

CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

Meeting Their Needs in Leicestershire
Schools

'A Guide for Parents'

This leaflet aims to provide you with information on:

- Leicestershire's overall approach to children on the autism spectrum
- The way in which children's needs are identified and assessed
- The range of provision made by the Local Authority

To keep the leaflet reasonably short, we have only offered a broad overview. Further information is available about specific aspects of Leicestershire's policy and practice.

Two booklets may be of particular interest:

1. *Special Educational Needs in Leicestershire – A Guide for Parents*
2. *Diagnosis and Identification of Autistic Spectrum Disorders – A Guide for Parents and Carers*

Both available to download from www.leics.gov.uk

General Principles

Leicestershire's approach to children on the autism spectrum is based on a number of general principles:

- We believe that it is important to recognise and respond to the needs of the individual child
- We recognise that the autism spectrum covers a very wide range of children. The nature and degree of their individual difficulties varies enormously. Each child also has his or her own personality, strengths and learning experiences. Some children may also have learning difficulties, or other areas of need, which are not related to their autism
- Because of this wide range of need, decisions about provision for children on the autism spectrum have to be based on an assessment of need, rather than purely on the basis of their diagnosis
- This broad range of need means that an equally broad spectrum of educational provision is required, which takes into account each child's strengths and needs
- We believe that children with autism can and should be catered for across the full range of educational settings, provided that suitable modifications are made to the curriculum and teaching approaches and that appropriate levels of support are provided

Children with autism are, therefore, supported in their local mainstream schools and in units and schools for children with learning difficulties. However, Leicestershire also recognises that it can be extremely difficult to meet the needs of a small proportion of children with the most complex and severe autism. These children may be catered for in specialist autism provision within Leicestershire. In exceptional circumstances, specialist schools outside Leicestershire may be used

Identifying and Assessing Needs

There are a number of routes by which a child's needs may be identified and assessed. The child's age and the extent of his or her difficulties will have a major influence on how this takes place.

- Many children will be recognised as having a difficulty before they reach school age. Parents or Health Service Professionals may identify these difficulties. This may result in further referral and assessment within the Health Service. If it is felt that a child is likely to have significant, longer term special educational needs, the involvement of services from Leicestershire's Children and Young People's Service is likely to be requested via the Early Panel.
- The needs of some children on the autism spectrum can be met, using the systems and resources that are normally available in the local school. All schools have systems for assessing and meeting children's special educational needs. They also have access to training, support and advice from outside sources
- Sometimes it is felt that a child's needs cannot be met by his or her local school, given the levels of experience, training and resources that are available. This conclusion may be reached at any point in a child's school life, or before he or she actually reaches school age. This may result in a decision to carry out a statutory assessment of special educational need. This is sometimes referred to as 'statementing'.
- If the Local Authority also seeks advice from a range of professionals, including medical officers (and any other Health Service Professionals who know your child), Educational Psychologists and teachers. More detailed information is provided in the booklet '*SEN in Leicestershire: Working with Children, Families and Schools: Support for Child*'
- A statement may then be drawn up identifying your child's needs, and the sort of help and provision that he or she requires. You will be consulted about the proposed content of the statement and have a right to comment and to have your views taken into account. Your child's progress and the statement will be reviewed at least every twelve months
- The statement will identify the school that your child will attend, and the arrangements that the school and the Local Authority will make, in order to meet your child's needs. This may include the provision of additional teaching or non-teaching help and the involvement of external services such as the Autism Outreach Service.

The Range of Provision for children in the Early Years

A range of help is available for children aged 2 to 6 years on the autism spectrum and their families. To receive this help it is **not** necessary for the type of assessment described in the last section to have been carried out. If your child seems to have significant difficulties, the first point of contact is likely to be with one of the Local Authority's Educational Psychologists. They will discuss with you the sort of help that is available and will consult with other professionals who may be involved with your child. One of the following options may be recommended:

- Home and/or setting visits from one of the teachers who work for the Early Years SEN Inclusion Service
- Support provided by an Autism Outreach Teacher (Early Years), who would be a teacher based within the Autism Outreach Service. Support is provided by means of visits to home and/or settings and/or through a programme of workshops, involving small group of parents
- Many playgroups and nurseries successfully cater for children who are on the autism spectrum. Increasingly, their members of staff have access to support and advice which enables them to meet the needs of children with more complex difficulties
- Some children may need more support such as access to higher levels of staffing and staff with specialist training and experience. Leicestershire has a number of special nurseries which are able to provide this level of support
- Each year the autism Outreach Service provides workshop packages which are specifically for parents of children who have been newly diagnosed and who are not yet in, or have just started school. These workshops provide information about autism and about the sort of provision that is available, as well as offering practical advice about how to help your child
- The Leicestershire branch of the National autistic Society (Helpline: 0116 291 6958) offers advice and support to parents from the time of diagnosis right through into adulthood

The Range of Provision for School Aged Children

Once children reach school age, the type of school they attend and the support that is offered will depend on the nature of their needs. Children on the autism spectrum attend all types of school. The level of support which they need varies enormously (and may change as they progress through the school system).

For many children, mainstream education is appropriate and desirable, particularly if the child needs the sort of curriculum and social experience that is likely to be available in such a setting. With increased awareness and training, it is more and more common for mainstream schools to meet the needs of children with autism spectrum difficulties. The level of additional help that such children need will vary:-

- Some may need only the systems and levels of support that are routinely available in mainstream schools; this includes additional teaching and non-teaching help when this is needed
- Sometimes parents or schools may have concerns about children's development that they would wish to discuss with an autism specialist. The Autism Outreach Service will respond to referrals from schools to meet this need
- For some children, it will be necessary to involve the Autism Outreach Service more closely; this is likely to happen where there is a need for highly specialised advice about approaches to meeting the needs of a particular child on a regular and on-going basis. Advice may be provided about classroom organisation, teaching approaches and the specific targets and strategies needed in the child's programme. It is not necessary for a child to

have a statement in order to access this level of support, although many children on the caseload of the Autism Outreach Service do have statements

- Some children with autism spectrum difficulties may also have a significant degree of learning difficulty. They may need the specialised curriculum, teaching approaches and higher staffing levels that are available either at special schools for children with learning difficulties or at a unit provision within a number of mainstream schools
- All these environments have staff who are experienced in teaching children who are on the autism spectrum. Many will also have had additional, specialised training. Involvement of the Autism Outreach Service is available in these settings and will depend on the extent to which there is a need for even more specialised knowledge and advice, in order to ensure that a child's needs are met
- All Leicestershire special schools offer excellent provision for children with severe autism combined with learning difficulties. There is also a mainstream primary school that offers specialist education for children with severe autism and additional learning difficulties

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