

Early Years Special Educational Needs Service ND progression framework: Guidance for use

Which children is this for?

You can use this assessment profile for children with social communication differences. They may have a diagnosis of autism or be on an assessment pathway or on that development trajectory (note that this group of children will be referred to as autistic children within this guidance document).

The Progression Framework is useful to use to celebrate the strengths, interests and differences for children where the Celebratory Checkpoints or Small Steps do not reflect their needs and/or progress accurately.

This cohort of children are those with additional learning difficulties or those who are currently in the early sensory stages of learning.

Rationale

For some autistic children, developmental progress may not follow the same sequence, pace or pattern described within EYFS Development Matters. While Development Matters provides a helpful guide to typical child development, it is based largely on neurotypical developmental trajectories and may not always capture the unique strengths, learning styles and ways of interacting that autistic children demonstrate. As a result, you may find that an alternative assessment approach, such as the Progression Framework, provides a more meaningful picture of a child's development by recognising and valuing different pathways of learning rather than measuring progress against age-related expectations alone.

The Progression Framework is particularly helpful because it is structured around the three areas of difference commonly associated with autism: **social understanding and communication, social understanding and communication**, and **flexibility, information processing and understanding**. These areas help us understand how a child experiences and engages with the world, identifying both strengths and areas where additional support may be beneficial. For example, a child may communicate effectively through gestures, visual supports or shared interests but not yet use spoken language in ways reflected within Development Matters. Similarly, a child may develop deep interests, prefer predictable routines, or engage with others in ways that are different from their peers. The Progression Framework enables you to recognise, celebrate and build on these differences, providing a more personalised and affirming view of development that can inform inclusive planning, targeted support and meaningful next steps for learning.

How to use?

The tool should be used to gain a snapshot of current strengths, interests and differences that require support rather than evidence progress made.

The statements should be considered and annotated to personalise the information gathered.

For example:

ther	She comments/shows attention to item/event Sends intentional message to prompt others to comment	She greets others Sends intentional message to initiate social interaction		 Lisa Anderton (Childrens Servi... September 10, 2025 at 7:15 PM takes adult hands to her face to request peek a boo game @mention or reply
			3	
			3	

gurgling, babbling and squealing. Shows pleasure at favoured playthings/ activities/ physical interactions Defends objects of preference Becomes distressed when a favourite activity ends. Develops independence and gets cross if adults try to complete tasks for them Share interest or excitement with an adult	1.2 Understands own sensory differences 2. Responding to sensory interventions 2.1 Responds to sensory adaptations to the environment 2.2 Responds to sensory input from supporting adult 2.3 Responds to input using sensory 'equipment'	  Rebecca Jones (Childrens Services) Smiles and makes happy vocalisations during bubble play; watches the bubbles and laughs when other children pop them. 06 September 2026 at 21:52
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At review points, additional observations can be added to existing comments and new comments added to statements as appropriate to demonstrate the child's current strengths, interests and differences.

Things to remember

- For children with social communication differences or a diagnosis of autism, we must remember the 3 areas of difference.
- Children with these differences develop differently and so should not be compared to neurotypical peers.
- The reviews should evidence the impact of your targeted work with the child, and it is the impact rather than progress that is important.
- Completing this assessment profile may support setting of new learning outcomes for the child. These learning outcomes should also take into account the child's personal context and interests.
- The assessment should be completed in collaboration with parents/carers.