



**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK
FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM**

Literature Review and Consultation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to feedback from its successful schools training programme (Cullen et al., 2013, Cullen et al., 2014) the Autism Education Trust (AET) has commissioned a project to develop a **Progression Framework** for children and young people with autism, accompanied by a **training module** to disseminate its use. The first phase of the project constituted a **literature review** and **consultation** exercise which would inform the development of the Framework. Consultation took place with practitioners, parents, pupils and adults with autism via on-line survey. There was also direct consultation with a range of professionals via school visits, email, telephone conversations and meetings with AET Programme Partners and AET Expert Reference Group

A **summary** of key points is included at the end of each section of the literature review and consultation report. These relate to areas identified as relevant to the development of a Progression Framework and include consideration of **good outcomes** for young people with autism, **good practice** in curriculum, teaching approaches and **assessment** for pupils with autism, the current **national context** in relation to assessment in schools and **findings from the consultation**. The final section of the report brings together a number of factors that will inform the writing of the Framework. This executive summary identifies some of the key themes which have emerged as a result of this review and consultation and which will underpin the development of the **Progression Framework**.

Key Findings

A positive response

There was a very positive response to the proposal to develop a Progression Framework specific to the needs of pupils with autism from both practitioners and parents. Although schools were collecting a great deal of data in relation to the progress of pupils, this did not always reflect the progress being made in areas **outside the National Curriculum**:

“So challenging for schools to show progress, even when they are doing a really good job – quite dispiriting for them” (Teacher, School survey)

“My child is ‘tracked’ the same as neurologically typical children, which means he is always consistently scoring lower. I would love to see SEN accounted for within the tracking” (Parent, Parent survey)

The individual pupil

In keeping with a key message in other AET materials there was a strong emphasis on the need to take into account the **individual needs** of pupils with autism and to ensure that the tool developed allows for **individual priorities** to be assessed and

identified. There is also a need to focus on the development of **individual strengths and interests** and to ensure that experiences provided are **positive** and promote **well being**. **'Good' outcomes** are not necessarily the same for all young people and good practice is based on an **eclectic approach** and **differentiated planning**. Interventions are chosen according to need, with an acknowledgement that **no single approach** will be effective for all pupils. **Individualised goal setting** in the form of 'personal learning intentions' is a feature of assessment systems developed by some special schools which have been identified as models of good practice in the current context of **'Life after Levels'** and there is a move away from numerical reporting towards a more **descriptive model** of what a young person has achieved.

"(A Framework) needs to be able to ignore areas that the individual doesn't need and drill down to specifics on the areas that are of importance" (Parent, Parent survey)

"It is specific to the individual challenges the student faces so the tool needs to be able to measure progress in all areas and could be made specific to the individual" (Teacher, School survey)

Framework areas

Areas identified for inclusion in a Framework relate closely to **autism 'differences'** (ie **social communication, social interaction, social imagination and sensory needs**) and the impact of these on the pupil's **social, emotional and learning needs** and their **independence** and **community participation**. Of particular importance to parents and to pupils and adults with autism were the areas of **social relationships** and **sensory issues**. Schools currently use a range of methods for identifying priorities and measuring progress in these areas, including **Individual Education Plans (IEPs)**, **specialist interventions** and their own **bespoke systems**. When drawing up a Framework, thought needs to be given to how skills relate to specific situations in order to provide a **context** for learning.

'Measuring' progress

A **scale** for recording the extent to which goals have been achieved will be included within the Framework but other measurement tools will also be **compatible**. There is a need for different types of recording to suit different audiences or contexts including **'at a glance'** and more **detailed recording**. Different settings may have different requirements in relation to the amount of detail required. **Guidance** and **worked examples** will be included with the Framework and an accompanying **training module** developed to be delivered by **AET hubs**. Schools will need to ensure that their systems for **moderating** assessments are **robust**.

Involvement of pupils and parents

Guidance from the **DfE** and professional bodies such as the NAHT lays a strong emphasis on the **involvement** of both pupils and parents in the assessment process.

This reflects the messages of the new **Code of Practice** (DfE/DoH 2014) with its emphasis on **person centred planning**. Findings from the parent survey indicated that there is scope for improvement in relation to involvement in relation to the reporting of pupil progress and in identifying priorities for learning. Ways in which both pupils and parents can be involved in this process will be considered as part of the development phase. The Framework might be used as part of the process of drawing up **Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCs)**

Understanding of autism

It was evident that a **sound understanding of autism** on the part of practitioners was important to ensuring a positive experience for pupils. Being able to see things from the perspective of the person with autism and create 'autism friendly' environments was often cited both within the literature and by those consulted. Ways in which the practitioner can be supported to develop their skills in order to best facilitate learning in relation to the areas identified within the Framework will be considered within the project and might form an area for **future work**.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a report on Educational Provision and Outcomes for People on the Autism Spectrum for The Autism Education Trust (AET) Wittemeyer et al. (2011) identify the need for schools working with young people with autism to review their systems of pupil assessment and work collaboratively as part of this review. Although a large amount of assessment data was reported as being collected in schools, it was not always felt to be useful to educational planning nor did it always reflect the progress being made by children with autism:

“Schools should look beyond what is measured by National Curriculum level descriptors and be encouraged to include data that are collected as part of the school's standard or in-house assessments (e.g. on social-communication and independent living skills; sensory sensitivities)” (Wittemeyer et al, 2011, p12 of Executive Summary)

Since the publication of this report, The Autism Education Trust has been responsible for the development and delivery of a significant programme of training and materials to support the education of children and young people with autism, through funding from the Department for Education (DfE). Evaluation by the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) has shown that the programme so far has had a significant impact in relation to improvements in the schooling experience and learning opportunities provided for children with autism as a result of increased confidence and skills of school staff (Cullen et al., 2013, Cullen et al., 2014)

Building on the success of its previous programmes and in response to feedback from training hubs, the AET has now commissioned a project to develop a **Progression Framework** for children and young people with autism and a training module to disseminate its use. This report sets out the main findings of the **literature review and consultation** which will inform the development of the Framework and is structured around the following main areas or key questions:

- Links with other AET projects and themes
- What are good outcomes for learners with autism?
- Good practice in autism education – curriculum and educational approaches
- Assessing, recording and monitoring progress
- Current context in relation to assessment
- Consultation with practitioners, parents, pupils and adults with autism
- The Development of a Progression Framework for children and young people with autism

2. LINKS WITH OTHER AET PROJECTS AND THEMES

Throughout this report close reference is made to existing AET materials and resources. AET training hubs were consulted via **Programme Partners** events and the online survey (see section 7 below). The AET **Expert Reference Group** was also consulted within the project's first phase. Meetings were also scheduled at regular intervals with teams working on other current AET projects i.e. revising the AET training materials, standards and competences and the development of additional modules related to participation and working with young people with complex needs. There was also close liaison with researchers from **CEDAR** commissioned to carry out further evaluation into the impact of training on a selected number of schools.

2.1 AET THEMES

Key themes from other AET materials (see links in 2.2 below) which will inform the development of a Progression Framework are as follows:

The individual pupil

How the Framework informs a personalised approach to assessment and planning, taking account of individual differences and understanding the strengths and needs of the individual pupil will be essential to the project.

Building relationships

The involvement of parents and the pupils themselves in identifying and reviewing priorities for learning is vital to ensuring full participation of all concerned. The Framework could be used as a starting point for such discussions.

Curriculum and Learning

The role of the practitioner in supporting learning through appropriate presentation of activities and modifications to the curriculum is key and ways in which planning for this aspect are supported through the Framework will need to be considered.

Enabling environments/participation

Adapting learning environment so as to be conducive to learning for pupils with autism is also a key factor in ensuring that pupils make progress. Again, ways in which practitioners might be supported to consider this aspect will be a feature of the development of the Framework.

Autism within a social context

The AET materials take account of the view that autism occurs as a result of the brain processing information differently and that difficulties that may be experienced by people with autism can be said to arise due to social environments not being conducive to their needs (rather than as a result of them having particular 'impairments'). The emphasis within education environments should, therefore, be

on ensuring that practitioners understand these differences and actively make adjustments in order to facilitate learning. However, it should also be acknowledged that people with autism are likely to encounter a range of situations throughout their lives which are not necessarily 'autism-friendly'. It is, therefore, important that, as far as possible, they develop skills that will ensure that they are not restricted in their life choices or made vulnerable in certain situations. This might involve the development of skills related to problem solving, self-regulation and in increasing their understanding of social behaviour and the contexts within which this occurs.

Independent of specific interventions or approaches

In keeping with other AET materials the development of the Framework will be independent of any specific approach or intervention used with learners with autism.

2.2 LINKS WITH AET MATERIALS

AET materials of particular relevance are:

- AET schools training materials
- AET National Autism Standards
- AET Professional Competency Framework
- AET Outcomes report (Wittemeyer et al, 2011)
- AET Good Practice report (Charman et al, 2011)

A note on terminology

In keeping with other AET materials the term 'children and young people (or pupils/learners) with autism' is used in this report. It is recognised that many adults with a diagnosis of autism prefer the term 'autistic person' but this is not as yet universal. During the course of this study the National Autistic Society (NAS) have advised the use of the term 'children and young people on the autism spectrum' and this will be taken into account within the Framework itself, associated guidance and training materials.

Audience and Scope

The development of a Progression Framework specific to pupils with autism needs to be informed by an understanding that schools are subject to many demands in relation to curriculum and assessment. The remit of this project is for the Framework to be accessible to a range of settings working with a variety of young people with autism across the age range. Pupils may have additional special educational needs and may be working at a range of developmental levels which may not correspond to their age. The Framework is not intended to address needs other than autism although it is likely that some content will be relevant to a wider range of pupils. The content and format will need to be user-friendly to professionals with different levels of expertise working in a variety of ways. The pilot phase of the project will be key to evaluating and developing its use in order to accommodate this range. Equally

important is the need for the Framework to be accessible to parents so that they can be included at all stages of the assessment and reporting process. In addition, either the Framework itself or a modified version will need to be accessible to the children and young people involved in order to ensure their participation as far as possible.

2.3 AUTISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING

The AET outlines four main areas of difference which are particularly important for education staff to understand and pay attention to because most pupils with autism will have individual educational needs to be met in these areas. It is useful to summarise these differences with examples of how they might impact on pupils' school experience both in relation to access to the 'academic' curriculum and participation in the 'hidden curriculum'.

Social Interaction

This involves understanding the social interactive style and emotional expression of others. Pupils may have support needs in:

- understanding social 'rules' and how these may change in different contexts e.g. greetings for different people, how to behave in different environments with different people
- playing or working with others in social or group situations e.g. group discussions, play or break times
- making and sustaining friendships and relationships
- understanding others' emotional intentions e.g. being able to respond appropriately or adapt behaviour based on this understanding

Social Communication

This involves understanding and using verbal and non-verbal communication and language. Pupils may need support in:

- understanding others' communication and language e.g. listening to and understanding instructions
- communicating effectively themselves e.g. to make known what they have or have not understood
- expressing themselves e.g. expressing needs, making choices, expressing opinions
- taking part in conversations e.g. socially or within the lessons
- non-verbal communication e.g. body language, facial expression as indicators of what a teacher or peer is trying to communicate

Some pupils with autism may be delayed in developing (or may not develop) speech and alternative means of communication will need to be taught.

Social Imagination / Information Processing

Sometimes referred to as Flexibility of Thought this involves differences in how information is processed and the ability to adjust to unpredictable changes to routine. Areas for support may include:

- coping with change e.g. changes to timetable or teaching staff
- managing transitions of different types e.g. moving between rooms or 'bigger' transitions such as year or school moves
- problem solving e.g. knowing what to do if in difficulty, being able to work out what processes need to be applied to a problem, inferring meaning
- planning and organising tasks and equipment in order to be more independent in their learning
- applying and generalising skills e.g. to different contexts
- recognising and developing strengths and interests (so that they can be used practically or functionally) e.g. as motivation within tasks, as a social medium (clubs etc.) or as a route to future educational opportunities or employment
- play and leisure skills e.g. as a means to social engagement

Sensory needs

This involves differences in the way sensory information is processed which can lead to pupils being distracted or overwhelmed by sensory stimuli. Creating a sensory profile for individual pupils can assist staff in creating environments that are more conducive to learning and which reduce pupils' anxiety caused by their sensory sensitivities. Pupils can also be helped to recognise and manage their own sensory needs.

These areas of difference and their associated learning needs provide a useful starting point for the identification of areas to include within a Progression Framework for pupils with autism. Throughout its materials the AET calls for understanding within schools that young people on the autism spectrum may require specific support in these areas. Indeed, ensuring that attention is paid to developing abilities in these areas may also lead to improved access to the academic curriculum and its related assessments.

3. WHAT ARE GOOD OUTCOMES FOR LEARNERS WITH AUTISM?

Having considered some examples of the implications of autism on pupils' learning within schools it is also useful to investigate what might be considered desired outcomes for young people on the autism spectrum as a context for the development of a Progression Framework.

The Preparing for Adulthood programme (www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk) funded by the Department for Education (DfE) as part of its delivery support for the SEN and Disability reforms identifies four main outcomes based on what young disabled people say are important to them in order to lead full lives with choices about their future and control of their support. These are employment, independent living, community participation and health and are reiterated in the Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2014). Research suggests, however, that adults with autism are far less likely to achieve these outcomes and life chances can be severely limited in comparison with others (Pellicano, 2014).

