



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools Indicators of Effective Practice



# Indicators of Effective Practice to Support Whole-School Planning

Whole-school reflective practice is a critical process in enhancing education provision for students with autism. Indicators of effective practice are set out in this companion document to support whole-school inclusive practice.

Furthermore, indicators of effective practice are also set out for each of the eight domain areas. These are made available as a planning tool to facilitate school leaders, school teams and whole staffs in mainstream, special classes and/or special schools to review specific aspects of provision for students with autism and to prioritise areas for development.

Any issues highlighted may be addressed through the guidance and resources outlined in *Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools: Supporting Children and Young People* and/or through consultation with relevant support services (e.g. National Council for Special Education [NCSE], National Educational Psychological Service [NEPS]). Additionally, this school-led process might also highlight topics that could be responded to through targeted professional development. Initially, schools should identify and plan to work on a small number of priority areas that are realistic and relevant to their context.



Research suggests that teachers of learners with autism require specific expertise in areas related to the:

- Characteristic of learners with autism
- Implications for teaching and learning
- Individualised planning and assessment
- Incorporating the particular interests and motivations of learners with autism
- Teaching and learning of social and communication skills
- Generalisation of skills

(Long, 2018)

# Whole-School Inclusive Practice – Key Principles

Schools can review and develop whole-school inclusive provision for students with autism by engaging with these key principles and associated indicators of effective practice:

