



London Autism in Schools Project

Newsletter



Immie's sign to spot autism as featured in Good Morning Britain TV show

Good Morning Britain shared a video clip for education professionals: Immie's Signs to Spot Autism and AET are very proud to have been a part of the project.

In the video, Immie discusses her diagnosis and experience in education, revealing that she went to 5 different schools. The segment covers 'masking' and how education professionals might go about spotting 'undiagnosed' autistic children.

"Teachers are really important, and I've met some amazing ones. These people were kind and understanding. At the time, they didn't know I had autism, and neither did I, but they were able to see that I just needed a little bit of help, and I am especially thankful to these teachers."

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH](#)

Welcome to the London Autism in Schools Pilot Project

I am delighted to welcome you to our second London Autism in Schools Pilot Project newsletter, and hope that you find it an informative and interesting read.

I am Will Hardy, the Programme Manager for the London Region Learning Disabilities and Autism (LDA) Programme, focussing on the Autism Workstream. I joined the Autism in Schools Project Steering Group in June 2022, and I will be the chair for the group as it moves into the design and delivery of phase 2. I joined the LDA programme in May 2022, having previously worked in strategic policy design and implementation, public health campaigns and operational acute Mental Health recovery working.

We are excited to be extending the Autism in Schools project into a second year, building on our phase 1 learning to an extended number of schools. In phase 2, we will continue our ambitions to reduce informal and formal exclusions for autistic students, creating learning environments where children can flourish and where their parents and carers can work with schools to deliver this. In phase 2 we will seek to build on our phase 1 offer to schools, aiming to improve linkages with Mental Health in Schools Teams, developing design principles for autism friendly spaces in schools, building on school leadership support and improving peer learning for both students and school teams.

I would like to thank all of the schools and their staff, students, parents and carers who have participated in phase 1 of the project, and look forward to working closely with them and my steering group colleagues and Autism Education Trust partners on the design and delivery of phase 2 of this exciting project. If you have any questions about the project or about anything in this newsletter, please do contact the project team (contact details at the end)



02
PROJECT FUNDING

03
USING THE PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK

04
SENSORY PREFERENCE CHECKLIST

05
PARENT CARER PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS



The Journey So Far...



We have now moved into the main delivery phase of the London Autism in Schools project, and it is very exciting to see the progress made.

Since the last newsletter we have had engagement from all of the key stakeholders in the project. Local Parent Carer Forum's have been working closely with schools and parents and we are seeing activity across all of the workstreams. This is described more fully elsewhere in this newsletter but here are some headlines.

AET Training partners have been developing training plans with Schools, tailored to their specific needs, and training is being delivered to whole school communities and smaller groups of staff.

Sensory Assessment Walks have been carried out and reports finalised. Schools can now carry out adaptations in line with the priority recommendations and submit your full claims for reimbursement.

The Sensory Preference Resource Pack pilot has now been completed and we would like to thank all who participated in this work – the findings have been very valuable in refining the offer.

The National Autistic Society evaluation team, working with UCL, will have been in touch with teachers, parents and carers to feed into the evaluation of the project work.

In the next two months we will deliver the remaining training in schools and also develop digital resources which will support schools beyond the life of the project. These will be ready to launch shortly. We are also excited to announce that AET and the Gender Identity Research & Education Society (GIRE) are developing an online autism and gender identity module - more to follow on this shortly.

We thank you all for your participation and engagement in all of the various elements of this project. If you would like further information, please contact the project team who will be happy to help. (contact details at end of newsletter)

Funding For Project Schools



Schools involved in the project are entitled to receive two types of funding – further information is provided here, but please do contact the project team if you have any questions. We would prefer claims for both funding to be made together wherever possible.

Enabling environments: capital fund

This fund is provided to help schools carry out some of the priority recommendations agreed in their sensory assessment reports. Typically, schools will have £5,000 each but this may vary; please check your report for any recommendations about funding levels. Invoices should be submitted once all of the funding has been used and with receipts provided as evidence of costs incurred.

Learning and development: staff backfill

Schools are also able to claim £5,000 in recognition of the staff time needed to participate in the project's learning and development programme. This is payable on completion of a school's training plan which each school will have agreed with their AET training partner and PCF lead.

The Progression Framework

There are many tools to track academic progress for children and young people (CYP) in education settings. How can we track the progress of autistic CYP in areas that fall outside the National Curriculum...? Fortunately, the Autism Education Trust (AET) has developed The Progression Framework.

 Communication and Interaction

 Sensory processing

 Emotional understanding and self-awareness

 Healthy living

 Social understanding and relationships

 Interests, routines and processing

 Learning and engagement

 Independence and community participation

What is it?

The [Progression Framework](#) is a widely recognised resource, free to download from the [Autism Education Trust](#). It is in Excel format and includes guidance documents.

Why is it important?

