# Mainstreaming autism: from research to practice

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# Who we are

- Neil Humphrey
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# Overview

- The challenge of inclusion for students with ASC

- What does research evidence tell us?

- What can be done?

- Time for questions

# The challenge of inclusion for students with ASC

- Inclusion is not just about going to mainstream school – it is about presence, participation, acceptance, and achievement
- *Excellence for All Children* (DfEE, 1997) resulted in sharp rise in numbers of pupils with ASC attending mainstream schools in England
  - e.g. 16% increase from 1997-2001 (Keen & Ward, 2004)
- This has evened off more recently
  - e.g. less than 1% change from 2004-2010 (DfES, 2004; DCSF, 2010)
- Around 70% of pupils with primary need reported as ASC receiving provision at School Action Plus or with a Statement of SEN attend a mainstream school (DCSF, 2010)
  - At secondary level:
    - Pupils with primary need reported as ASC make up 6.6% of all pupils with special educational needs receiving provision at School Action Plus or with a Statement of SEN in secondary mainstream schools in England
    - 18,170 pupils with primary need reported as ASC receiving provision at School Action Plus or with a Statement of SEN in secondary mainstream schools in England
    - Of these, approximately 60% have Statements of SEN (DCSF, 2010)

# The challenge of inclusion for students with ASC

- Pupils with an ASC are around 8 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than pupils without SEN (0.27% compared to 0.04%) (DCSF, 2009; 2010)

- They are most likely to be excluded due to a physical assault against another pupil or adult (DCSF, 2010)

- Teachers' relationships with pupils with ASC are associated with the amount of problem behaviour they display and their social inclusion within the classroom (Robertson, Chamberlain & Kasari, 2003)

- Teachers experience tensions relating to frustration over the enduring effects of emotional and behavioural manifestations of ASC (Emam & Farrell, 2009)

- "Children with an ASC… provide an excellent example of… where significant cracks exist in the system, to the detriment of those who fall between them" (HOCESC, 2006, p.18)

# The challenge of inclusion for students with ASC

- There is often an assumption that because of pupil with ASC is academically able, he or she should be able to cope in mainstream education (Moore, 2007)

- Difficulties in social interaction and communication can increase risk of and exposure to bullying and social isolation (NAS, 2006)

- Preference for routine, predictability and low sensory stimulation is at odds with the noisy, bustling and often chaotic mainstream school environment – meaning it can be a very stressful place for pupils with an ASC (Carrington & Graham, 2001)

- Typical cognitive profile and preferred learning style of pupils with an ASC can challenge professional assumptions about teaching and learning (Jordan, 2005)

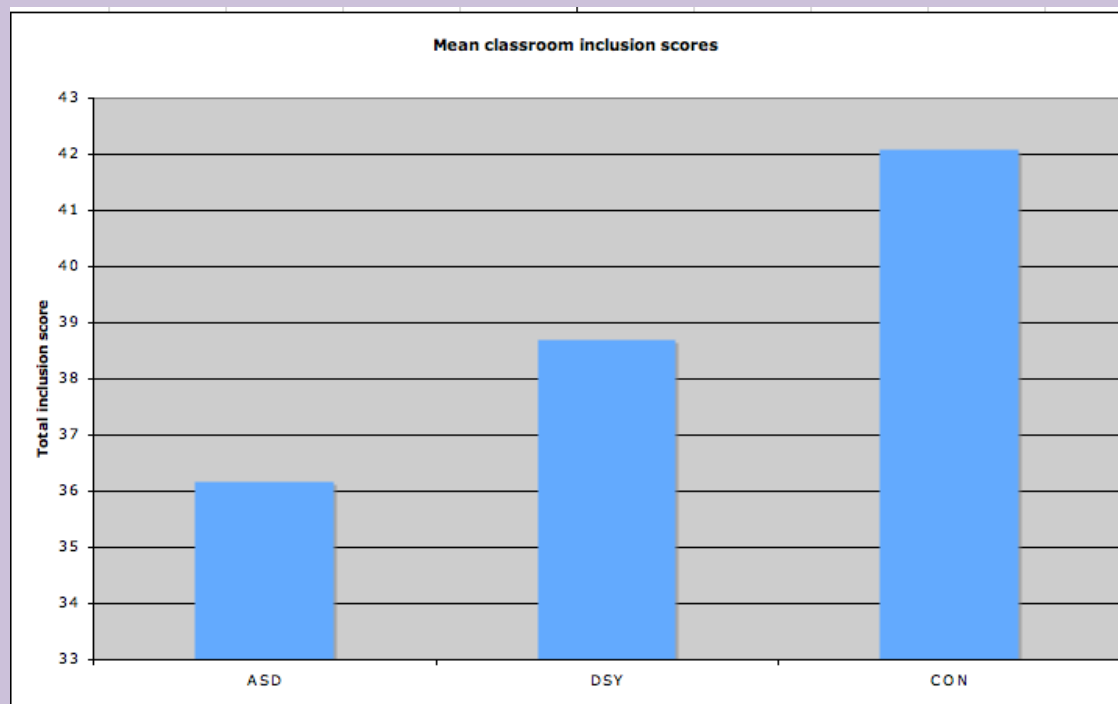# What does research evidence tell us? Peer relationships

