

## CYPE(6)-10-22 - Paper to note 2



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Jayne Bryant MS/AS, Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee  
([SeneddChildren@senedd.wales](mailto:SeneddChildren@senedd.wales))

25 April 2022

Dear Jayne,

I write to bring the Children, Young People and Education Committee's attention to the enclosed research about the education of Autistic pupils in Wales.

The preliminary report, by Steffan Davies, of Swansea University's School of Education, paints a valuable yet concerning picture of the experiences of Autistic children and young people.

One of the key findings of the study was around teachers' understanding of Autism.

While 77% of educators felt they had a good understanding, only 50% of parents and 28% of pupils felt their teachers understood Autism.

Mr Davies presented his findings to the Senedd's Cross-party Group on Autism, with speakers stressing the importance of involving Autistic people in the design and delivery of training.

The study also found that among Autistic pupils:

- three in four had been bullied at school
- one in four did not feel safe in school
- nearly 50% felt excluded
- and more than half felt they didn't receive enough support.

Another key theme was a disparity between mainstream and specialist provision. Only 46% of parents felt satisfied with mainstream compared to 81% for specialist settings. Among pupils, 71% enjoyed going to a specialist school which fell to 57% for those in mainstream provision.

We hope Swansea University's important research will provide an evidence base to inform policy development, and improve the experiences of Autistic children and young people.

I look forward to receiving your response accordingly.

Thank you.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

Mark Isherwood MS/AS

Chair, Cross Party Autism Group  
Cadeirydd, Grŵp Trawsbleidiol Awtistiaeth

Enclosed: The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales, Preliminary Report

# The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Preliminary Report 2021



Swansea University  
Prifysgol Abertawe

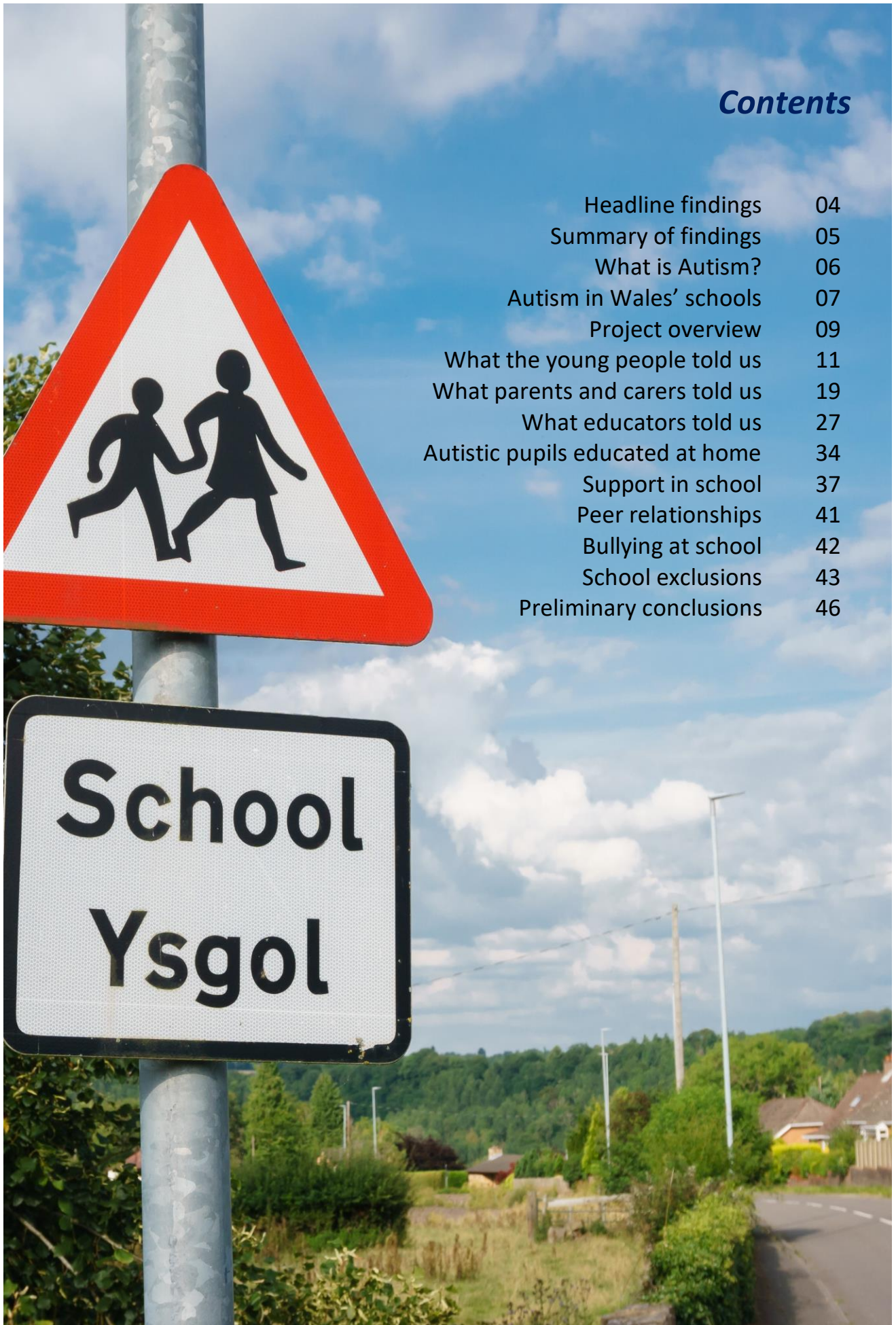
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales  
Preliminary Report 2021

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This report is part of a study being conducted by Steffan Davies MSc, who is working towards obtaining a PhD at Swansea University's School of Education, considering the education of Autistic pupils in Wales.

Steffan is a parent of an Autistic daughter and worked for ten years in a mainstream primary school setting in west Wales, supporting children with additional needs, specialising in Autism. He was also seconded to the Local Authority for two years working as part of their communication support service, setting up and rolling out a unique programme enabling schools to screen and assess communication and language development in the early years, promoting early intervention and access to specialist and diagnostic services.

Steffan has a keen interest in inclusion within education and achieved a First-Class BA Honours in Social Inclusion (Inclusive Education) at University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Carmarthen. He then graduated from Swansea University Medical School with an MSc distinction in Autism and Related Conditions in 2019, taking the award for best dissertation.

The project is supervised by Dr Cathryn Knight, a lecturer of Education at Swansea University, who specialises in Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion and Dr Helen Lewis who is Swansea University's Programme Director for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

This preliminary report shares the results of the first phase of the project and reflects upon the perspectives of educators, parents, and most importantly Autistic pupils themselves.

If you would like more information, or to discuss the project, please contact:

Steffan Davies MSc  
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Project Supervisors

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## The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Responses were received from:

**378** Educators

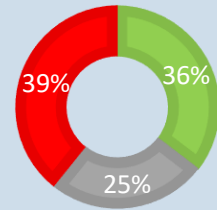
**371** Parents/Carers

**92** Autistic Children and Young People

# 39%

of educators felt unsupported by their Local Authority whilst working with an Autistic pupil.

36% felt they were receiving enough support, whilst 25% were unsure if the support from the Local Authority



# 1/4

More than **1-in-4** Autistic pupils said they do not feel safe in school.



More than **3-in-4** pupils said they have been the victim of bullying in school.

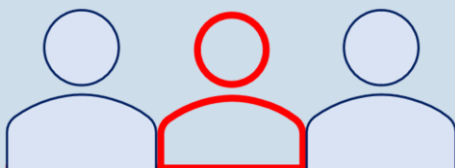
# 3/4

**Less than half** of all parents feel their child is currently in the best setting to meet their individual needs.



More than **1-in-4** consider their child's current setting is not meeting their needs.

Parents of children and young people with a Statement of Educational Need told us **1-in-3** were not receiving all the support detailed within the Statement.



**More than half** of Autistic young people feel they **don't receive enough** help in school.



More than **2-in-5** said they **couldn't cope with the work they were given** in school.



# 41%

of educators said they were **unsure of where to access suitable resources** to support them when working with Autistic pupils.

If you would like more information, or to discuss the project, please contact:

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Project Supervisors

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Dr Helen Lewis: [helen.e.lewis@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:helen.e.lewis@swansea.ac.uk)



Swansea University  
Prifysgol Abertawe



## *Summary of preliminary findings*

- In general, Autistic pupils told us they were happy in and enjoyed going to school, however a significant proportion said they did not feel safe in school and over three quarters feel heightened anxiety and worries when attending school.
- Autistic girls tell us they feel a lot less understood than their male peers in school, this led to comparable gender differences in how supported they felt.
- Three quarters of Autistic pupils reported being the victim of bullying in school, with their parents feeling that schools were not taking sufficient steps in response to their reports of such incidents.
- Both pupils and their parents report a significantly greater level of satisfaction when attending specialist provisions compared to mainstream in several key areas.
- Parents and carers feel unsupported by their Local Authority when searching for a suitable education placement for their child.
- A small majority of parents were unsure whether their child's current school was the best placement to meet their individual needs.
- Parents reported that despite having a Statement of Educational Need in place, many Autistic pupils are not receiving all of the support that they are legally entitled to.
- Despite educators' confidence in their knowledge and understanding of Autism, pupils told us that in general, they do not feel their teachers understand about Autism or how best to support them.
- Educators felt supported by their school when working with Autistic pupils, however generally they feel unsupported by outside agencies and their Local Authority.
- Whilst many educators felt their employers provided them with sufficient Autism related training, a quarter told us they had not received any.
- A third of education staff who have worked as a 1-2-1 support with Autistic pupils have no prior experience of Autism and received no training before taking on the role.

## ***What is Autism?***

Autism is a lifelong neurological developmental condition, recognised in the UK as a disability under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. The condition is known for its wide-ranging variance of presentation and severity of symptoms, meaning that whilst all Autistic individuals may have difficulties in the same core areas, the level to which each person is affected can vary significantly. The \*National Autistic Society suggest that approximately 1 in every 100 people are Autistic, with around 700,000 Autistic adults, children, and young people in the UK.

At its core Autism impacts the way a person communicates and interacts with the environment that surrounds them, affecting their processing of sensory and social information. Many Autistic people also have a range of restricted interests and repetitive behaviour patterns.

With these key difficulties in processing and understanding social situations and sensory input from their surrounding environment, it is unsurprising that many Autistic children and young people struggle in their education and find navigating the education system and school environment overwhelming.



### ***A brief note about terminology within this report.***

*For the purposes of this report the authors will use the umbrella term Autism to encompass all diagnostic terms relating to Autism Spectrum Disorder, unless more specific terminology is required, or participant specified data dictates otherwise.*

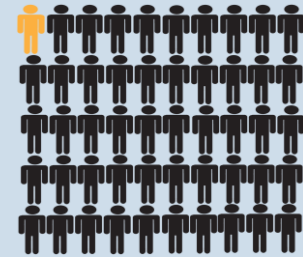
*The Autism community has regularly made clear their preference for identity first language, therefore throughout this report the author will endeavour to employ such terms unless data presented by participants is directly quoted using person first terminology.*

# Autistic pupils in maintained education settings in Wales

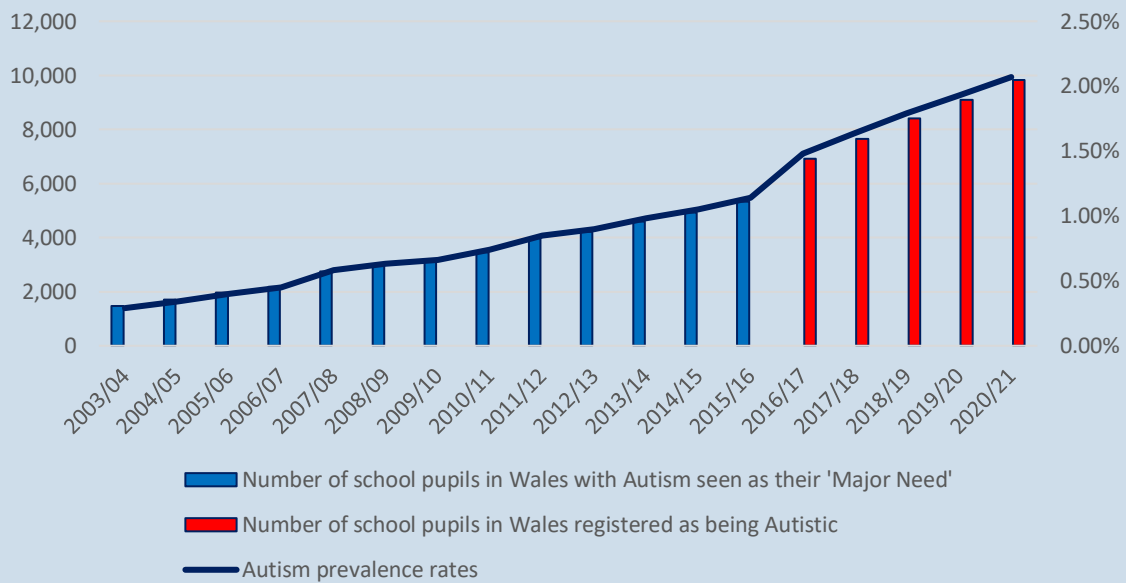
Analysis on Welsh Government Pupil Level Annual School Census data for the school year 2020-21 available from Stats Wales.

