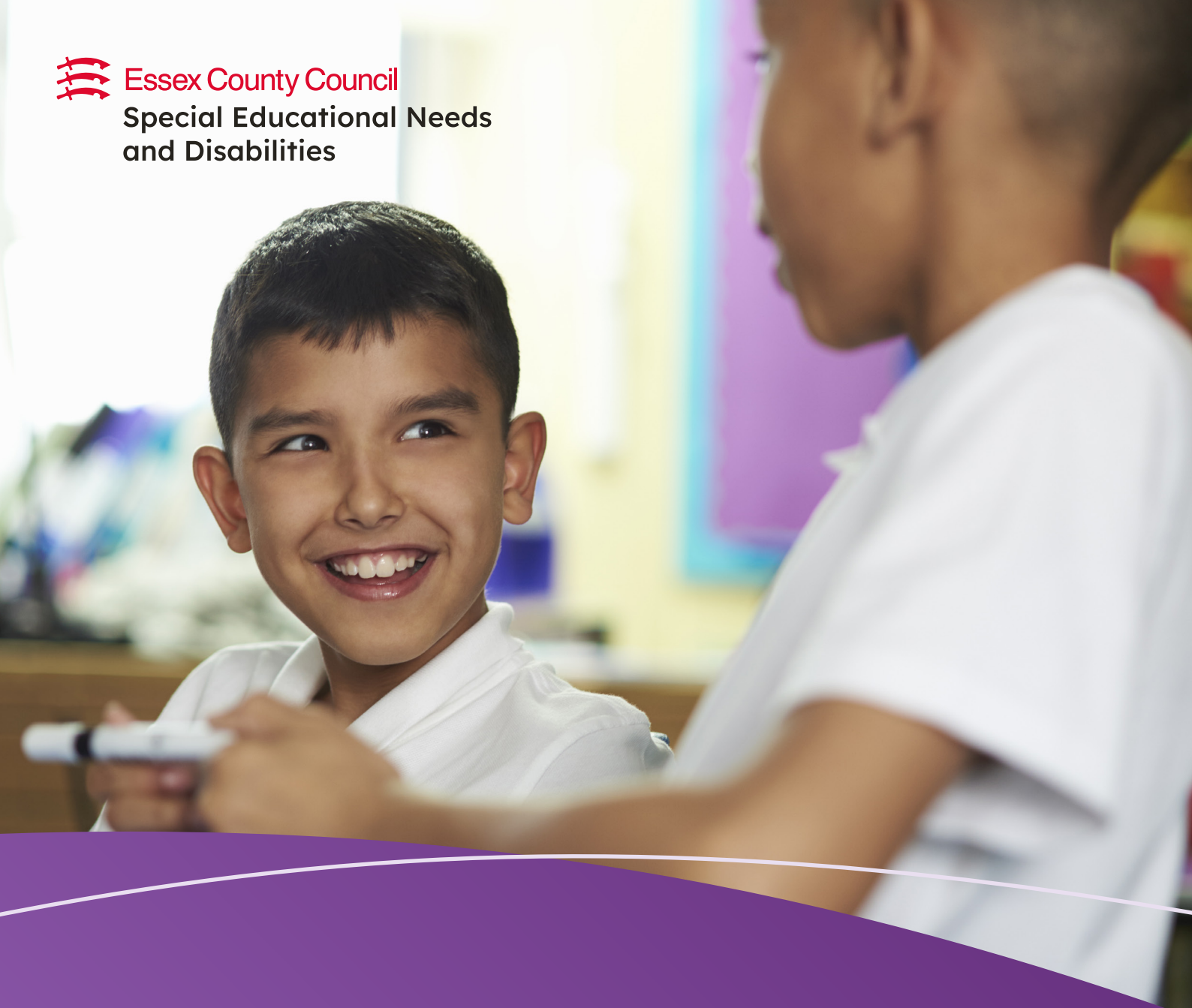




Essex County Council

Special Educational Needs
and Disabilities



Essex County Council

Autism Inclusion Guidance



Introduction

Essex is committed to inclusive education.

Essex County Council aims for all educational settings to be places where neurodiversity is embraced and celebrated and where children and young people with different strengths and needs can feel safe, understood, and able to learn. This commitment is set out in the Essex Education **Inclusion Strategy**; (Essex Council, 2022).

