

In early 2006 The National Autistic Society interviewed 28 children and young people with autism to find out about their experiences of education, as part of our *make school make sense* campaign. They come from across Britain and range from primary school age through to those in their final years at college. They speak about their experiences at school and at college, the challenges they have faced and their hopes for the future.

To join the *make school make sense* campaign, go to [www.autism.org.uk/campaign](http://www.autism.org.uk/campaign), email [campaign@nas.org.uk](mailto:campaign@nas.org.uk) or call 020 7923 5799 (answerphone).



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NAS 666

David Conrad Anna Joshua  
Ben Cameron Edward  
Alexander Eleanor  
Eoin Max Charlie

## make school make sense for me

children and young people with autism speak out

Hugh Christopher Donald  
Rachel Bruce Edward Jamie  
Micheál John Theo Jack  
Samuel Michael Ruairidh Stephen

Beth Reid and Amanda Batten



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**Hugh** Age 14, talks about support, bullying and the future

**Theo** Age 14, talks about school and friends

**Michael** Age 11, talks about boarding, friends and accessing mainstream school

**Stephen** Age 10, talks about school and friends

**Donald** Age 13, talks about difficulties at school, home education and ambitions

**Josh** Age 12, talks about support, anxiety and the future

**Samuel** Age 12, talks about home education, returning to school and ambitions

**Ruaraidh** Age 9, talks about activities at school, friends and support

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# Introduction

In early 2006 The National Autistic Society interviewed 28 children and young people with autism to find out about their experiences of education, as part of our *make school make sense* campaign. The *make school make sense* report (2006) showed that:

- Over 40 per cent of children with autism have been bullied at school
- 1 in 110 children has autism, yet there is no requirement for trainee or practising teachers to undertake any training in autism. Over 70 per cent of schools are not satisfied with the level of their teachers' training
- Over 25 per cent of children with autism have been excluded from school, usually due to a lack of understanding and awareness on the part of the school
- There are more appeals to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal about schooling for children with autism than for children with any other type of special educational need. 79 per cent of parents who have appealed to the Tribunal won their case.

The children and young people we interviewed come from across Britain and range from primary school age through to those in their final years at college. Between them they have had a range of education experiences, including mainstream, special schools, and home education. As well as having an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) some of the children have learning difficulties, mental health issues and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Here they speak out about their experiences of school, the challenges they have faced and their hopes for the future. Their parents have also provided descriptions of their children.

## What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects the way a person relates to the world around them. It affects an estimated 535,000 people in the UK. We use the term 'autism' to include all autistic spectrum disorders, including Asperger syndrome.

Every individual is different, and as a spectrum disorder, autism manifests itself in many different ways. But everyone with the condition shares a difficulty in making sense of the world.

People with autism all experience the following three main areas of difficulty, known as the 'triad of impairments'.

### Social interaction

Difficulty with social relationships, ranging from being withdrawn, to appearing aloof and indifferent, to simply not fitting in easily. People with autism may also seem insensitive to the feelings of others. This can lead to problems in the playground, with making friends and in turn, bullying.

### Social communication

Difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication, ranging from difficulties with developing speech, to repetitive or formal use of language. People with autism may also not fully understand gestures, facial expressions or tone of voice. Understanding teachers and participating in class can be challenging as a result.

### Social imagination

Difficulty with understanding how others think and feel and in the development of interpersonal play and imagination. A person with autism may pursue a special interest rigidly and repetitively without recourse to others. Difficulty in the area of social imagination may also manifest itself in response to change, so children with autism may find it hard to cope with changes to their timetable, for example. Children with autism may struggle with subjects that use abstract ideas.



# David

My name is David. I am 12 and I will be 13 in April. I have one brother, called Edward. He is autistic, much more autistic than me. He is nine and will be ten in September. I used to have 40 ants but they all appeared to die when I moved room. I like drama, football and I'm quite interested in politics. At the moment I am really into Philip Pullman, the *Dark materials* trilogy. They're pretty exceptional. I don't think it falls under a category, they're just a strange, mysterious book. I'm not into collecting cos all you can do is collect things and then they're collected. I liked fossils but I've got rid of them. I don't see the point of it.

I like to go to school. It's the one that Ofsted have been blasting. It is a high school and I am in year 8. It is a mainstream school.

**How do you get to school?** School bus. I don't like the school bus. It's noisy and you cannot get away from people.

**What class are you in?** In 8F. I don't like registration because people were all running around and they talk too much and sometimes I get really stressed and get thrown, well, actually I have time out because I don't like that.

*"Children are strange. Adults make sense."*

David's mum says: "David has a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome. It was very noticeable that he was different from early on. We noticed that he was rather obsessed with numbers – we would have to wait for digital clocks to reach '00' before he would carry out tasks; he had memorised [the] house numbers and phone numbers of all our friends and he would forecast what day of the week a date would be. He was very keen to talk to adults and they were amazed at how 'grown up' his conversation and his grasp of concepts was. However, he became increasingly unhappy in the company of children: unlike adults they did not answer his questions and he took this to mean they did not like him. He hated children crying and would become very agitated. He began to have panic attacks if left in the company of children.

"Things improved when a girl at playgroup invited him home for lunch. They have remained friends to this day and she has had a massive impact on his social development. She has always been able to tell him what is and isn't acceptable behaviour when we're not around."

[David puts a red card on the table and reads it out aloud.] 'Urgent, please be aware that David sometimes has difficulty coping with social situations. If he puts this card on your table he is feeling very stressed and needs some extra monitoring during the lesson.'

This is my red card and my red card helps me when I am very stressed, but sometimes it isn't enough. Sometimes I have to walk out of lessons. When I am stressed I have to go away but unfortunately there isn't anywhere to go. I could do with a room when I get stressed, I think it would help. I get to sometimes stay in the staff room because children are strange. Adults make sense.

One of my main problems is that when I'm having a conversation quite often I just ask questions or don't give comments, or I just give comments but don't ask other people questions...

**Do you eat lunch in the cafeteria?** I eat lunch outside the cafeteria with my friends. I've started doing that now, I started out hiding in the learning support room but that's a bad idea so I now stay with my friends. I've got to learn to deal with this. I want to be a space scientist so I'll probably have to speak to people.



**How did the transition from primary to secondary go?** We-ell. I think it was fine... It went much better than I thought. My only real problem is that I wasn't with anyone I knew in the form and it was quite difficult making friends. Well, it's on reflection really but I was quite annoyed that I wasn't with anyone I knew. The SENCO was really brilliant. She's just really, really efficient. She made sure that everything worked alright. I'm not sure what she did but [she] just made it work.

# Conrad

**Do you like school?** I like it cos I've got my best friend – his name is Aaron – in my class. At playtime I play with him. It would take too long if I tell you all of it. We play Star Wars outside. Today we played hide and seek cos it was too wet.

**How many are there in your class?** 28; with Aaron it's 29.

**What subjects do you like?** Playtime of course; ICT. I like history but I don't like maths or English, they're boring...my arms nearly fell off once cos I was so tired, there was so much writing. We go swimming every week on Wednesdays. I got a swimming award – I swam ten metres. I was very pleased.

Sometimes it's very noisy with people interrupting the teacher. I have my own place at a table with Scott and David; I like sitting with them. Aaron's moved to a different table which is sad.

*"I don't like maths or English, they're boring...my arms nearly fell off once cos I was so tired, there was so much writing."*

Conrad is seven and goes to a mainstream school and a special school. He loves cartoons. He is very verbal, friendly and lively but finds it hard to control his emotions and often expresses everything he feels. He is academically able but often limited by the behavioural effects of his autism. He reacts strongly to his surroundings, to food or to touch and finds it hard to accept other people's opinions or to do activities he is less than keen on. At home, Conrad is very affectionate and always enthusiastic about his interests.

**What about your future?** I want to be a space scientist. I think I am going to get very good marks and I am going to go to university, hopefully Oxford, where I want to get a PhD and become a space scientist. My dad has a PhD and I want a PhD, too. Maybe in astrophysics, something to do with space science. I also want a degree, obviously. I feel that I have a very full future in front of me.

Sometimes they are unkind to me, making fun of me and calling me names in football practice and being annoying. They even kicked my ball. I felt upset and angry. One person was being really annoying because he was making fun of *Amarillo*, which is my favourite song and so I got cross.

**Have you ever got into trouble?** Yes, in my last school. At the beginning I was naughty then I decided to be gooder.

**What would you like to do when you grow up?** Three jobs – I want to be an astronaut, write a book and make a museum. I might go to university, be a bit of a scientist...dinosaurs are really interesting.



# Anna

## What kind of school do you go to now?

Freemantles. I like it. It is good fun, actually. The work for instance, they make it fun.

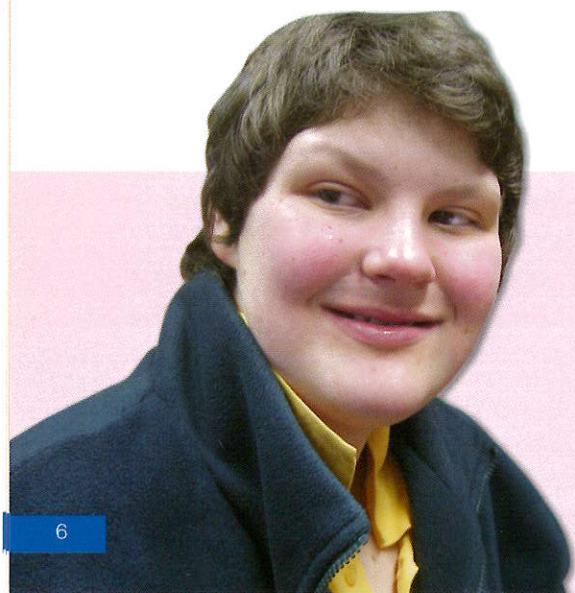
I go to school in a taxi. The driver's name is John. I am in class 10. My teacher's name is Mrs Thelton – she is quite nice, actually. She is very helpful. This week we have been doing work about spaghetti.

I like my classroom. I like listening to stories. Our work is on the walls. The teacher puts it there; I like to see that.

Assembly in the hall is difficult for me. It is OK at lunchtime. It's noisy but I like noise. In assembly we are all squashed up and I don't like it. I feel sad. We have to sit in there for a long time. It gets a bit boring.

I like literacy and music. I don't like Fridays. We have PE and then we go to the library. I don't like numeracy. I can't think of any others...art, sometimes. It is tricky to know what to put on the paper and when I put things on the paper, they keep on falling off.

