



HEREFORDSHIRE
COUNCIL

**Policy Document
on Children with
Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**

February 2001



Policy Statement on Children with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) for Herefordshire Council, Education Directorate

Introduction

Herefordshire LEA is committed to providing learning support for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in accordance with the details in the child's Statement of Special Educational Needs (Education Act 1996). The aim of the LEA is to identify the specific difficulties of the child in order to make appropriate educational provision and recognises that early diagnosis is essential for effective intervention.

Children with ASD vary in measured intelligence, although the majority have associated or additional learning difficulties. They also vary in the degree to which they are affected by Autism.

Most, but not all, children with ASD have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. In the light of proposals in the revised Code of Practice, it is anticipated that most ASD children will require a Statutory Assessment of their SEN. However, the decision to write a Statement of Special Educational Needs does not solely depend on diagnosis but on whether the child's educational needs cannot be met from provision normally made by the mainstream school.

1. Incidence of ASD in Herefordshire

Approximately two people in one thousand are likely to suffer from a severe communication difficulty related to an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). (Classical Autism and Asperger's Syndrome). This is approximately 70 children from 3-19 years or 50 pupils from 5-16 years in Herefordshire. This incidence figure coincides with both measurements taken over several years and with national surveys and studies. (National Autistic Society (NAS)).

2. Diagnosis

The core impairments essential for a diagnosis of ASD are:

- a) Difficulties in social comprehension, communication and imagination
- b) Delayed and deviant language development
- c) A restricted range of activities and interests resulting in obsessions and rituals
- d) Onset below 36 months.

Diagnosis is usually made by a Child Psychiatrist, Paediatrician or by a Psychologist (clinical or educational). In Herefordshire there has been an attempt to develop a multi-professional team comprising a Community Paediatrician, Clinical Psychologist, Educational Psychologist, Speech Therapist and others as appropriate who would conduct assessment and diagnosis. (See West Midlands Regional Project on Autism Report). Referral outside of the county is also made by GPs. Diagnosis is therefore established via several different routes.

Identification and Assessment

Herefordshire LEA is committed to identification and assessment as early in the child's life as is possible and reliable. Early diagnosis is essential for effective interventions. Assessment should commence in one of the two pre-school assessment facilities; the Child Development Centre or Leominster Early Years Centre.

Assessment should, whenever possible, be carried out by a multi-disciplinary team. It is essential that parents are given clear and consistent advice. There is no medical test for Autism and diagnosis depends on behavioural and developmental criteria. Successful interventions currently comprise educational and behavioural programmes. It has been amply demonstrated that the earlier behavioural and educational interventions begin, the more successful the intervention will be. The Herefordshire Community Health Trust has a duty to inform the educational services of the special educational needs of children under the age of five years (Section 176, Code of Practice).

Provision

Currently approximately one third of children in Herefordshire with ASD have severe learning difficulties and are appropriately placed in one of the three schools for children with severe learning difficulty. A further third have additional learning and language difficulties requiring specialist resourced provision in mainstream school or in the Langue Unit at Hampton Dene School. More able children with a milder degree of Autism are placed in ordinary school with additional resourcing. Herefordshire LEA is committed to inclusion and will try to meet the needs of children with ASD in local mainstream schools wherever possible.

A very small number of children with ASD are placed in out-county provisions. This group usually have a very severe and challenging behaviour and family life has or was in danger of breaking down. Such placements are increasingly rare and are joint funded by the Social Services Department.

Children with ASD placed in an ordinary school can be supported in some of the following ways:

- An IEP devised and delivered by the teacher in conjunctions with the SENCo particularly in the areas of social interaction, communication and social understanding. Precise target setting will be provided with records kept of progress.
- Further advice on the IEP from one of the Herefordshire Educational Support Services (HESS) and Herefordshire Psychological Services (HPS).
- Additional advice and training for school staff provided by HESS or HPS as requested.

- Assessment and programme planning carried out in conjunction with other health and social service colleagues as appropriate to the child's identified special educational needs; for example, a language and communication programme may need to be devised by the Speech and Language Therapist for school staff and parents to follow.
- Systematic and regular monitoring of the child's progress in conjunction with other professionals such as EPs, support teachers and speech therapists.

Where a statement of SEN is maintained by the LEA, formal opportunities for revising the child's progress will be achieved through the annual review procedures.

Teaching Approaches to ASD

Herefordshire LEA advocate a variety of approaches to the education of children with ASD according to individual need as follows:

- The NAS SPELL framework – Structure; Positive; Empathy; Low Arousal and Links Framework).
- The Early Bird Scheme as guiding frameworks for parent/carers following identification and assessment.
- Multi-agency liaison and 'joined-up' approaches to work with families of children with ASD.
- The TEACCH approach (Training and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children).
- The Picture Exchange Communication System
- Behavioural approaches to teaching (Lovaas)

Children with ASD require highly skilled and experienced teaching and non-teaching support in mainstream and special schools

Herefordshire LEA is committed to encouraging any teacher and support assistants involved with a child with ASD to undertake TEACCH training and to providing resources for such training and cover for teachers whilst training.

In-service training programmes are provided regularly by the LEA and are offered to individual school's staff as part of the Inspection, Advice and School Performance Service programme to all schools