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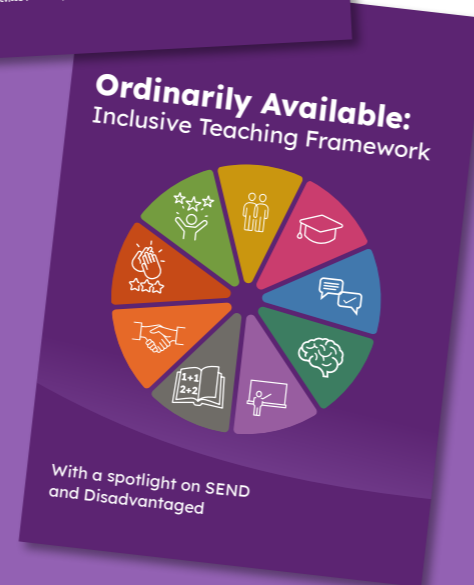
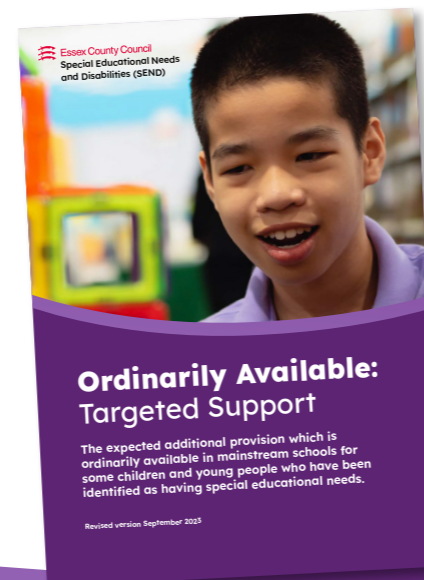
What does Essex do to support autistic children and young people?

The initial response to an autistic pupil's needs in Essex would be outlined in the **Essex Ordinarily Available** documents, both from the Universal and Targeted layer.

It is expected that staff in educational settings in Essex will refer to the Essex Ordinarily Available Provision document (Essex County Council, 2023) for guidance on approaches they can use to adapt teaching and learning to the needs of different children and young people. Further opportunities for support are outlined later in this document.

Ordinarily Available consists of two frameworks:

- **Ordinarily Available: Inclusive Teaching Framework** – universal support - for all pupils – for classroom teachers, supported by the lead for teaching and learning and the SENCO.
- **Ordinarily Available Targeted Support** – additional to and different from - for some pupils – for classroom teachers, pastoral and SEND teams.



In addition to the Ordinarily Available guidance, Essex County Council offers a range of support to schools and settings to develop their provision for autistic pupils. This support includes evidence-informed training from the Autism Education Trust. The training is based around the 8 Principles of Good Autism Practice as a framework for supporting autistic children and young people in educational settings. These principles should be referred to when implementing One Planning for autistic pupils.

The 8 Principles of Good Autism Practice (AET, 2021)



Understanding the individual

- **Principle 1:** understanding the strengths, interests and needs of each autistic child
- **Principle 2:** enabling the autistic child to contribute to and influence decisions



Positive and effective relationships

- **Principle 3:** collaboration with parents/carers and other professionals and services
- **Principle 4:** workforce development related to good autism practice



Enabling environments

- **Principle 5:** leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice
- **Principle 6:** an ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for autistic children



Learning and development

- **Principle 7:** targeted support and measuring the progress of autistic children
- **Principle 8:** adapting the curriculum, teaching, and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children

What the evidence and other respected authorities tell us

Essex is committed to evidence-informed practice; a 2015 review by the National Autism Centre concluded that:



‘there are a range of appropriate strategies and interventions that can be utilised to support autistic young people.’

Best practice requires collaboration between families, carers, and professionals, and is based on knowledge of the individual, their aspirations, strengths, and needs.

This means we need to take a holistic and flexible approach to meeting the needs of autistic pupils in schools which may include social stories; visual schedules, timetables, or jigs; social skills interventions; self-regulation interventions.

Essex County Council acknowledges the complexity of autism and the variety of strategies that may support different individuals. We recognise that successful support is that which is tailored to the individual’s preferences, strengths, and needs. This may include a combination of a variety of elements from different approaches, interventions, and frameworks.

What the NICE guidelines say

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is an organisation which provides Evidence-based recommendations developed by independent committees, including professionals and lay members, and consulted on by stakeholders.

The recommendations from NICE make it clear that best practice is when we:



“Consider a specific social-communication intervention for the core features of autism in children and young people that includes play-based strategies with parents, carers and teachers to increase joint attention, engagement and reciprocal communication in the child or young person. Strategies should:

- be adjusted to the child or young person’s developmental level
- aim to increase the parents’, carers’, teachers’ or peers’ understanding of, and sensitivity and responsiveness to, the child or young person’s patterns of communication and interaction
- include techniques of therapist modelling and video-interaction feedback
- include techniques to expand the child or young person’s communication, interactive play and social routines”

(NICE, 2013; 2021). [NICE Guidelines](#) updated in 2021

What the Department of Education guidelines say

SEND Code of Practice recommends:



“A detailed assessment of need should ensure that the full range of an individual’s needs is identified, not simply the primary need. The support provided to an individual should always be based on a full understanding of their particular strengths and needs and seek to address them all” (Department for Education and Department for Health, 2015 p.96).

