



Autism  
Education  
Trust

# Early Years

## Standards Framework

This framework can be used by leaders as a tool that enables them to enhance and embed good autism practice across their setting



Funded by



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



# Introduction to the AET Early Years Standards Framework

**The Autism Education Trust (AET) Early Years Standards Framework has been developed for professionals who are in a leadership position, whether that be leadership groups or individuals.**

The Framework will support these leaders to enhance and embed inclusive practice and improve outcomes for autistic children. The framework can be used by leaders across a range of provisions from mainstream to specialist to support settings to reflect, plan and implement improvement processes.

The Standards support leaders to meet the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2021), the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice (2014), and their equality duties whilst complying with the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (2019).

By using the AET Early Years Standards, leaders and leadership teams can:

- Identify priority areas to work on.
- Create an action plan to improve practice in the setting.
- Implement reasonable adjustments for autistic children.
- Improve the wellbeing of autistic children.
- Monitor practice and provide evidence of embedding good autism practice.

The AET Early Years Standards can also be used as a support for performance management. Managers can use the standards and AET Early Years Competency Framework to audit skills and can have these as Professional Development Review (PDR) targets.



## Why is it important to have specific standards for autistic children?

Autistic children can make significant progress when they have supportive learning environments that are structured, consistent, and respectful of their differences. The AET Early Years Standards support settings to meet the learning needs of autistic children. They provide pointers to effective teaching approaches, methods, and resources to use in educational provision and practice for this group of learners.

For autistic children, the following need to be taken into account:

- Three key areas of difference in autism influence the way in which autistic children learn and experience their educational settings. Knowledge about autism and these areas of difference is crucial for understanding autistic children. Staff need to take into account differences in:
  - Social understanding and communication.
  - Flexibility, information processing and understanding.
  - Sensory processing and integration.
- Autistic children often have uneven or spiky development, and each autistic child will have their own unique profile. For example, children can have relative strengths and needs in areas such as verbal or visual processing.
- Autistic children often have additional co-occurring conditions and differences alongside a diagnosis of autism. As with all children, co-occurring conditions and differences need to be considered in educational planning.

## The Early Years Foundation Stage and the Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life (EYFS profile handbook, 2021:8).

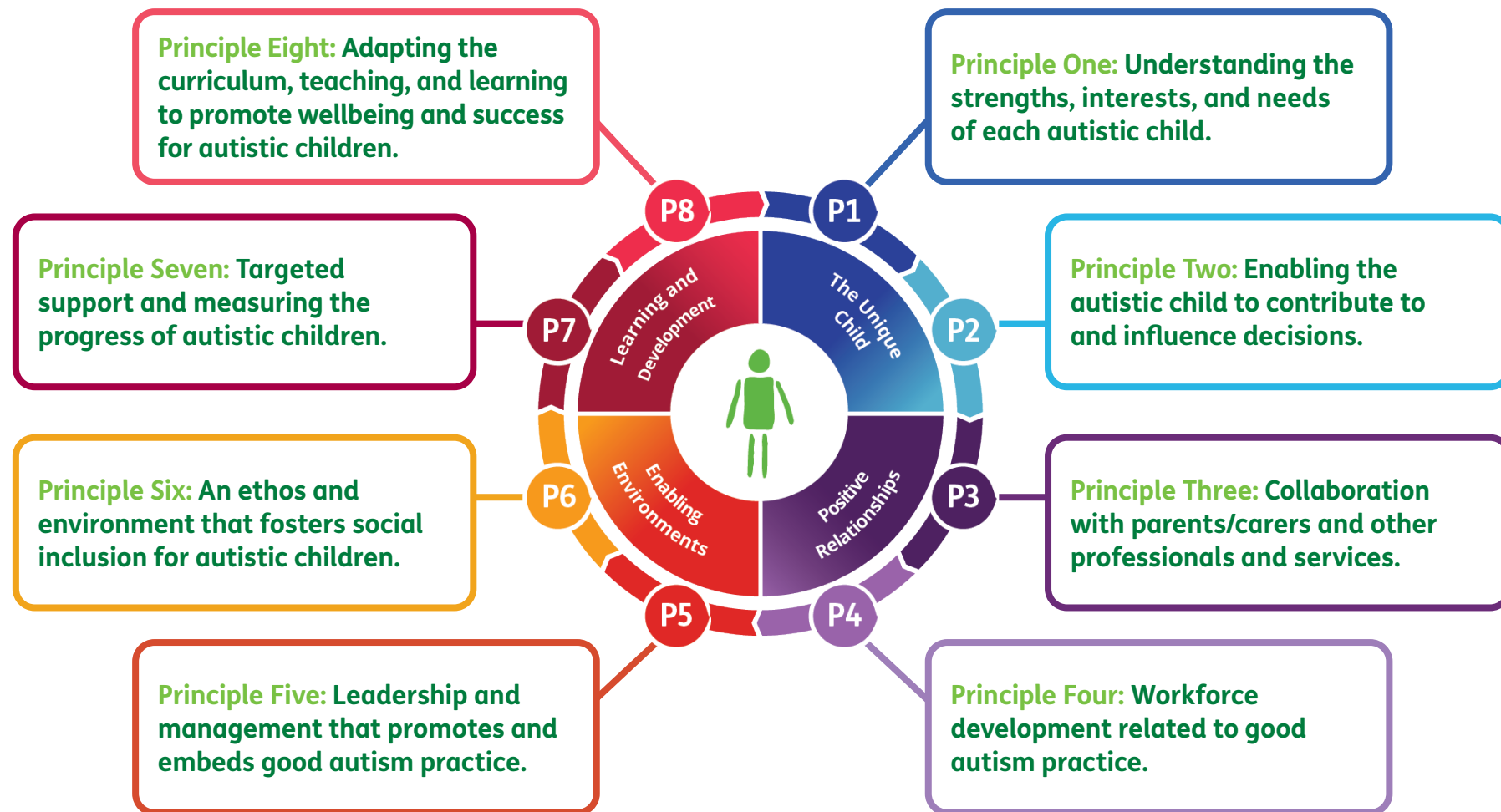
All schools and registered Ofsted providers must follow the EYFS. This includes childminders, preschools, nurseries, and school reception classes.

