

# SEN facts and figures

National statistics for statements of SEN and education, health and care plans in England

This latest statistical first release (SFR) provides statistics and analysis on data from the SEN2 survey earlier than in previous years. It therefore provides more timely information on the reforms introduced in September 2014. A second statistical publication, containing special educational needs data reported in the school census, is due to be published in July 2015.

## Quality of the data

The 2015 SEN2 return includes data from the 2014 calendar year as well as at the January 2015 census date, meaning that the data covers both the previous and new arrangements. The new features of the SEND system – EHC plans, mediation and personal budgets – came into

effect from September 2014. It is important to realise that some new processes may take longer because they are unfamiliar.

The timeline for the transition of statements and LDAs to EHC plans will differ between local authorities. This should be taken into consideration when comparing across local authorities or year on year changes. Where non-statutory EHC plans were issued by pathfinder authorities, these plans are not included in the figures.

## Statements of SEN and EHC plans issued within the time limits

The proportion of new statements issued in 2014 within the time limit was 89%. Early indications show that 64.3% of new EHC plans issued from September to December 2014 were within the 20-week time limit.

## EHC plan personal budgets and mediations

There were 1,360 new EHC plans issued in 2014 and 2,765 EHC plans transferred from statements or LDAs between 1 September 2014 and 15 January 2015. Of the EHC plans issued in 2014, 165 had taken up personal budgets.

Of the 75 cases that went on to mediation in 2014, around three-quarters did not proceed to tribunal.

## Learning difficulty assessments

As part of the new section of the 2015 SEN2 data return on progress transferring from the old system to the new, the

## KEY STATISTICS

- ▶ 4,205 statutory education, health and care (EHC) plans in place on 15 January 2015.
- ▶ 235,980 statements of SEN in place on 15 January 2015.
- ▶ 1,360 new EHC plans issued between 1 September and 31 December 2014.
- ▶ 25,780 new statements of SEN issued between 1 January and 31 December 2014.
- ▶ 2,765 EHC plans transferred from statements of SEN or learning difficulty assessments (LDAs).
- ▶ EHC plans make up 1.7% of the combined total number of statements and EHC plans. This combined total is broadly consistent with the increasing trend from previous years. However, EHC plans cover 0–25 year olds, although numbers are low for 20–25 year olds.
- ▶ The distribution of EHC plans across age bands is skewed towards the younger age groups.
- ▶ The age group distribution of the combined total of statements and EHC plans is broadly similar to previous years.
- ▶ There is a notable difference between EHC plans and statements in place on 15 January 2015, with 16.1% of EHC plans in the under five years of age band compared with 4.5% for statements, and 44.8% EHC plans in the 5–10 year old age group compared with 37.8% for statements.

number of LDAs at the 31 August 2014 was collected for the first time. Before using the LDA data, the following must be considered:

- ▶ Generally LDAs are not maintained by local authorities in the same way as statements or EHC plans.
- ▶ Anecdotal evidence

suggests that there are variations in the way local authorities are issuing and recording LDAs. In the 2015 SEN2 return, one local authority (Lancashire) reported that it didn't have any LDAs as it managed those children and young people in different ways.

- ▶ Not all LDAs are for high-needs children or young people; therefore, it is unlikely that all LDAs reported in the 2015 SEN2 return will require an EHC plan.
- ▶ A small number of local authorities are known to have used estimation to obtain LDA figures.

To read the full report *Statistical First Release – Statements of SEN and EHC plans: England 2015* visit [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statements-of-sen-and-ehc-plans-england-2015/](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statements-of-sen-and-ehc-plans-england-2015/)

**NOT ALL LDAS ARE FOR HIGH NEEDS CHILDREN**

**nasen**  
Helping Everyone Achieve

Editor: Jane Friswell  
Project Manager: Kath Mackrill

Editorial enquiries  
nasen House  
Tel: 01827 311500  
Email: [welcome@nasen.org.uk](mailto:welcome@nasen.org.uk)

nasen House  
4/5 Amber Business Village  
Amber Close  
Amington  
Tamworth  
Staffordshire  
B77 4RP

Tel: 01827 311500  
Fax: 01827 313005  
Email: [welcome@nasen.org.uk](mailto:welcome@nasen.org.uk)

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(England and Wales)

# Special extra

The essential information for today's SENCO

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## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

*Special extra* this term has a variety of content for you as we move towards the end of what has been an incredible year in the field of special educational needs and disabilities. We start with the impressions gleaned from our members' survey

Nasen knows that the successful implementation and embedding of significant reform to SEND is largely down to those of you working in our schools, settings and colleges to provide the very best support for our children and young people.

