



Name of local authority: Norfolk County Council
Address: Children's Services, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich NR1 2DL
Website: www.norfolk.gov.uk

Do you provide a range of provision which reflects the diversity of needs of children with autism in our area?

Norfolk currently has limited provision for children and young people with autism, however I would like to reassure you that Norfolk County Council does recognise this and has been working for some time now to put together plans for developing further provision and support.

In May 2005, as part of an overall review of special educational needs provision, a project group was set up to consider in detail the diversity of needs of children and young people with autism in Norfolk and the provision that should be developed to meet these needs. Importantly, this group considered the whole range of needs of children and young people on the autistic spectrum, including Asperger syndrome. The project group involved a range of different people including representatives from Asperger East Anglia, Norfolk Autistic Society, mainstream and special school headteachers and teachers as well as parents.

The project group made recommendations for the development of provision across Norfolk in each area in both the special school and mainstream sectors. The project group placed particular emphasis on the importance that there was a continuum of provision which would meet the diverse needs of children and young people from early years through to further education. They also recommended that there was a need for whole-school training for staff in order to raise the minimum levels of understanding about autism across schools.

The proposals developed by the project group now form part of the significant consultation on the overall special educational needs strategy for Norfolk. Specifically, the proposals in the consultation document include our plans to:

- Provide specialist autistic spectrum disorder support for children and young people in early years facilities in both mainstream and specialist settings.
- Develop specialist autistic spectrum disorder resource bases on the sites of mainstream schools for primary and high school age children. These specialist resource bases will include specially trained staff and appropriate facilities with quiet areas for a range of children and young people on the autistic spectrum.
- Work with colleagues in further education and schools to make sure children aged 14 to 19 with autistic spectrum disorders have access to local provision.
- Continue to work closely with our partner agencies in the voluntary and community sector.
- Develop further autistic spectrum disorder provision in our complex needs schools for all ages of children, building on existing good practice and expertise in our special schools.
- Raise understanding about autistic spectrum disorders across Norfolk in our schools and children's services, to facilitate more opportunities for children with autistic spectrum disorders to be included within their local mainstream schools, where appropriate.

The consultation ended on 14 August 2006 and a report will be going to County Councillors on 6 September 2006 where they will be informed about everyone's views on our proposals.

Do all SENCOs in your area receive training in autism?

All of the schools in the County hold their own training budgets and therefore the local authority does not automatically provide all SENCOs with training in autism.

However, the local authority does provide courses in autism, which are available for all schools to purchase using their training budgets. These courses are called *Living and working with autism* and consist of one-day courses for all teachers as well as one-day courses for all teaching assistants, which are run at different intervals throughout the year. In addition to these short courses we provide an Advanced Certificated Course in autism as part of a range of advanced courses.

The local authority also provides a three-day course called *The TEACCH approach to working with people with autism and their families* course, which is run by The National Autistic Society.

In addition, a one-day training workshop is available at our professional development centres in Norfolk called *Understanding ASD & the principles of TEACCH* and for the first time this year we are offering a one-day training workshop *The pupil with Asperger syndrome*. Both of these courses are facilitated by Asperger East Anglia.

Each of the courses mentioned above are regular features in our INSET Opportunities training which is made available to all schools. These are specific autism-related courses but there are also a further range of courses designed for SENCOs and Inclusion Managers.

Some of our specialist staff within Children's Services also provide limited training in autism to schools, which is free of charge.

Of relevance to your questions, all of our schools belong to SENCO networks, which are led by our special schools and therefore have access to further expertise and support on particular aspects of SEN. These networks also receive information relating to other courses which are provided by external bodies, which include specific training in autism.

The importance of whole-school training in autism was a particular issue that was emphasised by the ASD project group. Therefore, this is an area that we plan to review and develop alongside our implementation plans following the consultation period.

Are you using *Autistic spectrum disorders: good practice guidance to develop autism-friendly schools in our area?*

The proposals that are now out for consultation were developed using the *Autistic spectrum disorders: good practice guidance*. They were also developed in partnership with colleagues from Asperger East Anglia and the Norfolk Autistic Society as well as parents, educational psychologists and other key professionals who were part of that project group.

The project group also looked at national research on educational interventions for children with autism as well as visiting other local authorities across the country to see what works well for children and young people with autism.

We would like to reassure you that we will certainly continue to use the *Autistic spectrum disorders: good practice guidance* when we begin to implement these proposals following the consultation.

I hope that my answers to your questions provide you with some reassurance that provision for children and young people with autism is one of our key priorities. We do recognise that currently we have limited provision but hope that our plans for the development of provision will ensure that eventually:

- every child in Norfolk with autism should have local access to a diverse range of mainstream and specialist educational provision
- all teachers in Norfolk should expect to teach a child with an autism and must receive appropriate training to best support their needs
- that all schools in Norfolk should be autism-friendly schools which promote and provide a positive environment for children with autism now and in the future.

We recognise that this vision is long-term and will continue to work with our colleagues at Asperger East Anglia and the Norfolk Autistic Society to develop and improve our provision and support for children and young people with autism.