

This assignment will explore the challenges that people face if they have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) a condition which affects about 1.1% of people in the UK (National Autistic Society, 2018). It will consider what causes ASD and explain the different types of ASD. It will look at the definitions of what Special Educational Needs are and how the provision helps give children with ASD the same opportunity as any other child. The essay will identify the procedure of what to do when a child shows signs of ASD and how the child will be assessed and who will need to assess them. Furthermore, the essay will consider the challenges for a student in a school setting in particular when transitioning from primary to secondary school and identify what should happen to help the process for the child through a difficult and challenging time.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurological development disorder. It affects the way people perceive the world and how they communicate with others (ASDinfoWales, 2017). ASD is a lifelong development and disability. It is not an illness that can be cured and there are many different types of ASD. In the UK there are the different types of ASD, autism spectrum condition, classic autism, Kanner autism, pervasive development disorder, high-functional autism, Asperger's syndrome and pathological demand avoidance. In other countries descriptions of the condition are different. In Australia before 2013, for example, ASD was categorised as two different types Asperger's disorder, Pervasive development disorder now it is known as level 1,2 and 3. It is assessed on how much support an individual needs rather than naming the ASD. The most common different types of ASD are Asperger's, pervasive development disorder and classic autism (NHS, 2019).

Unlike people without ASD those with the disorder hear, see and feel the world differently (NHS, 2019). Autistic children have difficulties with social behaviour problems for instance initiating conversation, when speaking making eye contact and imitating behaviour to others. Some also have speech impairment (April *et al.*, 2019). ASD is classed as a disability code practice and educational needs. 1 in 100 people will be diagnosed with ASD in the United Kingdom (UK) it is more widespread than people think (Autistic Spectrum Society, 2016). Women and girls are harder to determine whether they have ASD compared to males or boys. This is because ASD was only thought to be a condition boys would have, but girls can also be

diagnosed. Girls will have different symptoms to boys, for instance they have more social understanding and fewer repetitive behaviours (Hurley, 2016).

Even though it is not known what causes ASD, it is thought to be environmental or genetic (NHS, no date). If a sibling has ASD it is likely that another sibling will have 5% chance of having ASD as well (GOSH, 2017). Since 1980 there has been an increase of ASD. Although it is difficult to explain the reasons for this increase and to determine whether people are more aware and have more recognition of the traits associated with ASD rather than having an increase in children having the disorder. There are some theories that have been suggested that ASD could be linked to diet, however this has not been proved. There was a scare that having the combined measles mumps and rubella MMR vaccination was linked to ASD, and some people thought by having this vaccination it would cause ASD. Many different research study investigations have been carried out in depth and it is scientifically proven not to be linked (GOSH, 2017).

According to the National Health Services (NHS) if there are any signs of Autism it is best to discuss with a health visitor or GP then a referral will be made to a paediatrician. The signs include Speech impairment, repetitive behaviour, social communication and interaction. Then the paediatrician will discuss whether or not the child will need to be referred to an Autistic team to be assessed (NHS). For the child to have a diagnosis of ASD they will need to be assessed. In the assessment there will be a Psychiatrist, psychologist, paediatrician, speech and language therapist and a neurologist to assess the needs and a full examination (NHS, 2019). Before the assessment they will need reports of all settings such as nursery, schools, family history. The child will also need to be observed in different setting (Lord et al, 2006). The importance of early diagnosis is be able to give behaviour intervention the children will be able to learn how to have strategies to cope, and learn life skills (Mogilner, 2019).

Some children may not be noticed as having ASD until they start school. This could be due to the fact that some children are high-functioning autism and they are extremely clever. Despite their social skills letting them down, they meet their educational learning. According to Elder *et al.* (2017, p1) there is 'a growing body of evidence which supports the value of early diagnosis and treatment'. The early diagnosis and associated interventions can 'significantly improve the quality of life of individuals with ASD as well as their carers and families' (Elder *et al.*, 2017). Despite this, many children according to *The conversation*, an

independent source of news and views are put on waiting lists 'because health professionals are reluctant to diagnose Autism early out of fear of labelling young children' (The Conversation Trust UK Limited 2010-2019, p1). According to the National Autistic Society (2018) 'getting a formal Autism diagnosis can mean access to the right support, and an explanation for why certain things are so difficult'.