So how successful has the year been? In late April, we put this question to our members and the following

**THERE IS STILL MUCH TO BE DONE**

article provides a glimpse of the reality of embedding new national policy into good quality local practice.

What an important year for schools and settings this one has been! Even for a profession which has grown used to adapting to significant amounts and types of change, 2014–15 stood out, what with a new national curriculum, the system of levels and assessment undergoing a complete rethink and, not least, the implementation of a brand-new SEND Code of Practice.

Members of nasen, all the visitors to the exhibitions and learning events attended by nasen, and professionals

accessing direct training sessions that we have run have been providing a picture of how the reforms are being received on the ground. To add to that picture, nasen carried out its survey, 'First year of the implementation of the new SEND Code of Practice', and the response from teachers and SENCOs was really interesting.

With regard to the difference the Code is already making for children and young people with SEND in schools/settings, both teachers and SENCOs reported a marginally positive response overall but the cool flavour of that response serves as an indicator that there is still much to be done before the new Code realises its full potential.

Lots of work has clearly gone into introducing the changes within the Code of Practice, as teachers and SENCOs rated this the aspect that has worked the best so far and this has had the secondary effect of serving to raise the profile of SEND in schools and settings, something which SENCOs rated as the second highest success factor to date.

### High-quality teaching

Unsurprisingly, what is really key for all staff, teachers and SENCOs alike, is achieving what the Code describes as 'high-quality teaching' in every classroom. Teachers see this as

**TEACHERS ARE ASKING FOR TRAINING ON SPECIFIC DIFFICULTIES**

being able to meet the wide range of individual needs, while SENCOs are perhaps feeling their responsibility in terms of supporting and developing staff to increasingly grow the most robust universal level of classroom provision. Teachers are asking for training on specific difficulties as their priority right now, and SENCOs overwhelmingly want training in how to engage all of their staff effectively. These two requirements can be designed to be perfectly mutually inclusive, with staff ready for support and SENCOs having the opportunity to demonstrate all the strategic and personal skills that build trust for the longer term with their teachers. Nasen is responding to the needs of the sector by producing a comprehensive package of online continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers, practitioners and tutors across the 0–25 years



age range which is designed to develop the confidence and practice of professionals in providing high-quality teaching to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND. This training will be free – for more information see page 4 and visit the nasen website at [www.nasen.org.uk/](http://www.nasen.org.uk/)

**NASEN  
WILL SUPPORT  
SENCOS  
BY ALSO  
PROVIDING  
FREE  
TRAINING TO  
MEMBERS**

Although nasen aims to support teachers directly, through our online CPD, we also recognise that it will be absolutely vital for the SENCO to plan for, direct and support the use of this training on the ground in schools and settings. To be able to do this effectively, nasen will support SENCOs by also providing free training to members which focuses on how to engage all staff effectively and how to optimise the use of the online CPD materials. For more information about this free training for SENCOs, visit the nasen website.

## EHC plans

The influence of the SENCO within their own setting is arguably already being evidenced by some of the outcomes of nasen's survey, indicating how closely teacher

concerns are aligned with the issues that SENCOs have been actively grappling with since September 2014. Where SENCOs are highlighting their main concern to be statement transfer to education, health and care (EHC) plans and all the EHC plan processes, this is reflected, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the second main concern of teachers: understanding EHC plans. Where the SENCO is exhibiting dissatisfaction or a lack of clarity in understanding new processes (possibly due to a lack of support from local authorities, who themselves are getting to grips with the changes), they are unable to support the understanding of their teachers. Teachers report that they value the support from their SENCOs very highly, indeed this is the second most successful aspect which has worked well after understanding the changes within the Code.