[SEND Code of Practice 2014](#)

In line with the recommendations from the revised SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education and Department for Health, 2015), the Essex person-centred approach to provision, via the Assess, Plan, Do Review process, ensures a holistic and personalised focus for supporting autistic individuals.

Autism Intervention – Essex’s view

In Essex we look at autistic children and young people holistically.

We consider the underlying factors that contribute to an individual’s presentation. This allows us to understand autistic children and young people and put in place appropriate support. We respect autistic children and young people, and autistic identity.

Within Essex we use an eclectic model to ensure that each child and young person is supported appropriately.

We take a holistic approach to monitoring progress by looking at the acquired skill and also the ability to generalise the skill into different contexts. As with all interventions the ultimate goal is to develop independence and employable skills for the future. The Autism Education Trust’s Progression Framework tracks where skills fit into wider child development and is the identified assessment tool that is used within Essex.

What this means

Support should always be guided by and built around each individual and their strengths, challenges and interests, combining elements of different approaches and frameworks as appropriate. (NAS,2023) Such person-centred approaches are also in keeping with the recommendations of the revised SEN Code of Practice (2014).

In Essex we expect our schools to use and implement the Ordinarily Available which includes, but is not limited to:

- use of appropriately modified language
- use of visual supports and alternative ways to communicate
- identification and support for non-academic barriers to learning and engagement
- understanding of and support for sensory needs

- strategies to support transitions and coping with change
- adapted environments and work areas
- consideration of how, when, and where a child or young person might access their learning to ensure maximum opportunities for success
- provision to support the development of social skills, positive relationships and unstructured times of the school day
- support to develop recognition of emotions and a range of strategies to successfully manage these
- an understanding that all behaviour is a form of communication and should be responded to from a position of trying to understand what is being communicated

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) - Essex’s view

Views on ABA can be strongly divided, and despite the research available, there remain gaps in the research, particularly about the long-term impact on autistic people.

What we understand is that Autistic people report highly varied experiences of ABA; in some cases, they have reported positive outcomes in relation to the development of life skills but others report experiencing considerable trauma resulting from this practice. For some, this is due to the methodology and principles of the approach itself and for others it reflects poor training and guidance.

Essex considers it best practice for school staff to take a balanced view when considering the best approach to support an autistic individual, taking into consideration:

- meeting the individual child’s needs
- the school ethos and their neuro-affirming practice
- their ability to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils
- parent/carer views

It is up to the individual school to decide if any external professionals (including ABA tutors) can work within the school.

If ABA is written into an EHCP however, schools must engage proactively to meet this provision.

Essex supports other forms of intervention and support which encompass a more person-centred approach which may have been based on some of the early practices of ABA.

It is important to understand that Essex does not condone the use of any intervention that uses corporal punishment, or that which attempts to make a person ‘less autistic’.



Further Interventions/ Approaches for supporting autistic learners within Essex

Good Beginnings

Good Beginnings is the Essex information course for parent/carers of autistic children, and those with social communication differences of reception age and younger. It is a face-to-face course covering a range of topics with a focus on developing parent/carer's understanding of autism and learning possible strategies and approaches to supporting their children. It is also a valuable opportunity for parents/carers to develop a local support network of other parents.

AET – Autism Education Trust

Schools are provided with training in 'Good Autism Practice'. This course involves two sessions with tasks to complete between sessions and after the second session. The focus of the tasks is to evaluate current provision in schools and individual teachers' confidence levels. This then results in an action plan to develop good practice in schools. The AET training promotes the 8 principles outlined at the beginning of this paper. Further training and support is offered on a bespoke basis as well as via regular on-line training using AET modules.

Advanced Practitioner Course for Autism

This 11 week course for practitioners working directly with autistic children and young people aims to develop a deeper understanding of autism and the possible ways to support autistic pupils. The course covers a range of topics and includes guest speakers. The aim is to improve support around individual pupils in schools and to establish whole school approaches to developing autism friendly schools.

Attention Building

The Essex Attention Building approach is similar to other Attention Building intervention such as 'Attention Autism' by Gina Davies, or 'Listen and Learn' by Leicester County Council and aims to work on the early fundamentals of language including awareness of others, attention, listening, shared attention, switching attention and turn-taking.

Structured Learning

Structured learning approaches are routed in TEACCH but can be provided in a range of ways. The purpose is to focus on:

- strengths in visual information processing
- difficulties with social communication, attention and executive function

The structured approach achieves this by providing:

- external organizational supports to address challenges with attention and executive function
- visual and/or written information to supplement verbal communication
- structured support for social communication

Structured teaching strategies can be used alongside other approaches and therapies.