In order to achieve a long term outcome such as employment it might be argued that educational outcomes should first of all be considered priorities. Indeed for some young people with autism 'education' in itself would seem to be a desired outcome, certainly from the point of view of some parents whose children are currently not attending school (see parent survey section 7.2 below). With regards to curriculum access, children and young people with autism may need extra support in order to make good progress in certain curriculum areas or in relation to specific aspects of a subject in which they may experience difficulties as a result of their autism. In addition, more flexibility as regards what is taught as part of the curriculum would allow schools to address the specific needs of young people with autism to help them with areas that may fall outside the national curriculum and to prepare them for life beyond school:

“The Department for Education should provide written guidance on how teachers, particularly in mainstream settings, can find the right balance between teaching pupils with autism key academic skills and teaching skills that fall outside of the National Curriculum (e.g. independent living skills, social and emotional understanding)” (Wittemeyer et al, 2011, p9 of Executive Summary)

The Outcomes report also recommends that every effort is made to consult with the young person, whatever their level or means of communication but also relates its findings that desired outcomes may differ between the young person, their parents and their education providers and ways of ensuring that a consensus is agreed need to be set up. The recent Code of Practice, with its focus on Person Centred Planning reinforces the need for such agreement with acknowledgement that priorities may differ between the parties involved:

“When agreeing outcomes, it is important to consider both what is important to the child or young person – what they themselves want to be able to achieve – and

what is important for them as judged by others with the child or young person's interests at heart"

DfE/DoH (2014) p. 163, Para 9.67

However, although 'typical' adult outcomes such as employment and independence might be strived for by some young people with autism and their parents, this might not be the case for all and it should not be assumed that good outcomes for people with autism are the same as for those without autism (Wittmeyer et al, 2014).

Vermeulen (in Jones and Hurley, 2014) cites the need to take more account of emotional wellbeing and happiness as desired outcomes for people with autism. He makes the point that although it should be welcomed that certain interventions are evidence based using measures such as increase in IQ and adaptive behaviour scores, decrease in challenging behaviours or less need for support, such measures do not take account of whether a child is happier. Similarly, adult outcomes such as employment, independent living, relationships and levels of support may not, in fact, reflect quality of life from the perspective of the person with autism and their families.

Vermeulen also advocates the need for a more positive measure of wellbeing rather than that which focuses on mental health problems in autism. Rather than focusing on preventing or treating stress he calls for a move towards understanding what makes people with autism happy and to develop strategies that increase positive feelings. Aligned to this is the model described by Fidler et al (2013) for measuring emotional well-being for children and young people with autism, which involves the perspectives of staff, parents and pupils. The system involves establishing a baseline in a number of key areas and then collecting data annually in order to track progress and identify priorities for future work through the provision of Personal Tutorials (Christie et al., 2008). The importance of fostering positive emotional wellbeing and, where possible, of providing evidence of progress in this area will be considered within the project.

Milton (2012) makes the point that although it is often suggested that people with autism are more predisposed to mental health problems, applying a more social model to their situation allows the view that such problems could in fact be caused by their difficulties in navigating a social world not designed for them. In relation to the school experience the message here seems to be for staff to strive to understand the perspective of the learner and to find ways of motivating the learner as well as adapting their approaches and the environment in order for them to be 'autism friendly'.

This focus on the need for conscious effort on behalf of the practitioner to shape their practice according to the needs of the learner is key to successful outcomes and ways in which this can be achieved will be considered throughout the project.

3.1 Summary

- 'Good outcomes' are usually considered to be employment, independent living, community participation and health
- 'Good outcomes' may not be the same for all young people
- Consultation needs to take place with young people with autism and their families with an understanding that priorities may differ
- Practitioners can support better outcomes by an increased focus on seeing things from the perspective of the person with autism and creating 'autism friendly' environments
- Ways of increasing positive feelings in people with autism need to be developed in order to foster 'happiness' as a desired outcome

4. GOOD PRACTICE IN AUTISM EDUCATION: CURRICULUM AND APPROACHES

In order to provide a context for the development of a Progression Framework it is useful to first consider what might constitute good practice in relation to educational provision for children and young people with autism in relation to curriculum and interventions

4.1 CURRICULUM

Although linked to a consideration of educational approaches used with pupils with autism within schools it is felt that a distinction should be made between the curriculum (i.e. the content - 'what' we teach) and teaching approaches (i.e. the delivery - 'how' we teach). For many pupils, particularly in mainstream schools it is likely that the national curriculum will take priority but it is important that access to this curriculum is ensured through appropriate differentiation based on an understanding of individual needs. Charman et al (2011) describe how in 'good practice' schools this individualisation was achieved through setting individual education plan (IEP) targets and imaginative delivery of the curriculum. However, in relation to some specialist provision, they also refer to the development of an "autism-specific" curriculum alongside the National Curriculum:

"And the autism-specific curriculum is much more about, in a sense, focusing on areas related to the triad and sensory differences...." (Charman et al, 2011, p 24)

Although opportunities to develop pupils' abilities in areas related to autism differences may (and indeed should) occur through a range of activities and experiences (including national curriculum subjects) it is important that schools ensure that they plan for these opportunities in ways which address the needs of individual pupils. In addition, schools may need to acknowledge that, for some pupils, specific teaching to address identified learning priorities may also be required.

4.2 EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES AND INTERVENTIONS

Although, as has been stated above, a Progression Framework for pupils with autism will be independent of specific interventions, it is anticipated that schools may use evidence of pupil progress from the Framework to evaluate the effectiveness of their provision which will include chosen interventions.

Milton (2014) cites Research Autism as currently listing over 1,000 interventions in the field of autism and it is not the purpose of this report to provide a detailed analysis of this area. A number of authors (e.g. Mills, 2013, Jones, 2002, Milton 2014) state that there is a lack of reliable research into interventions which makes it difficult to evaluate their effectiveness. In addition, those studies that do exist may suffer from shortcomings such as bias due to research being carried out by proponents of the intervention, lack of a control group or issues related to the design and implementation of the study (Jordan et al., 1998, Jones, 2002, Parsons et al., 2009). In

addition, the range of variables involved make it difficult to ensure that progress is directly linked to the intervention e.g. factors such as maturation or practitioner skills might affect the child's progress.

A range of different interventions are being used with children and young people with autism in UK schools. Some of these focus on many areas of development using a particular approach whilst others focus on a particular area e.g. the development of a communication system. Not all the approaches mentioned are exclusively used with pupils with autism. Those most commonly used include:

Behavioural approaches

Behavioural interventions aim to teach and increase targeted positive behaviours and reduce or eliminate behaviours considered inappropriate.

Examples include:

Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) - uses positive reinforcement to encourage and teach a range of desired 'behaviours' including communication and social skills

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) - analyses behaviour and sets out preventative, proactive and reactive strategies to support

5P Approach to Behaviour (Miller, 2009) - the 5 Ps are Profiling, Prioritising, Problem analysis, Problem solving and Planning. The approach provides a framework for behaviour intervention which has its roots in prevention and good practice, with an emphasis on promoting and encouraging the development of skills and independence.

Interactive / relationship based approaches

These approaches may differ but all encourage the development of functional social communication and social interaction with an emphasis on building relationships and following the child's lead and interests.

For example:

SCERTS -Social Communication Emotional Regulation Transactional Support (Prizant et al., 2006)

Intensive Interaction (Nind and Hewett, 1994, www.PhoebeCaldwell.com)

Musical Interaction (Christie and Wimpory, 1986, Christie et al., 1992))

DIR Floor time (Greenspan and Wieder, 2008, www.stanleygreenspan.com)

Relationship Development Intervention (RDI) (Gutstein and Sheely, 2002)

Structured approaches

These approaches use visual supports and structure to develop independence in a range of situations. Most commonly:

TEACCH –Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communications handicapped Children (e.g. Mesibov et al, 2004)

Communication-based approaches

Aimed at learners who lack a formal system of communication.

For example:

PECS (Frost and Bondy, 1994) – provides a means of communication using a symbol based communication exchange system.

Social Skills programmes

Aimed at developing social skills through direct teaching of skills which may not be 'instinctive' for, or learnt incidentally by, learners with autism

For example:

Social Stories, Social Articles, Comic Strip Conversations (e.g. Gray, 1994a, 1994b) – develops understanding of social situations

Talkabout series (e.g. Kelly, 1994) – often used with groups

Flexibility programmes

There are noticeably fewer resources aimed at this area and Miller (2013) makes the point that although work on flexibility is often included within behaviour management programmes this usually involves reacting to a problem rather than planning programmes to develop skills. 'The 5 P approach to developing flexibility' (Miller, 2013) provides a framework for developing skills in this area.

Sensory programmes

Therapy-led approaches to help modulate a pupil's sensory experience through a range of activities planned in accordance with individual sensory needs.

For example:

Sensory diets (Wilbarger, 1984)

The above is by no means an exhaustive list but does provide some insight into the types of interventions being used in schools and, more importantly for this project, the areas of learning that might be priorities for young people with autism. Rather than follow one particular method of working with children with autism, the majority of schools in the UK use a variety of interventions. This eclectic approach is based on the recognition that a combination of different approaches (or adapted approaches) can be effective in meeting the needs of pupils with autism, but also

that not all approaches will suit the learning needs of all children. O'Neill (2012) describes the use of the SCERTS model within a primary special school and concludes that rather than being a single intervention, the model encompasses many key principles of good practice for working with pupils with autism which alters the culture of the school and adult style.

Some schools have also adapted or developed their own approaches in order to meet the needs of their pupils. For example, Brookfields school has developed Relationship Education for the Autistic Child (REACH) based on the DIR Floortime (Greenspan, 1979) and PLAY approaches (Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters) (Solomon et al., 2007). The school's work is based on sound research and has involved positive evaluation of progress using the Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS) (Schopler et al, 2010). This type of research-based practice whereby practitioners develop approaches and assessments based on their understanding of the particular needs of their pupils was of particular interest to this project. O'Neill (2012) also highlights the benefits of reflective practice but notes that school systems often place significant restraints on the provision of opportunities for such work. It was heartening, therefore, to find a number of schools who were actively engaging in this kind of research and development.

Another example of this type of work is the development of assessment profiles in the areas of social understanding, communication and independence developed by Freemantles School. This school had also worked with Gina Davies of Attention Autism to create profiles for work specific to this approach. Another initiative in the planning stage at this school was a detailed consultation with pupils in order to identify their views on good outcomes. Staff had drawn up a detailed list of possible outcomes and planned to gauge their importance to pupils using methods such as Talking Mats (www.talkingmats.com).

Finally, Treehouse School have been working with researchers to develop measures for assessing progress for pupils with autism in areas that fall outside the national curriculum in order to evaluate their work which uses the ABA model (Lambert-Lee et al., 2015).

In relation to choosing appropriate interventions, Mills (2013) states:

"Most supportive evidence points to an individualised approach that is based on empathy for the person and seeks to enhance social, communication and problem solving abilities and reduce harmful levels of stress." (Mills, 2013)

Mills goes on to stress the importance of "see (ing) the world from the autistic perspective", respecting difference but at the same time recognising distress and offering "practical help".

In relation to an eclectic approach it is important, however, to ensure that interventions chosen are, indeed, based on a sound consideration of what might best suit the needs of particular pupils. One headteacher interviewed for the project

raised a concern about the term 'eclectic' as he felt that it implied a lack of pedagogical thinking as regards the choice of approach. He stressed that, for pupils at his school, strategies and approaches were chosen carefully in relation to individual needs but felt that this was not always recognised by funding agencies. In response to this, school staff had developed their own assessment documents which clearly set out the goals in relation to approaches such as TEACCH, PECS and Social Stories so that their effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes for individual pupils could be measured.

Linked to this is the issue raised by Milton (2014) of ensuring that what is being targeted through an approach is supported by the children themselves and their families and stresses the need to involve their views as regards "what one wishes to intervene with in the first place" (Milton, 2014, p11). The Consultation process undertaken as part of this project which takes account of the views of a range of stakeholders is described in detail below and provides this perspective in order to inform the Framework.

Rather than endorse any specific approaches Mills (2013) describes the National Autistic Society's (NAS) SPELL framework which provides both a set of values and practical elements against which approaches can be chosen in order to meet individual needs. Many of the approaches mentioned above include aspects of these elements which can be summarised as :

Structure - to assist the young person in organising themselves, understanding the task, what is going to happen next, in order to achieve autonomy and reduce levels of stress

Positive - a focus on developing strengths and interests and helping the young person achieve their goals

Empathy- the importance of trying to understand the perspective of the person with autism and how this relates to communication, behaviour and motivation

Low –arousal – an awareness of the sensory needs of the pupil and the effect on stress levels. The need to adapt environments and interactions accordingly

Links- the importance of communication with parents and other parties to ensure consistency and stability

These principles can also form a useful backdrop to the development of a Progression Framework.

