



**Autism  
Education  
Trust**

Supported by



**Department  
for Education**

# School Exclusions

## Steps to avoid the exclusion of autistic pupils



Supported by



**Autistic  
Young  
Experts**



## Introduction

Autistic children and young people can find school stressful and each individual has different needs and abilities. This resource considers the differences autistic pupils can face in school, and offers suggestions for ways in which they can be supported to avoid suspension or permanent exclusion.

### Training

[The Autism Education Trust operates a professional development programme](#) for practitioners working in early years, schools and post-16 settings. The programme include a range of training options – along with practical tools, templates, top tips, checklists and strategies – to support professionals working with autistic young people.

[The National Autistic Society offers a range of training opportunities](#) for professionals working with autistic young people, including how to adapt ways of working and support provided, including useful strategies.

[Professionals working in the field of autism can sign up to Autism Practice to receive free information and resources.](#)

### SEN support

[The Department for Education \(DfE\)'s school suspensions and permanent exclusion guidance](#) says:

**“Under the Children and Families Act 2014, governing boards of relevant settings must use their ‘best endeavours’ to ensure the appropriate special educational provision is made for pupils with SEN, which will include any support in relation to behaviour management that they need because of their SEN.”**

Schools have a legal duty to do their best to meet the special educational needs (SEN) of pupils through [SEN support](#). This support should develop from a four-part cycle, so that decisions and actions are revisited, refined and revised, leading to a growing understanding of the pupil's needs, and what interventions help the pupil.



## Introduction

### The four stages of the SEN support cycle are:

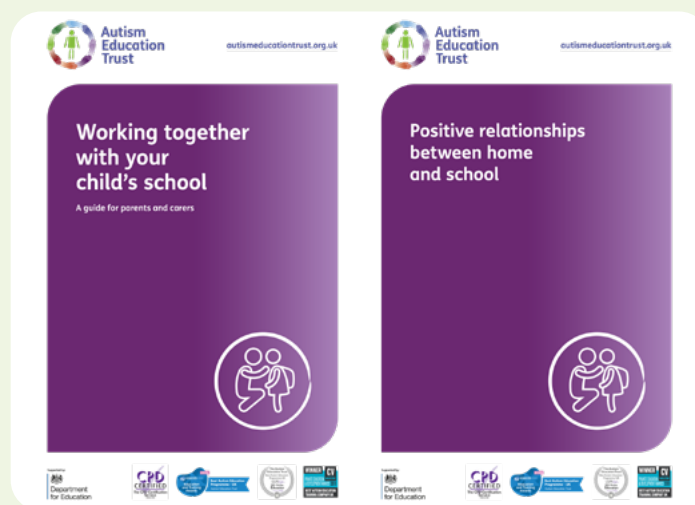
- Assess – individual assessment to understand barriers to and gaps in a pupil's learning.
- Plan – consideration of the strategies and interventions that can overcome barriers to accessing education.
- Do – implementation of the plan.
- Review – regular (ideally termly) review of the pupil's progress and the strategies and interventions.

It is important to remember that each autistic pupil is an individual and what works for one child may not work for another, but some of the [strategies for teachers](#) on The National Autistic Society's website might help. You can also find many [resources for teachers](#) on the Autism Education Trust website. In addition, you may want to consider getting specific advice from specialists outside the school, for example an educational psychologist, an autism outreach specialist or a speech and language therapist, who can give advice and provide assessments.

Involving the autistic young person and their parents/carers in decisions made about SEN support is vital. The [SEND Code of Practice](#) says that parents know their child best and it is important to listen to and understand parents' concerns. The DfE's school suspensions and permanent exclusion guidance says:

**“Schools should engage proactively with parents in supporting the behaviour of pupils with additional needs.”**

The Autism Education Trust has published a guide for parents and carers: [Working together with your child's school](#) and a guide for teachers: [Positive relationships between home and school](#).



## Understanding differences

Disruptive behaviour can be an indication of unmet needs. [The DfE's behaviour in schools advice for headteachers and school staff](#) says:

**“Where appropriate, staff should take account of any contributing factors that are identified after a behaviour incident has occurred: for example, if the pupil has mental health needs, has been subject to bullying, has needs including SEND (including any not previously identified), [...] Schools should consider whether a pupil’s SEND has contributed to the misbehaviour and if so, whether it is appropriate and lawful to sanction the pupil [...] It is also important for the schools to seek to try and understand the underlying causes of behaviour and whether additional support is needed.”**

Trying to cope with the school day can lead to autistic pupils displaying behaviour that staff can find challenging. This behaviour is often due to an underlying anxiety, frustration or sensory sensitivity and a reflection of distress. It is not always clear what has triggered it, which makes it difficult to identify useful strategies. Keeping a [behaviour diary](#) to see if you and the pupil can start to recognise when anxiety or frustration occurs can be helpful. If possible, talk to the pupil about what help and support they would like.

**Autistic pupils may also have differences in school with:**

- Relating to others.
- Communicating.
- Change.
- Organisational skills.
- Sensory sensitivities.
- Anxiety.

They may have specific or varying support needs during unstructured times, such as [break and lunch times](#). The SEND Code of Practice says that autistic pupils may have needs across all areas, including particular sensory requirements.



## Making reasonable adjustments

The DfE's school suspensions and permanent exclusion guidance says:

**“The Equality Act 2010 requires schools to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils. This duty can, in principle, apply both to the suspensions and permanent exclusions process and to the disciplinary sanctions imposed. ...”**

A diagnosis of autism would generally be considered a disability in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 (the Act), but you do not have to have a diagnosis to be considered a disabled person. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) [Technical Guidance for Schools](#) explains schools' legal duties under the Act and provides helpful examples. Chapter 4 of the guidance explains how the Act's requirements fit in with exclusions legislation and guidance.

The Act requires schools to make reasonable adjustments to avoid placing a disabled pupil at a substantial disadvantage compared with non-disabled peers. Schools must take positive steps to ensure that disabled pupils can fully participate in the education provided, and are able to have access to benefits, facilities and services provided for all pupils. The National Autistic Society website offers further information about [disability discrimination in schools](#), which includes examples of reasonable adjustments schools can make for autistic pupils.



## Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment

The DfE's school suspensions and permanent exclusion guidance says:

**“For those with SEN but without an EHC plan, the school should review, with external specialists as appropriate, whether the current support arrangements are appropriate and what changes may be required. This may provide a point for schools to request an EHC assessment or a review of the pupil’s current package of support.”**

If, despite providing appropriate SEN support and/or making reasonable adjustments, an autistic pupil remains at risk of exclusion, schools should consider requesting an Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment from the local authority.

The EHC needs assessment is a detailed multi-disciplinary exploration to find out what a child’s special educational needs are and what provision should be put into place to meet them. This assessment may lead to the issue of an EHC plan, which is for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through SEN support. The local authority’s [local offer](#) should include information about how to request an EHC needs assessment.





Explore our resources and guides for parents:

**- Parent Guide for Working Together with Your Child's School**

Our Parent Guide gives ideas on questions you might want to ask when choosing a school for your child.

**- Top Tips, Strategies and Resources for Parents**

A collection of 10 practical strategies and additional tips to support parents of autistic children and young people.

**- A guide to help parents navigate equality law, rights and entitlements when their autistic child is excluded or at risk of exclusion from school**

This resource outlines the legal duties the Equality Act 2010 places on your child's school in relation to the exclusion of disabled pupils.

Visit [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk) to find out more information about our training modules, including the Autism and Inclusion module.

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