## Partnership working

Pleasingly, given that it is such a key principle within the Code of Practice, working in partnership with parents has been considered one of the successes by both teachers and SENCOs. SENCOs report a higher success rating, which may reflect the fact that the responsibilities for communication with parents and carers are still in transit from the SENCO, and teachers have not yet assumed the full duty for this.

## Identification and the graduated approach

Much of the discussion leading up to the implementation of the reforms was around how to identify SEN and how this would work in tandem with the effective application of the graduated approach. From our survey it seems that teachers are more comfortable

with using the graduated approach than in identifying SEN, with approximately equal numbers classifying identification as an aspect that has worked well and one that is a main concern. This is echoed through the responses of SENCOs, suggesting that there is more work to be done on securing clarity within school SEN policy around identification. Where this can be through a process of discussion and collaboration, so that all staff contribute to the shared vision, it is more likely to result in a system that works for the individual school or setting and one which can be applied intelligently by the staff, effectively personalising the process in response to individual pupil need. The results from the survey also suggest that teachers may not be linking the application of the graduated approach to meeting individual needs, with 54% citing the latter as a main concern but only 14% using the graduated approach.

Understanding how to meet the needs of pupils by virtue of successive cycles of

**INTERVENTION  
PROGRAMMES  
ARE UNDER  
THE  
SPOTLIGHT**

refined reflection and that this process will ultimately provide the kind of evidence that supports the identification of an SEN is key. SENCOs may need to revisit the graduated approach within their schools with their staff and re-examine all of the opportunities and

challenges it presents, including considering:

- ▶ when and how to start using the graduated approach for concerns about a lack of progress
- ▶ what intervention means in the widest sense and how it can be used
- ▶ how and what to trial in relation to adaptations to teaching
- ▶ the importance of structured observation to gather evidence of pupil response to intervention
- ▶ when and how to make changes to planned intervention
- ▶ when and why to consider targeted intervention programmes
- ▶ how to monitor and evaluate the quality of any intervention
- ▶ when and why to seek support from colleagues (the SENCO, peers, outside agencies/specialists)
- ▶ when and how to work in partnership with parents
- ▶ how best to involve pupils in their learning (including the effective use of individual feedback)
- ▶ how intervention supports, and can lead to, reliable identification of SEN.

## Managing interventions

Linked to the effective application of the graduated approach, all of the aspects for managing targeted intervention should be the subject of discussion between staff and the SENCO. This area of responsibility – managing targeted provision – was of equal concern to teachers and SENCOs in our survey, with both rating it as a significant concern. With all the recent focus in education on the need for evidence-based practice, intervention programmes are under the spotlight for effectiveness and value for money. Knowing how to justify

your selection can be a source of confusion and anxiety for SENCOs, particularly when they may be operating in isolation within their school or setting. For teachers, this is likely to be even more difficult, not having had any experience of sourcing intervention programmes before. The expectation may be for teachers to manage provision like this for their pupils but, in reality, the SENCO must be involved as the in-school 'expert' for SEN. While teachers can be supported to initiate or manage the running of targeted intervention, the selection of the most suitable programme should at least be a joint responsibility, if not purely that of the SENCO. In this way, teachers develop a greater level of understanding about suitable approaches which then adds to their general repertoire for meeting individual needs; all of this builds capacity in schools and settings and inevitably strengthens high-quality teaching.

## Outside agencies

Working with outside agencies was a source of concern for teachers, in almost a third of all responses, and this could be related to the expectation that they will now take on more of the responsibility for this aspect of SEND provision. In reality, it is very unlikely that teachers will directly engage this specialist tier of support, although they will need to respond by:

- ▶ providing comprehensive information to the specialist teacher/outside agency regarding pupil needs, assessment outcomes, pupil progress and their response to all intervention to date
- ▶ engaging with the outside agency/specialist teacher to design an appropriate programme of intervention, using their knowledge of the pupil and the implications from

any specialist assessment undertaken

- ▶ monitoring and evaluating the resulting provision and sharing this with parents and pupils
- ▶ sharing in the decision making about next steps at the point of review, based on all the evidence gathered throughout and the views of the parents and pupils.