If I need help I ask my teacher. I have a learning assistant [but] I would always go to my teacher if I need help. If I get anxious I get in a tizz. I'm not sure why I get anxious. I bite my nails. I have to stay seated. They tell me not to worry. I write down my feelings. I have a timetable; it helps me to see what I have to do next, otherwise I get confused. If I feel upset I can go to another room. If I need to talk I like to talk to Wendy. She is not my teacher, I just like her. I don't know why I like her.



Anna is 14 and has been going to a special school for three years, where she has grown enormously in confidence. She is much, much happier and has some eyelashes now, after years of pulling them out. But she is very isolated socially and doesn't 'do' friends. She is very obsessive and repetitive, especially when anxious. A lot of the world's goings on make her feel very anxious. She has a wonderful sense of humour and is very loving. She doesn't like to go very far from home – home is safe. She has had a variety of diagnoses, including ADHD, severe dyspraxia and Asperger syndrome.

My friends are Jonas, Jamie and Anna. I play with them. I play with Jonas and with Anna, we talk together. I was bullied in my old [mainstream] school. I was left out. It was hard. They would not play with me. They chatted with each other but not to me. That made me feel sad because I wanted to be friends with them.

## Would you say that it has been better for you in a special school? It has.

Why? I have no idea.

When you leave school what job would you like to have? What would you like to be? I want to be a racing car driver. I think I will go to college. I don't know what I will do. At college I would like to make things, do cooking. I would like to cook pizzas.

When I leave school, when I am at home I'd like to make my own dinner, to try. I have no idea how to make my own dinner now. I would like to be able to now. I would like to cook bacon sandwich as well as pizza.

Do you want to get married? Maybe. I am not sure.

Do you like children? Yes, I do.

What ages? Ten.

Do you like babies? No. They are too hard to pick up.

*"If I get anxious I get in a tizz. I have a timetable; it helps me to see what I have to do next, otherwise I get confused."*

# Joshua

I'm Joshua. I'm 16 and I have two brothers, one sister. Both brothers have autistic spectrum disorders, my sister it appears not. I'm studying maths, physics, computer science and economics A levels. I was diagnosed with Asperger's in year 10. However, even in year 7 I was exhibiting a lot of Asperger's qualities and I was already clinically depressed. I was just getting so wound up and so mentally tired. I took practically every anti-depressant I could stomach until we fell onto one that worked. However, that did not tackle the problem of school. In some of year 10 I just got to a point where school had become a phobia and I could not get out of the car. As soon as I got in the car to go to school, I'd start having a panic attack. Eventually they found a mental health team and signed me off, which was the happiest day of my life. I am now doing my A levels over the internet. They write the lessons and I then contact [them via] email. It's so much easier. When I have a bad day I tend to have a *really* bad day. So I can leave the work for a day and relax and then over the next days put in an extra hour or so.

The idea of friends... I don't really have any friends. Partly because I don't have any time. My main way of coping was to separate home and school and so five minutes after I got home, I got out of my uniform into my plain clothes and at that point I would not think about school, I would not do any

homework or anything. So I had to do all my homework in the lunch hour and break, which meant that as soon as the lesson ended, I would go straight up to the library and I would immediately start working. I was working constantly from 8.45 to 3.40. I didn't have enough time to eat, so no dinners at school and I got to the point where I was so nervous about school I would not have any breakfast. I just couldn't eat – looking at food made me feel sick. I felt terrified. I still have nightmares about school. One of the unfortunate things is that in physics – I am doing A-level physics – I have to do a couple of experiments and for that I need to get some lab experience and the school's lab is the only lab near that I can go to. So I'm having to prepare myself to go back in there.

Have you thought about the future? Hopefully going to university to study astrophysics. After that I don't really know...whatever suits me, with a physics degree you can do pretty much anything. Whatever comes my way.

There was some careers advice in school but as time went on my grades deteriorated cos I was getting more and more stressed. I was at one time predicted As and Bs and that's just great. With As and Bs I could have gone on to do veterinary work which was what I really wanted to do. I don't have the grades to do the A levels to get on the university course. I was gutted.

One of the criteria that I'm going to be looking for from universities that I apply to will be what support they could offer me. There is no doubt that I will need support. In my lifetime I'd like to get married. My first priority, once I've got my degree, is to establish my job, establish my career, buy a house and hopefully concentrate on a relationship.

*"I just got to a point where school had become a phobia and I could not get out of the car. As soon as I got in the car to go to school, I'd start having a panic attack."*





# Ben

I'm in year 6. My teacher is a man called Mr Lucas. He does have rather a good sense of humour and keeps the class under control. There's a teaching assistant. Occasionally the teaching assistant is looking after another girl in a wheelchair, so I have to share. They come into a lesson a bit later and leave a bit earlier.

If I don't understand a question, all I have to do is put my hand up. I have to wait ages, but they have a lot of people to see. Or I talk them through with the teacher at the end.

## What do you do if you feel distressed at school?

Normally, if I'm only feeling a little bit distressed, I try to cope with it. If it becomes uncontrollable the teacher asks me to leave the class and I go to a calm area like the library or the entrance hall. The teaching assistant goes with me if they're there.

**Is there anyone who is horrid to you?** No. There was one or two people but they have stopped now. They were teasing, physical contact sometimes. They were just teasing me, trying to get me into trouble. I tend to know what bullies try to do. They attack and tease you and try to make you lash out and then go and tell the teacher and try and get me in trouble. My main tactic is just to run. I'm a very fast runner when I feel like it. They mainly pick on me in the playground and I would run round the quiet area. Nobody screams, it's quite a nice, quiet place, especially if you're one of the first people outside. When half-term is coming up, or a holiday, the children get more and more wild, excited. If people are being too noisy for me to cope I just go inside, in the classroom. Sometimes I go to the library. There's the entrance hall, but there's always people sitting there. That's when I normally get really stressed, when there isn't anywhere to go.

"I think all the people I know with Asperger's are really interesting people to talk to."

People see that people with autism are different and just because they are different, they start teasing them. This man in a wheelchair came in, he gave us this little phrase to remember: 'It's OK to be different'.

**Do you think it's good to be different?** Yep. Mum said that being weird is great. Mum says that all the famous people were 'mad': Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein. All these were Asperger's or autistic. I think of it as a sign of great intelligence. I think all the people I know with Asperger's are really interesting people to talk to.

Nobody can tell what will happen in the future. I always had a dream of being a bit like David Attenborough. University, yes. I need to study history if I am going to be a historian. Apart from being David Attenborough, I'd write books about history. If I could make a funny sort of history then people would buy it because it's funny. A bit like the *Horrible histories*, they're horrible and interesting.

**Would you like to have a family?** Not right now but probably I will when I am 25. In the *Guinness book of records*, how old was the youngest mother ever? I think she was about five. I think that's (a) disgusting and (b) amazing! I think the youngest father was seven. I wouldn't be able to break the record – I'm already 11! I want to wait another 14 years before I get married.

# Christopher

## What do you like doing?

Travelling to college. Travelling to lots of different places. I'm good at finding my way by planning the route and reading maps. I know a lot about bus routes, I can tell you about different routes.

**What other things?** I like motor racing. I try to wake up as early as I can to watch the race live on TV.

**Do you get excited?** Yeah, and I celebrate and shout.

**Now we're going to talk about school.** Good!

**Which schools did you go to?** Lots. I need to think: Spa School, Brent Knoll and the one before that was called Filo Hall Assessment Centre, and the very first one, that was the primary school and nursery.

**How long were you at Spa School?** Five years.

**What did you do there?** Lots. Cooking my own lunch. I had to do the shopping on a Monday and the next day had to cook it – [I] just cooked for myself. Really enjoyed Spa School; been brilliant.

**Did you do any exams?** Yes, lots. Maths GCSE; art.

**And at school how big were your classes?** Varies. Eight people and four teachers. Helped a lot having lots of teachers, it was a better way. Helped me to stay calm and to focus. That's all I can think of...

**What happened when the teacher was late or it was the wrong teacher?** Be angry and worried.

**And what about the school before that?** Good, and at the end of that time I started going home on Fridays, cos we finished at 2.30. Mum helped me learn the journey, know the route, plan it and she practised with me; got on the bus and took me step by step. She would meet me on the high street and then we walked home together and she waited at the bus stop for me. Then I did it on my own.

"I'd like to work as a librarian one day. I did [work experience] during the summer. It was excellent!"

## Have you ever got into trouble at school?

Sometimes, for swearing. They told me to stop it. Monday a year ago I went swimming; the bus driver wouldn't let anyone on and I was very upset. I don't want to tell you...upsets me.

**What do you do at college?** Social independence – travel, gardening, cooking, IT, finishing early on Friday.

**And do you travel on your own to college?** Yeah. Bus in the morning and 50/50 in the evening – one week trains and one week buses. Bus is quicker to get there but I like the train.

**Would you like to have a job after you finish college?** I'm not 100 per cent sure on this one. In a library...I'd like to work as a librarian one day. I'd like to do it at the [local] library, be near to home.

**Tell me about your work experience.** I did it during the summer. Went to the resource library, put books away, tidied them up into sections. Put the books in the boxes for the libraries in different areas. I did it for two months every Tuesday. It was excellent!

**Who helped you find it?** Mum.

## Where did you do work experience before that?

Another resource library. The school set that up. Also the Bean Café on Orient Street, the resource library and Oval House.

**What did you do at the café?** Cooking lunch and Mum came one week and I cooked lunch for Mummy. I enjoyed it. Orient Street's a residential home, [I] tidied the bedrooms and the kitchen and [did] hoovering. I enjoyed that. Oval House [was] paper work in an office: tidying up, putting paper in filing cabinets.

**Which was the best?** Every one!



# Edward

**How long have you been at your school?** Oh, nine-and-a-half years. I used to board weekly but it's fortnightly now, in the sixth form. There were quite a few differences. Things were a bit more casual. So for example, it involves wearing mufti [casual clothes] all the time.

**What things are you studying at school?** Well, for example, numeracy, and in horticulture as another example, we've been learning about plants and their pests and diseases. Literacy, ASDAN, ICT, COPE, food tech, and, well, even if I can't list anything else I can tell you that we don't have any science lessons or even history or geography. Nevertheless, there is one bit of it that I do find rather interesting. Every Monday, I go to another college with five other students to do this thing called the Motorvation course, which teaches us about motor vehicle maintenance.

**What parts of the school day do you enjoy?** I think careers is one of them because if you were in my shoes, you would enjoy talking about your future and of course, you would also have a well-organised one.

**What do you want to do when you leave St Mary's?** I hope to go to South Devon College. They have the course I want, motor mechanics, because it has got the job I want, and according to the Kwik-Fit website, there are quite a few branches in that particular region to work in. The reason for choosing South Devon College is because it is near where I want to live.