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census>

**1-in-50**  
pupils educated in  
maintained schools  
in Wales is Autistic

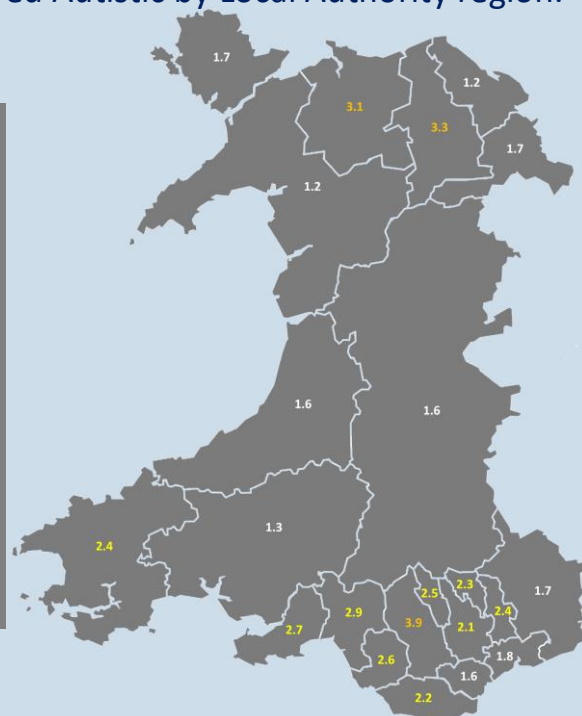


## Combined number of Autistic pupils and prevalence rate 2003/4 to present.



## Percentage of pupil population registered Autistic by Local Authority region.

Authority	Pupil population	Autistic pupils	Percentage
Rhondda Cynon Taf	39,161	910	3.87
Denbighshire	15,994	520	3.25
Conwy	15,857	490	3.09
Neath Port Talbot	21,585	625	2.90
Swansea	36,154	975	2.70
Bridgend	23,368	600	2.57
Merthyr Tydfil	9,172	230	2.51
Pembrokeshire	17,504	420	2.40
Torfaen	14,415	345	2.39
Blaenau Gwent	9,499	220	2.31
Vale of Glamorgan	23,497	510	2.17
Caerphilly	28,226	580	2.05
Newport	27,170	495	1.82
Isle of Anglesey	9,804	170	1.73
Wrexham	19,398	330	1.70
Monmouthshire	11,586	195	1.68
Cardiff	56,943	910	1.60
Powys	17,255	275	1.59
Ceredigion	9,700	150	1.55
Carmarthenshire	27,999	375	1.34
Flintshire	23,378	285	1.22
Gwynedd	17,059	205	1.20



## Autism in Wales' schools

Data from the Welsh Government's 2021 school census\* shows there are currently **9,818** Autistic pupils enrolled in maintained schools in Wales, who make up **2%** of the pupil population. There were **723** more Autistic pupils being educated in Wales in 2020/21 than the previous year. This increase of almost **8%** comes after a year where diagnostic services were virtually non-existent for many months due to the pandemic. In the four years since current reporting methods were introduced in 2017, there has been a **42%** increase in the number of Autistic pupils.

Autistic pupils account for:

- 1.4%** of primary school pupils
- 1.9%** of middle school pupils
- 2%** of secondary school pupils
- 1.6%** of all mainstream pupils
- 43%** of special school pupils

**54%** of Autistic pupils have a Statement of Educational Need, accounting for **22%** of all Statements in circulation. Autism is the most common type of need recorded in issued Statements for the fourth consecutive year.

Rhondda Cynon Taf has the highest prevalence rate, almost **1-in-25** pupils educated within the authority registered as Autistic. Swansea has the highest incidence with **975** Autistic children and young people educated in their schools. Carmarthenshire recorded a **17%** increase (+55), whilst Flintshire (-2%) and Wrexham (-7%) saw a decrease. Cardiff reported **105** additional Autistic pupils (+13%), whilst Denbighshire which had the highest prevalence in 2020 recorded the same number of Autistic pupils in 2021.

**86%** are educated in English medium settings  
**14%** in Welsh medium settings.

## Education in Wales

Education in Wales is going through a significant period of change with the introduction of a new 'Curriculum for Wales', replacing the old National Curriculum, which was first introduced in 1988, more than ten years before the formation of the Welsh Assembly following devolution. This new way of teaching and learning is being introduced from September 2022.

## Provision for learners with Additional Needs

The way children with additional needs are supported is also being overhauled, through the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill 2018 and introduction of the new ALN Code 2021. The new approach replaces the Special Educational Needs Code, which has been in use since 2004, and separate guidance for post-16 education to create a unified system of support for learners up to the age of 25.

The most significant changes include the replacing of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Statements of Educational Need with one statutory document known as an Individual Development Plan (IDP). The idea being that the document will be easier to create and revise when necessary and give the children and young people a greater say on the provision made available to them.

The implementation of the new code was delayed by the Coronavirus pandemic; however, the first phase of the roll out began in September 2021, with selected year groups being transferred onto the new IDP system along with all learners newly identified as having additional needs.

Responses to our Parent Survey showed that **82%** of parents said their child's school or the Local Authority had not informed them of the upcoming changes in provision for learners with additional needs.

Whilst **73%** of parents whose children currently have a Statement of Educational Need said their child's school or the Local Authority had not informed them of the upcoming changes in the provision of Statements.

## Project overview

There are approaching 10,000 Autistic pupils enrolled in maintained schools across Wales making up 2% of the school population, meaning roughly 1 pupil in 50 are Autistic\*. However, to date there have been no specific studies looking in depth, at the education experiences of Autistic pupils in Wales, whilst studies from other nations have shown there are some real issues that need to be addressed in order to improve service provision for these children and young people, who make up a sizeable proportion of the school community.

This study set out to listen to the voices of Autistic pupils, their parents, and their educators to try and build a clear picture of what challenges are being faced in the education of Autistic children and young people in Wales. Working together it is hoped that this project will help guide and inform future policies and practices, to develop a more knowledgeable, understanding, and supportive education system for all Autistic pupils, throughout Wales.

Bilingual online survey questionnaires were developed to gain insights from the three key stakeholders which were all reviewed and approved by the Swansea University School of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Sub-Committee. The timings and release of the surveys was slightly delayed and adjusted due to the new year Coronavirus lockdown which again saw schools across the UK closed to most

pupils throughout January, February and March, with not all pupils making a full return to in school learning until mid-April 2021.

The first questionnaire to go 'live' was the educator's survey which was launched in April, with details of the project together with links to the survey emailed to all maintained education settings in Wales, including post-16 provisions and further and higher education institutions. Questions within the survey were focused on gaining an overview of education professionals' experiences, knowledge and understanding of Autism; access to training and resources; support; and confidence. The educator survey was active through April and May and attracted 549 responses at a completion rate of 52%, with 378 unique responses (89% in English & 11% completed in Welsh) having entered sufficient information to be taken forward for analysis.

Swansea University, College of Arts and Humanities  
School of Education Research Hub  
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

### Do you work in education, in Wales?

Could you spare 15 minutes to complete our online survey?  
**Educator Survey - Research Participants Needed**

We are looking for educational professionals to share their experiences, knowledge and understanding of Autism, in Wales' schools.

To participate, it does not matter if you have not yet worked with Autistic pupils, the input of those who haven't is equally as important as those who have.

**This survey is open to**

- Teachers - NQTs - Student Teachers - Teaching Assistants - 1-2-1s
- Learning Support Assistants - HLTAs - Agency/Supply Staff
- Any other professional working in Education

**Working in any of the following settings**

- Mainstream - Special Schools - Specialist Settings
- Pre-school - Primary - Secondary - Post-16 (ages 16-18yrs)
- Home Tutoring - Local Authorities - Private/Independent Settings

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Sub-Committee  
290321/9814

**The link to the survey is in the information above.**

**For more information contact**  
Steffan Davies MSc  
PHD Candidate  
856614@swansea.ac.uk

**Project Supervisors for Swansea University**  
Dr Cathryn Knight: cathryn.knight@swansea.ac.uk  
Dr Helen Lewis: helen.e.lewis@swansea.ac.uk

\* See information on pages 4 and 5 (data from Welsh Government Pupil Level Annual School Census – Stats Wales)

The parent/carer survey sought parental perspectives on many areas of interest relating to the education of their Autistic children and young people, including Statements of Educational Need; educational support, inclusion, exclusions, peer relationships, bullying and parental satisfaction. The survey was released in May and remained active until mid-June. 511 responses were recorded with a 43% completion rate. 371 individual participants were entered into the analysis having completed appropriate number of critical questions, 98% chose to complete the survey in English with 2% using the Welsh language.

The final and most critical element, the survey of Autistic pupils was launched in mid-June, allowing participants the time to have settled back into the day-to-day school routines. The questions were made available in advance through a downloadable question preview document. This gave the children and young people and their parents an opportunity to know what to expect and prepare themselves before entering the online questionnaire and was viewed over 280 times. To try and ensure the survey was accessible to Autistic pupils of all abilities, three ability levels of questions were devised, with each level expanding on the questions posed in the level before. Questions in the first two levels were mainly of a straightforward Yes/No response variety using visual cues to aid understanding for all, with Level 3 having the addition of a selection of multiple choice questions offering agree, neither agree nor disagree or disagree answer options. The pupil survey remained active until early August and attracted 163 responses with a 43% completion rate, 92 unique responses were entered into analysis which included 1 Welsh language participant.

These survey responses translate into almost **4%** of Autistic pupils currently educated in Wales being represented by the input of 371 of their parents and carers in the parent survey.

Just short of **1%** of the Autistic pupil population in Wales are having their voices heard through participation in the pupil survey.

Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities: School of Education Research Study  
Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe

Are you the parent/carer of an Autistic child or young person aged 18 or under?  
Are they currently, or were they until recently educated in Wales?

We need your input to help us learn more about the current situation relating to:

### The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales

Parent/Carer Survey  
Research Participants Required

How can you help?  
You can participate by completing the initial on-line survey questionnaire, which should take no more than half an hour to complete.

The link to the survey is in the accompanying information.

Take the parent survey now and contribute to the field of Autism research in Wales

If you would like more information, or to discuss the project, please contact:  
Steffan Davies MSc  
PhD Candidate  
856614@swansea.ac.uk

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Sub-Committee  
RESEARCH

Project Supervisors  
Dr Cathryn Knight: cathryn.knight@swansea.ac.uk  
Dr Helen Lewis: helen.a.lewis@swansea.ac.uk

Swansea University College of Arts and Humanities  
School of Education Research Study  
The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales  
Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe

### Survey of Autistic Pupils

Open to all Autistic children and young people, aged 18 years and younger, living and currently or until recently educated in Wales.

Giving Autistic pupils a voice and a chance to help develop an education system that works for Autistic pupils across Wales.

Pupils under 16 years will require parental consent and support to complete the short survey.  
Pupils aged 16-18 can participate independently or with support if required.

Questions are available to download in advance by following the link above  
The survey should take no longer than 10-15 minutes to complete  
The link to the survey is in the information above

If you would like more information, or to discuss the project, please contact:  
Steffan Davies MSc  
PhD Candidate  
856614@swansea.ac.uk

Project Supervisors  
Dr Cathryn Knight: cathryn.knight@swansea.ac.uk  
Dr Helen Lewis: helen.a.lewis@swansea.ac.uk

To view the survey in a booklet or find more details, follow the information provided.

Swansea University Research Ethics Sub-Committee  
2022/23/18

This preliminary report brings together the findings resulting from the input of all participants in the three surveys and has been produced to present the results of the study to date.

It is the culmination of the first phase of this PhD project and will guide further research and analysis as the project progresses through to completion in summer 2023.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss anything within the report with the author, the contact information appears throughout the document.



## What the young people told us...

**58%** of Autistic young people told us they enjoy going to school.

**43%** of Autistic pupils said they were not happy in school.

**28%** say they did not feel safe in school.

**77%** told us that being in school makes them feel anxious or worried.

**28%** of Autistic children and young people told us they had no friends in school.

**48%** of pupils said they did not enjoy play, break and unstructured times at school.

**76%** of respondents say they have been the victim of bullying at school.

**83%** of Autistic students say they feel different from the other children and young people at school.

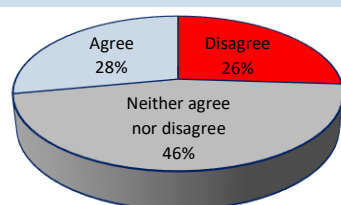
**49%** told us that they feel excluded at school.

**41%** said that there was no quiet space available for them to go and relax in their setting.

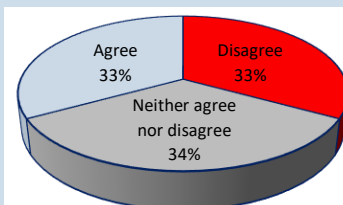
**58%** feel they are coping well with the schoolwork.

