

Policy briefing

Fewer than one in four young people with autism continue their education beyond school.¹ The Department for Education (DfE) funded Finished at School Programme tested new ways of working to address this problem at a local level with the development of partnerships between schools, colleges and local authorities.

The project centred on three main points of action: creating effective, outcomes-focussed curriculum options for young people with autism; supporting their move from school to further education; and helping them to maximise their attainment, the foundations for moving on from education to employment and a positive adulthood.

This briefing has been created to allow policy-makers, commissioners and education providers to better understand what they can do to improve outcomes for young people with autism.

What was the aim of the Finished at School Programme?

The Finished at School Programme aimed to help education providers better support learners with autism in light of the most far-reaching reforms to special educational needs and disability (SEND) policy in a generation.

The Children and Families Act 2014, which came into force in September 2014, has created a special educational needs framework covering young people aged between 0 and 25. Young people with autism and other disabilities now have the right to be involved in making decisions that concern them and to expect coordination between education, health and social care services to meet their needs.²

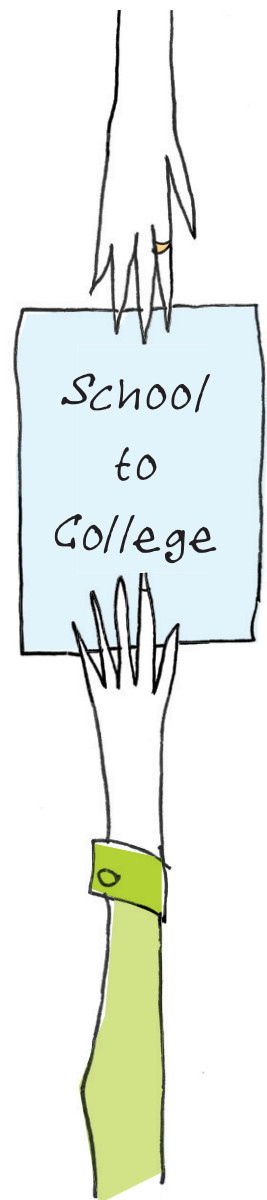
The accompanying SEND Code of Practice states that young people should be able to access high quality provision that successfully prepares them for adulthood.³

These reforms have placed new duties on providers of post-16 education:

- to cooperate with the local authority on arrangements for children and young people with SEN.
- to admit a young person if the institution is named in an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.
- to have regard to the SEND Code of Practice.
- to use their best endeavours to secure the special education provision that the young person needs.



Finished
at
School



¹ Ambitious about Autism (2012), *Finished at School: Where next for young people with autism?*

² Children and Families Act 2014, Part 3, Section 19

³ SEND Code of Practice, Section 1.2.

What more needs to be done?

1

Policy-makers should:

- Be aware that the SEND reforms have marked the beginning of a substantial process of change for practitioners and families. They are re-evaluating what young people with autism can expect from their education.
- Recognise that being person-centred means exactly that: all decisions must be brought back to what is best for the learner and helps them to achieve their aspirations. If not, new processes will not bring about improved outcomes. The young person has to be involved in decisions concerning their education and life.
- Incorporate cross-departmental working between education, health and social care services into the Ofsted inspection framework.

2

Commissioners should:

- Monitor the development and quality of provision for learners with autism. Engaging with managers at education providers will enable the local offer to be updated and improved in response to demand and feedback
- Ensure the local offer is easily accessible to young people with autism and their families, which will enable them to identify an appropriate provider. The local offer for young people should be distinct from the offer for school-age children.
- Create new opportunities for planning and collaboration across the education, health and social care sectors. Undertaking shared training and pooling resources encourages the development of a common language and understanding around how outcomes for young people with autism can be improved.

3

Education providers should:

- Work in partnership to ensure that staff skills and experience can be drawn on to support all learners' aspirations.
- Actively seek to raise the profile of their provision through participating in their local autism partnership board and other key local groups, including SENCO forums.
- Designate and empower an individual in a leadership position to take a lead in building partnerships with other providers.

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Address The Pears National Centre for Autism Education, Woodside Avenue, London N10 3JA

Telephone 020 8815 5444

Email info@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

Website www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

 [@ambitiousautism](https://twitter.com/ambitiousautism)

 www.facebook.com/ambitiousaboutautism

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