

**MINISTER'S DIRECTIVE No. MD 2013-01**  
**Educational Services for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders**

Pursuant to section 8 of the School Act R.S.P.E.I. 1988, Cap. S-2.1, I hereby issue the following Minister's Directive concerning educational services for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

**1.0 Objective**

The purpose is to provide direction to school boards and schools regarding services for students with autism spectrum disorders. In this directive the terms **"Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)"** and **"Autism"** are used interchangeably to refer to the conditions included within the umbrella term, "Pervasive Developmental Disorders" (i.e., Asperger Syndrome, Autistic Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Rett's Disorder)

**2.0 Definitions**

- 2.1 **"Applied Behaviour Analysis"** is the science based on known principles of learning that can be effectively used to understand behavior and teach new skills.
- 2.2 **"Behavior Support Plan"** is a written record of what the team will do to address challenging behavior impeding the learning of a child. A comprehensive plan is based on an understanding of the purpose of the behaviour and includes positive evidence-based strategies, preventative measures, teaching and reinforcement strategies and is monitored carefully for effectiveness.
- 2.3 **"Continuum of Support"** is the range of programs, settings, materials and services, using additional or alternate curriculum, adaptations or modifications, changes in teaching methodology and/or support from staff that accommodate various levels of need for students with diagnosed special needs.
- 2.4 **"Individualized Education Plan (IEP)"** is a written record that documents the individualized plan for a student with special educational needs. This planning is a continuous and integrated process of assessment, instruction, evaluation, decision-making and reporting. The IEP outlines support services and educational program adaptations and/or

modifications and is developed in collaboration with the family.

- 2.5 **“Pervasive Developmental Disorders”** involve impairments in reciprocal social interaction and communication skills and the presence of stereotypical or repetitive behaviours, interests, and activities.
- 2.6 **“Provincial Autism Team”** consists of the Autism Clinical Specialist, Early Years Autism Coordinator, Board-based Autism Consultants and Early Years Autism Specialists
- 2.7 **“School”** in this document refers to public education only

### **3.0 Key Concepts**

- 3.1 Persons with autism, like others, will continue to learn throughout their lifetime. At different times, they require varying levels of support depending on the severity of their condition.
- 3.2 Many students with autism require individualized programming. Assessment is the basis for determining appropriate programs and services, including intensity, duration and instructional context. Decisions about intervention and program delivery shall be outcome-based, using objective measures.
- 3.3 Teaching strategies based on the science of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) have been documented to be effective in the education of individuals with autism. A variety of behavioural teaching strategies and supports based on peer reviewed research and evidence based standards shall be utilized.
- 3.4 A collaborative team approach is an essential component. Active parent engagement, education and ongoing communication maximize learning opportunities and generalization of skills.
- 3.5 Services must be provided by appropriately trained personnel at all levels. Both pre-service and ongoing professional development are necessary.
- 3.6 Special attention and planning must occur to prepare students for transitions at key points such as school entry, between grades, changing schools and to post-secondary environments.
- 3.7 A continuum of supports shall be available for both the students and the educators, to facilitate successful experiences for the student with autism in public school.
- 3.8 The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development plays an active role in capacity building and monitoring the ratio of Autism Consultants and Early Years Autism Specialists to students with ASD in order to maintain a ratio that allows for effective support.

- 3.9 Further elaboration of the standards and guidelines for delivery of educational services to students with Autism can be found in the handbook *A Guide to Early Years Autism Services* (DEECD, 2012) as well as best practice guidelines and resources on the Department website <http://www.gov.pe.ca/eecd/autismservices>
- 3.10 In order to promote province wide consistency in the implementation of the Guidelines, it is essential that School Boards consult with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development when decisions will impact on service delivery for students with ASD or on the role of the Autism Consultants and Specialists
- 3.11 Recognizing that early intervention is important, the Department is committed to providing a seamless continuum of needs based services from the earliest point possible.

## **4.0 Roles and Responsibilities**

### **4.1 Department Responsibilities**

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is responsible for providing leadership, direction, assistance and ongoing support for the delivery of educational services for students with ASD. Leadership in this area is provided by the Autism Clinical Specialist and the Early Years Autism Coordinator in collaboration with the Provincial Autism Team.

