



**Ambitious
about Autism**



**Equality, diversity,
and inclusion
strategy**

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Foreword from Jolanta Lasota, Chief Executive



I'm pleased to introduce Ambitious about Autism's equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) strategy. Our strategy is a high-level plan of action that sets out what we intend to do to make our organisation the best we can be over the next three years. It's been possible thanks to the work, thought and insights, provided by staff and external advisers, who are committed to the vision and mission of Ambitious about Autism.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion affect everybody. Its impact touches every part of our work, whether it's the young people, organisations, and supporters we work with, or our staff and volunteers. Only by recognising and valuing difference and treating everyone with dignity and respect, can we create a truly effective organisation, that has a positive impact on people's lives. Last year, the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement caused us all to confront the injustices that continue to exist in our society. Like many organisations, it brought into focus how much we still had to do ourselves.

As a leader of a disability charity and the mother of an autistic child, I know that many communities in our society continue to face marginalisation and discrimination. Minoritised groups continue to face barriers where others do not.

At Ambitious about Autism, we all have a role to play in addressing these inequalities by learning and growing as an organisation.

This strategy provides a framework that will take us through the next three years. It will enable us to minimise these barriers by working together and collaborating with our community to create a fairer organisation and a better society.

We are building on some good foundations. We are a Disability Confident Leader. A recent external report from the EW Group found that the tone of our website is very inclusive, we have some good policies in place and have followed through steadily with the Equality Statement we made in 2020. As a direct provider of services, we have consistently developed more resources to support families and children. As a national influencer, we have worked with organisations to create neurodiverse-friendly workplaces.

However, we do face real challenges as a direct service provider and as an employer. We do not always succeed in our EDI aspirations and in living our values and our evidence base is too shallow. I want to see more pupils and learners fulfilling their potential and finding employment when they leave us. I also want to see greater diversity in our leadership and management positions. Most importantly, I want everyone to experience and feel that we are an inclusive organisation where your voice matters.

Introduction

Autistic children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. We champion their rights and create opportunities. We take a person-centred approach focused on individuals' quality of life called the Ambitious Approach.

Our vision is a future where every autistic child and young person can be themselves and realise their ambitions.

We stand with autistic children and young people, champion their rights and create opportunities.

To realise our vision and mission, we need to understand the diverse needs of autistic children and young people. We can only achieve this by ensuring that we are diverse and inclusive across all our work, from our governance and leadership to people, services and wider influencing.

This document sets out the following.

1. Our context: what we do, the importance of EDI, values and behaviours.
2. Our EDI vision.
3. Our strategic priorities.
4. Our key performance indicators.
5. Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.
6. Next steps.



Our context and the importance of EDI

We are the national charity for autistic children and young people. We help autistic children and young people to be themselves. Through our Ambitious Approach, we take a person-centred approach focused on individuals' quality of life.

Over the next three years, we will continue to build on our core expertise in education and employability while engaging more than ever before in the other areas that are essential for autistic children and young people to lead a fulfilling life, such as having supportive families and relationships, good health and wellbeing and being active citizens in their communities.



If we are to succeed in achieving the best possible outcomes for autistic children and young people – in their time with us and beyond - we have to be diverse and inclusive as a direct service provider and as an employer. We need a workforce that reflects the demographics of the population we serve and provides a workplace where all employees feel a strong sense of belonging; and where they're free to bring their whole selves to work. We want our volunteers to have an excellent experience and those who support us to be confident that everything we do is inclusive.

EDI is about being the best we can be – a high performing organisation that brings together all the different elements defined below.

- **Equality** is when all staff, job candidates, prospective employees, volunteers, and supporters are treated with respect within the law and have an equal opportunity.
- **Diversity** is about recognising difference. It acknowledges the benefit of having a range of perspectives in decision-making - and the workforce, volunteers and supporters are representative of the organisation's audience and beneficiaries.
- **Inclusion** is where people's differences are valued. An inclusive working environment is one in which everyone feels that they belong without having to conform. Their contribution matters, and they can perform to their full potential, no matter their background, identity, or circumstances. An inclusive workplace has fair policies and practices in place and enables a diverse range of people to work together effectively.

Values

Autistic children and young people are at the heart of everything we do.



One of our core values is that we celebrate difference: creating a world where everyone belongs. We strive to live by this value every day in all that we do, but we recognise it is time for us to up our game. We are ambitious in name, and this should include ambition in equality, diversity, and inclusion. We must and want to do much more. It is part of our core purpose to be an organisation that champions and supports diversity.