## Person-centred practice

The use of person-centred practices did not feature very highly, either as an aspect that is working well or as a concern, with around 19% of responses for both teachers and SENCOs falling into the latter. This could indicate that it isn't an area that has yet been prioritised in schools, with staff not seeing person-centred thinking as a concern as they are unaware of the opportunities it presents and how key it is within the Code of Practice. Schools have tended to take a 'one step at a time' approach and the danger is that this practice will fall off the agenda due to a range of factors, not least the time needed to explore it properly with all staff. Where SENCOs have seen the person-centred review process as the showpiece for person-centred practices, opinion may have been divided, with many fully appreciating the opportunities for meaningful engagement with parents and families but finding the 90-minute time commitment for the actual review itself a barrier to conducting many reviews in this way.

Our thanks to all of you who responded to our survey. Nasen is preparing a report to provide to the Department for Education to update them on your concerns and explain what is working well and what is not.

# MENCAP'S GATEWAY AWARD

An Award scheme to encourage disabled people to experience new things, gain confidence, meet new people, have fun and be healthy

The Gateway Award is an activity award open to people with a learning disability of any age or ability. The award encourages people to gain new skills and experiences, become more independent, make friends, be active in the community and have better health and well-being. There are three levels of the award: bronze, silver and gold. People are free to decide their own goals and activities and can work at their own pace with whatever level of support they require. Participants will receive a certificate on completion of each stage. At each level participants must complete five different activities. The categories include:

- ▶ Hobbies – including arts and crafts, collections and recreations
- ▶ Fitness – participants choose new fitness activities from a list to take part in
- ▶ Volunteering – participants choose a volunteering activity to benefit their community
- ▶ Lifestyle – there are a number of lifestyle topics to learn about, including healthy eating, first aid, money, independence and health.
- ▶ Gateway Challenge – participants identify a personal, group or adventurer challenge and undertake an activity or project to address it.

People can enrol and be supported with the award at a Gateway Award centre, such as a school, college, residential organisation, statutory and voluntary youth organisation, day service, resource centre or NHS setting.

Once enrolled at a centre, participants can access e-training. Additional training can be purchased if a centre requires it. Evidence from the Gateway Award can also be used towards the Duke of Edinburgh Award, although participants will need to complete any additional requirements.

The online Gateway Award is funded by the Health Lottery and was tested by 20 pilot Gateway Active Centres in the first year, from 2012–13. If you are an existing centre or would like to become an award centre, but are not a pilot Gateway Active Centre, you can request more information from Mencap. Each centre can contact Mencap for support and get in touch with other groups taking part in the award to share information and ideas.

If you would like any further information about how to get started, email [gateway.award@mencap.org.uk](mailto:gateway.award@mencap.org.uk).

# ASSESS, PLAN, DO, REVIEW

Move your professional development up a notch with our new online training for teachers and our SENCO guidance sessions



All teachers require access to training and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities which address the key requirements of high-quality teaching as the first response in identifying and meeting the needs of pupils. Nasen is currently developing a brand-new concept for an online universal training offer for SEND for teachers which will be free to access.

*Assess, Plan, Do, Review* is designed to provide the foundation for teachers to develop a reflective approach to teaching and support for

SEND within the context of the SEND Code of Practice. The training consists of a free universal offer of SEND CPD for teachers from the early years to post-16. It will be available as an e-learning resource, enabling every teacher to access a package of online learning which takes an enquiry-based approach to effectively identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND.

The training offer, currently at the design stage, will 'go live' in early spring 2016; however, in the meantime, nasen recognises

that to enable all teachers to access this new training offer, we need our SENCOs to be able to provide collaborative support for teachers so that they gain a better understanding of the impact SEND has on learning.