The AET Early Years Standards align with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS handbook, 2021) and are embedded within the EYFS themes. They are also structured around the AET's Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice that provide the framework for the development of setting-wide approaches to enhancing provision for autistic children and their families.

The eight principles have emerged from an examination of the current evidence from research and practice, as well as key policies and the perspectives and insights of autistic individuals (Guldborg et al., 2019). The reports outlining this work are available on the [Autism Education Trust](#) website. They consist of a full report on good autism practice, a practitioner guide and a suite of case studies.

# The Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice

This is how the Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice are embedded in the four themes.



# The Eight Inclusion Promises

The AET is supported by a panel of Autistic Young Experts to share the voices of autistic young people.

The Panel brings their diverse experiences in different types of education to our work, including the creation of our professional development programmes.

To ensure the Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice are accessible, the Panel created the Eight Inclusion Promises for autistic children to better understand what staff should be doing to support them.

## We promise to:

- 1 Understand what you are good at, what you like doing, and when you might need help.
- 2 Listen to and act upon your ideas about how we can help you if you need it.
- 3 Listen to and work with the people who know you best and who you trust.
- 4 Make sure we are always progressing towards your goals and aspirations.
- 5 Make sure all staff know the best way to support you, both in and out of lessons.
- 6 Help you to get involved and be included in the activities you wish to participate in.
- 7 Work together to set achievable goals that are important to you, and that help you see how well you are doing.
- 8 Help you to feel safe, secure, empowered, and able to learn.

# AET Early Years Professional Development Programme

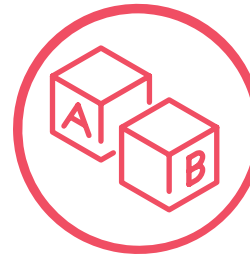
The AET Early Years Standards Framework is part of the Early Years Professional Development Programme. This Programme contains a set of modules and materials for staff working in early years across mainstream and specialist settings.

In addition to the Standards the AET Early Years Professional Development Programme consists of:

- The AET Early Years Competency Framework that enables practitioners to evaluate and reflect upon their own practice when working with autistic children.
- The AET Progression Framework, a comprehensive interactive assessment tool that supports practitioners to identify learning priorities, set key learning intentions, and track progress for autistic children and young people in both mainstream and specialist educational provisions.

