Disorder in under 19s: recognition, referral and diagnosis' (September 2011, updated December 2017 part 1.1.3) to be undertaken by a multi-disciplinary group or 'autism team' including as its core group a paediatrician or adolescent psychiatrist, speech and language therapist and clinical or educational psychologist.

- Alternative terms for Autism Spectrum Disorder include 'Autism Spectrum Condition', 'ASC', 'being on the spectrum' or simply 'ASD' or 'autism'. Inspectors are likely to find variation in terms used in different providers. It is always best to liaise with specific providers about their preferred terms when on site. Avoiding raising the status of an individual's diagnoses is prudent as some leaners may not be aware of this.

- Former terms such as (PDD-NOS) Pervasive Development Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified, Asperger's Syndrome, Atypical Autism, High Functioning Autism, Classic Kanner Autism or (PDA) Pathological Demand Avoidance have all been replaced by the one term in the DSM-V, 2013 of 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' (ASD).

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a recognised disability as classified in the Office for Disability Issues: HM Government Equality Act of 2010. However, learners with ASD do not always have associated learning disabilities.

- Current estimated numbers of learners with ASD is around 1 in 68 or potentially 1 in every dual form entry primary school class or around 3 in a high school year group of 200 learners (The NHS Information Centre, Community and Mental Health Team, Brugha, T. et al (2012). Estimating the prevalence of autism spectrum conditions in adults: extending the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey. Leeds: NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care). Learners with ASD have a high rate of comorbid difficulties, that is, they may also have other additional needs or diagnoses such as developmental co-ordination difficulties (DCD), hypermobility, dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) among other conditions.

- Up to 29% of learners with ASD have a comorbid social anxiety disorder, 28% have comorbid ADHD, 84% meet the criteria for at least one other anxiety disorder and 70% have a comorbid disorder (Rosenblatt, M 2008. I Exist: the message from adults with autism in England. London: The National Autistic Society, p3)

- It is important to recognise learners with ASD are on a 'spectrum' and thus have varying difficulties and widely differing learning needs. Around half of learners with ASD have an associated learning difficulty whereas others excel academically but can experience more profound difficulties in social interaction and communication.

- ASD is a communication disorder, therefore learners may use a variety of communication methods including visual symbols and photographs, real life objects of reference, picture exchange systems, speech generating devices and technologies or Makaton sign language.

- Five times as many males as females are diagnosed with ASD, however current research which is ongoing suggests girls have historically been 'under-diagnosed' due to differing presentation of need.

Inspection area 1: Standards

General considerations on outcomes for learners with ASD.

Are pupils…?

- Able to follow the instructions of staff with the appropriate resources?

- Developing their skills, including being able to work with greater independence, in line with their needs and abilities?

- Developing in their confidence and becoming resourceful in supporting their own learning?

- Able to engage in meaningful dialogue with staff and other pupils in line with their communication needs?

- Able to identify if they have achieved learning objectives?

- Developing the ability to communicate to meet their needs and express free opinions or from a range of choices?

- Developing social skills from individual starting points?

Inspection area 2: Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

General considerations on effective outcomes for pupils with ASD.

Are pupils…?

- Given reasonable opportunities to calm and self-regulate if anxious?

- Able to interact with strategies to stay safe or regain a calm state?

- Able to participate in a range of extra-curricular and pupil voice opportunities?

- Motivated and engaged in tasks as a result of clearly communicated success criteria?

- Able to develop their ability over time to better engage in tasks?

- Able to manage transitions between tasks, lessons and environments?

- Able to maintain their own or others high expectations of behaviour and engagement in line with their ability?

- Able to use a variety of recording methods in tasks in order to achieve lesson outcomes?

- Able to reflect on their progress and development over time?

> **Helpful ideas for promoting pupil wellbeing and attitudes to learning**
>
> Using an effective method of regular communication with parents or carers can help maintain successful pupil wellbeing and readiness for learning. Interactive online sites and applications, weekly feedback sessions face to face or in written form in a 'home-school' book can assist close liaison in the planning for learners with ASD.
>
> Learners' own engagement in person centred planning approaches can help them give input into what is important and what works for them in, for example, the creation of a one page profile or as part of their IEP, IDP or Statement of SEN.
>
> Allowing for 'social breaks' at unstructured times when learners with ASD find the social demands challenging, can be helpful. The use of 'buddies' to help learners with ASD to navigate the social expectations of busy unstructured times can also be beneficial.

> Where possible, allowing learners with ASD an element of choice in their learning can aid attitudes toward learning. Many learners with ASD have a special, or range of particular interests that can help motivate and be an avenue into rich learning experiences that engage and maintain motivation.

Inspection area 3: Teaching and learning experiences

General considerations on effective classroom practice for pupils with ASD.

Do teachers/support staff…?

- Use the learner's name to gain attention before giving instructions?

- Use a range of suitable resources to maintain motivation and engagement?

- Use simple and precise language, avoiding idioms, multi-step instructions and layered explanations?

- Enable learners to participate in paired and group tasks with appropriate support?

- Break down tasks into smaller 'chunks', presented visually where appropriate?

- Allow sufficient processing time for learners to process and respond?

- Promote independence with targeted structure and work systems?

- Maintain engagement and motivation through a system of reward?

- Have a good understanding of the needs of the pupils? Are they able to assist in developing new skills and understanding? Do they develop pupils' independence skills appropriately? Do support staff have sufficient knowledge of the subject being taught and the pupils' needs?

