

ASPERGERS - ALN

How is your chosen ALN identified and diagnosed?

According to Baron- Cohen et al (2006) Asperger's Syndrome is a heritable condition which involves empathy deficits and an unusually narrow interests and an above average intelligence. At 18 months old a check can be given for autism and then at 26 months a test for Asperger's can be taken.

Asperger's is a sub-group on the autistic spectrum with a normal IQ and a normal language development (Baron- Cohen 2006) typically detected later on and rarely before the age of 6. According to Neurol (2006) low level eye contact is not a predictor before the age of 9 months.

Asperger's Syndrome is a specific type of high functioning ASD. Although Asperger's is known as a milder form of autism according to Dedridge (2007) this is misleading as many individuals can experience considerable difficulties in their ability to function in everyday life.

According to Wing (date) who was the first person to use the term Asperger's syndrome, diagnosing Asperger's syndrome involves two stages the first being questionnaires or rating scales for the parents and teachers these can indicate if the child has Asperger's syndrome. The second stage is a diagnostic assessment by specialist clinicians who are expert in the field and experienced in examining the behaviours and abilities of children with developmental disorders using the specific criteria which can give a decisive description of the syndrome.

Picture Exchange Communication system (PECS) can be used with children with speech and language delay or who are non-verbal. The benefits of this are providing children with a means of communication (National Autism resources 2022). Also it provides staff with additional training and qualifications which will enhance the quality of care and support within the setting. However the training for the PECS system takes a lengthy amount of time to implement (Early Years Career 2016).

By using inclusive practice, practitioners will acknowledge values and promote the diversity of children and families and ensure everyone is treated with fairness and equal opportunities (Welsh Government 2019). By using an inclusive approach practitioners can recognise and respond to children's diverse experiences and ensure they are given the support to fully participate to the best of their abilities (Welsh Government 2020). It is important for all children to feel included and accepted and this can be achieved by incorporating inclusive practice into the educational approach (Lindon 2021). This is supported by Lee (2021) who state that inclusive practice encourages a strong sense of belonging and ownership.

Working together with the individual and the parents is important in order to meet the needs and aspirations in a child centred way (Hellawell 2019).

According to the Additional learning needs code for Wales (2021) it is the responsibility of the local authority to review additional learning provisions and they have intervention powers to be used if the schools fail to perform their duties sufficiently (The Additional Learning Code For Wales 2021 Welsh Gov).

According to Siraj and Hallet (date) practitioner behaviour will directly affect a child in a positive or negative way and can continually modified with Continuous professional development in order to create positive interactions and achieve the best outcomes for the children.

After a child has received a Statement of SEN and official diagnosis, they will go on to receive the extra support they need which can be tailored to their specific needs which can improve the child's quality of living and learning with the child's needs and likes at the forefront of their care however getting a diagnosis of this type can also have its drawbacks and children are at risk of being labelled or pigeon holed and not given the chance to excel as there may be attitudes and beliefs which may act as barriers.

According to Dauncey (2016) approximately one in five learners in maintained schools in Wales have SEN and their needs are currently met through graduated stages of intervention which start with additional support given in schools this may come in the form of an LSA, the next stage of support would be this in school support together with involvement from external agencies and thirdly would be a local authority statement of SEN which comes with support from local authorities in the form of a specialised support package.

One of the challenges faced by children with ALN in mainstream school are the limited resources this is supported by Hesmonhalgh and Breaky (2001). From September 2021 the new ALN system commenced which is intended for all children up to year 10 who are newly thought to have ALN. The ALN code is to be used by schools, local authorities or PRU's (Pupil referral units) when supporting a child who is thought to have an ALN. The code replaces the SEN system. When the child is suspected of having an ALN the child or parent may request the child be moved onto the ALN system by requesting an IDP notice which means the child is treated as if they had an ALN from the date that the IDP is requested (gov.Wales).

What are the signs?

Section 312 (1) of the Education Act 1996 states that children have special educational needs (SEN) if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them, however with Asperger's syndrome this may be a problem as children can have a normal to high IQ and language development and their difficulties may come in the form of social standards.

According to Matson (2005) Early intervention has been proven to be the best strategy, however this can also prove difficult with Aspergers Syndrome as children learn to mask their symptoms at a very early age in order to fit in and meet social norms this together with their normal to high IQ and language development can make diagnosing their disorder difficult in the early stages.

Children with Asperger's will have poor social skills, an average or above average cognitive and language ability, they will enjoy social isolation and are known for being socially odd, socially uninformed and awkward also displaying typical autistic behaviours such as self-stimulation and an insistence on environmental sameness, they differ from Autistic individuals as they have average intellectual ability and normal language development (Simpson & Smith 2018).

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