#### **The Autism Clinical Specialist**

- 4.1.1 provides consultation and mentoring to the Provincial Autism Team to support the use of evidence based practices for students with ASD and their families
- 4.1.2 maintains a database including all PEI children diagnosed with ASD in order to inform policy development and plan for current and future needs
- 4.1.3 provides direct student or team support for complex cases in response to School Board requests; may include assessment, assistance in development of IEPs, Behavior Support Plans and identifying appropriate curriculum materials
- 4.1.4 coordinates and monitors the implementation of the Provincial Autism Strategy in collaboration with other departments and the Provincial Autism Team
- 4.1.5 collaborates with partners in the development of programs, resources, policies, guidelines and handbooks related to autism
- 4.1.6 consults with government and community agencies regarding effective educational services to individuals with ASD;
- 4.1.7 participates in collaborative research with designated partners;

- 4.1.8 monitors the ratio of Autism Consultants to students diagnosed with ASD, and trains additional staff when fully qualified candidates are not available;
- 4.1.9 supervises Autism Consultants during their training year; provides mentoring and professional development for the Provincial Autism Team
- 4.1.10 In collaboration with the Provincial Autism Team, provides in-service training to school and board staff on behavioural teaching strategies and evidence based intervention;
- 4.1.11 maintains an autism lending library for staff and families;
- 4.1.12 insures that schools and families have access to information about funding for preschool and school age funding
- 4.1.13 represents the province as a member of the Atlantic Autism Advisory Committee

### **The Early Years Autism Coordinator**

- 4.2.1 coordinates the provision of Early Years Autism Services for designated children with ASD receiving Intensive Kindergarten Support (IKS)
- 4.2.2 provides clinical supervision and professional development to the EarlyYears Autism Team
- 4.2.3 ensures that interventions for children with ASD in the Early Years Autism Service are based on effective evidence based practices
- 4.2.4 collaborates in the development of programs, guidelines and handbooks related to the provision of Early Years Autism Services for children with ASD
- 4.2.5 monitors and measures the overall effectiveness of the Intensive Kindergarten Support Program in collaboration with schools

### **4.3 School Board Responsibilities**

The School District/Board is responsible for providing ongoing support for teachers and instructional staff in the delivery of educational services for students with ASD by

- 4.3.1 ensuring that personnel assigned to Board Autism Consultant positions have met Department standards of education, relevant experience and appropriate training;
- 4.3.2 ensuring that only students with a documented diagnosis of ASD receive support from Board Autism Consultants;
- 4.3.3 ensuring that interventions with documented empirical effectiveness for children with autism are prioritized and form the basis of educational services
- 4.3.4 monitoring the caseloads of Autism Consultants to maintain effective service provision

- 4.3.5 supporting the transition of children with autism at school entry as per the protocol described in *A Guide to Early Years Autism Services* which may be updated or amended from time to time by the Department
- 4.3.6 ensuring that children with autism in kindergarten transition smoothly to Board Consultant caseloads as appropriate

#### **4.4 Board Autism Consultant Responsibilities**

Board Autism Consultants shall play an active role in supporting students with ASD in Grades K-12 as well as designated children in Kindergarten. They work in partnership with schools to provide effective supports including but not limited to

- 4.4.1 providing guidance to school teams in the creation and monitoring of IEP goals and objectives for students with ASD;
- 4.4.2 completing formal and informal assessment to assist in the development of Individual Education Plans;
- 4.4.3 providing guidance for Functional Behavior Assessments to develop Behavior Support Plans;
- 4.4.4 providing support to optimize student transitions at school entry or between grades and schools
- 4.4.5 maintaining written documentation of school consults, student observations and recommendations;
- 4.4.6 collaborating with designated school staff in the development of social skills groups;
- 4.4.7 providing suggestions to schools regarding recommended teaching materials/resources and teacher-made visual supports;
- 4.4.8 ensuring that interventions with documented empirical effectiveness for children with autism are prioritized and form the basis of educational services
- 4.4.9 guiding staff in the use of efficient, accurate and non-intrusive data collection to enable decision-making
- 4.4.10 providing introductory, curriculum-specific or student-specific training sessions for school staff;
- 4.4.11 providing the Special Education Autism Coordinator with enrollment figures for students with ASD bi-annually in January and June and as requested
- 4.4.12 provide individualized support, with level and frequency of service and support based on assessed needs

#### **4.5 School Staff Responsibilities**

School staff shall support educational service delivery to students with Autism, pursuant to current Department and Board policies under the direction of the principal, by