Nasen is therefore providing free one-day training in a variety of locations around the country for all member SENCOs, entitled 'Collaborative Learning for SEN; the Role of the SENCO'. The associated guidance will better inform SENCOs about how to embed a culture of collaborative

learning for SEN in their school, setting or college. The free training is available on the following dates:

- ▶ Monday 29 June, Swiss Cottage School, London
- ▶ Thursday 15 October, Manchester Metropolitan University.

More dates will shortly be released. Places will be offered to nasen members only and on a first-come, first-served basis, via online registration only. For further information on the training, guidance and the online offer visit the nasen website at [www.nasen.org.uk/](http://www.nasen.org.uk/)

## Delivering better outcomes

André Imich sheds some light on the main areas of new responsibility for colleges and some of the early issues that have arisen around implementation

A key aim of the new SEN framework introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014 is to improve the life chances of young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Too many of this group do not secure employment when they leave the education system, or have the skills to live more independently, and the new system is designed to improve preparation for adulthood.

The reforms recognise that colleges have a major part to play in achieving this aim, and, for the first time, colleges are now part of the SEN framework.

Under the 2014 Act, colleges must now use their best endeavours to make the provision required to meet the special educational needs of young people. This means, in reality, that colleges must do their best, using their resources and expertise, to identify and provide for these young people.

Colleges must also co-operate with the local authority in drawing up and reviewing the local offer, a new system for providing information about support for children and young people with SEND that is available in their local area. Many colleges have worked closely with the local authority in developing a comprehensive local offer, and it is expected that most will continue working

with them to monitor, further develop and review these.

Part of the local offer requires authorities to publish information about special educational provision in post-16 institutions. This presents colleges with a genuine opportunity to celebrate their provision and practices in providing a range of study programmes and wider support for young people with SEND. An example of a college SEN offer which provides clear, comprehensive and accessible information about its provision and general arrangements is the Isle of Wight College ([www.iwcollege.ac.uk/information/equality-and-diversity/learning-support](http://www.iwcollege.ac.uk/information/equality-and-diversity/learning-support)).

### Individual planning and assessment

At the heart of the reforms are changes to the SEN system that are designed to

**CO-PRODUCTION  
NEEDS TO BE  
EVIDENT IN  
EVERYDAY  
INTERACTIONS**

improve the ways in which we undertake detailed planning and assessment. When this works well, young people will have improved provision and agreed outcomes that lead to more successful preparation for adulthood, with a focus on independent living, employment, good health and community cohesion. Central to this is co-production with parents and young people, and their increased participation in decision making. For many practitioners, co-production means doing things differently, with all parties working together on a solution-focused approach. It requires strong leadership,

**COLLEGES  
ARE NOW  
PART OF  
THE SEN  
FRAMEWORK**

patience and joint commitment and, above all, communication that is transparent and open. In colleges, it means taking time to engage with young people and their families and to work together towards improvements on programme planning, access and wider

## COLLEGES MAY BE ASKED TO HOST MEETINGS

opportunities. Co-production needs to be evident in everyday interactions as well as in more formal circumstances, such as reviews.

Allied to co-production is person-centred planning. This approach sets out an expectation that planning should start with the individual and all parties should have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the parent and/or young person, their aspirations, the outcomes they wish to seek and the support they need to achieve them. Assessment and planning processes, both formal and informal, should therefore focus on the person as an individual and highlight the young person's strengths and capabilities. Arrangements arising through person-centred planning should result in tailored support for the needs of the individual. This can mean in the college context reorganising the way programmes are delivered or structured, and ensuring that the young person can access other programmes in the college as necessary. The delivery and construction of individual personalised study programmes, with degrees of flexibility, are testament to a commitment to individual planning and assessment, as

is ensuring that there is a focus on outcomes that prepares the young person for adulthood.

