



Autism Strategy

for Children and Young People in Cornwall
2016-2019



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1. Vision

Our vision is that Cornwall is a county committed to supporting children and young people with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) to achieve positive outcomes.

Children, young people and their families will be able access services which meet their needs. Families will feel supported through the diagnostic pathway and will receive advice and signposting about the services which are available to them.

Families will have confidence that educational settings in Cornwall have a good understanding of autism and can meet their children's needs. There will be good links with the Cornwall Autism Partnership for adults regarding issues such as transition to adult services, apprenticeship and adult education.

Parents and carers of children and young people with autism will be able to access information and training and all staff working within Cornwall Council (and their partner agencies) who work with children will be able to demonstrate a good understanding about autism and the support that they can provide to young people on the autism spectrum and their families.

2. What is Autism?

The National Autistic Society (NAS) defines autism as 'a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others. Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people'.

Autism is a spectrum condition and it is important to understand that although all autistic people share certain difficulties, being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some people with an autism spectrum condition also have learning difficulties, mental health needs or other conditions resulting in them needing different levels of support. The NAS states 'All people on the autism spectrum learn and develop. With the right sort of support all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing'.

Throughout this strategy the terms autism and autism-spectrum condition (ASC) are used. In other documentation regarding autism the term autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are also used.

3. The incidence of Autism nationally and in Cornwall

There are around 700,000 people in the UK living with autism. If you include their families, autism touches the lives of 2.8 million people every day.

The UK estimate is that more than one in a hundred children has autism and currently significantly more boys than girls diagnosed. The NAS website provides helpful information about the numbers and ratios and also the importance of understanding the different gender presentations of autism.

There is no single database that records all of the children in Cornwall who have a diagnosis of autism and there continue to be several different pathways for the diagnosis of autism in children and young people.

Young people with a diagnosis ASC in schools in Cornwall:

The data gathered by school census from 2008-12 showed an 18% increase in the number of pupils with an ASC diagnosis (either at SEN School Action or with a Statement/Education Health and Care Plan) over that period. Between 2012 and 2016 there was a further increase of 34% in the number of children in schools with a diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition.

School census information Spring 2016:

Returns for the school census in spring 2016 indicated that there were 741 pupils in Cornwall schools with a primary need of autism at either Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support or with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education Health and Care Plan (reception to Year 11).

Of these:

- 280 were at SEN Support
- 461 had a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education Health and Care Plan

Early Years Provision:

There are no specialist Early Years settings for children with autism. The Early Years Inclusion Service currently includes Autism Spectrum Workers who support children who have social communication difficulties and those who may be on the autism diagnostic pathway.

School Placement:

There is a range of educational provision available for children and young people with autism aged 4-16 in Cornwall. The majority of these young people attend mainstream primary and secondary schools, including a number of pupils attending Area Resource Bases attached to mainstream schools. Of the remainder, most attend one of Cornwall's four special schools, while a small minority are in alternative provision such as an Independent Specialist Provision

(funded by Cornwall Council). At any one time there are a small number of pupils registered in a mainstream school who attend an Alternative Provision Academy or Nurture Group because of their social, emotional or behavioural needs, or who are receiving home tuition (through the Community Hospital Education Service) because of their health/mental health needs. There are also some children with autism who are being electively home educated by their parents.

Types of educational provision for children with a diagnosis of Autism and a Statement or EHC plan in April 2016:

- **Special School** – 125 (all with a Statement/EHC plan)
- **Area Resource Base** – 70 (all with a Statement/EHC plan)
- **Independent Special Placement** -14 (all with a Statement/EHC plan)
- **Mainstream school** -546 (280 at SEN Support and 266 with a Statement/EHC plan)
- **Elective Home Education**- 19 (all with a Statement/EHC plan as well as an unknown number without a Statement/EHC plan)

This represents 741 young people with autism in Cornish schools plus 33 who were either in independent specialist placements or electively home educated.

