

Educational environments for children and young people with autism

A discussion forum for teachers, practitioners, researchers and families.

Summary of the presentations

1. Keynote

Perspectives on the experience education for young people with autism. **Sarah Roscoe**, Executive Head of TBAP East.

Summary: Sarah offered an overview of the journey of The Rise School, a special free school for children with ASC that is based in Feltham, Hounslow. She shared her personal experience of establishing the school as a successful, energetic and aspirational learning community for children with autism. She vividly brought to life the potential to change the lives of young people by creating the right physical, social and emotional environment to allow them to flourish.

2. Focus sessions

A. Legal, moral and ethical environments

How important is strategic universal design? **John Harding**, Head of Disability Resource Centre, University of Cambridge and Director, National Association of Disability Practitioners

Summary: John offered an overview of the new approaches to supporting students with disabilities at Cambridge University with better access to the curriculum, teaching and assessment. Currently 13% of students have a diagnosed/declared disability and times are clearly changing in higher education too.

What does inclusive education mean for children with autism? **Hannah Ware**, Education Researcher at University of Cambridge and Teacher.

Summary: too often those involved in autism education and research focus on the voices of professionals or parents. Hannah gave a summary of her research which is focusing particularly on capturing the voices of children with autism. She hopes this work will set about "redressing the educational status of children with disabilities (which) must be central in global efforts towards developing equitable and effective education systems."

What are the top three strategies that every teacher should be using to support children with autism? **Tiffany Middleton**, Assistant Headteacher at Histon & Impington Junior School and SEND Coordinator for Cambridge Primary Education Trust.

Summary: Tiffany offered practical strategies that could be employed in primary or early secondary classes that assist children with autism and SEND to access the curriculum and teaching & learning. The strategies make extensive use of visual aids and cues, in particular to support emotional regulation.

What should schools be doing to meet their legal, moral and ethical obligations to their pupils with autism? **Robert Campbell**, CEO Morris Education Trust

Summary: Robert gave an overview of what he felt schools should be doing further. Five points were raised: general awareness/training for all, specific training for teaching/learning staff, culture & ethos, engagement with all students and outward projection (linking with wider stakeholders).

B. Social environments

Tackling the challenges of the school environment, **Nicola Rathbone**, Teacher of Design and Technology

Summary: Nicola shared her personal perspective on the sensory and social challenges faced by autistic children and adults in schools. She explained how flexibility is key to meeting the needs of individuals and that care must be taken not to make assumptions from a neurotypical perspective. The difficulties experienced by autistic children can vary considerably according to the stresses in the environment.

How can educational settings support social inclusion for students with autism? **Joanna Hastwell**, Asperger Syndrome Adviser at the University of Cambridge.

Summary: The number of students at Cambridge University presenting with a diagnosis of autism has been increasing rapidly, including a large proportion diagnosed after beginning their studies. Regular social groups and mentoring for students with autism are extremely useful for students in managing the ambiguous social rules of university life.

How can classroom dialogue adapt to the needs of children with autism? **Ana Trigo**, Education Researcher at Cambridge University

Summary: Dialogic teaching is a technique that focuses on structured verbal communication between the teacher and the pupil, and between pupils. This approach can support the learning of all the pupils, but has particular benefits for children with autism which Ana is exploring by developing a technique that can be used by teachers in mainstream and specialist settings.

Why is school exhausting for children and young people with autism? **Julie Bailey**, Education Researcher, Specialist Learning Mentor and Chair of Governors for The Cavendish School

Summary: Julie considered a range of recent research on autism to identify additional sources of effort and stress for children with autism. Making changes to the school environment to remove and reduce these can make school less exhausting for children with autism and improve their ability to engage with, and enjoy school.

C. Learning environments

How do bilingual children with autism experience school? **Katie Howard**, Linguistics and Education Researcher at Cambridge University

Summary: An overview of Katie's research project giving insights into the emotions and perspectives of children and parents who are part of bilingual families; and looking at ways of improving the school experience for them.

How can a focus on executive function improve outcomes for children and young people with autism? **Rosie Penford**, Education Researcher

Summary: Executive function encompasses the processes involved in certain areas of cognitive and behavioural control. Rosie's presentation gave insights on assessing the processes of 'working memory', 'switching' and 'inhibition' and practical examples on how to help with these processes.

What strategies can be used in the modern languages classroom to support students with autism? **Eloise Johnson**, Teacher at Comberton Village College and Education Researcher

Summary: Talk cancelled due to ill health

How can the SEND team support classroom teachers in meeting the needs of students with autism in the classroom? **Leah Cooper**, Lead Key Stage 3 SEND Teacher, Impington Village College

Summary: Leah presented practical ideas and suggestions for supporting teachers in the classroom through training, coaching and mentoring; ensuring there is no blame when things go wrong; and with a key message that it is necessary to be flexible and it is acceptable to try a number of strategies until you find the one that works for that individual.

3. Planning for the future

What next? **Robert Campbell**, CEO of Morris Education Trust

Summary: Robert gave an overview of The Cavendish School from how it came to be developed through its vision, approach and curriculum to its current likely opening date. He particularly invited delegates to continue engaging with the Trust (MET) as work continues on the project over the next two years.