**How did you find South Devon College?** I was looking at a bus timetable on the internet for my own recreation, and then there it was! Beforehand, it was a bit of a struggle because we were looking for a college particularly in the West Country with decent accommodation so that I can live in the college. Now I have found the college the only other thing I need to get over is the accommodation bit.

**So you're looking for a family where you can stay?** Yes, that's right, and the trouble is I did manage to find a few people who live in the region, through a club magazine, but the membership secretary wouldn't give me their addresses, for some reason. So now we have to go back to doing it the hard way.

**Have you visited the college?** I haven't visited yet but I have remembered the contact details.

**Do you want to visit soon?** Definitely.

**How long would you stay? How long are the courses?** Goodness, I don't really know.

**And when you finish you might work for Kwik-Fit?** Or perhaps a smaller, less international garage.

**But you want to be a mechanic?** Yes, because near my future home town of Totnes, I have already found about four Kwik-Fit branches. There's one in Exeter, Newton Abbott, another in Torquay and another in Paignton.

*"The reason I wanted to live in Totnes, it is a tranquil but well-equipped town and above all it is a town for all seasons."*

Edward is 18. He has two brothers, one is 13, the other, David, is 20 and at university. Edward plays the trombone, the flute and the piano. He rides a unicycle and likes motors, engines and locomotives. He goes to a special school which takes students with a range of different needs.

**Why do you want to live in Totnes?** My dad and I spent a weekend there six years ago. The reason I wanted to live there, it is a tranquil but well-equipped town and above all it is a town for all seasons. And because it is so well-equipped, it's got some amenities like an ordinary town, but it has also got a few tourist attractions, you know, South Devon Railway, Totnes Elizabethan Museum, the castle, plus boat cruises along the River Dart to Dartmouth.

I might become a member of a local model engineering society, and I've found two. One is the Torbay Miniature Railway Society. Their HQ is in Paignton, but they operate a seven-and-a-quarter-inch gauge railway on the side of Buckfastleigh Station on the South Devon Railway. Buckfastleigh is only seven miles from Totnes. There is also the Newton Abbott Model Engineering Society.

**How do you feel about the changes after you leave St Mary's?** At the moment I have spent more time there than just about everybody else.

**So it will be a big change?** Yeah, a huge change, because the college, my other college, is about 200-odd miles from here, even if my older brother goes to university twice that distance.

**So you won't be able to come home so often?** In this sense, I would use David, this is my brother I'm talking about, as a role model. So I would come home for things like Christmas, etc. By revisiting the accommodation my mum in fact had the idea of renting a flat with some of the other students, and I did some research on that. As far as I can remember there's a four-bedroom flat in Torquay and that is £300 per month. That would be £75 each.

I have a very detailed future. I would also intend on collecting classic cars and use at least one of them on daily use, because the kind of vehicle I have in mind would be tax exempt so it saves a bit of money.

# Cameron

**Do you like school?** Not really. Don't like the lessons. I like computers. I usually do work on the computer writing things and searching for things on the internet. Been doing databases, but we finished that about two weeks ago. Don't like maths...am OK at it, but I hate it. Dunno why, just do.

**How big is your class?** I estimate it is about 30 or 31.

**Do you have any particular friends?** No, not yet.

**Do you go to any clubs?** Yes, I go to breakfast club. They have one that opens at 7.45 in the morning and after school I go to one or two. They don't have a name. They organise games and things, a mix, really.

**Do you get extra help?** No, just from the teacher. It's easy to understand. I don't have my own timetable - it wouldn't make much difference. I'm

happy at school. I try not to be noisy because it gives me a headache if I'm noisy. School is quite noisy and that's difficult sometimes.

**Do you sit at a table with others?** Yes, about five or six. We move around. I would prefer to sit in the same place but I have never asked. The teacher would say no.

**What do you want to do in the future?** I want to be an archaeologist. I just got into it. I sometimes dig up things...bit of digging in different places in the back yard, and I found a shell fossil. Well, I didn't actually dig it up. It was lying on the ground; not sure why.

*"I want to be an archaeologist. I sometimes dig up things."*

Cameron is seven and lives in Wales. He started at a new school in September.



# Eleanor

**How many GCSEs did you do?** Did nine and I got seven Cs, E for maths and B for art. Did them all in school except history. I did that at another school. In the mock exam I was allowed to sit with someone watching me and it was a lot nicer just me doing the subject, but for some reason in the real one I was the only one in the room, sitting with a support person watching over me in the gym. It was unnecessarily intimidating. They said it was official. You just need quiet conditions and someone watching over you, you do not need a huge gym – a waste of space, for a start. They gave me the choice to do it at another place but I didn't think I'd know the way [and] it would be people I don't know so I'd get stressed, then I'd probably go down a mark. So I thought I'd do it at school.

**Have you ever been in serious trouble?** Did graffiti on one of the walls. I was feeling really down at the time. I think there were builders, stress and headaches, it was year 10, [I was] feeling lonely, there were some new girls who were really mean and finally I rebelled: hate this school, so I damaged it. I was being robbed a lot – lots of money, my phone, phone charger, anything...out of spite. What was annoying, they [the teachers] knew I had problems with panicky situations, so to my face they would be really torturing, then talking to Mum and Dad they'd say they understood. Why can't they ask 'What's wrong, why did you do this?' and I'd tell them. They never asked me, they just said, 'This is terrible; what is wrong with you?'

**Do you have friends at college?** It's a bit slow, to be honest. They've all gone into their own groups and you go into a group, do your best, practically sell yourself, laugh and humour and that, then they don't give you an inch, they don't talk to you much. I get on more with the adult teachers, adults more than people my own age. It'll happen, I s'pose. I don't like sitting in the canteen. There's something so intimidating when you are sitting on your own at a table, everyone else is in groups, and someone comes up and says 'can I take this chair', telling you they've got lots of friends but you haven't. At breaks, I like to look in the LRC [library resource centre] cos at least I'm doing something. I'm not doing anything in the canteen. Sometimes I go to other people's tables but I forget who they are, there are so many of them. When it's too crowded in the lunch area, I go in the chapel where it's quiet.

**Do you have someone you can go to if you're finding things difficult?** I have a couple of people, mainly one. Once a week with Pria, I do one-to-one with her. College organised that on the first day. About anything – mainly social side, how my work's going, whether I'm behind in my deadlines...we plan and I can do work with her in that room. It works well. She can get a bit over the top about things and worry too much, so sometimes I don't like to tell her things. If I don't like someone she might go and confront them, and I only want to know how she would react, not whether she can do anything about it. I talk to someone else when I

*"There's something so intimidating when you are sitting on your own at a table, everyone else is in groups...they've got lots of friends but you haven't."*

Eleanor, 16, went to a mainstream primary school, a special secondary school and is now attending a Catholic mainstream college where she is studying English, fine art and graphics at A level and maths at GCSE. She was diagnosed at three with high-functioning autism. She has high levels of anxiety, low self-esteem and, sometimes, difficulty comprehending what is expected of her. She finds it difficult not being able to socialise with her peer group, as this can make her feel very lonely.



don't want to talk to her. And I've got a helper, James, in the lessons the whole time. Really helps. I've got a couple of As, never got an A in my life. Wouldn't have got that otherwise.

I want to go to uni, hopefully Goldsmiths cos that's quite close and does the subjects that I want to do and is very good. Something along the lines of art.

**Do you know what you want to do after uni?** Not really. I was put off by my careers adviser. I'd be telling her my ideas about what I want to do when I grow up, working at home doing art. She said, "Well, it's very hard for someone with your problem." Well, if you'd seen my work you'd see that my 'problem', my autism, is what makes me good at art in the first place. She'd never, ever seen my work but she kind of put me off having a career, so I don't know what to do. If I'd said I don't want a

career she'd have raised her eyebrows – you couldn't win with her. Me and Mum visited Connexions but they are the same. Every time I mention an idea they say well, you can't do that. They don't give us any help. They were basically negative, this is a problem.

I was thinking, wouldn't it be great if I could work at home? My dad has a long train journey to Victoria and all that...don't think I could really cope with that sort of routine. It would be nice if I could just work from home cos I get very stressed on transport.

**How do you imagine your future? Do you think you'll get married?** Maybe get married or have a partner or a flat or something, but not children. Don't think I could cope with children, they'd probably be autistic like me. Don't think I could cope with that.

# Edward

Edward is nine and is David's brother. Edward is very sensitive to noise. Edward's mum talked about what he likes doing.

It's very difficult to say what Edward enjoys doing. He enjoys trampolining and he goes horse riding with the school. He loves music but then again that is a difficult one because of the noise issue. He's happy, he likes listening to songs. He's singing a lot himself. He likes drumming which is really bizarre because of his sound sensitivity, but I think it might have something to do with the vibrations going through his arms. He was in a tent with five other Cubs at a Cub camp and they were beating hell with drumsticks on tins and he joined in. I couldn't believe it. You can never tell with Edward.

He is happy travelling in the car, he likes walking and he decides the route. As long as he doesn't encounter loud noises when he's walking then it's something he can get some comfort from.

He puts everything in his mouth. He is unaware of dangers. So he needs one-to-one support the whole time. When he was three, Edward was so withdrawn we felt that we were holding him by his fingernails. We felt we were losing him rapidly and we had to do something fast. We started to do self-education. The transformation was significant. He became much calmer and wanted to participate.

When he reached school age, we eventually found Rosebank School, which is a special ASD school in Northwich. It was fabulous. Edward has one-to-one support in a class of six children with one teacher and two classroom assistants as well, who manage the group.

*"We started to do self-education. The transformation was significant."*



# Jack

**Do you watch the television?** Yes, I like *The A-Team*; I like watching helicopters. I have been in helicopters a lot. My dad flies them, he has a helicopter in the garage. I like playing with tractors and driving tractors and mending tractors. We've got one. I like reading leaflets because they've just got pictures. I ride quad bikes. I ride it in the field there, it explains why the field is too muddy. I race them for a club.

**Which part of the school do you like best?** I like our classroom best. It's small but it's not too big. I don't like the hall. Everyone shouts, everyone shouts and screams. It makes me feel that I'm going to throw up because everyone spits. They speak with their mouth full and then it sort of goes all over the food. And flecks get on my cup.

**Who helps you with your reading?** My assistant, I have her every day apart from Monday and Friday. Sometimes she is a bit funny, not in a happy way. She shouts when I'm not doing what I'm supposed to do, when I look out of the window. Mrs D helps me with reading and writing outside the class, in the library.

**Who do you go to if you need any help at school?** I go to a teacher called Mrs A. I like her better than all the other teachers at the school. She is very nice, she's kind and she never shouts.

**What sort of things do you go to her about?** Out in the playground and stuff and when people shout at me. One boy just shouts the F-word at me. I just run off. I go to Mrs A or just run off.

**When you tell Mrs A, what happens?**

Nothing, really. I don't think any of the teachers believe me.