- Peer interaction patterns (Humphrey & Symes, 2011)

- Bullying and social support (Humphrey & Symes, 2010)

- Social acceptance (Symes & Humphrey, 2010)
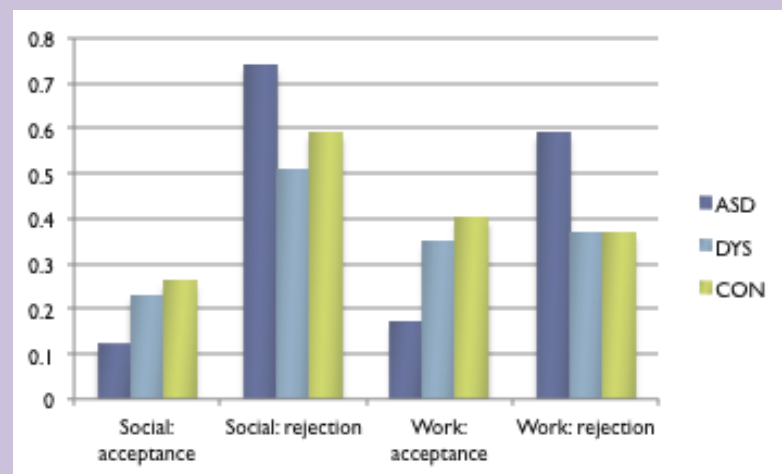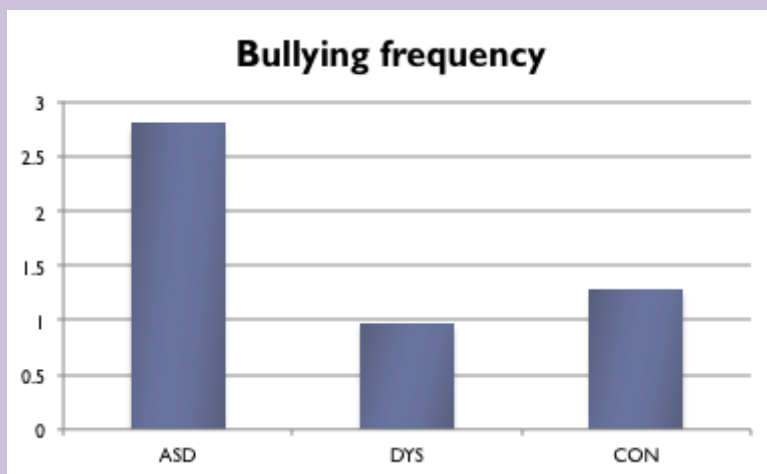
# What does research evidence tell us? Participation in the classroom

- Extent to which students with ASC are effectively included in lessons (Symes & Humphrey, 2012)

# What does research evidence tell us?
# Students' views and their mental health

- Students' experience of school and understanding of their ASC (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008)

