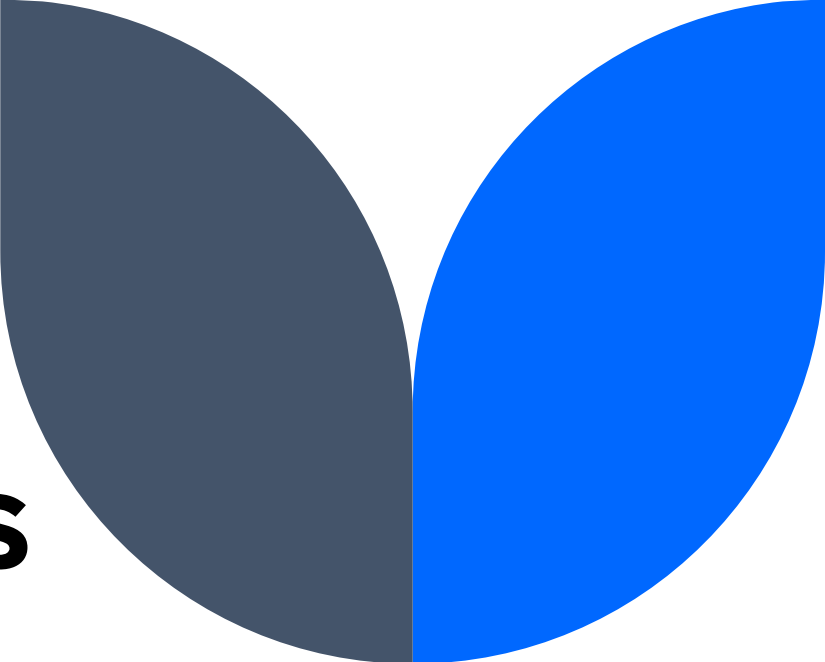
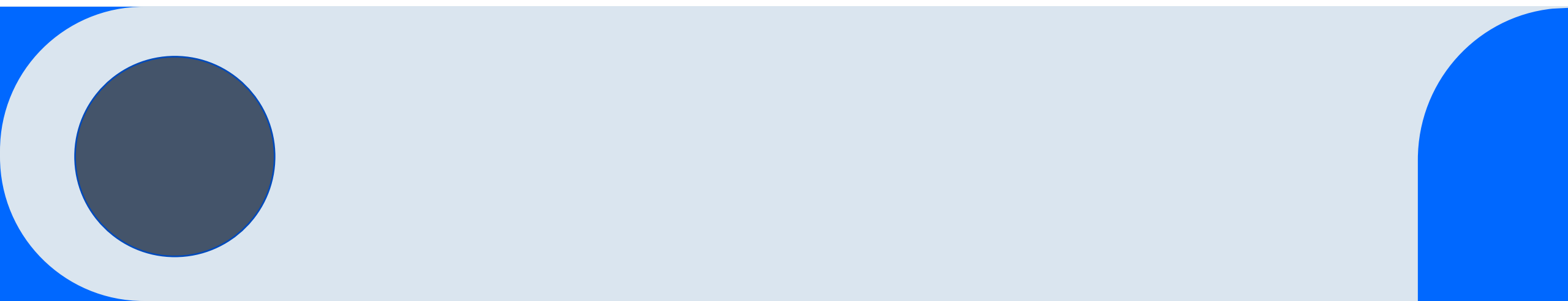




Autism, SEND Education and Changing Perspectives

By Emma Gazeley



What is Autism?

- A lifelong neurodevelopmental difference.
- Affects communication, social interaction and sensory processing.
- Every autistic person experiences autism differently.
- Many autistic people have strengths including:
- Excellent memory
- Strong attention to detail
- Creativity
- Honesty
- Deep interests and specialist knowledge

Some individuals may also have:

- Anxiety
- ADHD
- Learning disabilities
- Speech and language differences

Key Message

Autism should be understood through a strengths-based, neurodiversity approach rather than focusing only on difficulties.

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER INFOGRAPHIC



Historical Perspectives of SEND

Before the 1970s

Many children with SEND were excluded from education.
Some attended separate institutions or hospitals.
Disability was viewed through the medical model.
Limited expectations for learning and independence.

Turning Point

The Warnock Report (1978)

Introduced the term Special Educational Needs.
Recommended that children should be educated according to individual need.
Promoted inclusion wherever possible.
Influenced future education legislation.



Legislation and Change

Education Act 1981

- Implemented recommendations from the Warnock Report.
- Introduced legal duties for identifying pupils' educational needs.

Equality Act 2010

- Protects disabled people from discrimination.
- Requires schools to make reasonable adjustments.