4.3 Summary:

- Access to the curriculum for pupils with autism is dependent on appropriate differentiation and planning for individual differences
- Teaching and learning priorities need to be based on an understanding of autism and pupils' individual needs
- An eclectic approach is based on the understanding that pupils may require a range of interventions in order to meet all their needs and that no one approach will be effective for all pupils
- School-based research and development is effective in identifying needs and creating effective tools and resources for specific groups of pupils
- Parents and pupils should be involved when choosing interventions

5. ASSESSING, RECORDING AND MONITORING PROGRESS

In their Outcomes report mentioned above Wittemeyer et al (2011) report that many of the measures used by schools for assessing progress in relation to the National Curriculum were ill – suited for planning and monitoring educational progress in young people with autism. Teaching staff had difficulties in reporting aspects of attainment that fell outside the national curriculum and there was a call for greater flexibility in relation to data that would be considered 'useful' for OFSTED. In addition, there was a call for consultation between schools on assessment systems and 'what works'. A detailed account of the feedback from consultation with schools carried out for this project in relation to their assessment systems and their effectiveness in relation to pupils with autism is given below. This section sets the scene for this by examining the types of tools available and issues related to their use with pupils with autism.

5.1 Issues in assessing pupils with autism

Before considering schools' existing systems it is useful to highlight some issues related to assessment for children and young people with autism. In the same way as Milton (2014) above refers to the need to identify what is to be "intervened with" it is also necessary to be clear about what is to be assessed or measured. This will, of course, relate to curriculum and interventions but, as stated elsewhere in this report, should have as its starting point the individual needs of the pupil.

Although it relates to assessment in the early years, the AET resource on the views of autistic adults on assessment offers some interesting insights (Jones et al., 2014). Those consulted advocate the need for assessment to identify strengths, special interests and motivators so as to better inform teaching strategies and ways of engaging the pupil. There is also a call to keep assessment positive so as to avoid a focus on deficiencies which can affect pupils' self-esteem. In addition, the context for assessment is considered very important and the fact that factors such as sensory sensitivities can greatly affect performance and behaviour.

Other reasons that may lead to assessment not being straightforward for pupils with autism include:

Uneven or 'spiky' profile – some pupils with autism may display particular strengths and abilities in some areas and difficulties in others. Although this might be the case for many children this can be more marked in pupils with autism and may also occur within the same area of functioning e.g. a child with Asperger's syndrome may have very good spoken language skills but may have difficulty in understanding the meaning of others' communication.

Additional learning needs – although a focus on this is not possible within the scope of this project it is common for pupils with autism to have learning needs in other areas eg dyslexia, ADHD resulting in a complex profile whereby a range of learning needs need to be addressed through appropriate interventions.

Difficulties with communication – many forms of assessment rely on the pupil's ability to access them using their communication skills e.g. discussion groups, questioning. Pupils with autism may find it challenging to communicate what they have learned making accurate assessment difficult. Furthermore, even areas such as maths and science rely on language to describe concepts and although pupils may have skills in these areas they may be disadvantaged by this aspect. It is important that practitioners find ways of ensuring that pupils are able to access both the learning and its assessment by being creative in their presentation of materials.

Different interpretation of abilities – linked to both the above it is essential that assessments are agreed by all those working with a pupil in order to reach an accurate judgement as pupils may not show their skills consistently. In addition, previous judgements may need to be reviewed if it seems that a pupil has not retained skills or is unable to apply them in new contexts.

Difficulties with generalisation – linked to differences in relation to information processing or flexibility of thought pupils may require specific teaching in order to enable them to generalise skills. It is important, therefore, not to assume that once a skill has been acquired in one context that it will be able to be applied elsewhere. In relation to a Progression Framework, ways in which the ability to apply and generalise skills across contexts will need to be built in in order to demonstrate this achievement.

Motivational difficulties - this is not exclusive to pupils with autism but may be a factor that relates again to difficulties with flexibility. Pupils may not see the 'bigger picture' in relation to why assessment might be necessary or may lack motivation as regards the curriculum due to their preference for activities linked to their particular interests. The ability of the practitioner to make use of their knowledge of these interests will be key to successful learning and assessment.

Staff in schools need to be aware of these factors and adjust their processes accordingly to ensure that assessment information gathered is as accurate as possible.

5.2 Assessment Tools – National Curriculum

The section on Context (below) highlights the current context in the light of recent changes to education legislation. In response to a new National Curriculum, schools have been prompted to review their existing assessment systems in order to meet new requirements. For many young people with autism, progress towards National Curriculum expectations will be measured in the same way as it is for their peers and a range of new measures are currently being developed by and for schools in order to meet the new requirements in relation to assessment (e.g. Lilly, Peacock et al, 2014). That is not to say that assessment in this area is without its issues for pupils with autism and an NFER report on Autism and Educational Assessment highlights some of these, in particular in relation to Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies which are expanded on in the section on Pupil Involvement below (Wilkinson and Twist, 2010).

The report also highlights the need to improve teacher knowledge about autism so that appropriate accommodations in relation to summative assessments (tests, exams etc.) can be made which relate specifically to the needs of these pupils.

For pupils with autism whose attainment in the National Curriculum falls significantly below that of their peers, schools might use measures designed for pupils with SEN. Such measures generally relate to the P (Performance) scales which provide an eight point progress scale for pupils working below Level 1 of the (previous) National Curriculum. These tools have also required recent revisions in order for them to match the new curriculum. As will be seen from the school survey (below) popular schemes used by schools with pupils with SEND include B Squared and PIVATS (Performance Indicators for Value Added Target Setting: Lancashire County Council). These schemes begin their assessments at the level of the P scales (which they break down into smaller steps) but also allow for progression into the National Curriculum.

Of interest to this project is that some areas assessed within these schemes do in fact have relevance to the areas identified above as priorities for learning for young people with autism e.g. aspects of communication within the English 'Speaking and Listening' area, aspects of personal and social development (e.g. PIVATS PSD and B Squared PSHCE). When evaluating the effectiveness of existing tools it is of interest that the areas of communication and attention and learning were felt by some schools to be more effectively measured than some other areas (see Consultation below), indicating that such tools may go some way towards allowing schools to show progress in these areas. However, since there prevailed some dissatisfaction with the P scales as a progress measure for pupils with autism it was felt that these areas should be included within the remit of this project since they have been identified as priorities for learning for pupils with autism. Areas not related specifically to learning differences arising as a result of autism i.e. those relating more directly to the National Curriculum, would not be addressed by this project and would need to be measured using tools designed for this purpose.

5.3 SEN assessment tools

Existing assessment tools that relate to areas that may fall outside the National Curriculum or which provide alternative measures of early development were also examined in order to inform the project. For example, as one of the schools who received the DfE's Assessment Innovation Fund (DfE 2014a) Swiss Cottage school's work on 'Progression Planners' is of interest. Although not specific to learners with autism, it provides in its rationale a number of messages which sit well both within the context of recent reforms and in relation to feedback from schools and parents from the surveys (below). Key aspects felt to be useful for this project include:

- Prioritises areas important to the target group (in this case learners with severe learning difficulties) which fall outside the national curriculum (i.e. Life skills)

- Complements other types of assessments and is designed to be used alongside other systems
- Teachers use as a basis to set 'personal learning intentions' which address priority individual needs for each pupil
- Allows for more meaningful dialogue with parents about what the child is intrinsically learning rather than an abstract discussion about levels
- Advocates a 'deep learning' rather than a 'small steps' or 'tick list' approach to assessment and learning (see section on 'Current Context' below)

The Swiss Cottage materials also make reference to the MAPP ((Mapping and Assessing Personal Progress) tool devised by The Dales special school. Again this approach is based on the setting of personalised learning intentions whose content is drawn from a framework of 'milestone' statements in the areas of Communication, Thinking Skills and Personal and Social Development. Reference is also made to schemes such as the Routes for Learning (DfE, 2006) and Quest for Learning (Northern Ireland Curriculum, 2011) materials often used with pupils with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) as providing additional sources for the setting of intentions. As with the Swiss Cottage approach it is stressed that statements should not be simply 'lifted' from elsewhere but should be written specifically to meet the needs of the individual learner. Personal learning intentions should be expressed as precise, observable behaviours which can be assessed objectively over time and should be based on discussion about a learner's needs, strengths and aspirations by those who understand and know them best, including the learner him/herself.

Alongside this framework sits an additional assessment tool which can be used independently of other aspects of MAPP if required. The Continuum of Skill Development (CSD) facilitates the recording of lateral progression and allows qualitative data to be recorded both graphically and numerically. This aspect of an assessment tool is felt to be important to the project and is given further consideration in relation to 'Differentiating achievement' below.

Although both the MAPP and Swiss Cottage materials set out learning statements in broadly hierarchical sequence it is not expected that a learner will work through them all or in sequence or that learners will start at the same point. Rather:

"The learner's pathway should be thought of as planning a route on a map rather than climbing the rungs of a ladder. This approach acknowledges the differing strengths and needs of individuals and recognises the fact that some may need to spend far more time than others in a given area of learning and that for some individuals certain skills may remain always inaccessible and therefore need to be bypassed or replaced. In the same way in planning a journey people may adopt different starting points and may visit different landmarks in travelling towards the same destination." (MAPP)

5.4 Autism assessment

In relation to the assessment of areas specific to pupils with autism many of the interventions referred to above provide guidance or formats for assessment which relate specifically to the intervention. For example, the SCERTS model (Prizant et al, 2006) sets out within Volume 1 a comprehensive assessment process (SCERTS Assessment Process -SAP) with specific assessment criteria at three stages of communication development. Detailed forms are provided for collecting information and monitoring progress. Volume 2 addresses how to prioritise goals and implement practices within the domain of Transactional Support and how to link these to Social Communication and Emotional Regulation goals. O'Neill (2012) relates how the SCERTS model allowed her team within a special school to collect more specific data about pupil progress in relation to skill areas which relate to social difficulties in autism. This data was included within annual review information and was replacing the use of PIVATS in relation to personal and social development skills.

Similarly, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) (Frost and Bondy, 1994) provides detailed progress monitoring at each phase which allows the user to assess whether the learner is ready to move on to the next phase and to help plan next steps.

Division TEACCH have also developed assessment tools to support their materials e.g. TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile (TTAP) (Mesibov et al, 2007). The tool helps identify goals, strengths and weaknesses and provides a method of ongoing assessment for community-based education.

The 5Ps approach to Behaviour (Miller, 2009) and Flexibility (2013) include a detailed system for assessing progress in these areas.

Information gained through the consultation carried out with schools (section 7.1 below) suggests that not all schools using these interventions were seen to be using the accompanying assessments. Some had developed their own assessments which took into account progress in relation to these interventions in ways which were felt to be more practical to those using them. For example, one school's Speech and Language Therapist had created a detailed Language and Communication assessment document which was related to P scales and national curriculum levels but which also made specific reference to achievement within the PECS phases. Assessments related to PECS, TEACCH and Social Stories developed by another school have already been mentioned above.

5.5 Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Common to many schools' assessment practices in relation to pupils with autism has been, and may continue to be, the Individual Education Plan (IEP). Although no longer a statutory requirement it is likely that many schools will continue to use them.

Peterson, in 'The Key' states that schools should continue to use IEPs if they find them effective:

"Schools that have robust target setting, monitoring and recording processes for all pupils should not need to do anything different" (Lorraine Peterson - 'The Key for School Leaders' web resource)

Some schools, however, have been developing alternatives to IEPs such as school-based plans, pupil profiles and SEN support plans which may keep the main features of the IEP but follow more closely the structure of the Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans now required (DfE/DoH, 2014)

Areas of learning included within IEPs or their alternatives are of interest (see Schools Consultation below) as they should highlight areas considered by school staff to be priorities for pupils with autism and may be the prime means of setting goals and recording progress in relation to areas that fall outside the national curriculum. In its toolkit for supporting Person Centred Planning the AET recommends that objectives within IEPs for pupils with autism address difficulties related to the autism triad i.e. "communication, social understanding and imagination or flexibility of thought" (AET Person Centred Planning, p9)

Also important is the process of drawing up an IEP with the involvement of both professionals, parents and the pupils themselves considered good practice although there may be variation in the extent to this involvement (see Parent Consultation below). In relation to EHCs the Code of Practice (DfE/DoH 2014) sets out its expectations about the involvement of pupils and parents in this process (see section on Parent and Pupil Involvement below).

The setting of goals or targets within IEPs raises the issue of the how these targets are written in order to be effective as a means of measuring progress. Guidance on writing IEPs has traditionally recommended that they be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed). As outlined above, assessment systems such as MAPP or the Swiss Cottage Progression Planners favour the term 'personal learning intentions' rather than 'targets' which they reserve for numerical targets such as those relating to P levels (Edwards, 2014). The concept of SCRUFFY targets (Student-led, Creative, Relevant, Unspecified, Fun, For, Youngsters) (Lacey 2010) is preferred which offer a more open-ended approach:

"SCRUFFY targets are general, non-specific and allow for a vast horizon of unique and unpredictable responses...learning intentions require a more in-depth analysis of individual learning and progress" (Edwards, 2014)

This focus on analysing learning relates to the need to ensure that assessment systems include a means of providing evidence that learning has taken place. A number of assessment systems developed recently within the commercial sector include the means for schools to include evidence of learning in order to support judgements (e.g. SOLAR for Schools, 2Simple- 2Build a Profile). This might include

photographic evidence, witness statements or examples of work which can be uploaded alongside assessment data. An example of a school's approach to this is at Kisimul School where a format for including descriptive and pictorial evidence within the evaluation section of their individual learning plans (ILPs) had been developed. This provided an effective visual record to share with parents and other interested parties.