## Education, health and care plans

The Act has led to the replacement of statements and learning difficulty assessments (LDAs) with education, health and care (EHC) plans for new entrants. For those with existing statements or LDAs, there are timescales and processes laid down for them to transfer to EHC plans – by August 2016 for LDAs and by April 2018 for statements. All new assessments since September 2014 have been undertaken under the new legislation and have resulted in EHC plans where appropriate. Colleges play a key role in both new assessments and in the transfer process.

For young people attending college who undergo a new assessment, colleges are required to contribute to the assessment. At a minimum, this involves producing advice and information that is clear, accessible and specific. It should include proposed outcomes that are relevant for the young person, and some strategies for their achievement. Using person-centred approaches to gather evidence will help to ensure that the young person's interests are well represented.

For transfers (transition reviews), colleges may be asked to host meetings and collect and collate evidence. Ultimately, the production of an EHC plan is the local authority's responsibility and it cannot delegate this to colleges. However, it is reasonable for the authority to expect co-operation from the college in undertaking this important task. Colleges can therefore expect support and guidance from the local authority in so doing.

*André Imich is SEN and Disability Professional Adviser at the Department for Education.*

## EARLY IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

These SEND arrangements are new to the college sector and, inevitably, a wide range of issues and queries has arisen in the early days of implementation. The following highlight some of the more common areas of enquiry:

**Duty to admit** – Where a college is named on an EHC plan, the college must admit the student. Before naming a college, a local authority will always consult the college, and gain their perspective on the proposed placement. There may be different views on this, but the authority is ultimately responsible for making the decision. Note, however, that the duty to admit a young person if the college is named in the EHC plan is a duty to admit to the college, *not* to a specific course. The young person does not have the right to attend a specific course if they have not met the course entry requirements. In these circumstances, the college must consider an alternative course or study programme which is still able to meet the student's SEN, and help them to meet the outcomes stated in their EHC plan.

**Annual reviews** – EHC plans must be reviewed annually, and there are two areas where colleges can make a contribution. First, for those not yet in college, review meeting organisers should be inviting representatives of post-16 institutions to these meetings, particularly where the young person has expressed a desire to attend a particular institution. Second, for those in college with an EHC plan, local authorities can request that the college convenes and holds the annual review meeting. Reviews will be most effective when led by the college staff, who know the young person best, will have the closest contact with them and their family and will have the clearest information about progress and next steps.

**Information and advice** – A new service for young people in colleges is the information, advice and support service, provided by the local authority. In addition, disagreement resolution services are now available to young people with SEND in colleges whether or not they have an EHC plan. Details of local services will be accessible via the local offer.

**Apprenticeships** – Another important tool for supporting young people with complex needs into employment is the EHC plan, which continues even if a young person begins an apprenticeship. The plan should set out the support that will be provided to the individual while they are accessing both the training and the employment elements of the provision specified in the plan, and specify what outcomes the provision is designed to achieve. The contribution of colleges to this planning will be important in setting person-centred, aspirational outcomes with the young person, and in terms of monitoring progress towards their achievement.

**Education beyond 19** – While the expectation is that most young people with SEND will move on to higher education, training or employment at 19, there will be some who may require longer to make an effective transition to adulthood. However, there is no automatic entitlement or expectation to continued education and training support for young people aged 19+ who have an EHC plan. A local authority may cease a plan for a 19–25 year old if it decides that it is no longer necessary for the plan to be maintained. It is important that colleges and local authorities agree clearly on the general circumstances where a young person may need to continue accessing college provision.

# Time for a rethink

We need to reassess what we know about autism and start again with a female perspective, says Sophie Walker

Ever heard the one about the man who wouldn't ask for directions, or the woman who couldn't read a map?

Society is full of jokes about the ways in which men and women are different. Many of them are nonsense, but most of them are based on an acceptance that men and women's brains work in different ways.

We know this because biologists and researchers tell us this. Studies have shown that women and men's brains are wired differently. Scientists have created tests to show that women score better at languages and men score better at spatial reasoning; that women can multitask and men prefer single subject learning.

**MEN AND  
WOMEN'S  
BRAINS  
WORK IN  
DIFFERENT  
WAYS**

These results are, of course, open to interpretation and conjecture. The conversation about the differences between men and women is an ongoing and very busy one. But one thing that everyone accepts is that the sexes think differently.

