

# Evaluation of the Autism Education Trust programme, 2015-2016

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# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

The Autism Education Trust (AET) training and support programme is now in its sixth year. There have been two earlier rounds of the Programme – the AET Programme 2011-2013, and the AET Programme 2013-2015. The AET Programme 2011-13 established a hubs training model and introduced school years training for all school staff working with children and young people with autism. The 2013-15 Programme involved the development of new Early Years (EY) and Post-16 (P-16) training materials for workforces and settings supporting EY and P-16 children and young people with autism. The Programme consisted of three tiers of training which were delivered via four EY and four P-16 training hubs. The 2013-15 Programme also involved the development and roll-out of National Standards and Competency Frameworks for EY and P-16 settings. In addition, guides for parents and carers on working with their children’s schools were produced.

The 2015-2016 Programme piloted a newly developed Progression Framework, and associated training module, designed for the AET by Autism Associates. The Progression Framework was a response to the need for research-based models that can be applied by school staff to track the progress of children and young people with autism. The Progression Framework that the schools worked with in the Autumn term 2015, and the Spring term 2016, was a *pilot* version, including five of the seven areas of learning. The pilot Progression Framework was, at that stage, very much a work in development, and will be further developed as a result of the piloting process, feedback from stake holders, and the evaluation findings.

As with the earlier rounds of the AET Programme, the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR), the University of Warwick, was contracted (following a competitive tendering process) to evaluate the 2015-2016 Programme. This evaluation consisted of the following elements:

- Work with five schools – one special secondary school, one mainstream secondary school, and three mainstream primary schools – over the period September 2015 to the end of

January 2016. The work enabled the development of highly detailed case studies of autism support in the schools.

- The focus of the case-study work was, firstly, on the impact of training, on staff and pupils in the schools.
- In addition, the schools all utilised the pilot AET Progression Framework (PF), and the school staff provided regular reflective feedback on its use.
- Each school also nominated children with diagnoses of autism, whose progress over the period was monitored, using the Progression Framework.
- Parents and carers of children with autism from the case-study schools also took part in the evaluation, in order to generate data on good, and bad, practice in relation to school support for children and young people with autism.

## 1.2 Findings:

### 1.2.1 Schools and the AET Programme 2015-2016

Work with the five case-study schools provided detailed accounts of day-to-day support for children and young people in three different types of school setting – mainstream primary, mainstream secondary, and special secondary provision. The learning from the case study schools that relates to enabling factors for the provision of good quality support for children and young people with autism involved the following points:

- Support and wholehearted commitment from a school's head teacher and senior management team (SMT) was necessary for good autism provision. SENCOs, lead practitioners, teaching staff and TAs all need to be fully supported by management in their efforts to provide support for children and young people with autism.
- All of the case-study schools had undertaken AET Schools Programme training at all three tiers, and one school had undertaken some AET Early Years training. AET training and materials were important in equipping schools to provide good autism provision. In addition, it was common for the schools to draw upon a wide range of other sources of autism training, information and knowledge. For example, schools

combined materials and knowledge from the NAS, local autism outreach teams, CAMHS, and the AET in order to develop their autism strategies.

- The Progression Framework was successfully piloted in four of the five schools. It is unclear as to why one school (School 2) had difficulties with incorporating the Progression Framework into their work. However, it might be of significance that School 2 piloted the Progression Framework with the youngest children of all the case-study schools. In addition, the training background of the staff was not as wide as some staff from the other schools.
- External support and co-working characterised all the schools. Work with, and support from parents and carers, and external agencies such as local CAMHS, and autism outreach teams, provided valuable support for staff and schools. In addition, some staff, for example from School 3, were able to draw upon a local schools network focused on autism.

### 1.2.2 Parent and carer views of school autism provision

Each school in the evaluation recruited parents/carers to the evaluation in order that their views on what constituted good, and bad, provision for their children with autism could be collected. Eleven parents were recruited in total, but only nine were able to be interviewed. The interviews focused on the parents' children, their experiences of their children at school (including schools other than the school currently attended), the background to their child/ren being diagnosed with autism, their progress at school, the parent/carer view of what constitutes a good relationship between home and school, what constitutes a good school for their child with autism, and difficulties they had experienced with school and their child/ren. The findings from the parent interviews were analysed under two headings:

- Parents' experiences of difficulties related to their child/ren's schooling.
- Parents' views on what constitutes good practice in relation to school support for children with autism.

The difficulties experienced by parents revolved around three issues:

- Unwillingness of schools to accept children with autism onto the school roll.
- Lack of understanding of autism on the part of individual teachers and head teachers.
- Failure to plan for transition, particularly between settings.

Parent views of what constituted good practice focused on the following areas:

- Good communication between school and home, with daily contact between the two being preferred.
- School-home co-working and co-operation, with both settings able to learn from the other.
- Schools implementing positive changes which could be evidenced by identifiable impact on the school experience for the children with autism.

### 1.3 Observations and recommendations

The evaluation makes the following observations and recommendations:

- The value of autism training for school staff continues to be an important element of good provision for children and young people with autism. The case-studies showed that, typically, schools combine AET Programme training, at all levels, with training, information and materials from other sources. The latter included, for example, local autism outreach teams, CAMHS teams, and the National Autistic Society (NAS). The practice of drawing upon a variety of sources of training, support, advice, information, and materials makes it difficult to isolate the impact of AET Training. Nonetheless, the case-study school staff evidence provided good evidence of the high value school staff place upon the AET Programme, and reaffirmed the findings of previous evaluation reports on the ongoing AET Programme. **AET Programme training can, therefore, be recommended for school settings seeking to provide good autism support for children and young people.**
- The AET Progression Framework was successfully piloted in four of the five case-study schools. The AET Progression Framework was seen by those schools to provide a valuable tool in supporting school staff to identify appropriate goals, select interventions, record

impact, and map the progression of children and young people in terms of both the quality of their school experience and learning journey. The AET Progression Framework was regarded as a valuable addition by the schools. In the case of the school which abandoned use of the Progression Framework, there was still an intention to return to its use in the future. It may be that the difficulties that the school experienced reflected a need for further training and support for school staff. On balance, therefore, **the Progression Framework can be recommended for use in schools where staff have good autism training and access to supporting materials and information.**

- External support and co-working characterised all the case-study schools' work with pupils with autism. Local school networks, parents and carers, local CAMHS and autism outreach teams all provided highly valued support and advice. **The earlier evaluation of the AET Programme, 2013-15 drew attention to the importance of support networks for all settings, and the AET has begun the process of supporting the growth and development of such networks. It is recommended that this approach should continue, with the ultimate aim of ensuring that all settings should be in a position to be able to draw upon, and participate in, external support.**
- One case study school (a special secondary school for young people with moderate learning difficulties) was in the process of applying for NAS Accreditation, and the school's engagement with the AET Programme was part of that process. The process requires a great deal of staff time and preparation, however, it was seen by the school to confer numerous benefits, including the support of the school strategy to further develop its provision for young people with autism. **It is recommended that the AET might consider developing an accreditation system for schools and other settings.**
- Parents from the case study schools who took part in the evaluation provided detailed accounts of good, and bad, experiences relating to the support of their children in schools, and nurseries. Parents greatly valued good, strong, two-way communications with schools about their children. They also valued schools having staff who were knowledgeable, trained, and understanding about their children's needs, and who were willing to co-work with parents to enable the best support for the children in school. It was also the case that parents were generally unaware that schools had undertaken AET training. **It is recommended that schools should be encouraged to fully inform parents and carers about the training that school staff undertake in relation to supporting children and young people with autism.**



- Parents were generally unaware of support that was available for them as parents and carers of children and young people with autism. Similarly, they were unaware of sources of information and support available for parents and carers to work with schools, and other settings, to ensure the best provision for their children. **It is recommended that further outreach work be considered in relation to parents and carers. At a simple level, schools that have accessed AET training and materials should be encouraged to share knowledge of AET, and other, provision with parents and carers. Further, the AET might consider advertising its work more widely to reach parents and carers who might have few resources to draw upon.**
- The successful piloting of the AET Progression Framework suggests strongly that it will be another useful tool for school staff working with children and young people with autism. In keeping with the AET's established practice with regard to its training and autism support materials it is hoped that the Progression Framework will continue to be refined and amended. **It is recommended that the roll-out of the Progression Framework, and any subsequent developments of the framework, be incorporated in the continuing evaluation of the AET Programme.**

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

The Autism Education Trust's (AET) training hubs Programme is now in its sixth year. There have been two earlier rounds of the Programme – the AET Programme 2011-2013, and the AET Programme 2013-2015. The AET Programme 2011-13 established the hubs training model and introduced school years training for all school staff working with children and young people with autism. The 2013-15 Programme involved the development of new Early Years (EY) and Post-16 (P-16) training materials for workforces and settings supporting EY and P-16 children and young people with autism. The Programme consisted of three tiers of training which were delivered via four EY and four P-16 training hubs. The 2013-15 Programme also involved the development and roll-out of National Standards and Competency Frameworks for EY and P-16 settings. In addition, guides for parents and carers on working with their children's schools were produced.

Both rounds of the AET Programme were evaluated by the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, the University of Warwick. The evaluations (Cullen, M.A. *et al* 2012, 2013, Cullen, S.M. *et al*, 2014, 2015) showed that the AET Programme, the training hubs model, and the training and support materials were all successful in delivering well-regarded, high quality training to the workforce for children from Early Years to Post-16. The success of the earlier Programmes led to further Department for Education (DfE) funding for the AET Programme 2015-16.

### 2.2 The AET Programme 2015-2016

The 2015-2016 Programme introduced a newly developed Progression Framework, designed for the AET by Autism Associates. The Progression Framework is a response to the need for research-based models that can be applied by school staff to track the progress of

children and young people with autism. This need, in the wider context of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, was identified as a research priority by the DfE in March 2014<sup>1</sup>. During 2015-2016 the Progression Framework was developed and piloted by Autism Associates. The Progression Framework and the associated guidance is to be rolled out at the end of February, 2016.

### 2.3 The evaluation

CEDAR was commissioned to evaluate the AET Programme 2015-2016. The evaluation focus was described by the AET:

‘In response to feedback from Ofsted, the [evaluation] brief will include a focus on school change and pupil outcomes arising from the embedding of previous programmes. This strand would link closely with the development of progress measures for pupils with autism [the Progression Framework]... The [evaluation] report will focus on 4 schools who applied the [AET] training and track developments from that training. Additionally the newly developed AET progression framework will be trialled in respect of 20 pupils to track links between improved provision and pupil outcomes. As well as evaluating the impact of the programme the data gathered could be used as exemplars of the new progression framework.’<sup>2</sup>

The evaluation, then, consisted of the following elements:

- Work with five schools – one special secondary school, one mainstream secondary school, and three mainstream primary schools – over the period September 2015 to

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<sup>1</sup> Special educational needs and disability: research priorities and questions. Ref: DFE-00086-2014. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/special-educational-needs-and-disability-research-priorities-and-questions>, accessed, 11 February 2016

<sup>2</sup> AET Project Brief – Evaluating the impact of the AET Programme’, April, 2016, p.4.

the end of January 2016. The work enabled the development of highly detailed case studies of autism support in the schools.

- The focus of this work was, firstly, on the impact of AET, and other, training, on staff and pupils in the schools.
- In addition, the schools all utilised the pilot Progression Framework (PF), and the school staff provided regular reflective feedback on the use of the Progression Framework.
- Each school also nominated children with diagnoses of autism, whose progress over the period was monitored, using the Progression Framework
- The schools also recruited parents/carers of the nominated children to the evaluation in order that parent/carer experiences, and expectations of school support for their children could be examined.

### 2.3.1 Data collection

All the AET school age hubs were asked to provide school contacts from their areas to enable the recruitment of schools from a range of areas. In the event, after repeated calls for school contacts, 14 school contacts were provided, and all were invited to take part in the evaluation. The 14 represented two special secondary schools, one special primary and secondary school, one special primary school, three mainstream secondary schools, and seven mainstream primary schools. The schools were drawn from five of the AET school age hubs areas. Of the 14, five schools eventually agreed to take part in the evaluation. The details of the five participating schools and staff are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Participating schools

School	AET training hub area	School type	Role/position of responsible staff member/s
School 1	A	Special secondary school	Assistant Head Teacher, with responsibility for additional & special needs
School 2	B	Mainstream primary school (no specialist unit)	1 x Assistant Head Teacher & SENCO 1 x HLTA & 1-2-1 support
School 3	B	Mainstream primary school (no specialist unit)	Lead Practitioner for Autism
School 4	C	Mainstream primary school (no specialist unit)	Assistant Head Teacher & SENCO
School 5	B	Mainstream secondary school	SENCO, child protection officer, responsibility for looked after children in the school.

