

Autism Resource Base Proposal

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Background

Local Authorities are responsible for planning school places for children who are resident in the Borough. WCC/LBHF/RBKC has seen an increase in the number of children with a diagnosis of autism and for which the Borough is responsible for maintaining a statement of SEN (from 1st September 2014) an Education, Health and Care Plan). This increase mirrors the national picture; the UK estimate is that 1 in 100 children have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Baird 2006), with between 30-60% of these children having a learning disability (Baird et al 2006).

Boroughs are seeking to develop the Local Offer for children with autism.

What is Autistic Spectrum Disorder?

Autism is a syndrome; it is a collection of behaviours rather than a known biological entity. It is known as a pervasive disorder because it affects almost every aspect of behavior. Diagnosis is dependent on symptoms in at least one of the areas that define autism (social development, communication and play) being present before 36 months. Diagnosis of ASD focuses on two key domains of development those of social communication and restricted and repetitive behaviours.

Children with ASD face a range of related challenges which affect their capacity to learn in the classroom, including difficulty interacting with others, gaining eye contact, interpreting and understanding the thoughts of others and anticipating others actions and/or narrative. Repetitive and restricted behaviours and interests includes a wide range of behaviours from repeated actions, such as spinning or flapping of arms to preoccupations with schedules or vehicles or appliances to interests which maybe similar to other children e.g. dinosaurs but which reach a level of intensity that interferes with a child's ability to carry out ordinary activities.

What is an autism resource base?

A resource base provides children the opportunity of accessing the curriculum and social opportunities offered by a mainstream school with the support of autism specialists and an environment which enables small group learning alongside and/or in addition to the regular classroom.

A resource base enables children to follow an individual programme tailored to support them address key areas of development, in particular communication and

social emotional skills through the provision of evidence-based intervention managed by practitioners who are trained to work with children with autism.

Evidence based Interventions for primary age children

It is generally recognized that no one intervention is consistently more effective than any other for children with ASD, which is not surprising given the variability in the way in which autism is manifested in children's development (Howlin et al, 2011). The importance of structured education programmes, which provide for children of primary school age and above to have access to a range of evidence-based interventions has been recognized for some years.

The crucial components for educational success for children with autism include a high degree of structure, optimal use of visual teaching strategies and access to staff who have experience and training in managing challenges associated with the social, emotional behavioural aspect of children's autism. In addition to close and effective liaison between home and school to ensure the generalization of skills taught.

It would be expected that the school of which the WCC autism resource base becomes a part employ one or more teachers who have a substantive (post-graduate) qualification in autism and/or who will commit to undertake this study and additionally ensures staff are trained in and can deliver the following evidence-based interventions.

- TEACCH (Teaching and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped CHildren) – an individualized developmental approach which specifically emphasizes the need for structure, appropriate, environmental organization and the use of clear visual cues.
- PECS (Picture Exchange System) – a systematic, picture-based approach to enhancing communication, specifically developed for children with autism
- Augmentative and alternative communication e.g. use of Makaton signing
- Earlybird and/or Earlybird Plus Programmes (a parent programme designed specifically to support parents of children with autism after diagnosis)

Provision for children's speech and language and occupational therapy needs would be made through Local Authority and Clinical Commissioning Group jointly commissioned provision of specialist therapies. It would be expected that school staff co-ordinate education, health and care planning.

How are placements made?

Placements are made through the Tri-borough SEN Service. Admission to all specialist autism provisions (special schools and resource bases) is subject to the

maintaining authority's admission process. The LA will consult with schools regarding new placements and hold a special school and resource base admission panel for children with autism during the autumn term to determine placements for the next academic year. Head teachers and/or senior teachers are asked to support this process. Please contact (sen@rbkc.gov.uk) for details of admission criteria.

Tri-borough Schools for Children with Special Needs

Across the Tri-boroughs (WCC; LBHF; RBKC) there are a number of special schools and resource bases; significantly the latter group has grown in recent years. The Local Authority is keen to encourage and support schools in working together to develop practice. A Tri-borough special school and resource base head teacher group meets half termly with Local Authority representatives to share practice and develop approaches together.

Schools with specialist expertise are encouraged to work with other schools to support the spread of effective evidence-based approaches. This provides opportunities for development for staff in these provisions.