

TACKLING THE AUTISM ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT CRISIS

Guide for local authority colleagues

The problem

- There is a crisis in the diagnosis and support of autistic children and young people (CYP), with many struggling to access the necessary diagnostic and support services.
- Systematic inequalities exist in both diagnosis and support, leaving girls, children from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those from poorer families less likely to receive help.
- The life chances for autistic CYP with unmet needs are seriously impacted – they often experience poorer educational outcomes, higher rates of school exclusion, as well as poorer overall health and reduced life expectancy.

What you can do at a local level

- Foster a **needs-led approach** where support can be accessed independently from formal diagnoses. This should be integrated into the structures of local education, health, and care settings.
- Build and support **ward-level partnerships between education, health and social care professionals** for assessing and supporting autistic CYP.
- Prioritise **early identification and intervention**, tailored to the local population. Support should be delivered at the point of need, with strategies informed by community-specific barriers and facilitators.
- Promote **data-sharing systems across local services** to support the goal of early identification and intervention.
- Provide and **extend access to mandatory continuing professional development (CPD) courses** for local health, education, and social care professionals to improve understanding and awareness of autism.

Evidence-based insights

Autistic children are **2x** as likely to be excluded from school compared to children without special educational needs (SEN).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a **306%** increase in the number of children waiting for an autism assessment.

Examples of good practice that you may wish to explore:

Early identification using existing educational data

Education data from existing cohort studies (e.g., Born in Bradford) or population-linked administrative datasets (e.g., Connected Bradford) have been used to support effective early assessment and intervention, leading to better support and provision for autistic CYP.

Assessment in schools by multi-disciplinary school assessment teams

Improving service accessibility can reduce missed appointments, lowering overall service costs. Evidence from the SUCCESS project indicates that such approaches could deliver long-term savings and reduce waiting times for autism assessment and support.

Psychoeducation for autistic CYP

Psychoeducation can help autistic CYP build on their strengths by supporting advocacy, improving professional practice, and creating inclusive environments.

Neurodiverse-friendly schools

Building an inclusive environment can better support autistic CYP and their families, leading to improved educational and social outcomes. Inclusive practices not only benefit autistic CYP, but the whole school community.

Check out the innovative approaches outlined in this briefing and **consider implementing these practices into your local area/constituency.**



Scan the QR Code for the report

Please share this guide and start a discussion in your organisation about how we can all play our role in building a country that works for all children and young people.