autism education trust

IOE LONDON
Leading education and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

What is good practice in autism education?

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Centre for Research in Autism and Education
www.ioe.ac.uk/crae/

Research Brief

AET commissioned research into existing good practice:

- What good practice guidance already exists?
- Schools with identified ‘good practice’
- Conduct on-site research into good practice in these schools
- Describe common and individual practices across schools
- Make recommendations for practice and policy
- Identify knowledge gaps
- Highlight areas for future research

http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/resources/good_practice_report.aspx

Research Brief

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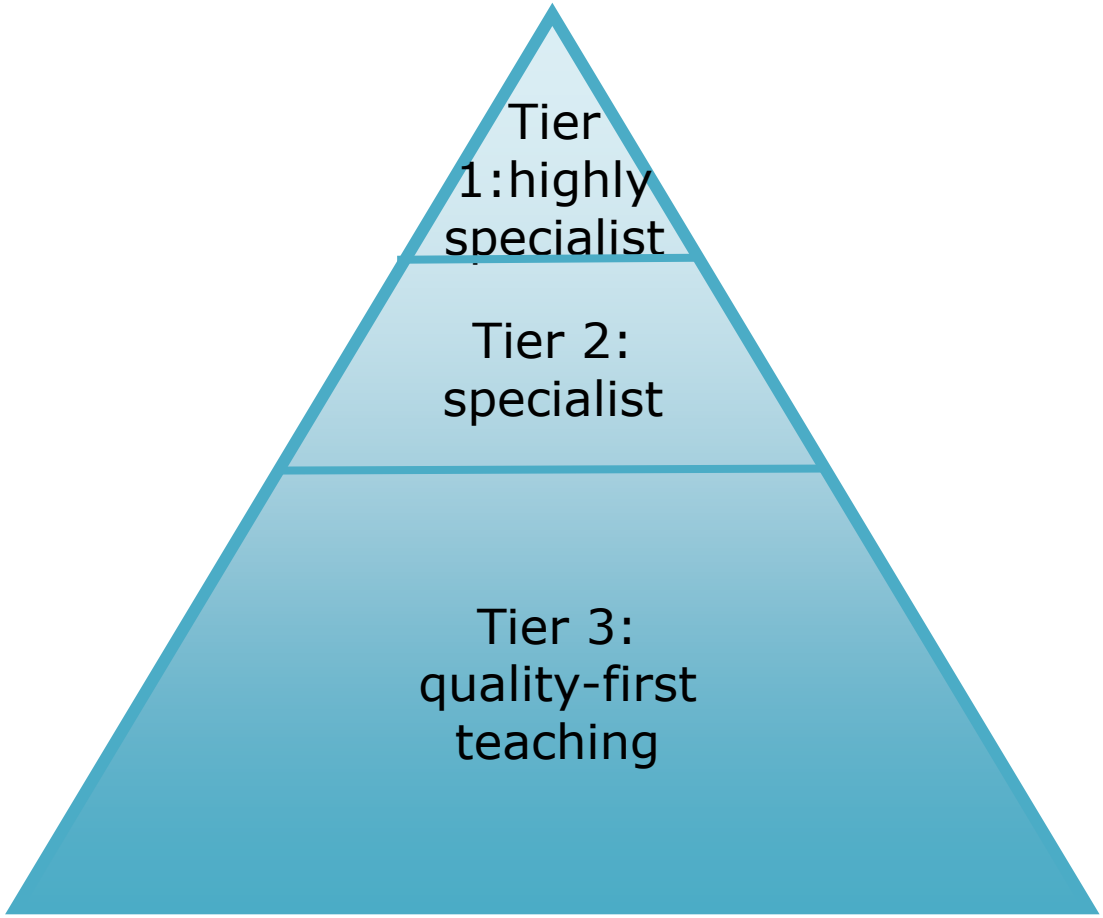
Contextualising autism good practice



Selection of Schools

- A convenience sample; not a systematic or representative sample
  - Initial list developed by AET
  - Special schools (SEN, autism specific) had ‘Outstanding’ or ‘Good with outstanding features’ Ofsted reports
  - Mainstream schools with commended autism provision
  - Some geographical spread in England but London/SE over-represented
  - Pragmatic choice constrained by timetable and budget

	Age range	Type	Sector	Ofsted
School 1	2 to 5 years	ASD school	Non-maintained	Outstanding
School 2	11 to 18 years	MS with ARB	LA	Outstanding
School 3	4 to 16 years	ASD school	Non-maintained	Outstanding
School 4	3 to 19 years	ASD school	Non-maintained	Good with outstanding features
School 5	11 to 19 years	Special school	LA	Good with outstanding features
School 6	3 to 19 years	Special school	LA	Outstanding
School 7	3 to 19 years	ASD school	Non-maintained	Outstanding
School 8	4 to 19 years	ASD school	LA	Outstanding
School 9	3 to 19 years	ASD school	LA	Outstanding
School 10	2 to 19 years	Special school	LA	Outstanding
School 11	3 to 11 years	MS with ARB	LA	Good with outstanding features
School 12	3 to 11 years	MS with ARB	LA	Good with outstanding features
School 13	11 to 18 years	MS with ARB	LA	Outstanding
School 14	3 to 12 years	MS with ARB	LA	Outstanding
School 15	11 to 19 years	Special school	LA	Outstanding
School 16	3 to 11 years	MS with ARB	LA	Good with outstanding features