**53%** felt they were not getting enough help in school.

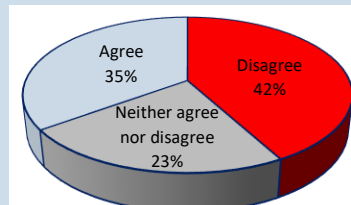
My teachers understand about Autism.



My teachers understand me.



My teachers know how to support me.



**74%** said school was often too noisy.

**40%** say they wish they were in a smaller school with less pupils.

## Gender differences in what the young people told us.

There were many areas where gender can be clearly identified as having a role to play in shaping the educational experiences of Autistic students in Wales.

62% of male pupils told us they enjoyed going to school compared to just over half of the female participants (53%). 38% of boys and exactly half of Autistic girls said they were unhappy in school whilst 80% of those identifying as non-binary told us they were happy at school.

27% of Autistic boys, 31% of girls and 40% of non-binary pupils said they felt unsafe in school and 73% of males, 81% of females and 83% of non-binary students said being in school made them feel anxious and worried.

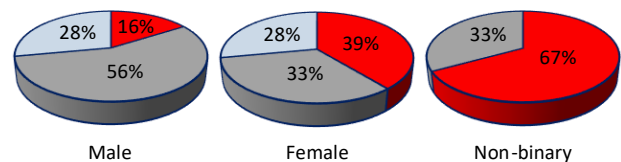
Across all three groups around 3-in-5 say they cope well with the work in school, although girls (61%) and those identifying as non-binary (60%) felt they didn't get enough help, whereas 55% of boys say they were getting enough help in class.

Non-binary pupils (60%) and boys (57%) were more likely to feel included than girls, with more than half (53%) of female responses saying they felt excluded at school. All non-binary participants told us they felt different to their peers whilst girls (93%) and 3-in-4 boys were also highly aware of their differences.

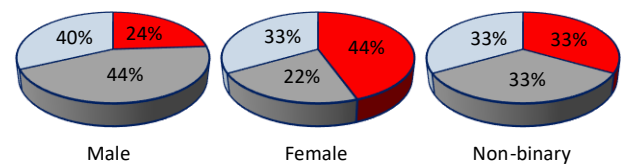
28% of male responses agreed that their teachers understood about Autism, whilst 16% disagreed. The same percentage of girls agreed, however 39% disagreed. None of the non-binary respondents agreed and 73% disagreed.

As a group it is clear from responses that females feel they are less understood and supported than both other gender cohorts.

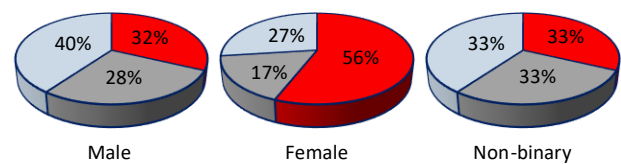
My teachers understand about Autism.



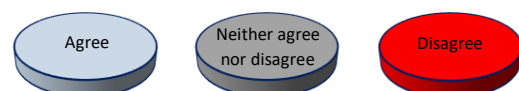
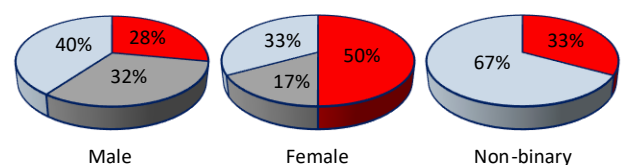
My teachers understand me.



My teachers know how to support me.



I get enough support in school.



44% of female participants felt their teachers did not understand them, compared to a third of those identifying as non-binary and less than a quarter of boys. Half the girls thought they were not getting enough support in school with 56% feeling their teachers did not know how to support them. 28% of boys say they don't get enough support in school and 32% suggested their teachers did not know how best to support them. A third of non-binary pupils told us that their teachers didn't know how to support them and that they considered they were not getting enough support in school.

40% of the males, 28% of females and none of the non-binary participants thought that their teachers understood how sensory difficulties made certain situations in school difficult to cope with. Over half of the girls and 67% of non-binary pupils told us they thought their teachers didn't understand these difficulties.

76% of boys, 72% of girls and all non-binary respondents said that the school environment was often too noisy.

A third of those who identify as non-binary said they wished they were in a different school compared to 20% of males and 17% of females. However, 45% of female participants, 36% of males and a third of non-binary young people felt that they would prefer to be in a smaller school, with less pupils.

The final question asked within Level 3 of the pupil survey asked whether participants would prefer to be in a school specifically for Autistic pupils, none of the non-binary cohort said they would whilst 16% of males and 17% of the female participants told us they would prefer to attend a school specifically for Autistic pupils.



## Setting differences in what the young people told us.

78% of the children and young people who responded to the pupil survey were educated in mainstream settings, whilst 15% received their educations in specialist provision.

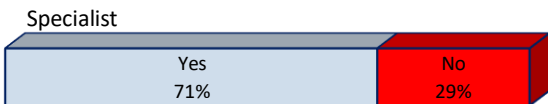
71% of pupils educated in specialist settings told us they enjoyed going to school, compared to 57% of those in mainstream, whilst 56% of mainstream Autistic pupils and 69% of pupils attending specialist provision told us they were happy in school.

All participants from specialist education said they felt safe in school, but a third of those in mainstream say they do not feel safe. 82% of mainstream students felt anxious or worried going to school, in comparison to 45% of those in specialist settings.

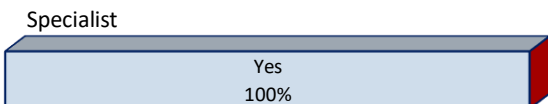
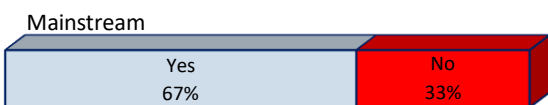
Less than half (48%) of Autistic pupils educated in mainstream feel included in school, whilst 78% of pupils in specialist settings felt included. A similar number in each setting told us they had friends in school, although whilst 77% of pupils from specialist provisions said they enjoyed play and break times, 54% of mainstream pupils told us they did not enjoy those unstructured times.

87% of those educated in mainstream say they feel different from their peers compared to 50% of those in special education.

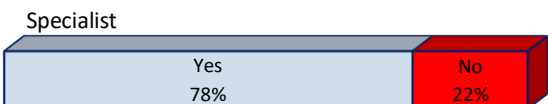
Do you enjoy going to school?



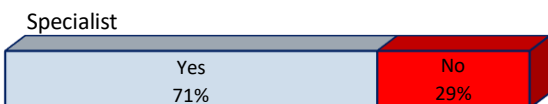
Do you feel safe in school?



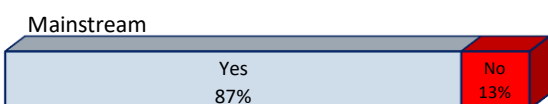
Do you feel included in school?



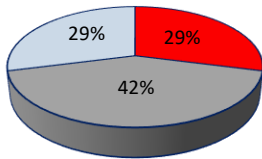
Do you enjoy play and break times in school?



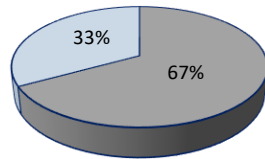
Do you feel different from the other pupils at school?



My teachers understand about Autism.

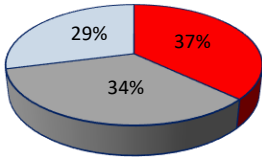


Mainstream

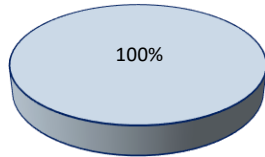


Specialist

My teachers understand me.

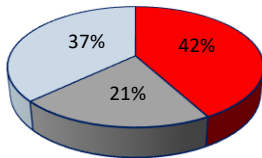


Mainstream

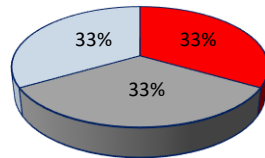


Specialist

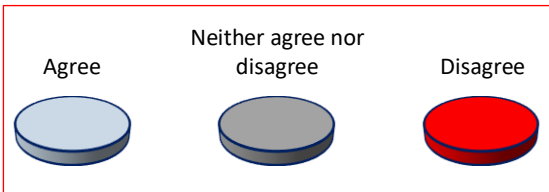
My teachers know how to support me.



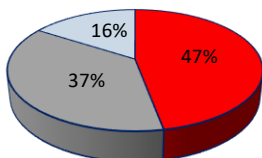
Mainstream



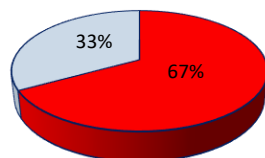
Specialist



I wish I were in a different school.

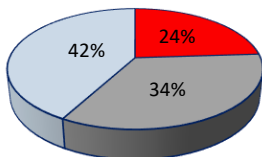


Mainstream

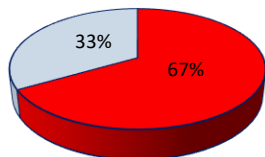


Specialist

I wish I were in a smaller school with less pupils.

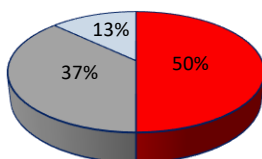


Mainstream

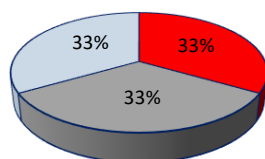


Specialist

I wish I were in a school specifically for Autistic pupils.



Mainstream



Specialist

90% of children and young people attending specialist provisions told us they had a safe and quiet space available to them, whereas 45% of mainstream pupils said there was no safe space for them at their school.

When asked if they coped well with the work in school 46% of those in mainstream told us they didn't in comparison to 80% of those in specialist education who said they did cope well. 44% of mainstream pupils felt they were getting enough help in school in contrast to 70% of those in specialist settings.

29% of mainstream students felt their teachers had a good understanding about Autism and the same percentage thought their teachers understood them whilst 37% say teachers knew how to support them. A third of young people educated in specialist settings felt their teachers understood Autism whilst all felt their teachers understood them and a third said their teachers knew how to support them.

Two thirds of young people attending specialist provision and 41% of those enrolled in mainstream schools felt that their teachers understood how sensory differences made some situations hard to cope with at school. Whilst 79% of mainstream pupils told us that they often found school too noisy, none of the participants receiving their education in specialist settings felt this way with 67% disagreeing with the statement.

16% of mainstream pupils wished they were in a different school, 42% wished to be in a smaller school with fewer pupils and 13% wanted to be in a school specifically for Autistic pupils, whilst a third of those educated in specialist settings agreed to all three of these statements.

## Age and sector differences in what the young people told us.

22% of participants in the pupil survey were of primary school age (4-11 years), 58% attend secondary school (aged 12-18 years) and 16% were aged 16-18 years in post-16 education. 58% were 15 years or younger, needing parental consent to partake and 42% were aged 16-18 (74% partaking independently, 26% with support).

70% of Autistic primary pupils, 53% of those in secondary and two thirds of students in post-16 education told us they enjoyed going to school. Three quarters of those in primary school said they were happy in school compared to 51% of secondary school pupils and a third of those in post-16 provision.

Pupils attending primary settings reported feeling safe in school (85%) as did 77% of those in post-16 education, whilst a third of secondary school learners told us they didn't feel safe in school. More than three quarters of students in secondary and post-16 settings and 71% of those in primary told us going to school makes them feel anxious or worried.

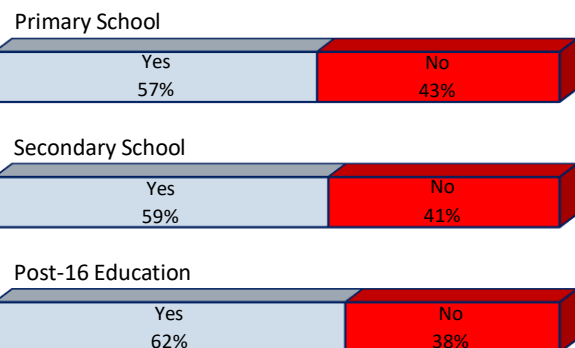
69% of those in primary school told us they are coping with their schoolwork as did 75% of those in post-16 education, however just half of Autistic pupils in secondary education said they could cope with the work. When asked whether they receive enough help in school 57% of primary pupils and 52% of secondary pupils felt they didn't whilst 54% of those in post-16 education say

they were.

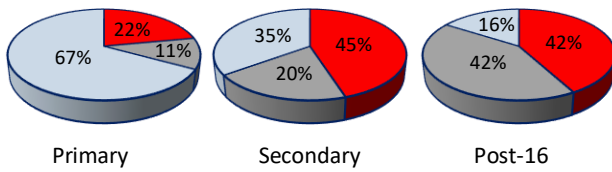
57% of primary school children, 55% of secondary pupils and just 50% of those educated in post-16 settings told us they felt included in school. Those in post-16 education were more aware of feeling different to their peers (92%) than Autistic pupils in secondary settings (80%) and primary aged pupils (79%).