5.6 Differentiating achievement

A final point to consider involves ways of describing the level of engagement or the extent to which a goal has been achieved. In relation to new National Curriculum measures systems generally include a means of recording this using language related to the extent to which national standards have been reached and the depth of understanding achieved e.g. working towards, achieving or exceeding expectations. Other language often seen relates to skills which may be described as 'emerging, developing, fluent, maintained, generalised' as, for example in the Continuum of Skill Development mentioned above.

Another system adopted by a number of schemes is that of the 'Framework for Recognising Attainment' (QCA, 2009). This framework was used in materials produced by QCA for supporting those working with pupils with learning difficulties in relation to the previous national curriculum and sets out seven levels with which to assess pupils' level of engagement with learning (Encounter, Awareness, Attention and Response, Engagement, Participation, Involvement, Gaining Skills and Understanding). B Squared also make use of this scale within their assessment tool. A similar type of scale is used with accreditation schemes for learners working at Entry level 1 (e.g. the Achievement Continuum in ASDAN Personal Progress (ASDAN 2015)) as a way of qualifying the extent to which learners have accessed assessment criteria independently. One school visited, had created a similar system for its own work in relation to the assessment of Life Skills with their older pupils. The SILSAF (Secondary Independent Living Skills Assessment Framework) developed by Brookfields school has a scale of five engagement levels based on the ASDAN Achievement Continuum. This provides an effective means of showing progress in relation to the development of skills in this area. Many of the systems using this type of differentiation use a numerical grading for each descriptor. This allows progress to be quantified and for schools to chart progress visually using computer software.

5.7 Pupil /Parent Involvement

A final, but crucial, element of the development of a Progression Framework is ensuring that it is accessible to parents and that pupils can be involved in the process of identifying and evaluating their own targets. In order to achieve this it is essential that the structure and layout of the Framework is clear and straightforward and that content is free of jargon so as to be accessible to parents. As part of guidance produced to support the Framework, ways in which pupils can be helped to be involved in deciding on, and reviewing, their own goals will be explored.

The new Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2014) introduced Education, Health and Care plans (EHCs) to replace Statements for those children and young people identified as needing special education provision. In relation to this the Code calls for 'maximum involvement' of parents in decision making. It recommends that, where a child is receiving SEN support, schools should meet parents termly to set clear outcomes and review progress towards them, discuss the activities and support that will help achieve them, and identify responsibilities. In addition it calls for target setting and review procedures to help pupils develop and prepare for the next stage of their education and adulthood. This will require direct involvement of the pupils in identifying aspirations and understanding what they need to do to achieve them.

Many schools are already experienced in involving parents and pupils in this way through person centred approaches. The challenge is to ensure that all pupils are able to participate meaningfully, including those with the most complex needs and those who are pre-verbal. The AET has produced guidance on person centred planning for pupils with autism which provides useful guidance on ways in which pupils and their families can be given access to this process. The AET has also recently commissioned a project whose remit is to develop training materials on increasing participation for pupils with autism, including those with complex needs. This will include guidance on including pupils in EHCs. Since it is anticipated that the Progression Framework will provide a useful focus for the setting and reviewing of goals within meetings linked to EHCs these materials will be a valuable complement to this project.

Also important to mention at this point is the practice of Assessment for Learning (AfL) whereby teachers collect information about pupils' ongoing performance and adjust teaching to meet needs more effectively. Core AfL strategies have been summarised as:

- Using a range of strategies to elicit evidence of learning
- Providing pupils with evaluative feedback
- Sharing learning intentions with pupils
- Encouraging pupils to conduct self-assessments
- Promoting participation in group work and peer reviews

Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group, 2006 in Wilkinson and Twist, 2010, p11

Although the principles of AfL are based on a personalised approach to teaching and learning Wilkinson and Twist (2010) in their report for NFER make the point that there is a lack of specific guidance on how to modify this approach for pupils with autism and that some of the AfL strategies may present potential challenges for a group who often struggle with social interaction and self-evaluation. The report calls for further investigation into ways in which this approach can be applied to pupils

with autism based on an understanding of their specific educational and assessment needs.

5.8 Summary:

- Tools being used with pupils with SEN in areas based on the National Curriculum go some way towards measuring some aspects of learning that may be prioritised for pupils with autism e.g. communication
- Examples of good practice in assessment for pupils with SEN may measure areas outside the national curriculum
- Individualised goal setting based on specific needs in the form of personal learning intentions is an area being developed by schools
- Schools for pupils with autism do not always use assessment tools related to particular interventions but may have devised their own tools which complement their own systems and meet the needs of their pupils
- The extent of progress towards achieving a skill can be measured to show degrees of progress
- It is good practice to support progress reporting with evidence of learning
- Pupils and parents should be fully involved in the process of deciding on learning priorities
- Ways in which pupils can participate meaningfully need to be explored

Before providing details of the findings of the Consultation carried out as part of the project it is useful to examine the current context in relation to recent changes in education legislation which provide a backdrop to the project.

6. CURRENT CONTEXT

The need for research into approaches to assessment and achievement that are most effective for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has been identified as a priority by the Department for Education (DfE, 2014b). This call for a move towards more evidence-based practice sits well within the current context of educational change and the paper also identifies the need to ascertain whether schools are changing their approaches in the light of reforms in curriculum and assessment. Although for the purposes of this project we are concerned primarily with implications of such changes in legislation for children and young people with autism, it is useful to expand further on recent reforms pertaining to assessment within schools more generally and the implications of these reforms for OFSTED inspections.

6.1 Removal of national curriculum levels

In May 2013 the government announced the removal of national curriculum levels as the means of reporting children's attainment and progress and made it clear that they would not be replaced.

"Schools should have the freedom to decide how to teach their curriculum and how to track the progress that pupils make" (DfE, 2014c: p4)

Tim Oates, chair of the expert panel that reviewed the national curriculum between 2010 and 2013, advocates that children should study fewer things in greater depth. The emphasis should be on linking what is actually taught with what is being assessed. With reference to learners in education systems across the world that performed well:

"They secured deep learning in central concepts and ideas. Assessment should focus on whether children have understood these key concepts rather than achieved a particular level." (National Curriculum: Tim Oates on assessment - YouTube)

Linked to this is the idea of a 'mastery' curriculum whereby the aim is for pupils to grasp concepts fluently and in depth and to be able to recall and apply their learning effectively. Where learning is not secure pupils are expected to consolidate their learning and for those who grasp concepts quickly they should be challenged with more sophisticated problems rather than being accelerated on to new content.

Reasons for levels being dropped include labelling and children being encouraged to move at an undue pace through the levels, even though they may not have grasped key ideas and concepts. Assessment needs to be manageable and move away from a culture of assessing 'everything that moves'. Oates also shifts the responsibility for children's learning onto the teacher rather than onto the child:

“In high performing jurisdictions when a teacher is asked why a child doesn't understand something the teacher will say: ‘...because I've not presented it in the right way,’ yet in England the answer will tend to be ‘...because they are a level three.’” (National Curriculum: Tim Oates on assessment - YouTube)

Reflected in this is also the need to make a stronger connection between assessment, planning and teaching which has been welcomed by many commentators. For example:

“We are focusing a lot of energy on how we plan, teach and assess in a holistic kind of process, rather than the planning being separate from the pedagogy and the assessment being something that someone else does by administering a test.....”

(Dame Alison Peacock, Headteacher, The Wroxham School- interview for InfoMentor, 2014, p9)

In order to support the changes the DfE have produced a set of Assessment Principles to guide schools' developments (Appendix 1) at the forefront of which was the importance of providing parents with information which is reliable and easily understood and providing focused feedback to pupils that contributes to improved learning.

In addition, the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) set up an independent commission to carry out a thorough review of assessment in schools. A number of recommendations were made by the commission and they also produced a set of principles of good assessment and a design checklist for a practical assessment framework . Recommendation 6 of the report states:

“In respect of the National Curriculum, we believe it is valuable - to aid communication, comparison and benchmarking - for schools to be using consistent criteria for assessments” (NAHT, 2014, p6)

In response, the NAHT produced its own assessment framework which identifies key performance indicators (KPIs) drawn from the national curriculum programmes of study for each year group against which assessments can be made. This reflects the move towards a closer link between what is taught and what is actually assessed.

There is also guidance on ways in which reporting might be presented with examples of both descriptive and numerical reporting with an emphasis on the former as being the most valuable. Unlike the proposed end of Key Stage descriptors (still in the consultation stage) which suggest a confusing array of ways to describe pupils' achievement (DfE, 2014d) , the NAHT model keeps its numerical 'descriptors' simple i.e. pupils are assessed as either “working towards, meeting, or exceeding” the standard for the year. Similar assessment criteria have been formulated by other schemes with some variations in wording but basically allowing teachers to assess where pupils are in relation to the standard. The NAHT principles also advocate that

assessment should draw on a wide range of evidence to provide a complete picture of student achievement.

Mention of pupils with SEN is sparse in documentation relating to the new national curriculum and its related assessment, although it has been stated that P scales will be retained for the purpose of assessing those pupils who are unable to access end of key stage tests. In relation to accountability for the attainment and progress of pupils with SEN:

"...given the very diverse nature of this group, data need to be seen in context to give a clear picture of school performance. Schools will remain accountable through robust inspection which looks at teacher assessments of low attaining pupils and whether pupils are making appropriate progress." (DfE, 2014c, p9)

Although much of the above relates specifically to national curriculum assessment this context needs to be taken into consideration when embarking on the development of a Progression Framework for children and young people with autism. Learning experiences for pupils with autism will include the national curriculum and it is important that this is made as accessible as possible and that other key areas of learning are addressed in ways which complement its teaching, and improve access to it, rather than stand apart from it.

6.2 OFSTED

When making decisions about assessment strategy schools will be keen to ensure that the systems they use will be inspected favourably by OFSTED. The DfE have communicated the following information to schools:

"Ofsted do not have any predetermined view as to what specific assessment system a school should use. Inspectors' main interest will be that the approach adopted by a school is effective. They will be looking to see that it provides accurate information showing the progress pupil are making. The information should be meaningful for pupils, parents and governors." (DfE, 2014e,p4)

Or as the chief inspector of schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw puts it:

"What matters is that schools can show what their pupils, know, understand and can do" (Sir Michael Wilshaw, Speech-North of England Education Conference, Nottingham. 15/4/14)

Inspectors will (and will expect schools to) triangulate their evidence i.e. information on pupil progress will need to include evidence in the form of pupils' work, classroom observation and assessment data. Similarly, a range of assessment tools might be used in order to provide the complete picture of an individual's progress, described by Edwards (2014) as a "basketful of indicators". Since the P Scales are to remain it is anticipated that Progression Guidance, which provided schools with national data sets in order to benchmark and compare the progress of individual and groups of students, will also remain as one of these "indicators" for OFSTED.

In relation to pupils with SEND, OFSTED will want to see evidence that targeted provision and interventions are having an impact and how this impacts on progress in other areas e.g. national curriculum expectations, attendance. In addition, a recent report highlighted the need for more attention to be paid to progress being made towards wider outcomes:

“Most schools monitor closely the progress that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make in their academic subjects. However, less attention is paid to the progress they make in developing personal and social skills and in becoming more independent.” (OFSTED, 2014, p16)

6.3 Summary

- Opportunity for schools to review their assessment systems and focus on developing assessment that reflects their priorities for learning
- Recognition of the need for a degree of 'common language' between schools as useful in stimulating discussion about progress
- Emphasis on 'deep learning' or 'mastery' of ideas, concepts and skills rather than 'surface learning' aimed at moving up the levels
- Acknowledgement of the essential relationship between assessment, planning and teaching in order to facilitate learning
- Emphasis on the importance of effective teaching which strives to maximise the learning for individual pupils
- Emphasis on reporting in the form of 'descriptive profiles' rather than 'numerical summaries'
- Emphasis on clear and reliable information to parents

7. CONSULTATION

At the start of the project a consultation process took place in order to gain the views of stakeholders and inform the development of a framework. Pellicano (2014) in her article on the ethics of autism research advocates the need to include the autism community in research:

“Autistic people, family members, practitioners need to be involved in various stages of the research process” (Pellicano, 2014, p24)

In order to achieve this, four online surveys were developed aimed at four distinct groups:

1. Practitioners in schools attended by children and young people with autism
2. Parents of children and young people with autism
3. Children and young people with autism of school age
4. Adults with autism

The surveys were ‘live’ during May/June 2015. The main findings for each group are outlined below.

7.1 School survey

Information and a link to the school survey were distributed via the AET and NASS (National Association of Special Schools) newsletters. In addition, direct contact with schools and other education forums were used to ‘cascade’ the link. 91 surveys were completed by staff working in a range of roles within schools, including those who worked in an advisory or outreach capacity. 19 (out of 48) counties within England were represented.

7.1.1 Provision type

A good balance of responses was received from mainstream (50%) and special schools (46%) with a good proportion of pupil age represented.

