

Monmouthshire Autism in Schools and Settings

Project background and overview

In September 2022 Monmouthshire commissioned the Autism Education Trust (AET) to design and deliver a programme that will improve education for autistic children and young people in the county. This contributes towards our aim to develop a truly inclusive educational system in Monmouthshire.

In recognition of the increasing numbers of autistic learners within our educational system, both in mainstream and our Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs) we commissioned this partnership project to help us move towards our shared goal, as outlined in the ALN Code, that *'all learners are given the opportunity to succeed and have access to an education that meets their needs and enables them to participate in, benefit from, and enjoy learning'*.

To achieve this, while maintaining our belief that Monmouthshire children and young people should be enabled to remain in Monmouthshire settings, schools and communities, we recognise that we need a workforce that is highly skilled, confident and able to meet the range of needs of autistic children and young people, and their families.

Since its launch, this project has been led by a steering group whose membership includes local authority staff, education practitioners and parents and carers. Their expertise and lived experience have, and will continue to shape the way this programme is designed and rolled out in Monmouthshire.

Our Vision: All autistic children and young people in Monmouthshire will experience a positive and inclusive education that supports their wellbeing and provides equality of opportunity. The parents and carers of autistic young people have a positive and collaborative experience of education settings which supports and improves their wellbeing.

The Project's Aim: To develop a skilled and supported education workforce that has the knowledge, skills and confidence to work effectively with all children and young people, including autistic young people, by:

- ✓ Upskilling the Specialist Resource Bases as centres of excellence for autism
- ✓ Creating an Autism Champion model which adds capacity and drives the change needed across specialist and mainstream settings
- ✓ Building capability in mainstream settings by developing and delivering Monmouthshire training materials and resources drawing on AET's approaches

What has been delivered so far?

Upskilling Specialist Resource Bases:

- All SRBs have received a one-day training course based on feedback from a training needs analysis and visits.
- All SRB staff have completed further twilight training sessions on: communication needs, autistic girls, sensory needs, and anxiety and distress.

Creating an Autism Champion model:

- A working group of Monmouthshire professionals has created a model for Autism Champions covering their role and responsibilities and this has been tested with ALNCOs.
- Eventually each primary and secondary school, and clusters of Early Years settings, will have an Autism Champion to lead improvements in good autism practice.

Building capability in mainstream settings:

- There has been a consultation, using surveys and interviews with practitioners, on the required AET materials for Monmouthshire.

- Monmouthshire-specific AET materials, in both Welsh and English, have been written and reviewed by the Expert Reference Group (ERG).
 - These include frameworks for standards and competencies across Early Years and school settings, and training materials for delivery by a Monmouthshire team.
- The ERG is made up of professionals, autistic people, and parents and carers, from across Monmouthshire and wider Wales.
- Panels of autistic young people from Monmouthshire secondary schools have been created to ensure their lived experience and expertise is at the heart of the programme.

What happens next?

- The Monmouthshire AET training team and Autism Champions will be identified, inducted and trained.
 - The training team will be made up of staff from the Specialist Provision and Outreach Team including those from the Educational Psychology Service, Education Support Team and Specialist Resource Bases.
- Together they will deliver and embed the Monmouthshire-specific AET materials across schools and settings to build capability and knowledge.

How will it work?

The AET Monmouthshire Programme will deliver a whole school and setting approach to embedding good autism practice from September 2024.

There will be three key areas of the programme:

1. embedding the voice of children and young people,
2. delivering high-quality training,
3. and working with autism champions to build capability amongst all staff.

This means that in your child's school or setting, staff will attend training sessions by members of the AET Monmouthshire team. They will also work through units to implement best practice in supporting autistic pupils with the guidance of an Autism Champion for their school or setting.

These training sessions and units are built around the AET principles of good autism practice. These principles have been developed for education professionals as a guide to creating structured, consistent teaching environments that respect differences. The principles and step-by-step guidance will be published in the AET's Standards and Competency Frameworks for Wales.

In line with the programme being rolled out in schools and settings, there will be Q&A sessions for parents and carers in 2024.

How can you be involved?

As a parent or carer of an autistic child, we would like to work with you to ensure your lived experience and expertise is at the heart of the programme.

This could be through:

- Filling in an anonymous survey asking about you and your child's experiences of education:
 - Early Years or Primary: <https://surveys.clearoutcome.co.uk/s/XBFU4R/>
 - Secondary: <https://surveys.clearoutcome.co.uk/s/N8JX5M/>
- Taking part in or contributing to videos that will be included in the Monmouthshire AET training materials.

If you are interested in taking part in the videos, please email: Emily Niner, Project Manager:
Emily.niner@autismeducationtrust.org.uk