LEANS project

LEANS is a free curriculum to introduce pupils aged 8-11 to the concept of neurodiversity and help them explore how it impacts school experiences. It is a teacher-delivered resource for the whole class. LEANS is guided by three big goals: **know-think-do**.

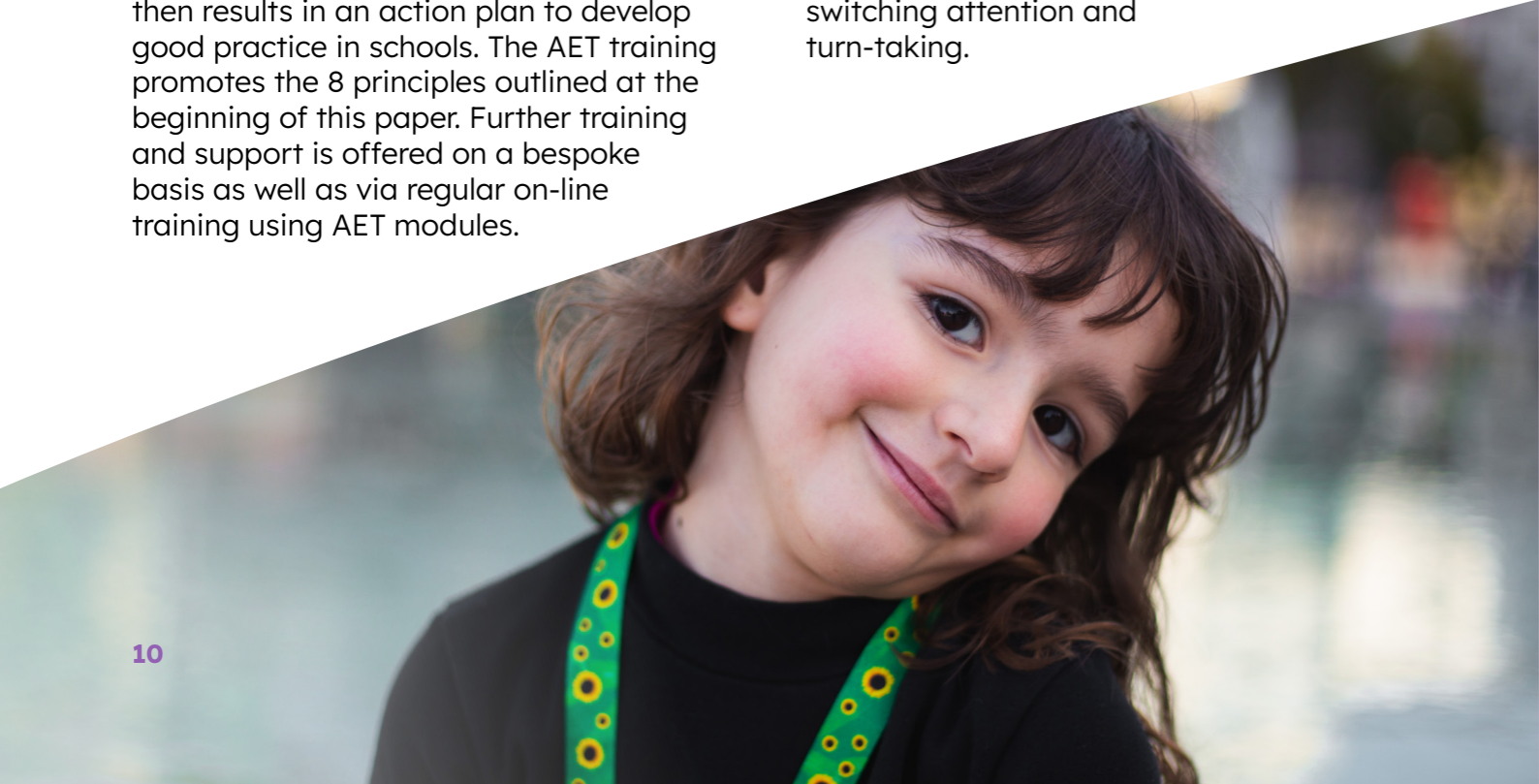
Autistic and OK

A peer-led programme and toolkit for secondary schools created by Ambitious about Autism to empower autistic pupils to take control of their mental health and wellbeing, understand themselves, and feel ok.

Further information about all interventions that might support autistic children in schools, and where to access training, is available on the Essex Autism Portal.

Summary

By systematically reviewing all the best research and evidence we currently have available, means that Essex prefers to take the position that there is no one specific approach or intervention that can meet the needs of all autistic children. It is in drawing on a range of evidence informed approaches, and personalising these, that it is possible to achieve the best and most purposeful outcomes for autistic children. In line with this belief, Essex has adopted the Ordinarily Available framework which promotes a range of perspectives and interventions in an inclusive, developmental and evidence informed approach.



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