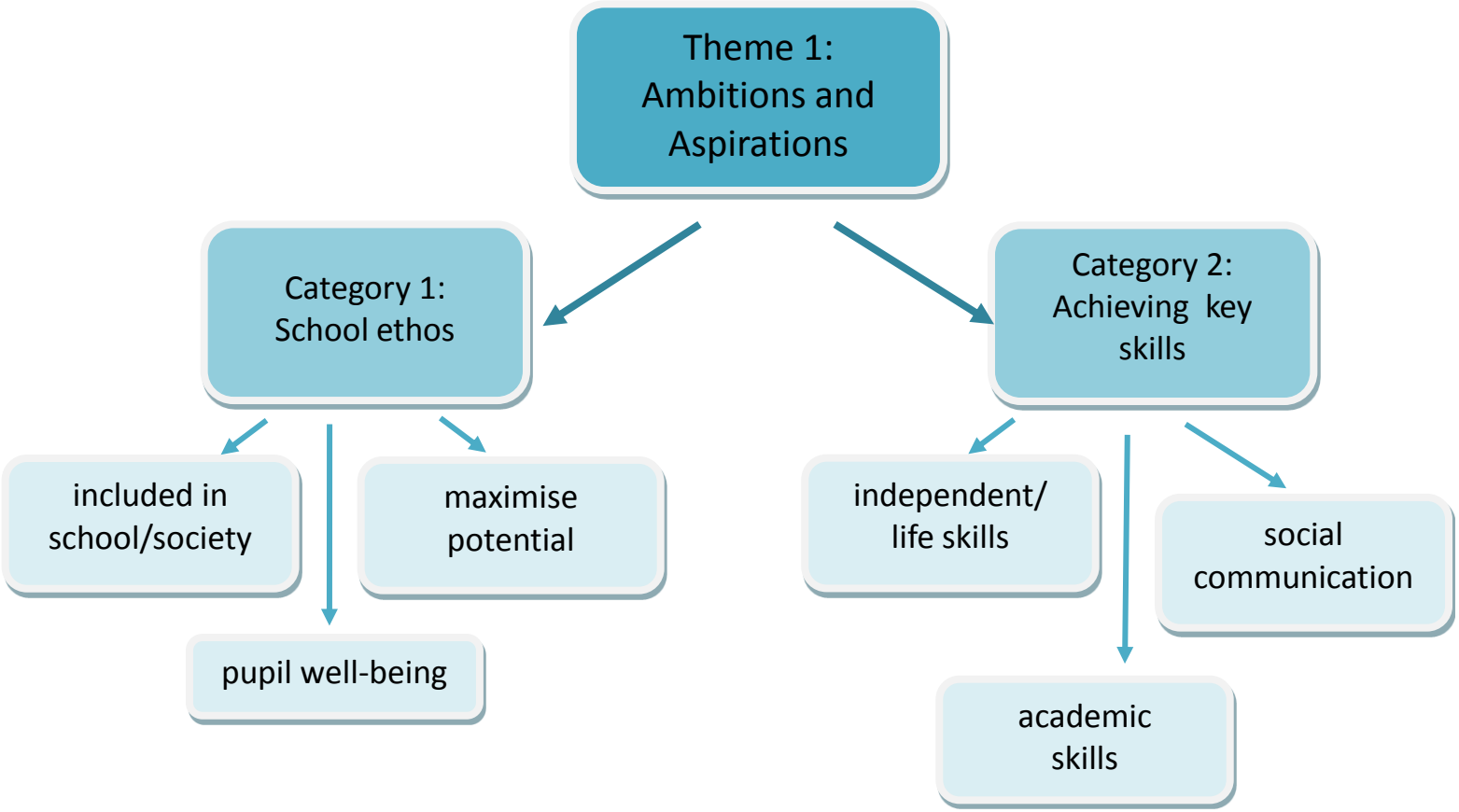
Methods

- Qualitative, in-depth interviews
- Topic guide developed from literature review; previous studies + pilot interview
- 20 interviews (3 ‘phone) with 29 staff
- Interviews with 11 pupils (5 schools)
- 1 parent focus group + 1 parent interview
- Interviews all fully transcribed
- Thematic analysis conducted using framework system (with some cross-coding)

Interviewees

Role	**Number of staff interviewed**
Head of Service	2
Head Teacher/Principal	8
Deputy Head	2
Head of Inclusion	2
Head of Autism Resource Base	3
Head of Further Education	1
Outreach Team Member	2
Class Teacher	3
Teaching Assistant	2
SENCo	2
Speech and Language Therapist	2
TOTAL	**29**