Unstructured times, including play and break times were enjoyed by 60% of pupils in primary school, although 52% of secondary pupils told us they did not enjoy these times of day and they were slightly less problematic for those in post-16 education with 53% telling us they were ok. The majority of young people educated across the sectors told us they had access to a safe and quiet space during the school day although roughly two in five say they do not.

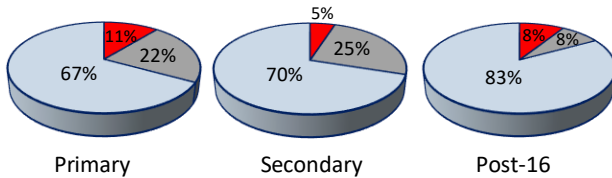
Do you have a safe, quiet space where you can go and relax at school?



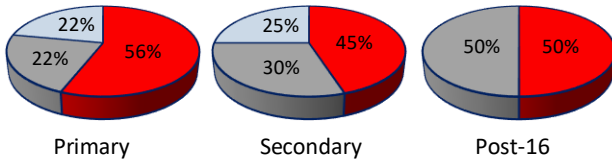
My teachers understand that sensory differences can make some situations in school difficult to cope with.



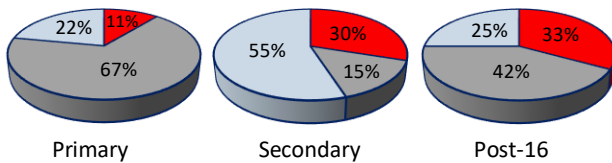
School is often too noisy.



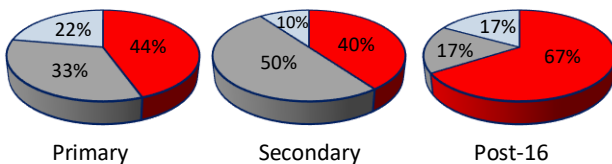
I wish I were in a different school.



I wish I were in a smaller school with less pupils.



I wish I were in a school specifically for Autistic pupils.



Two thirds of Autistic primary school pupils and a quarter of those in secondary felt that their teachers had a good understanding of Autism, whereas just 8% of students in post-16 education say their teachers understood about Autism.

Half of those in post-16 education and a third of primary children feel their teachers understood them, whilst 50% of participants educated in secondary settings tell us their teachers did not understand them.

A third of primary aged pupils feel they get enough support whilst in school, with 44% saying that their teachers knew how best to support them. 45% of Autistic young people at secondary school say they don't get enough support and only 30% suggest their teachers knew how to support them. For those students in post-16 provision, half felt they were getting sufficient support and whilst 42% felt their teachers understood how to support them the same though that they didn't.

Participants in primary schools felt their teachers had a good grasp of how sensory differences could make some situations difficult for them to cope with (67%) this appreciation of sensory difficulties was not so recognised in secondary schools (35%) or post-16 settings (17%). 83% of those attending post-16 settings were most disturbed by the noisy environment compared to 70% of pupils in secondary and 67% in primary schools.

22% of primary school children and a quarter of those in secondary schools told us they wished they were in a different school, whilst none of the students in post-16 education wished to change placement.

When asked if they would rather attend a smaller school with less pupils, half of all participants from secondary schools, 22% of primary school pupils, and a quarter of those in post-16 education said they would. 22% of children in primary settings told us they would like to attend a school specifically for Autistic pupils, 40% of those in secondary schools told us they wouldn't and whilst 17% of young people in post-16 education said they would, three quarters say they would not.



## What parents and carers told us...

**80%**

of parents say that Autism was the primary condition that impacts their child's education

**48%** feel that their child is currently attending the best setting to meet their individual needs.

**1-in-3** with children attending mainstream told us they were unhappy with the setting their child currently attends.

**81%** of parents with children being educated in specialist settings said they were happy with the school.

**70%** said they felt unsupported in finding a suitable school placement for their child.

**18%** told us their Local Authority had discussed suitable placements available in the area.

**35%** say their child was receiving no additional support in school.

**34%** of parents whose children had a Statement of Educational Need say their child did not receive all the support detailed in the document.

**71%** felt their child needed more support if they were to reach their full potential.

**26%** thought their child had no friends at school.

**71%** of parents say their child really wants to make friends but struggles to connect with their peers.

**23%** told us their child had faced exclusion at school.

**63%** of parents were happy with how educators interact with their children.

**31%** of parents were unhappy with their interactions with school management.

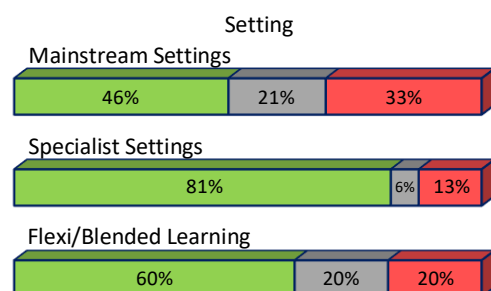
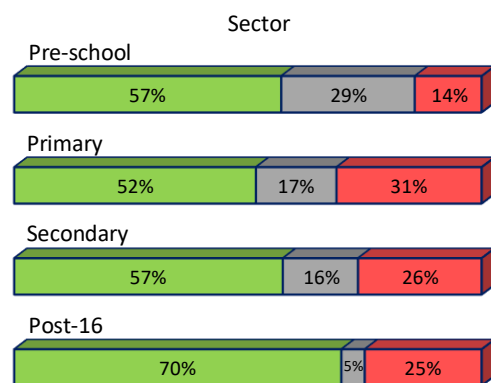
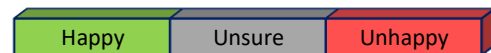
## What parents told us about their satisfaction with their child's current placement.

56% of parents told us they were happy with the school their child currently attends, however 28% said they were not, and 1-in-10 reported being very unhappy. Whilst parents of boys were equally as happy as those with daughters (55%) a higher proportion of girls' parents reported being unhappy (33%:27%).

For the youngest Autistic learners, 57% of their parents were happy with the pre-school provision they were attending, with only 14% reporting they were unhappy. 52% of parents of primary school pupils were happy, however 31% told us they were not. For those with children attending secondary education 57% were happy but 26% were unhappy, the sector parents were most happy with was post-16 provision with 70% telling us they were happy, however a quarter said they were unhappy.

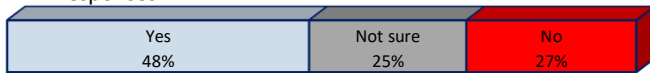
Less than half (46%) of parents with children in mainstream education reported being happy with their school and a third said they were unhappy. 81% of those with children educated in specialist settings were happy, with 60% being very happy, just 13% reported being unhappy. Parents whose children were being educated through a flexi/blended pathway were generally happy with the provision (60%), whilst 20% say they were not happy with the provision for their children.

I am happy with the school my child currently attends.



Do you think your child is currently in the best setting to suit their individual needs?

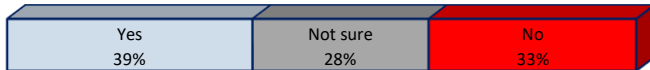
All responses



Boys



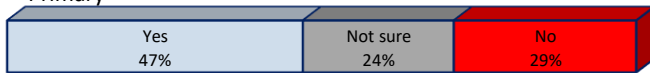
Girls



Pre-school



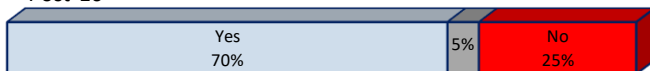
Primary



Secondary



Post-16



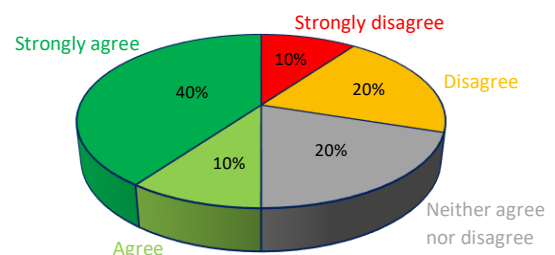
48% of parents felt that the school their child currently attends was the best placement to suit their individual needs, with more than 1-in-4 telling us that their child's current school was not the best setting to meet their needs. 28% strongly agreed that their child's school was meeting their needs, yet 13% strongly disagreed.

Parents of Autistic boys were almost twice as likely to be satisfied that their child's needs were being met than those with daughters. 51% of boys' parents felt their current placement was suitably meeting their needs however 39% of Autistic girls' parents feel the current school was meeting their daughters' needs and 1-in-3 telling us that their needs were not being met satisfactorily.

57% of parents with Autistic infants attending pre-school settings told us they were not satisfied that the settings were meeting their children's needs. Whilst 47% of those with children in primary settings and 49% with secondary school children felt the current placement was suitable for their child's individual needs. 70% of parents whose children were attending post-16 education provision agreed that their child was in the best setting to meet their needs.

64% of participants with children currently being educated through a flexi/blended learning pathway generally felt this approach was the most appropriate way to meet their child's individual needs. 40% were strongly in favour of the mixed methods style of education, however 30% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that this educational delivery was the most suitable approach for their child.

My child's current flexi/blended learning pathway is the best approach to meet their needs.



69% of all parents said they did not feel they received enough support in finding a suitable placement for their child, 77% of those with children in mainstream education and 51% whose children were in specialist provision.

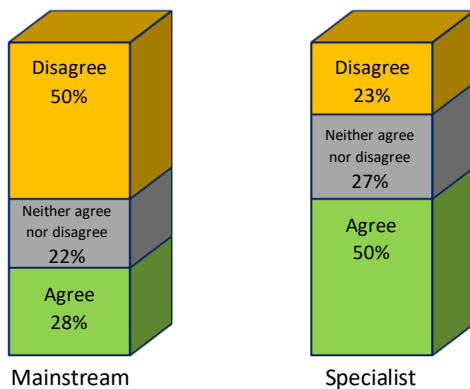
82% say their Local Authority did not discuss the different school placements available, this was as high as 89% for those with children in mainstream but was as low as 65% when children attend specialist settings.

# Mainstream or Special Education?

Just over 1-in-4 (28%) of all the participating parents and carers felt mainstream was the best place for their child's education, whilst just under a half disagreed that their child would be best placed in mainstream settings.

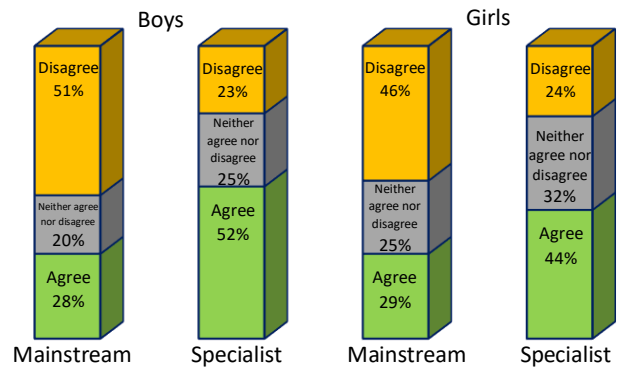
By comparison a half of all parents of Autistic learners felt education within a specialist setting would be the most suitable provision for their child, with just 23% disagreeing that their child would be better placed in a specialist education setting.

I think that mainstream education/specialist provision is best for my child.



52% of the parents of Autistic boys feel that specialist education provision would be best for their sons, whilst 28% shared a preference towards a mainstream education.

I think that mainstream education/specialist provision is best for my child.



29% of girls' parents agreed that mainstream education was best for their daughter, whereas 44% told us that they felt specialist education would be a better option.

Only 18% of parents with young children attending pre-school settings felt mainstream was the best place for their child, whilst 55% preferred the idea of a specialist placement. For those whose children were in primary school 62% felt specialist provision was preferable to mainstream (28%). 30% of secondary pupils' parents considered mainstream more suitable and 53% favoured specialist provision. 46% of participants with children in post-16 provision feel specialist settings would suit their child best, whilst 1-in-4 considered mainstream more appropriate.



### *Children currently in mainstream education.*

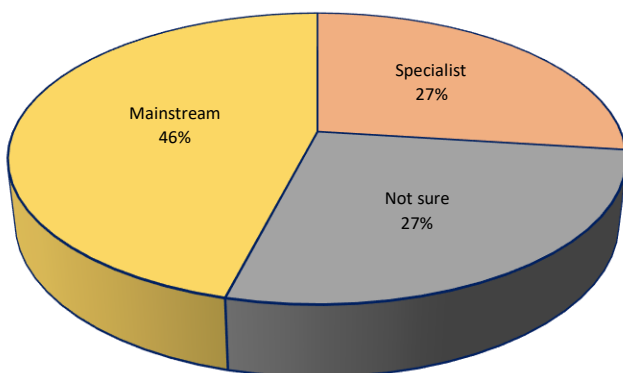
56% of participating parents and carers were representing Autistic children and young people being educated in mainstream settings. 37% of these parents told us that they felt the mainstream school their child was currently attending was the best setting to meet their individual needs, however 30% considered that current placement was not best meeting the individual needs of their child.

Less than half (46%) of all parents with children attending mainstream schools considered mainstream to be the best suitable setting for their child whilst more than 1-in-4 (27%) felt that specialist settings would offer their child a more appropriate environment for learning.