7.1.2 Existing assessment tools

A range of assessment tools were used to assess learning and progress for learners with autism (Appendix 2). Most schools used a number of different tools and assessed progress termly or half termly (with some variation according to tool).

The majority of measures related to National Curriculum assessment and despite the fact that levels have ceased to be statutory this academic year, 71% of schools continued to use them. This may reflect the fact that the timeline for change following government reforms has stipulated that new ‘life after levels’ assessment measures should be in place by September 2015. Most schools are undergoing a transition phase and this was supported by the fact that 47% of schools were also already using end of year expectations (which relate directly to the programmes of study) as a measure of progress. However, one respondent commented:

“New age-related expectations are not good as (learners with autism) may always be ‘emerging’”

P scales were used by 64% of schools indicating a high proportion of schools with at least some pupils whose attainment was at early levels of development. However, limitations in their usefulness were also noted:

“The P levels are only a ‘best fit’. We find they do not allow our children to achieve as their autism is not taken into account. This is especially true in speaking, listening and PSHE”

“There are limitations as difficult to set a best fit level. Often children with autism show skills spanning several levels”

35% of (secondary) schools used GCSE grades as a measure. Of the commercial schemes B Squared and PIVATS had the highest number of users. Some schools found these effective whereas others had reservations. One autism advisor working across schools commented:

“Many of the schools have mentioned that P levels and related schemes are not clear, there is overlap or some areas are not relevant”

A few measures that have been devised more specifically for children with autism were used, with SCERTS (Prizant et al, 2006) used by 9% and the Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales (Sparrow et al, 2005) cited by a small number of respondents. A small number of schools had devised their own bespoke measurements some of which have been discussed above. A number of respondents mentioned the lack of a suitable tool “to measure what is important to the individual”:

“Normal level and grade setting does not benefit our pupils with ASC at all, as no recognition of processing, sensory and other factors”

In relation to the processing of assessment data schools used a range of software such as Raiseonline, SIMS, CASPA and B Squared. Some schools were in the process of changing their systems to reflect changes to their assessment arrangements. However, a large number of schools were using their own systems in order to process their data.

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of existing tools in demonstrating progress for learners with autism in relation to the national curriculum core subjects (Chart 1) with a significant number (approximately 75%) indicating that this was satisfactory or very effective but with up to a quarter of respondents feeling that existing tools were not very effective:

“I find that children with autism may or may not progress at the rate of their peers, and where we see huge gains in their social and communication skills this does not transfer to their core subjects”

Chart 1

Q4 In the context of your setting, how effective are your existing systems in ensuring that you are able to demonstrate progress for learners with autism in relation to the National Curriculum (core subjects)

Answered: 89 Skipped: 2

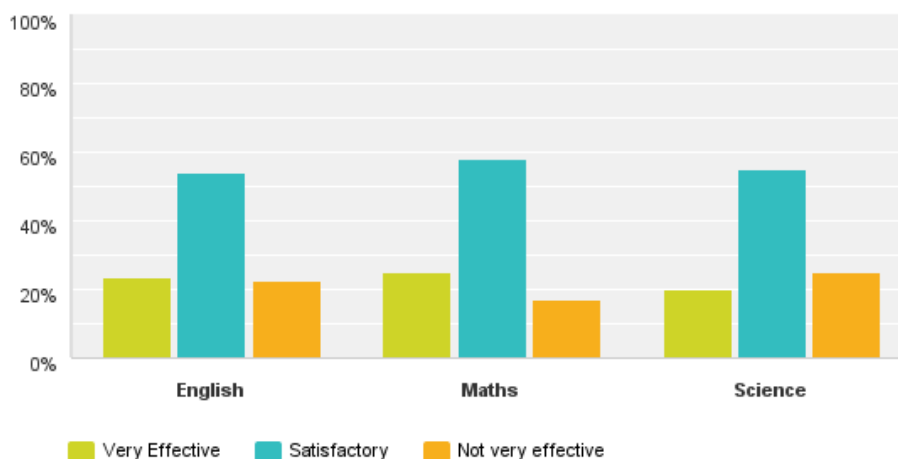


Chart 2 shows how respondents rated the effectiveness of existing tools in measuring progress in areas that might be identified as areas for development for children and young people with autism.

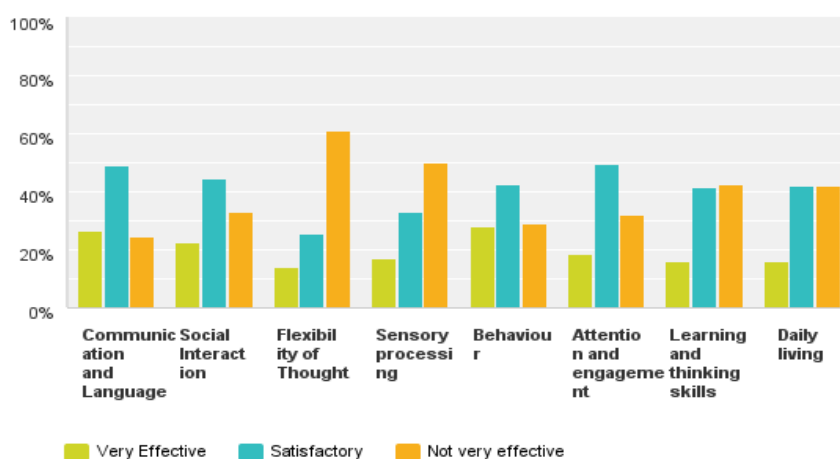
Areas most effectively measured were communication, social interaction, behaviour and attention and engagement. As stated earlier it is likely that this is because these are areas covered to some extent within the P scales and related schemes which break them down into small steps e.g. PIVATS English: speaking and listening, PSD: interacting and working with others; attention; independent and organisational skills.

Areas cited as least effectively measured were flexibility of thought, sensory processing, learning and thinking skills and daily living skills. These are areas which are less likely to be explicitly included within existing tools but which can be seen as essential in improving access to learning for young people with autism.

Chart 2

Q5 In the context of your setting, how effective are your existing systems in ensuring that you are able to demonstrate progress for learners with autism in the following areas

Answered: 91 Skipped: 0



Respondents expressed a need for a means of showing progress in these areas:

“Looking for an effective way to measure PSHE and the areas above”

“So challenging for schools to show progress, even when they are doing a really good job – quite dispiriting for them” (teacher)

Some respondents indicated that they used qualitative assessments to measure progress in the areas suggested:

“...existing system for measuring progress includes collecting rich data in a number of ways (e.g. observation, consultation with parents, direct work with the child or young person)”

Individual learning plans (ILPs) were also cited as examples of progress measurement:

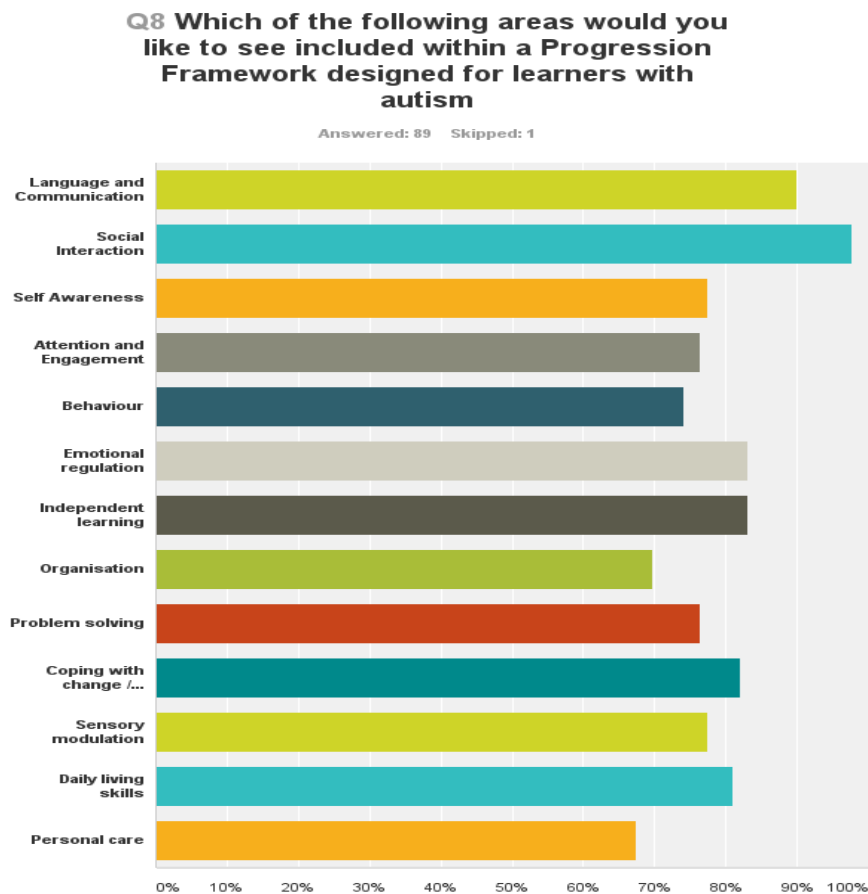
“School based ILPs are becoming very effective at tracking progress, and use contextual learning to rehearse and develop functional skills to enable learning”

“We set learning intentions and assess progress on the basis of a personal strengths / needs analysis. This is a multi-disciplinary process and we involve parents/carers. As a consequence we are able to show progress where progress occurs”

7.1.3 Areas for inclusion in a framework

Respondents were provided with a list of suggested areas for inclusion within a Progression Framework for learners with autism (Chart 3). There was a high response to all areas with social interaction and language and communication achieving the highest number of selections and personal care receiving the lowest number of selections.

Chart 3



Some respondents welcomed the areas suggested but indicated that these would vary according to the needs of different children:

“All of the above but not necessarily with each child, a selection relative to each child's area of development”

“It is specific to the individual challenges the student faces so the tool needs to be able to measure progress in all areas and could be made specific to the individual”

Respondents were also asked if there were any other areas they would like to see included. Additional areas suggested were: work / careers / employability skills, flexibility included within coping with change, self-esteem and confidence, relationships, fine and gross motor skills.

7.1.4 Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

A section was included on IEPs as it is likely that the assessment tool developed would link closely to this type of format for individual planning. Although, as discussed above, IEPs are no longer a requirement of the Code of Practice many schools appear to have retained them or have an equivalent document in place e.g. one school commented on the need to closely align targets to the SEN / EHC plan.

Most schools reviewed their IEPs termly and the average number of targets included was 3-4. A small number of schools had significantly more targets (e.g. "About 5 key broad areas with 3 key learning intentions in each area per term")

In relation to 'headings' within IEPs some related closely to the autism triad i.e. communication (very prevalent), social interaction, flexible thinking, sensory issues whilst some were more aligned with category of needs e.g. as identified within LA services e.g. communication and interaction, cognition and learning, behaviour, social and emotional, physical / sensory. A number of schools also included independence skills. 'Academic' skills such as literacy and numeracy were included on a number of IEPs although one respondent commented:

"IEPs are access based and informed by the triad. The focus is to remove barriers to learning rather than support specific curriculum targets"

7.1.5 Conclusions

Key points drawn from the schools survey that are useful to the development of the Progression Framework can be summarised as:

- Schools are changing over from National Curriculum levels to age related expectations. Assessment in this area may not take into account "barriers to learning" that may be encountered by learners with autism nor acknowledge specific difficulties in certain areas
- P scales only provide a "best fit" measure and do not necessarily show the uneven profiles of learners with autism. Small steps tools based on the P scales do not always focus on areas of priority identified by practitioners
- There is a lack of suitable tools to measure progress in areas considered important to learners with autism and the development of such a tool would be welcomed
- Many of the areas identified as needed within such a tool are targeted within existing IEPs
- A tool should allow the flexibility to assess the individual needs of learners and identify priorities in certain areas

7.2 Parent Survey

This survey was spread widely via parents' own networks using social media. 241 responses were received. Some respondents had more than one child with autism within different types of provision.