Ambitions and Aspirations

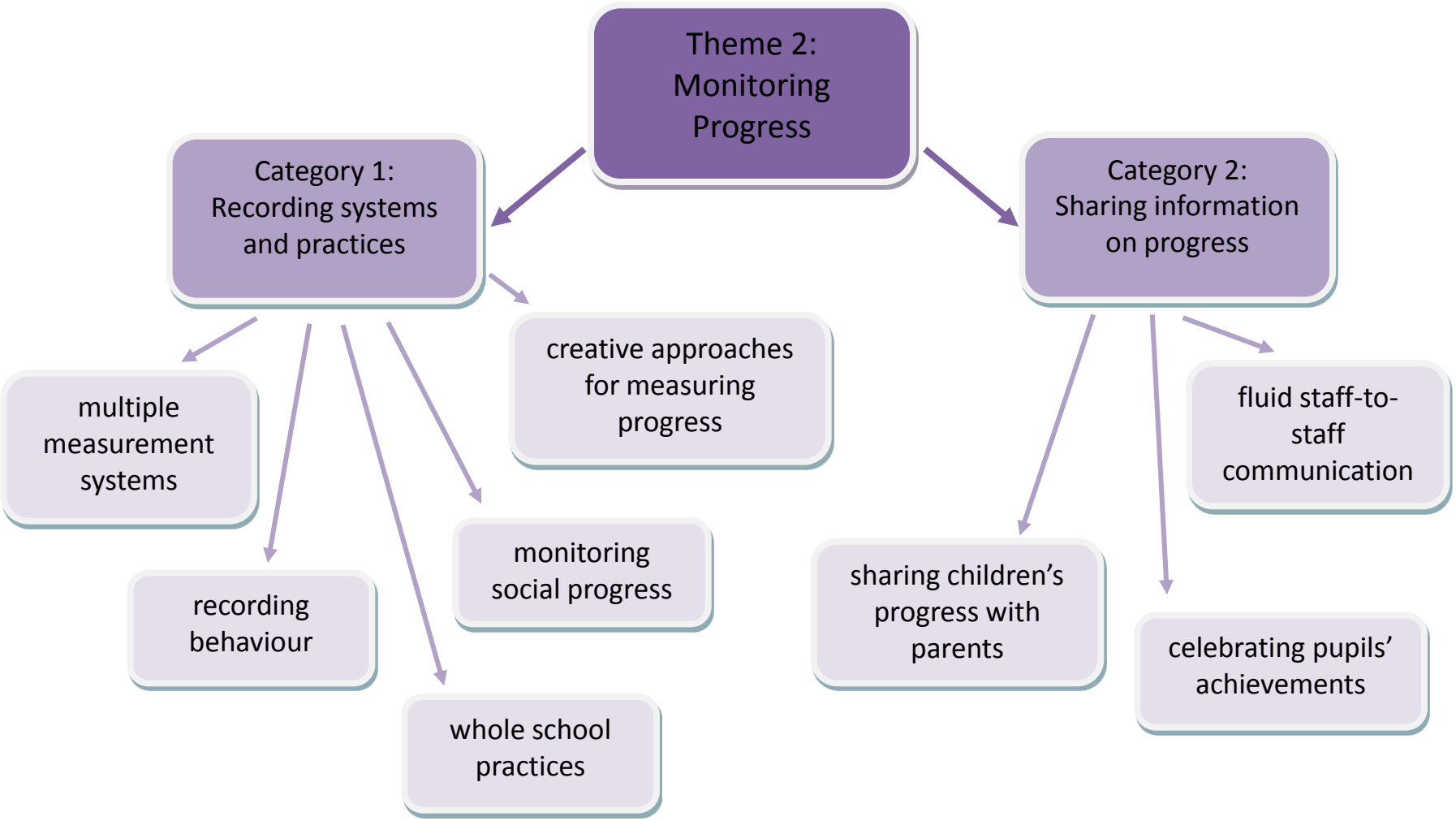


Ambitions and Aspirations

"… for them to be included in mainstream schools and mainstream society; to be able to go on to college and hold down a job and have meaningful and productive lives."

"I'd hope that they'd be as independent as possible by the time that they leave this school, as independent as it's possible for them to be."