Each school was visited by a researcher from CEDAR at the beginning of the evaluation, and the relevant staff were interviewed. The interviews were recorded, with informed consent, and subsequently fully transcribed for analysis. The initial meeting was also used to plan the research, and to identify the children who would be the focus of the evaluation. As a result of these planning meetings each school was able to identify two children with autism (ten children in total) who would benefit from the application of the pilot Progression Framework to track their progression during the evaluation period. The children were chosen on the basis of having a diagnosis of autism, of having different priorities in relation to their needs in each school, and on the basis of the children's parents/carers being willing to give consent to their children being part of the research, and being likely to be interviewed themselves.

The evaluation design was centred on the need to develop detailed case studies of autism support in each school over a term and a half of the 2015-2016 school year. Table 2 summarises data collection for each school.

Table 2: Data collection

<b>School</b>	<b>Date of initial visit (planning and staff interviews)</b>	<b>Dates of telephone interviews with responsible member/s of school staff</b>	<b>Dates of interviews with parents/carers</b>	<b>End of evaluation questionnaire completed by responsible member/s of school staff? Yes/No</b>
School 1	23 September 2015	[the member of staff was on sick leave Oct-Dec 2015) 27 January 2016 3 February 2016	Mother S1P1: 27 November 2015 (telephone interview) Mother S1P2: 8 December 2015 (telephone interview)	Yes
School 2	22 September 2015	6 November 2015 15 December 2015 19 January 2016	Mother S2P1, and Father S2P2: 13 October 2015 (face to face interview) S2P3: 21 October 2015 (telephone interview)	Yes
School 3	14 September 2015	11 December 2015 29 January 2016	Mother S3P1: 8 December 2015 (telephone interview)	Yes

School 4	16 September 2015	19 October 2015 11 November 2015 7 December 2015 25 January 2015	Mother S4P1: 19 October 2015 (face to face interview) Mother S4P2: 19 October 2015 (face to face interview)	Yes
School 5	17 September 2015	17 October 18 November 17 December 29 January	Mother S5P1: 10 December 2015 (telephone interview)	Yes
<i>Totals:</i>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>

The initial teacher interviews averaged 45 minutes, while the subsequent, telephone, interviews were typically between 15-20 minutes. All interviews were recorded, with informed consent, and subsequently fully transcribed for analysis. The parent/carer interviews varied from 25 to 70 minutes in length, and were also recorded, with informed consent, and transcribed for analysis. The end of evaluation questionnaire (Appendix 1) was completed in February 2016 by all the responsible school staff.

## 2.4 This report

This report aims to:

- Provide detailed case studies of autism support in each school over a term and a half of the 2015-2016 school year. The case studies themselves are built around three areas:
  - The experience of piloting of the Progression Framework in each school.
  - Reflections on the value of AET, and other, training, along with current and future training needs.
  - The progress of the identified children with autism over the period of the evaluation, and the relationship between the use of the Progression Framework and that progress; in addition to the need for further autism support training for staff.

- Provide overall conclusions from the five case-study schools
- Provide an account of the parents/carers' views of the needs of their children, and their views of the autism support provision of the schools.



## 3. The School case-studies

### 3.1 Introduction

Each of the five case studies provides background on the school, with particular attention being paid to the autism support training history of each school, and the role, experience and training of the responsible teacher. In addition, the backgrounds of the children who were part of the evaluation are also presented, with an examination of their needs, related to autism and otherwise. The piloting of the Progression Framework is tracked, and closely linked to the support provided for the children in each school. In addition, training, both prior training, and possible future training needs, are examined. The intention is to provide rich, detailed accounts of support for children with autism, the piloting of the Progression Framework, and training needs in the five schools.

### 3.2 School 1 (Special secondary school)

#### 3.2.1 School overview: school, staff member, training, pupils

##### *3.2.1.1 The school*

School 1 (S1) was a special secondary school for children and young people with moderate learning difficulties. Its school roll was 170, and pupils were aged 11-19. Although around one third of the pupils have a statement of autism, for the majority of them autism was not the primary need on their Statement of SEN, or Education Health and Care (EHC) plan. As the teacher (ST1) explained, ‘we have quite a broad spectrum, and quite a broad range of ability [...] so we run GCSE courses, and entry level courses, and we run BTecs as well’ (ST1).

##### *3.2.1.2 The member of staff – experience, qualifications, and role*

The member of staff who took part in the evaluation was an assistant head at the school and had responsibility for additional and exceptional needs. Her previous teaching experience was at a combination of mainstream and special secondary schools. Part of that experience had been in an enhanced resource provision (ERP), which was ‘for students who were academically able enough for mainstream, but the issues around their autism meant that they couldn’t just go to mainstream school without that additional support’ (ST1). In the ERP, the teacher had acquired extensive experience of supporting children with autism in relation to a wide range of autism-related needs, such as social skills, life skills and additional academic support. In addition to extensive experience of autism support, the teacher also had a postgraduate certificate in autism from the University of

Birmingham, and was taking a part-time master's degree in education with a specific focus on additional needs and autism. With this strong combination of experience and training, the teacher had been recruited to the school in September 2013.

The assistant head's recruitment was specifically linked by the school to an identified need to improve autism provision in the school. She explained her role and the existing support for children with autism in the school:

'I came [here] as Assistant Head with responsibility for additional and exceptional needs, which is kind of the SENCo role, but with the fact that all of the children have got special needs, it's a little bit different. So I oversee a variety of things; I oversee the autism provision, so we've got a Key Stage 3 class and a Key Stage 4 class, which is in this building now. The Key Stage 3 class are mixed age group and they're taught in that group all day every day and the teachers come to them so they're not moving round the school quite so much and it's quite a nurturing environment. They move round a bit for things like PE and cooking and stuff but they're mostly in the classroom. The Key Stage 4 class works a little bit differently because what we [...] actually when I came here the autism unit was just one class, it wasn't 2 separate classes, and so Year 7 – 11 in one class being taught by one teacher all day every day for what I quickly established that the progress being made by the students wasn't up to scratch and you can't give all of that broad range of students what they need in that age range in one room. So what we started to do we started bringing in specialist teachers for the subjects so they weren't having just the one teacher for everything. And then we split into the 2 key stage classes so the older class, so Key Stage 4, they actually join the main school classes now for their lessons because we couldn't offer them the broad curriculum without them doing that. Because we've got students in that class that are entry level, some GCSE, some wanting to do ICT, some wanting to do drama. So in order for them to have that broad experience they need to go out and join the classes.'

(ST1)

The changes that she outlined here were designed to widen the options and education available to the children with autism in the autism unit. In addition, she was in the process of enhancing whole school CPD for staff and provision for all pupils.

### *3.2.1.3 Training and development strategy for the school in relation to autism provision*

The assistant head's strategy involved AET training for all staff and a project to achieve National Autistic Society (NAS) Autism Accreditation<sup>3</sup>. The AET Programme training was, in the assistant head's plan, key to achieving Autism Accreditation. By September 2015, the entire school staff had undertaken Tier 2 AET training<sup>4</sup>, and 15 members of staff had completed Tier 3 training over two sessions. In addition to the AET training, the assistant head had 'backed up the AET level 3 training by doing whole school training on the National Autistic Society SPELL framework, so everybody is now using that'<sup>5</sup>(ST1) The assistant head saw the AET training as being crucial to the school's intended bid to gain NAS accreditation. She also warmly welcomed the Progression Framework, hoping that it would enable effective tracking of support and the progress of pupils, in addition to being a tool which could evidence good autism provision in relation to the NAS accreditation bid.

### *3.2.1.4 The pupils*

The assistant head teacher had reviewed the pupils with autism, and, after consultation with their parents/carers, two pupils had been identified as the two pupils for tracking progress using the piloted Progression Framework. Although many more pupils had diagnosis of autism, it was felt that the piloting of the Progression framework would be most effective if a small range of key progression targets were aimed at. The two pupils (S1P1 and S1P2) both had EHC plans. The first child (S1P1) was a student in Year 8 (Key Stage 3). He had experienced difficulties in mainstream schooling that were not alleviated by the school. However, he was eventually given a diagnosis of autism and moved to the special school. The second pupil (S1P2) was a student in Year 11 (Key Stage 4), and had been in mainstream schooling throughout primary school and for two and a half years of secondary schooling. S1P2's general practitioner enabled a diagnosis of autism at an early age (less than two years old), but as the child's mother explained, 'she was always on the very edge of the developmental normal range' so it proved difficult to obtain the support the child needed at a

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<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/accreditation.aspx> (accessed, 29 February, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> All the AET school level training in the schools in this report was undertaken before the 2016 revision of the AET Schools Training, which replaced the designations 'Tier 1, 2 and 3' with descriptive titles.

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.autism.org.uk/spell> (accessed, 29 February, 2016).

mainstream school. The child had particular difficulties in social and friendship terms. Her additional needs include epilepsy, speech and language difficulties and dyspraxia.

### 3.2.2 Choosing to use the Progression Framework, September 2015 – January 2016

In her initial interview, ST1 explained how the piloting of the Progression Framework had come at the right time for the school. As part of the revision of autism support, and staff training that she had initiated in the school, the assistant head had developed a ‘Social Skills Profile’ tool to help track progress in that area for pupils with autism. The development of the in-house Social Skills Profile was of interest in itself, in that it represented a development that depended on the experience and qualifications of the assistant head, drawing upon material provided by the local ‘Autism Outreach Service’, and AET Training material. ST1 explained:

‘Can I show you something else that I’ve done? When the students come into the school now and put autism on their statement we complete one of these – for the recording it’s a “Triad of Challenge Profile”. We talk to the primary schools about the issues that they face regarding each of the areas, and it refers to a sensory profile and stress survey as well. So we do the sensory profile that came from the [local] Autism Outreach Service. And the stress survey came from the AET training.’ (ST1)

The combining of material from differing sources was a common occurrence in the schools that took part in the evaluation. Here, this in-house tool was a part of the ‘Progress Portfolio’ kept on each child, and was to be introduced in September 2015, but the assistant head decided that she would trial the pilot Progression Framework in its place.

### 3.2.3 Using the Progression Framework

The initial face-to-face interview with ST1 (23 September 2015) was not followed by other interviews during the autumn term as the assistant head was off work for several weeks towards the end of the term. However, the Progression Framework was used, and, on return to work, the assistant head was interviewed again in January and February, 2016; in addition, she completed the end of evaluation questionnaire.

The assistant head introduced the Progression Framework with 16 members of staff, who were members of the 'Autism Focus Group' in the school. The process started with a training session for the 16 staff run by the assistant head and a member of the local autism outreach team. The assistant head explained:

'We've got an Autism Focus Group in the school, so that the 16 [staff], including me, are the Focus Group. And so I delivered a little bit of training on the Progression Framework. I had a bit of a play with it first, and then [name] from the Autism Outreach came to the training as well, and she was able to fill in any gaps that I was struggling with. And all of the staff were present with their laptops, and I'd e-mailed a copy of it out to them beforehand, so they were able to sit in the training session and follow what I was saying and look at how it worked so that gave them the opportunity to get over the technical aspects of it whilst in a room and sharing together. So yeah they've gone off and done their own thing with it really. I haven't reviewed it officially with all 16 yet because I'm waiting for the next ... we've got another Autism Focus Group coming up in a few weeks' time so that will be when we look at a more formal evaluation of it to see how we can see it moving forward in school. Informally, obviously, I've discussed it with various teachers to see what they're doing.' (ST1)

The focus was only on one section of the Progression Framework, in order to introduce staff to it without overwhelming them. As with the other school staff in the evaluation, there had been an initial sense that the Progression Framework was 'rather huge' (ST1), but it was quickly appreciated that it was a flexible and varied tool kit that could be drawn upon as needed. The section the school focused on was the Social Skills section: 'the Positive Relationships with Friendships section, and we chose six learning intentions that we wanted to work with [...] working on strategies within the classroom specifically for those learning intentions' (ST1). This Progression Framework focus informed three areas of activity in the school:

'We've got one teacher that set up a group that the children themselves have named Social Rangers, which is quite nice, so they meet once a week during an assembly time and look at the different targets they've got. So that's kind of the more formal side to it. Most of the

teachers are just using their tutor time and the less structured times of the day for work on the targets with the students and we are seeing some progress, so, good.’ (ST1)

For each child, six learning intentions were chosen. Progression Framework use proved to be highly valued for the focus it gave to work with the pupils on progressing their social and friendship skills. Box 1 provides the assistant head’s account of using the Progression Framework to structure successful autism support.