The AET Early Years Professional Development Programme also has a range of training modules for those working in early years educational settings. For further information, please visit the AET website:

[www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/training](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/training)



## Early Years

### Modules

Making Sense of Autism

Good Autism Practice

Progression Framework

### Elective topic based modules

Anxiety Module

Inclusion Module

### Editable framework documents

Standards Framework

Competency Framework

Progression Framework

### Leadership Resources

Leadership Modules

GAP Resources

## At a Glance:

The four key themes, the Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice, the AET Early Years Standards, and the AET Early Years Competencies.



The following tables outline how the four themes, the Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice, the AET Early Years Standards, and the AET Early Years Competencies are interlinked.



## A Unique Child

### Principle One: Understanding the strengths, interests, and needs of each autistic child.

#### STANDARDS

**S1.** We are committed to developing knowledge about autism, and we gather information from a range of sources to fully understand the individual autistic child.

**S2.** We take into account how each child's co-occurring conditions and differences, including anxiety and stress, can affect behaviour and cause barriers to learning. We are committed to understanding the causes and functions of a child's behaviour.

#### COMPETENCIES

**C1.** I identify the key strengths and differences of autistic children in the areas of social understanding and communication; flexibility, information processing and understanding, and sensory processing and integration.

**C2.** I understand that many autistic children have co-occurring conditions and differences. They experience high levels of anxiety and stress, and these can create barriers to learning. I know that a child may display behaviour based on a combination of factors and I work hard to understand the causes and functions of the behaviour.

### Principle Two: Enabling the autistic child to contribute to and influence decisions.

#### STANDARDS

**S3.** We use child-centred approaches to consult and involve children in any decisions being made.

**S4.** We provide play and learning opportunities that are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and that take into account their autism. We involve children as partners in their learning goals.

#### COMPETENCIES

**C3.** I include, consult, and support children to communicate their experiences. I understand the importance of observing and listening to the child. I regularly involve children in any decisions being made.

**C4.** I see the child as a partner in their learning and actively involve autistic children in the development of their learning goals.



## Positive Relationships

### Principle Three: Collaboration with parents/carers and other professionals and services.

#### STANDARDS

**S5.** We actively listen to and involve parents/carers in contributing to decisions about their child's education and future aspirations.

**S6.** We work collaboratively with health, social care, and other professionals to improve educational experiences and outcomes for autistic children.

#### COMPETENCIES

**C5.** I engage and build up trust with parents/carers to establish and develop ways of communicating and sharing information, ideas, and progress.

**C6.** I collaborate with health, social care, and other professionals to improve educational experiences and outcomes for autistic children.

### Principle Four: Workforce development related to good autism practice.

#### STANDARDS

**S7.** We show a commitment to continuing professional development on autism across our staff and ensure they receive ongoing training that is appropriate to their role.

**S8.** We audit staff confidence levels, understanding and knowledge of autism, and the changes staff make to their practice as a result of undertaking professional development.

#### COMPETENCIES

**C7.** I engage in professional development that enables me to address the needs of autistic children and to enhance and embed inclusive practice.

**C8.** I reflect on, note down, and gather data on the implications of my learning and development for my own practice, and ultimately for the autistic child/children I work with.



## Enabling Environments

### Principle Five: Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice.

#### STANDARDS

**S9.** We promote a supportive environment where leaders and managers are knowledgeable about autism and cascade information to their staff. We encourage our staff to reflect upon, discuss, and evaluate their practice.

**S10.** We develop mutual understanding, communication, and support between autistic children and staff, between autistic children and their peers, and between parents/carers and staff.

#### COMPETENCIES

**C9.** I create enabling environments based on what I know of the individual child and through making reasonable adjustments accordingly.

**C10.** I create positive, supportive, and caring relationships, between autistic children and staff, between autistic children and their peers, and between parents/carers and staff.

### Principle Six: An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for autistic children.

#### STANDARDS

**S11.** Our enabling approaches foster a calm, low-arousal learning environment and we promote a sense of wellbeing, security, and belonging for our autistic children.

**S12.** Our learning environments are structured, understandable, and predictable. We adapt learning environments to enable children to participate fully in learning and play.

#### COMPETENCIES

**C11.** I understand the importance of focusing on identifying and addressing barriers to learning in the three areas of difference, namely social understanding and communication; flexibility, information processing, and understanding; and sensory processing and integration.