Monitoring Progress

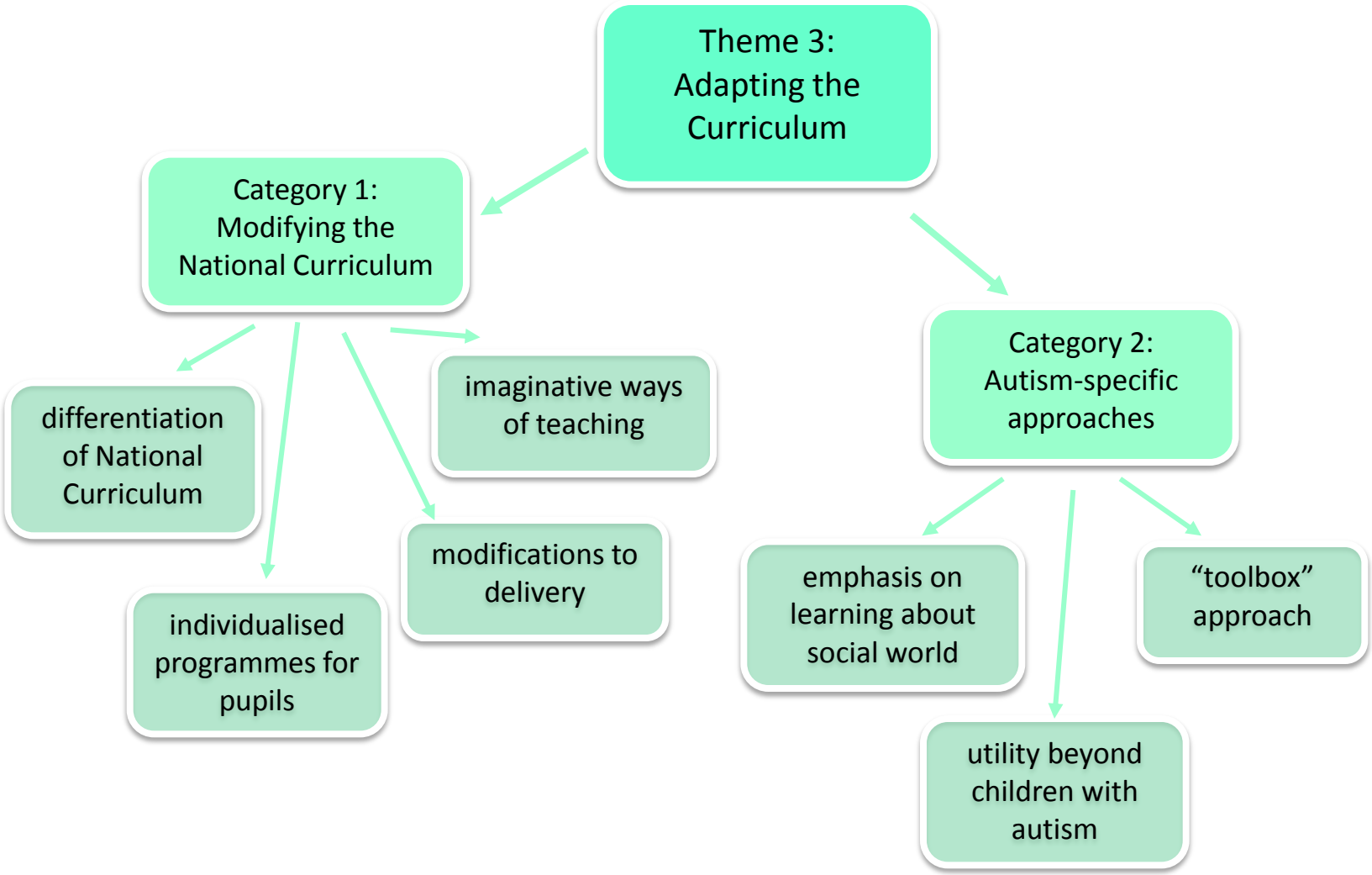


Monitoring Progress

"… it looks at communication, adapted behaviours … and obviously social progress … working in a group, and maintaining themselves to be able to cope with unstructured time."

"… sometimes I email photos of things to the parents; some of the children don't go home and communicate to the parents what they've done, so it's quite nice for them to have an email or something."