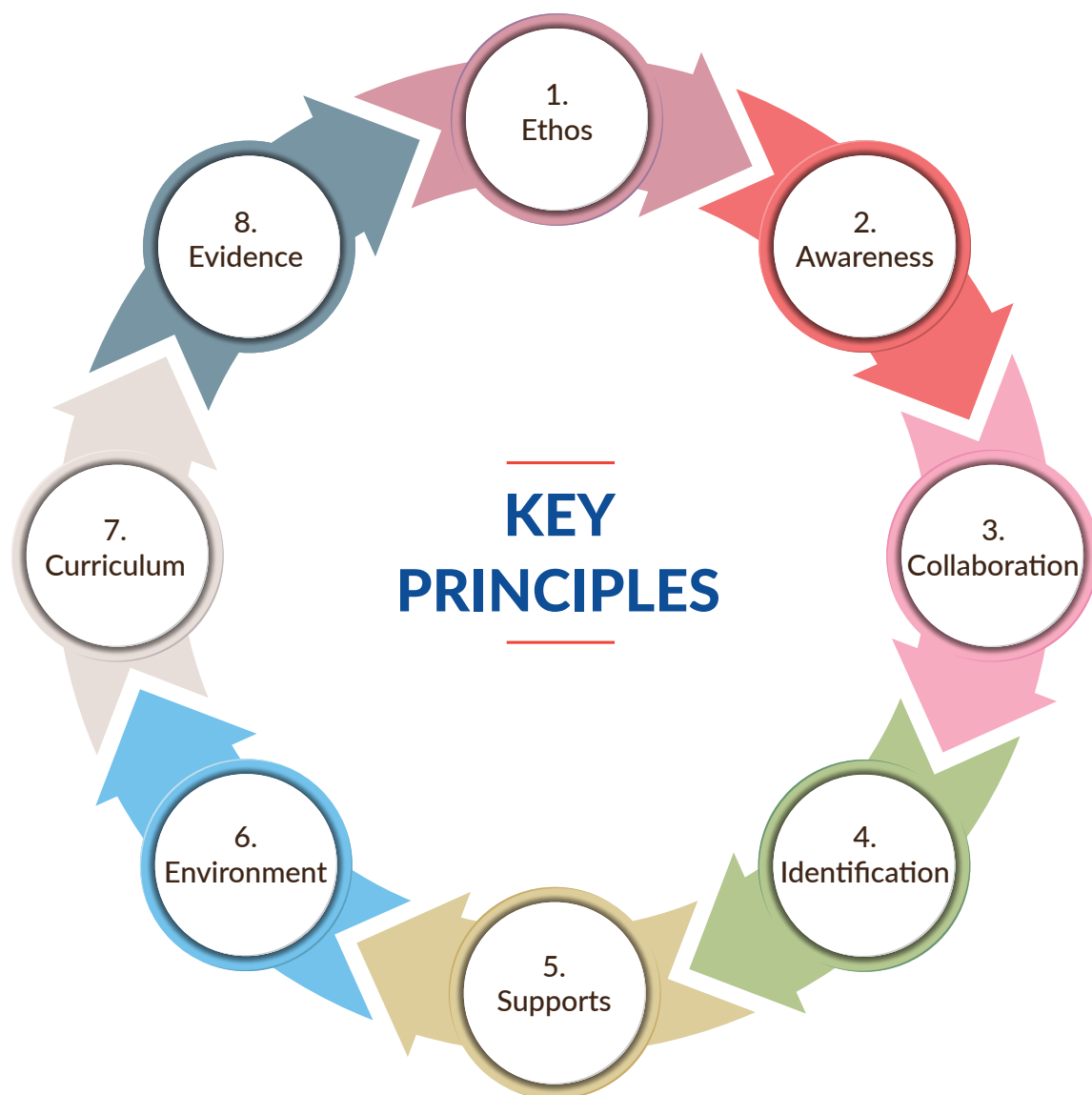


Figure 1: Key principles to support whole-school inclusive practice

## Key Principle 1: Positive inclusive ethos

Positive inclusive ethos that is responsive to the diversity of needs of learners and is actively promoted by leadership within the school.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
The board of management fosters a culture of high ambition and aspirations for all students, including those with autism		
School management lead the development, communication and monitoring of whole-school inclusive policies and practices that are responsive to needs and foster positive attitudes towards people with autism		
School systems and structures are proactively adjusted to promote the social inclusion and participation of students with autism and to reduce the risk of school refusal, school exclusion and/or bullying		
In mainstream schools, the special class is centrally positioned within the school to avoid segregation and isolation for students, staff and parents		
Consistent and responsive adult-student relationships foster students' sense of belonging, safety and secure attachment as a basis for developing problem-solving and independence		
Peer education programmes are in place that promote an understanding of diversity and inclusion		
Students with autism have opportunities to meet others with shared interests and experiences		
A culture of reflection is promoted involving an appraisal of inclusive practices, including parental engagement and student participation		
<b>Priority area for further development:</b>		



## Key Principle 2: Awareness and understanding of the needs of students with autism

Awareness and understanding of the needs of students with autism across the entire school community, supported by relevant professional learning.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
School leaders create an environment that promotes an understanding of the strengths and needs of students with autism		
Whole-school professional development is encouraged and supported through regular audits to identify professional learning needs		
There is a good understanding amongst staff of how autism may present differently in girls		
All teachers understand autism and adapt their classroom management and teaching approaches to provide high quality and differentiated learning opportunities for students with autism		
The school has an induction programme that supports and informs supply staff and new staff members about the strengths, learning styles and needs of students with autism		
Staff demonstrate knowledge and understanding of best practice in the education of students with autism, and structures are in place for the regular sharing of this knowledge between staff		
Opportunities are provided to develop mutual understanding and communication between students with autism and their peers		
<b>Priority area for further development</b>		

### Key Principle 3: Collaborative practice with well-defined roles for all

Effective collaboration between school staff, parents and students, supported by external professionals as required.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
School leaders lead a collaborative whole-school approach to the education of students with autism and use indicators of effective practice to identify elements that are working well along with areas that require further development		
Class/subject teachers undertake responsibility for the education of all students, and collaborate with support staff to plan interventions that promote meaningful inclusion and address students' priority learning needs		
Parents are enabled, through a partnership approach and strong communication channels, to contribute to their child's education		
Person-centred planning (PCP) approaches have been adopted to promote active participation of students in educational planning and decision-making, including sharing their views, preferences and making choices		
Special needs assistants support the inclusion of students by addressing care needs and by understanding the implications of autism for participation, independence, social interaction and behaviour		
School staff, parents, students, and external professionals collaborate effectively to identify and respond to the needs of students with autism		
<b>Priority area for further development</b>		



