



Strengths-based approach that values differences in autistic pupils

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The background features abstract geometric shapes in various shades of blue. On the right side, there are several overlapping triangles and polygons in light blue, medium blue, and dark blue. On the left side, there is a single light blue triangle pointing towards the center. The overall design is modern and minimalist.

My Why

I am a mother of two autistic boys who are currently being educated at specialist provisions attached to mainstream schools.

Why do we need the strengths-based approach ?

Autistic people are much more than the challenges that are too often used to define them. Public services and policies should support people's individual profiles of difficulties and strengths. (Autism Research Group -Curtin University)

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Why do we need the strengths-based approach ?

Disability was understood to be within the person and seen as broken diseased , pathological, atypical, or aberrant; as outside the norm. This led to segregation, resulting in negative societal outcomes, with people with disabilities viewed as societal problems (Smith;Wehmeyer,2012)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 24 of the CRPD, pertaining to education , states that parties who adopt the CRPD:

“shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to: a) the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;

(COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, 2016, Art. 24).

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

b) the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;

c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free Society”

(COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, 2016, Art. 24).

Considerations for educational settings

Students are capable of success if they we consider their strengths and provide the necessary support to help them meet their goals.

It will require settings to move away from the deficit model that focuses on what children cant do and for adults working with young people to stop viewing pupils needs as a problem to be solve.

Strengths associated with some autistic children

- Outstanding reading ability
- Passionate interests
- Logical thinking
- Hard working approach when motivated
- An interest in research and presentations



The Children Commission reported the three over-arching ambitions suggested by young people with SEND:

To ensure all children and young people get support that reflects their ambitions.

To ensure that all children are getting timely and effective support, locally, with a focus on early intervention

To ensure that all children have consistent, excellent experiences wherever they are in the system

Reasonable Adjustments:

- Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the DDA) schools and education authorities have had a duty to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils.
- The duty is 'to take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to avoid the substantial disadvantage' to a disabled person caused by a provision, criterion or practice applied by a school.

Autistic Differences

Autistic differences are generally associated with sensory experience, communication, behaviour and interests. How these differences are perceived plays a big role in how autistic children experience the world.

Societal judgement can cause isolation and anxiety for many autistic people. On the contrary, understanding and acceptance allows autistic children to feel a sense of belonging, which can enable them to achieve their goals.

([Autism.org.uk](https://www.autism.org.uk))

Sensory Processing

Sensory processing disorder is a condition in which the brain has trouble receiving and responding to information that comes in through the senses. (WebMd)

Autistic people can experience both **hypersensitivity** (over-responsiveness) and **hyposensitivity** (under-responsiveness) to a wide range of stimuli. Most people have a combination of both.

How frequently do ASD and sensory processing issues occur?

In one survey* of adults with autism, **83% of respondents** said that they had some challenges with sensory processing. In the same survey respondents also listed sensory processing challenges as **contributing to their increased levels of stress.**

The percent of children with ASD and sensory processing issues has been reported to be between **69% to 95%** depending on the study**. It also occurs frequently enough for it to be included as part of the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 update in 2013.



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Supporting pupils with sensory processing needs

- Staff should be alert to signs and triggers, this could be environmental such as noise levels.
- Provide the children and young adults with the agreed accommodations
 - a) Movement breaks /Time out
 - b) Fidget
 - c) low demands or no demands for work
- Pre- classroom adjustments such as uniform as some students are affected by textures .

School life can be improved for autistic children with steps such as:

- Inclusive teaching strategies which enable pupils to access learning with the required accommodations.
- Excellent communication with families.
- Autism training for all staff, not limited to those who are classroom-based. This should develop their understanding of autism, but support should be tailored to the individual pupils.

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- **School life can be improved for autistic children with steps such as:**
 - Making reasonable adjustments to policies and practices, such as ensuring that behaviour policies do not put autistic pupils at an increased risk of exclusion.
 - Facilitating an increased understanding of autism for all pupils, especially their sensory profile.

School life can be improved for autistic children with steps such as:

- Frequent conversations with autistic young people about their experiences at school.
- An education, health and care assessment which considers strengths and differences, where appropriate.

Inclusive teaching strategies:

“Pupils with autism require bespoke multi disciplinary packages which include therapeutic support to help them to engage with learning.

They need predictable environments with structure and high levels of routine along with packages of social learning and interaction.”

Inclusive teaching strategies

- Use of ICT - use of the internet to research a topic, access to predictive word processing software and on-screen word grids to support writing, opportunities to create presentations.

Inclusive teaching strategies

- Find out what they know about or are good at, and have them share this with the rest of the class or school. This could be pre-recorded if pupil does not want to engage in public speaking.

Inclusive teaching strategies

- Remember that children (and adults) who are stressed find it hard to take in and remember complex information; make instructions short and clear. When pupil is experiencing emotional turbulence or anxiety, provide low-key tasks and increased structure and predictability in the classroom environment.

Co-production /Partnerships

“1.1 Section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014 makes clear that local authorities, in carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to needs (SEND), must have regard to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child’s parents .

Co-production /Partnerships

- the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions.
- the need to support the child or young person, and the child's parents, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood.

Quotes to support a strengths-based approach

Educating students with autism requires an understanding of the unique cognitive, social, sensory and behaviour deficits that characterize this developmental disability. Humphrey (2015)

Autistic people are much more than the challenges that are too often used to define them. Public services and policies should support people's individual profiles of difficulties and strengths.

“Pupils with autism require bespoke multi disciplinary packages which include therapeutic support to help them to engage with learning. They need predictable environments with structure and high levels of routine along with packages of social learning and interaction.”

Quotes to support a strengths-based approach

Inclusion is not just about going to mainstream school - it is about presence, participation, acceptance, and achievement (Gareth Morewood and Neil Humprey)

**“Parents have unique knowledge of their children's needs, strengths, interests, and current and future goals, and are their child's first teacher, supporter, advocate, and voice to the outside world”.
(Cummings et al -2017)**

Sources

<https://www.scie.org.uk/strengths-based-approaches/guidance>

<https://www.griffinot.com/asd-and-sensory-processing-disorder/>

<https://www.griffinot.com/sensory-processing-disorder/>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/sensory-issues>

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/school-experience>