Why, then, do we assume that men and women with autism will think, and thus behave, in exactly the same ways?

The National Autistic Society, the UK's leading charity for people with autism and their

families, defines autism as a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.

Ask the person on the street to define autism and nine times out of ten the answer is likely to come back: 'Rainman'.

That Dustin Hoffman's character brought autism to a worldwide audience and shone a light on a diagnosis that many had previously never heard of is to be applauded. That it is still, nearly 30 years after the film's release, the benchmark for autistic behaviour, is a problem.

There are no women with autism in *Rainman*. But there are many women with autism in the real world, and their needs are going unmet because we are all still working to a male template, according to Liz Pellicano, a developmental cognitive scientist at University College London.

'Difficulties in detecting autism in girls by professionals (and parents) are unsurprising given that there has been so little research on gender differences,' she says. 'All of the research thus far has been conducted on girls versus boys who have already been diagnosed with autism under a biased male-centric diagnostic system.'

As a result, 'GPs don't really believe, even now, that girls can be autistic,' says Sarah Wild, Headteacher at Limpsfield Grange, a school for girls with autism. 'We have heard stories of doctors telling women on the spectrum that they can't be autistic because they can make conversation and have relatively good eye

contact. We need to unlearn what we think we know about autism and start again, this time with a girl bias.'

## Disguising the difficulties

The ways in which women with autism differ from men with autism vary widely. After all, it is a spectrum condition, neatly summed up by a well-known saying in the community: 'When you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism.'

But talk to a room of parents of girls with autism and patterns very quickly start to emerge. One of the most common is that many girls with autism, unlike

the boys, will try to hide their difficulties in understanding the social conventions around them and will attempt to blend in, bowing to the expectation that girls behave more sociably than boys.

The stress and overload that this causes them often results in major meltdowns once they get home.

'My daughter hates getting up for school in the mornings because she can't bear the prospect of the day ahead of her. When she gets home in the afternoon she is pale from the strain of the noise and the faces and trying to follow the lessons and understand the jokes, while feeling permanently on the outside,'

## NASEN'S NEW WORKING GROUP

Nasen believes that the needs of girls who may have an autism spectrum condition should be a priority. The association has set up a new working group, to be developed into a national forum, in order to promote awareness and increased support within schools and settings. It aims to:

- ▶ recognise and appreciate the unique identity of girls and women with autism and the positive contribution they make to society
- ▶ challenge the inequity of diagnostic experience and process which currently does not fully acknowledge the needs of girls and women
- ▶ positively change and influence perceptions and attitudes about girls and women with autism
- ▶ promote equal consideration of girls and women who have, or may not yet have, a diagnosis of autism
- ▶ provide pragmatic and practical information for schools, settings and colleges to better inform their response to providing appropriate support.

The working group will meet quarterly and invite attendance and contributions from ministers and top government officials leading on emotional well-being and mental health issues affecting pupils in schools, settings and colleges.

Jane Friswell, Chief Executive of nasen, comments 'Nasen is committed to galvanising the education sector to continue to raise awareness of the work of this group and to advocating for girls and women with autism spectrum conditions for improved services and support in both identifying their needs early and providing appropriate intervention to promote well-being, strengthen resilience and achieve independence in learning and life.'

Should you have a specific interest in the work of this group, contact nasen's Education Development Officer Alison Wilcox at [AlisonW@nasen.org.uk](mailto:AlisonW@nasen.org.uk).

## WE ARE ALL STILL WORKING TO A MALE TEMPLATE

says one parent. 'She will often burst into tears as soon as she comes in the front door, or fly into an uncontrollable rage.'

Given these responses it does not come as a surprise, then, to hear from parents that many of their daughters have anxiety-related mental health illnesses. However, as these effects are often so closely linked to autism in girls, they may offer a way in for doctors seeking diagnosis guidelines.