52% of the parents were satisfied with their interactions with mainstream setting staff, yet 32% told us they were dissatisfied. Participants were slightly more satisfied with staff's interactions with their children (54%), however 28% still reported being dissatisfied with how mainstream staff interacted with their children.

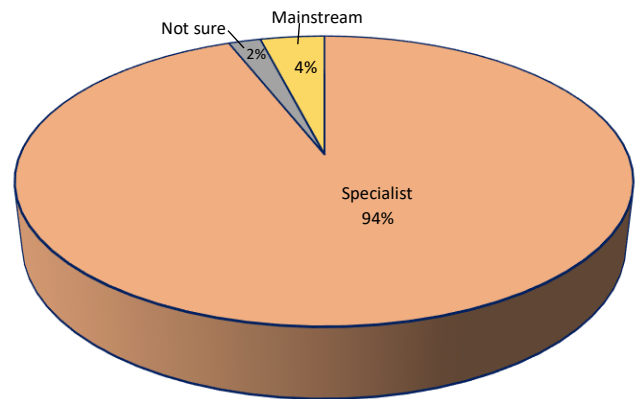
Which type of education provision do you think would best suit your child and their individual needs?

Children currently educated in mainstream settings



Which type of education provision do you think would best suit your child and their individual needs?

Children currently attending specialist provisions



### *Children currently attending specialist provisions.*

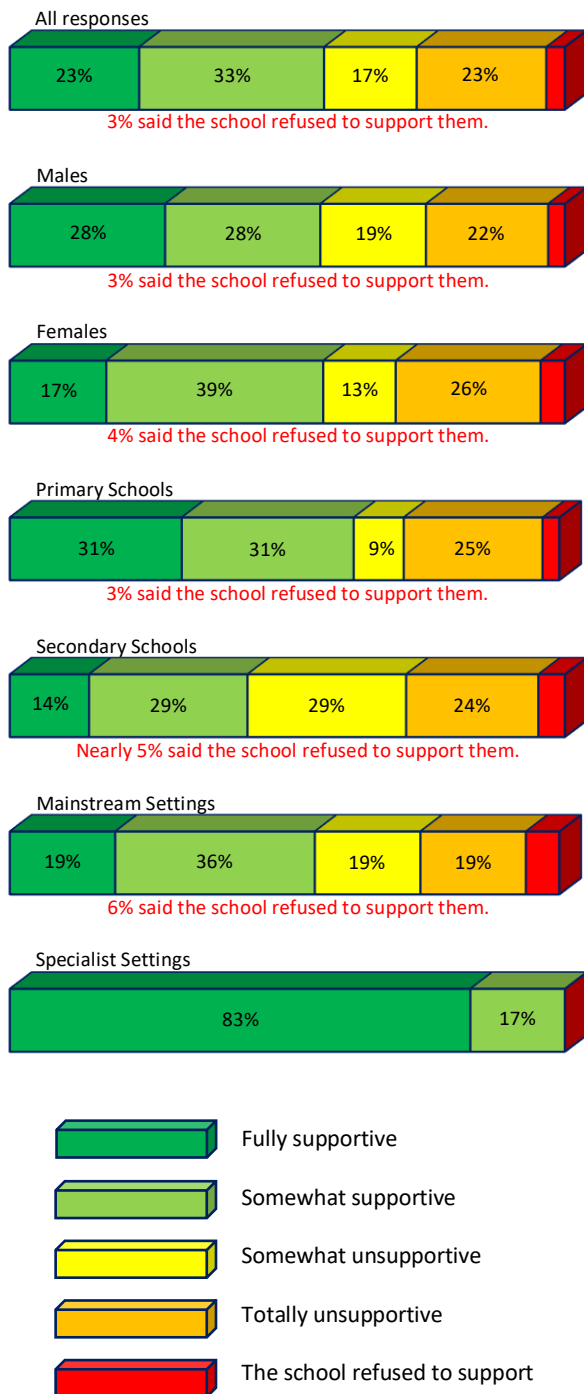
30% of all participants in the parent survey told us their children were receiving their education in specialist provision settings. Nearly three quarters (72%) of these parents felt that the current specialist setting was the best place to ensure their child's individual needs were being met and just 14% feel their children's needs were not being best met in their present school placement.

94% of parents and carers of Autistic children and young people currently being educated within specialist provisions felt a specialist setting was the most suitable placement for their children, with only 4% telling us they thought their child would be more suited to a mainstream education.

Overall, 86% of the parents of pupils attending specialist settings were satisfied with their contact with the staff, just 6% told us they were not satisfied with these interactions. 88% say they were content with how the staff at their child's specialist setting interacted with their child, 4% of respondents felt dissatisfied with how setting staff interacted with their children.



How supportive do you feel your child's school has been in opening the gateway to access diagnostic services?



### Accessing diagnostic pathways

Parents who told us that their child was currently on the diagnostic pathway were asked how supportive their child's school had been in initiating diagnostic processes and opening the gateway to the diagnostic pathways.

98% of the parents responded with 57% suggesting their child's school had been supportive of the referral onto the diagnostic pathway, however 43% felt unsupported with 3% saying the school refused to support a referral.

Parents of boys found schools more willing to fully support the initiation of the diagnostic process (28%) than those with daughters (17%), although overall support was more aligned (56%:57%) however just over 4% of girls' parents told us the school had refused their support compared to slightly under 3% in parents of boys.

Parental reports suggest there are significant differences in the likelihood of gaining support depending on the age of the child, especially in which sector they are educated. Pupils in primary schools whose parents wish to embark on the diagnostic journey are twice as likely to gain the support of the school than those who start the process whilst in secondary school. For those in primary settings 57% had the support of the school whilst 3% were refused any support, meanwhile 57% of the parents of secondary school pupils felt the school to be unsupportive and almost 5% were refused support.

All parents with children already attending specialist settings said their schools had been supportive, with 83% saying they felt the school was fully supportive of their child being entered onto the Autism diagnostic pathway. Mainstream settings were generally supporting of the process, 19% of parents saying they had the full support of their child's school. However, 44% felt the school had not supported them with nearly 6% telling us that they had been refused support from their child's school.



## What educators told us...

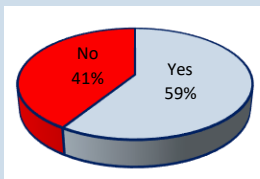
**51%** of educators told us they have experience of Autism outside of their professional role.

**92%** of education professionals have experienced working with Autistic children and young people.

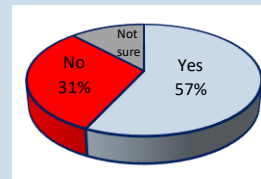
**68%** told us they were currently working with Autistic pupils.

### Information sharing

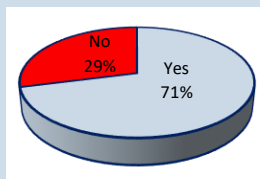
Did you have the opportunity to meet the pupil before working with them?



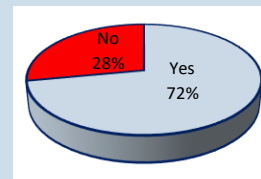
Do you feel you were given enough information about the pupil?



Were appropriate strategies known to be effective with the pupil shared in advance?



Were you made aware of specific triggers known to upset the pupil, in advance?



**79%** of education professionals told us they felt well supported by their school/employer, whilst working with Autistic pupils.

11% felt unsupported

**39%** of educators said they felt unsupported by their Local Authority whilst working with Autistic children and young people.

35% felt supported

**42%** told us they were satisfied with the support received from outside agencies when they were working with Autistic pupils.

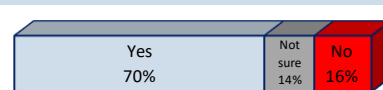
39% were not satisfied

### Autism related training

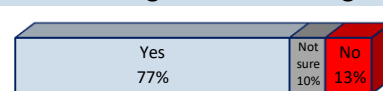
**1-in-4** educators say they have not received any Autism related training provided by their employers. **65%** said they feel their employer provides enough Autism related training. **57%** told us they have independently undertaken their own Autism related training.

### Knowledge and understanding

Do you feel you have enough knowledge about Autism?



Do you feel you have enough understanding about Autism?



### Access to resources

**59%** told us they have enough access to resources to support them whilst working with Autistic pupils, but **41%** said they were not sure or did not know where to access resources.

## Teachers

Almost 2% of teachers who took part in the educator survey told us they were Autistic, closely mirroring the percentage of pupils reported as being Autistic across Wales.

51% say they have experience of Autism outside their professional role and 94% said they have taught an Autistic pupil, with 68% of those currently working with an Autistic student.

64% said they had been given an opportunity to meet and get to know the pupil before they started working with them, 31% felt they hadn't received enough information about the student in advance. Three quarters told us that they were informed of appropriate strategies known to be effective with the Autistic young person whilst just over a quarter say they weren't made aware of specific triggers known to upset the child.

85% of teachers felt supported by their school, when working with Autistic students, 43% feel they were not supported sufficiently by their Local Authority and 46% thought they had been adequately supported by outside agencies.

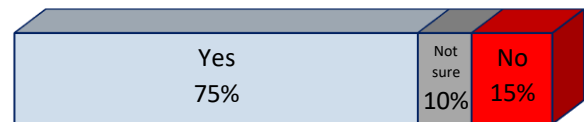
More than 20% told us they had not received any Autism related training provided by their employer, however 85% of those who had said their training had occurred within the past 5 years. 72% feel their employer provided sufficient training and 57% had independently undertaken training to improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

28% suggested they didn't have enough resources available to them to support Autistic pupils effectively. 88% said they would like to access more resources however 36% said they were unsure or did not know where they could access more resources to support them in their current role, whilst teaching Autistic students.

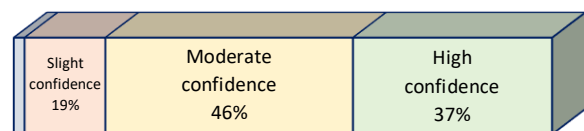
Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about Autism?



Do you feel you have enough general understanding about Autism?

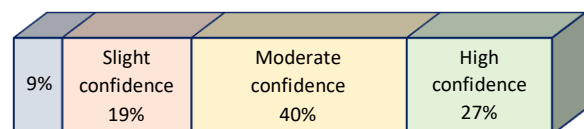


How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an Autistic pupil?



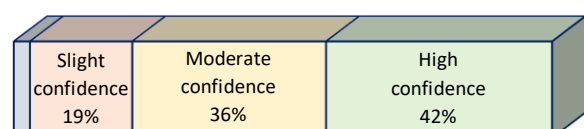
2% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support the family of an Autistic pupil?



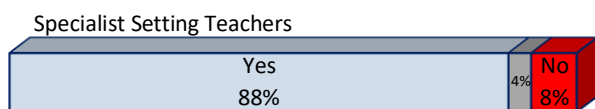
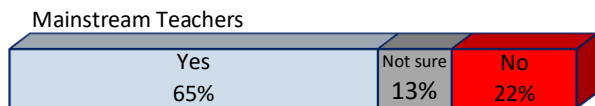
9% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying Autistic related traits and behaviours?



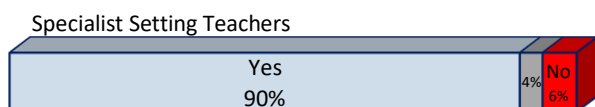
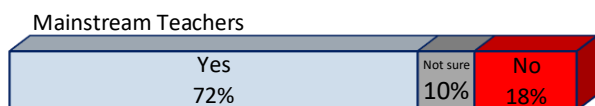
3% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about Autism?



\*8% of teachers working in specialist Autism education settings felt they didn't have enough detailed knowledge of Autism

Do you feel you have enough general understanding about Autism?

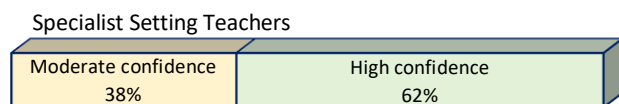


\*4% of teachers working in specialist Autism education settings felt they didn't have enough detailed understanding of Autism

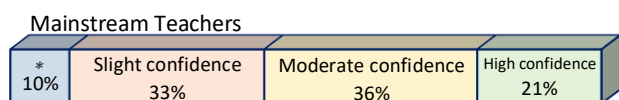
How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an Autistic pupil?



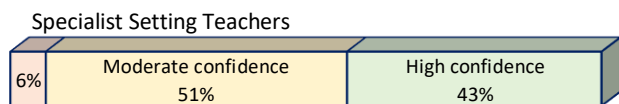
\*2% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence



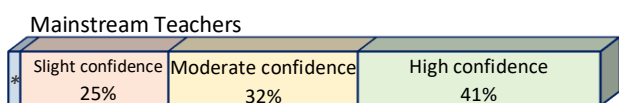
How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support the family of an Autistic pupil?



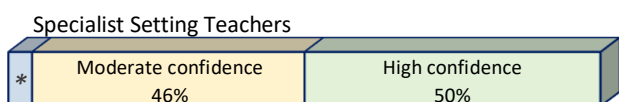
\*10% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence



How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying Autistic related traits and behaviours?