Adapting the Curriculum

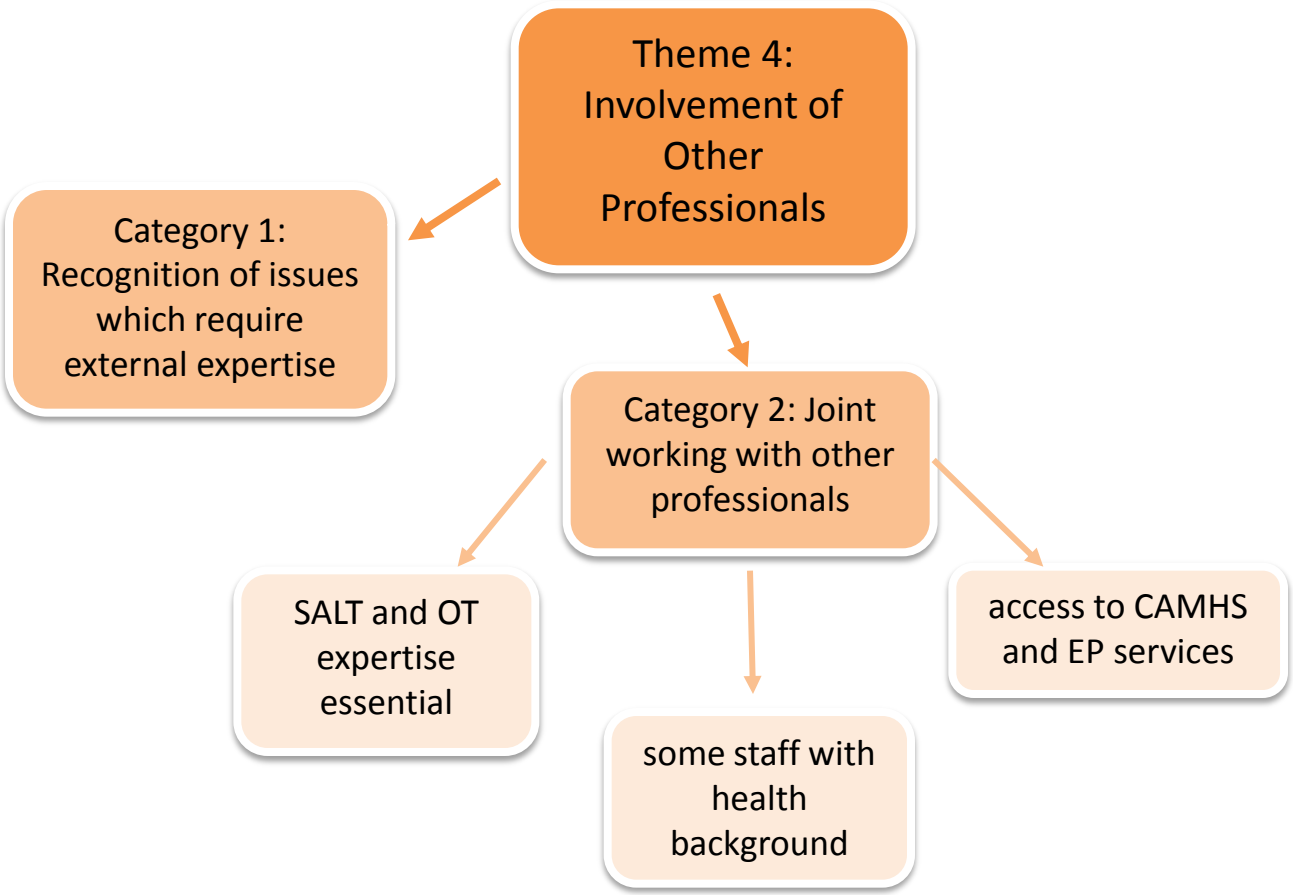


Adapting the Curriculum

"But we would be setting an IEP and individual targets that contain both elements of the NC and what we would see more as the autism specific curriculum … focusing on areas related to the triad and sensory differences I suppose in simple terms."

"Social stories, cartooning … and I think, by sharing in our meetings and so on the benefits, you then get people thinking, well I've got a situation with so-and-so here; I could use that with them."

Involvement of Other Professionals

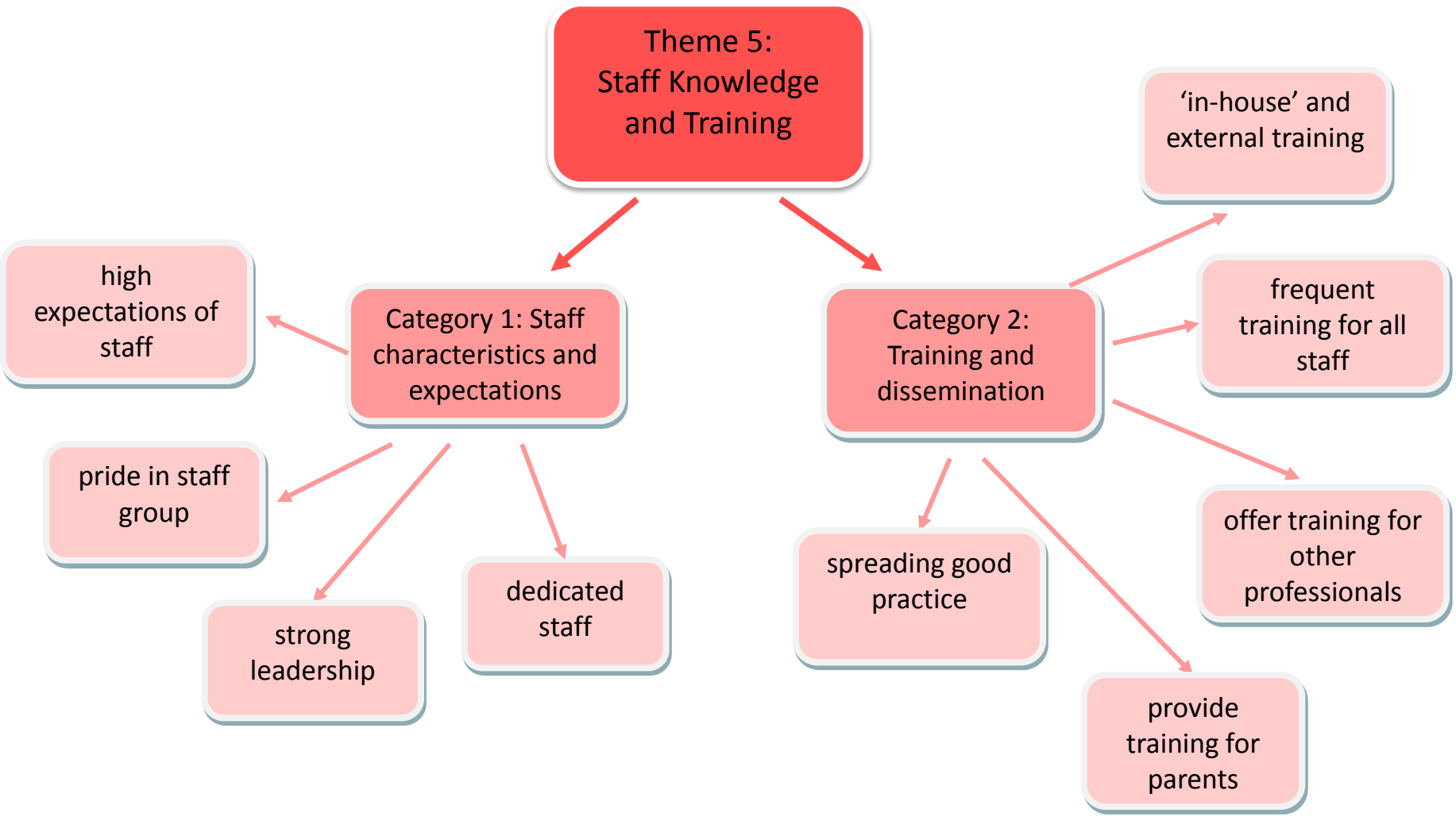


Involvement of Other Professionals

"The classic child within that group is … children with a more able Asperger or other sort of profile, perhaps with additional mental health issues or complex issues as part of their ASD diagnosis."

