

Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Bennett

Living with Autism/Aspergers within the Education System

Autism is a disability, one that cannot be seen but is a disability that is for life. It does not go away or disappear but if managed properly and systems put into place, certainly in the early years, can help these children live a better life.

Without understanding autistic people they are at risk of being isolated and developing mental health problems. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is much more common than many people think. There are around 700,000 people on the autism spectrum in the UK, that's more than 1 in 100. If you include their families, autism is a part of daily life for 2.8 million people.

For young people with ASD their emotional state often captures the essence of the day. A student who is confused, scared and anxious cannot focus on the teacher's tasks or their own learning. For many young people with ASD, anxiety is part of their daily life.

Children with ASD who attend mainstream schools have to put up with daily "bullying", "feeling isolated", "being excluded" and dealing with the stigma that is attached ASD. They can't often clearly articulate their emotional predicament, and may communicate their discomfort in more basic ways such as hitting out, screaming, avoiding situations, running away or closing down, 34% of children with ASD say that the worst thing about being at school is being picked on.

Due to the lack of training in ASD, many teachers expect these children to behave like everyone else, which is impossible. A recent study finds that while the academic provision for children with ASD has "improved tremendously" in recent years, much remains to be done. Practitioners trained in ASD education say that one of the biggest challenges is a lack of knowledge and understanding among schoolteachers. Despite the government's policy of inclusion of pupils with special needs, mainstream schools find it difficult to integrate pupils with ASD. For a child to be successful in mainstream school, the school must want to make the most of every opportunity for the child and include the parents.

Instead of recognising the atypical development of children and young people with ASD, teachers tend to view them through a "typical lens", comparing their behaviour with children who do not have the condition. Some believe they can force autistic children to behave as other pupils do, or that it is a condition that they will grow out of. Many teachers do not realise, for example, that the challenging behaviour can be accompanied by high intelligence.

Children who have Aspergers, which is now ASD have been deemed to be "too bright" for support, and yet "can't work with other children and they struggle to understand some instructions". Autistic pupils make the most progress when teachers provide an individualised programme that addresses specific social, personal and learning difficulties.

It is remarkable that emotional wellbeing and the pursuit of it, although being highly valued for every human being, has received so little attention in the field of ASD. Studies of the effects and outcomes of certain interventions rarely include emotional wellbeing as a desired outcome. Criteria for success in life focuses exclusively on the level of independence and adaptive functioning, not on quality of life and certainly not on the personal experience of emotional wellbeing. Underneath this approach is the assumption that success in life and happiness are based on high levels of independence and adaptive functioning. That assumption should be challenged.

Although ASD is not a mental health condition, people on the autism spectrum are more vulnerable to mental health problems. Research indicates that 70% of children with ASD develop mental health problems and it is vital that intervention is given at an early age. Accurate diagnosis of mental health issues can be challenging in individuals with ASD, yet appropriate treatment is particularly crucial. Psychiatric disorders can worsen autism symptoms, interfere with education and reduce the benefits of behavioral therapies. Some studies suggest that high-functioning individuals with ASD experience particularly high rates of anxiety disorders – perhaps because they're more aware of "not fitting in."

Individuals with ASD may be particularly prone to depression as they enter adolescence and adulthood. Research suggests depression can be particularly difficult to diagnose in those with ASD. Compared to other depressed individuals, those with ASD may be less likely to express their feelings typically used to diagnose depression. These include saying one feels depressed, worthless, unable to concentrate or suicidal. In the absence of such statements, tell-tale signs can include neglect in personal hygiene and other self-care activities.

Autism doesn't just affect children. Autistic children grow up to be autistic adults. While autism is incurable, the right support at the right time can make an enormous difference to both theirs and their family's lives.

This Council resolves:

1. To request the Head of Schools and Families to write to all schools in Sefton to encourage all of them to become actively involved in the World Autism Awareness Week from the 26th March 2018 to the 2nd April 2018, details of which can be obtained from the National Autistic Society.
2. Sefton Council to support World Autism Awareness week and to promote this via their social media.
3. to request the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds asking that additional funds are made available immediately to:
 - a) Work with local authorities, schools and multi-academy trusts to make sure that the right mix of educational provision and support for children with

ASD/Aspergers is available in all areas and to provide for more high needs funding for children who don't have a EHCP but have a diagnosis

- b) Ensure that training and awareness of ASD/Aspergers is embedded across the education system to include existing teachers and all support staff not just new teachers who are training.