\*2% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence



\*4% of respondents indicated they have NO confidence

## Teachers in mainstream and specialist settings

63% of teachers who responded to the survey worked in mainstream settings, 33% were working in specialist settings.

83% of mainstream teachers told us they felt supported by their school when they were working with Autistic pupils compared to 94% of teachers in specialist settings.

49% of teachers in specialist settings feel their Local Authority provided enough support, whilst 36% felt unsupported by the Authority.

In mainstream schools 45% of teachers felt unsupported by the Local Authority compared to 35% that said their Authority provided sufficient support.

Outside agencies were thought to provide enough support by 39% of mainstream teachers and 62% of teachers employed in specialist settings.

74% of teachers working in specialist Autism settings told us they received no Autism related training from their employers before starting in the role, however, 74% also said their employers provided them with regular updated Autism related training.

85% of teachers working in specialist settings and 77% of those in mainstream said their employers had provided them Autism related training.

73% of mainstream teachers felt their schools provided them with enough Autism related training, whilst 19% of teachers in specialist settings thought their employers could provide them with more Autism related training.

76% of teaching staff from specialist settings and 48% in mainstream have independently undertaken training to help improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

## Support staff

46% of education support staff told us they have experience of Autism outside of their professional role, and 91% say they have worked with Autistic children and young people.

52% of those who have worked with Autistic learners say they had an opportunity to meet and get to know the individual before starting to work with them. Less than half felt they were given enough information about the pupil in advance, 61% said effective strategies were shared and two thirds were informed of triggers that were known to upset the child.

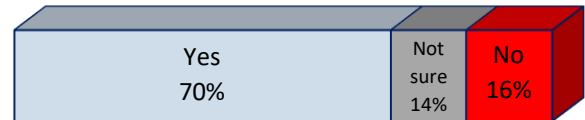
77% told us they have received Autism related training, with 85% saying this training was within the last five years. 31% felt their schools were not offering enough Autism related training and 57% said they have independently taken courses to improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

71% of school support staff feel they have enough general knowledge about Autism, whilst 78% think they have sufficient understanding of Autism.

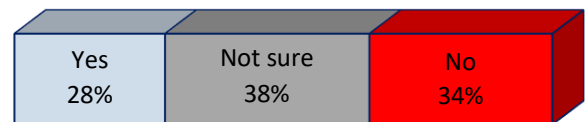
1-in-4 respondents suggest they don't have enough resources available to them, 91% would like to access more resources and 45% did not know or were unsure where they could access additional resources to support them, whilst working with Autistic pupils.



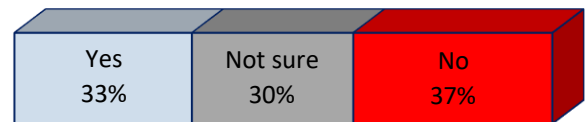
Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your school whilst working with Autistic pupils?



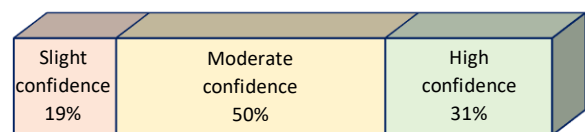
Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from the Local Authority whilst working with Autistic pupils?



Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from outside agencies whilst working with Autistic pupils?

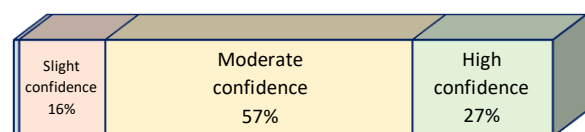


How confident are you that you would have the knowledge and understanding to support an Autistic pupil?



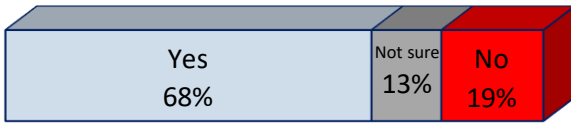
None of the respondents indicated they have NO confidence

How confident are you that you would be able to identify if a pupil was displaying Autistic related traits and behaviours?

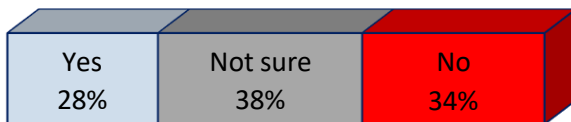


One respondent indicated they have NO confidence

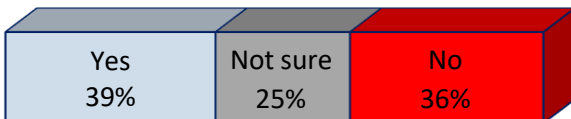
Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from your school whilst working with Autistic pupils?



Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from the Local Authority whilst working with Autistic pupils?



Do you feel you are/were getting enough support from outside agencies whilst working with Autistic pupils?

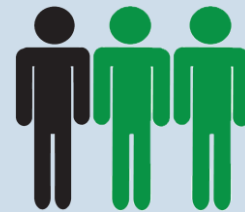


## 1-2-1 support staff

78% of education support staff say they have at some point in their career provided 1-2-1 support to an Autistic pupil.

44% of those who have said they had no detailed knowledge of Autism before they took on the role of supporting an Autistic pupil 1-2-1.

61% told us they did not receive any Autism related training in advance of them working 1-2-1 with an Autistic child or young person.



**1-in-3** support staff who have worked as a 1-2-1 support for an Autistic pupil had no prior knowledge of Autism and received no Autism related training before starting in the role.

72% said they did have some form of Autism related training whilst they were working 1-2-1 with an Autistic student.

56% felt their employer provided them with sufficient training although 32% feel their employer could provide them with more Autism related training.

63% of staff who have provided 1-2-1 support to Autistic pupils told us that they have independently undertaken their own training to improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

## Agency and supply staff

92% of education agency and supply staff have experience of working with Autistic pupils, and 67% told us they have worked as a 1-2-1 support with an Autistic pupil whilst on supply.

50% say they have had times where they were not made aware that they would be working with Autistic pupils before arriving at a school, although all participating agency and supply staff said they have experienced occasions where they were given this information in advance.

1-in-3 felt they were not given enough information about the young person they would be working with in advance, however, 42% suggested that they were given sufficient information upon arrival at the setting.

75% told us that they were made aware of appropriate strategies known to be effective with the individual pupil and all had been given information relating to specific triggers known to upset the young person.

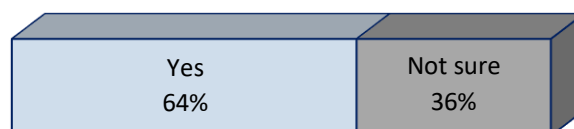
1-in-4 said there were occasions where they felt unsupported by the school in which they were working, whilst working with Autistic pupils.

83% of agency education staff said they had received Autism related training provided by their employers within the last 5 years. Half felt their employer provided them with sufficient Autism related training, whilst  $\frac{3}{4}$  say they have independently undertaken their own training to improve their knowledge and understanding of Autism.

One education agency supply staff member said...

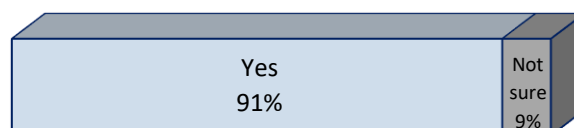
*"I wish to share that all school staff should have compulsory ASD awareness training. It is very difficult treading the line of doing the very best I can for the autistic child in a mainstream class when other staff in the class do not get provided with appropriate Autism understanding training."*

Do you feel you have enough general knowledge about Autism?



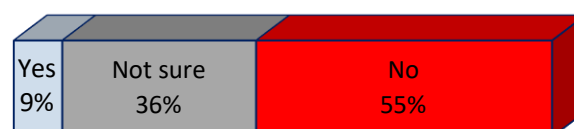
None of the respondents selected the NO option

Do you feel you have enough general understanding about Autism?

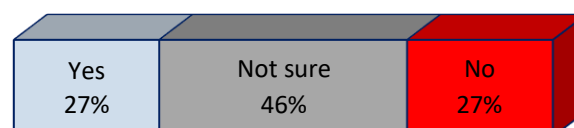


None of the respondents selected the NO option

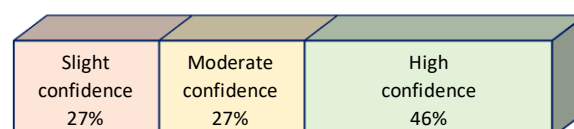
Do you feel you have enough access to resources to improve your knowledge and understanding about Autism, and support you in your current role?



Do you know where to access resources to improve your knowledge and understanding about Autism, and support you in your current role?



How confident are you that you have the knowledge and understanding to support an Autistic pupil?



None of the respondents indicated they have NO confidence



## ***Educated at home – what parents told us...***

**4%** of parents who took part in the survey say their children were being educated at home.

**86%** felt educating their child at home was the best approach to meet their individual needs.

**79%** told us the decision to educate their child at home was their preference.

**86%** of young people educated at home had previously been educated in a mainstream setting, **36%** had attended a specialist setting.

**36%** of parents whose children are educated at home felt their child might be better placed in a specialist setting.

**50%** told us they expected their child to continue being educated at home for the remainder of their education.

**93%** said their Local Authority had not discussed the different placements available to their children.

**79%** of parents who decided to educate their children at home felt unsupported in making the decision by their Local Authority.

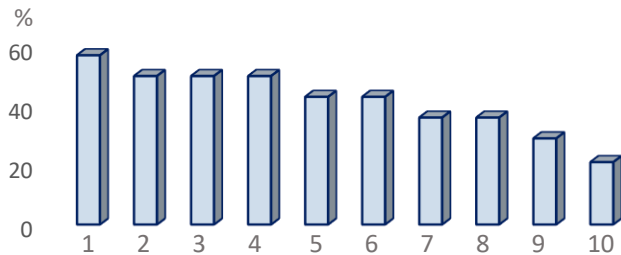
**50%** told us their Local Authority had supported the transition from setting to education at home.

**57%** of young people educated at home have a Statement of Educational Need.

**38%** have provision within their Statement for being educated at home.

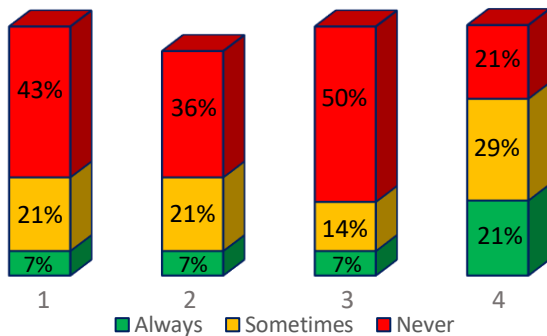
**63%** do not receive all the support prescribed within their Statement.

Areas of support that parents feel their child needs but does not currently have access to.

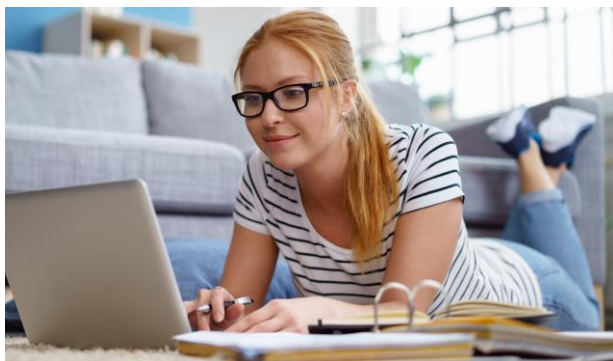


- |                                     |                                      |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 Mental Health Support - 57%       | 6 Counselling - 43%                  |
| 2 Specialist Support Staff - 50%    | 7 Access to Sensory Room - 36%       |
| 3 Social Skills Interventions - 50% | 8 Travel Training - 36%              |
| 4 Music Therapy - 50%               | 9 Occupational Therapy - 29%         |
| 5 Positive Play/Play Therapy - 43%  | 10 Speech and Language Therapy - 21% |

Communication between home and Local Authority



- When discussing your child's education with the Local Authority, do you feel they listen to your point-of-view?
- When discussing your child's education with the Local Authority, do you feel they understand your point-of-view?
- When discussing your child's education with the Local Authority, do you feel they respect your point-of-view?
- When discussing your child's education with the Local Authority, do you they communicate using language and vocabulary that you understand?



**What led you to make the decision to educate your child at home?**

*"He spent more time suspended because of his behaviour, so wasn't having an education"*

*"The placement 'broke down', the school did not implement any of the strategies needed for my child to thrive"*

*"Child heard teachers laughing about her exclusion and since then has refused to attend school"*

*"Unhappiness, mental wellbeing and bullying"*

*"My child was bullied, and the school isolated him, not the bullies. They told us there was nowhere in the school for him"*

*"His anxiety was at a level where he was close to breakdown, nobody in the school listened to me because he sat under his desk all day and didn't cause any trouble. He was having panic attacks and started talking about killing himself when he was only 7"*

## ***Educated at home***

71% of parents said their child was happy being educated at home.

50% of parents whose children are educated at home feel their child receives the right level of support to help them succeed, however 71% told us that they felt they didn't get enough support to help their child.

58% said their child needed some form of mental health support that they were not currently accessing.