'As autism is a medical diagnosis, the starting point needs to be to stress the importance of clinicians considering the possibility of autism being an underlying cause of, for example, anxiety, depression, self-harm, eating disorders and the like in girls and women,' says Rona Tutt, special educational needs lead for the National Association of Head Teachers.

The act of raising awareness is often cited as an essential part of improving understanding and thus improving support for women and girls on the spectrum. But what does 'raising awareness' in this context actually mean?

'Raising awareness is an important next step. But it is difficult to do so without knowing precisely what we need to raise awareness of,' says Liz Pellicano. 'We need much more research on girls and women across their lifespan, including their early behavioural features, their social experiences, their developmental trajectories,

their mental health and well-being, their engagement with education and healthcare services and the like, relative to boys and men. All of this is especially important for determining whether we need to develop specific ways of identifying and supporting girls and women on the spectrum.'

### Joined-up services

It is also vital to have buy-in from health, social care and educational establishments from the NHS to children and young adult mental health services, social services and schools.

'There is a need to link closely with health professionals who are in a position to educate their colleagues in improving diagnosis,' says Rona Tutt.

Barry Carpenter, chair of a new working party to promote awareness about girls and women with autism, adds, 'The British Psychological Society and the Royal College of Psychiatrists are key institutions to co-opt if we want to improve the situation and give girls with autism spectrum conditions better education and better emotional support for their mental health.'

In the end, the benefit is not just for the girls, points out Carrie Grant, mother to three daughters on the spectrum. More girls with autism being able to live independently and take up employment and lead more fulfilling lives would reduce the nation's benefits bill and increase the happiness of all concerned. But a more profound result than that, Carrie points out, is the fact that societies flourish when they embrace those who think differently: 'High functioning girls with autism have a lot to offer. They are assets, not burdens. When they are fully understood, they can fly.'

*Sophie Walker is a journalist and has a teenage daughter who has Asperger syndrome.*

## The go-to website for SEND!

The SEND Gateway's reputation is growing as the online SEND resource for all education professionals



The first year in the life of any website is a time of trial and development and after a demanding year that has seen the implementation of the SEND Code of Practice: 0–25 years, the SEND Gateway is going from strength to strength.

The SEND Gateway is an online platform promoting high-quality resources, events and news to dedicated special educational needs professionals, and is fast becoming the go-to website for SEND.

Developed by nasen, the SEND Gateway provides an opportunity for the education workforce to develop new skills and understanding, navigate recent and upcoming reforms to SEND and access resources and training materials from the UK's leading education resource providers.

In May, Nasen Live 2015 marked the first birthday of the SEND Gateway at a time when schools across England had been getting to grips with local offers, education, health and care plans and changes to SEN funding. The Gateway was originally designed to support the education workforce in their implementation of the SEND Code of Practice and at the launch it included resources that specifically fulfilled that aim. Today, the Gateway provides access to a wide range of resources supporting a spectrum of needs. In its first year, the site has had over 80,000 visitors and achieved a massive 326,773 page views – and it is growing!

New resource providers are required, meeting the

same high-quality standards of existing voluntary and community sector providers, to ensure that the standard of resources available from the Gateway is maintained.

One of the many great features of the SEND Gateway is the ability for registered visitors to provide feedback on resources used. Over the past year we have listened to feedback from both visitors and resource providers to improve the functionality and content of the website. New features developed as a result of this feedback include the ability to save searches each time you visit the Gateway, a new A–Z of publishers and the option to search for resources by price.

An aspect of development of the Gateway that we are really excited about is an effective practice area. Over the next 12 months a whole section of the website will be dedicated to providing support for effective practice in schools and other education settings and will include downloadable tools, videos, webinars and a link to online training.

To get the most from the SEND Gateway log on to [www.sendgateway.org.uk](http://www.sendgateway.org.uk) and register to receive the latest updates on SEN resources, events and news and for the chance to provide feedback on resources, or just visit the website to see what's available and accessible for all school staff.

If you have a resource that you would like to share on the SEND Gateway email [webadmin@nasen.org.uk](mailto:webadmin@nasen.org.uk) or call 01827 311500.