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What is Neurodiversity?
O'Donnell, (2020) refers to neurodiversity as a variation in the human brain regarding social learning, attention scale, mood, or other functions linked to mental state or ability.

NeurodiversityHub, (n,d) shares how neurodiversity points out how every individual has a unique nervous system which allows for a combination for different needs and abilities. This statement emphasis’s the importance of equality and diverse environments, especially in early years settings.

By having a Neurodiversity friendly environment, it allows a safe and welcoming space for children with a range of different learning needs and stops labels and celebrates differences

The Umbrella Term
Neurodiversity is used as an umbrella term for many additional learning needs, although the term ‘neurodivergent’ was first used by sociologist Judy Singer. Signer used this term for individuals with Autism in particular although other additional learning needs have taken this term on also. (Resnick, 2021).

Diagnosis process – specifically Autism
According to the NHS, (no date), online, to start the diagnosis process for a potential neurodivergent individual such as Autism, speaking directly to a General Practitioner (GP), Health visitor if the child is under 5, any other health care professionals or if the child in question is attending school then support can be provided by the schools Special Educational needs staff member or SENCO.

After discussions have started, the individual may be referred to have an autism assessment.
An autism assessment is carried out by a team of individual who specialists in autism and autistic behaviour (NHS, no date A). During a child’s assessment this team will start to gather information about personal development such as when they started talking. GP reports or statements will also be gathered at this stage. Observations will also take place in schools, to see how the child interacts and play in different environments, as this stage school report will also be obtained and views from other professionals will also be taken into account (NHS, no date A).

When the assessment has finished, a report will be given that will firstly confirm if the individual has or has not been diagnosed with autism, if the outcome is a diagnosis then the assessment team will provide a report that states the follow information; support for the child or a specific area that they may need extra support with such as social interactions, communication or behavioural factors. The report can also point out strengths of the child for example academic development, physical development or social interactions.
It is important to remember that all types of autism are different, and each diagnosis is unique to the individuals (NICE, 2022).

Adapting settings and having Neurodiversity friendly classrooms – What are the barriers

Arguable, one of the biggest barriers for Neurodiversity is the lack of understanding and how to adapt the environment for neurodivergent children.

According to, Progress Lifeline, (2021) 1 in 5 people in the UK have a disability, with a huge 80% of those disabilities being ‘invisible’. This is what makes additional learning needs harder to acknowledge and understand, especially for undiagnosed children.

This high percentage, alongside with the main barrier is what makes it difficult to support young children with ALN.

Neurodivergent students and young children in Early Years can be easily misunderstood and may need additional support. Andy Cutting, (2018) from the National Autistic Society, advices ways to overcome barriers for children to feel included and not excluded in early years and educational settings.

The ways in which Cutting, (2018) suggests support includes:
Building a personal relationship with pupils and understanding personal interests. By knowing and understanding what makes the pupil stress, feel anxious or uncomfortable, as practioners we can then work with the child and outside individuals such as family to find ways to support the child or pupil.

- Support can be offered by identifying triggers and how to release them
- Adjusting the classroom
- Understand personal strategies to help lower stress and comfort during uncomfortable situations
- Including the individual on how to deal with stress
- Create a safe space, sensory tent, quiet corner

In Wales, the Additional learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) act 2018 was introduced. This act was introduced to set out how children and young people with ALN are provided with support in Wales. One of the main aims from this act is to improve communication between outside health authorities, health boards and health professionals and local authorities within the schooling environment (Senedd Research, 2021). By having this in place the child’s or children’s best interest will be prioritised.

Research – just how much support and resources are given to Neurodivergent individuals

National Assembly for Wales, (2013) share that approximately 22% of school children in Wales are identified as having some type of Additional Learning Needs (ALN). This statement alone shows the importance of ALN training in schools across the UK.

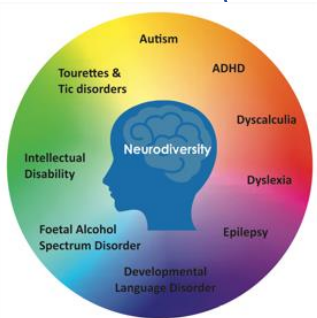
An article written by Cook and Ogden, (2022), shares research made within different school environments, mainstream and special needs schools, research taken was questions based on school provision for autistic individuals. One of the main challenges for the practitioners were identifying environmental factors that lead to pupil’s anxiety. One teacher shared an experience of how one pupil used physical movement to express anxiety and how from moving to secondary school has caused stress, anxiety and embarrassment of showing emotion in front of new peers. A strategy put into place in this setting was for the teachers to understand and identify factors that caused stressed and how to act/support when the student goes through high emotions. This shows again, the importance of adapting environment and how lack of understanding can make the child suffer.

Neurodiversity

Negative views from early year practitioners

Not only do children and young people with neurodivergent needs, find comfort and support from the resources and environment, support from staff and early years practitioners play a huge role in development.

Armstrong, (2012) shares a scenario about a primary school teacher having negative opinions and stereotypes about a number of neurodivergent pupils in his class for the new academic year. In this scenario the teacher uses phrases such as ‘I not a trained special needs teacher!’ and ‘Who is going to help me with the problems caused by these children.’ Straight away this teacher is showing negative thoughts and degrading these children as problem children. This attitude links to the medical model around non-visible disability.
A positive outcome from this scenario is that when the teacher approached the head teacher about his negative opinions and views, the head teacher reminds him of the positive impact that these children can have on the learning and classroom environments.



It does make people take a few steps back to think more creatively about all the different ways work or school sks can be done.”
Viginton, (2021)

(autismtoolbox, n,d)