**C12.** I provide a clearly organised learning environment that takes into account the needs of autistic children.



## Learning and Development

### Principle Seven: Targeted support and measuring the progress of autistic children.

#### STANDARDS

**S13.** We use a holistic approach to assessment that includes a child's sensory needs, emotional wellbeing, and preferred way of communicating, interacting, playing, and learning.

**S14.** We develop and implement targeted child-centred support plans in partnership with the child and parents. These are regularly reviewed to monitor progress.

#### COMPETENCIES

**C13.** When assessing progress towards learning goals, I have a holistic approach that builds on strengths and interests, whilst addressing skills and understanding that autistic children may find difficult as a result of their autism.

**C14.** I am involved in the development and implementation of child-centred support plans in partnership with children, parents and other staff.

### Principle Eight: Adapting the curriculum, teaching, and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children.

#### STANDARDS

**S15.** We provide a broad, flexible, and balanced EYFS curriculum that addresses the learning needs of autistic children and their social and emotional well-being, communication needs, and life skills.

**S16.** We always promote positive attitudes towards autism and have high expectations for all of our children and staff.

#### COMPETENCIES

**C15.** I strive to understand autistic children and I adapt the learning environment and my teaching approaches to provide high-quality support for autistic children.

**C16.** I promote positive attitudes towards autism and have high expectations for all the children I work with.

# How to use the AET Early Years Standards Framework

The AET Early Years Standards can be completed by leaders within a setting or a group that make up a leadership team. The framework will support leaders to enhance and embed inclusive practice and to improve outcomes for autistic children by identifying priority areas for the whole setting to work on.

Settings are encouraged to develop an action plan using the AET Early Years Standards in order to review provision for autistic children and to prioritise areas of development, in line with the improvement focus of the setting. There are 16 standards, and settings can work on as few or as many as is manageable.


Every standard will be linked to an additional resources document with further reading, practical materials and templates to help you develop and implement that standard.


For each standard, you should aim to collect:

- Documentary evidence (e.g. records of training events, assess, plan, do, review documentation, accounts from children, children's outcomes, observation schedules, and policy documents).
- Photographs, or video clips of relevant practice.

1. Give each standard, and each example under that standard, a RAG (red, amber, green) rating:

 **Room for improvement:** Work needs to be done to develop practice in this area.

 **Developing:** Work has started on this area of practice.

 **We do this really well:** This standard is well developed.

2. Use this information to decide which of the AET Early Years Standards are most important to focus on in your setting.
3. Create an action plan for the standards you are focusing on by documenting your actions for those that need improvement.
4. Include specified timeframes and nominated team members for implementation of this.
5. Collect data before and after so you can document the change of implementing the standard.

# Theme one: A Unique Child





# A Unique Child

**Principle One: Understanding the strengths, interests, and needs of each autistic child.**

**Standard One:** We are committed to developing knowledge about autism, and we gather information from a range of sources to fully understand the individual autistic child.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Examples of how we can do this:

We gather information about the child from the child, their parents/carers, and other professionals.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We observe the child across a variety of situations (including in the playground, during play, at story time, during a structured activity, doing an activity the child loves, and when interacting with other children). This information helps staff to understand the individual child’s strengths, interests, challenges, and ways of learning and interacting with other children.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We consider the autistic child’s development in the areas of social understanding and communication; flexibility, information processing, and understanding, and sensory processing and integration.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Links to statutory frameworks

Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured (EYFS statutory framework, 2021:6).

Depending on their special educational need, children will demonstrate learning and development in different ways. Practitioners observing a child involved in day-to-day activities must be alert to their demonstrating attainment in a variety of ways, including eye pointing, the use of symbols or signs (EYFS profile handbook, 2021:17).



## A Unique Child

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



# A Unique Child

**Principle One: Understanding the strengths, interests, and needs of each autistic child.**

**Standard Two:** We take into account how each child’s co-occurring conditions and differences, including anxiety and stress, can affect behaviour and cause barriers to learning. We are committed to understanding the causes and functions of a child’s behaviour.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Examples of how we can do this:

Staff are informed about co-occurring conditions and differences, including potential disturbed and erratic sleeping, eating, and toileting. Staff are aware of how each individual child’s co-occurring condition or physical/mental health needs might affect learning and/or behaviour and how this may differ across settings.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Staff work closely with parents/carers, other professionals, and the child to identify and understand the reasons for and the functions of behaviour, with a particular focus on understanding behaviours that signify distress.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Staff implement individual strategies to reduce anxiety and enhance the wellbeing of children.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Links to statutory frameworks

Providers are responsible for managing children’s behaviour in an appropriate way (EYFS profile handbook, 2021:34).