**Why don't you think they believe you?** Because I have done some stuff in the past and it doesn't seem true.

**When people don't believe you do you tell your mum?** Yes, she has written a letter to them and she's been to speak to the teacher as well.

**Do they believe her?** Yes.

**What happens to the boy when they believe you?** Well, they either put him on the wall, which isn't a punishment, because his friends are still around in the playground. Or they tell him to go inside, but then all his friends go to the window and wave at him.

**Do you have many friends at school?** Not many, because they all hate me cos I'm funny. Funny in a happy way and funny in a bad way. They just sort of shout and kick me. I do it back sometimes cos it makes me really angry.

**Do you belong to any clubs at school?** I don't want to. I have got better things to do. I would rather be outside with my dad or something. Watching telly.

**What do you feel about going to your new school?** I'm feeling alright, I'm excited because I want to make new friends.

**Have you thought about what you would like to do when you leave school?** I want to get a pilot's licence so I can fly people around. A helicopter pilot. I might go to agricultural college, learn about machinery and engineering.

"They all hate me. They just shout and kick me. I do it back sometimes cos it makes me really angry."

Jack is ten and is in year 6 at a small, local church school. He will soon go to a big high school with an ASD resource base. Jack was diagnosed with dyslexia at six and dyspraxia at seven. He then became very withdrawn and was referred to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) for depression and subsequently was diagnosed with ASD. He also has auditory processing disorder and uses coloured overlays for reading.

# Mícheál

**Do you have help at school?** I get a teacher for some, most of my lessons. Same person most of the time. I get on alright with her, although sometimes she brings up another subject when I'm trying to...like if I've got course work for a different subject, like media and I'm in science, I don't want to talk about media in the middle of science. It's how I work, I have to think about a different subject. Between subjects there's a little break, except for break and lunch, there's a five-minute break to get to the next lesson and that's when I change from, like, science to maths. I have to change, I don't keep myself in science when I'm in maths or else I won't understand what I'm talking about. I can't change it that quickly to a completely different subject.

**What part of school do you like best?** Depends really, depends on the season, like the weather. There are some subjects, some rooms in the school where it's better to be there in the winter than summer, cos they're quite warm, they've got radiators and other rooms are better in summer, cos they've got air conditioning. Also, in the winter you wouldn't want to be standing in the middle of the playground freezing, but in summer you're better there than inside.

**Are people ever unkind to you? Have you been bullied at school?** Depends really, there's some people I don't like. I don't get bullied as such. I normally don't really care what other people think. I'm not really sure if I've got bullied or not. I know some people try to make fun out of me but I don't particularly care about them...I don't take notice of them. Sometimes they say I should fight. I say, what

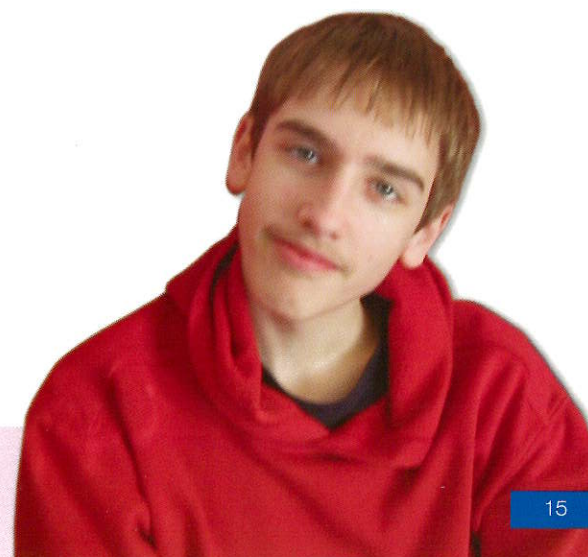
does that prove? I feel that all a bully wants is a reaction from you, and they've got you. If you don't react to them they won't exactly keep on going, they're not going to stay there forever. I don't give them...it's like giving them a weapon to beat you with.

**What are you planning to do after GCSEs?** I know I'm doing history as an A level, might want to do media. I want to do government and politics because we did a bit of that in citizenship once and I quite liked it. But I'm not sure if I'll get into government because I need a C in English and I'm C/D borderline...I could get a C but I don't want to take chances. I don't want to say, oh well, I will get a C [when] I could end up with a D. So I want to have a back-up one but I'm not sure between biology and physics. I don't mind exams, really. I don't look at it as a grade until once it's done; I look at it as a piece of paper with questions on it, cos I think in my mind that I'm not going to get scared of a piece of paper.

**Have you thought about what you want to do afterwards? A job?** I'm not sure really what I want, I've not even thought [about it]. That's why I don't want to go for one subject, go for one career path. That's what I did when I went for my GCSEs: I didn't want to pick them with one career choice in mind, cos if that didn't work out... And I want to choose subjects that have got uses for other subjects. Strategies, cos that's how I work, really.

"Some people try to make fun out of me but I don't particularly care about them... If you don't react to them they won't exactly keep on going, they're not going to stay there forever."

Mícheál is 15 and is about to do his GCSEs. He has two brothers and two sisters.





# Rachel

**Do you have any brothers or sisters?** Yes, I have Reuben. He is younger than me, eight.

**Do you have any pets?** No, I don't have any pets. I had a fish but it died.

**What do you spend a lot of time doing when you are at home?** Going in the garden. I play.

**Do you do any gardening?** No!

**What things do you do during the weekends?** Go shopping for food.

**What is your favourite food?** Pasta. And chicken.

**What things do you know a lot about?** I like...I learn a lot about numbers. I learn about adding. And doubling.

**What school do you go to now?** I go to Freemantles.

**What is it like?** Building.

**And what is the building like?** Oh, well, walls and a whole lot of things.

**What is it like to be in? Is it a happy school?** A happy school.

**How many pupils does this school have?** Lots.

**How do you get to school?** On the bus. Two people on the bus with me.

**"I want to get married, I want to have children. I would like to have two girls."**

Rachel is 11 and was diagnosed with autism when she was two. She goes to an autism-specific special school. She generally copes with life by controlling things as much as possible: she likes to know what's going on, when, and how long it will take. She's becoming more sociable (always on her own terms) when out, but finds it hard to share her own home space with visitors. She speaks clearly, is learning social rules, and is usually 'well-behaved' when out and about. She used to have several extreme fears, such as clocks and hoovers, but these are now largely under control, though buttons still present a problem. She particularly enjoys maintaining her personal mental database regarding people she knows and meets, which includes birth dates, clothes and shoe sizes, food dislikes and class groups, among other things.



**Do you like going on the bus?** Yes, because I just like it.

**What is your teacher like?** A man.

**Is he a nice man?** Yes. I don't know why.

**What lessons do you find easy?** Work, all of it. Sometimes tricky.

**What do you find tricky?** Hard things.

**Do you get any help at school?** No-oo. I do need adults. All the adults.

**Is there a special adult?** Yes, Wendy is a special one. She teaches, she is a teaching cover. She doesn't lecture me, sometimes. Reflections, not always, sometimes. Listening to people. Listen to me...

**If you are in class and you feel anxious and you have a face like this [shows a picture of an anxious face to her] what do you do?** Well, tell the adults.

**Do you leave the room?** No-oo, I stay in.

**Do you have a timetable?** Yes.

**Is it just for you?** Yes...and for the others, too.

**Do you have one each?** Yes!

**Do you have someone to help with your work apart from the teacher?** No.

**What do you do if you feel upset in school and you want to cry?** People hurting me.

**How do they hurt you?** No one hurts me.

**Have you ever been upset at school?** No, never.

**If you did, who would you go to?** An adult.

**What part of the school do you like?** Freemantles.

**All of it?** Yes.

**What part of the school day do you like best?** Swimming.

**Do you have friends at school?** Yes, Joshua. All of them.

**What do you do with them?** Screaming noises.

# Charlie

Charlie was diagnosed with autism at two. His school describes him as a happy and affectionate boy who likes nothing more than getting himself and everyone around him really messy during sensory sessions. He loves to play with toy animals, particularly dinosaurs, rhinoceroses and warthogs. Charlie also loves anything physical, especially swimming, trampolining and being chased.

Charlie has very high support needs. We interviewed him in the assistant head's office at his school, but he found the room very distracting. The interviewer used Widget symbols on cards to communicate with him. Charlie chanted 'Mummy' over and over and then when he was asked about what he watched on TV, he started chanting 'Scooby Doo'. It became evident that Charlie found the interview very distressing as he started shouting and pacing, so it was decided not to continue.

**Do you feel better when you scream?** Yes!

**How do you get on with people generally?** I get on in the garden...and you go on the muddy grass. You get very muddy. I have to stay on the path.

**Do you do that?** Yes.

**Oh, you are a good girl! Are you always a good girl?** No.

**What do they say to you if you are not good?** Oh dear.

**Is anyone ever unkind?** No-oo.

**What do you want to do when you leave school?** Go outside!

**Do you want to get married and have children?** I do. I want children. [Chants] I want to get married, I want to have children. I would like to have two girls.





# Eoin

**What do you do on weekends?** I'm on the computer. I sometimes like to write and I do read. I like finding out about things, I like learning lots of things. I just wish I could go out with people I know, because I don't usually get invited anywhere. I'm just trying to get to know people.

**How was school?** Overall, I did not have a good time there. It was just difficult to really get to know people. I really didn't fit in with anybody at that time. I knew people, I'd talk to people, but I was sort of shy with talking to people.

**Did you need special support?** I had a one-to-one person. I had Miss Jones with me in primary school and then I had Miss Curtis from there on in. I was with Miss Jones for so long and suddenly she was leaving. They put an advertisement in the paper and they didn't tell me that, so it was sort of like, you could have got [asked] me, because she was looking after me, at the end of the day. [When Miss Curtis started] I used to come home and say 'I don't like her', I wanted a new person or something. But after a while I got used to her and Cathy, as I call her now, we get on well now.

**Did you have a Connexions adviser?** I had a Connexions adviser but I'd have to say that they weren't really too helpful. They just seemed like 'you can't do it'...

**How do you like college?** I like it. It's less restricting. I have more friends there, I know people. I've got to get out of my shell, I'm still a bit not confident. The

teachers there are more respectful of you as a person, rather than you as a student. The respect goes two ways even though they are the teacher.

**Do you cope with the noise?** I cope with the noise, it's just, like, me. I still have this notion that if something goes wrong, then everything goes wrong. So if I forget about a piece of work then I just think everything is going wrong, and that annoys me. I still do it sometimes.