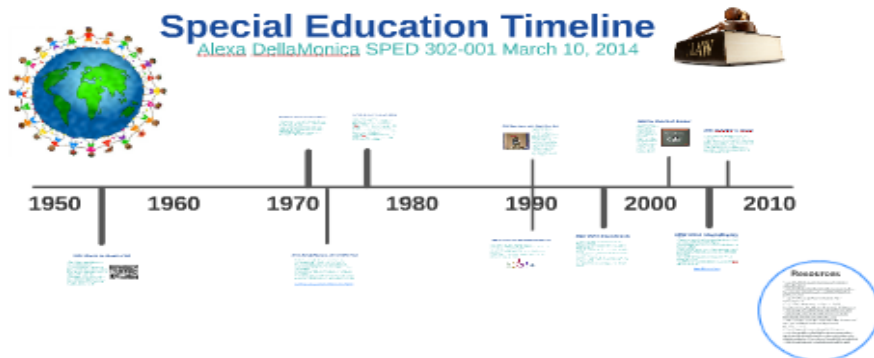
Children and Families Act 2014

- Introduced Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
- Encouraged joint working between education, health and social care.

SEND Code of Practice (2015)

Schools should:

- Identify needs early.
- Work closely with parents.
- Review progress regularly.
- Promote participation and independence.



Key Theories Influencing SEND Practice

Vygotsky (1978)

Zone of Proximal Development

Children learn best with guidance.

Examples:

- Adult modelling
- Scaffolding
- Peer support

Bronfenbrenner (1979)

Ecological Systems Theory

A child's development is influenced by:

- Family
- School
- Friends
- Community
- Society

Why is this important?

Successful SEND support requires strong partnerships between schools, parents and professionals.

Mainstream Education for SEND Learners

Advantages

- ✓ Learning alongside peers
- ✓ Inclusive opportunities
- ✓ Wider friendship groups
- ✓ Broad curriculum
- ✓ Extracurricular activities
- ✓ Preparation for adult life

Challenges

- ✗ Large class sizes
- ✗ Busy environments
- ✗ Sensory overload
- ✗ Increased anxiety
- ✗ Limited specialist staff
- ✗ Teachers supporting many different needs simultaneously



Key Message

Mainstream education works well when reasonable adjustments and effective SEND support are consistently provided.



Benefits of Specialist SEND Schools

Benefits

- ✓ Small class sizes
- ✓ Higher staff-to-pupil ratios
- ✓ Specialist teachers
- ✓ Personalised learning
- ✓ Visual communication systems
- ✓ Sensory-friendly classrooms
- ✓ Consistent routines
- ✓ Life skills and independence

Possible Challenges

- ❖ Fewer opportunities to mix with mainstream peers.
- ❖ Longer travel distances.
- ❖ Some pupils may later require support transitioning into wider community settings.



Bluecoat Beechdale Academy

Bluecoat Beechdale Academy

- **Location:** Bilborough, Nottingham, England.
- **School Type:** Mixed, state-funded secondary academy for students aged **11–16**.
- **Students:** Approximately **900** students.
- **Trust:** Part of the **Archway Learning Trust**.
- **Admissions:** Non-selective, welcoming students of all abilities.
- **Focus:** Provides a broad curriculum with an emphasis on academic achievement, personal development, and preparing students for further education and future careers.



Behaviour Support

The school uses several graduated responses before exclusion:

1. Learning Support Base (LSB)
2. Classroom reminders
3. Triage
4. Reflection
5. Off-site reflection
6. Engage provision
7. Alternative Provision (AP)

Foxwood Academy



Foxwood Academy

- Specialist school in Bramcote, Nottingham.
- Supports pupils aged 3–19.
- Majority of pupils have Autism Spectrum Condition.
- All pupils have an EHCP.
- Focus on communication, independence and preparation for adulthood.

Inclusive Practice

- Visual timetables
- Now and Next boards
- Colourful Semantics
- Intensive Interaction
- PECS and AAC communication
- Sensory regulation strategies
- Individual learning targets
- Structured routines
- Positive behaviour support

Impact

These strategies reduce anxiety, improve communication and enable pupils to participate successfully in learning.

SEND Statistics

England

- Around **1.7 million** pupils are identified as having SEND.
- Approximately **5%** have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Autism is one of the most common primary needs among pupils with EHCPs.
- The number of children diagnosed with autism has increased over the last decade due to improved awareness and assessment.

Schools require:

- Better staff training
- Increased funding
- Early intervention
- Inclusive practice



Reflection and Future Practice

What Have We Learned?

Autism should be understood using a strengths-based approach.

Every learner has different needs.

Relationships are central to successful learning.

Specialist schools provide highly personalised education.

Inclusive practice benefits all learners.



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