A detailed assessment of need should ensure that the full range of an individual’s needs is identified, not simply the primary need. The support provided to an individual should always be based on a full understanding of their particular strengths and needs and seek to address them all (SEND Code of Practice, 2014:96).



## A Unique Child

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



## A Unique Child

**Principle Two: Enabling the autistic child to contribute to and influence decisions.**

**Standard Three: We use child-centred approaches to consult and involve children in any decisions being made.**

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

We enable autistic children to identify and celebrate their strengths, hopes, dreams, and aspirations. We record this information in their one page profile.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Staff identify developmentally relevant methods for each child to communicate their views and experiences, and support and encourage them to use them. We take on board the perspective of the autistic child across the different activities in which they engage and use a range of tools to capture the child's voice.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Children have regular opportunities to communicate their likes and dislikes.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential (EYFS statutory framework, 2021:5).

Providers must have arrangements in place to support children with SEN or disabilities. Maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and all providers who are funded by the local authority to deliver early education places must have regard to the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. Maintained schools and maintained nursery schools must identify a member of staff to act as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and other providers (in group provision) are expected to identify a SENCO (EYFS statutory framework, 2021:37).



## A Unique Child

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



# A Unique Child

**Principle Two: Enabling the autistic child to contribute to and influence decisions.**

**Standard Four:** We provide play and learning opportunities that are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and that take into account their autism. We involve children as partners in their learning goals.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Examples of how we can do this:

We recognise that play is an important part of learning social interaction and skills (such as turn-taking) and we encourage the child to engage in play-based activities while respecting that the child will often play in a different way from other children.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We involve the child and the parents/carers in the assess, plan, do, review process when appropriate and possible, and co-produce learning goals with autistic children so that the child is at the centre of educational planning.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We provide children with opportunities to communicate, interact and play in a range of ways.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Links to statutory frameworks

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child established the right of all children to express their views and to have these views listened to and taken seriously when decisions are being made that affect them.



## A Unique Child

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:

# Theme two: Positive Relationships





# Positive Relationships

**Principle Three: Collaboration with parents/carers and other professionals and services.**

**Standard Five: We actively listen to and involve parents/carers in contributing to decisions about their child’s education and future aspirations.**

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Examples of how we can do this:

We involve parents/carers in their child’s education. This includes the identification of their aspirations and learning goals for their child.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We proactively engage with parents and carers to establish and develop ways to communicate and share information, ideas, and progress.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We conduct home visits before children attend our setting, and we support the transition process.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Links to statutory frameworks

Positive relationships: Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships (EYFS statutory framework, 2021:6).

Each child must be assigned a key person. Their role is to help ensure that every child’s care is tailored to meet their individual needs (in accordance with paragraph 1.16), to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents (EYFS statutory framework, 2021:27).

Local authorities, Early Years providers and schools should enable parents to share their knowledge about the child and give them confidence that their views and contributions are valued and will be acted upon (SEND Code of Practice, 2014:21).



## Positive Relationships

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



## Positive Relationships

**Principle Three: Collaboration with parents/carers and other professionals and services.**

**Standard Six: We work collaboratively with health, social care, and other professionals to improve educational experiences and outcomes for autistic children.**

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

We develop links with professionals across services and contexts according to the needs of children. For example, this can include Educational Psychology, CAMHS, specialist autism teams and the transition support service.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We follow the graduated approach in the SEND Code of Practice and are confident in collecting assess, plan, do, review evidence for submitting to external professionals.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We bring together professionals within and beyond the setting in a multi-disciplinary approach and all staff are aware of the Team Around the Child.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

An EYFS profile completed by a practitioner alone only offers a partial picture of a child's attainment. Practitioners must actively engage children, their parents and other adults who have significant interaction with the child in the assessment process (EYFS profile handbook, 2021:15).

No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances. If children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action (Keeping children safe in education, 2020:5).