**Do you get support in college?** I get one-to-one in some of my lessons. I don't think I get enough support – I'd like more. It's more like you go to the staff, they work with you. It's good in one respect because you get to know a bunch of people, but it's bad in another respect...if I'd stayed at the school I would still have it [one-to-one support], even in the sixth form. The agreement doesn't go with you. And the lack of communication in the college – no one knows what's going on. Like at school, even though we had our log books, they still told us when half-term was coming up and now we get told at the last minute, like we're ending today, and we don't get prepared for it, which is annoying.

**Has bullying been an issue?** At one point. There was this boy, I'll just call him Colin, he used to say I'm autistic. It sort of got more annoying. I didn't do anything to him but he just started on me because I was autistic and I acted differently. It came to one point where one of his friends, I forgot his name but I knew him, I sort of started it, he came behind and tapped me on my back. I don't remember what happened, I started on him because he was with Colin and I was worried and I just started and he followed me back...he beat me up. Then some sixth form students came and helped. I think me

*"The teachers at college are more respectful of you as a person, rather than you as a student."*

Eoin is 17 and is in his second year at sixth form college studying media, film and history.

and him got called in by Miss Smith. And she told us off cos I started it, he was obviously getting involved. Luckily the headmaster was busy. It carried on for a bit longer, but Colin did know it was wrong and wanted to apologise and I spoke to him on occasions after that. He admitted that he'd done wrong and I'm not one to hold grudges.

**What about the future?** In terms of going to university I'm thinking of taking a gap year, because I don't know if I can cope straight away with going into that environment. I want to use my gap year to get some experience. My mum has given me so many scenarios, either to work here, maybe with my local paper, maybe even to go to Ireland or to America or something. There's lots of ideas.

**What would you like to do when you go to university?** Probably a media or journalism course or something to do with producing in media. That was my main ambition from the age of five and I've never really stopped that.

**What about you personally, do you want a family?** I want to get married. Sometimes I want to have kids, sometimes I don't want to have kids because I don't know if I'd cope, if my wife was pregnant I don't know if I'd cope cos of the difficulties I've had. I don't know if I would cope as an autistic person with the mood changes and stuff. I sort of bounce it around. Need to think about it more, but it'd be nice to get married.

# John

**What do you enjoy doing at school?** Technology, making stuff with wood or metal. I like, I just like ICT. Everything with computers, a lot of stuff with computers.

**Do you get lots of help at school?** Yes, I have multiple helpers. They sit with me in class. Sometimes I ask, sometimes I do it without help. I have my timetable. I don't have a map, I don't need a map; I already know my way round the school. It was easy to find my way round.

**What things do you find difficult?** English and dance and PE. I'm just not that strong plus I get really cold when we do outside PE and I hate it.

It's not too noisy at school... North wing is not that noisy any more because now they have made a rule no one can be in the corridor during the second half of lunch time, they have to go outside or go to an activity in the building.

*"I have multiple helpers. They sit with me in class. Sometimes I ask, sometimes I do it without help."*

John is in his second term at a mainstream secondary school. He is 11.

I go to private, form-organised video clubs, DVD club. I watch all kinds of DVDs there. I also go to an internet club. I go on the internet and I also do other stuff.

**What do you do with your friends?** Er, well, I'm just friends with them. Well, we play together sometimes.

**What do you want to do in the future?** Not sure...looking for a sort of temporary job when I leave school. I'm looking for an easy-to-do temporary job, as a way to make money while I continue my education to get a better job.

**So you want to go to university?** Yes! Study ICT maybe.





# Jamie

I'm Jamie. I'm 11. I've a sister called Erin. We've got a cat called Dusty, she is Erin's, and a rabbit called Rachel, she is mine, and fish that we share.

My school is in Fairlands. It is OK. My favourite thing is home time. My worst time at school is the playtime, because sometimes it is cold. It is a small school, I think there are about 421 children at the school, I might be wrong, but that is what I remember from the list. There are three buildings, one pre-fabricated building, the room where the office is and a classroom, and then there's the new building. There are about four buildings...five. I am in year 6. There's 30 in our year. I like my teacher because she is nice and kind. She understands me.

**Is this your first school?** Yes. I'm still waiting for the silly people to decide. I am due to move to a new school next September, but the people have not decided. I think they might think that the school we want will be too expensive. I think we might have to convince them that they have got to pay for it. It is taking them so long. I would like to tell them to hurry up.

**Do you have any help at school?** Yes, I have support. In the morning I have Mrs Edwards. Then Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday afternoon I have Mrs Burgess. I don't know, but she annoys me. Then on Thursday afternoons and Fridays I have Mrs Hopkins, but she's stopping now. I don't know why she is going, but she says that I don't really do anything with her...but that is true.

I sit by the computers; it is a little desk of computers near the door, and I sit by the computer desks at the

end of the bank of computers. And I'm near to a powerpoint for my laptop. I actually wanted to sit there. I have got more space. If I sit on a big table it's usually all cluttered up in my space and when it is time to go home, I shove everything on to my chair. We used to have silly chairs, but now we have school chairs and I have a cushion, cos [the chairs are] uncomfortable.

If I need to leave the room I need to tell Mrs Burgess or Mrs Hopkins, then I can go out. Sometimes we go to the pond, we have a little pond. If things get a bit much we go to the pond. It used to dry up all the time, but now they've put some netting over it and they have re-lined it and it is a proper pond now. I go there if there's too much noise.

On Thursday afternoons, Mrs Hopkins does PE with everyone, so I sit out with my laptop. I talk to Suzie – she broke her leg, I think. She's kind, she's very kind. I don't do PE. I sometimes do the outside PE.

**Are the children nice to you?** No. They laugh at me sometimes, I don't know why, and they tease me. I disappear. I hide because under the desk there are lots of boxes and that is a good place to hide. I talk to a teacher, I talk to Mrs Waddington [the SENCO]. She's not my class teacher, but I always talk to her because she is nice. I once took my little cat out to play and they snatched it off me and threw it to each other and then they threw him in the mud and picked him up again and then they made me chase them. But then they got big told off, so big that they got put into another room all by themselves and the head teacher came down and I heard them shouting really loud. They have never done it since.

*"They tease me. I disappear. I hide because under the desk there are lots of boxes and that is a good place to hide."*

Jamie was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome/high-functioning autism when he was six. He has been in mainstream school but in September will be going to an ASD-specific residential special school on the advice of his current school and educational psychologist. He says he is looking forward to being with "people like me" and where everyone understands him. The mainstream school has done brilliantly to keep him there to this point, but over the last couple of years he has struggled and been very unhappy.



# Bruce

I don't go to school at the moment, I'm not going to school at all any more because I don't like school. There's too much talking. They're talking too fast and they're making me do it very quickly...like English and maths...they won't let me bounce on the trampoline and give me free time. Maybe the bouncing on the trampoline is the problem why I'm not learning. Maybe that is the problem with me now.

I stayed there for ages and ages and they wouldn't get me out. I wanted to be at home. I hated being in school. I didn't like staying away from my family and best friends, and being with people I'm not used to.

I wanted to get expelled so I'd have to go home, so I tried to be bad, tried to be violent so I would get expelled so I would go home. But why wouldn't they just expel me? Cos I hated it...wanted to get out of the school... I was feeling very homesick. Like for example in *Finding Nemo*, when he's put into a fish tank he was very homesick.

Don't like my clothes going in the wash. I don't care how they are, just put a deodorant on them, but not put them in the washing machine...put a fragrance on them [Mum: he gets fixated on one outfit].

**How long did you go to that school for?** A year and a quarter. They made me do horrible lessons...everything was horrible and it was the most boring lessons in the world. Made me just eat vegetables most of the time and I didn't want to.

I went to another school from when I was five 'til when I was ten. I liked it in the beginning and then I started to hate it cos it was a mainstream school

*"I was feeling very homesick. Like for example in Finding Nemo."*

Bruce is 12 and is being educated at home. He has previously been in both mainstream and special schools. He has high-functioning autism with very high levels of anxiety and ADHD.

and they didn't know how to teach people with autism and I didn't like having a one-to-one helper. There were a few [helpers]. They would sit next to me and not next to anyone else, just for me and stupidly not anyone else.

**Did she help you?** She would force me to do my work and I would always sit outside in the corridor. And I kept running away and not doing my work, then I would run back to the house and go into the bathroom, lock the door, take off my clothes and have a bath or shower and flood the floor, and they could always open it from the outside with a screwdriver. They were so, so, so the cleverest people on earth.

Some of the boys are bullies. They would hit me and hurt me, they hated me so. I would tell one of the staff and then they would take one of the boys to their rooms. Don't want to talk about it, it's difficult.

I'm not actually learning, because I'm tricking people into thinking I'm learning. I don't want to learn. I just want to make them pleased so they can think I've learnt and I just want to go on the trampoline.

**When you grow up what do you want to do?** Want to, don't know. Want to be very rich and have a wife and four children.

**How will you get rich?** Don't know; win the lottery. Try winning it millions of times then I'll win it, hopefully.





# Alexander

I'm in year 6. I enjoy mental arithmetic, literacy and science. Partly cos I'm good at it, but partly because I'm beating everyone in the class. Well, almost everyone. When I beat people it's exhilarating.

There are about 29 people in my class because there are usually one or two off sick, 31 in total. It feels a bit full at times...it makes me feel claustrophobic, but I try and act as normal. I virtually always succeed. For some reason I think it makes my body temperature go up. I go to the library at break time – it's quiet and there aren't many people. It feels a lot better. I like the books, they are better company when everyone's screaming around outside.

In the past everyone used to bully me, especially year 6s when I was in years 4 and 3. Called me names...worst thing, in my class, one or two people who were hitting me. I felt really annoyed. No one helped. I did ask the teachers but it takes its time. I do usually tell the teachers. One person in particular calls me a very large amount of names. Let's just say that I learnt some of my rudest swear words from what that person used to, or still, calls me. I don't know what the point of that is; he even sounds stupid, not just looking stupid.

I feel like I'm finally getting to the end of the tunnel. In the primary maths challenge, I got through to the final. I've done the final but I haven't got the results...I think I got 25 or more. I hope I did cos then I get a gold medal. I found out [I'd reached the final] in an assembly. They were a bit shocked. Everyone thinks I'm dumb. Some of them thought I'd cheated, most of them changed their opinion. It made me very proud, and I hope no one's going to say pride is one of the seven sins.

I eat lunch in the hall. I feel claustrophobic. It's deafeningly loud cos everyone's always screaming.

**"There are 29 people in my class...it makes me feel claustrophobic, but I try and act as normal."**

Alexander is 11 and was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome when he was nine. He attends a mainstream primary school with a minimum of help and is very bright academically but he has some motor skills difficulties as well as social skills problems. He is very sensitive to noise and dislikes crowds but has learned to cope. He only had one good friend at school, who moved away two years ago.



The teachers have to hit the tables, a metal table with a metal spoon, to get everyone to shut up. They did it yesterday. [The kids] started shouting but a bit less loudly after the teacher had finished speaking.