7.2.1 Provision type

This survey had a greater number of children attending mainstream provision, especially in the primary phase. However, it was concerning to note that a significant number of respondents reported a breakdown of school placement resulting in the child being home educated or simply "out of school" and without an alternative plan in place:

"Child was permanently excluded from mainstream primary in July 2014 and has not attended school since. LA have been unable to identify suitable educational provision since then"

7.2.2 Information on progress

Parents were asked how schools shared information about their child's progress (Appendix 3). A range of methods were used with parents evenings being the most common. Some parents reported good day to day communication with teacher, TA or SENCO. Some parents attended termly IEP meetings or review meetings although there were some reports of needing to specifically request these rather than them being offered:

"We are trying to work out a more useful method of communication / reporting for our daughter's upcoming junior school, but are having to do most of the thinking and action to ensure this is done ourselves"

One parent's comments are interesting in relation to the discussion above about 'levels' and ensuring that assessments are accurate:

"Sometimes getting information is like pulling teeth....Levels of progression on the NC scales has been unhelpful as although the teacher may be able to tick the boxes should my son complete a task which progresses him through the levels, this does not give a true account of his real level of understanding or ability to complete said task at another time"

In relation to the effectiveness of information relating to progress (Chart 4) this was felt to be most effective in relation to national curriculum subjects, communication and behaviour. At least half the respondents felt that information relating to social relationships, emotional wellbeing / managing stress, sensory needs, transitions / coping with change and daily living skills was not very effective and this reflected a lack of awareness of how these areas might impact on the child's school experience and access to learning:

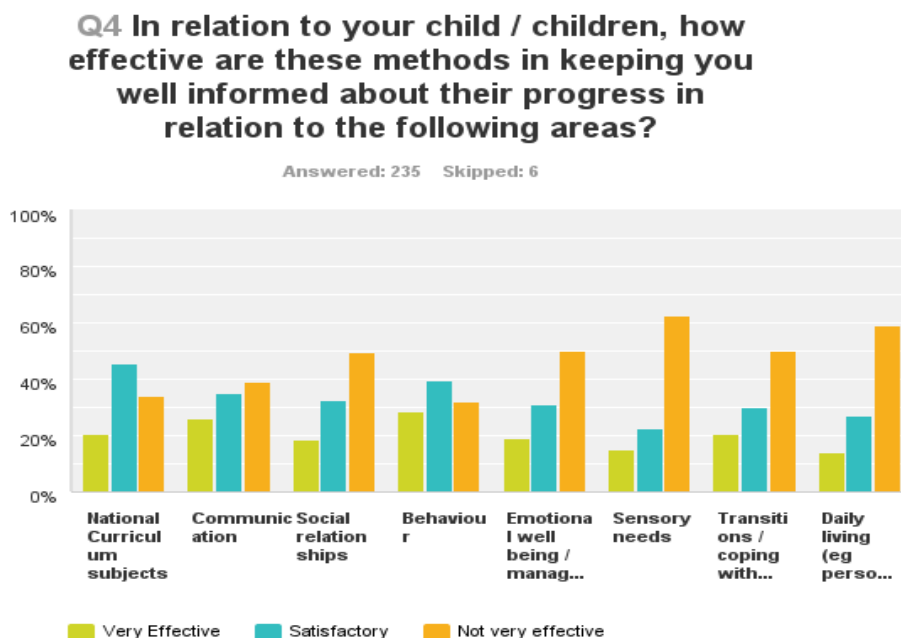
“There is no understanding of sensory needs or emotional wellbeing / social relationships”

A number of comments related to a need for better understanding of the needs of children and young people with autism within school so as to avoid issues that may have arisen due to this lack of understanding or failure to support the child appropriately:

“I would say they are reactive rather than proactive in developing strategies to support and so communicate about these areas”

“Usually contact once an issue has reached a level of concern rather than in the early stages in which it could be sorted before escalation”

Chart 4



7.2.3 Areas for inclusion in a framework

Chart 5 shows the response to areas suggested for inclusion within a Progression Framework. The highest priority area was social relationships with emotional wellbeing, self-awareness/self-esteem and coping with change/transitions also high. Anger management was also listed as an area to include as well as a wider definition of flexibility and, more specifically, adaptive behaviour rather than simply “behaviour”. It was suggested that social communication be separated out from “language and communication” and an emphasis placed on developmental milestones that children may not have mastered.

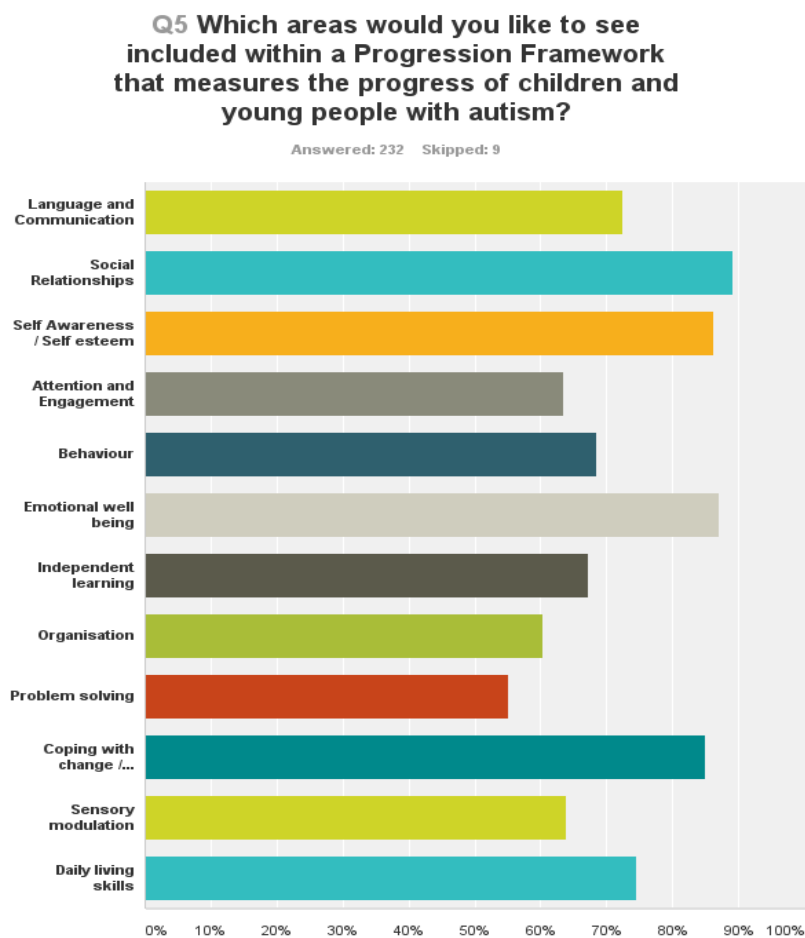
A number of parents felt that “all of the above” were important and voiced the need for a holistic approach. One parent stressed the importance of

“measurement” in these areas serving to improve services for the child rather than highlighting “failure” on the part of the child (or parents).

As with the schools survey parents also stressed the need for these areas to be “available” from which individualised targets could then be agreed and progress reported on:

“It is very hard for one plan to fit all. With my two boys they are so very different. You might as well compare a broken leg with a heart attack, the plan needs to be able to ignore areas that the individual doesn’t need and drill down to specifics on the areas that are of importance”

Chart 5



One parent expressed some reservations about the implications of a Progression Framework specific to autism areas:

“If they were working on all these things in depth (like I assume they do in special schools) they wouldn't have time to teach my child the national curriculum. Having to use such a Progression Framework would put too much pressure on the staff. It would also put too much pressure on my son who would ask why does he have to have all these measures to control how he is doing in these areas when the 'normal' kids just get measured on their school work”

However, another welcomed the idea of a means of celebrating progress in areas that fall outside the traditional curriculum:

“My child is 'tracked' the same as neurologically typical children, which means he is always consistently scoring lower. I would love to see SEN accounted for within the tracking”

Parents were also asked to comment on areas of learning at school that their child might consider important. Some of these related specifically to the child's special interests or “favourite” subjects or to “academic” subjects generally. Other areas which were prevalent included: stress management, resilience / coping mechanisms, self-esteem, behaviour, communication, emotional wellbeing.

By far the most frequent area cited was that of social relationships/social interaction and friendships:

“Well my child just wants to have a friend so I would say social interaction and building friendships appropriately”

7.2.4 Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Parents were asked if they were consulted about targets for their child's IEP. Although a large number were consulted a significant proportion were not. Of those consulted, some indicated that this was after the plan had been drawn up rather than including them within the planning process. When asked if the IEP focused on areas they considered priorities for their child the response was fairly evenly split. For example:

“Yes but only because as parents we've ensured it does”

“Only academically, there is no focus on wellbeing or relationships”

“My priority is his mental health and ensuring his emotional needs are met. At his age I feel going to school with minimum anxiety is key and I feel this is being met more than adequately”

“No, due to lack of expertise and support from specialist services”

7.2.5 Further comments

Parents were given the opportunity to add any further comments on what they perceived to be good progress for their child or what features they would like to see within a Progression Framework. In summary these included:

- personalised goals set with parents
- young person part of the process of decision making when targets are set
- well thought out motivators to boost self-esteem and help the pupil achieve

Comments which extended more widely included:

- better liaison between different agencies
- education for peers about autism
- better training and support for staff
- less focus on academic results at the expense of other needs
- curriculum that provides a balance of social, communication, integration and educational skills
- schools that are determined for all children to succeed
- expert support available to parents outside of school (as other areas won't be able to be addressed within a mainstream school)
- know that there needs to be a two way process of adaptation both on the part of the young person and "society" (the environment) i.e. to accept different ways of "being" in society

7.2.6 Conclusions

As with the schools survey it is useful to summarise some key points to be taken into account when developing the Progression Framework:

- There is room for improvement in relation to schools' involvement of parents with regards to the communication of pupil progress and in identifying priorities for learning and setting targets
- Areas in which information on learning and progress is least effectively shared is in relation to: social relationships, emotional wellbeing, sensory issues, coping with change / transitions and daily living
- A better understanding of needs is required in order to inform provision. The aim of a progress measure should be to inform the planning of interventions

- Priority areas for inclusion within a progression framework would be: social relationships, emotional wellbeing, self-awareness / self-esteem, coping with change / transitions
- There is a need for a more holistic approach to learning
- A framework should have areas “available” but should allow for individualised targets to be set against which progress could be reported
- The area most cited by parents as important to their child was social relationships / friendships

7.3 Children and young people with autism survey

This survey was aimed at pupils in school and was disseminated via schools and through the AET newsletter. Since the survey was in text form its audience was restricted to pupils who were able to read or those who could be supported to complete it by a parent, carer or member of school staff. Some learner surveys were clearly completed by parents on behalf of their child although this was not always made explicit which may affect the reliability of some of the responses. There were 151 respondents.

7.3.1 Provision type, age and gender

This survey also had a greater number of children attending mainstream provision with an equal proportion of primary and secondary. 9% attended units attached to mainstream schools. A third of respondents attended special schools. 30% of respondents were girls and 70% boys.

7.3.2 School experience

Respondents were asked about their likes, dislikes, strengths and difficulties at school in order to ascertain information about their school experience. As would be expected many responses focused on individual subject preferences and there were some positive comments about lunchtime clubs which catered for special interests. With respect to ‘likes’ there was also a strong focus on opportunities to see friends:

“I like meeting up with my friends and talking about the games we play on Xbox”

In addition, some pupils mentioned the support they were given and teachers’ understanding of their needs as a positive:

“I like my friends. I like it being a nice small school, some of the teachers understand me, and the work gets better explained, there’s no bullies, and it is a very quiet school and I also really like the animals being here.”

In relation to aspects disliked or what they found difficult many responses related to sensory aspects, in particular noise and the volume of people:

“All the noise and people milling around and make it hard for me. The noise hurts my head”

More specific sensory issues were also highlighted:

“We have glass panels on the stairs and I don't like looking down”

Bullying was also mentioned a number of times and other pupils being “annoying”. Lack of understanding about their autism on the part of both teachers and other pupils also featured . Most prevalent in relation to difficulties were aspects related to social relationships, in particular “making friends” and “socialising”:

“Starting conversations with people, making friends, having conversations with people, reading aloud to a teacher and taking it all in, asking people questions”

Other aspects found difficult included change, not being listened to, telling teachers when they don't understand and following instructions. In relation to academic subjects writing was often cited as an area of particular difficulty.

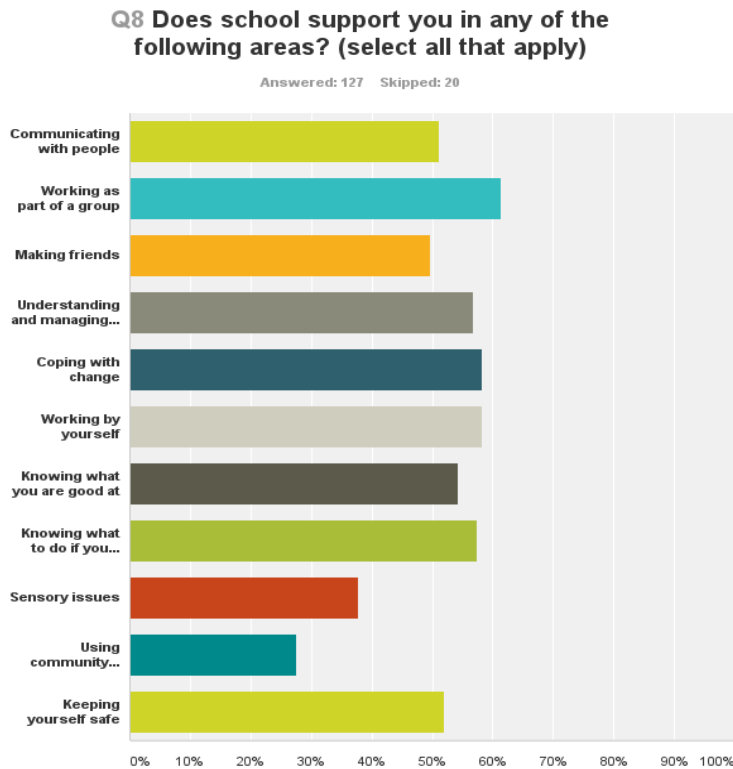
Chart 6 shows the extent to which pupils felt supported in areas that they might find difficult as a result of their autism. Although areas where pupils need support will differ, it appears that there may be room for improvement in the extent to which such support is provided. This is particularly true for sensory issues and using community facilities. For example:

“More understanding about not wanting to go into assembly as the noise can drive me crazy”

Other areas where pupils felt that more support would be of benefit were in the most part related to areas they had cited as difficult i.e. conversations, making friends, socialising, understanding other people, understanding and managing emotions, knowing what to do if you find a situation difficult. As one pupil summed up:

“I wish I knew how to understand other people and their intentions. I wish I had more preparation for a social life and how to be social. School doesn't develop you as an individual”

Chart 6



86% of pupils reported that there was someone to talk to if they needed help, advice or support although some indicated that they found this difficult.