*Box 1: The Progression Framework as a successful tool to support children with autism*

I’ve spoken to the member of staff who does the Social Rangers and that’s working really, really well. And actually I’ve spoken to the students who are doing the Social Rangers Group and they really enjoy it. And they’re doing some really structured work on the individual targets, things like how to join in a conversation, joining a group and how to cope when people don’t agree with your opinions and that sort of thing, building up from greetings and extending conversation. So they’re doing it in quite a formal way, which is working really well, and it’s mixed in with we’re also doing something called Lesson Study here and the teacher who’s running the Social Rangers is doing the Catering for Students with Autism as her lesson study, so the Progression Framework and the lesson study have kind of combined so she’s running the group for 2 purposes they have married in together quite nicely. So that’s working very well indeed and I think what we’ll be looking at is to formalise some of the other work that’s going on around school in a similar way as this group, because that has been really successful. (ST1)

This is a good example of the use of the Progression Framework to provide a staged, step-by-step map to structure support, and enable progression, for children with autism.

### 3.2.4 The young people and use of the Progression Framework

School 1 was unique among the five evaluation schools as it was a special secondary school with a comparatively large number of pupils with autism. As a result, the school was able to pilot the Progression Framework with the young people in the Social Rangers group, and throughout the school. In addition, there was the focus on the two identified students, S1P1 and SP2.

Just as the Progression Framework had enabled a 'really structured work' to be done with the pupils in the Social Rangers group, so the Progression Framework was proving useful for the same reasons in working with S1P1:

'He is definitely making good progress. The [Progression] Framework is helping because it gives us a bit of a structure to work with, because I think it was a bit woolly before. So, we are able to set him specific targets, and then we move on and set new ones, and the [Progression] Framework helps you do that. Once you think he's met one [target] we put in another one for him, and that works nicely.' (ST1)

This is an example of the Progression Framework being used to track and to plan progress for a student. In the case of the second student, S1P2, the use of the Progression Framework was temporarily suspended because progress was not being made as other issues needed to be addressed first:

'We've done the same thing with [S1P2], but she's a bit more of a complex character, and we're having a few difficulties. At the moment she's struggling with ... shall we call it "emotion regulation", and there's been a few incidents in school, so we're having to make quite a lot of changes to her timetable, and I think the work we are doing on her social interactions [being tracked with the Progression Framework] has taken a little bit of a back seat while we're trying to get her more settled, and get that side of things sorted out. But it hasn't disappeared altogether. We're still using it, and it's in the background, but other things have had to take priority over the last few weeks.' (ST1).

The intention, then, was to return to the full use of the Progression Framework, once the other issues had been settled. The school's own flexibility was, in effect, being supported by the flexible nature of the Progression Framework.

The school was also using the Progression Framework in its reporting to the parents of the children. Although the assistant head had not used the term 'Progression Framework', she was using the

targets from the Framework to report to the parents via the 'annual review and through our Progress and Aspiration Reports' (ST1).

### 3.2.5 Training impact

With the leadership of the assistant head, the school staff had taken part in various training activities. Foremost among these was AET training, but other sources of training and autism information had been used. As part of the preparation for the NAS Autism Accreditation application, the school took advantage of AET training at Tiers 2 and 3 (see above at 3.2.1.3). In the interview with ST1 on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2016, she explained how the AET training had begun to impact on autism provision in the school:

'The AET [tier] 3 was really good, that was led by [name], and there was 16 of us, the same 16 as the Autism Focus Group, that did that. It's really starting to have an impact in school. In briefings in the morning we're talking about behaviour and people say "I'll write a Social Story for that" and things like that, whereas that wasn't happening before. And also just a little bit more understanding of ... You know sometimes if children are displaying challenging behaviours and just a little bit more understanding about it might have been a sensory thing or a change to routine and rather than telling them off there's a bit more empathy around it. So I think that's going really, really well.' (ST1)

In addition, the school had adopted the NAS Standards. The NAS standards had been chosen instead of the AET National Standards because of the goal of achieving NAS Accreditation. A plan was developed to roll out the standards throughout the school, and, at the time of the interview, only a few of the standards needed more work. The intention was to achieve consistency of training, understanding, environment and support throughout the school.

Future training needs were expected to focus on ensuring the new members of staff were trained to at least tier 2 of the AET Programme, but there was also an intention to maintain a core of teachers trained to tier 3. In terms of the Progression Framework, the assistant head used the open question on the end of evaluation questionnaire to note:



‘It would be useful for some practical strategies to be included as a kind of action pack to go with the Progression Framework for each area. If this could be developed, the [Progression] Framework would be even more useful.’ (ST1)

### 3.2.6 School 1 conclusions

School 1 had strong, senior management level, backing for the provision of good autism support.

Under the leadership of the school’s assistant head teacher, the school had:

- Developed a strategy to enable high levels of autism provision. The strategy involved whole school AET Tier 2 training, and Tier 3 training for a core of 16 staff with specific autism responsibilities.
- Begun to prepare for an application for NAS Autism Accreditation. AET training and materials were an essential part of the preparation.
- Successfully piloted the AET Progression Framework. The success of the school’s pilot had led to the Progression Framework being integrated into the school’s recording, planning and reporting schemes for pupils with autism.
- The Progression Framework not only enabled the planning and tracking of individual pupils’ progress, but was also to be used to evidence that progress, and provide details of impact of support for individual pupils.

AET training and materials formed a central part to developments in the school, as did the Progression Framework. The AET input was one element in the strengthening of autism provision in the school. The assistant head teacher had been recruited with a specific remit to improve autism provision, and she had extensive experience and qualifications in the area. In addition, the NAS schema for attaining NAS Autism Accreditation provided a framework for building provision, as did the NAS National Standards.

### 3.3 School 2 (Mainstream primary school)

#### 3.3.1 School overview: school, staff member, training, pupils

##### *3.3.1.1 The school*

School 2 (S2) was a mainstream primary school, with 270 pupils on the school roll, from nursery to Year 6. Two children in the school had diagnoses of autism, and at least five other children were believed to be displaying signs of autism. One of the latter group had additional learning difficulties.

##### *3.3.1.2 The member/s of staff – experience, qualifications, and roles*

Two members of staff were involved with the evaluation. The first (ST2) was the assistant head teacher and SENCo. She had 11 years of teaching experience, and had been at the school for five years. Since taking over the post of SENCo, ST2 had undertaken a post-graduate course for SENCos at a local university, which she was in the process of completing at the start of the September 2015 school term. In addition, she was undertaking short courses focused on strategies to support children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The second member of staff (ST3) was the one-to-one support worker for a pupil with autism in Year 1, who was pre-verbal and had a diagnosis of autism. She had been with the school since November, 2014, and had moved from another mainstream school when a pupil with autism she was working with moved to a special school. ST3 had worked with the pupil in Year 1 since she entered the Nursery class. There had been no transition plan in place when the child entered Nursery, and the school had only found out that the little girl would be joining it a week before the start of the September, 2014, term. As a result there was a delay before ST3 joined the school, but her experience of working as a one-to-one support for children with autism enabled a positive change for the child: ‘when I came I introduced lots of visual support and visual timetable and visual prompts. And then we introduced PECS [Picture Exchange Communication System], and it just changed her life’ (ST3).

The two members of staff, then, combined extensive classroom experience, with some formal training. However, the SENCo noted that the post-graduate course she had undertaken was a broadly based SEND course that provided little in the way of strategies for supporting pupils,

particularly those with autism. The main autism-focused training had been provided by the AET Programme. The SENCo outlined the school's AET training:

'The whole school has had Level 1 [i.e., Tier 1] training, and we had that in January this year [2015]. And then myself and a TA who works very closely with the Year 1 child have had Level 2 training. And I have been on the Level 3 training. [ST3] had already had Level 1 and Level 2 before she came to this school, and now she's done Level 3 as well.' (ST2).

In addition, the Nursery staff had also take the AET Early Years Programme at Tier 1, as well as the AET School Programme, Tier 1.

### *3.3.1.3 Training and development strategy for the school in relation to autism provision*

The SENCo did not envisage further whole school training. However, there was an intention to ensure that all new staff were trained to Tier 1, in either the School Programme or the Early Years Programme, depending on role. In addition, there was a hope that it would be possible to train more staff to Tier 2 of the Early Years or School Programmes. The key driver for this was the need to meet the requirements of individual pupils as they entered the school, or received diagnoses of autism.

Beyond continuing training needs, the SENCo had identified the need to introduce and fully exploit the AET National Standards and Competency Frameworks. The impetus to this decision was her completion of the Tier 3 School Programme, and it was her intention to add the Standards and Competency Framework to the school's SEN Action Plan.

The SENCo's development strategy for autism provision envisaged the creation of better physical spaces for pupils with autism. In particular, she wanted to 'get this sensory room up and running, because I feel that there is no chill-out space for children to go when it's just too much in a classroom' (ST2). She was also engaged in a programme to make the whole school more aware of the impact of physical environment on the sensory needs of children with autism.

The SENCo had also begun to improve communication and develop closer links with the parents and carers of pupils with autism. The aim was to build on the daily, informal, contacts that the one-to-one support worker had with parents. An example was a special autism awareness assembly, part of the school's autism awareness day, which was attended by parents of pupils with autism. The autism awareness day was seen to be a mode of how support for children with autism could be part of whole school developments. The SENCo said: 'it was a lovely day, because all the Reception children were shown how [name of Reception pupil with autism] works throughout the day, and what the PECS book is for, and the timetable is for, and why there's things stuck up around the school' (ST2). The one-to-one support worker also commented on the success of the day: 'they [the pupils] were so sensible, and I was really pleased with that day, it was really good' (ST3).

#### *3.3.3.4 The pupils*

Two pupils were identified by the SENCo to be part of the school's piloting of the AET Progression Framework. The first pupil (S2P1) was a girl in Year 1, whose one-to-one support worker was ST3. She was diagnosed with autism in 2014, while she was in a nursery at a different school. Her speech development was delayed, but in February 2015 she began to use a small number of words. She also needed assistance with dressing and undressing for PE, and in going to the toilet.

The second pupil (S2P2) was a boy in Year 2. His parents had felt that, from an early age their son had issues that needed support, but had experienced difficulty in getting that support. It was not until he started at the school's Nursery that steps were taken, at the instigation of the school, to seek a diagnosis for the pupil. The boy experienced high levels of anxiety, needed clear and predictable routine, was sensitive to noise, and needed suitable space to be quiet and calm. In Nursery, the school developed a reduced day for him, enabling him to avoid the beginning of the school day, and to leave after lunch. That had been progressed to a point where the pupil arrived at school before the other pupils.

#### *3.3.2 Choosing to use the Progression Framework, September 2015-January 2016*

The SENCo had a strongly positive view of the value and impact of the AET training that the school had undertaken, and was keen to pilot the AET Progression Framework because of the training experience.

### 3.3.3 Using the Progression Framework

The initial face-to-face interview with ST2 and ST3 (22 September 2015) was followed by telephone interviews on 6 November, 2015 (with ST2 only), 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2015 (with ST2), and 19 January, 2016 (with ST2 and ST3), at which point the school had decided to abandon their piloting of the Progression Framework. In addition, the end of evaluation questionnaire was completed by ST2 and ST3 together.

The school was the only school of the five case study schools that decided to stop using the Progression Framework. As a result, the three telephone interviews provide an interesting insight into possible difficulties that some schools may face in attempting to use the Progression Framework. During the September term, the school continued to work with the Progression Framework, albeit with reservations. It was hoped that as they became more familiar with the Framework, its value would become clearer. The telephone interviews in November and December, 2015, reflected this process. However, just before the end of the term, ST2 and ST3 decided that the school would no longer use the framework; that decision was discussed in the final telephone interview in January, 2016. Each stage is covered here.

#### *3.3.3.1 Working with the Progression Framework over the September term, 2015*

The central issue that the school had with the use of the Progression Framework was a need for more guidance related to achieving objectives. This issue remained constant throughout the September term. The initial feedback from ST2 was ‘we were expecting a bit more information in terms of tips and such as to how to achieve a set target. We were expecting to go to this objective, this intention, and then it would be a case of either “look for this, this and this” [...] suggestions on how to achieve’ progress (ST2). She added, ‘we already knew that was the area we wanted to work on next – I think it was more a case of we wanted more direction’ (ST2). The two staff thought that the objectives, and the step-by-step approach were good, but that too much depended on the knowledge, qualifications and experience of staff. Although it was recognised that staff with little experience or knowledge should not be working, unsupported, with children with autism, it was felt that this was possible, and that the Progression Framework, while providing objectives, would need more guidance to be linked to it.

By the beginning of December, the school had begun to make less use of the Progression Framework. The Framework was not being used in a strongly structuring way, but in an ad hoc fashion:

‘There’s not much direction on the information, and I kind of felt that we’d not used it to the best we could, we’re just dipping in and out of it because just by looking for the objectives it doesn’t give us any other guidance really. I think because of that we’re not using it as much as we possibly should be, so we are just dipping in and out of it, thinking, right, here are the objectives, and we are just following it as we wish.’ (ST2)

The SENCo repeated her view that more was needed by way of directions and advice aimed at achieving the progress outcomes, and said that ‘to be honest, all it’s helping us to do is to word [name] the objective’ (ST2).