Sometimes people come and help me in class. They take me out and talk about things that happened recently. They tell me what I'm supposed to be doing. It's difficult to understand sometimes. Everyone has a timetable on the interactive whiteboard. It helps being able to see what's going on.

**Would you like to be the same as the other people in the class?** No, because then I wouldn't get the very high marks in my SATs. [I] got very high marks in every type. Science and maths I got 88 per cent, English got 70 per cent.

In the future I'll be a severely strict health inspector, making sure everyone's washed their hands properly and face and their feet and has showers properly. I like everything clean. Came from me noticing that hardly anyone in my class washed their hands and lots of adults don't wash their hands. Worries me is an understatement. I feel disgusted, sick, paranoid. Well, not quite paranoid, but close...

I get ideas for books – I'll be trying to write a couple down soon. Oh, and I'll be a scientist, inventing new things, and I'm going to switch jobs, one after the other. Probably author first because my ideas come to me at a young age. Besides, when you're old, at least when your hair's gone white and you're bent over with a walking stick, you can't type very well.

I want my own house and family. Even if I'm unsuccessful in certain things, it might be only a family of teddy bears. I have four now. One has natural wheat. I like the smell. The first one I had almost since I was a baby, called Sheepy.

# Max

**How do you feel at school?** Yes.

**Do you feel happy or sad?** Sad. Because I want to go home.

**Do you like going home?** Yes.

**What do you do at home?** Play with Mummy...I play with Josh and Charlie.

**What games do you like playing?** No. I like watching films. Nursery rhymes. Noddy, *The adventures of Winnie the Pooh*, and *Baby Max goes to Step by Step* [one of Max's schools].

**Do you have friends at school?** Josh and Charlie and Mummy and Daddy...

**Which days do you go to Step by Step?** Thursday and Friday.

**And which days do you go to your other school? Do you go on Saturday and Sunday?** No!

**Which days do you go?** Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

[Plays with top as a reward]

**When do you get to play with your top?** When I've done lots of work.

**What do you learn at school?** Ooooooh, hokey cokey.

**You learn to sing lots of words?** Yes.

**Do you learn to read?** Yes.

**Can you read lots of words?** I don't know.

**Do you read stories?** Yes [shows one of his books]. It's about Snick Snack Snickle Nose. He's a troll.

**Do you like numbers?** Yes. Adding up numbers and counting numbers. And I ride the bike.

**What makes you happy?** Playing on the tower, outside. Play chasing, chase Charlie.

**"I like thinking time and like going home time."**

Max is in a dual placement in an autism-specific special school called Step by Step and a mainstream school. He has two brothers, Charlie and Josh.

**What else makes you happy?** Seeing who can play on the seesaw in the garden.

**And what else?** Round and round the bee hives...special things outside.

**Do things at school ever make you sad?** When I want to go home, when I want Mummy and Daddy and Charlie and Joshua, too.

**Is your other school a big school?** Yes.

**Are there lots of children?** Yes.

**How many?** Don't know. 99.

**What's your teacher like?** Mrs Emmerson, Mrs Water, Mrs Boardwood, Mrs Callingham, Mrs Tigg, Mrs Taplin, Mrs Piper. Kelly comes to see me.

**What does Kelly do when she comes to see you?** Sit in class with me.

**Do you like it?** Yes.

**Does she help you?** Yes.

**What does she do?** Don't know.

**Does she come every day?** Every day.

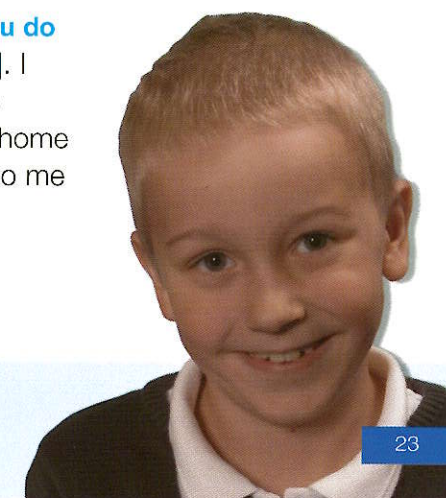
**What are your friends called?** Heidi, Thea, Chloë, Daniel, Thomas, Connor, Alice, Alex...

**Do you sit with some of your friends at your table?** Yes.

**What do you do at circle time?** It's snack time...sweetcorn and a drink.

**Do you like your drinks?** Yes.

**What do you do when you do music?** Do a song [sings]. I like thinking time and like going home time. Going home with Susan. She comes to me on Thursday afternoon.





# Hugh

I'm Hugh, I'm 14, year 9 at school. I have one brother, one sister. Brother is younger, my sister's youngest.

## What do you spend most of your time doing?

Playing guitar, teach myself. Download stuff from the internet and learn the chords. I've got lots of CDs. I've got 195 CDs. I like rock.

## What are your teachers like?

They are alright.

**What would a good teacher be like?** Helpful, not impatient, they'd understand me and always get the full picture of what's going on. They are alright at the moment, but not that long ago, he [the teacher] just doesn't get the full picture of what's going on, so someone knocked my pencil case in class and I went to get it off them and then he shouted at me, who had just got up to get it back.

**Is there an assistant in the class?** Yes. They're alright. They help me to write and stuff. Usually using a laptop; it helps. I'm not very good at writing, my writing is awful, but I get my work done better when I type it. I can touch type. The education authority provided me with it. It broke before the Christmas holidays and they've just recently deemed it irreparable. Now we're just waiting for the new one to arrive. They've decided what to get.

**So you've had a term without.** Yeah. It had a hard drive failure. Luckily I backed it all up.

**What other support do you get at school?** I've got an exit pass now so that if something goes wrong I go out to the learning zone, [which is] for support and stuff. It's quite a big area, there's a few classrooms and a computer room. There's not a quiet area

*"I've got an exit pass now so that if something goes wrong I go out to the learning zone. There's always someone there. It's good."*

Hugh has Asperger syndrome, which was diagnosed when he was seven. He is in a secondary school with a moderate learning difficulties resource base because there were no autism resource bases at the time. His autism was much more a feature when he was younger, but his obsession with electrical things (especially hoovers) has gradually morphed into mobile phones, audio equipment and electric guitars which are all quite cool and 'normal'. He has developed pretty good social skills and become quite independent.

specifically set aside, it depends what time it is. That's where I go instead of French. I got taken out of French at the beginning of the year, I didn't like it, caused lots of stress. I do additional literacy stuff. Sometimes if it's really bad I go there, but not always. I can talk to someone. There's always someone there. It's good. I've been there a few times for stuff like that.

**What part of the school day do you really like?** When I go home. The end. Lunch time, break time. I hang around with my friends outside.

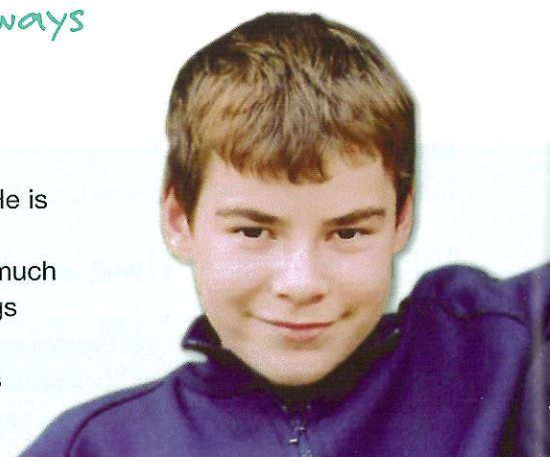
**What's the hardest thing at school?** People who I don't get on with.

**Do you get bullied?** Yes. It's the same group of people just annoy me all the time. They do a range of different stuff – chucking stuff at me, paper and stuff in class...not usually in break time... Happy slapping me once, got seriously dealt with. I went up to the learning zone straight away before it got around. They got detention and badly shouted at.

**What do you plan to do on leaving school?** Not really sure... Would quite like to work in computing, possibly build computers. Would like to have my own business.

**Would you do a degree?** Don't really know what there is.

**Who do you expect to give you advice?** Connexions. I saw them once at my last school. Took me out of lessons and introduced themselves. It was quite a while ago. I think everyone with a statement has to do something with Connexions.



# Theo

**Do you go to school every day?** Not exactly every day, I do it on Mondays to Fridays. I don't stay there. I don't go every day, Saturdays, Sundays, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. I go just from Mondays to Fridays. I stay home Saturdays and Sundays.

**What subjects do you like doing?** I like doing maths – that's my favourite lesson. I do it indoors at school. The lesson I really do not like is food tech cos you have to do a lot of writing and I don't get to finish it before dinner. I'm not really fast enough.

**What other subjects? What about science?** I do science but my other favourite is ICT and drama, cos in drama you used to do lots of things about theatres, but that was all led by Gail and she doesn't work there any more. So, we mostly play on the computers in ICT. We are actually doing a production this year but we don't know what it's really called yet, we haven't got any titles. I'm enjoying that. That's really much it.

**How many people are there in your class?** About six or seven students. There are about...oh yes, four teachers.

**Do you stay in one room?** I go to lots of different rooms, yes, yeah. And of course, there are different classes, you have to pass one, class 1 to class 8 [to progress to the next class]. The primary classes are 1, 2 and 3 and the secondary are 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. I'm in class 6. When you finish class 8 you go to college.

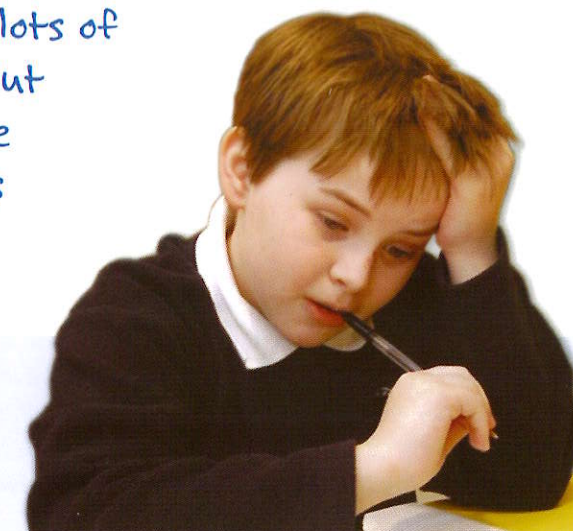
**What do you want to do at college?** You can have free time, I think. I don't really know about college, but I'm doing well in school.

**Are your teachers pleased?** Yeah, they are...they think my work is great. I'll tell you about my friends. I've got quite a lot but I'll tell what friends I have in my class. The two Simons are my friends, one's a staff teacher and one's a student. We have lots of laughs together. We actually laugh about this word called 'pudding' which is quite funny! Simon the student says that it is funny and it's the autistic mind.

