

Autism spectrum guideline

This guideline is a recommended course of action under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this guideline must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting operational policies](#) page.

Overview

This is an introductory guide to using the ‘autism support plan’ and ‘sensory overview support plan’ to build staff understanding around planning personalised learning for autistic children and young people in preschools and schools.

It provides information for Department for Education staff about developing individualised approaches to support the learning of children and young people with autism. It helps staff to understand diverse presentations of autism, choose appropriate adjustments, and develop strengths-based, personalised approaches to support the inclusion and achievement of autistic children and young people.

This document uses identity-first and person-first language interchangeably throughout. It is recognised that there are people in the autistic community who prefer person-first language and people who prefer identity-first language and people who use the terms interchangeably.

Scope

This guideline applies to educators, principals, directors and education support staff working in education and care.

It provides staff with tools and resources to help build their understanding of the diversity of skills, strengths and support needs of children and young people with autism.



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Detail

What is the autism spectrum?

Autism refers to a broad range of conditions that affects how a person thinks, feels, interacts with others, and experiences their environment. Autism is a neurodevelopmental difference. The symptoms of autism occur on a spectrum meaning that symptoms can affect some people's lives significantly, while for others the symptoms may be mild and experienced as a difference in thinking. This is also known as the autistic or autism spectrum.

Diagnosis is based on behavioural observations and characteristics. Individuals on the autism spectrum can appear quite different to each other. The way a person's autistic characteristics interact with each other and the environment varies from person to person. Strengths and support needs of people on the autistic spectrum vary across time and contexts.

The strengths and abilities of children and young people on the autistic spectrum are not always obvious. Some autistic children and young people appear to cope well for some of their educational journey and as they experience more difficulties in adolescence, only then start on the diagnostic journey. Due to difficulties in accessing the diagnostic process in some areas, not all children and young people will have a diagnosis by the time they start school. Children and young people with autism may excel in one or more curriculum areas and have difficulties in others.

The autistic spectrum includes a wide range of strengths and difficulties. Each learner with autism is a unique individual. It's important for preschools, schools and families to work together to develop strengths based support for children and young people on the autistic spectrum.

Educators and leaders who support learners with autism should make sure adjustments to their learning and environment are tailored to their needs. When you understand the impact of autism you'll be better able to adjust to those needs. Specific adjustments need to be tailored for each individual and may need to be changed over time.

Support plans

Support plans complement and inform the development of a personalised learning plan (One Plan).

Autism spectrum support plan

Use the [autism spectrum support plan HSP430 \(DOC 298KB\)](#) to identify relevant information and key areas for consideration for the child or young person, including:

- communication strategies
- sensory sensitivities and strategies
- skills, strengths and interests
- learning preferences (not all autistic children and young people are visual thinkers)

- adjustment needs and types.

Sensory overview support plan

Use the [sensory overview support plan HSP431 \(DOC 389KB\)](#) to get a detailed understanding of the child or young person's sensory preferences. It helps you to develop adjustments, which may assist in reducing sensory overload in the education or care service.

Updating the sensory overview support plan is recommended at points of transition eg preschool to primary, new teacher, or primary to secondary. Education staff, the child or young person and their family or other members of their care team work together to develop and update the sensory overview.

What to do – a summary

- Complete the [sensory overview support plan HSP431 \(DOC 389KB\)](#) and the [autism spectrum support plan HSP430 \(DOC 298KB\)](#)
 - Work with the child or young person and their family to complete these.
 - Include teachers, student support officers working with the child and young person, allied health teams, and Student Support Services team members.
- Use these ideas to plan for a positive, strengths based first contact between a child and young person and any new teacher or SSO:
 - Find out if the child or young person's has a special interest prior to meeting them.
 - Check in with the child or young person about their preferred communication modes, including daily greetings and how they would like successes to be celebrated.
 - Talk about something they are interested in or share a picture or object of something they are interested in.
- Be patient. Spend time getting to know the child or young person and build your understanding of them:
 - Small details can be big signposts to their emotional state even when they are unaware of their emotional state.
 - Consider if the child or young person's tone, pitch or volume of vocalisations changes according to their emotional state.
- Use adjustments from the sensory overview and autism spectrum support plan to respond to their strengths and support needs.
- Teach new skills and knowledge through current interests. For example, teaching counting using dinosaurs.
- Celebrate progress (in their preferred way) with the child and young person, their class and family.
- Provide positive role models that reflect the variety of positions that autistic adults have, including; parent, artist, musician, teacher, nurse, surgeon, university lecturer etc.

- Explicitly teach the whole class how to interact positively and respectfully.
- Help the child or young person to use visual and written supports and reminders.
- Use positive behaviour for learning practices .

Information and support services

Go to [supporting children and students on the autism spectrum](#) for information and resources.

See also [Practice Guidance](#) information on autism.

Department for Education disability policy

The [children and students with disability policy](#) makes sure all children and young people with disability have access to a learning program that meets the requirements of the early years learning framework and the Australian Curriculum. It describes the legal responsibilities of staff to provide appropriate learning programs and services to children and young people with disability.

Student support services

[Student support services](#) has supports for children and young people with disabilities, including inclusion educators, psychology, speech pathology, behaviour support coaches and consultative advice. Written referral to any support service requires signed consent from families.

Inclusive education support program (IESP)

Additional resourcing can be applied for through the [Inclusive Education Support Program \(IESP\)](#).

Statewide Inclusive Education Services (SIES)

[SIES](#) has learning and teaching materials and specialised services for children and young people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Other services

Other organisations that provide professional development, funding and support for education and care services and individual children and young people include:

- [Positive Partnerships](#) provides support through targeted professional learning
- [Autism SA](#) provides a range of service supports for individual children and young people and training opportunities staff.
- [Novita Children's Services](#) provides a range service supports for individual children and young people.
- [National Disability Insurance Scheme \(NDIS\)](#) supports connections to community services, including preschool and school.

Definitions

guideline

A recommended course of action taken from evidence-based best practice. It provides specific detail on matters that are the subject of legislation, regulation, policy or decision by executive directors and are discretionary.

Roles and responsibilities

All staff

Use this guideline to inform practice.

Refer to [Practice Guidance](#) information on autism.

Supporting information

[Supporting children and students on the autism spectrum](#)

[Disability access and inclusion for our education system](#)

[Planning transition from preschool to school](#)

[Statewide transition process](#)

[Inclusive Education Support Program \(IESP\)](#)

Related policies

[Children and students with disability policy](#)

Related legislation

[Education and Children's Services Act 2019](#)

[Education and Children's Services Regulations 2020](#)

[Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)

[Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)

[Convention of the Rights of the Child](#)

[Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disability](#)

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