Access to Education: Communication and Autism Team (CAT)

The Communication and Autism Team (CAT) are a specialist educational support service, supporting children and young people in Birmingham with autism.

Through specialist advice and support these children and young people can access learning, successful inclusion and the opportunity to maximise their educational, social and employment potential.


CAT Registration

Birmingham children and young people, aged between two and twenty five years, can be registered by their setting only to the allocated Communication & Autism Team worker. For those in a school setting aged between two-eighteen years, must have a Unique Pupil Reference Number (UPRN.)

Those in the foundation stages up to the end of key stage two may have significant social communication difficulties or an official diagnosis of autism. Those key stage three to post 16 must have a formal diagnosis on the autism spectrum.

Our model of service delivery is to support children and young people at three different levels; this is decided between the setting and the CAT worker for each individual. It is subject to change with the fluctuating needs of the child/young person.

The levels are:

1. Universal & Universal Plus – To promote good autism practice across the setting, delivered through the setting’s Strategic Lead &/or Lead Practitioner, who receive support, advice and resources from CAT worker.
2. Additional Support – delivered by Strategic Lead &/or Lead Practitioner and supported by CAT Worker.
3. Complex & Significant led by CAT worker consolidated by Strategic Lead & Lead Practitioner.

Autism Education Trust Programme

The Autism Education Trust Programme was awarded funding from the DfE in 2011 to deliver a programme to raise workforce competency through:

- Developing a 3 tiered programme of autism training for school staff
  - Tier 1 (general awareness)
  - Tier 2 (for staff working with children and young people on a daily basis)
  - Tier 3 (for senior leaders within the setting)
- Integrating this training with national standards for schools for autism education
- Developing a competency framework to guide professional development

A key feature of this programme is that the elements are closely linked so that staff and schools can not only identify development needs but also have access to the training and resources to meet them.

In 2013 the programme was expanded to include training for Early Years and Post 16 settings, developed in line with the existing framework for schools. Central to the programme is the concept of autism as a difference not a deficit and this is a significant change in approach. It puts the child and young person at the heart of the process.

The training is delivered by regional hubs across the country and Birmingham Communication and Autism Team (CAT) hold the licence to deliver all 3 programmes. Evaluations show that over 98% of those attending our courses feel strongly that it had made a difference to their understanding and working practice.

info@autismeducationtrust.org.uk

A guide to the use of the AET programme materials by local authorities, support services and schools in Birmingham
Youth Clubs and Family support
CAT run 3 Youth Groups with a view to supporting some of Birmingham’s most complex young people with a diagnosis of autism who are unable (due to their autism) to access any other groups within their local communities.

- South Youth Group is a mixed group (12-18 yrs) that meets on a Tuesday evening in Bournville
- Central Youth Group is a mixed group (12-18 yrs) that meets on a Wednesday evening in Nechells
- North Youth Group is a girl’s group (13 – 18 yrs) that meets on a Thursday evening in Sutton Coldfield

The groups are small – 12 Young People, 2 Leaders and a number of volunteers. Referral is usually by way of CAT working in schools but also via BCCP – contact CAT directly to discuss.

CAT run a variety of parent support events:
- Parent autism awareness courses – free but places must be booked – (Barnardo’s Cygnet course) – 6 x weekly 2½hr sessions – offered termly at venues across the city (at least 4 per term) – invite is usually through CAT worker within CYP’s school but other requests for courses come directly to CAT and we will try to accommodate where capacity allows
- Monthly drop-in sessions – free and no need to book – just turn up – there are 2 CAT groups that currently meet in Nechells and in the South. (Also some CAT workers have agreed with their individual schools to hold regular drop-in sessions for local parents)
- Termly coffee morning – free but places (60) must be booked – these have previously been held at the MAC – fliers are sent out to schools and also advertised on BCC School Noticeboard

CAT Complex Work
The CAT work closely with SENAR as the commissioner to identify, maintain and, where concerns are raised, quality assure out of authority educational placements for children pupils whose needs require additional Local Authority funding, above and beyond the levels available through Birmingham’s Banded Funding framework.

Birmingham Complex Care Panel
Referrals for CAT involvement in assessment of individual pupil need and representing pupil voice to inform commissioning services are taken from SENAR commissioner on Birmingham Complex Care panel. From this autism specific assessment, further involvement to support transition or to provide a Local Authority view on transition may be actioned, depending on individual need and resources already commissioned.

Vulnerable Placements
Where SENAR identify pupils in vulnerable placements, CAT workers are allocated to liaise with families, settings, agencies and pupils themselves in order to offer an autism specific view of situation and inform assessment of whether the placement remains viable or whether a new one needs to be identified.

Mentoring
Where complex children and young people are discharged from Tier four inpatient services, SENAR request mentoring from CAT to increase pupil’s ability to access educational services and wider community services.

Secure estate
Pupils with SEN in the secure estate are referred to CAT by SENAR. CAT provide advice re suitable post sentence educational placements and transition arrangements.

CAT Children Out of School Service
The CAT CHOOS Service came into effect from September 2012. The team was commissioned by Birmingham City Council, Special Educational Assessment and Review (SENAR) to provide ‘autism specific’ interim teaching and learning for children and young people who are ‘out of school’ and often presenting with complex and uneven profiles.

Referrals to this team are made via the SENAR Team Managers and Principle Officers only.

The team offers individualised packages of support that progresses ‘readiness for school’ and accommodates personalised transitions back into education.

The views of the children/young people and the families that we support are at the centre of our work ensuring that they lead and inform decision making. Our holistic approach enables participation, engagement, inclusion and access.

Post 16
The team track Young People registered with CAT to their post 16 destination. We work on supporting the transitions into FE settings.

Where a young person has and Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and is deemed by SENAR as being at risk of not meeting their EHCP outcomes, SENAR may request mentoring support to engage with that young person.

Contact us
If you are working with a child or young person with autism and you would like advice or to discuss what specialist support may be available please ring 0121 303 1792 or email A2EFlatSandwich@birmingham.gov.uk