## Positive Relationships

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



## Positive Relationships

**Principle Four: Workforce development related to good autism practice.**

**Standard Seven: We show a commitment to continuing professional development on autism across our staff and ensure they receive ongoing training that is appropriate to their role.**

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

We recognise the importance of high-quality professional development in the education of autistic children. As knowledge is continuously progressing, we regularly update the knowledge, skills, and practice of our staff.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Our setting empowers and supports staff to share, learn, and develop knowledge and skills in order to develop greater understanding of autistic children and common co-occurring conditions.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We use the AET Early Years Competencies to identify the professional development needs of all staff.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

STA expects LAs to offer training to all their early years providers completing the EYFS profile. The format and structure of this training can be agreed and arranged locally by each LA (EYFS profile handbook, 2021:32).

The local authority must set out information in its Local Offer on securing expertise among teachers, lecturers or other professionals to support children and young people with SEND or disabilities. This should include professional development to secure expertise at different levels (SEND Code of Practice, 2014:68).



## Positive Relationships

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



## Positive Relationships

**Principle Four: Workforce development related to good autism practice.**

**Standard Eight: We audit staff confidence levels, understanding and knowledge of autism, and the changes staff make to their practice as a result of undertaking professional development.**

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

Staff complete self-evaluation forms about their knowledge, confidence, and practice related to autism before and after undertaking continuous professional development (CPD). For example, this can include using the AET self-evaluation checklist.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We gather information from staff about the changes they make to their practice as a result of professional development and for performance management purposes.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We frequently share and cascade knowledge and learning among staff.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

The daily experience of children in early years settings and the overall quality of provision depends on all practitioners having appropriate qualifications, training, skills and knowledge and a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities (EYFS statutory framework, 2021:26).



## Positive Relationships

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:

# Theme three: Enabling Environments





## Enabling Environments

**Principle Five: Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice.**

**Standard Nine:** We promote a supportive environment where leaders and managers are knowledgeable about autism and cascade information to their staff. We encourage our staff to reflect upon, discuss, and evaluate their practice.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

Senior leaders have attended training and have a good understanding of autism. They are aware of the strengths and differences associated with autism.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Information about how we support autistic children is referenced in our development plan, in policies (particularly the SEND policy and the behaviour policy), and in our Equality Duty objectives.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Leaders use a coaching model with staff and regularly monitor how they are working with children. They provide specific feedback on their interaction with children in order to develop consistency across the setting.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

The leaders of Early Years settings, Schools and Colleges should establish and maintain a culture of high expectations that expects those working with children and young people with SEND to include them in all the opportunities available to other children [...] There is a significant overlap between children and young people with SEND and those with disabilities and [many] are covered by both SEND and equality legislation (SEND Code of Practice, 2014:27).

Leaders are to ensure all learners, including those with SEND, get the information, advice, guidance and support to achieve their next steps and progress [...] Leaders are to provide the support for staff to make this possible (Ofsted Education Inspection framework, 2019).



## Enabling Environments

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



## Enabling Environments

**Principle Five: Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good autism practice.**

**Standard Ten: We develop mutual understanding, communication, and support between autistic children and staff, between autistic children and their peers, and between parents/carers and staff.**

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

We create an inclusive learning environment through promoting positive attitudes and behaviours toward autistic children. Our staff build effective relationships by actively listening to and observing children, and by communicating regularly and positively with parents/carers.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Staff appreciate that interactive play is really important for the development of both communication and social understanding. Staff find out what motivates the child. They create opportunities to engage with the child at their level, and encourage interactive play with peers.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We understand the importance of working towards shared attention and interest by paying close attention to what a child is doing and engaging with them through what interests and motivates them.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

The learning environment should provide balance across the areas of learning. Integral to this is an ethos that:

- respects each child as an individual
- values children’s efforts, interests and purposes as instrumental to successful learning (EYFS statutory framework, 2021:11).



## Enabling Environments

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



## Enabling Environments

**Principle Six: An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for autistic children.**

**Standard Eleven:** Our enabling approaches foster a calm, low-arousal learning environment and we promote a sense of wellbeing, security, and belonging for our autistic children.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

We identify, monitor, build, and maintain the mental and emotional wellbeing of autistic children.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We organise rooms and spaces to manage sensory differences that may be distracting or uncomfortable.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We use a range of strategies support children to regulate their emotions.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests and development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all areas of learning and development (EYFS statutory framework, 2021:15).