## Key Principle 4: Comprehensive identification of strengths and needs

Comprehensive identification of strengths and needs that is informed by an understanding of autism and associated difficulties, linked to a process of planning, teaching and review.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Teachers, parents, students and external professionals as appropriate, are actively involved in the identification of individual strengths and needs, setting shared learning objectives, and reviewing and assessing progress in response to changing needs over time		
Assessment approaches are adapted in line with the needs of the student and include tools developed specifically for students with autism		
A variety of assessment approaches are used to build a comprehensive profile of the student's performance of key skills across a range of environments		
Students are actively involved in identifying their strengths, needs, interests and preferences through the use of Person-centred planning (PCP) approaches and visual forms of communication) to inform educational planning and decision-making		
Teachers engage with students and their parents to identify leisure and recreational activities based on their individual strengths and interests		
<b>Priority area for further development</b>		

## Key Principle 5: Allocation of appropriate teaching supports

Allocation of appropriate teaching supports to ensure that students with the greatest level of need have access to the greatest level of support.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
School leaders carefully plan the deployment of staff to specific roles and ensure that students with the greatest level of need are supported by staff with relevant expertise		
The school adopts a comprehensive approach to the supports provided to students with autism, informed by regular review of the student's response to intervention		
Supports provided for students with autism are guided by the principle that students with the greatest level of need have access to the greatest levels of support		
The number of teachers supporting each student is kept to the minimum necessary to provide continuity of support		
A designated teacher assumes responsibility for each student and facilitates the exchange of information between school staff, home, and external professionals		
Students with autism have a Student Support Plan which identifies their strengths and needs, incorporates clear targets and strategies, and records outcomes and review processes		
<b>Priority area for further development</b>		





## Key Principle 6: Development of environments responsive to the needs of students with autism

Consideration of the needs of students with autism that relate to the school’s learning, social and physical environment.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Structured supportive teaching and learning environments and activities are provided which involve planned, consistent teaching approaches and meaningful differentiation of the curriculum that builds on student strengths		
A range of physical and teaching environmental supports (e.g. visual aids, calming space, workstation) are implemented to meet the diverse needs of students and to promote their participation during the school day		
Proactive strategies and interpersonal supports are adopted for students with autism to build positive relationships and a sense of connection and belonging to their class and school		
Peer-support groups provide practical support to students with autism during work and leisure activities		
Students in special settings have structured opportunities to engage with their mainstream peers in both classroom and leisure activities in order to share interests and experiences		
The school environment is reviewed and adapted to promote positive behavioural development and to prevent the emergence of behaviours of concern		
<b>Priority area for further development</b>		

## Key Principle 7: Students have access to a broad curriculum

Access to a broad curriculum that is relevant and appropriate to students' needs, including the development of communication, social, emotional and daily living skills.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
Students have access to a broad, relevant, and differentiated curriculum, through the use of appropriate teaching approaches tailored to individual needs and learning styles		
The curriculum is responsive to academic learning, social, wellbeing, communication and life skills needs of students, and includes certification options as relevant		
There is a commitment to preparing students for adulthood, through the holistic development of their daily living skills, problem-solving and independence		
The emotional wellbeing of students with autism is monitored and students are supported to identify and regulate their emotional states		
Students with autism have access to enhanced and differentiated learning in the areas of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)		
Students have access to extra-curricular activities where their interests are fostered and developed, and which provide opportunities for social contact with the broader community		
<b>Priority area for further development</b>		



## Key Principle 8: Use of evidence-informed practice

Use of evidence-informed practice to enhance the educational experience and lifelong, learning outcomes for all students, including effective transition planning within and between settings.