Although the Welsh Government plans to tackle Referrals and Autism Diagnosis within 26 weeks, this is not in line with the Well-being Future Generation Act (2015) to have sustainable development in Wales, to improve well-being goals. In an article by BBC it reported that in Wales there are concerns over the time taken for assessment for autism. In the article a woman discusses her experience getting her son diagnosed, it took 5 years and six thousand pounds (BBC, 2018). Although it cites the fact that there was staffing issues the BBC reported that in Wales the Hywel Dda Health Board took an average of 107 weeks for a child to be seen. In other parts of Wales even though they did not meet the government's targets it was still less of a wait than Hywel Dda. In Betsi Cadwaladr the average wait was 39 weeks and on the new Neuro development team service at Cardiff and Vale it took 27 weeks. The areas that meet the plans to tackle referrals on Autism Diagnosis were Cwm Taf that took 26 weeks, Aneurin Bevan 18 weeks, and Powys 13 weeks (BBC, 2018). There was one area of Wales that did not provide figures, which was Aberystwyth. Delays in being diagnosed with ASD can have an impact on a child's needs in school especially in primary, because without being diagnosed the child will not have anything in place to help them fulfil their potential. The child could feel lonely, socially excluded, anxiety or even have suicidal thoughts (BBC, 2018).

Once a child has an ASD assessment, the people who will need to be there to assess the child could then be put in place. The legislations that are in place such as Social Services, Well-being Act (Welsh Gov, 2019). These are all in place to provide people in Wales with the required access to all the services with the needs they acquire with no matter what disability that they have. On June the 21st 2018, Wales made its first annual report to implementing ASD. This will be the Welsh Government's plan on what they are going to do to improve supporting families of ASD and people with ADS. The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 is to replace the existing special educational needs and disabilities legislation. It provides a better core structure in supporting young people and children in Additional Learning Needs (Welsh Gov, 2018). The Act still continues to have the existence of

the Special Educational Need Tribunal for Wales. When decisions are made by local authorities then parents, children and young people will still be able to appeal against the local authorities about their child (Welsh Gov, 2018). However, will this new Legislation improve things? It is perhaps too early to assess.

To help families there is a wealth of online information provided by The National Autistic Society which covers topics such as transitioning and support services for people with ASD and their families. This is important because children and family of people with ASD can feel socially excluded and socially isolated. Every child will have different needs that they will acquire for their ASD. Some children may find some solutions helpful whilst others will not find it helpful (Mogilner, 2019). Topics discussed on the NAS website also include life at school and the difficulties that can arise during the important transitions in life. Transitions include moving from primary school to secondary school, for example. Research for this assignment has revealed that the level of information offered by schools on their websites to help parents did differ. For example, Portfield School in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire has comprehensive information for parents which includes policies for children with Autism, additional needs and transitioning (Portfield school, ND) whereas other schools such as primary schools provide more limited information for example only aims for children with additional needs but does not specify Autism (Myrddin school, ND). Although this is the area needed as children are newly diagnosed and need a lot of support.

Many children with ASD or who are diagnosed later on are more likely to have a negative experience of school. Because of these experiences they will have low self-esteem (National Autistic Society, ND). Whilst ASD children are in school it is important to build their self-esteem back up, as it is essential to address behaviours. If a teacher in a school setting speaks to the child negatively it can have an impact on the child. Children with ASD often have a fear of failure, so this coupled with a negative experience in school can cause the child to have anxiety and subsequent negative behaviour (Snap Cymru, 2019). Because of this, many children with ASD experience issues with the National Curriculum in school, in addition the children will need approaches and differentiation in teaching styles. Meanwhile, to equip schools with the understanding of the learning of ASD the Welsh Government has come up with the Learning with autistic program. It will guide mainstream schools with the educational needs of the children (Welsh Gov 2019). There are four different types of schools,

mainstream, a base unit with mainstream, special schools and residential schools. After the assessment will determine what school will be suitable for the child. However, they will need to be assessed to see which needs will be relevant. The Special Educational Needs Code of practice is to make sure that schools will provide expertise in helping every child with additional learning needs. As every autistic child is different, it will vary on every individual child on what needs they will acquire (National Autism Society, ND).