## Enabling Environments

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



## Enabling Environments

**Principle Six: An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for autistic children.**

**Standard Twelve: Our learning environments are structured, understandable, and predictable. We adapt learning environments to enable children to participate fully in learning and play.**

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

Staff consider the accessibility of the learning environment for autistic children by taking into account potential physical barriers and processing difficulties, sensory needs, and social demands of working with or being with their peers.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We support verbal and non-verbal communication through a range of approaches, including the organisation of the setting, visual aids, reducing and simplifying language, and providing sufficient time for processing and understanding of instruction.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We adhere to statutory guidance and adjust the environment to meet children's sensory and physical needs.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

Children learn and develop well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers (EYFS statutory framework, 2021:6).



## Enabling Environments

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

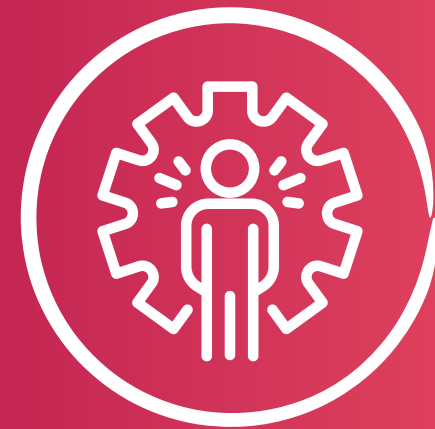
### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:

# Theme four: Learning and Development





## Learning and Development

**Principle Seven: Targeted support and measuring the progress of autistic children.**

**Standard Thirteen: We use a holistic approach to assessment that includes a child’s sensory needs, emotional wellbeing, and preferred way of communicating, interacting, playing, and learning.**

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

Parents, children, and external professionals (as appropriate) are actively involved in the identification of strengths and needs, in setting shared learning goals, and in reviewing and assessing progress.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

The assessment approaches we use are adapted in line with the needs of the child and include tools developed specifically for autistic children.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Staff are confident in using the AET Progression Framework to identify individual learning needs and set suitable learning intentions as well as measuring progress in these.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

Each child’s level of development must be assessed against the early learning goals (see Section 1). Practitioners must indicate whether children are meeting expected levels of development, or if they are exceeding expected levels, or not yet reaching expected levels (‘emerging’). This is the early years profile (EYFS profile handbook, 2021:11).



## Learning and Development

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



# Learning and Development

**Principle Seven: Targeted support and measuring the progress of autistic children.**

**Standard Fourteen:** We develop and implement targeted child-centred support plans in partnership with the child and parents. These are regularly reviewed to monitor progress.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

All autistic children have a child-centred education plan that is tailored to their strengths and needs, and has clear learning goals and strategies.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Support plans are initiated promptly using the graduated approach. They focus on communication and joint social interactions, and they identify opportunities for peer collaborations and home/school links to support the generalisation of skills.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Careful review of targets, approaches used and outcomes related to the learning environment are scheduled at least every term. Support plans are updated and review dates are set.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

In the final term of the year in which the child reaches age five, and no later than 30 June in that term, the EYFS Profile must be completed for each child. The Profile provides parents and carers, practitioners and teachers with a well rounded picture of a child’s knowledge, understanding and abilities, their progress against expected levels, and their readiness for Year 1. The Profile must reflect: ongoing observation; all relevant records held by the setting; discussions with parents and carers, and any other adults whom the teacher, parent or carer judges can offer a useful contribution (EYFS profile handbook, 2021:11).



## Learning and Development

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



# Learning and Development

**Principle Eight: Adapting the curriculum, teaching, and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children.**

**Standard Fifteen:** We provide a broad, flexible, and balanced EYFS curriculum that addresses the learning needs of autistic children and their social and emotional well-being, communication needs, and life skills.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Examples of how we can do this:

We prioritise the development of communication skills such as joint attention, communication, speech, vocabulary, as well as turn-taking and interactions with peers.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

Staff consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and use this information to plan an enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning, play, and development.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

In line with the EYFS, each area of learning and development is implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mixture of adult-led and child-led activity.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

## Links to statutory frameworks

Early years providers, schools, and colleges should know precisely where children and young people with SEN are in their learning and development. They should ensure decisions are informed by the insights of parents and those of children and young people themselves; have high ambitions and set stretching targets for them; track their progress towards these goals; keep under review the additional or different provision that is made for them; promote positive outcomes in the wider areas of personal and social development, and ensure that the approaches used are based on the best possible evidence and are having the required impact on progress (SEND Code of Practice, 2014:25).