Indicator: What this looks like in school practice	Developed	Developing
There is a whole-school focus on evidence-informed proactive interventions including the establishment of well-structured environments and teaching students adaptive ways of getting their needs met		
Interventions in response to behaviours of concern are informed by positive behaviour supports and an understanding of the functions of behaviour		
Following a comprehensive identification of strengths and needs, teachers draw on evidence-informed practices to support the development of academic, social, emotional, behavioural, communication and life skills		
Interventions are initiated promptly and include opportunities for peer collaborations and strong home-school links to support the generalisation of students' skills		
Communication systems (e.g. Picture Exchange Communication System [PECS], LÁMH) are regularly reviewed and students are supported and encouraged to communicate for a range of purposes		
Transitions are carefully planned in consultation with parents and students, and a post-school transition plan is developed in advance of completing school as part of an ongoing accreditation process, as appropriate		
The Student Support Plan records learning targets, interventions, reviews and outcomes where learning objectives and strategies are adapted accordingly		
<b>Priority area for further development</b>		

# Eight Domains of Support – Indicators of Effective Practice

Eight domains of support and associated indicators of effective practice are set out below to support schools in reviewing and developing specific aspects of whole-school inclusive practice for students with autism.



Figure 2: Eight domains of support



## The Learning Environment

The following statements are provided to assist schools to reflect on practice relating to the learning environment and to help identify areas for further development.

	Learning Environment	Developed	Developing
Identification	Students' needs, in relation to whole-school learning environments, are assessed using autism specific assessment tools including checklists, interview, and observation		
	Students' needs are considered with regard to the physical environment, visual supports, transitions, and behavioural and task expectations		
Intervention	<b>Physical Environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The classroom is arranged to allow accessibility and easy management of materials (e.g. use of labels, visuals and colour coding)</li> <li>Sensory stimuli (e.g. noise and light) are considered when preparing a workspace/ workstation which may be used for short periods, as appropriate</li> <li>Adaptions are in place to address sensory needs</li> <li>A calming space is available to support emotional and/or sensory regulation as required</li> </ul>		
	<b>Visual Supports</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visual schedules/timetables are used to provide predictability and structure to the school day</li> <li>Individualised visual supports are used to support learning and task engagement (e.g. first-then system)</li> </ul>		
	<b>Transitions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visual schedules and routines have been established to support transitions between activities/environments</li> <li>A consistent and clear timekeeping method is provided for students as required (e.g. sand timers/digital timers)</li> </ul>		
	<b>Behavioural and task expectations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class rules and routines are developed in collaboration with students and regularly reinforced using visual aids</li> <li>Behavioural expectations are developmentally appropriate and meaningful for students</li> <li>Task expectations are set out clearly and supported by visual aids</li> </ul>		
Monitoring and reviewing outcomes	The learning environment checklists, together with the views of students and parents, are used to monitor the effectiveness of adaptations and strategies		
	Following a careful review of targets, intervention strategies and outcomes related to the learning environment, support plans are updated and a subsequent review date set		
<b>Priority areas for further development</b>			



## Language and Communication Development

The following statements are provided to assist schools to reflect on practice relating to language and communication development and to help identify areas for further development.

	Language and Communication Development	Developed	Developing
Identification	Students' language and communication skills have been assessed in collaboration with parents and the Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) and learning objectives have been identified. Students' views are considered as part of this process		
	The school has developed support plans that include time-bound language and communication goals and learning objectives, which are shared with all involved		
Intervention	Students' motivation to communicate and attend to instruction is promoted (e.g. use of high interest topics and activities)		
	Teaching approaches are adapted by reducing and simplifying language, avoiding the use of ambiguities and idioms and providing sufficient time for the student to process and understand verbal instruction		
	Students have access to alternative or augmentative communication systems where necessary		
	Language and communication skills are explicitly taught and opportunities to practice in different situations and contexts to promote generalisation		
	Students' language and communication skills have been reviewed in collaboration with school staff, parents and SLT as appropriate. Students' views are considered as part of this process		
Monitoring and Reviewing Outcomes	Following a careful review of targets, intervention strategies and outcomes related to language and communication development, support plans are updated and a subsequent review date set		
Priority areas for further development			





## Social Development

The following statements are provided to assist schools to reflect on their practice relating to social development, and to help identify areas for further development