### *3.3.3.2 Deciding to stop using the Progression Framework*

The decision to stop using the Progression Framework was taken at the very end of the September term. An assessment was made that the use of the Progression Framework was not adding value to the work with the children. As such it was just another task – ‘we were doing those things regardless of that document [the Progression Framework], we were doing it anyway, and then it just became a paper exercise, and we’re ticking it, but, well, we’re doing it anyway’ (ST2).

The staff were asked what, in their view, could be added to the Progression Framework in order to make it more useful to them. They suggested two additions. Firstly, they would like to see more direction associated with attaining the goals for children. Secondly, they thought that there was a need for external support for schools choosing to adopt the Progression Framework. There was a recognition that it would be difficult to provide comprehensive direction as part of the Progression Framework itself, and, they argued, it might be more useful if, for example, local autism support could help schools to benefit from the Framework. Further, it would be important that any external advice came from workers with a knowledge of each child with autism in the school. ST2 concluded:

‘For this [the Progression Framework] to have worked, I think it would have been more helpful if, say, when [local autism outreach team] did come in we talked through the targets that we were going for, and they would either say, right, this is how we could implement this, and then we reviewed that as it was moving on. I think that having somebody from the outside who does have that understanding, and then making sure it’s clear’. (ST2).

### 3.3.4 The children and the use of the Progression Framework

The two children – S2P1 and S2P2 – were in Year 1 and Year 2 respectively, and for both children, the SENCo thought that it would be appropriate if the focus was on a small number of progress objectives: ‘I think that for one of the children [S2P2] we’ll probably just stick to one objective at a time, and then for the other child [S2P1] we think she could probably cope with more than just one or two objectives’ (ST2). The objectives were taken from the Progression Framework, and the focus for S2P1 was on social interaction and speech, language, and communication, while for S2P2 the focus was on social interaction, relationships and friendships. Although the school stopped using the Progression Framework in relation work with the two children, it did, initially, help frame the decisions relating to targets for the children.

Over the period of the evaluation, the SENCo, the one-to-one worker for each child, and the school staff all worked to help the children achieve their goals. That work was carried out in conjunction with the parents of the children, and with outside agencies. For the little girl in Year 1 (S2P1), the September term saw notable progress:

‘The little girl [S2P1] has been making great progress in terms of speaking, she’s actually been saying words, and she’s using her PECS very much in terms of communicating. And she’s got a really good part in the Christmas nativity play as well, and she’s been happy with that, she’s a mouse in the nativity, and she’s coming out – so that’s been great in terms of her confidence in a whole group situation’ (ST3)

In addition to one-to-one support with ST4, and the routine use of PECS, the girl was receiving support from a speech and language therapist – ‘a lot of it has been about emotions actually, that she’s been looking at in terms of speech and language, whether she’s happy or such, and that has

really helped her' (ST2). Finally, during the September term, the child's Statement was converted into an EHC Plan, 'so, there are a lot of little elements just coming together' (ST2). By the beginning of the January term, the staff reported that 'she's becoming really independent, which is good', (ST3).

The little boy's progress was less pronounced over the period. The school staff and his one-to-one support focused on supporting him in social situations, and had identified progress as a result of using social stories:

'With the boy I've been doing small – at lunchtime because he struggles at lunchtime – we've been doing work on social stories but he's really struggling with writing them down so what we've been doing is lots of talking about them, about when he's having trouble he comes and says 'Mrs [name] can I ask you something?' and it's really nice that he's got that and then I'll draw a little cartoon about things that he's talking to me about, quite visual, and it's down there and it seems to be really helping because in class he's coping with losing at games and at playtime when it's time to come in he's not getting so cross. So that feels really nice, like that's working.' (ST3)

Focused work (although not fully utilising the Progression Framework), support from all the adults around the children, co-working with parents, and with external support, were all important in enabling effective support for the two children.

### 3.3.5 Training impact

In the initial interview, the SENCo talked about the impact of AET training on school staff and the provision of autism support in the school. She explained that the whole school Tier 1 training had impacted upon the understanding and attitudes of staff towards autism. In addition, it had helped to reinforce messages regarding differentiation in the classroom:

'I think they found it useful from the feedback, especially with TAs just because I think as a class teacher when you're trained up you do think about differentiation and you do think



about that but TAs don't automatically think about things like that. And also I think one of the big things was just to say it's alright if they're not all doing the same thing. I think giving that back to the teachers and the TAs to say it's alright if they're not all going to doing the same thing, it's okay, just giving them back because I think that's a massive thing for us whereas 'they should all be doing the same work'. Well no because they can't access it. It's fine, it's alright, we understand. And I think for the Level 1 just giving them options and saying try this, try that it did put the staff's minds at ease.' (ST2)

The SENCo had undertaken all three tiers of the School Age training, and praised the 'progression' from one tier to the next. She was also reassured by the training that strategies that the school already had in place for pupils with autism were correct. She found Tier 3 of the training useful from her position as the SENCO, and assistant head teacher:

'The Level 3 was good in terms of thinking whole school and not just for one specific child. It was good to think about things we should be doing as a school and not just for children who are on the spectrum. It was the case that it's just good practice. They are a few changes that we're making this year, visual timetable, things like that, where we can help all children.' (ST2)

The training had also helped in reinforcing messages related to autism provision, and reasonable adjustment, that the SENCo was giving. She explained that compared to pre-training experience, the school was now in a position where, 'if I ask for anything [in relation to autism provision], you've got the support there, and it's also about having people come to you and ask when they are not sure, rather than going "oh, I don't know" and not saying anything, so then nothing gets done' (ST2). The whole school training had, she said, made 'a massive difference to the whole atmosphere of the school' in terms of autism provision.

### 3.3.6 School 2 conclusions

School 2 had strong commitment to providing good support for its pupils with autism. Staff, including one-to-one support workers had extensive experience of working with children with autism. The AET Programme, at all three tiers, had provided invaluable training for school staff. Of the five case-study schools, School 2 was the only school not to continue with its piloting of the Progression Framework. In the end of evaluation questionnaire open question, the SENCo explained the difficulties that the school had experienced with the Progression Framework, and suggested how the difficulties might be overcome:

‘As a school, we did not find the AET programme Progression Framework as useful as we had hoped it would be. Having discussed this we feel that it may have been more useful if it was implemented by an outside agency [name of agency – local autism outreach service]. As a team we felt that the objectives/areas of learning were already our priorities, and therefore the programme [Progression Framework] didn’t add much to the provision that we already had in place. It would have been useful if the programme came with a progression type chart, or how to assess that the objectives had been met.’ (ST2)

## 3.4 School 3 (Mainstream primary school)

### 3.4.1 School overview: school, staff member, training, pupils

#### 3.4.1.1 *The school*

School 3 was a mainstream primary school with 250 pupils on the school roll, between the ages of 3 and 11. A large majority of the pupils were of ‘White British’ origin. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs was above average. Similarly, the number of pupils eligible for additional funding (pupil premium) was above the national average. There were two children who had diagnoses of autism, and six who were believed, by the school, to exhibit characteristics associated with autism.

#### 3.4.1.2 *The member of staff – experience, qualifications, and role*

The member of staff who took part in the evaluation was the Lead Practitioner for Autism (ST4), and had overall responsibility for autism support in the school. She explained: ‘I’ve got eight children that

I oversee, and jump in where needed for the classroom teachers if they say, “this isn’t working – can we change it?””. The Lead Practitioner had joined the school in 2011 as a one-to-one worker for a child with severe complex needs, which included autism. ST4 had a wide range of training for her role, which had expanded since joining the school:

‘When I first came to the school, I had my level 2 NVQ supporting teaching and learning skills, and I finished my level 3 in the November of that first term. Since coming to the school, I have been Tacpac trained, Intensive Interaction trained, team teacher trained, NCC medical background relating to autism, Retts syndrome, and similar, trained. Level 2, and Level 3 AET schools’ programme trained; SEN literacy trained; they’ve also given me Webster Stratton Classroom Management training.’ (ST4)

The child that ST4 had originally joined the school to support had, after two years, moved to a special school, but ST4 had remained with the school with a broadened remit.

#### *3.4.1.3 Training and development strategy for the school in relation to autism provision.*

The Lead Practitioner for Autism’s role encompassed direct classroom support for pupils with autism, and training and development support for school staff. Her role and remit were fully supported by the school’s senior management team. In terms of AET training, all the teaching staff, along with the Teaching Assistants (TAs) had undertaken the Tier 1 training. In addition, ST4 and the school’s head teacher, had undertaken AET Tier 2 training in November 2014, and, subsequently, Tier 3 training. The Lead Practitioner then cascaded the Tier 2 training to other members of the school staff. This was done as an e-mailed document outlining key areas of the Tier 2 training. In addition, the Lead Practitioner was in the process of introducing the AET National Standards into the school. There school also has a programme of peer awareness events, including an ‘Autism Awareness Week’, with whole school and class-based activities and exercises.

A key driver for training at the school was the need to meet individual pupil’s needs. An example was the training undertaken prior to a little girl with SEND joining the school: ‘we’ve had additional training for the girl coming in. We’ve got additional training to meet her needs, so we’ve done CPR, defib, I’ve had stoma training, all for her’ (ST4).

#### 3.4.1.4 *The pupils*

The two pupils with diagnoses of autism were included in the evaluation. One child (S3P1) joined the school nursery in September 2015, which she attended in the mornings only. This child has complex medical needs in addition to autism, but, as the Lead Practitioner commented: 'she's a bright little button, which is why she is in mainstream school' (ST4). When the child is in school, ST4 works as her one-to-one support.

The second child (S3P2) was in Year 2, and had been in the school since he joined Reception. The Lead Practitioner described his progress from Reception until September 2015:

'He came to us non-verbal, serious issues with his clothes, still does have very clear obsessions which hindered his progress and development in all areas. We've gone from him throwing, kicking, would throw things and run away to a boy who's very compliant. There are times when he's mischievous; he does have a sense of humour. He's now writing, he's now reading, he's counting up to 30, and he is very good with technology because as soon as I've turned my back on him he's changed what he's doing. He will go to most members of staff now, whereas before he was fixated on just me and that was it, couldn't leave his side. He's now toilet trained as of this summer and will ask to go to the toilet now. At the beginning of the week I just kept taking him but today he turned round to me and went 'I need the toilet'. He is recognising more and more faces, he is playing alongside his peers, still alongside but tolerates them and tolerates the noise more. He does know when somebody is not there with regards to one girl in another class because they go swimming together and he turned round to me one day and said 'where is so and so gone?' and I said 'she's just gone to the bathroom'. So he is making those links now. He's in the classroom a lot more, which he never was; he was always in that room next door [the Nurture Room]. In the classroom he will do his handwriting, computer work, PE, art.' (ST4)

The Lead Practitioner gave other examples of progress, and commented that the boy had 'come on in leaps and bounds', and that the school, and his parents, believed that further progress was likely.

### 3.4.2 Choosing to use the Progression Framework, September 2015-January 2016

The Lead Practitioner was keen to pilot the Progression Framework with the two children with diagnoses of autism. She had, prior to the evaluation, identified a number of areas that she was intending to work on in relation to the children. For example, she had a clear idea of the short and long-term goals she had for the little boy (S3P2), which were based upon the aim of providing him with life skills to enable independent living; Box 2.

#### *Box 2: Planning educational and life-skills goals for a Year 2 child with autism*

'I would like him to start writing sentences if we could. I really do want him to start working on that, even simple, three, four word sentences. I would love for him to be able to sit down and write a sentence. I also want him to be more solid with his money to the extent that I know what the coins are. Because he is supposed to exchange 10 pence for a piece of fruit and things like that at playtime [...] Being able to recognise the coins so that we can then start to work on, "if I have 50 pence and it costs 20 pence, how much change?". That sort of thing so that he can go to a shop – this is way down the line – independently and make sure that he's not being swindled. To continue with his reading to get him to another level but to be able to understand what he's reading, somehow checking that he's actually understanding and he's not just mechanical reading. But he does understand the pictures so I see a ... Like today there was some fish, it was a pirate one, and I said 'how many fish?' and he counts them for me. 'What colour is that one?' – just to continue on those themes and get him solid. Get him to fold his own clothes and get him to put them in the right ... he knows where his peg is, he knows where his pumps go. He can do all that now. He's coming into school on his own. Before it was his parents that would bring him in; it's straight into that room. He'll walk in through the door. So it's to continue in all those things the way we've been doing. Get him to use a knife, because that's a bit more independence again, get him to be able to work in small groups. ' (ST4)

The range of goals that the Lead Practitioner had for the boy were focused on a combination of learning outcomes that would lead to the increasing independence of the child. ST4 wanted to be able to evidence progress in the areas she highlighted, and to be able to show that progress was not superficial, but reflected understanding by the boy. In consequence, the Lead Practitioner welcomed the chance to pilot the Progression Framework as a possible mechanism to monitor, track and evidence progression.