- 4.5.1 making appropriate referrals for screening to the Board Student Services team when ASD is suspected;
- 4.5.2 taking a leadership role in coordinating the student's program, with the school-based Student Services Team, or designated staff
- 4.5.3 notifying the Board and the Special Education Autism Coordinator when a student with Autism is newly enrolled, newly diagnosed, leaves the province or exits school;
- 4.5.4 ensuring that the Board Autism Consultant or Autism Specialist (for IKS students) is a member of the IEP team for assigned students;
- 4.5.5 monitoring student progress through product samples, pre- and post-testing, curriculum-based assessment, skill specific data collection or a combination of these, as identified in collaboration with the Board Autism Consultant or Early Years Autism Specialist;
- 4.5.6 collecting formal assessment information through a resource teacher or other designated school staff, as needed;
- 4.5.7 facilitating the transfer of information as students move between grades and other schools, utilizing communication tools as outlined in the resource *Elementary Transition Planning. A Framework for Successful Transition Planning for Young People with Special Needs*. (DEECD, 2006) as may be updated or amended from time to time by the Department
- 4.5.8 coordinating the development of a Secondary Transition Plan, beginning at age 14 and providing opportunities for the student to develop skills for work and independent living in addition to academic programming during their high school years, as outlined in the handbook, *Secondary Transition Planning. A Framework for Transition Planning for Young People with Special Needs*. (DEECD, 2007) as may be updated or amended from time to time by the Department
- 4.5.9 encouraging school or community-based work opportunities for students with ASD during their high school years;
- 4.5.10 identifying professional development and training needs for school staff and forwarding requests to the Board Autism Consultants, Autism Specialists and/or Autism Clinical Specialist;
- 4.5.11 engaging families to the greatest extent possible in the decisions about supports for their child, including the development of IEPs and Behavior Support Plans
- 4.5.12 ensuring that interventions with documented empirical effectiveness for children with autism are prioritized and form the basis of educational services

#### **4.6 Early Years Autism Specialist Responsibilities (Kindergarten)**

Early Years Autism Specialists play an active role in supporting young children with ASD, some of whom may require an increased level of support during the first school year. The Autism Specialists work in partnership with Kindergarten staff to provide effective Intensive Kindergarten Support (IKS) including but not limited to

- 4.6.1 providing guidance to school teams in the creation and monitoring of IEP goals and objectives for students with ASD;
- 4.6.2 completing formal and informal assessment to assist in the development of Individual Education Plans
- 4.6.3 providing guidance for Functional Behavior Assessments to develop Behavior Support Plans;
- 4.6.4 providing support to school teams to optimize student transitions at school entry and/or to Grade 1
- 4.6.5 maintaining written documentation of consults, observations and recommendations;
- 4.6.6 providing suggestions regarding recommended teaching materials/resources
- 4.6.7 ensuring that interventions with documented empirical effectiveness for children with autism are prioritized and form the basis of educational services
- 4.6.8 providing individualized support, with frequency based on assessed need
- 4.6.9 working directly with assigned students and providing ongoing coaching and feedback to involved staff

#### **5.0 Board Autism Consultant/ Early Years Autism Specialist Qualifications**

In order to provide appropriate and effective educational supports for students with ASD, consistent with the aims established in this Directive, it is necessary that individuals employed as Board Autism Consultants and Early Years Autism Specialists possess essential professional competencies prior to employment in PEI, including

##### **Minimum Requirements:**

- Master's degree in Education, Special Education, Psychology, Child Development, or related field [Education, Special Education degree preferred];
- Extensive training in Applied Behaviour Analysis: minimum two Graduate level courses in Applied Behavior Analysis or Autism;
- Three years direct experience working with learners with autism, preferably in school settings
- Knowledge of current effective evidence-based practices for learners with autism

##### **Preferred Qualifications:**

- Completion of (7) BCBA approved courses in Applied Behavior Analysis or Autism (Graduate level or equivalent)
- Board Certification in Behavior Analysis

**5.1** When, after internal and external posting, no appropriately trained full time candidates are identified, the Department may provide additional incentives (i.e., tuition reimbursement and one year of practicum/mentoring, based on return for service of 5 years beyond the training completion) to a candidate identified by the School Board.

**Dated** at Charlottetown this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2013.

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J. Alan Mclsaac  
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development