- Mental health issues (Hebron & Humphrey, 2012)
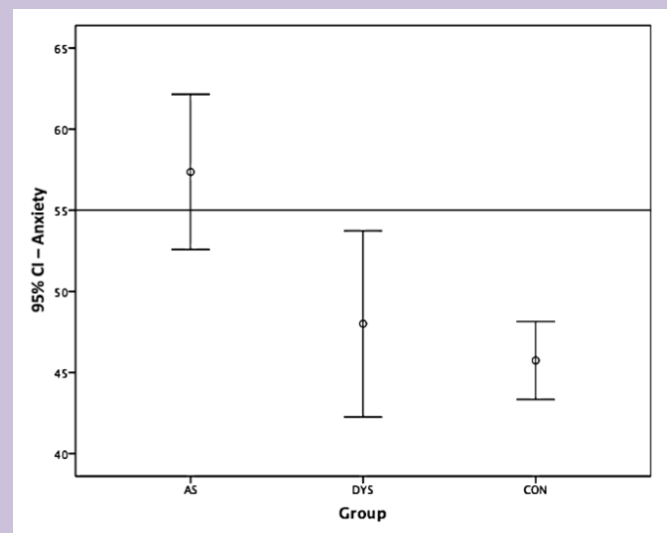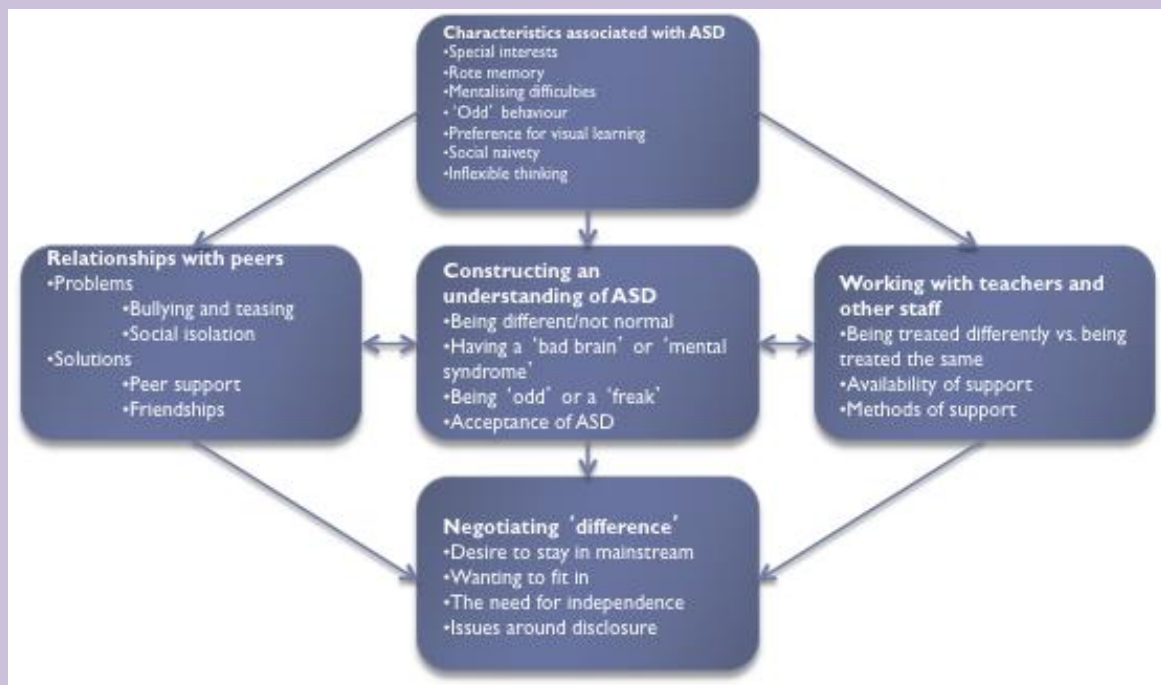
# Key elements for including young people with ASC in mainstream schools