Our vision is for a future where every autistic child and young person can be themselves and realise their ambitions. To achieve this vision, we must be an organisation that values difference.

Our values and beliefs have informed what we aspire to in our EDI behavioural framework. Our strategy and the action plans that follow will reinforce their importance.

1. **Respect and value** – the needs, challenges, responses and opinions of others, embracing diversity and difference as they are what make us ambitious.
2. **Feedback and trust** – we are open to giving and receiving feedback and developing the culture of trust, so that everyone feels their voice is heard.
3. **Accountability** – we are all responsible for our actions and for making our workplace inclusive. We may not always get it right but, if this happens, we will take prompt action.

This strategy is a critical component of Ambitious about Autism's three-year organisational strategy (2021-24). The EDI strategy is informed by an external diversity audit conducted by the EW Group, governance reviews and the parent/carers survey.

Our EDI vision

Our EDI vision is to become a place that embraces, enables and champions equality, diversity and inclusion. We want autistic children and young people, our staff, volunteers, supporters, in fact, anyone who comes into contact with us to feel they belong and can bring their whole selves to Ambitious about Autism. Through our advocacy, we seek to have a positive impact on society as a whole.



EDI strategic priorities and overarching goals

1. **Courageous governance and leadership** – an organisation whose diverse governance and leadership demonstrably and actively lead on EDI.
2. **Inclusive workplace** – where all our people feel a strong sense of belonging/can bring their whole selves to work.
3. **High quality and inclusive education and services** – reach and support diverse communities in a way that is enabling and appropriate to ambitions, interests, experiences and needs.
4. **Influential national work** – we will stand with autistic children and young people from diverse backgrounds nationally.

Courageous governance and leadership

Our governance and leadership will:

- proactively and confidently embrace and lead the EDI agenda as a central part of our approach and plans
- become increasingly diverse and inclusive over time
- gather evidence to inform actions that will improve outcomes.

Inclusive workplace

Our workplace will have equality, diversity, and inclusion at the heart of what we do by:

- developing a deep understanding of the profile, needs and views of all our people
- ensuring leadership and management is driven by the principles of inclusion
- having fair and consistent processes
- investing in staff development
- creating an environment that celebrates diversity.

High quality and inclusive education and services

We will reach and support diverse communities in a way that is enabling and appropriate to their ambitions, interests, experiences and needs by:

- ensuring that all plans, policies, systems and processes for our services take a holistic approach to EDI

- ensuring the curriculum and content within our services reflects the diverse histories, interests and experiences of the communities we serve
- working to ensure we promote our services and are accessible to diverse communities.

Influential national work

Nationally, we will stand with autistic children and young people from diverse communities by:

- researching and highlighting the views, experiences and needs of the diverse communities we serve to help shape policy and practice nationally
- working in partnership to make change happen with and for autistic and children and young people impacted by multiple barriers
- ensuring our work is representative of and promoted to diverse communities.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

We will develop a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, which will include the following key performance indicators (KPIs).

Courageous governance and leadership:

- Demographic data on key governance and leadership roles.
- The board will be more diverse and inclusive overtime.

Inclusive workplace:

- Demographic data on staff and volunteers.
- Engagement rates.
- Participation in learning and development.
- Progression rates.
- Reward, including pay gaps across gender, disability, and race.
- Disciplinary and grievance rates.
- Monitoring the impact of diversity events/initiatives.

We will develop our demographic data so that we can conduct analysis by different protected characteristics.

High quality and inclusive education and services:

- Schools and college equality and accessibility plans in place.
- Pupil and learner attendance, satisfaction, progression, attainment, outcomes, and destinations.
- Parents and carers engagement and satisfaction.
- Access to, and satisfaction with, employability, participation, and information services.
- Events held to celebrate diversity.

We will monitor, evaluate, and report on this EDI strategy through:

- an annual EDI report to reviewed by the EDI Committee, Senior Management Team (SMT), Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and our Board
- organisational monthly, termly and annual monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes

- the EDI Committee, ELT, SMT, Board and Governing Body meetings.

Next steps

We will:

- Communicate our strategy to all our stakeholders.
- Develop a detailed EDI action plan.
- Embed EDI in our three-year strategy, operational plans, school and college development plans, departmental plans and budget.
- Invest in the resources needed to implement this strategy, including an ongoing EDI lead.
- Develop an EDI monitoring and evaluation framework and embed EDI in the organisational framework.