- There are three key factors underpinning the importance of the Progression Framework:
- It develops school staff's confidence in understanding and assessing the progress autistic CYP makes in areas outside of the National Curriculum
- It develops the extent to which schools measure progress and address the needs of autistic CYP, including measuring the impact of approaches
- It is an effective tool for tracking progress made by autistic CYP

We're all working towards preparing all our CYP for adulthood and this is at the core of the Progression Framework. However, any tools used not only need to be effective in achieving the best outcomes for our CYP, but the process needs to be realistic and manageable. The Progression Framework has been developed to successfully include the themes that matter, as identified by those who use it.



TIPS FOR USING THE PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK



- Download the Progression Framework, for free, as an Excel document
- Start off by identifying one main learning area relating to the CYP as you don't want to be overwhelmed. You can then pick out the learning priorities, outcomes and intentions
- The Progression Framework is a working document. Regular discussions about learning needs, approaches and progress must involve CYP (intrinsic to good person-centred practice) their parents/carers and all those who work with them
- Identifying areas where autistic CYP may require additional support, means specific approaches can be planned, implemented and then reviewed in terms of their effectiveness (Assess/Plan/Do/Review)
- Use the Progression Framework as an embedded tool to prepare for termly and annual reviews, as well as providing evidence for Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs)

Leading Change

1 *Fantastic opportunity for members of staff to gain knowledge from experts. Very useful and insightful. Thank you.*

2 *I will use many parts of the training in my practice.*

3 *I enjoyed the cohesive & colleagues working in partnership approach of the additional AET whole school inset.*



We would like to thank our schools, parent carers and the AET training partners for all of their efforts to work collaboratively to design and deliver training in individual schools in a very challenging environment. The project deadlines mean that delivery largely has to be completed by the end of December to enable time for the evaluation to be undertaken and reported on to meet national requirements. We are delighted to say the training delivery has started and schools have begun to receive bespoke training drawn from the awareness-raising Making Sense of Autism, and/or the more focused Good Autism Practice, as well as more specific sessions, for example considering Autism and Anxiety or Autism and Girls.

We have also launched the Peer Learning Network which aims to support teaching assistants to develop their competencies. Further information and a link to register interest are provided elsewhere in this newsletter.

If you would like further information about the training offer, please contact your AET training partner or the central project team.

Understanding Our Sensory Preferences

As part of the project's Enabling Environments workstream we have been excited to be able to develop and pilot a resource pack which helps pupils and teachers discover how every person's sensory system and the sensory input in the school environment impact performance on a daily basis; and then provides strategies to support them. There are three tools; a Sensory Preference Checklist, an Interpretation sheet and a Field Guide and the pilot for these tools were completed this the half term. We will be disseminating the finalised resource pack after the half term break.



The Sensory Processing Checklist mainly contains questions on how the pupils experience sensory input, and a few questions relating to their ability to participate actively in the school environment. The pupils used a 5-point rating scale to reflect their experience described in the statements. The pupils are then asked to transfer their most highly rated answers to the Interpretation sheet. The Interpretation sheet summarises their answers and indicates the sensory areas that impact their learning. Teachers are then able to use this to identify strategies within the Field Guide that will benefit the pupils. The Field Guide is a comprehensive guide that explains how sensory processing works, definitions and strategies relating to the different sensory systems and is designed to help teachers to support the pupils. For example, if a pupil struggles with noise levels in the classroom, then the teacher can look at this statement in the auditory system section of the Field Guide and find strategies specifically relating to that.

The participation in the pilot study was insightful. All of the project schools were invited to participate in the project. Two classes (a Year 8 and a Year 10 class) were selected in each school and all the pupils in the two classes were asked to complete the Sensory Processing Checklist and the Interpretation sheet. One pupil from each class and the teacher from both classes were asked to complete a survey to gather their opinion of the tools they used and their usefulness. Senco's from each school was also asked to comment on the tools and the value of using the tools.

“Sensory processing impacts pupils’ as well as teachers’ responses and participation in daily activities, whether they are neuro-typical or neuro-diverse.”

The feedback from the surveys was positive. One pupil commented, “I learned that I fidget a lot and I can get easily distracted.” A teacher commented on the Field Guide: “Comprehensive guide on what to look for and how to support the students with each area. Clearly identifies what each area is. It will help to put strategies in place for students with regular dysregulation.” Most teachers indicated that they learned something new by participating in the pilot. A Senco felt the checklist helped to provide insight into issues that pupils present with that are sometimes overlooked and another found the Field Guide clear and useful.



Dr Helga Abernethy



Amy Goodman
Goldberg



Sonia Swart

Developing School Based Parent Carer Participation



BY REBECCA TANSLEY
BARKING & DAGENHAM PCF



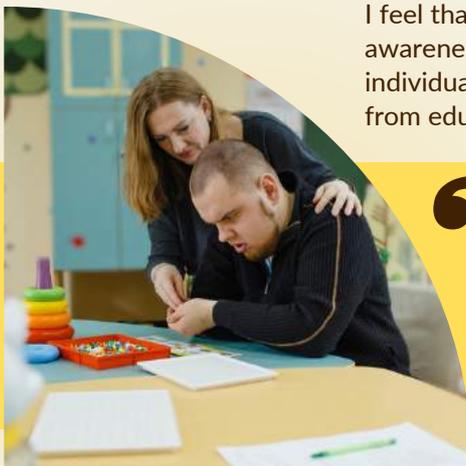
We are delighted to provide a second update from one of our Parent Carer Forum leads on the work she has been doing as part of the project to strengthen the parent carer voice and strengthen relationships between parents and carers and their schools. This includes taking part in training with school staff, and running coffee mornings with parents and carers to better understand their concerns, and begin to build improved communication.

