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Views of children and young people with autism on:

What makes a good school for pupils with autism

(Analysed and compiled by Damian Milton and Katerina Giannadou)

Note on the sample:

Children and young people with autism completed a brief form to give information on what they considered to be important school and education. These responses were used in the development of the Standards. A total of 32 children and young people completed the survey and their replies are given under the four themes used within the Standards.

Theme: Individual pupil

Important aspects were:

- Being given space by adults when needed

- Having trained staff who can guide learning in a differentiated way

- Helping the child to understand their autism, anger or other issues

Difficult aspects were:

- Waiting

- Anger

- A lack of understanding from staff

- Transitions

- Memory issues

Theme: Building relationships

Important aspects were:

- Supportive friends

- Supportive staff that listen

- Rules on behaviour that adults and peers follow too

Difficult aspects were:

- Bullying

- Friends can be overwhelming and can be the 'bullies'

- Not being given space to be on one's own

- Being mocked

Theme: Curriculum and learning

Under this theme, some subjects were enjoyed by pupils with autism and others were not. This highlights the need to ask the individual pupil and not to make generalisations and assumptions from our general knowledge of autism.

Important aspects were:

- Trips
- IT
- Swimming – P.E.
- Science
- Being given help
- Maths
- English or Literacy
- Use of pictures (visual stimuli)
- Video clips and DVDs
- Art
- More time to do work
- Rewards
- R.E.
- Using special interests in learning process
- Cooking club
- Teaching assistant support
- History
- Geography
- Design and Technology
- Working in groups with clear rules of engagement
- Using games in lessons

Difficult aspects were:

- Letters and Sounds
- Maths
- Literacy or English
- French
- P.E.
- Geography
- History
- R.E.
- IT
- Science

The biggest difficulty is in English and Literacy – which may be overlapping with difficulties in Maths (with increasing using of tests written in a style that requires verbal reasoning).

Theme: Enabling environments

Important aspects were:

- Secret garden or play area
- Accessible play areas
- Enough personal space in playground
- Sensory room
- Shorter days
- School monitoring of behaviour and bullying
- Small and tidy building
- Spacious classrooms
- Libraries
- Permanent staff (consistency)
- Individual support
- Equipment that works and is taken care of
- Peers that help with learning process
- Interesting things on the walls (but tidy)
- No crowds
- Quiet environment

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Difficult aspects were:

- Climbing stairs

- Uncomfortable seating

- Finishing things by time limits

- Transitions

- Crowds

- Big complex buildings

- Uncomfortable school clothes

- School dinners (food)

- Things to do and structured activities at break time

- Cancellations

- Vandalism

In summary: having personal space, time to finish things, no crowds, and people looking after the environment – so that it is tidy and orderly, and things to do at break times (without getting bullied in the process).