### 3.4.3 Using the Progression Framework

The initial, face-to-face, interview with ST4 (14 September 2015), was followed by telephone interviews on 11 December, 2015, and 29 January, 2016. In addition, the Lead Practitioner completed the end of evaluation questionnaire on 5 February, 2016.

The Progression Framework was piloted by the Lead Practitioner, who took responsibility for observing, analysing and recording the progress of the two children. Her initial reaction to first sight of the Progression Framework had been that it 'seemed too big'. However, it was quickly clear to her that:

'You just pick an area and just focus on that area. I focused on what they [the children] both needed to do, and I can see the progression and I can document it, because then you've got the evidence to show everybody else [...] I think it will work as long as the people using it are using it the right way' (ST4).

Some difficulties were experienced at first that were of a technical and practical nature, involving the failure of the data entry boxes to expand when data was entered. It may well be that the problem was a local IT issue. These practical issues were not fully resolved over the period of the evaluation. Nevertheless, the Lead Practitioner was happy with the Progression Framework's usability: the 'data I've put in is looking good. I found that once I'd got my head round it, it's fairly easy [to use]. It's just a little bit time consuming, but I like the graph at the end where you can see the progression. I definitely do like that, and the colour coding.' (ST4).

By the time of the interview on 29 January, 2016, the Lead Practitioner was completely familiar with the Progression Framework, and very positive about its contribution to her work with the children, and with the ability the Progression Framework gave her to evidence that work and its success; box 3.

*Box 3: the Progression Framework: structuring and evidencing autism support*

'I do like it; I like the way you can use it to plan your next steps and things like that, the fact that you actually have, rather than trying to go through books or trying to give verbal evidence, it's there. It's documented, rather than somebody relying on me to say yes he's doing this, yes he's doing that, I can then say well if we refer to the paperwork on such a day he started doing this but by this point in time he's generalised and being able to use it and transfer those skills across the board and this is when it happened and when we noted it. It would be nice to be able to expand on all of that and say we've noted it 3, 4, 5 times now so he's generalised it.' (ST4)

In terms of the practical, day-to-day use of the Progression Framework, the Lead Practitioner pointed out that recording the children's progression could rarely be done directly onto the electronic version of the Progression Framework. Instead, post-it notes were written while working with the children, which were then transferred to a paper copy of the relevant parts of the framework, before all the information was collated weekly onto the electronic version. Although this was seen to be time-consuming, she still argued that: 'it is worthwhile if schools allocate the time to actually conduct this, and do it properly. I think that getting schools on board at first will be the hardest thing,' (ST4).

#### 3.4.4 The children and the use of the Progression Framework

For both of the children (S3P1 and S3P2) the Lead Practitioner chose to focus on social and communication development. She found working with the Progression Framework useful in providing direction for support, as well as for recording progress. Talking about the boy (S3P2), she explained:

'I focused on social communication things, listening and understanding, because that's where he's at the moment, and yes, it [the Progression Framework] is useful because you look at it, and think, "Ah, I can work on that", and "that's something I haven't thought of". It gives you prompts for your intervention, so it useful.' (ST4).

Of the two children, the boy made more progress in social situations during the period of the evaluation than did the girl (S3P1). The girl made progress in academic terms, but 'she's really stuck

on friendships, and she can't understand that you can have many friends and not just one, and it's ok to play with different people. So we are working on that. She has intervention every day. She is making small steps of progress, but nothing you could document' (ST4). The support for the girl in respect of friendships continued throughout the evaluation period, but there was little progress. Nonetheless, in terms of the Progression Framework, the lack of evidence reinforced the school's focus on maintaining individual, and small group intervention around friendships for the child.

The boy (S3P1) showed more evidence of progress in the area of social and friendship development. The Lead Practitioner was able to evidence his progress in terms of approaching other children, making eye contact with them, playing alongside them, sitting on the carpet for longer periods of time than he had previously, as well as extending his sentences and asking school staff for help with tasks. The Lead Practitioner gave other examples of his progress, as well as some of the interventions that were in place for him:

'He's working in Lego Therapy with other children now, he's attending art session with them more and more. He's doing okay, he's coming on, his swimming's brilliant, now unaided. He's approaching other members of staff. If I make myself unavailable he's quite happy to go to other members of staff, even if he doesn't know them. His personality is coming out more; he's a very mischievous young man, very cheeky. One of the members of staff turned her back on him in the dining hall and he went to the dinner ladies and said "more potato please". And they gave it to him because they were shocked.' (ST4)

All of these developments were recorded using the Progression Framework.

#### 3.4.5 Training impact

The school drew upon a range of sources for its training needs. In this, the school was typical of the case study schools in that the AET training was not the only source of training, information, or materials used by the school. The school, like others, was willing to draw upon training and information from as many trusted sources as possible. In addition to Tiers 1, 2 and 3 of the AET Schools Programme, the school had training input from the local autism outreach team, medical training to support particular pupils, and in-school training and cascading of training by the Lead



Practitioner and the school SENCo. In addition, in order to share knowledge and experience, and provide an accessible support network, the Lead Practitioner had started a local schools' Teaching Assistant Network to overcome 'the isolation [of being a support worker] and the fact that there was nobody really to talk to because the other members of staff [in the school] that were with me weren't experienced enough to bounce the ideas off' (ST4).

In terms of the AET training, the Lead Practitioner noted that the Tier 1 training, undertaken by all the teaching and TA staff, had established a baseline of knowledge across the school. This enabled her cascaded Tier 2 training, in addition to other information she delivered to colleagues, who, as a result of the Tier 1 training, had a grounding in autism support. The value of drawing upon different sources of training and information was further stressed by the Lead Practitioner when she discussed the impact of the AET Tier 3 training that she had undertaken. Talking about the content of Tier 3 – 'all to do with standards, OFSTED, competencies and things like that' – she said that:

'As a school it [AET Tier 3 training] has given the school a direction in which to go in, and given us an understanding and an idea of expectations and things like that, but as an individual, I would prefer practical help, which is where the Teaching Assistant Network came in.' (ST4)

Here, the formal structure of AET Tier 3 training was underpinned, for the Lead Practitioner, by the information exchange available via the local TA network that she had set up.

#### 3.4.6 School 3 conclusions

School 3's autism provision was led by an experienced, qualified and enthusiastic Lead Practitioner, who had the support of the school's senior management in her work to extend autism support in the school. The Lead Practitioner was pro-active in terms of identifying and accessing training, information and support; this included her founding of a local schools' TAs' network to help exchange information and provide support regarding SEND, including autism, in local primary schools. The Lead Practitioner (ST4) had:

- Undertaken all tiers of the AET's School Programme, and had cascaded the tier 2 training to all the school teaching and TA staff, who had, in turn, undertaken Tier 1 training.
- The main driver for training in relation to autism and other SEND needs was to meet the needs of individual pupils, with those needs being identified prior to a pupil's joining the school.
- The Lead Practitioner successfully piloted the AET Progression Framework in respect of two children with diagnoses of autism. The Progression Framework was valued for its contribution to planning, implementing, and recording interventions and outcomes for pupils with autism.

In her response to the open question in the end of evaluation questionnaire, ST4 commented:

'The early intervention of autism training for the [school's] one-to-one key worker, and the whole school approach is vital to the progression of the individual child, and for the way that staff and pupils deal with autistic traits. This approach has enabled all the children on the spectrum to enjoy continued development and acceptance from staff and pupils. The local support network of the TA, autism leads, [...] enables practitioners to share and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies/approaches we take. [...] With regards to the Progression Framework, once I had worked out how to use it, it quickly became a useful tool to plan specific targeted areas for development, and an accurate track record of the pupils' attainment.' (ST4).

### 3.5 School 4 (mainstream primary school)

#### 3.5.1 School overview: school, staff member, training, pupils

##### 3.5.1.1 *The school*

School 4 (S4) was a mainstream primary school, with a school roll of 200 pupils. The proportion of pupils who were eligible for the pupil premium was well above the national average. The proportion of pupils who had SEND was above the national average. The school had a large majority of BME pupils. There were six children receiving support for autism issues, with two of those children having diagnoses of autism, and two of them, at the time of the evaluation, being assessed. The school was able to draw upon good, local support from a communication and autism team.

### *3.5.1.2 The member of staff – experience, qualifications, and role*

The member of staff (ST5) who took part in the evaluation had taught at the school since the 1990s. A new school head teacher in 2013 had asked ST5 to become the school's SENCo. She took that role from 2013 onwards, along with the position of associate teacher for pupil and school support, and also acted as Specialist Leader of education for a network of local schools. She described her work as involving: 'a lot of work with the Pupil and School Support Team, the Communication and Autism Team, and the Educational Psychology Team' (ST5). She worked in the school two days per week, with a particular focus on the children with autism and those exhibiting autism traits.

### *3.5.1.2 Training and development strategy for the school in relation to autism provision*

The SENCo had enabled AET Schools Programme Tier 1 training for all the teaching staff at the end of the 2013/14 school year. She then followed up that training with a CPD form which asked the teaching staff about their autism related training and experience, and also asked if they were interested in further autism training. As a result of the survey, staff with experience and skills, for example, Makaton training, were identified. The staff who were interested in further AET training, at Tier 2, were given that training in two groups. The SENCo then held a planning meeting with those staff to plan additional autism support in the school:

'Things that we've done as a result are sensory audits, which I can show you. We've done inclusion walks, which isn't obviously only for autistic children, but it helps. I've done further autism training myself, CPD training. What I did was myself, as Level 3 trained, the materials, it was a 2 day intensive course, I then met with the Level 2 trainers and we sat together and we put together training on both of our experiences. And actually they were slightly different, depending on who's delivering the training.' (ST5)

The agreed view of the staff who had been trained to Tier 2 was that the training 'was really powerful, and the staff were looking at those reasonable adjustments that you can make in the classroom that helps all children, not just autistic children', (ST5). The SENCo then took advice from the local Educational Psychology service, and used materials from a post-graduate autism course, to put together an accessibility plan for the school in relation to autism. Summing up her work by September 2015, ST5 said, 'so, we've looked at how we can change the environment, how we can

change the curriculum, and also to CPD for staff, and how we can monitor that', (ST5). This was the planning framework for continued improvements to autism provision in the school.

### *3.5.1.3 The pupils*

Both of the children were in Year 2 at the beginning of the 2015/16 school year. One had a diagnosis of autism before he joined the nursery, the other child was diagnosed with autism after joining the school's nursery. The first child (S4P1) was described by ST5 as being 'very self-directed' and sometimes displaying aggression. In addition, 'cognition and learning is an issue, and I've had some testing done through Pupil and School Support, which showed expressive language was fine, but his number work was a concern. He wasn't recognising numbers and there was an issue with him copying them upside down' (ST5).

The second child (S4P2), was a little girl with English as an additional language. When she joined the school nursery she was non-verbal, and she received a diagnosis of autism in her Reception year. The diagnosis had a major impact on the support she received from adults, and, as a result of changes being made in the support she was receiving, her school experience improved:

'She was non-verbal at that time and her mum was very keen for a diagnosis as well as a Statement. So we got the diagnosis with the help of the Educational Psychologist. So that all happened at the end of Reception and then it was almost like a light bulb moment, in that all of a sudden, through relationships with the adults and the little adjustments we put in place, she started to conform. So we had a one to one with one of our LSAs (Learning Support Assistants), which was very high cost at that time but actually has paid dividends now because she's now speaking in sentences. In fact [name of local autism support team member] will say when she comes we still went for the Statement but we were looking at a change of provision.' (ST5)

However, the success of changes made in the school meant that it was not necessary for the child to move to special provision. The child began to make progress and spoke for the first time at the end of her Reception year. By September 2015, the situation was 'she's working really well, [and] she's under our speech and language therapist [...] and she's working really well' (ST5).

### 3.5.2 Choosing to use the Progression Framework, September 2015-January 2016

The SENCo was keen to pilot the AET Progression Framework, and hoped that it ‘can support our practice’ (ST5). She defined this as ‘understanding how to make a difference for the children’ (ST5). There was interest in having a tool that would enable the school to assess how far interventions that were put in place for children with autism were effective, and could be evidenced as such.

### 3.5.3 Using the Progression Framework

The initial face-to-face interview with ST5 (15 September, 2015), was followed by three further, telephone interviews on 11 November, 2015, 7 December, 2015, and 25 January, 2016. In addition, ST5 completed the end of evaluation questionnaire on 4 February, 2016.

At the November interview, the SENCo reported that one of the children (S4P1) was undergoing further medical assessment for an additional need. As a result, the school had temporarily suspended its use of the Progression Framework for the child. Instead, the school staff were collecting evidence at the request of the medical team involved with the child. Nonetheless, in her third telephone interview, the SENCo reported that the boy continued to experience difficulties that were being monitored by the local CAMHS team. Nonetheless, the school had, as part of the monitoring process, put together a ‘book for him, which is linked to the AET material [the Progression Framework], with regard to his non-compliance’ (ST5). This was an interesting use of the Framework, helping to inform observation and recording for wider purposes.