## Learning and Development

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:



# Learning and Development

**Principle Eight: Adapting the curriculum, teaching, and learning to promote wellbeing and success for autistic children.**

**Standard Sixteen: We always promote positive attitudes towards autism and have high expectations for all of our children and staff.**

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Examples of how we can do this:

Differences between children are embraced in our setting and we promote awareness and acceptance of autism.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

All staff understand autism, create respectful relationships with children, and adapt their practice to meet the needs of children.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

We have a vision of including all children, and our positive approach to diversity and inclusion is proactively shared in our communications both internally and externally.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING

WE DO THIS REALLY WELL

### Links to statutory frameworks

Public bodies, including further education institutions, local authorities, maintained schools, maintained nursery schools, academies and free schools are covered by the public sector equality duty and, when carrying out their functions, must have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between disabled and non-disabled children and young people (Equality Act, 2010:17).



## Learning and Development

### How do we document evidence of working on this standard?

We document evidence of working on this standard through case studies, one page profiles, and the goals we co-produce with parents/carers and children (where possible), and by documenting our reasonable adjustments and the impact of those.

#### Evidence to show how we meet this standard:

### What has been the impact of implementing this standard?

#### On staff:

#### On parents/carers:

#### On autistic children:

# Author and Acknowledgements

---

## Lead Author:

### Professor Karen Guldberg

The AET standards and competencies have been co-produced with a number of people. Although Karen Guldberg has been lead author, the standards/competencies are the result of input from a number of people representing a range of perspectives. We are grateful to a number of people who have been involved in creating and co-authoring these frameworks. Co-authors have included the members of the AET's Autistic Young Experts panel who have provided input on key concepts, ideas and terminology, The Bridge London Trust and Liverpool's Special Educational Needs Inclusion Support Service have provided invaluable input into the development of content and advice on drafts, as has Emma Chantler, AET Content Manager. The Birmingham Communication Team shared valuable resources.

## Training Partner Co-Authors:

For the early-years based materials Rachel Read, Specialist Advisory Teacher with the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Support Service (SENISS), Liverpool: providing advice and support for children with special educational needs, in order to promote their inclusion within mainstream and nursery settings, enabling them to achieve their full potential.

Natalie Reaney, Specialist Advisory Teacher with the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Support Service (SENISS), Liverpool: providing advice and support for children with special educational needs, in order to promote their inclusion within mainstream and nursery settings, enabling them to achieve their full potential.

For the school-based materials, the training partner co-author was Dr Jamie Galpin, Developmental Psychologist, Lead AET Trainer and Researcher at The Bridge London Teaching School. A member of The Bridge London Trust, a unique Multi Academy Trust consisting of three special schools, one mainstream primary school, a teaching school and outreach service.

## With thanks to:

Alice Gair, Specialist Paediatric Occupational Therapist in The Sensational Thinking Project with Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust: advocating for the needs of children and their families affected by sensory processing differences including raising awareness and education of the impact of sensory processing and integration on daily living in an effort to contribute to better wellbeing, health and education outcomes for children.

Pam Simpson, Autism advisor and previous AET hub lead for Birmingham Communication and Autism Team: providing a local authority approach to raising the capacity of schools to meet the needs of autistic pupils through the implementation of the AET standards and competency frameworks and the delivery of training. Pam is a member of the AET Board.

The AET expert reference group: Phil Christie, Glenys Jones, Vicky Jones, Alison Reevey, Kevin Baskerville, Wendy Peel, Vanessa Foulds, Alison Levy, and The NAS Autism Knowledge and Expertise Team.

Thank you to the whole AET network for contributing in the early stages to the redevelopment of the Early Years and Schools Professional Development Programme.



**Autism  
Education  
Trust**

**Autism Education Trust**

393 City Road  
London  
EC1 VNG, UK

e: [info@autismeducationtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@autismeducationtrust.org.uk)  
t: 020 7903 3650

[www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk)

All rights reserved. Not to be photocopied.  
Ref: Early Years Standards Framework\_T-HUB-EY-Mt



Funded by



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