According to Transitions in Autism (2014)

‘there are many changes that occur in everyday life and they all involve transition... the rigidity of thought processes, sensory processing issues and communication difficulties experienced by people with autism mean transitions, however how small they may seem, can require careful and systematic planning’ (Hedges, 2014 p.1).

Some of the most significant transitions take place during time in school. However, a research published in 2018 by Nuske *et al* conformed children with increased social pressure and anxiety and parents felt ‘overwhelmed’ and teachers found it difficult to provide the necessarily support with insignificant resources (Nuske *et al* 2018). They looked at how the schools deal with transitioning with children with ASD and families across four continents. The study also reported that intervention development for transitioning students has only recently begun. However, they found and called for community based ‘Rigorously tested interventions to examine the effectiveness of different transition strategies’ (Nuskie *et al* 2018) A child with ASD finds transitioning extremely difficult. Whilst a child is in transition point it is important to remember the Special Educational Needs code of practice 2002 (Snap Cymru, 2019). When a child with ASD transitions from primary school to secondary it is important that both schools communicate with each other. It is important to know the legal and procedures of the new school during the transitional process such as, making sure that they meet the needs of the child they will be working with and personalise the process, introducing the child with ASD to the team in advance with their parents or carers, making sure that the child gets used to the environment in advance by showing them the new school setting and all the new teachers, taking photos of the school and teachers whilst visiting the school will provide visual images

and by organising a peer group through Having a buddy system or a friendship group. In the transition meeting there should be the child's parent/carer, relevant teacher, SENCO (this is the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator for the school), Learning Support Assistant, educational psychologist and health service representative. The inclusion of children with ASD remains a concern with being able to socialise with other children and being bullied (Snap Cymru, 2019).

These are the procedures that schools should follow when children with ASD are transitioning from primary to secondary schools. A journal by Makin, Hill and Pellicano (2017) conducted research on the primary to secondary school transition for children with Autistic spectrum in a multi-informant mixed methods study. They reported that because children with ASD are vulnerable during school transition to secondary school and it was difficult to determine why these children found this difficult and whether the difficulties related to the school and system level (Makin, Hill and Pellicano, 2017) The study was conducted with fifteen children, two of whom were female, all the children were diagnosed and assessed with ASD beforehand. They all had legal documents identifying their Special Educational Needs and the associated duty to provide for them. All children were in year six primary school with consent to participate in the research. They were all given pre and post questionnaires along with visits. The people who were involved with the children were their parents and their teachers (Makin, Hill and Pellicano, 2017). This study also took place in primary and secondary, mainstream and special units due to the severity of the children's ASD. This research showed that the transition from primary to secondary was really poor regardless of whether it was from mainstream or a special unit. Tension choosing the school was delayed so there was a delay in the placement decision making. There was a lack of communication between primary school and secondary, and there was hardly any preparation within the primary school. A key concern was with identity-related problems with the children, which caused negativity on how they would adjust in their new school (Makin, Hill, and Pellicano, 2017).

In conclusion it has been shown that despite knowledge of the importance of early assessment the waiting period in some areas in Wales is poor and children are struggling to cope with their anxiety, as they have not been having the right needs to support them with their ASD as highlighted in the BBC report. There are negative thoughts that ASD students can have in relation to the transition from primary to secondary. As identified by Makin, Hill and

Pellicano (2017) the transition point for children with ASD in education should be a better process for the children and family however there were failings in schools and system-level factors. There is much legislation appointed to help people with disabilities and their educational needs. However, to access the help and support that the legislation alludes to then children require early assessment. In a survey it is said that 48 percent of autistic adults found that due to lack of professional understanding it was hard to have assessable support. Arguably this shows that current legislation is not enough for people with ASD and does not appear to minimise the barriers that ASD people face (Thomas, 2018). The new Legislation the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 is now in place and being implemented however it is probably too soon to assess whether this will be more effective.

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