In relation to setting their own targets just over half the respondents reported involvement although this was not always done effectively:

“They tell me about decisions, but I just say yes to everything because I think that's what I should be saying. I don't really understand what they are talking about most of the time”

7.3.3 Conclusions

Key points can be summarised as:

- Support and understanding of school staff (and peers) in relation to autism and listening to the pupil (pupil voice) were important to ensuring a positive school experience
- Sensory issues were a common area of difficulty and were often not recognised
- Bullying was an issue for pupils with autism

- Making friends and socialising were high priorities for many and more support to develop skills in this area would be welcomed

7.4 Adults with autism survey

This survey was aimed at adults with autism and was distributed via the AET newsletter. Questions were similar to those in the pupil survey. There were 25 respondents with an age range of 18 to 60. A range of provision was attended. Some respondents had not been diagnosed with autism whilst at school.

7.4.1 School experience

Reports on this were mixed with some very positive reports of school helping to increase confidence through academic success and opportunities to participate socially. As with the pupil survey, friendships were an important factor as were supportive and understanding staff:

“Making friends, being with students similar to my abilities, learning, the staff, socialising, after-school activities”

“The school helped me with confidence in myself, getting out into society, and with my social skills. I like having structure, and less people around me. As the school only took 150 students max, it was ideal”

On a less positive note, in relation to what respondents disliked or found difficult at school common areas included noise/busy environments, changing classes, teachers not understanding disability, socialising, organisation, what to do at breaks, understanding and following instructions. By far the most common reason for disliking school was bullying and this was attributed to both peers and staff:

“People- including teachers – were bullies. (What I disliked was) that I understood nothing that was going on but no one noticed”

There were also examples of pupil and teacher not understanding each other:

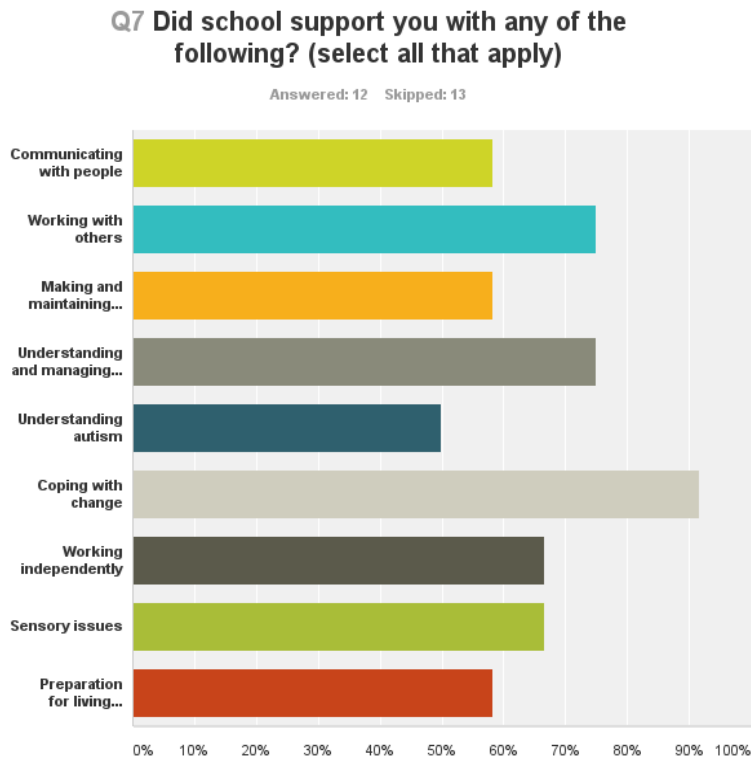
“Getting told off for doing what teachers said because I did what they said not what they meant”

“Understanding the difference between what people said and what they actually wanted me to do”

Chart 7 shows the extent to which respondents felt they were supported at school in relation to areas of difficulty related to their autism. Significantly, more than half the respondents skipped this question with many stating that they did not receive any such support but would have liked to:

“I needed help with all of them – got none in mainstream. They had to do a lot of work with me to try and catch up even a little in Specialist College. Those things were more important for me than GCSEs”

Chart 7



Areas that respondents may have liked more support with at school included staying organised, transition from school, understanding and managing anxiety, 'life' skills, understanding how neurotypical people think and work:

“As I was academically able I think people assumed I was able in other areas but this wasn't the case – I would have benefitted from work on emotions and feelings, friendships and self-esteem. Also counselling to gain self-awareness and self-acceptance. More help with careers planning and preparing for university as I found the social aspects of this very difficult and it took me a long time to get started with my career”

7.4.2 Conclusions

Findings from the adult survey support, in the most part, many of the conclusions drawn from the pupil survey. Positive experiences related to supportive and understanding staff, opportunities to socialise and being with pupils of similar abilities. Bullying was again an issue and was attributed to teachers as well as other pupils. There were reports of mutual lack of understanding between teacher and pupil. Significantly, there was a marked difference in support and teaching available in the

areas specific to autism which respondents felt would have been beneficial. Since respondents had experienced the transition to the next phase of their lives it was interesting that it was felt that support within this transition period would have been helpful. Some respondents indicated that their academic ability had 'masked' other difficulties they experienced.

7.5 Direct consultation with schools, AET Programme Partners and AET Expert Reference Group (ERG)

In addition to the surveys (above) a number of schools were consulted via visits, email and telephone conversations. References to materials and ideas felt to be of relevance have been included within the report. In addition, AET Programme Partners and ERG meetings provided opportunities to present findings and consult with a range of autism professionals. Advice was sought on 'headings' to include within the Framework and on useful resources that might support its development.

8. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

At the start of the project a number of questions were raised in relation to the development of the Progression Framework. The Literature Review and Consultation reported above has gone some way towards providing answers to these questions although it is anticipated that further research and consultation during the Development and Pilot phase of the project will continue to influence the final product. A summary of responses agreed to date is outlined below.

8.1 Identifying areas of learning

Based on an understanding of the impact of autism differences on pupils' experience in schools, a consideration of desirable outcomes and feedback from the surveys a series of 'headings' was agreed (Appendix 4). These were used as part of the consultation process with AET Programme Partners and Expert Reference Group who were also asked to contribute to resources and references that might be of relevance to drawing up the Framework.

As can be seen, the areas identified relate closely to the areas discussed under Autism and its Implications for Learning (above) i.e. Social Communication, Social Interaction, Social Imagination/Information Processing, Sensory needs but also include areas on Self Awareness and Emotional Understanding, Learning and Independence/Community Participation. Although the need for support in these latter areas may not be specific to pupils with autism it was felt that they should be included as priorities as pupils often experienced difficulties in these areas as a result of their autism.

Initial work on drawing up 'goals' or 'learning intentions' has highlighted the need to avoid lists of isolated or fragmented skills and to ensure that what is included relates

to an appropriate context or end goal. Vermeulen (2012) has coined the term "context blindness" and stresses the need to take account of the difficulties in this area that people with autism may experience when planning educational programmes. Jordan and Jones (1999) make the point that in relation to social relationships, for example, the fundamental nature of pupils' difficulties in this area mean that it is not simply a matter of identifying and teaching missing social skills. If pupils lack a proper understanding of social situations and the ability to adapt their behaviour accordingly the skills themselves will not be able to be applied effectively or generalised which in turn could lead to pupils' behaviour being misinterpreted or considered socially 'odd'. They advocate enabling pupils to gain socially rewarding experiences whilst making the rules underlying social behaviour explicit. So when drawing up goals for the Framework, where possible the emphasis will be on relating 'skills' to specific situations. For example, the development of social behaviour such as facial expression, eye contact or personal space will be referenced to specific situations such as enjoying an interactive game with an adult or having a conversation with a peer, rather than as a series of isolated skills.

One area that provoked comment from the consultation was that of sensory needs and the fact that this area had not been divided into potential 'sub' areas as was the case with others. The reason for this was based on the fact that it was felt that goals for this area lay mainly with the practitioner and their ability to take account of the pupil's sensory needs and adapt the environment accordingly. This having been said, the ability of pupils to recognise and regulate their own sensory needs would be considered important goals and ways in which these could be incorporated would be examined. Further consideration of how this area might be developed in order to show progress, including consultation with OTs, would form part of the next phase.

There was also discussion about whether 'Behaviour' and 'Emotional Wellbeing' should be included as areas. At this point it was felt that outcomes in these areas were related to other factors such as pupils' ability to communicate, to cope with change or to understand their emotions but, as with sensory needs, pupils' ability to manage and self-regulate their behaviour would be important areas to include. At the same time, awareness on behalf of school staff of factors that may cause anxiety for pupils with autism would be key to pupils' making progress in these areas.

In relation to Learning, aspects of this area were felt to be key since, for many pupils with autism, issues with motivation and engagement and the ability to cope with the school environment can lead to an unsuccessful school experience.

Finally, the area of Independence and Community Participation takes account of needs in relation to life after school if pupils are to move successfully into adulthood. Instances of lack of awareness in areas such as personal hygiene, internet safety and sex and relationships education are common in relation to young adults with autism and there was a call for this area to be included.

Since, as has been stated elsewhere, every pupil with autism will have differing needs it is likely that not all areas will be considered priorities for all pupils. The tool will need to allow for this individualisation and should allow users to focus on priorities for individual learners at specific points in their school career.

8.2 Layout and size

Feedback from the consultation raised some concerns as to the potential size of a document whereby the range of ability, age and provision type was extensive. There was some discussion as to whether a narrowing of focus might be necessary in order to ensure that the task was, indeed, manageable. At this point it was felt that, rather than restrict the 'audience' it would be preferable to aim for a 'broad strokes' framework that could be used to identify priorities for learning, aid staff in planning interventions, and provide evidence of achievement towards individual goals. There would not be room for an infinite level of detail but the personalisation of learning goals would be key to the Framework being used effectively. Each area would be sub divided so that those using the Framework could move easily between areas based on a pupil's particular priorities. Where possible, these sub areas would reflect priorities identified through the surveys e.g. making friends. In addition, although not 'levelled' in relation to particular skill areas, there would be some degree of hierarchy of skills within areas.

8.3 Purpose and use of the Framework

The main purpose of the Framework will be primarily to demonstrate progress for pupils with autism in areas that fall outside the National Curriculum. However, since assessment in these areas should be directly linked to the planning of interventions it is anticipated that a function of the tool would be to assist school staff in identifying areas of priority for individual pupils which would then lead to discussions as to ways in which the pupil could be supported to achieve his or her goals. This emphasis on the role of the practitioner and ways in which teaching and the environment can be adapted to support this is prevalent within other AET materials. Other materials related to assessment (e.g. Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Early Education, 2012)) also use a format which lays emphasis on these interrelated aspects (Unique Child, Positive Relationships, Enabling Environments) and it is felt that this type of document could provide valuable support to staff in schools, particular those in less specialised environments. Consideration has been given as to whether the Framework could include suggestions for strategies and / or links to useful resources. Although it is anticipated that some guidance notes will be necessary within the actual body of the Framework it is likely that more detailed guidance will not fall within the scope of this phase of the project. However, further work in this area might form an extension project if pilot schools felt this would be useful and if funds were available.

As has been stressed elsewhere in this report the involvement of parents and pupils in the assessment and planning process is vital. The Framework could be used as a

starting point for discussing priorities and identifying goals within EHC or IEP (or equivalent) meetings. It therefore needs to be accessible both in relation to its size and the language and format used, as is discussed in the next section.

Examples of good practice in assessment have been described above. Some schools appear frustrated with a 'tick list' approach to assessment which has been encouraged by schemes which 'break down' the national curriculum into 'small steps'. There is a feeling (e.g. Edwards, 2014) that such an approach fragments learning since the small steps do not necessarily 'add up' to the overall learning goal. In response to this, some schemes (e.g. Swiss Cottage Progression Planners, The Dales School MAPP) advocate the writing of 'personal learning intentions' whereby learning goals are individualised in order to take account of specific needs.

At this point in the project, it is felt that such an approach is desirable. However, it is recognised that this makes it difficult to record progress specifically against the learning goals that will make up the Framework. Ways in which these two aspects can be reconciled will therefore be explored. Initial plans are to recommend that staff identify goals as they appear in the Framework but then personalise the goal within an individual learning plan which also outlines how they will go about supporting the pupil. Suggested formats for doing this will be included as guidance alongside the Framework (e.g. in the form of worked examples or case studies) and will form part of the accompanying training module (see below).

In relation to the above it is recognised that schools may already be using tools which could be used alongside the Framework in order to measure progress. For example the MAPP tool 'measures' progress using the Continuum of Skill Development which could be used to measure progress in relation to the Framework's autism areas. Other systems may also accommodate the Framework and it is for schools to decide how it best fits within its existing processes.