- Morewood, Humphrey & Symes (2011): Mainstreaming autism: making it work. *Good Autism Practice*, 12, 62-68.
- Environment
- Peer education and awareness
- Direct [specialist] support
- Clear policy and guidance
- 'Safety net'
- Creative school structures and learning opportunities

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# Additional considerations…

- Children and young people may also show:
  - Unusual responses to sensory stimuli which can affect many aspects of everyday life
  - Impulsivity
  - Difficulties with attention control
  - Unusual levels of anxiety and arousal
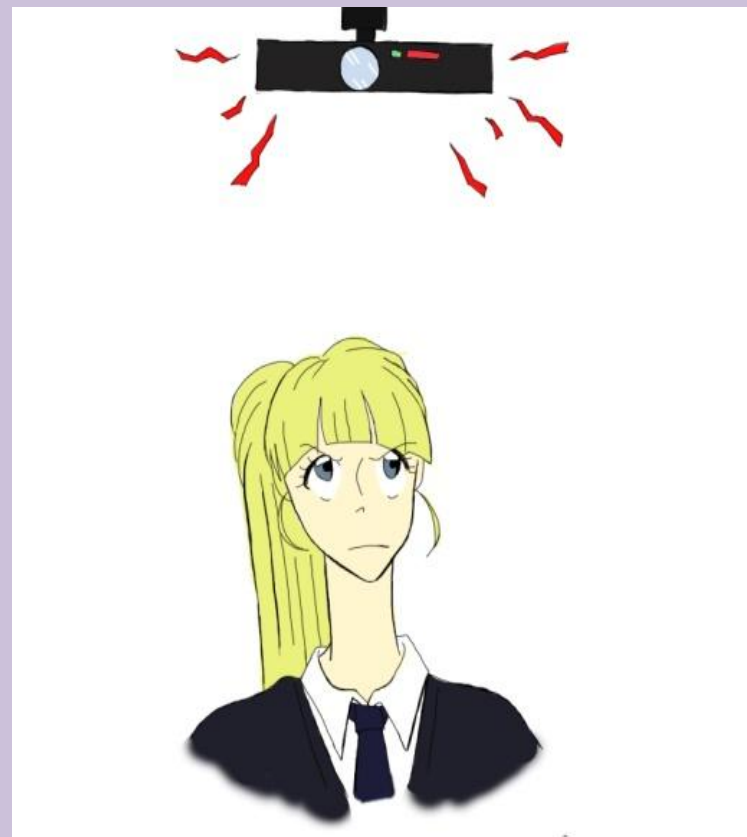
# Don't forget the positives…

- People on the spectrum may also:

  – be loyal and dependable

  – have exceptional memory

  – display persistence in pursuing topics

  – adhere meticulously to routines and appreciate order

  – have particular areas of knowledge, skill, etc.

well done

# Immersion is an important strategy

- To move a school towards being 'autism-friendly' it needs to be ***saturated*** in understanding and awareness…

- It is hard, but a whole-school rolling response; supporting, educating and developing the understanding of everyone involved is key…but it is not easy!

# Peer education is essential…

- Other children may:
  - resent extra attention given to child with ASC
  - be hurt if their social advances are ignored or rejected
  - be distracted/disrupted
  - feel child 'gets away' with things
  - be nervous of or frightened by the child with an ASC
- In some cases may respond by, ignoring, teasing, 'winding him up' or bullying

'*The education of the peer group is an essential part of moving towards a truly inclusive community*'