The Progression Framework was, however, being used with the second child, S4P2, and the SENCo’s description of the work illustrated how the school was utilising the Progression Framework. A single outcome had been chosen, in relation to the child’s sensory needs, and a hard copy of the relevant section from the Progression Framework had been added to the child’s classroom folder, where, ‘what the staff do is that the use that as the target in the classroom. The date it when they feel they’ve seen evidence of this, and they annotate it’ (ST5). The SENCo gave an example of the use of the Progression Framework:

‘We printed out the Understanding and Expressing Own Sensory Needs aspect of it [the Progression Framework], and we focused on that, and it was placed into a file that was kept into the classroom, a hard copy, and it was annotated each time they felt they were using them as targets. So, for example, one of the targets was “intentionally communicates likes or dislikes of familiar sensory experiences stimuli” and that was dated for 25/11/2015 and then they annotated that to say through her smelling and touching she communicates throughout that. She doesn’t necessarily communicate verbally; that’s sometimes the way she does it.’ (ST5)

By the time of the second telephone interview on 7 December, the SENCO reported continued use of the Progression Framework with S4P2, but not with S4P1 due to continued medical assessment and treatment. Not only was it being used to record the progress of S4P2, but it had also formed the basis of a ‘Sensory Profile’ that had been created and completed using classroom observation of the child, and the Progression Framework continued to be used throughout the evaluation to track her progress in relation to her sensory needs.

In terms of the practical, day-to-day use of the Progression Framework, the school staff were using hard copy print-outs of the relevant section of the Progression Framework. The SENCO said, ‘we haven’t done it electronically on the computer. It’s all been on file, and in the classroom, but we have found it really useful,’ (ST5). This use of paper copies was in part driven by the busy nature of classroom work, but staff had experienced some problems relating to IT issues with the e-version of the Progression Framework that were similar to those experienced by school 2.

#### 3.5.4 The children and the use of the Progression Framework

For the boy (S4P10) use of the Progression Framework was limited by other medical issues that the school was monitoring and recording, in conjunction with external bodies, including CAMHS and the local hospital. The school did incorporate some of the Progression Framework element into a wider programme of recording the child’s behaviour and progress: ‘the classroom staff are aware of the other [Progression Framework] targets, and they have got them in a file, but they’re not specifically annotated in the same way as with [S4P2],’ (ST5). In fact, the school did make quite extensive use of the Progression Framework in its reporting to the local hospital. The hospital needed information

about the impact of medication on the child's behaviour on a day to day basis, and the school's reporting utilised elements of the Progression Framework

'We've looked through the AET [Progression Framework] materials just to see, looking at self-direction and social interaction, and things like that. They [the classroom staff] written a date each day, and just written how he's bee that day, and they've looked at the AET materials to see if there's a strategy that they can use in order to support him in accessing and being able to self-regulate. So, that's been more informally done.' (ST5).

Work to support the girl (S4P2) progressed throughout the evaluation period, with a focus on 'Understanding and Expressing Own Sensory Needs' from the Progression Framework. The school carried out a sensory profiling of the child, combining elements of the Progression Framework with the Sensory Profile on the National Autism Standards check list. This was another example of the way in which practitioners draw upon different sources to inform their work to support children with autism.

In explaining the work on S4P2's sensory needs, the SENCo gave a good example of the way in which the Progression Framework was used: Box 3

*Box 3: Successful use of the Progression Framework to inform work with a child with autism*

'If we take one of the examples, what we're looking for her to do is to be able to manage her own sensory needs independently to avoid any triggers that might impede her learning. So, for example, on 19th November, it [hard copy of the relevant sections of the Progression Framework] was annotated to show that one of the targets was responding to adult prompt to use equipment to alleviate sensory output. And then this was where she used cubes for a maths lesson, and she found that she could access the curriculum through that. When she was working, she found the use of cubes, and the touching of cubes, was more powerful for her learning, so they [teaching staff] found that worked really well with her maths.' (ST5)

By the time of the final interview (21 January, 2016), the SENCO reported that the girl (S4P2) had achieved all her targets, as per the Progression Framework, and that 'we have now targeted one thread each, not more than one. So, she's now working on the emotional and understanding and self-awareness thread. All staff are aware, and it's giving them a framework in which to work to give her more ownership of her targets' (ST5). This work had been undertaken in conjunction with the girl's parents, who helped the school identify which fabrics the girl liked to have with her. As a result, the child brought fabric into school from home, and was able to use the fabric when she realised that she was becoming anxious.

For the boy (S4P1) the school continued to use elements of the Progression Framework in consultation with the external agencies supporting him. In addition, the school had begun to use the sensory thread, with the intention of moving him to the learning thread. The SENCo explained the thinking behind this and made an interesting comment regarding the usefulness of the Progression Framework in relation to staff knowledge:

'Because one of the issues with him is sensory, but it's also cognition and learning. So we're going to move him on with the learning thread. The thing we've found is really how it moves the teachers on, because staff wouldn't necessarily have Level 1 or 2 training but it gives them a framework or tools in which to think about what the children need to do, these very, very small steps, and what their targets should be.' (ST5).

The SENCo went on to say that successful small steps depended upon reasonable adjustments being made by school staff.

### 3.5.5 Training impact

The SENCo had wide experience and had undertaken training from a number of sources. Her school was also able to draw upon effective, accessible, support from the local autism outreach team, and other services, such as the educational psychology team. She had used the AET School Programme training at all three tiers in the school to provide a base of common knowledge and understanding that underpinned autism provision in the school. In answer to the open question of the end of



evaluation questionnaire, the SENCO linked the AET training with other CPD available to her and colleagues with the use of the Progression Framework:

‘The autism CPD that we have received at [S4] – levels 1, 2 and 3, and city-wide training packages that have been offered, complements the Progression Framework, and allows us to understand the needs of these children [with autism], and ensure that we provide the right environment for them to reach their potential.’ (ST5).

As with other case-study schools, the SENCo, and her school took advantage of training opportunities from a range of sources. These opportunities, allied to access to specialised external support, enabled the effective use of the AET Progression Framework. She further stressed that to ensure the positive impact of training it was necessary to ‘take a whole school process, and the way we do that is we cascade knowledge,’ (ST5).

#### 3.5.6 School 4 conclusions

School 4 had, since 2013, developed a strategic plan to improve provision for children with SEND, with a particular focus on autism provision. The SENCo was experienced, qualified and held a number of SEND positions that benefited the school, and other local schools. She worked in the school two days per week, with a particular focus on the children with autism and those exhibiting autism traits. During the period of the evaluation, the school:

- Continued to cascade training and information regarding autism provision.
- Successfully piloted the Progression Framework with two children with autism. In the case of one child, additional medical requirements were under consideration, and elements of the Progression Framework were used to help record the child’s progress.
- The school combined the Progression Framework with the National Autism Standards check list, to record the progress of the second child, and to plan changes in support for the child.

The SENCo summed up the evaluation period learning in her response to the open question in the end of evaluation questionnaire:

‘The Progression Framework was very helpful in giving us targets and next steps to support our autistic pupils. It helped us to make reasonable adjustments to reduce the barriers to learning these children face. The involvement of parents was also very powerful as it allowed us to not only support the family at home, but the partnership that developed gave us an insight into the children and how we could meet their needs.’ (ST5).

## 3.6 School 5 (Mainstream secondary school)

### 3.6.1 School overview: school, staff member, training, pupils

#### 3.6.1.1 *The school*

School 5 was a mainstream secondary school, with a school roll of 1,400 students aged 11-18. The majority of the students were ‘White British’. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs was well below average, as were the proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium funding. The school had 87 young people on the special educational needs register. At the time of the initial interview with the school member of staff (ST6) in question, changes were being made in response to ‘the new code of practice [...] we have two processes. We have the SEN cohort, and the learning support cohort – they are non-SEN, but children on watch,’ (ST6).

#### 3.6.1.2 *The member of staff – experience, qualifications, and role*

The school staff member who took part in the evaluation (ST6) was the school’s SENCo. She had previously worked as a SENCO in another mainstream secondary school, and had been specifically recruited to the school, S5, in 2012 by a new head teacher aiming to improve provision for pupils with SEND. The SENCo gave an account of her role and developments in the school over the previous three years:

‘What I’ve found since I’ve come here is I’ve been working with a lot more young people with behavioural issues, mental health issues than I did at the previous schools. So the role has changed quite a bit. A bit of background to the school; when I arrived here there wasn’t much set up here in terms of support for young people with special needs, so we’ve been on a very quick journey to get things established. We have managed now after two years to get - I think a very secure and safe system for our young people with additional needs.’ (ST6)

### *3.6.1.3 Training and development strategy for the school in relation to autism provision*

The SENCo's remit was to continue to improve support for children with SEND. She explained that there was a particular focus on autism provision: 'autism probably is our passion and something that we've done a lot of work on with individuals as much as, you know as a group of people,' (ST6). This was a continuing focus that was agreed, and supported by the school's senior management team (SMT). As a result of her previous work, she felt, in September 2015, that 'we're at the stage now where we can start perhaps being a bit more innovative because we've spent two years setting things up and now we're looking to try new things and staff are established and they are perhaps more confident about putting new things into practice.' (ST6) There was, then, a strong sense of direction in relation to autism support in the school.

### *3.6.1.4 The pupils*

The SENCo said that there were eight students in the school that had diagnoses of autism, and another seven the school believed showed traits of autism. Two students were chosen by the SENCo as part of the evaluation. The first student (S5P1), had a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome, 'who is struggling at the moment with friendships; he's a young man who is desperate to make friends but finds it very difficult to do so and has had a lot of surrounding difficulties with that,' (ST6). S5P1 was in Year 9, and the SENCo identified the issues that he needed support with as being social communication, appropriate behaviour in making friendships, and 'recognising his own feelings of frustration when social situations don't go well' (ST6). The second student (S5P2) was in Year 8, and he also had needs in relation to social interaction. The SENCO explained: 'he's a behaviour policer, and if he has issues, it's because he's falling out because he's speaking his mind, and is socially isolated because of his behaviour towards others,' (ST6).

### *3.6.2 Choosing to use the Progression Framework, September 2015-January 2016*

The SENCo welcomed the chance to pilot the Progression Framework, as part of the school's continuing strategy to improve provision for students with autism. It was envisaged that the Progression Framework would help to embed learning from the AET Schools Programme training, and that it could be added to the range of material that the SENCo drew upon to ensure good autism provision.

### 3.6.3 Using the Progression Framework

The initial, face-to-face, interview with ST6 (17 September, 2015), was followed by telephone interviews on 18 November, 2015, 17 December, 2015, and 29 January, 2016. In addition, ST6 completed the end of evaluation questionnaire.

The SENCo was pleased with the Progression Framework, saying, 'I think it looks great. I'm quite excited about it to be honest. It's good to have something tangible to get our hands around,' (ST6). She was particularly welcoming that it combined both academic progress with personal, and social and emotional progress. She explained that the question that she is most asked by parents and carers of young people with autism is 'what can you do? I'm worried about them socially,' (ST6). She also noted that social and emotional progress underpinned academic progress. The SENCo's initial concern with using the Progression Framework was how far she should 'narrow down' the targets for the two young people, as she felt that 'we could probably do something on all of them, but I didn't know whether that would be too much,' (ST6). In the event, the focus chosen for the work with the two young people was on social interaction and learning. The SENCo hope that the school's work with the young people would lead to them both 'having a happier time [which] I guess that if that's positive it will have an impact on the learning anyway,' (ST6).

The SENCo experienced no difficulties working with the Progression Framework – 'it's really smooth and easy to use, and I like the quick links, that you can click on those things and it gives you more,' (ST6). This seems to suggest that the two schools which did experience problems using the Progression Framework might have had wider issues with their schools' IT systems.

Very quickly, the SENCo decided that the Progression Framework had wide applicability in relation to the school's reporting system. Further, the Progression Framework was seen to have applicability in co-working with the parents and carers of young people with autism. After a few weeks of use, she took her ideas in this respect to the school's SMT; Box 5.

*Box 4: the Progression Framework as part of wide reporting and co-working with parents of young people with autism*

'We really like it and in fact I've got a meeting with the deputy head after we've talked because what I'd like to do is develop something along the same lines to go alongside our reporting system. So for our autistic children – because we report three times a year – so when they get their report on their academic progress to do something about their progress in the areas that we've been researching. So trial it perhaps with the two parents that we're working with, the families, and then work with them to develop something that we can roll out to other parents because these young people can't access education unless they're happy and feeling safe and secure in their environment so I think it's a really valuable part of reporting to those parents. So that's something that I really want to do and he's [the deputy head] really up for it actually, which will be great.' (ST6)

The use of the Progression Framework in conjunction with other training and materials was a constant theme throughout the period of the evaluation. By the time of the final interview with the SENCo (29 January, 2016), her view was that the Progression Framework:

'Is very useful in identifying areas of focus in terms of intervention and support that a young person needs. It's helped us assess what's working and what isn't working so we've used it almost alongside the SEN Code of Practice that was [unclear] so getting the baseline and data for the children, putting in some provision, reviewing it and then looking at what's working and what isn't based on the results that we get. So it's been very useful for that and we would definitely use that in the future.' (ST6)

She noted, however, that, as expected, change and progress would be slow for the young people, and the Progression Framework based work would be a long-term matter, and would need to underpin work throughout a young person's time at secondary school.