**Why do you think pudding is funny?** Well, Simon and I don't know that yet. It just is to autistic people. Simon thinks I laugh at everything!

*"The two Simons are my friends, one's a staff teacher and one's a student. We have lots of laughs together. We actually laugh about this word called 'pudding' which is quite funny! Simon the student says that it is funny and it's the autistic mind."*

Theo is 14. He likes going to the cinema, playing games on his computer and watching DVDs. He goes to Helen Allison School, an NAS special school for children with autism.





# Michael

**What made you decide to be a weekly boarder?**

**Does everyone stay over?** Just some people. It's just from year 6, which is where I'm at now. Well, I was quite excited at first cos I thought it was going to be a bit more like me than they actually were [sighs]. It was quite hard being away from home. Poor old Mum. I was a bit sad, too. But I've been coping quite well with it recently, a good spell. But the activities and things...badminton, swimming, and some really good ones sometimes, like dry ski slopes. Similar sorts of things to what I like. I've got a feeling I'm going to be hugely, hugely grateful about this.

We actually have our own Game Boy club on a Friday. Some of the boys go out for the whole afternoon to do the activities we do at the hostel, but the boys who go to the hostel [including Michael] don't go. And if you suddenly come into a class where you do the activities on a Friday, you'd never be able to get to Game Boy club, which would be a complete nightmare! Luckily being in the hostel I still get to Game Boy club.

**Do you enjoy lessons as much?** Yes. Maths especially, because I'm very good at maths. They are actually struggling to find work that's hard enough for me so I go up the road for maths lessons twice a week. Sue goes with me, my additional support worker. She helps in the mental part which I really get sleepy at, she says, 'Are you sure you understand?' and I usually say yes, I usually do understand. It's one lesson at a time. Maths and science on a Tuesday, just maths on a Wednesday. One older boy used to go, but he's left now so I am the only one at the moment.

**"I'm very good at maths. They are actually struggling to find work that's hard enough for me so I go to another school up the road for maths."**

Michael is 11 and goes to Helen Allison School, an autism-specific NAS special school, where he has been since before he was five. He now stays there during the week. He also has some lessons at the local primary school. He has a high IQ, is good at maths, and has a good general understanding of the English language. However, he has difficulties with writing and putting his words onto paper. Michael has severe difficulties understanding himself, other people and the world around him. He is extra sensitive to touch, noise and light, and finds everyday life a constant battle.



**Do you enjoy going up to the school on Tuesday and Wednesday?** Yes, except the fact that it is extremely noisy. It just gives me a headache... Just have to put up with it. It's also quite hot and it does make me feel a bit sleepy.

**What special friends do you have?** Two in particular, Bradley and Charlie. We run around a lot in the playground and we copy cartoons and what not. They just join in and recreate the scenes, however, it does usually involve something with attacking Joshua. Recently, Patrick's been playing this game of 'Cook Joshua for dinner'!

**Is it noisy at Helen Allison as well as at the primary school?** Yes, there are a few pupils that make quite a lot of noise but it is a different type of noise. At Meopham Primary, it's more of a constant chatter noise, but at Helen Allison it's a sort of single person, screechy noises. I don't find that as hard, really.

**Do you get on with the other pupils at school?** Some of them, particularly the ones with Asperger syndrome and not autism. Because you can get more of a proper conversation out of them.

**What about the ones with autism?** That's quite hard because I don't quite completely understand them...and usually it means they're not as good at the games because they don't completely understand what they are supposed to be doing, which is a bit sad. That's why I try to stick with them [his friends who have Asperger syndrome]. I think it's like a less serious autism which I find quite easy to cope with.

# Stephen

I'm ten. I don't have any more brothers, I just have one brother. I haven't got any sisters.

**What do you know lots about?** Well, lots about working. Numeracy.

**Are you good at it?** Yes.

**How big is your school?** Ten. Ten metres wide.

**How many people at your school?** One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. I'm trying to say, I'm trying to say, it's really easy and it's really hard.

**Is this hard for you?** Yeah.

**Is your teacher nice?** Yes.

**How do you get to school?** I get to school with my mum.

**What lessons do you find easy?** Well, I found it in my room.

**What did you find?** Well, there's nothing I can do. My mum finds time... Do you know what? I'm still thinking. When you get a sandwich, I'd say...I think, well, Fred, he's my friend. Connor and Fred and me are best friends, really.

**What do you do together?** We chase and, well, I think, by myself. Do you know what, I have a big head! I think there's nothing else.

**Is there anything at school you really like?** I think, well...Holly.

**Who's Holly?** That's when I was last year.

**Is there anything you don't like about school? Do you like numeracy?** Oh, yes.

**Literacy?** Yes.

**Swimming?** Yes.

**Play time?** Yes.

**Assembly?** Yes.

**Games and PE?** Well, sometimes, some days, we talk. I talk to my mum, well, my mum...she's younger...

**What would you like to do when you leave school, when you are older? Do you know what I mean?** No.

**When you're grown up, when you're a man, what do you want to do?** Actually I'm not a man. I don't want to do a job.

**When you're grown up, when you're a man, what do you want to do?**  
**"Actually I'm not a man. I don't want to do a job."**

Stephen has autism and finds it hard to communicate with strangers and will shout or get aggressive if they talk to anyone from his family. He doesn't always play with his brother or he plays with him on his own terms. He likes his routine and it is difficult if this is changed. He is loving and very caring, he likes singing and has a fantastic memory. Getting out and about is hard but his school has enabled him to gain confidence in everyday situations. He finds eating with cutlery difficult, but likes his computer. He has sensory issues with noise and smells.



# Donald

**Where do you go to school?** I don't. They broke it down at my last school, but it's a very, very bad school. The person who runs it is very...my parents said this, very self...will not believe in experts, only believe what she thinks, and she thought that OCD is controlling behaviour and was always hurting me. I got hurt several times including injuring my arm. They hurt me. They grabbed me, pushed me up the stairs. There's other parents who've said this. It's a very, very, very bad school.

**How did you feel at the school?** At the beginning they were quite nice. Once I started settling in it turned out to be a terror school. I had an OCD incident and they were violent to me and pushed me around. I was scared about the work that had been put on the table, and I got scared.

**What happens when you get scared?** Then I get OCD worried. Then I get upset or I do compulsions.

**Where do you do your lessons now?** At home; Miles and Christina who come, well, only just started again... Miles was a year ago, used to see him three days a week. At the moment I've only just started two days a week cos it is quite scheduled, but it might change. Miles on Monday, and Friday Christina, and they are very nice.

**What do you do with them?** Miles, for several months last year, English and maths mostly... He's good at art. I'm not, although he says I am. I like designs, not so much art. When I was younger I did two or three different design I would do over and over again – a house plan, one of the tube map, one was a big house...different sections of transport like rail and bus and coach.

"I was scared about the work that had been put on the table, I got scared."

Don't enjoy maths but I was good at it at my primary school which was a mainstream school before I was even diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. I was the first person ever in my year 6 SATs exam to get 100 per cent, 100 out of 100. I got triple five. Felt good, but I don't enjoy maths. I enjoy ICT. I want to work as a computer programmer...I've seen [visited], looks like a wonderful place...work on the 15th and 16th floor of a building; they have wonderful-looking corridors, a little café and tables, wonderful-looking offices where they do their programming, and they are all sorts of people, sounded just like me, ones who had problems as a child, didn't fit in, sounded very much like me. Their design was to make great games while meeting great people while eating endless supplies of pizza and soda. I don't like fizzy drinks but I like pizza.

**Which GCSEs would you do?** ICT, of course. At lower level before a degree and that, maybe maths especially. You need to do maths and English at least to O level, if not A level, and once you get to the level of degree you just do one or maybe two subjects. It all seems so confusing: O levels, A levels, bachelors' degrees, masters' degrees, PhDs...

# Josh

**Do you like drawing?** Yes...just Sonic characters and made-up characters, cartoon characters. I draw them on their own, but sometimes I make little comic books...give them words and things as well. Only like drawing cartoon characters, though; not like drawing objects and stuff.

**What subjects do you really enjoy at school?** Art, music, PE and that's all really. Have to do other things in art like draw objects and learn about artists and stuff. But I mostly draw in my scrap book when I get bored in some of the other lessons. I like playing the keyboard. I'd kind of like to get a guitar, but I don't think Mum will let me.

**Are there subjects you don't like?** Maths; I don't like division. That's all really.

I can usually understand the teacher. If I don't I go up to her and say 'what do you mean?' They sometimes write it on the board, mostly they don't. It's easier when they write it down, then I can just look up at the board and see what I have to do. Sometimes I read it a couple of times – it's better.

**Are there things at school that worry you?** Doing my homework, I get really worried about homework, if I'll be able to do it on time. They write it down for me and sometimes I get different homework than the others.

**Are you good at doing your homework?** Well, yes, I got all my target grades and I got all excellents and goods for my homework, so yes.

**Do you get any help in school?** Yeah. They write it down for me, like the stuff I say to them and then they write it down. Notes about stuff, the things that we are doing in lessons.

"It's easier when the teachers write things down...then I can just look up at the board and see what I have to do."

**Does someone sit with you?** Yes. She helps me. There's this other teacher and she has to help everyone. She writes down the homework for me and says 'Are you alright with this work?' and stuff like that. There's three helpers for each year and they take it in turns to go with someone. She sits there, well, it's pretty hard to explain...then I write some things in my book and she takes notes down so she knows what we're doing for all the lessons. Then she comes and helps me.

**Is there anything that ever makes you unhappy at school?** Being late sometimes, but that was at my primary school. Now I don't mind it cos I can walk. I leave at 8.00 but it's only two minutes' walk away [school starts at 9.00]. If I do be a little bit late Max comes and knocks for me and then we walk up there. Mostly I knock for him.

**What about the future? What sort of job would you like to do?** An artist...a game maker for GameCube, or something like that.

**What do you think you might need to do to get there?** Probably try really hard in art and try really hard in IT. Like, research on how to make games and stuff.

**And would you like to live away from home and get married and things like that?** Yes. I've thought about that. I'd like to go to Spain, cos we mostly go there every holiday, or Egypt. I've only been to Egypt once and it was really good. I went with my friend and his mum and dad. Had a hotel and we could get free stuff.

**Anything else? Would you like to go to art college or university?** Kind of like to go to art college.





# Samuel

**Do you go to school at the moment?** No, because I don't have a school to go to. Because the school I was at is no good and we can't find a new one. Because they did not want to keep me. Too much trouble. The bullies were too much trouble.