Gareth D Morewood, 2011
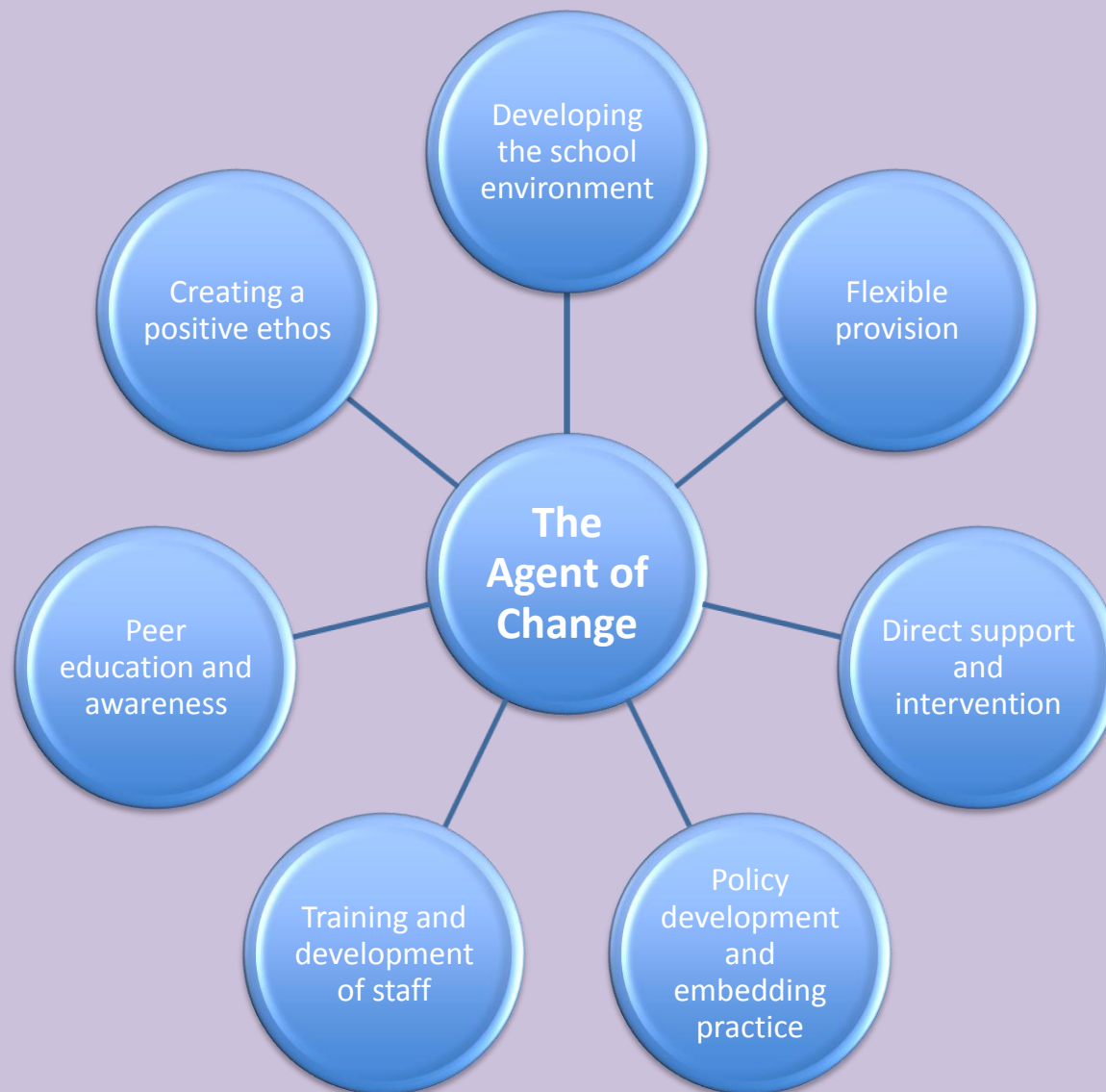
# So where did we start?

- An 'autism friendly' environment
    - physical environment
    - social environment
    - communication environment
    - emotional environment
- Provision of an inclusive structure
- Visual support for learning

# Rewards …

- Schools may have a reward system that may mean less to student with autism

- It need to set realistic, achievable targets

- Rewards may need to be more immediate and tangible

- What reward systems do you use and how effective are they?

Don't forget to make rewards appropriate and immediate…

# Learning isn't always the same …

- Lots of resources and information:

  [www.gdmorewood.com](http://www.gdmorewood.com)

- Especially the illustrated pamphlet: Dos & Don'ts for Supporting Students with ASC in Mainstream Schools

- And from the ESRC website:

  [www.asdinclusion.info](http://www.asdinclusion.info)

# Thanks for listening & questions?

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