- Consider and plan for the impact and stimulation of the environment on learners?

- Make expectations and rules explicit, including the motivators to comply?

- Make effective use of 'special interest' areas to enhance engagement and progress? A 'special interest' area for someone with ASD may be something like dinosaurs, 'The Titanic', 'space and the universe' or technologies like tablet computers or online video platforms.

- Set high expectations of engagement and progress via tasks set at an appropriate level of challenge?

- Understand and plan for the sensory differences of pupils with ASD?

- How does the school ensure the meaningful inclusion of learners with ASD in mainstream curriculum, whole class, group and paired activities?

Helpful ideas for adapting resources and teaching

Pupils with ASD very often have a strength in visual learning. Visual resources such as timetables, work systems, explicit rules and instructions can help provide permanence, promote independence and reduce the anxiety associated with work tasks, change and transitions.

A restricted, repetitive and rigid mind-set is part of the diagnostic criteria for ASD. As such, enhanced means of motivation such as visually presented motivators, distractors and rewards are often effective. 'Choice time' or 'golden time' gives learners a specific goal to achieve.

A 'movement break' sometimes helps pupils with ASD to reduce the anxiety associated with a busy classroom, refocus and calm. A short time of being engaged in a different environment or on a different task can help achieve a 'ready to learn' state.

Pupils with ASD sometimes respond favourably to having access to a 'fiddle toy' or something to hold to aid concentration and engagement. Plasticine or a small tactile object can help pupils focus and self-regulate, especially when required to sit or listen to adult instruction.

Task breakdown or planning resources help learners with ASD access tasks that require multistep action. Similar to the format of a cooking recipe, 'I need…', 'first…', 'then…', 'now…', 'then…', 'finally…' and 'now I can…' for example, can help pupils develop independence in tasks and not rely on adult prompting.

Learners with ASD often struggle to understand and generalise social rules. A small number of explicit rules of conduct, behaviour or other parameters give definition to sometimes vague social boundaries.

Seating learners with ASD who find distraction a challenge at or near the front of the room and directing instructions or requests using their name, keys learners into the information.

Learners with ASD often have heightened levels of anxiety. Tracking challenges faced using an antecedent/ behaviour/ consequence model can help staff identify problem times of day, environment, tasks, clothing, weather or any other factors that may contribute to challenges that learners themselves are unable to articulate.

Inspection area 4: Care, support and guidance

- Does any additional support target the development of life skills and building independence?

- Has the school taken good enough account of the needs of pupils in adapting the physical environment?

- How does the school ensure learners with ASD have the opportunity to participate fully in the wider social aspects of school life?

- Does the school make effective use of targets on IEPs, IBPs, IDPs or Statements of SEN to maximise support and progress?

- Does attainment data for learners with ASD demonstrate that progress is being made? How well are learners with ASD making progress in relation to their starting points over time?

- Are targets on IEPs, IBPs and IDPs relevant and appropriate for learners with ASD?

- Are annual review meetings for pupils with a statement of SEN held in line with national guidelines? Are learners and parents encouraged to access person centred planning approaches to fully participate in these reviews?

- Does the school provide an appropriate level of curriculum and social challenge for learners with ASD?

- Are appropriate measures identified in risk assessments to ensure that pupils with ASD are not disadvantaged? For example, inclusion in off-site visits or positive handling procedures?

- Is an appropriate focus given to personal and social development and independence to maximise the skills of learners with ASD?

A low stimulus environment can be helpful to learners with ASD. Having an area in a classroom or work area that is less 'busy' with less extraneous visual information can help learners with ASD focus on the given task. In rooms where there is less free space, a table in a quieter area of the class, ideally looking away from the zone of activity for example, at a blank wall can be beneficial.

Anxiety is a common end product of high levels of social interaction, communication, requests to be flexible and expectations to work on someone else's agenda. Learners with ASD can change from appearing calm to being very upset, very quickly. This is likely to be as a result of underlying anxiety when coping with the demands of a stressful environment. A quiet space, room or area that learners with ASD know is safe can be very successful in allowing learners with ASD to calm and return to learning.

A key member of staff who knows the individual can be effective in helping the learner with ASD feel safe.

Where learners with ASD are experiencing heightened levels of anxiety, being seated near the rear of a room or the door can be effective. A 'time-out' system, for example in the form of a card can further reduce anxiety.

The ability to arrive late at lessons, or leave lessons early to avoid busy times in corridors and cloakrooms can assist learners with ASD to remain calm.

Opportunities to 'check-in' and 'check-out' at the start or end of the day with a key member of staff can help learners with ASD assimilate to the new environment, problem solve any concerns the pupils have or bring closure to issues that may have occurred throughout the day.

Certain learners with ASD experience difficulty with physical contact, or sports that involve getting wet or muddy. Reasonable adjustments such as undertaking physical activity in the gym or on exercise machines can enable pupils to achieve goals via alternative methods.

Inspection area 5: Leadership and management

Do leaders in the school…?

- Set high expectations for learners with ASD?

- Ensure that all staff have received basic training in ASD?

- Ensure that where learners are in receipt of a diagnosis of ASD that appropriate advice, when relevant, is sought from outside agencies such as specialist teacher teams or an educational psychologist in line with their referral procedures and that any advice is implemented.

- Raise awareness and understanding of ASD in the school and with parents?