36% told us they are in regular communication with the Local Authority regarding their child's education, yet 93% felt there was not enough communication with their LA.

36% of children being educated at home have experienced school exclusion through internal 'isolation' and fixed term external exclusion. 7% have been permanently excluded from an education setting.

90% of those who attended a school prior to being educated at home had been the victim of bullying, with 66% of parents considering their child was bullied for being Autistic.

## Statement of Educational Need

51% of the participants in the survey of parents and carers said their child has a Statement issued by the Local Authority, closely matching the 54% of Autistic pupils with a Statement across Wales.

Parental reports suggest Statements were issued to 41% of Autistic pupils in mainstream education, 87% of pupils attending specialist provisions, 64% of those accessing a flexi/blended learning pathway and 57% of those being educated at home. 56% of young people educated through a flexi/blended pathway and 38% of children educated at home have these approaches prescribed within their Statement.

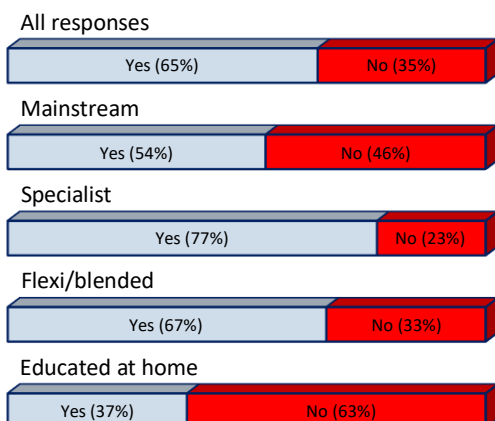
74% of respondents told us that Autism was the primary need recorded in their child's Statement.

*A Statement of Educational Need is a document issued by a Local Authority, following a Statutory Assessment process. The 'Statement' is legally binding, setting out the individual needs of a child and how they should be met within their education. The document will set out long-term targets and indicate appropriate strategies for achieving short-term incremented steps towards reaching them. An annual review involving a multi-agency approach is held to assess the effectiveness of the document and identify where any changes are required. In Wales, under the implementation of the new ALN code, Statements are gradually being phased out, to be replaced by Individual Development Plans (IDPs).*

More than a third (35%) of parents told us that their child was not receiving all of the support detailed within their Statement.

In mainstream settings 54% reported their child to be receiving all the specified support. 20% of parents with Autistic children in pre-school settings, 37% in primary, 59% in secondary and 57% in post-16 reported their child was not in receipt of all the support as detailed within their Statement. Data suggests that mainstream primary school pupils are 2½ times more likely to get all the support they are entitled to than those in mainstream secondary education. Two thirds of pupils attending specialist provisions are reportedly receiving all the support as set out within their Statement. Parents of pupils attending both specialist primary (80%) and secondary (81%) report a high percentage of pupils accessing the prescribed support, however there was a 50-50 split for those young people attending specialist post-16 provisions.

Does your child receive all the support detailed within their Statement of Educational Need.



**73%** of parents with children who currently have a Statement of Educational Need said they have not yet been informed of the upcoming changes in the provision of ALN support.

## Individual Education Plans

*An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a formal, structured document to help teaching staff plan and prepare a child's education. The IEP should be unique to the child, reflecting their individual needs and must help guide what is taught, exactly how it should be delivered and how often. It should set out short-term achievable targets and strategies for reaching them particular to the child, over and above what may be available to the whole class, which are kept under regular review. In Wales, under the implementation of the new ALN code, IEPs are gradually being phased out, to be replaced by Individual Development Plans (IDPs).*

65% of respondents to the parent survey told us their child had an IEP, just under a quarter said they didn't and 11% were not sure if they had an IEP or not.

36% of Autistic children attending pre-school settings, 58% in primary and secondary schools, and 42% of young people in post-16 education settings have an IEP.

In mainstream education settings 52% had an IEP whilst a quarter did not. 76% of Autistic pupils in specialist provisions were said to have an IEP, with only 6% being without. Parents of 64% of those currently on a flexi/blended learning pathway told us their child had an IEP, a third said the document covers the various settings they attend. 21% of young people being educated at home have an IEP, two thirds of them say the Local Authority help them to maintain the document.

60% of parents said they thought their child's IEP was reviewed on a regular basis, however 1-in-5 felt that it was not. Less than half (47%) of parents with children attending mainstream education compared to 80% of those

in specialist provisions say there is a regular review of the document, whilst 22% of those educated through a flexi/blended approach and a third of those educated at home felt the IEP is not reviewed regularly enough.

55% told us that their child is involved in the reviewing of their IEP, less than half of those in primary settings (48%), nearly 60% of those in secondary and three quarters of those attending post-16 placements.

65% said that they were often involved in the review of their child's IEP, 59% in mainstream in comparison to 76% in specialist education.

54% of parents felt the targets set within their child's IEP were realistic and achievable, whilst 18% disagreed. The level to which parents agreed reduced slightly as their child moved through the sectors, 100% in pre-school, 54% in primary, 51% in secondary and 50% of those with children educated in post-16 settings. Nearly three quarters of those with children in specialist settings feel their IEP targets were achievable compared to 41% of those whose children were in mainstream.

## Areas of support

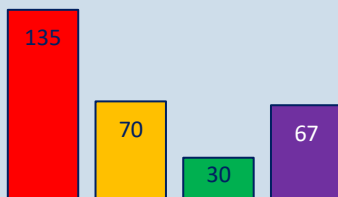
Parents were asked about different types of support to find out what their children were currently receiving or what they thought their children should be receiving, whilst in school.

Participants were given 4 response options:

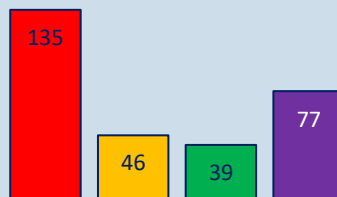
**No access currently, but it is needed** - **Limited Access but more is needed** - **Sufficient Access** - **No access needed**

**No access currently, but it is needed** - The five areas where most parents felt their child needed support that currently was not made available to them were:

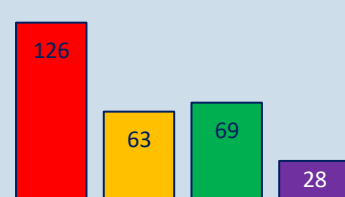
Mental Health Support (45%)



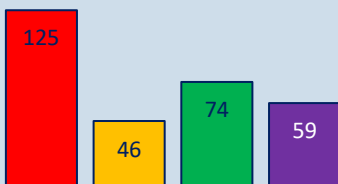
Travel Training (45%)



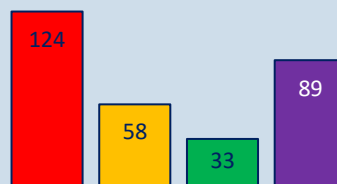
Peer Mentoring/Buddying (44%)



Access to Sensory Room (41%)



Occupational Therapy (41%)

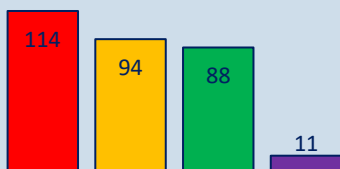


The next five areas were:

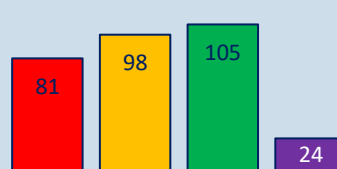
General Life Skill Development	123 (41%)
Road Safety Guidance	119 (40%)
Social Skills Interventions	114 (37%)
Counselling	112 (37%)
Positive Play/Play Therapy	100 (33%)

**Limited Access but more is needed** - The five most common areas where parents felt their child needed more support than they were currently receiving were:

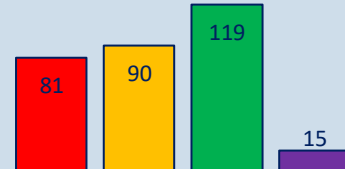
Social Skills Interventions (31%)



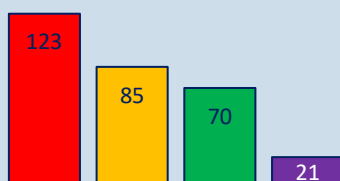
Specialist Support Staff (30%)



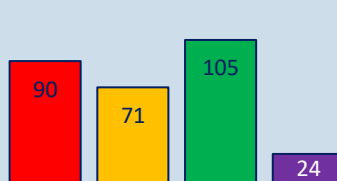
Access to quiet room or safe space (30%)



General life skill development (28%)



Support during unstructured times (24%)



The next five areas were:

Mental Health Support	70 (23%)
Peer Mentoring/Buddying	63 (22%)
Counselling	61 (20%)
Road Safety Guidance	60 (20%)
Occupational Therapy	58 (19%)

## Educational Support

52% of children and young people felt they did not get enough help in school.  
56% for those educated in mainstream compared to 30% of those in specialist settings.

42% suggested they were unable to cope with the work given to them in school.  
45% of pupils in mainstream, and just 20% of those in specialist settings.

42% of Autistic pupils felt their teachers did not know how to support them.

35% of parents told us their child received no additional support in school, girls (61% access additional support) are less likely to have support than boys (66%).

Almost 2-in-5 primary school pupils and a third of those in secondary and post-16 education receive no additional support.

According to parental reports 27% of pupils attending mainstream settings currently do not have any additional provision in place.

*"There is a huge lack of support for children who are academically able and non-disruptive, like girls with ASD"*

*"...he gets forgotten, just because my child has no learning difficulties, it doesn't mean he doesn't struggle"*

*"I was told that secondary schools don't get funding for support staff"*

*"Neurodiverse children deserve input from trained support staff...there should be a minimal level of training"*

*"It is heart-breaking to be told there isn't enough funding to implement all the support identified in your child's IDP"*

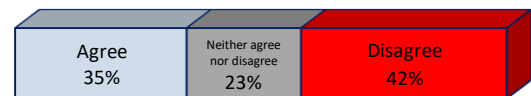
*"I don't like asking for help I'm quiet, so they leave me to it"*

*"I felt like I sometimes got a lot of help but sometimes I didn't"*

*"My helper is great he knows me well and can see when I need help"*

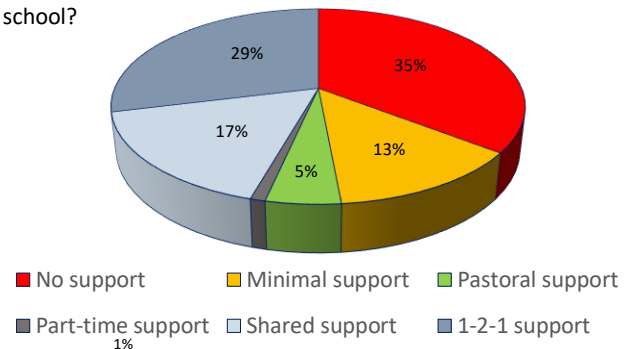
*"It's hard, my teachers don't see I am struggling"*

My teachers know how to support me.

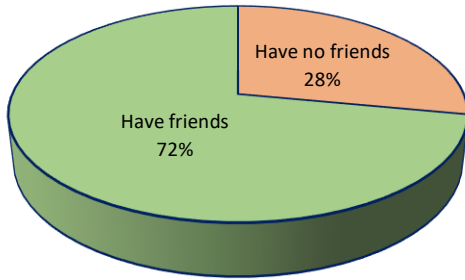


*"Work can be a struggle to get my head around I find it hard to concentrate, some subjects were ok, but in others I struggled and wasn't really getting the help I needed"*

What level of additional support does your child receive in school?



Do you have friends in school?



*"I found it hard to make friends"*

*"I have one close friend, sometimes when they are not in school it is lonely"*

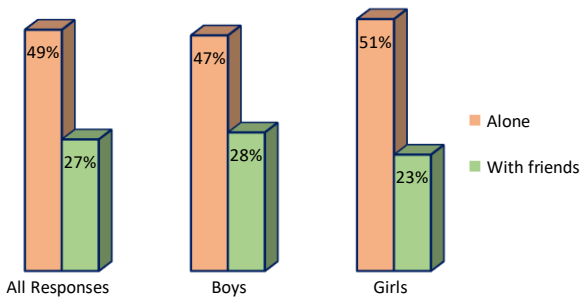
*"I only had friends for the last two years of my school life"*

*"I have a very small group of friends but am often side-lined by them so they can talk to their other friends instead of me"*

*"I only felt happy with my friends in school...I constantly felt threatened by other pupils"*

*"I wish I had more friends"*

Generally, my child is happiest when alone/with friends.



## Peer Relationships in School

28% of young people who responded to the survey told us they have no friends in school.

Parent responses indicate that boys are marginally less likely to have friends than girls with 68% of boys compared to 64% of girls having either no friends or just one close friend.

Age also played a role in determining whether their children made friends with ¼ of primary school aged children having no friends compared to 2-in-5 of those in post-16 education.

Parents told us that 1-in-3 children and young people educated in specialist settings had a good group of friends, slightly higher than the 31% of those attending mainstream settings.

71% of parents felt their child wanted to make friends but struggled to connect with their peers, with girls (78%) being more inclined to yearn for positive relationships with their peers than boys (69%).

