

# The Everyday Autism Handbook for Schools: 60+ Essential Guides for Staff

By Claire Droney and Annelies Verbiest

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*The Everyday Autism Handbook for Schools* provides essential guides for teachers and the whole school community educating and supporting autistic<sup>1</sup> learners across all age ranges in mainstream primary, post primary, special class and special school settings. It starts with an impactful visual representing views of autistic students answering the question “what brings you joy”? This is a remarkable opener that reminds us how supporting autistic learners is about using strengths to thrive. It effectively sets the tone for this handbook that is informed movingly in parts by the insights, opinions and commentary from autistic students, families and advocates. This handbook links theory to practice in an accessible way, structured simply in six key parts with each broken into user-friendly guides. The book is accompanied by downloadable appendices which offer concrete resources highly suitable for the busy teacher.

This practicability comes from the experience of the authors Claire Droney and Annelies Verbiest who have been working in this area for almost 40 years combined. They know what works and how to communicate in a way that will support teachers in an efficient and sustainable manner; it is a book by teachers for teachers.

Part one provides two short guides in understanding autism. These give digestible information in what you need to know. The strengths based approach is refreshing and almost novel for a book which provides guidance for supporting autistic learners. Notes on terminology as well as gender and autism reflect ongoing understanding and new learning in this area.

Part two offers autism friendly strategies which are both evidence based and accessible. These again are refreshingly entitled from the perspective of the

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1 Terminology adopted in the book reflects choices of authors who use identity first throughout but respecting views of contributors who chose to use person first language.

learners e.g. “Make everything visible for me”. These guides provide case examples, top tips, frequently asked questions and most importantly, the views of autistic advocates, parents and learners themselves in short quotes. The authors have aimed to centralise the insider perspective of autistic individuals and families which reflects a participatory approach to supporting autistic learners.

Parts three and four give guidance in cultivating an inclusive whole school community. This includes the environment along with supporting all staff, parents and peers again with a focus on acknowledging autism as a difference rather than a disorder. Here the authors have balanced supporting learners directly but also providing guidance in the role all community members play to create autism friendly schools. The authors’ reminder that good practice for autistic students will also benefit all learners is welcome.

Part five contains much of what you wanted to know and were afraid to ask about setting up the special class. This real-world information will be invaluable for all teachers in particular, those new to their special class or for principals planning to set one up in school. It is an often overlooked aspect but crucially important and again, the authors’ own experience and research here is evident.

Part six reflects the realities of the special class in an effective guide to class management with empathetic understanding. It is noteworthy that the authors discuss that what is perceived as challenging could actually be a very logical and functional solution for the pupil due to their areas of difference. This small attitudinal change has the potential to be very impactful in the classroom. This section again is further supported by case examples and guidance on how to use this information effectively.

This handbook is a clear move away from deficit based and hierarchical structures in autism education, reflecting the centrality of the autistic community in these matters and relating information grounded in research and professional experience in a straightforward way. Those interested in learning more can be guided by the comprehensive reference list and the index allows teachers to dip in and out of the pertinent aspects relevant to them. Further colour coding with easier access to the appendices could be beneficial here. These are possibly featured in an online version which was unavailable to the reviewer at time of writing.

The insights and tools in this book have the potential to lead to attitudinal and effective change in schools. It could be a resource for teachers as part of school self-evaluation or as a resource for communities of practice within or across

schools. The authors have provided an abundance of information that reflects a transactional approach to both supporting and educating autistic learners as well as guidance for educators and community members to think and behave ourselves in more inclusive ways to support diverse learners.

**THE EVERYDAY AUTISM HANDBOOK FOR SCHOOLS: 60+ ESSENTIAL GUIDES FOR STAFF** by Claire Droney and Annelies Verbiest, illustrated by Melanie Corr is published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2021 and costs Stg. £25.00