4. Rationale for developing the Children and Young People's Autism Strategy for Cornwall

In 2015 Cornwall's Health and Wellbeing Board acknowledged the work of the Cornwall Autism Partnership (CAP) in relation to the Autism Strategy for adults but recommended that there should now be increased focus on the needs of children and young people with autism. It was recommended that either an all-age strategy be developed or a separate one which focused particularly on the needs of children and young people. It was considered that the needs of children and young people with autism are distinct and different from those of adults and it was agreed that a Children and Young People's Autism Strategy should be developed.

During 2015 a consultation was carried out involving parents/carers, young people with autism and professionals. This consultation provided a range of information about what people felt was working well and what needed to be improved in relation to children and young people with autism.

In response to the consultation, parents and carers said that the majority of them had not felt supported through the diagnostic process, that the process took too long and was not straightforward. They also said that they received very little information about the services available to them and their child as a result of the diagnosis. Parents informed the consultation that they felt there

were benefits to having a diagnosis of autism and that their children were often treated differently and with greater understanding once they had a diagnosis. Parents were clear that there needed to be more training in schools around autism spectrum conditions and that schools needed to become more 'autism friendly'. Several parents noted the lack of educational provision for highly anxious children and young people with autism who didn't have a learning disability, and stated that more specialist provision was needed in Cornwall. Some parents said that the reason that they had chosen to educate their child at home was due to the lack of provision and appropriate support in their child's previous school or educational setting.

During the consultation parents talked about the need for 'barriers to be broken down' in order for them to access health services. For instance: knowing *how* to access the service and *who* to contact. Parents expressed concerns at having to make repeated calls in order to get appointments, maintain appointments and needing to gain a better understanding of what services they needed in order to be redirected appropriately. Parents also said that they found it more difficult to access Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and CAMHS Learning Disabilities Services than any other health services.

Parents and carers said that significant improvements are needed in order to make community and leisure services more 'autism friendly' and that this could include information and training for staff.

Young people with autism informed the consultation that what was working well in school was when teachers were flexible and allowed for the needs of the individual. However these young people also talked about the physical and emotional bullying they had experienced. Several young people reported that they had moved schools as a result of bullying and a few had moved on more than one occasion. Young people also told the consultation that some teachers did not adapt their lessons and that they did not appear to understand autism spectrum conditions. Young people said that they wanted schools to be more open to diversity and for teachers and other pupils to develop a better understanding of autism spectrum conditions. Young people with autism had some specific suggestions for schools such as teachers incorporating the young person's hobbies into lessons and for lessons to be more practical with less sitting at desks. Young people also told us some of things which would improve their access to leisure and community activities and the importance of people organising sports and other leisure activities having an understanding about autism. There was very positive feedback from young people about the role of Aspires but they wanted this to be available to them for longer. Aspires is a project in Cornwall which supports young people to access mainstream social activities. The young people are aged 8-18, with a diagnosis of autism who do not have significant learning difficulties.

Professionals from education, health and social care responding to the consultation told us about the range of improvements they think are needed in terms of making schools, settings and services more 'autism friendly'. Only 15% of the 208 professionals who completed the survey as part of the consultation

agreed with the statement: 'Cornwall has an appropriate range of education provision and the capacity within provision to meet the needs of children and young people with autism'. The types of support that professionals would most like to see are: the school culture being supportive of children with autism, increased availability of the specialist Autism Spectrum Team, adaptive teaching style or approach used in classrooms, and having an 'autism friendly classroom'. There was agreement that there is a need for additional specialist educational provision for some young people with autism spectrum conditions. The findings suggest that professionals feel that the most important development within existing provision is to increase is the cultural understanding of autism spectrum conditions and for teachers to adapt their teaching accordingly. Professionals also raised the issue of improving links with post-16 education providers and employers.

The feedback from the consultation has been considered alongside the guidance produced by National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE guidance) on:

- Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: recognition, referral and diagnosis (September 2011)
- Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: support and management (August 2013)

5. Partners:

The Children's Cornwall Autism Partnership group which has been developing this strategy has included representatives from:

- Cornwall Council
- NHS provider services and commissioners
- Voluntary sector including The National Autistic Society
- Parents/carers

The development and implementation of the action plan arising from this Strategy will need to include, in addition to the above, representatives from:

- Early Years settings, schools and colleges
- Leisure and community services
- Young people

6. Broad Aims for 2016-19

Each of the following aims has been broken down into objectives with specific outcomes and time scales. There is a work-stream lead for each of the following four areas with responsibility for monitoring their area of work and keeping the Action Plan updated. The action plan will be reviewed quarterly and with oversight from the Children's Cornwall Autism Partnership group.