"If the child's not moving on, how then do we adapt the strategies that we're using? And that should be very much based in the class. So the SALT has regular communication meetings with the class staff."

Staff Knowledge & Training

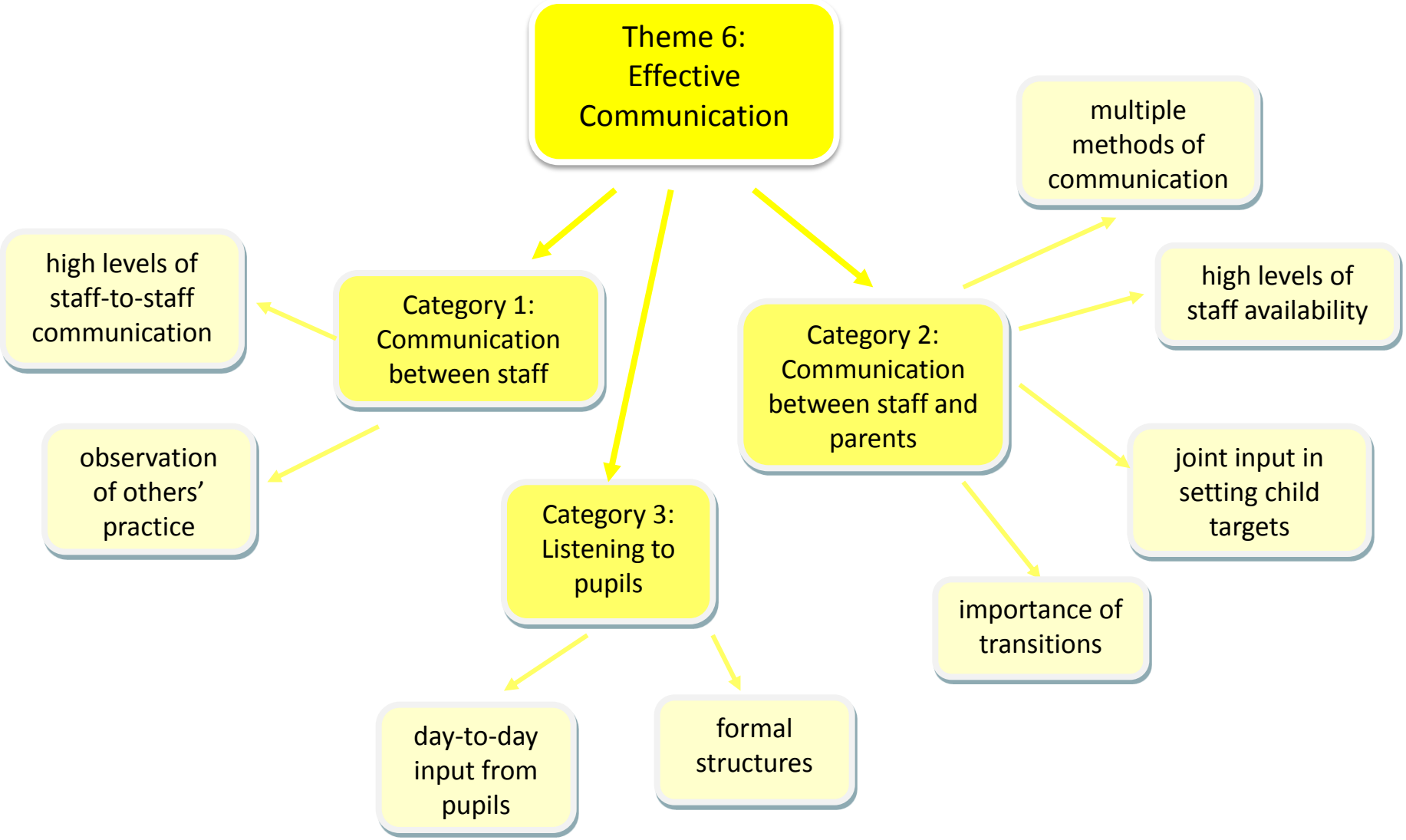


Staff Knowledge & Training

"That's what I'm most proud of actually – the staff's ability to work with such terribly demanding, challenging young people and absolutely really loving it and seeing the response that you get from children."

"We have a whole tranche of training, right from autism awareness, which is sort of two hours with the bus drivers … right through to Masters."

