

Foreword

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The primary aim of the Professional Development Programme is the promotion of continuing professional development among Scottish Educational Psychologists through participation in collaborative, cross boundary tasks and projects on matters which impact on practice within the profession.

The social and political imperative to promote inclusion, clearly poses challenges to those charged with the responsibility for addressing the educational needs of pupils with ASD. If such pupils are to derive long-term gain from their educational experiences, whether in mainstream or in specialist provision, there are implications for Local Authority policymaking, management of the schools, curriculum planning and delivery, and staff training. These are the core issues that have been considered by the ASD project group, with the following five factors providing the driving force for the study:

1. The increase in numbers of children identified as having ASD (PHIS, 2002).
2. The social and political pressure for inclusive practices in education.
3. The fact that twice as many Primary aged children are identified as having ASD as those of Secondary age (NAS, 2002) and the implications of this for Secondary schools in planning how to respond effectively to the needs of these pupils following transition.
4. The fact that many pupils who have an Autistic Spectrum Disorder find the challenges of macro transition (moves from one educational sector to another) more stressful than other young people of a similar age and the effect that this has on parents, families and schools.
5. The increasing demands on Educational Psychologists to become involved in the training of other professionals in order to promote the inclusion of pupils with ASD in mainstream placements.

The ASD and Inclusion project group consisted of sixteen Educational Psychologists from eleven Services across the country. All members of the group had a special interest in casework with ASD children. Most had a training and development remit for ASD within their employing Service and some had attended one or more national seminars/events on the topic.

The agreed outcome of the project was that, working in three cross Authority groups, participating Psychologists would seek to enhance the knowledge and practice of colleagues working in the field of ASD by carrying out the following three tasks:

1. Addressing the research question 'What constitutes effective inclusion in mainstream secondary schools for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder?'
2. Addressing the research question 'What are the most effective ways of managing transitions for pupils who have an Autistic Spectrum Disorder?'
3. Compiling a range of resources from which Educational Psychologists and others can draw and customise for multiprofessional training of staff and parents, with the aim of supporting educational placements for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

Taking account of the current legislative context, the following five themes were embedded in the project:

- Views of young people
- Parental perspective
- Peer perspective
- Peer support
- Interdisciplinary dimension

The first of the cross Authority groups, namely **Mardi Alexander, Kathy Franks, Alison Gardner, Sam March, Shirley Paterson, Hilary Scott and Elaine Smith** designed a study to examine 'What constitutes effective inclusion for pupils with ASD in Mainstream Secondary Schools?'

They approached eight of the thirty two Scottish Local Authorities where, following agreement from Education Service Management, all Secondary schools were asked

their views on a number of issues relating to inclusive practice in their school. From this sample, six schools were selected which, according to a self-rating exercise, had developed effective practice in relation to the inclusion of ASD pupils. An in depth analysis of these schools was carried out, including interviews with parents, staff and pupils (ASD and peers). The results of this in depth examination of the six schools form the basis of the findings of the study

Robert Johnstone and **Pat Patrone** carried out a detailed study within two very different Local Authorities, designed to identify the most effective ways of managing transitions for pupils who have an Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Using research methods determined by the guiding principle of finding and identifying good practice, they developed a reflective format using solution focused questions which allowed them to gather a substantial amount of data in a user friendly way without imposing a significant extra burden on staff and families. The views and opinions of parents, teachers and pupils were sought and detailed findings with regard to existing good practice in schools are presented. These highlight strategies which have been found to be effective in relation to three key dimensions:

- Child focussed strategies
- Resources/environment related strategies
- Communication strategies

The authors argue that good transition management will facilitate effective inclusion, and they make recommendations for Local Authorities in relation to this. In addition they have developed a transitions matrix to provide a structure for managing the process for individual pupils.

The CD ROM, which accompanies this document, contains a range of resources for use by Psychologists and others who are presenting training courses with the aim of supporting the educational placements of pupils with ASD. It has been compiled by the third cross Authority group **comprising Shona Crawford, Rosemary Flannigan, Anne McCulloch, Anne McNally, Christine Munro, Anne Skillen and Moira Sweeney.**

Topics include the following:

Introduction to Autism
Inclusive practice and ASD
Autistic thinking and learning
Understanding behaviour
Teaching social skills
Peer support
Self help and increasing independence
Social Stories

The materials have been compiled in such a way as to allow users to select either an individual topic for a one off training session or a cluster of topics to use as a training course. It is hoped that these materials and the supporting PowerPoint presentation with speaker's notes will prove useful to colleagues.

A list of the contributors together with their contact addresses is included at the end of this document; please make direct contact with the authors if you require further information.

References

National Autistic Society (2002) 'Autism in Scotland's Schools: Crisis or Challenge?' London, National Autistic Society.

Public Health Institute of Scotland (2001) 'Autistic Spectrum Disorders: Needs Assessment Report' Glasgow, PHIS.