**Did someone support you all the time?** That depends. At the start no, towards the end yes.

**Did they stop the bullying?** No. Sometimes they would do it even if there was a member of staff there.

**Did the member of staff support you?** No, they were too busy trying to stop me from getting to the bullies.

We're trying to get a place in a new school and it's going very, very slowly. I just want an education! I feel that they should just get on with it.

**If they were here now, what would you like to say to them?** I would ask them why I don't have an education yet, for one thing.

**When you go to another school, would you like to go to a mainstream school, or a special one?** I'd just like to go to a school, actually!

**Do you think that if they had taken more time with you, you might have had more of a chance to succeed?** They do not know that for a fact. Maybe that is just what they really believed. I don't think that was true, personally. I think it's more about the school than the speed you do it at.

**Would you like a school where there are more staff, maybe where the classes are smaller?** I dunno, I'd just like to go to a school.

**Would you like to go to a school where there are others like you?** Yes, probably, but as I said, I just want to go to a school. The fact of the matter is they are taking a long time, but then again there

are few schools we can still get into. We can't use a mainstream school because the LEA won't let me go into a mainstream school – my theory is because we have already failed at one mainstream school. On the other hand, we have already failed at...I lose count...two specialist schools.

[Mum: It wasn't that you failed – it wasn't a test. It's just that those schools weren't right for you, because the LEA that you come under doesn't provide specialist schooling for children with Asperger syndrome in this county. So now we have to look for a school out of county. So it's the LEA that's failed, not you.]

Well, exactly! They've failed, I make it three times. So basically we tried one LEA and it didn't work so now we're trying a different LEA.

**Would you rather have a school that is nearer?** I would actually rather have a school that I go to!

**If you could choose, what then?** Whichever one I'd end up in quicker!

**How long have you been out of school now?** One term.

**How do you feel about that?** Very frustrated. I mean, actually, it is a bit more than a term. It's just over... If you can call three lessons a day in the learning support room an education, then it's just over a term. But I don't think you can call it an education so it's actually more than that.

I do music and art and PE, too. I like art. The thing is I get one art lesson a week and PE I think it's



Samuel is 12. He has been in a number of schools, most recently a large comprehensive with a special resource base. He has a younger brother called Joshua. Since this interview took place Samuel has started doing 20 hours a week at a mainstream school in his local area.

one, so in total that's five lessons per week. So I am doing five lessons a week, and I should be doing five lessons a day, I think. Or more, if you make it shorter lessons. So actually I am getting what I should get in a day in a week!

[Mum: It's a shocker, isn't it, Sam? We're going to sort it out, aren't we?]

**Have you thought about what you'd like to do when you leave school?** Yes, an 'oddquillionaire'! That's a posh name for a businessman.

*"I want to be a part-time campaigner. The same thing that you are campaigning about now. Schools for people who can't get a proper education."*

[Mum: Sam, the word you are looking for is an entrepreneur.]

Oh, yes! And one of those! I want to be an entrepreneur and a bailiff, and a part-time campaigner. The same thing that you are campaigning about now. Schools for people who can't get a proper education.

# Ruaraidh

I go to primary school and I'm in P5. I like maths and free time. I play football and hide and seek with my friends, Cameron and Daryl.

Didn't always go to this school – I was at home [when he was five]. I like school cos I get to see my friends, but at home I got lots of play time.

I sometimes go to Cubs after school and I've got 15 badges – ice skating, sport, swimming 1 and 2, and others.

I don't like spelling and times tables.

I have a helper who sits with me and if I'm stuck on a word she helps me. It makes a big difference. Sometimes she goes to Elliot in a different class. Reading and writing are difficult cos I'm dyslexic. Mum says she keeps me on track. I used to have my own timetable but not now. I don't want to be different.

*"I have a helper who sits with me and if I'm stuck on a word she helps me. It makes a big difference."*

I sometimes get into trouble and get shouted at and get told off for saying stuff I wasn't saying. They [the older children] don't like me. The teacher doesn't do a lot to stop it and she shouts at me. But it doesn't happen when my helper is there. I feel safe then.

I go to school in a taxi, but I don't like it – it's got dog hairs in it and the driver's not very nice. He slams the door and shouts and he pushed my brother in the car.

When I grow up I want to be a mechanic mending motor bikes in Glasgow. I want to be a housemate with Daryl and go to college.

Ruaraidh (pronounced Rory) is nine. He is in a mainstream school in Scotland and is in a mixed-age class.



# Conclusion

School can be a confusing and difficult place for children with autism. Many of the children in this report talk about finding it difficult to fit in at school and make friends. Too many have been bullied, many have had to change schools and some have been excluded from school.

However, the children also talk about individual teachers or assistants who, through their understanding and support, have made a positive difference to their school life. They talk about the support or adjustments that have helped them overcome some of the barriers they face. Despite the challenges, children speak of 'happy schools', good friends and fantastic academic results. As they demonstrate, where there is understanding and appropriate support children with autism can achieve and play a full role in school life.

Young people with autism have the same hopes for the future as their peers; in these interviews they talk about becoming a space scientist, an artist, a mechanic, having a family and writing a book, and doing "the same thing that you are campaigning about now...schools for people who can't get a proper education."

The National Autistic Society *make school make sense* campaign calls for improvements to educational provision for children with autism, so that every child can get the education they deserve to enable them to succeed at school and in the future. It is vital that national governments, local authorities and education and library boards listen to the views expressed by these young people and act on their words so that they, and all children with autism, can access the education that is their right.

## Autism is complex – our demands are simple

### The right school for every child

The children in this report are all individuals and they learn in different settings. Many have been to a lot of different schools or have been excluded from school, some are out of school altogether and, in Samuel's words, "just want to go to school". Their experiences demonstrate the need for every child with autism to have local access to a diverse range of educational provision.

- The Government, Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and the Scottish Executive (SE) should enshrine in law a duty upon local authorities and education and library boards in Northern Ireland to ensure that every child with autism has local access to a diverse range of mainstream and specialist educational provision, including autism-specific resource bases attached to mainstream schools, special schools and specialist outreach support.
- Local authorities and education and library boards should ensure that every child with autism has local access to this diverse range of mainstream and specialist educational provision, and report publicly on the range of provision that is provided. If a child has highly complex needs which cannot be met locally, they should be able to access appropriate national provision.

### The right training for every teacher

Many children in this report highlight the difference it makes to be taught by teachers who have an understanding of autism. Some pick out individuals who they could not manage without. David says, "The SENCO was really brilliant...it's hard to explain but she made everything sort of work alright."

1 in 110 children has autism so all teachers should expect to teach a child with the disability and must receive appropriate training in order that they can best support their needs.

- The Government, WAG and SE should fund, develop and distribute resource packs on autism for teachers and support staff, which provide practical information, ideas and support on how best to support the differing needs of children with autism.
- The Government, WAG, SE, local authorities and education and library boards must ensure that all Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and the Principal Teacher of Learning Support (or another senior member of staff in Scotland) receive training in autism. This training must be sufficiently in depth that they are able to meet the needs of children with autism, and can disseminate best practice to other staff in the school.

### The right approach in every school

As these children reveal, simple adjustments and support can make a real difference to their lives. Some have a quiet space to go to when it all gets too much, some have individual timetables and help to find their way around the school, others talk about how clear, written instructions and visual information helps them to make sense of class. It is vital that all schools are autism-friendly schools.

- Local authorities and education and library boards must ensure schools' disability accessibility plans refer to the specific needs of children with autism and are implemented effectively.
- Local authorities and education and library boards should embrace the opportunity presented by the new Disability Equality Duty to ensure that schools in their area promote and provide a positive environment for children with autism now and in the future.
- Local authorities in England must review implementation and promote the use of the DfES *Autistic spectrum disorders: good practice guidance*.
- The WAG and the SE should adopt the DfES good practice guidance or develop an equivalent for use in Wales and Scotland.

## Take action!

There are lots of ways you can get involved in the *make school make sense* campaign to help make a difference for children with autism. To find out more visit [www.autism.org.uk/campaign](http://www.autism.org.uk/campaign), telephone 020 7923 5799 (answerphone) or email [campaign@nas.org.uk](mailto:campaign@nas.org.uk)



# Appendix

## Discussion guidelines

### Background

- How old are you?
- How many brothers, sisters or pets have you got in your family?
- What are your favourite TV programmes, books or games?
- What other hobbies and interests have you got?
- What do you spend a lot of time doing when you are at home?
- What things do you do during the week or at weekends (clubs, sport, music, art, etc)?
- What things do you know a lot about, or do you like reading and talking about?
- Do you collect anything?

### School basics

- What school do you go to now? Describe it: how big is it? How many buildings are there? How many people?
- How do you go to school? Do you walk, go by car, by bus, etc?
- What class are you in? How big is it? What is the teacher like?
- What other schools have you been to? For how long and why did you leave? (Check background with parents.)
- What subjects or lessons do you enjoy or find easy?
- What subjects or lessons do you find difficult?
- What school clubs or other activities do you take part in? (You may get information about non-school activities here, too.)

### Help in school or college

- What help do you get in school or the classroom, eg prompts; teacher gives extra instructions; things are written down, classroom assistant; friends tell you what to do; allowed to sit somewhere special; get extra time to do tests; allowed to go out if getting anxious; have personal timetable and task reminders; a tutor who helps you.
- If you need help in school who do you go to? When? Do you have regular meetings or are they ad hoc? How do they work? What sorts of things do you get help with?
- Is there somewhere you can go if you feel distressed?
- Which parts of the school or school day do you like? For example being in the library, staying inside at break time, going home.
- Which parts of going to school do you find difficult or do you dislike? For example, changing lessons, break times, when the teacher changes, lunch in the cafeteria, doing PE. How do these make you feel?
- What was it like moving from your old school to your new school? What helped you? What worried you?

### People in school

- Do you have friends at school?
- What do you do together?
- How do you get on with other people at school? Who do you like talking to outside lessons?
- Are people kind to you? What sorts of things do other pupils, or your teachers, do or say?
- Are people sometimes unkind? What happens? Have you ever been bullied?

### Bullying

- Do you get, or have you ever got, into trouble? What happened? Why? How did you feel?

### The future

- How do you feel about the future?
- When you leave school what job would you like to have? What would you like to be?
- When you leave school, what do you think you will do – go to college or university; stay home; get a job; nothing?
- What do you want to do or be when you grow up?
- Do you want to get married or have a family?

### Transition (where relevant)

- Have you started planning for your future? Who helps you with that? What have you done about planning?

## Glossary

<b>ASD</b>	autistic spectrum disorder
<b>ASDAN</b>	curriculum teaching key skills and personal and social skills
<b>CAMHS</b>	children's and adolescent mental health services
<b>COPE</b>	certificate of personal effectiveness
<b>mufti</b>	casual clothes
<b>SENCO</b>	special education needs co-ordinator