Effective Communication

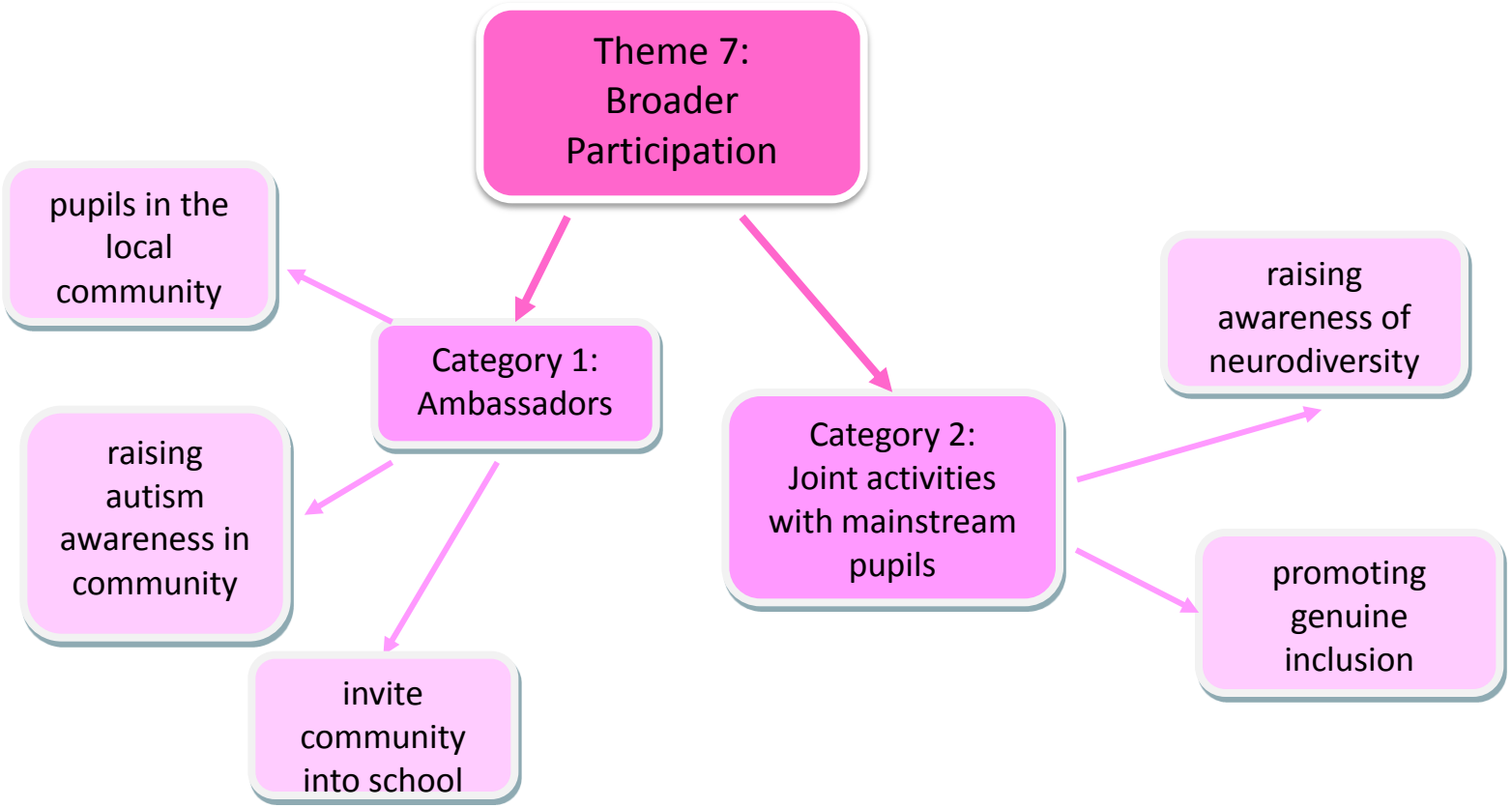


Effective Communication

"And then every Friday we have a departmental meeting and one of the items on the agenda is always sort of ASD issues."

"That was the key thing. Could email and say [CHILD'S NAME] was particularly upset about something today. Warning of triggers." [parent]