### 3.6.4 The young people and the Progression Framework

The SENCo had focused Progression Framework based work with the two young people on emotional and social skills issues. In the event, each student progressed to different degrees, with

one student progressing more than the other. Nonetheless, the Progression Framework based work enable both these outcomes to be recognised, understood and recorded.

Work with the two young people was based on input from the local autism outreach team, learning from the AET Programme, and an innovative programme to build social skills, co-operation, in addition to one-to-one mentoring. The Progression Framework was used:

‘To help us identify where the areas of most need are for each child, and then you communicate that [to other staff]. So we use the Student Passport rather than IEPs. They help me inform the staff, so I’ve used some of the phraseology from the Learning Intentions [Progression Framework] to rephrase things on the Passports. So I think helping us to identify needs; that has been fantastic because it breaks down to such an extent.’ (ST6)

The first young person (S5P1) progressed, with the support that was put in place, to a point where he successfully took part in the programme to build social skills. The programme worked ‘really well for him in terms of his communication and his turn taking, and his understanding of emotions’ (ST6). From there, the SENCo was able to progress the student to work on ‘some specific social skills and things in a group’ (ST6). This contrasted with the other young person:

‘The [programme] with [S5P2] was a really good example of what wasn’t working because we talked about his understanding ... we focused on his social skills and working with other people so we felt that would be a really good starting point. In fact he wasn’t ready for that group work even because he wanted to dominate and control, he always wanted to have the lead role, so we had to then stop and go back and do one to one work, and we’re still doing that; he’s not at the stage anywhere near, in fact he’s probably regressed, but he’s a very new diagnosis so he’s being very controlling at the moment. It helped us to say there’s no progress, we’re going backwards, let’s stop and think. And the way it’s broken down in such detail enabled us to do that.’ (St6)

In both cases, the Progression Framework helped to identify, plan and assess support for the young people, and was as useful in tracking and recording progress as it was in evidencing the need for reassessment and a return to an earlier stage of support.

### 3.6.5 Training impact

Starting in September 2014, the school had initiated a programme of AET training for staff that was still in progress at the time of the first interview with the SENCo in September, 2015. TAs and some teaching staff were the first to undertake AET School Programme Tier 1, and that training was

extended to other staff during the September 2015 term. In addition, selected staff undertook Tier 2 and 3 training during the school year 2014-2015. This included the SENCO, a TA, and two lead practitioners to Tier 3, and another TA who would be trained to Tier 3 in order that she, too, could become a lead practitioner with a particular remit relating two students with autism.

The SENCo gave an account of the impact of the AET training on staff that highlighted the low level of prior-knowledge, and the stimulus the training gave to additional, in-house, training led by the SENCo; Box 4:

#### *Box 5: the impact of AET School Programme training on school staff*

'We did see immediate change [following the AET training], and I think that was because there hadn't been any training for long time before that. So once people listened to an hour of information and working with young people I think they go away and think "oh actually I can see that now". So we did see definite impact initially. With my TA team it was fantastic because they'd gone from not really having much knowledge at all, to going off to doing research and we did further training as a team on that. And then a number of the TAs have worked with the [local autism outreach team] with individuals so again consolidating the knowledge they got from the training. And then I've done staff training following on from the [local autism outreach team] AET Level 1 training. So staff have been really enthusiastic about changing their practice. At the same time we started to write student passports with young people so we could use the AET training to

inform our passport writing and be specific about children's needs. So it has been a year of education in autism I would say.' (ST6)

The SENCo had combined elements of the AET training with information from the local autism outreach team to produce the outline of the student passports. She explained that she constantly reinforced the message that an understanding of autism had to be combined with an appreciation of the individual needs of each student. In this, she was strongly supported by the school SMT.

### 3.6.6 School 5 conclusions

The school's SENCo had been recruited to the school in 2012 with a specific remit to improve support and provision for young people with SEND. With support from the school's SMT, training, including AET School Programme training at all three tiers, had been put in place. In addition, external support, in the form of the local autism outreach team, had been intensified, and materials and learning from other sources, such as the NAS, had been utilised. During the period of the evaluation, the school:

- Successfully piloted the Progression Framework which was welcomed as a valuable tool to aid identification, planning, monitoring and recording of work with young people with autism.
- Had begun the process of incorporating the Progression Framework into the school's reporting system for young people with autism.
- Continued to work with parents and carers, and the local autism outreach team to support young people with autism.



## 4. The five case-study schools: overall conclusions

The five case-study schools provide five detailed accounts of day-to-day support for children and young people in three different types of school setting – mainstream primary, mainstream secondary, and special secondary provision. Staff in each school worked in different contexts, but all the staff engaged with the evaluation showed high levels of commitment to supporting children and young people with autism. The learning from the five case study schools indicates that there are four overall conclusions that can be made related to factors which strongly help to support good autism provision. These are:

- Support and wholehearted commitment from a school's head teacher and senior management team (SMT) is essential for good autism provision. SENCOs, lead practitioners, teaching staff and TAs all need to be fully supported in their efforts to provide support for children and young people with autism.
- All of the case-study schools had undertaken AET Schools Programme training at all three tiers, and one school had undertaken some AET Early Years training. AET training and materials were important in equipping schools to provide good autism provision. In addition, it was common for the schools to draw upon a wide range of other sources of autism training, information and knowledge. For example, schools combined materials and knowledge from the NAS, local autism outreach teams and the AET in order to develop their autism strategies.
- The Progression Framework was successfully piloted in four of the five schools. It is unclear as to why the fifth school (S2) had difficulties with incorporating the Progression Framework into their work. However, it might be of significance that School 2 piloted the Framework with the two youngest children of all the schools. In addition, the training background of the staff was not as wide as some staff from the other schools.
- External support and co-working characterised all the schools. Work with, and support from parents and carers, and external agencies such as local CAMHS, and autism outreach teams provided valuable support for staff and schools. In addition, some staff, for example, from School 3 were able to draw upon a local schools network focused on autism which had been founded by School 3 itself.

These four factors which underpin successful autism support were mirrored in the open question response of ST6 (the mainstream secondary school SENCo) to the end of evaluation questionnaire, and is worth quoting in full; Box 6.

*Box 6: A mainstream secondary school's SENCo on successful autism provision*

'Staff training is essential if young people with Autism are to be understood and supported effectively in school. Staff who do not know about or understand autistic spectrum conditions-or how different young people with Autism are cannot support them effectively and successfully in the classroom. All staff, from head teachers to site managers, need to have this understanding so as to create a genuinely inclusive environment. Ideally, schools should be equipped to deliver this training in-house and on at least a yearly basis.

Working with parents has been essential in gaining a proper insight into the individual. We also work with parents when specific incidents occur, in order to explore reasons for behaviour and support the child in developing their resilience, as well as educating other students about ASC needs.

Support from outside school is invaluable when students are really struggling in a particular area. [Our local] team support has enabled and empowered some of our young people with ASD to embrace their differences and deliver assemblies and class PowerPoints about their needs. A good relationship with this team is vital.

The Progression Framework has allowed us to be far more specific in our assessment of a child's needs so that we can identify appropriate support and intervention for that child. It has also allowed us to monitor and track the success of that intervention so that we know how to progress with the child throughout the school year. I would hope that we will continue to use the Progression Framework for all of our young people with ASD differences on entry-to ascertain their needs at the start of their high school life-and also as a review tool throughout their time here. I would hope that all stake holders can be involved in the assessing and reviewing processes so that parents, the child and school staff have a good understanding of progress and gaps. We would also look to link the Framework with our termly academic reporting to parents.' (ST6)

## 5 Parent and carer views

### 5.1 Parent and carer interviews

The school staff involved with the evaluation recruited parents of the two children nominated by each school to contribute to the evaluation. Eleven parents were recruited in total, but only nine were able to be interviewed, with the remaining two having difficulty in arranging suitable times for interview. Table 2, above, presents the breakdown of interviews per school, and per parent. Three of the interviews were conducted face-to-face by a researcher from CEDAR (a father and a mother from School 2, and two mothers from school 4); the remainder of the interviews were telephone interviews. Parents were given the choice of being interviewed by telephone or face-to-face. All the interviews were recorded (with informed consent) and fully transcribed for analysis.

The interviews focused on the parents' children, their experiences of their children at school (including schools other than the school currently attended), the background to their child/ren being diagnosed with autism, their child's progress at school, their view of what constitutes a good relationship between home and school, what constitutes a good school for their child with autism, and difficulties they had experienced with school and their child/ren.

The findings from the parent interviews are presented here under two broad headings:

- Parents' experiences of difficulties related to their child/ren's schooling
- Parents' views on what constitutes good practice in relation to school support for children with autism.

### 5.2 Parents' experiences of difficulties related to their child's schooling

#### 5.2.1 Introduction

The most common difficulty experienced by the parents (in four of the cases) related to difficulties experience not with schools, but with doctors, health services, and assessment and diagnosis of their children. This made the positive responses of schools even more welcome by the parents, and

highlighted the significance of good autism support, particularly when children had not been formally diagnosed as having autism. Where parents had experienced difficulties with schools, the difficulties were experienced with schools that their children no longer attended at the time of interview, or with staff, and school leaders, who were no longer at the school their child attended. Difficulties were identified in relation to the following areas:

- Unwillingness to accept children with autism into a school
- A lack of understanding of autism on the part of individual teachers and head teachers
- Failure to plan for transition

Each point is dealt with here. As with the case-studies of the five schools, the data from the parent interviews provide case-study examples of difficulties faced by parents and the children with autism.

#### 5.2.2 Unwillingness to accept children with autism into a school

One of the parents gave an account of difficulties she had in attempting to find a school for her child. The parent was looking for a mainstream school that her child could move to at the end of primary school. The parent was keen that her child should attend a nearby mainstream secondary school which had a good reputation. On visiting the school to explain her child's needs and, as she hoped, begin planning transition, she found: 'that whilst I was there [at the school] they turned round to me, and I know they can't do this, but they turned round to me, and said that there was no way that they could accept [child's name]' (S1P1). It was made clear that the school's objections were based on the child's diagnosis of autism.

#### 5.2.3 A lack of understanding of autism on the part of individual teachers and head teachers

Three of the parents gave accounts of school staff having very little, or no understanding of autism, and the needs of children with autism. Of the three, one parent (S1P2) experienced difficulties arising out of staff lack of understanding at the school (S1) where her child was at the time of the interview; however, the difficulties related to an earlier period, and changes in the school's SMT had wrought very positive changes in the provision.

This contrasted with the account of a parent who discovered that the head teacher of the primary school her child attended had no knowledge of autism:

‘It was a very, very negative [response], a really shocking response. The head teacher, and this is a head teacher, didn’t understand autism. Everything I mentioned he had just no idea what I was talking about, and I even had somebody come in from the local autism education team, and even he couldn’t do anything. So what I did at the end of Year 5, I got [name of child] out of that school and into another primary school [...] and they assessed [name of child], and they were absolutely disgusted really with what the other school had sent through, the paperwork, because the paperwork they sent, and the boy who presented in class didn’t fit.’ (S5P1)

For this parent, and child, there appeared to be no alternative but to exit the school in question.

A less severe example was given by the parents (S2P1 and S2P2) of a child who started a new school year in a class taught by a newly qualified teacher who had no knowledge of autism. In this case, as soon as the parents altered the school to this, the school’s SENCo put in place training and support for the teacher to enable provision for the child.

#### 5.2.4 Failure to plan for transition

Two examples arose of failure to plan for transition. The first example was of a child who had been diagnosed as having autism at the age of two and a half years. The child was at a private nursery before he moved to the Reception class of primary school. For an unexplained reason, the local autism outreach team had recommended that the child should not visit the school prior to joining Reception, nor was any transition planning undertaken. The parent explained:

‘The [autism] team had recommended us not to do visits with the school. And at the time I agreed with it because I thought that as [the child’s elder sibling] goes there, and if [child] thinks he can go through those doors, I’ll have an issue every day. He’ll want to go in, so I didn’t. They [the outreach team] did do a couple of visits to his nursery and saw him in that

environment, but the school was in no way prepared for what came with [child's name] at all. [...] It was a big mistake. The school definitely won't ever do that again.' (S3P1)

The school confirmed this version of events. In fact, it was the challenges presented by the unplanned transition of the child into the school's Reception class that acted as the immediate spur to the school undertaking AET training.