“We have gained some valuable information from our coffee mornings with parents and schools have received and responded positively to their feedback.

In one school the parents gave very positive feedback saying they had good communication with the school and know how well their child is doing. The parents asked the school to consider the introduction of a clip-on tie for uniform, and also the inclusion of ARP students in the school newsletter so that the whole school community are aware of the ARP students and their achievements. We passed this information back to school, and school appreciated hearing the parents' views and stated this is something that is very important for them. The school are in contact with the uniform providers to try and arrange the introduction of a clip-on tie and are planning the newsletter for the new academic year in September.

In another school we heard more mixed reviews from parents about communication between them and the school. For example, the teachers do not always understand how autism affects each child differently and some parents found that their child was being given detention or isolation for issues that they cannot help, examples of this given by parents was a) not being able or wanting to wear the school blazer, b) forgetting pencil case or equipment, c) being late due to issues with sleep or a problem that has occurred in the morning, d) detention for not completing work when extra time is needed to process the information. This feedback has been given to school and is being considered. All parents really enjoyed the coffee morning, felt it was a place to have their voices heard and are looking forward to the next one.

I think the information we gathered from the two coffee mornings shows the importance of the Autism in Schools project and how it can help improve the educational experience of all children with SEND and their families. It is opening the lines of communication between parents and schools so that their voices and concerns can be heard and addressed. It has meant that PCF representatives have been able to pass on information from training, for example about reasonable adjustments, what they are and how schools can implement them. PCF representatives can also signpost parents to other services and help in the local area which parents may not be aware of without these coffee mornings.



I feel that the training being offered through the project will give all school staff a better awareness, knowledge and understanding of the students' needs and how to meet those individual needs so that each child can progress and not become isolated or excluded from education.”

“

Autistic pupils often face significant barriers to learning within the educational environment. These can be overcome by ensuring we create supportive teaching environments that are structured, consistent, and respectful of differences

An Excellent Learning Opportunity

As well as directly supporting autistic pupils in the twenty schools, the project is an excellent learning opportunity. For this reason, it is being independently evaluated by the National Autistic Society using an experienced team – Ian Dale, an evaluation consultant and former head of research at the NAS, Dr Anna Cook of University College London, and Alice Boddy a post-Masters Research assistant. Anna and Alice, who both have a personal connection to autism, specialise in research on autistic pupils' education experiences.



Dr Anna Cook

The team are supported by a co-production group of parents and autistic young people which has so far met twice. This group advises on the questions to ask staff, pupils and parents (what is most important to ask about and how to do it); it also advises on what to write in the report and the recommendations it makes.



Ian Dale

The evaluation design is based on a Theory of Change developed with the AET and the project steering group. The evaluation has received ethical approval from UCL. Data collection is now underway including pre and post training questionnaires, and questionnaires for autistic pupils and parents. Qualitative fieldwork with staff, parents, pupils, school leaders and PCF members is also planned, beginning with focus groups with SENCOs after October half term.

Findings are due in April next year although we hope that it will also be possible to track the project's longer-term impact.

Ian, Anna, and Alice are always happy to hear from anyone involved in the project and can be contacted via ian@iandale.org.



Alice Boddy

Peer Learning Network

We are delighted to announce that the Peer Learning Network has been launched recently. It aims to help teaching assistants to develop their individual competencies and put their AET training into practice in their work with autistic young people. This is an online forum which offers self-assessment, bitesize learning, downloadable resources and the opportunity to provide and receive peer support. Individuals will be able to engage in the forum in the way that suits them, taking into account their strengths, the areas they wish to improve in, goals, and time-constraints.

The PLN has been launched in Autumn term and will initially last four months. Please do circulate this information to your teaching assistants and encourage them to register to receive further information.

Further information about the PLN and the link for registering interest is available [here](#):

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Recording and Resources of Launch Event

[CLICK HERE](#)

Project Brief Document

[CLICK HERE](#)

Learning from the Covid Pandemic:
Secondary Schools

[CLICK HERE](#)

School Exclusions: School Stress and
Anxiety

[CLICK HERE](#)



*My needs are different
and when they are met I
excel; and when they are
not, I struggle*

*OLLIE
AET Young Experts Panel*



**DO YOU HAVE
QUESTIONS
ABOUT THE
PROJECT?**

The project team runs regular Q&A sessions for schools involved in the project to answer any questions they have about the project or raise any concerns. The next one will be held on **Monday, 21st November**. Please do contact the project team if you are a member of staff and would like an invitation.



For any queries on the project, contact the project team:

Jacinta Faulkner: jacinta.faulkner@autismeducationtrust.org.uk

Aparna Verma: aparna.verma@autismeducationtrust.org.uk