Broader Participation

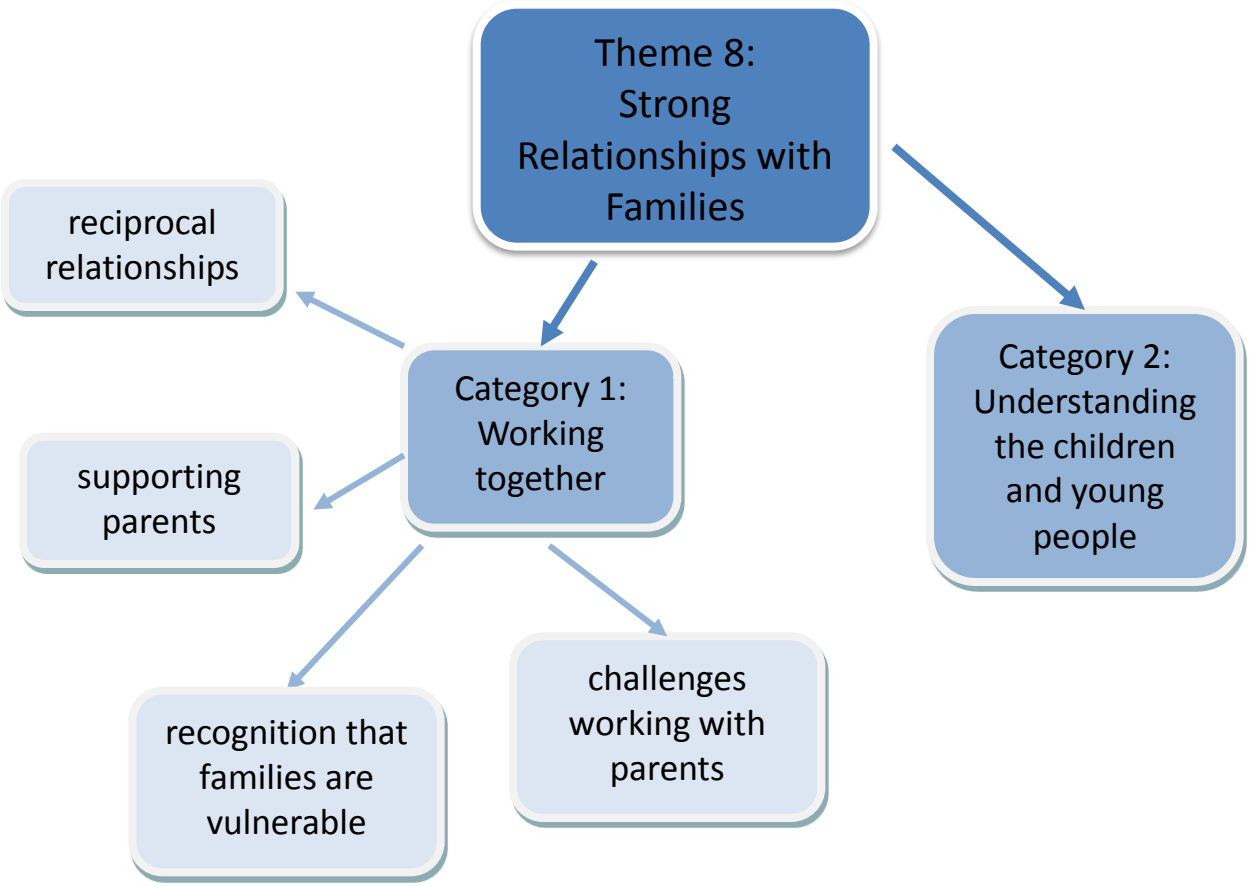


Broader Participation

"… the other parallel ambition is to work with the wider community as much as possible to teach them as much as possible about autism."

"… in Year 10 and 11 they do the junior sports leaders, so they're working with the local primary school children and teaching them, so that they can get their reward."

Strong Relationship with Families



Strong Relationship with Families

"…right from the start that makes the parents feel that the school sees their child as important, that they see their views as important…you set off on the road of engaging them as partners."

"… it would be good to be able to support the parents more. We do have a parent liaison officer who works very hard to do that, but that is a very difficult task."

"They are friendly and very supportive and they are very calm about everything…if you wanted time out on your own they would wait until you calm down and give you time to yourself." [14-year-old pupil]

Core Principles of Good Practice (1-8)

1. High ambitions for all pupils.
2. Embed specialist, evidence-informed approaches in quality-first teaching.
3. Increase the range of learning opportunities for developing independent living skills.
4. Celebrate and value achievements of pupils and staff.
5. Use multiple systems for recording progress of academic attainments *and* behavioural and social outcomes.
6. Use innovative and individualised methods of adapting the curriculum.
7. Encourage joint planning and working with health and education professionals.
8. Select and value motivated, enthusiastic and empathetic staff.

Core Principles of Good Practice (9-15)

9. Build and consolidate autism expertise at a consistently high level for *all* staff.
10. Disseminate practice and share expertise with schools and professionals in the local community, and with parents.
11. Develop a close working, reciprocal relationship with parents.
12. Seek to build strong connections with pupils, and ensure that they are active participants in their education.
13. Recognise parents' need for supports so that learning continues outside the school.
14. Raise awareness about autism broader community, ensuring that pupils with autism have meaningful, visible participation in local activities.
15. Strong leadership and a clear vision.

Novel findings

- ‘Centre of excellence’ model
  - Training other staff, sharing good practice
  - SEND Green Paper (‘share expertise and services’)
- Reciprocal relationships with families
  - Genuine connections between teachers and parents; and teachers and pupils
- Community ambassadors
  - Raising awareness about autism; enabling students to be included in community
- High aspirations for pupils with autism
  - Well-being√ Independence√ Attainment?
- Schools describe need for a broader curriculum for their pupils - an ‘autism curriculum’?

Knowledge Gaps and Future Research

- Good practice vs. Effective practice – Not (necessarily) the same thing!
  - Several reports on the former; many fewer of the latter
- Need to test implementation of practice
  - Even for better evidenced approaches
- How to choose which measures to measure what outcomes?
  - Schools use many measures beyond KS and P levels informed by own experience
- Models and effectiveness of joint working
  - Intuitively a 'good idea' but is it effective?
- Developing a 'relational', rather than a 'transactional', approach to autism education

Elephants in the Report/Room

- Do we need an 'autism curriculum' alongside the NC?
  - Prioritising social, emotional and independence targets?
  - Embedding opportunities for these within delivery of the NC and focus on learning/attainments
- Less active involvement of pupils in setting IEPs and choices/decisions than we had anticipated
  - A challenge across the spectrum
- Schools recognise families needs for support but are unable to adequately provide this support
  - Can this inform joint EHCP from SEND green paper?

What does the field need?

- Better research to determine whether there is an autistic 'learning style' related to an autistic cognitive profile
- Test the effectiveness (and limits) of autism-specific interventions using RCTs
  - Some evidence for PECS
  - Little evidence for other popular approaches such as sensory processing
- Address the challenge to include parents and pupils voice in IEP planning in a meaningful way
- Working to ensure schools and teachers are central to the joint health, education and social care assessments and planning (see NICE)

Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE)

"Improving outcomes for people with autism"

CRAE is generously supported by

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