The second example emerged as part of a parent's account of good transition planning and preparation. The case concerned a child who had autism and other needs, and concerned transition from primary to secondary school. The parent described a well-planned and executed transition programme which involved a small group of children with SEND. Although the parent was very pleased with the process, she also noted that its success had depended very heavily on the commitment and determination of the primary school's SENCo, who had struggled with the secondary school's lack of engagement with the transition process. The parent also noted that, as she understood, 'it never happened again' (S1P1).

## 5.3 Parents' views on what constitutes good practice in relation to school support for children with autism

### 5.3.1 Introduction

The parent interviews produced a small range of views on what the parents saw as good practice by schools in relation to the support of their children with autism. Foremost among these was parents' appreciation of schools and school staff they saw as being responsive and understanding, with good communications between school and home. The parents also provided examples of the positive impact of school practice on their children's experience of school; this also included some links being made between good practice and school AET training. The good practice points are presented here under the headings:

- Schools working with parents.
- Positive impact of school practice.

### 5.3.2 Schools working with parents

Parents put a very high value on good communications with their child's school. It was seen to be important for both the school and for the parents in helping both to support children with autism. Typically, parents of children at primary school would be able to speak to school staff involved with the support of their children on a daily basis. In addition, home-school books were used. For parents of young people at secondary school, telephone contact was more typical than daily face-to-face meeting. The most important aspect of communication was that parents had to feel that they could contact a named person who had full knowledge about their child, and was open, sympathetic and willing to work with the parents.

A good example of a parent view of good communication and co-working was given by one parent who explained:

'I think there is great communication with me. We work on the same kind of ethos. If I introduce something at home they will mirror that exactly the same at school, and vice versa. I'm a very strict parent, so I don't make his condition an excuse for his behaviour, and, again, they stay that strict with him as well. So, because his behaviour is quite manageable in school I think that allows him to stay there more. [...] They've really got to know him, and his ways. They know when he's having a meltdown because he's got a sensory issue or he's frustrated, or they understand when he's just being naughty and just trying his chances.' (S3P1)

Parents also appreciated rapid responses to issues they raised concerning their children, particularly concerning new developments at home or school that were concerning for the parents and children. As one parent noted: 'communication is very, very important I think for any pupil, but especially for pupils with additional needs, because if that communication is not there, things tend to slip, or sometimes things escalate, and you just need to do that communication. It is really vital,' (S5P1).

One parent noted that even though it was often difficult in the morning rush of school, to speak at any length to the staff most involved with her child, communication was still maintained:

‘Yeah we do often talk [with the staff]. When I pick up or when I take her to school in the morning they’re such rush hours and maybe I want to say something and sometimes they don’t have time so what we decided with the school to have like a communication notebook, a small one which stays in [name’s] book bag. So if they want to tell me something they will write on there and every evening when I pick her up I go through it and see if there is any communication. And if I want to say something or I want to know about something I put it on there and that’s how we communicate unless there’s something I need to say face to face. Almost every day we have a discussion with the teachers.’ (S2P3)

This parent was ‘really, really happy’ with the communication she had with the school.

School-home co-working was also seen to benefit parents in terms of their support for their children at home. The parents of one child gave a good example of how provision for their child at school had led to them recreating that provision at home:

‘She [the SENCo] had like a big leaf, from Ikea or somewhere like that, and they fastened it to the wall, and a big, giant leaf comes over, and they put a bean bag underneath. So if [child] was getting wound up, anxious, he could take himself away and go and sit in a little quiet area. The other kids could use it as well, but if [child] was there the kids knew to go away and leave [child] alone [...] and we spoke to [SENCo] and she said, “it’s working so well”, so we thought we would try it at home, and once we’d managed to get him his own space, I won’t say everything fell into place straight away, but you could see a change in him.’ (S2P1 & S2P2).

This is a good example of the impact of co-working between parents and schools, with both elements being able to benefit from shared knowledge and understanding.

### 5.3.3 Positive impact of school practice

The parent interviews provided a good deal of evidence of the impact of good school practice on the school experience, and learning of the parents’ children. There was an awareness that positive impact arising out of changes to school practice often depended on individual members of staff.



Parents who noted this were also aware that there was a need for more systemic change, as good practice otherwise relied too heavily on individuals who might leave the school, or take on other roles. One example of this issue was given by a parent who described changing practice and impact over time in the same school:

'It [good practice] was very much to do I think with the SENCo in place at the time, because it was the Head I spoke about earlier, he was the SENCo, he subsequently went and we had a part time SENCo in. and again it was very unco-ordinated, even within the school setting there was a complete lack of sharing of information at that time. I have to say the later years at the same school were completely different; I had a fantastic SENCo join the school. She was absolutely amazing. Even though it was against policy she had [name] in her class for the remaining three years and she completely tailored and accommodated [name] within the setting.' (S1P1)

Other parents also stressed the impact of individual school staff, and, in the case of S1P2, contrasted a very poor overall experience at a school which then was transformed into a very good experience for her child with the appointment of a new head teacher, who, in turn, appointed a new SENCo. The change led to 'a 360 degree turnaround in the school' for her child (S1P2).

The good practice examples that the parents talked about all amounted to 'reasonable adjustments' being made for the children and young people with autism. These included obtaining ear defenders for a child with sensitivity to noise, allowing a child to eat a small number of foods at lunch, running peer awareness sessions at school, being flexible with school arrival and departure times to allow a child to arrive and leave before the rush, making a small quiet area for a child to spend time in at will, and running social skills groups for children and young people.

The parents greatly appreciated schools' efforts, and persistence, toward providing good support for the children. One example was:

'They [school staff] worked really, really hard developing routine boards, a quiet area for him, getting to know him. He still does now, but he was a really bad screamer, happy or sad. So, it

was getting to know him and his ways, and what caused him a meltdown. He had a massive fascination with numbers, and the [autism outreach team] had assumed that was because he had anxiety. I'd be, like, "he hasn't, he carries numbers around all the time. They're his favourite things". So, it was just [everyone] getting to know him.' (S3P1)

The combination of the school's work to support the child, the knowledge that staff had of how to approach the task, and the willingness to 'get to know' the child and his needs, all contributed to good support for him.

Although parents were generally aware that school staff either had, or were receiving training related to autism, only one of the parents knew that at least some of the training was AET Programme training. Even in this case, the knowledge was sketchy. In general, parents have only a slight idea about the training that school staff have, or might, access. In a similar fashion, none of the parents were members of any autism support group or organisation. This was, to some degree, surprising, and suggests that these parent, at least, had received little or no information on how they could continue to support their children through education, and beyond. There was a sense from the interviews that, too often, parents were on their own in supporting their children. The AET has produced parent and carer guides, for example, *Working together with your child's school*<sup>6</sup>, in addition to other web-based resources<sup>7</sup>, but parents were unaware of the AET and its work, or of other bodies, such as the NAS.

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<sup>6</sup> AET, *Working together with your child's school*; [http://www.aettraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/AET\\_working\\_together\\_with\\_childs\\_school.pdf](http://www.aettraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/AET_working_together_with_childs_school.pdf) (accessed, 15 April, 2016)

<sup>7</sup><http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/Global/News/Brand%20new%20AET%20resources%20for%20parents.aspx> (accessed, 15 April, 2016)

## 6 Conclusions

- The value of autism training for school staff continues to be an important element of good provision for children and young people with autism. The case-studies showed that, typically, schools combine AET Programme training, at all levels, with training, information and materials from other sources. The latter include, for example, local autism outreach teams, CAMHS teams, and the National Autistic Society (NAS). The practice of drawing upon a variety of sources of training, support, advice, information, and materials makes it difficult to isolate the impact of AET Training. Nonetheless, the case-study school staff evidence provided good evidence of the high value school staff place upon the AET Programme, and reaffirmed the findings of previous evaluation reports on the ongoing AET Programme. AET Programme training can, therefore, be recommended for school settings seeking to provide good autism support for children and young people.
- The AET Progression Framework was successfully piloted in four of the five case-study schools. The AET Progression Framework was seen by those schools to provide a valuable tool in supporting school staff to identify appropriate goals, select interventions, record impact, and map the progression of children and young people in terms of both their school experience and learning journey. The AET Progression Framework was regarded as a valuable addition by the schools. In the case of the school which abandoned use of the Progression Framework, there was still an intention to return to its use in the future. It may be that the difficulties that the school experienced reflected a need for further training and support for school staff. On balance, therefore, the Progression Framework can be recommended for use in schools where staff have good autism training and access to supporting materials and information.
- External support and co-working characterised all the case-study schools' work with pupils with autism. Local school networks, parents and carers, local CAMHS and autism outreach teams all provided highly valued support and advice. The evaluation of the AET Programme, 2013-15 drew attention, previously, to the importance of support networks for all settings<sup>8</sup>, and the AET has begun the process of supporting the growth and development of such networks<sup>9</sup>. It is recommended that this approach should continue, with the ultimate aim of

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<sup>8</sup> Cullen, Stephen Michael, Cullen, Mairi Ann and Lindsay, Geoff (2015) *Evaluation of Autism Education Trust Training Hubs Programme, 2013-15: final report*. Coventry: University of Warwick. Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, p.10.

<sup>9</sup> AET, *AET response to recommendations arising out of Warwick University's Evaluation Report of the 2013/15 AET programme*; <http://www.aettraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/AET-response-to-recommendations-arising-out-of-Warwick-University.pdf> (accessed, 14 April, 2016)

ensuring that all settings should be in a position to be able to draw upon, and participate in, external support.

- One case study school (a special secondary school for young people with moderate learning difficulties) was in the process of applying for NAS Accreditation, and the school's engagement with the AET Programme was part of that process. The process requires a great deal of time and preparation, however, it was seen by the school to have conferred numerous benefits, including the support of the school strategy to further develop its provision for young people with autism. It may be that the AET could develop an accreditation system for schools and other settings.
- Parents from the case study schools who took part in the evaluation provided detailed accounts of good, and bad experiences relating to the support of their children in schools, and nurseries. Parents greatly valued good, strong, two-way communications with schools about their children. They also valued schools having staff who were knowledgeable, trained, and understanding about their children's needs, and who were willing to co-work with parents to enable the best support for the children in school.
- The parents from the case study schools were largely unaware of the support that could be accessed through the AET, or other bodies such as the NAS. This not only affected the range of support they could give their children, but also affected the level of support that they were able to access for themselves. It is recommended that further outreach work be considered in relation to parents and carers. At a simple level, schools that have accessed AET training and materials should be encouraged to share knowledge of AET, and other, provision with parents and carers. Further, the AET might consider advertising its work more widely to reach parents and carers who might have few resources to draw upon.

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## 8. Appendix 1:

Results of the end of evaluation questionnaire completed by the school staff who participated in the evaluation. The results are for the closed questions (open question responses have been incorporated in the main body of the report). The two members of staff from the same school who took part in the evaluation submitted a single questionnaire.

### Evaluation

#### AET Programme, 2015-2016

#### End of evaluation school staff questionnaire.

The evaluation of the AET Programme 2015-16 has been a success thanks to the work that you and a small number of other school staff have put into the project. I have been able to gather some very useful data as a result of working with you, and I would be very grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete this end of evaluation questionnaire. As with all the other help you have given, this questionnaire is confidential, the responses will be held securely, and will only be used in an anonymous format.

Name:

Job role/title:

School:

<b>1. Supporting children with autism at school</b>					
(Tick one box in response to each statement)					
	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally Agree
1a. The school senior management team supports					5

work to improve the school experience of children with autism.					
1b. School staff have found AET training valuable.				1	4
1c. AET training enabled improvements in teaching practice for children with autism.					5
1d. AET training enabled improvements in provision for children with autism.					5
1e. AET training enabled improvements in terms of outcomes for children with autism.					5
1f. There is a need for more autism training for staff at the school.		1	1	2	1
1g. The cost of training inhibits the school undertaking more training.		1		2	2

<b>2. The Progression Framework</b>					
(Tick one box in response to each statement)					
	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally Agree
2a. The Progression Framework is easy to understand.				4	1

2b. The Progression Framework is easy to use.			1	3	1
2c. The Progression Framework helped to plan support for the two pupils with autism*.		1			4
2d. The Progression Framework helped to track the progress of the two pupils with autism*.		1			4
2e. The Progression Framework helped to provide the necessary strategies to support the two pupils with autism*.		1	1	1	2
2f. I will use the Progression Framework again in future			1		4
2g. I would recommend the Progression Framework to other school staff supporting pupils with autism.			1		4

\*The two pupils being the two children/young people that were part of the evaluation work.

3. Could you please add any further information you think it would be useful for the evaluation to know about. For example, about the value of autism training for staff, working with parents, autism support from outside school, or the Progression Framework.

<b>Open Question</b>
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Thank you again for working with the evaluation – it has been very helpful indeed.

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