	Social Development	Developed	Developing
Identification	Students' social development skills have been assessed using observation, interview and checklists and include the views of students, parent and teachers		
	Priority learning needs regarding students' social skills have been agreed		
	Support needs in relation to the student's engagement in leisure and play activities have been identified		
Intervention	A variety of evidence-informed approaches, (e.g. scripting, modelling, prompting and reinforcement strategies) are used to teach social skills and to promote social interaction		
	Opportunities are provided to practice social skills across home and school to increase the generalisation of skills		
	Incidental teaching, planned learning opportunities and peer support programmes are used to promote skills development		
	The school community supports students with autism to use social skills in daily school activities through scaffolding and structured opportunities		
	Support plans include strategies to develop participation in leisure and recreational activities		
	The school's anti-bullying policy is reviewed to ensure a safe environment for all students, including those with autism		
Monitoring and Reviewing Outcomes	Regular reviews of the progress of students' social development and outcomes of interventions are informed through observation, interview and checklists		
	Following a careful review of targets, intervention strategies and outcomes related to social development, support plans are updated and a subsequent review date set		
<b>Priority areas for further development</b>			



## Emotional Development

The following statements are provided to assist schools to reflect on their practice relating to emotional development and to help identify areas for further development:

	Emotional Development	Developed	Developing
Identification	Whole-school autism-friendly approaches that foster a calm low arousal school environment and promote students' sense of wellbeing, security and belonging, have been identified		
	Students' skills in recognising, labelling and expressing emotions in themselves and others have been identified		
	Students' capacity to problem-solve and regulate their emotions within social-emotional interactions at a level appropriate to their ability, have been identified		
Intervention	Collaborative home/school links are developed which focus on building positive relationships and on fostering the mediating role supporting adults play in promoting emotional development		
	The school has accessed external professional advice as necessary, to meet students' emotional wellbeing needs		
	Opportunities for the teaching of emotional awareness are incorporated into interventions across the Continuum of Support		
	Interventions for supporting emotional development are based on an understanding of the Emotional Arousal Cycle		
	Students are supported in identifying causes of emotional dysregulation in themselves and others		
	Students are provided with opportunities to practice and generalise a range of emotional coping strategies and problem-solving skills		
Monitoring and Reviewing Outcomes	In collaboration with parents and the student, the school has reviewed students' response to interventions which targeted emotional awareness, emotional regulation and social-emotional problem-solving		
	Following a careful review of targets, intervention strategies and outcomes related to emotional development, support plans are updated and a subsequent review date set		
Priority areas for further development			







## Sensory Processing

The following statements are provided to assist schools to reflect on their practice relating to students with sensory processing needs and to identify areas for further development:

	Sensory Processing	Developed	Developing
Identification	Students, teachers, parents and external professionals (e.g. occupational therapists) collaborate in identifying sensory needs, constructing a sensory profile and designing appropriate sensory interventions		
	Students' sensory environments have been assessed to determine whether modifications are required		
	Responses to sensory input are identified and recorded in order to establish baseline measures against which the effectiveness of modifications and strategies can be evaluated		
Intervention	Classrooms and school spaces are organised to minimise sensory experiences that may be distracting/uncomfortable for students		
	Students have access to sensory experiences required for self-regulation as indicated in their sensory diet or profile (e.g. a quiet area, movement breaks)		
	Students are facilitated in indicating their need for a movement/sensory/calming break as necessary		
	Student responses are monitored and recorded when introducing new sensory strategies/activities and modifications made as required		
	Students are prepared in advance, for sensory stimuli which may be present in new activities or environments		
	Sensory based recommendations are consistently implemented by all staff, across all school settings		
Monitoring and Re-viewing Outcomes	Parents, students, school staff and external professionals have been involved in monitoring responses to sensory interventions and in making modifications as required		
	Following a careful review of targets, intervention strategies and outcomes related to students' sensory programmes, support plans have been updated and a subsequent review date set		
<b>Priority areas for further development</b>			



## Functional Skills for Daily Living

The following statements are provided to assist schools to reflect on their practice relating to functional skills for daily living and to identify areas for further development:

	Functional Skills for Daily Living	Developed	Developing
Identification	In collaboration with parents and students, information is gathered on students' functional skills across school and home settings		
	Students' demonstration of functional skills has been observed and assessed, as either emerging/completed with assistance/prompting, completed independently, or demonstrated across settings		
	Priority targets have been identified to promote students' problem-solving skills and level of independence		
Intervention	Structured teaching and learning activities and modifications to the school environment are used to promote students' engagement and independence		
	Functional skills are divided into incremental steps that are taught and reinforced using visual approaches		
	Functional skills are promoted through the curriculum and through targeted interventions at group and/or individual level		
	Students are provided with opportunities to practice skills across home and school settings		
Monitoring and Reviewing Outcomes	Students' progress in relation to priority targets are assessed across settings using observations/ interviews/standardised assessment tools		
	Following a careful review of targets, intervention strategies and outcomes related to functional skills, support plans are updated and a subsequent review date set		
<b>Priority areas for further development</b>			





## Academic Development

The following statements are provided to assist schools to reflect on their practice relating to academic development and to help identify areas for further development:

	Academic Development	Developed	Developing
Identification	Information is gathered on how well the environment is structured to meet the needs of autistic students, in addition to data on their strengths, abilities, areas of interest and motivators for learning		
	Assessment methods are adapted to meet the needs of students with autism, and information is gathered on their learning profile and progress across the curriculum		
Intervention	Students have access to a broad, adapted curriculum and to certified learning options as appropriate		
	Differentiation of teaching approaches, materials, content and pace, match lessons to students' needs		
	Language differences are considered when planning academic tasks and appropriate modifications and supports provided		
	In partnership with parents, students' strengths and interests are incorporated into academic tasks, and students are supported to participate in setting learning goals.		
	Academic instruction is informed by a variety of evidence-informed teaching approaches including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual structured teaching approaches</li> <li>• Behavioural teaching approaches</li> <li>• Communication based programmes</li> </ul>		
	Strategies are in place to support organisational skills and to foster independence around study skills and examination preparation		
Monitoring and Reviewing Outcomes	Digital learning and assistive technology approaches are used to support students' communication and learning		
	In consultation with parents and students, a variety of assessment approaches are used to assess students' progress in relation to priority learning targets		
	Following a careful review of targets, intervention strategies and outcomes related to academic development, support plans are updated and a subsequent review date set		
Priority areas for further development			



## Behavioural Development

The following statements are provided to assist schools to reflect on their practice relating to behavioural needs and to help identify areas for further development

	Behavioural Development	Developed	Developing
Identification	A student's behaviour has been observed and consideration given to basic needs, environmental and interpersonal supports, skill development needs, and an understanding of the possible function of the behaviour		
	A person-centred approach is used to enable students to communicate their views, experiences and what might help meet their needs		
	Information has been gathered from a range of sources, as part of a comprehensive, holistic approach to understanding the student's behaviour across contexts		
Intervention	Students, parents and school staff have been consulted on strategies to improve the student's quality of life by reflecting on their strengths, needs, skills and experiences		
	Planned proactive approaches using positive behaviour supports, are in place at whole-school, class, and individual levels, to address behaviours of concern		
	Proactive strategies, informed by an understanding of the possible reasons why the behaviour is occurring, are included in the student support plan to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address any unmet basic needs</li> <li>• Respond to strengths and needs across domains</li> <li>• Create supportive environments</li> <li>• Strengthen interpersonal supports</li> <li>• Teach and reinforce targeted skills</li> </ul>		
	Reactive strategies are in place if required, including low arousal approaches and ensuring the safety of the student and others		
Monitoring and Reviewing Outcomes	Staff consistently implement and regularly review intervention approaches by considering if behavioural goals have been met, including the development of more prosocial behaviours and improvements to the student's quality of life		
	The contributions of all supporting adults, and where possible the students themselves, form part of the reflection on outcomes and the adaptation of the support plan as appropriate		
	Following a review of targets, intervention strategies and outcomes, the student's support plan is updated and a subsequent review date set		
<b>Priority areas for further development</b>			



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