No longer held back:

Making the education system work for children on the autism spectrum

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World Autism Awareness Week

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Autism is a lifelong disability that affects how people communicate and interact with the world.

- 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK: approx. 1 in 100 people
- Hidden disability: you can’t always see that someone is autistic
- How it affects people: difficulties with social communication and interaction; repetitive patterns of behaviour; reliance on rules and routines; highly-focused interests; sensory sensitivity; anxiety
Our education services

We provide:

• Eight autism-specific schools in different parts of the country, offering specialist support for children and young people with complex needs

• Education support, training and outreach to mainstream and special schools

• MyWorld online teaching resources for education professionals

• Education Rights Service, offering specialist advice to parents and help with navigating the SEND system
Autism and the education system

• More than 72 per cent of children on the autism spectrum are educated in mainstream schools

• Autism is the most common type of SEN among children and young people who have an education, health and care plan – 27% of pupils who have an EHCP have autism as their primary need

Figures from Department for Education, 2017
Held back

Parliamentary inquiry in 2017 by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism found that too many children on the autism spectrum are being let down by the education system.

- Fewer than half of the autistic children and young people we surveyed said they are happy at school
- Fewer than half of the teachers we surveyed said they are confident about supporting a child on the autism spectrum
- 40% of the parents we surveyed said that their child’s school place does not fully meet their needs
- 50% of parents said that their child waited more than a year for support to be put in place for them at school
Held back

• 42% of parents said their child was refused an assessment of their special educational needs the first time it was requested

• 60% of young people and 70% of parents said the main thing that would make school better for them is having a teacher who understands autism

‘An inherently hard process that circumstances conspire to make harder.’

Evidence to APPGA inquiry by Chair of Local Government Association Children’s Board
‘Autistic pupils are probably the SEN group I need the most guidance with and have received the least guidance on.’

Response from a teacher to APPGA survey, 2017
‘We are stuck in a system that wants the child to fail before help is offered.’

Response from a parent to APPGA survey, 2017
‘Like a fish in a tank of piranhas.’

Sam, one of our Young Ambassadors who gave evidence to the APPGA inquiry
New national autism strategy

Our ‘Held Back’ campaign called for a national autism and education strategy. The Government has now agreed to extend the national autism strategy this year to include children and young people for the first time.

This is an opportunity to:

• Improve understanding of autism across the education system
• Improve commissioning and planning of school places and wider support in local areas
Understanding autism

• Schools and local authorities still do not understand well enough what it means to be autistic and what support a child might need
• A child’s anxiety – caused by their autism – is too often misunderstood as ‘bad behaviour’
• Children on the autism spectrum are three times more likely than children with no special educational needs to be excluded from school [DfE figures]
• Every teacher needs training in autism – before they qualify and throughout their career
• Understanding needs to be embedded across the whole school, beginning at the top
• Schools need to work together to share knowledge and expertise
Commissioning and planning support

- Too often, children have to fail before they get a school place that meets their needs
- For children to succeed, the right services/support must be available in their area
- Schools, local authorities and other organisations should work together to plan ahead for what children will need
- Children have a wide range of needs, so there should be a wide range of provision
- Two groups of children are currently not well served:
  - Secondary school pupils who are academically able but struggle to cope in mainstream secondary school environment
  - Children who have a learning disability and whose behaviour is perceived as challenging
For more information on teaching autistic children

• Sign up to MyWorld for free online information and resources
  www.autism.org.uk/myworld

• Attend our training and conferences
  www.autism.org.uk/professionals

• Autism Education Trust
  https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/