Just over a quarter of parents said their child was happiest when with friends, and just below half said their child was happiest when alone.



## Bullying

76% of Autistic children and young people told us that they have been bullied in school.

36% of Autistic pupils currently in primary school settings told us they have experienced being bullied, by the time they are educated in secondary settings 87% report being the victim of bullying at school.

Gender differences appear to have little impact on the possibility of encountering bullying with 77% of boys and 74% of girls reporting being bullied at school, whilst 80% of participants who identify as non-binary said they had been bullied.

The type of setting in which a child is educated plays a role on the chances of experiencing bullying, 76% of pupils in mainstream education compared to 70% in specialist settings reported being bullied.

Half of the parents think their child was considered an easy target for bullies, whilst 62% felt their child was targeted by bullies for being Autistic.

98% of parents who were aware of their child being bullied reported this to the school.

56% felt the school did not take their concerns seriously, 60% felt the school did not take appropriate action in response and 62% said the bullying continued despite the school being made aware.

Responses suggest that parents consider schools do not take complaints of bullying seriously or act accordingly in response to concerns, with specialist settings performing worse than mainstream.

*"I was told my child needed to be more resilient and ignore or stay away from the bullies"*

*"The school blamed my son; said he was too sensitive and literal to take jokes and rough play"*

*"...concerns get ignored so a school can look good on paper without considering the effect on a child's mental health"*

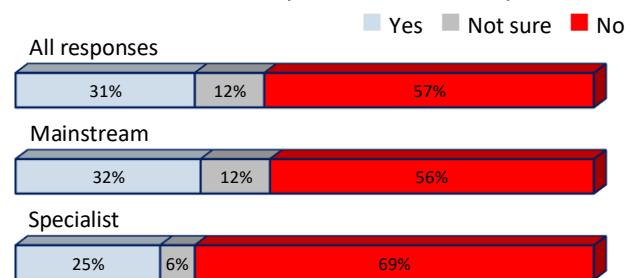
*"Other children don't want to talk to me, sometimes they say I am fat and call me names"*

*"Me and another Autistic student I knew faced a lot of ableism in school from both teachers and students"*

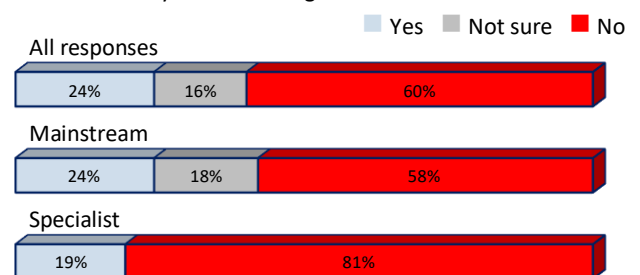
*"I was bullied in primary school and most of secondary. I didn't enjoy playing because kids never accommodated for me"*



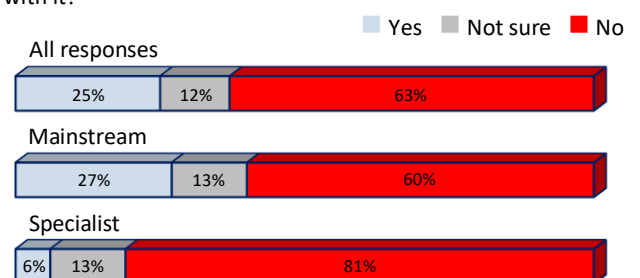
Where you reported bullying issues to the school, do you think the school listened and took your concerns seriously?



Do you think the school acted appropriately in response to your concerns about your child being bullied?



Did the bullying stop, as a result of you asking the school to deal with it?



## School exclusions

23% of parents told us that their child had faced a school exclusion, either internally by isolation or through external fixed-term or permanent exclusions.

98% of those represented children who were excluded at mainstream settings, 14% from specialist settings, with 12% having experienced exclusion in both.

78% of those excluded were male (1-in-4 of all boys) and 20% female (18% of all girls). 24% of Autistic pupils who have been suspended or excluded from school, either internally or externally, temporarily, or permanently were aged 10 or younger, with the youngest being 6 years old. 31% were of primary school age (14% of all primary pupil parent responses).

*According to parental reports Autistic pupils with comorbid ADHD are 2½ times more likely to be excluded than those without.*

### Internal exclusions

78% of parents who told us their child had been excluded reported their child being internally excluded by being placed in isolation (18% of all respondents).

95% of the pupils isolated faced this in mainstream schools and 19% in specialist provision (11% were isolated in both type of setting). 65% reported their child had been placed in isolation on more than 5 occasions and 37% said

their child endured isolation periods of two whole school days, or longer.

The youngest participant's child placed in isolation was 6 years, with 20% of those having experienced isolation being aged 10 or younger (7% of all pupils aged 6-10 years). 24% of the pupils were isolated in primary school (9% of all Autistic primary pupils). 64% of primary pupils experienced isolation on more than 5 occasions and 27% for periods of two days or longer. The most common reason given by schools for placing primary pupils in isolation was staff being unable to manage the child's behaviours.

78% of those placed in isolation were male (61% of all represented males). 36% experienced periods of isolation lasting two days or longer and 61% had been isolated on 5 or more occasions. Disruptive behaviour and staff being unable to manage behaviour were the reasons most used by school by way of explanation.

Female participants accounted for 20% of those who had experienced being placed in isolation (14% of all girls). 78% were isolated five or more times and 36% had endured isolation periods lasting two whole school days or longer. 89% of parents told us that their daughter's school had used isolation as a result of them not listening to school staff, whilst unacceptable and disruptive behaviours were also commonly given explanations.

## Most common reasons schools have given parents for exclusion of their children.

### Internal exclusions

#### Internal exclusions (All cases)

Disruptive behaviour - 57%  
 Aggressive behaviour towards school staff - 50%  
 Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 50%  
 Unacceptable behaviour - 48%  
 Not listening to the school staff - 48%

20% of all Autistic pupils' internal exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

#### Internal exclusions (Boys)

Disruptive behaviour - 50%  
 Staff unable to manage child's behaviour - 50%  
 Aggressive behaviour towards school staff - 44%  
 Unacceptable behaviour - 39%  
 Not listening to the school staff - 39%

19% of Autistic boys' internal exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

#### Internal exclusions (Primary school)

Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 73%  
 Violent behaviour towards school staff - 55%  
 Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 55%  
 Disruptive behaviour - 55%  
 Violent behaviour towards other pupils - 46%

36% of Autistic primary school pupils' internal exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

#### Internal exclusions (Girls)

Not listening to the school staff - 89%  
 Unacceptable behaviour - 78%  
 Disruptive behaviour - 78%  
 Disobeying school rules - 78%  
 Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 67%

11% of Autistic girls' internal exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

### Fixed term external exclusions

#### Fixed term exclusions (All cases)

Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 52%  
 Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 46%  
 Unacceptable behaviour - 46%  
 Disruptive behaviour - 42%  
 Violent behaviour towards other pupils - 38%

23% of all reported fixed term exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

#### Fixed term exclusions (Boys)

Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 50%  
 Disruptive behaviour - 45%  
 Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 43%  
 Unacceptable behaviour - 40%  
 Violent behaviour towards other pupils - 38%

26% of boys' fixed term exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

#### Fixed term exclusions (Primary school)

Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 65%  
 Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 65%  
 Violent behaviour towards school staff - 53%  
 Violent behaviour towards other pupils - 53%  
 Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils - 47%

47% of Autistic primary school pupils' fixed term exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

#### Fixed term exclusions (Girls)

Unacceptable behaviour - 78%  
 Aggressive behaviours towards school staff - 67%  
 Staff unable to manage child's behaviours - 67%  
 Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils - 56%  
 Not listening to the school staff - 56%

11% of Autistic girls' fixed term exclusions were blamed on staff shortage or lack of available support.

### Permanent exclusions

#### Permanent exclusions (All cases)

Violent behaviour towards school staff  
 Violent behaviour towards other pupils  
 Aggressive behaviours towards school staff  
 Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils  
 Use of bad language directed at staff  
 Unacceptable behaviour  
 Not listening to the school staff  
 Staff unable to manage child's behaviours

*Were all referenced as reasons in 60% of permanent exclusions*

#### Permanent exclusions (Boys and girls)

Violent behaviour towards school staff  
 Violent behaviour towards other pupils  
 Aggressive behaviours towards school staff  
 Aggressive behaviours towards other pupils  
 Use of bad language directed at staff

*The 5 most common reasons given by school for the permanent exclusion of Autistic boys and girls were the same, with each referenced in 67% of boys' and 50% of girls' exclusions.*

#### Permanent exclusions (Primary school)

Violent and aggressive behaviour towards school staff and other pupils was the most common reason for the permanent exclusion of Autistic primary school children, being cited as explanation in 100% of the reported exclusions.

### *Fixed term/temporary external exclusions*

20% of parents told us their child had been temporarily externally excluded by being sent home or asked to stay at home, known as a fixed term exclusion.

15% of those pupils had been given a fixed term exclusion from both mainstream and specialist settings, 98% from mainstream and 19% at specialist provision. 42% of pupils temporarily excluded faced fixed term exclusions on five or more occasions, whilst a third had been excluded for periods of a whole school week or longer. 4% of them were aged just 6 years old, and a quarter were aged 10 years or younger (10% of all participants' children aged between 6 and 10 years). 13% of all respondents whose children were in primary education said their child had been temporarily excluded, 41% on more than five occasions and 35% for periods of a week or more.

81% were boys (22% of all males) with 43% temporarily excluded on five or more occasions and a third for a week or longer. Half of the parents of boys who had experienced fixed term exclusions say the school had given the reason that they were unable to manage their child's behaviours with disruptive behaviour being the second most common reason. 14% of all females represented in this study had been temporarily excluded. A third were removed from school for a week or more, whilst 42% had faced fixed term exclusions five or more times. Schools referenced unacceptable behaviour in 78% of cases whilst 2-in-3 were for aggressive behaviours towards school staff.

52% of parents said they did not receive a written account of the exclusion from the school.



### *Permanent exclusion*

10% of parents who reported that their child had been excluded at school told us they had been permanently excluded (2% of all parental responses).

80% of those were permanently excluded from mainstream schools (2% of those participants educated in mainstream) with 20% being permanently excluded from specialist settings (1% of those educated in specialist provision). The youngest child of a participant to be permanently excluded was 9 years old, with 40% of permanent exclusions happening in primary settings, due to violent and aggressive behaviour towards staff and other pupils.

80% were permanently excluded from one setting, whilst 20% were excluded from two.

2% of all parents of boys said their son had been permanently excluded, two thirds from one school and a third from two. 40% of all those who had faced permanent exclusion were female (3% of all girls who were represented).

80% of parents whose children had been permanently excluded told us they felt supported by their Local Authority in finding suitable alternative provision for their child.

### *About this report*

This report presents the first phase of findings from a study conducted by Swansea University School of Education. The data was collected between April and August 2021 through three online survey questionnaires. In total, responses from 841 individuals were entered into the analysis, 92 Autistic children and young people, 371 of their parents and carers and 378 education professionals, all resident and learning or working in Wales. Both quantitative data (responses to yes/no and multiple-choice questions) and qualitative data (responses to the optional free-text requests for further information) were included within this initial analysis.

Following publication of this preliminary report, further, more detailed analysis will continue and the conclusions of this will direct the remainder of the project, which is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2023.



### *Preliminary conclusions*

For many Autistic children and young people in Wales, negotiating the day-to-day challenges of the education system is an overwhelming experience. Both the students themselves, and their parents have shared their frustrations about many areas that present significant issues in their responses to the surveys.

Whilst educators who took part in the study, largely considered themselves to have a good knowledge and understanding of Autism and the particular difficulties Autistic pupils face, it is clear that parents and pupils share a different viewpoint and feel there to be room for improvement in these areas.

Whilst the majority of Autistic young people told us they enjoyed going to, and were happy when at school, a large proportion told of the heightened anxiety a school day can generate. Those attending specialist settings were notably more content than those in mainstream, and there were also clear gender differences to be found in the experiences discussed. Parental reports also pointed to a significant difference in the experiences of those attending mainstream and specialist settings, with most indicating a greater overall satisfaction with the specialist provision experience.

The author of this report will continue detailed analysis of all responses and endeavour to set out a comprehensive set of conclusions to support any recommendations for moving forward upon completion of this project.





The Swansea University School of Education (SUSE) is determined to be an internationally recognised, but also Welsh, centre for high quality educational research. SUSE is already engaged in a wide range of research activities, including collaborative projects at national and international level.

SUSE aspires to be a leading research centre with a strong focus on policy and practice. It is internationally connected and is establishing itself to be a centre of excellence nationally and internationally.

All SUSE academic staff hold doctorates and are research active. The research profile of the department represents both a breadth and depth of interests within the field of education and those holding more senior posts have an international research profile.

### *Acknowledgements and thanks*

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All the participants who took part in the surveys, your responses have been truly amazing, and those who took the time to share the details of each survey to ensure the project attracted responses from every Local Authority area in Wales.



The Education of Autistic Pupils in Wales  
Preliminary Report 2021

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