Health:

- Parents and carers will be able to access information about the diagnostic process in Cornwall. They will be clear how a referral can be made, likely timescales and the process which will be followed. They will be provided with information before, during and after the diagnostic process and understand the implications of a diagnosis (see NICE guidance on referral and diagnosis)
- Children and young people with an autism spectrum condition and mental health difficulties will be able to access timely support including, where appropriate, Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Families will know how to access other health services for their child with an autism spectrum condition (such as Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy)
- Families will report a positive experience of accessing services for their child with an autism spectrum condition from GPs and from hospitals when surveyed

Education:

- Children and young people with autism will report that their needs are understood and respected in early years settings and schools
- Parents and carers of children with autism will have trust and confidence that early years settings and schools will be able to meet their child's educational needs
- Good practice in relation to young people with autism in educational provision will be celebrated and shared to improve the educational experience of young people in Cornwall.
- Early years settings and schools will have access to appropriate training and support in relation to autism (including the offer of all schools being able to have an Autism Champion and schools having access to appropriate specialist support services)
- Schools will be aware that the siblings of young people with autism may benefit from interventions such as Sibling groups
- Cornwall Council will work with parents and other stakeholders to develop a continuum of educational provision to meet the range of needs presented by children with autism

- Young people with autism will feel that their needs are understood and respected in colleges and schools with post-16 provision
- Parents and carers of young people with autism will have trust and confidence that colleges and schools with post-16 provision will be able to meet their child's educational needs
- Young people with autism will be supported to reach their potential in post-16 education, training and into the world of work

Early Help and Social Care:

Parents and carers of young people with autism will know where they can find information about services to meet their child's needs

- Parents, carers and young people with autism will have confidence that staff in Early Help and Social Care services have an understanding of autism
- Families with a child with autism will understand how to request a carer's assessment and the what the threshold is for the involvement of social care services
- Families will be able to access information about what services are available to adults with autism and how the transition process works between children's and adult's services in Cornwall

Leisure and Community Services:

- Information will be provided for sports/leisure groups to show what adjustments should be made to make their provision more accessible for children and young people with autism
- Training available for coaches and others in community settings in order to help them make adjustments so that sport and other leisure activities in the community are more accessible for those with autism
- Clear information available about particular 'autism friendly' groups/organisations available to children and families
- Leisure services and other stakeholders informed about the work of the 'Includer Service' which can provide support to attend groups with young people to help them access extracurricular activities

7. Priorities identified by the Children's Cornwall Autism Partnership (CAP) group

By 30.9.16 'Work-stream Groups established in relation to:

- Education (including early years, schools and colleges)
- Health and Mental Health Services
- Early Help and Social Care Services
- Community and Leisure Services

Each of these groups to consider the aims set out above and how they will be achieved. Consideration to be given to the feedback received from Stakeholders.

Work-stream groups to identify the work they need to complete by 31.3.17, 31.3.18 and 31.3.19 and the outcomes they aim to achieve by these dates. This will be shared with the Children and Young People's CAP group and then circulated more widely to stakeholders.

8. Governance:

The implementation of the Children and Young People's Autism Strategy in Cornwall will be overseen by:

- Task and Finish Groups feeding into the Children and Young People's Cornwall Autism Partnership group (chaired by Senior Manager Children's Psychology Services)
- Health and Wellbeing Board via Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Board (chaired by Head of Service Early Years and Education)

9. Links to other strategies:

The Children and Young People's Autism strategy has links with the following strategies and developments:

- Cornwall's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy
- Cornwall's Education Strategy
- Cornwall's Raising Aspiration and Achievement Strategy (RAAS)
- Cornwall's Employment and Skills Strategy 2016
- Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Transformation

The Chair of the Children's CAP will continue to make the links between the autism strategy and the above strategies and the work being carried out on 'One Vision'.

Dates for review:

31.3.17

31.3.18

31.3.19