

'Great need to improve autism education in India', say researchers

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Academics from the University of Birmingham are in India this week sharing their expertise in the area of special educational needs, and autism in particular.

Typically 1 in 100 people are on the autism spectrum. While general awareness of autism has grown in India in recent times various misconceptions still exist. The public and some professionals need better understanding of what it means to have autism and how it affects people. There is also a need to share notions of 'best practice' in the education of children and young people on the autism spectrum.

Joining volunteers from the charity Hope & Compassion and colleagues from Cardiff Metropolitan University, Birmingham academics will impart skills and knowledge to people with limited access to training in autism, and introduce new technologies and equipment to help engage children who are hard to reach. The group will be running seminars and conducting training with practitioners and parents. Additionally, they will undertake teaching sessions with children using interactive software (Reactickles and Somantics), which is specifically designed for children with autism.

The visit will also strengthen existing partnerships and create new collaborations with academics at the University of Delhi, Khalsa College, the charity Action for Autism and Pingalwara Charitable Society, as well as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (a local government initiative for children with special educational needs and disabilities).

Dr Karen Guldberg, Senior Lecturer in Autism Studies and Director of the Autism Centre for Education and Research at the University of Birmingham, said: "We hope to set up sustainable networks and partnerships and will undertake a training needs analysis with a sample of parents and teachers. This will identify how we might be able to offer meaningful, long-term partnership and support."

Manpreet Kaur from the charity Hope & Compassion, said: "It is with the help of volunteers and academics that we are now able to bring new knowledge and research into areas that normally would not cater for the various disabilities. This enables progression and development for children, families, carers and institutions."

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