8.4 'Levels' of achievement

Linked to this and referred to in the report is the need to consider 'degrees' or 'levels' of achievement or engagement. It is felt that the Framework should include a simple scale (e.g. 1-4) which would allow for the extent to which a goal has been achieved to be recorded i.e. from an emerging skill to that which is secure and consistent across contexts. Descriptors for each of these 'levels' will need to be carefully worded so that staff making judgements are clear as to what the pupil needs to have done in order to achieve this level and so that there is consistency between staff making assessments. The aim is for pupils to be able to move from a level at which they are given considerable support or prompting to one whereby they are independent and able to generalise the skill. Since application of skills across contexts can be difficult for people with autism this kind of 'lateral' progression is to be celebrated.

8.5 Reporting progress

Reports on progress have a number of audiences and include pupils, parents, school senior staff and external agencies (e.g. funding agencies, OFSTED). In order to meet the needs of these stakeholders there is a need for the tool to be easily accessible and understood and for it to meet different requirements. 'At a glance' reporting in the form of a visual summary or profile of progress was felt to be desirable e.g. via a 'spider diagram' format (c.f. Kelly, 2010). Colour coding is also popular within a number of systems and ways in which this might be incorporated will be investigated.

In addition to this overview a more detailed 'layer' of reporting which provides a more comprehensive account of progress will be recommended in relation to individual pupil achievement in relation to personal learning intentions. This is likely to be a more descriptive account and should provide references to evidence of learning.

8.6 Pupil Involvement

Linked to the above is the need to incorporate ways of ensuring that pupils are involved in both the setting of learning intentions and in assessing their own progress. Given the range of age and ability of pupils targeted it is likely that different formats for this might be necessary. Again this is an aspect of the project that might require further work (and would need to be informed by outcomes from the Pupil Participation project) but suggestions and examples for ways in which school staff can create their own systems for ensuring involvement can be included within accompanying guidance and the training module. For example, areas of priority can be made more accessible by changing headings e.g. 'My Communication', 'Me and Others' etc. and success criteria relating to learning goals can be 'translated' into 'I can...' statements meaningful to the pupil.

8.7 Moderation

A final area for consideration is the need to ensure that judgements being made using the tool are robust and that the evidence of progress it provides is reliable. Linking judgements to evidence in the form of written accounts, multi-media evidence or pupils' work will provide one means of supporting assessments. In addition, it is important to ensure that regular discussion about priorities and progress towards them takes place amongst staff who know the pupil well. One school visited had regular meetings to review and moderate goals and their assessment and involved an external observer as a 'critical friend'. Staff were encouraged to take examples of goals set for their 'least straightforward' pupils so that their processes could be scrutinised. Good practice in this area will also be highlighted within guidance materials.

8.8 Pilot phase

As has been indicated the draft Framework will be piloted in schools in order to test its effectiveness and identify revisions. A range of schools covering all provision types has been identified and this phase will take place in the autumn term 2015. Since the amount of time available for the pilot is limited the focus will be less on the amount of progress made by pupils and more on feedback relating to the content of the Framework, its usefulness and usability in relation to the pupils in the identified schools, and how it might support planning and teaching processes.

8.9 Training module

The final phase of the project will involve the development of a half day training module which will form part of the AET schools training materials and complement other training for school staff. The module will be predominantly a 'how to' session in order to introduce the Framework and familiarise staff with how it works. At this stage it is felt that a 'hands on' element would be useful which allows staff a chance to use the Framework in order to profile a young person and identify priorities accordingly. Such a session should also allow participants opportunities to engage in discussion about progress for young people with autism and to reflect on the school experience for pupils in their school.

8.10 FINAL SUMMARY

The purpose of this review and consultation was to provide a context which would inform the development of a Progression Framework for children and young people with autism by consulting with relevant literature and canvassing the views of a range of stakeholders. The next phase of the project is to write a first draft of the Framework which will then be piloted in schools. Each of the sections of this review has included a summary of key points which will be taken into account as the Framework is drawn up. To summarise this final section:

- Areas identified for the Framework relate closely to autism differences and the impact of these on social and emotional needs, learning and independence and community participation
- When drawing up 'goals' consideration will be given to the context within which skills will be developed
- Further consideration needs to be given to ways in which the area of sensory needs is incorporated within the Framework
- The facility to personalise learning priorities will be an important feature of the Framework
- The 'audience' for the tool should not be restricted at this point

- Areas identified should be subdivided for ease of access and should reflect priorities identified through the surveys
- Detailed guidance and links to resources in order to support practitioners will not fall within the scope of this project but could form the focus of a future project
- The Framework might provide a starting point for IEPs / EHCs
- A scale for recording the extent to which goals have been achieved will be included within the Framework but other measurement tools will be also be compatible
- The Framework will allow for different levels of reporting including 'at a glance' and more detailed descriptive reporting
- Examples of ways to include pupils will be included within accompanying guidance and training and will be informed by the Pupil Participation project
- Schools should ensure that their systems for moderating judgements in relation to the Framework are robust
- Pilot schools have been identified from a range of provision types with the emphasis on feedback in relation to content and usability
- The training session will provide a 'how to' and 'hands on' opportunity for schools to learn about the Framework

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Appendix 1: Assessment Principles

Published: April 2014 (DfE)

Assessment Principles

As part of the 2013 Primary Assessment and Accountability consultation, we consulted on a set of core principles to underpin effective assessment systems within schools. Following feedback from the consultation responses, these principles were further developed by an independent Expert Panel.

The principles are designed to help all schools as they implement arrangements for assessing pupils' progress against their school curriculum; Government will not impose a single system for ongoing assessment.

Schools will be expected to demonstrate (with evidence) their assessment of pupils' progress, to keep parents informed, to enable governors to make judgements about the school's effectiveness, and to inform Ofsted inspections.

Effective assessment systems:

Give reliable information to parents about how their child, and their child's school, is performing

- a. Allow meaningful tracking of pupils towards end of key stage expectations in the new curriculum, including regular feedback to parents.
- b. Provide information which is transferable and easily understood and covers both qualitative and quantitative assessment.
- c. Differentiate attainment between pupils of different abilities, giving early recognition of pupils who are falling behind and those who are excelling.
- d. Are reliable and free from bias.

Help drive improvement for pupils and teachers

- a. Are closely linked to improving the quality of teaching.
- b. Ensure feedback to pupils contributes to improved learning and is focused on specific and tangible objectives.
- c. Produce recordable measures which can demonstrate comparison against expected standards and reflect progress over time.

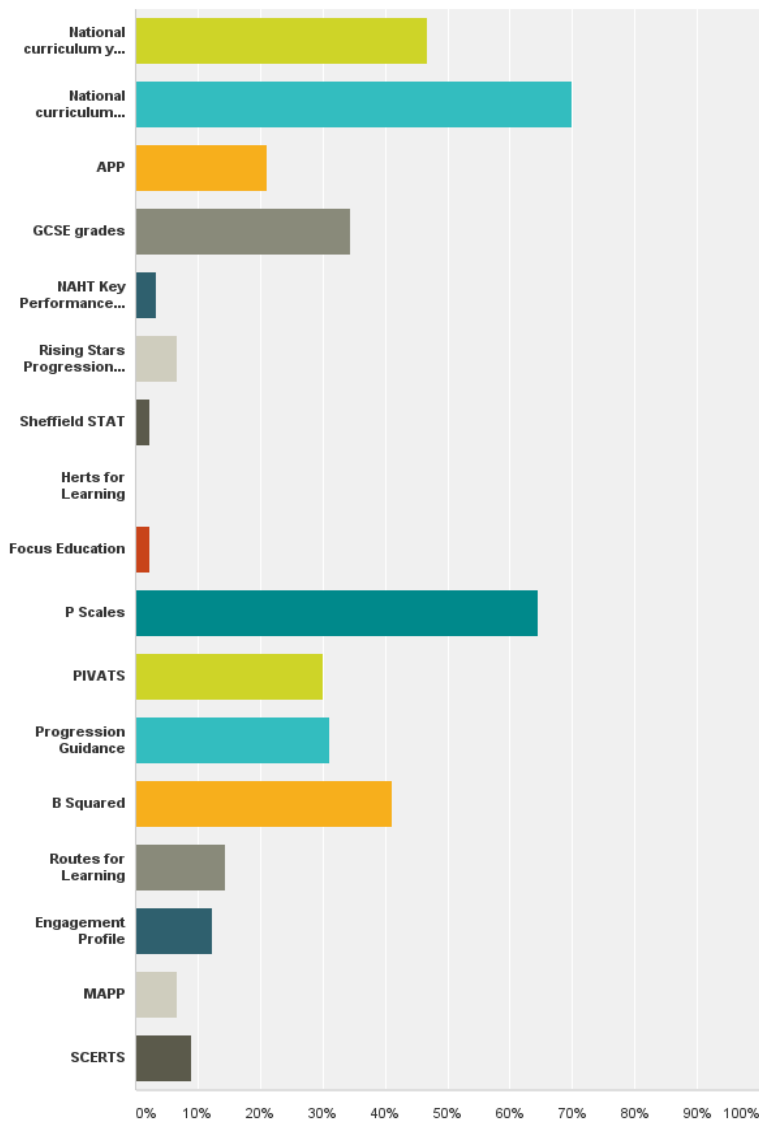
Make sure the school is keeping up with external best practice and innovation

- a. Are created in consultation with those delivering best practice locally.
- b. Are created in consideration of, and are benchmarked against, international best practice.

Appendix 2: Assessment Tools

Q3 Which assessment tools do you currently use to assess learning and progress for learners with autism? (Select all that apply). Please give detail of any other tools used, including those devised by you, your school or Local Authority

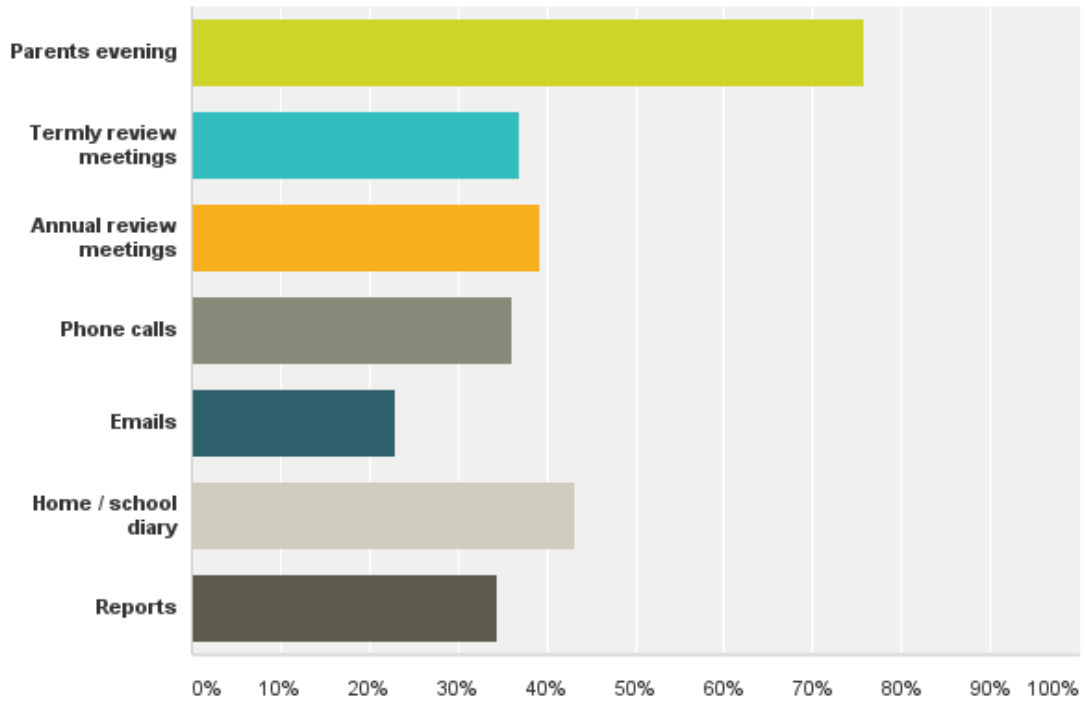
Answered: 90 Skipped: 1



Appendix 3: Information on Progress

Q3 How does your child's school share information about their progress with you? (please select all that apply)

Answered: 227 Skipped: 14



Appendix 4

Progression Framework – suggested areas

Social communication

Listening and responding

Understanding others' communication (verbal and non-verbal)

Expressing self-e.g. needs, requests, preferences, choice, information, opinion

Conversations

Social interaction

Being with others

Positive relationships (adults)

Positive relationships and friendships (peers)

Group activities

Social conventions

Social imagination / Information processing

Coping with change

Transitions

Problem solving and Thinking skills

Special interests

Play

Sensory needs

Recognising and regulating own sensory needs

Self-awareness and emotional understanding/wellbeing

Understanding own emotions

Understanding others' emotions

Managing emotions and behaviour

Self awareness

Developing confidence and self esteem

Learning

Motivation / engagement / co-operation

Listening, attention, understanding

Organisation, independence

Thinking / problem solving

Coping in different learning environment / groups

Independence and community participation

Mobility e.g. finding way around

Independent living

Personal care

Health

Skills for the workplace

Safety

