

What is Autism/ASD?



According to Mencap (no date) Autism is a lifelong condition, often called autism spectrum disorder (ASD), it is referred to as a spectrum because it encompasses a wide range of experiences and challenges. While autism itself is not a learning disability, approximately half of those with autism may also experience a learning disability (Canavan, 2016).

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), isn't a one-size-fits-all condition. Since it's a spectrum, everyone's experience can be vastly different (Mayo Clinic, 2018)

Understanding ASD. Autism is characterized by three key features that can affect how someone:

- Interact with others in social settings.
- Communicate with others.
- Experiences and perceives the world around them (National Autistic Society, 2024).

Identification and Referral: The process begins with identifying potential signs of autism. This can be done by parents, teachers, or healthcare professionals. Once identified, a referral within school environments would be passed onto the additional learning needs coordinator (ALNCo) who will arrange the collection of detailed history and prepare for observations. (Sakhuja, 2024).

The **signs and symptoms** can vary widely but according to NHS Choices (2019) and Mayo Clinic (2018) common signs in children may include -

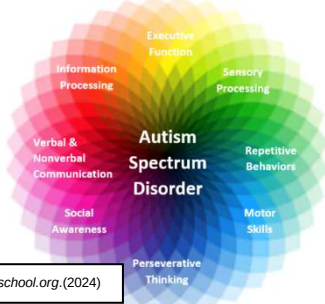
Social Communication and Interaction difficulties -

- Avoids eye contact or has difficulty maintaining it. Difficulty understanding social cues, making eye contact, or forming friendships.
- Does not respond to their name by 9 months of age
- Limited facial expressions by 9 months
- Difficulty understanding others' emotions
- Prefers to play alone
- Delayed speech or loss of previously acquired language skills. Delayed repetitive language, or challenges in understanding non-literal language.

Restricted or Repetitive Behaviors

- Repetitive movements like hand-flapping or rocking
- Insistence on routines and gets upset with changes
- Obsessive interests
- Unusual reactions to sensory experiences (sounds, smells, tastes, etc.)
Other Characteristics.
- Delayed developmental milestones (language, movement, cognitive skills)
- Hyperactive or inattentive behavior
Sensory Sensitivities: Over- or under-reacting to sensory input like sounds, lights, or textures.

ASD can present differently in individuals, especially between genders, with women often masking their symptoms to fit in socially (Baker, Lane, Angley and Young 2007, Mayo Clinic, 2018, National Autistic Society, 2024).



Source: Thekeyschool.org. (2024)

Your rights as parents/families and your child's rights

Children under eighteen are legally protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Dewis Cymru, 2020; Welsh Government, 2021a). Both parents and young individuals can appeal council decisions, including ALN and Disability Discrimination claims, with advocacy support provided by local councils.

Support networks exist for parents of children with autism (Dewis Cymru, 2020, (National Neurodivergence Team, 2020).Children have the right to express their views on decisions affecting them, though many need support from family, friends, or professionals.

Independent advocates help young people understand their rights, explore options, and voice concerns in various settings like school, healthcare, and legal matters. Under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, local authorities must provide advocacy services for children needing care and support .

• Barriers Impacting children with ASD

• Communication Barriers:

Children with ASD often experience difficulties in both verbal and non-verbal communication. For example, limited speech, atypical use of gestures, and challenges in maintaining conversations can impede interactions in the classroom and social settings (Canavan, 2016; National Autistic Society, 2024).

• Social Interaction Challenges:

Understanding social cues is often difficult for individuals with ASD, which can lead to isolation and difficulties in peer relationships. These barriers can be compounded by limited awareness among teachers and peers Canavan, 2016).

• Sensory Sensitivities:

Many children with ASD have sensory processing issues, which can result in heightened sensitivities to stimuli such as bright lights, loud noises, or certain textures (Kogan and Boyle, 2015). This may cause discomfort and distractions, hindering engagement in the learning process (National Autistic Society, 2024)

• Educational Barriers:

The mainstream education system may not always be adequately equipped to support children with ASD (Doherty *et al.*,2022). For example, a lack of individualized teaching methods and an inability to modify the classroom environment may hinder the student's participation (Smith *et al.*, 2017, Wearmouth, 2021) In line with the **ALN Code in Wales**, the education system is called to offer a graduated response, ensuring appropriate support at every stage.

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Supporting children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)



Diagnosis

There is a nationally agreed pathway for neurodevelopmental assessment and diagnosis services across all seven regions in Wales This ensures consistency and quality in the diagnostic process (Welsh Government, 2021a)

The identification and diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) involve a complex and multi-faceted approach, with a reliance on clinical observation, diagnostic interviews, and standardized assessments. Diagnosis is usually made by a developmental pediatrician, psychologist, or psychiatrist, often based on observations and parent/caregiver reports (Welsh Government, 2021a)

Support Strategy for children with ASD

Inclusive Education:

Differentiated Instruction: Use of teaching strategies tailored to individual needs, such as visual supports and structured routines, is vital for children with ASD (Koegel *et al.*, 2014, Child Disability Team, 2022, Kogan and Boyle, 2015).

Use of Technology: Tablets, communication devices, and apps designed to support communication have proven beneficial for children with ASD in expressing themselves more effectively (Barker *et al.*, 2013; Douglas *et al.* 2015).

Behavioural Interventions:

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): ABA is a well-established, evidence-based intervention that focuses on teaching socially significant behaviors through reinforcement (Lovaas, 1987).

Social Skills Training: Programs like PEERS (Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills) aim to improve social interactions by teaching children with ASD how to navigate social (Canavan, 2016).

Sensory Accommodations:

The use of sensory breaks, quiet spaces, and the provision of sensory tools (e.g., fidget toys) can significantly improve focus and comfort in a classroom setting (Baker *et al.*, 2008, Canavan, 2016)

Support Personnel:

The inclusion of speech therapists, teaching assistants, and special education professionals, as recommended by the ALN Code in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021), can ensure that children with ASD receive individualized support (Bosanquet, 2021, NHS, 2024, National Neurodivergence Team, 2020)

Conclusion

This poster has evaluated the identification, barriers, and support strategies related to ASD as an additional learning need. The importance of a multi-disciplinary, individualized approach to diagnosis and support has been highlighted, especially in the context of the ALN Code in Wales.

Ongoing research is necessary to further refine diagnostic tools and support strategies. The implementation of inclusive education practices and ALN provisions in Wales will continue to evolve to better support children with ASD.



Source: Quotefancy.com (2025),