

Autism is a difference in how a person's brain develops which affects how they see and experience the world. It is often called a type of neurodivergence. It can affect how a person communicates with others, how they understand others and how other people understand them. It can affect how they think, learn and pay attention to things and affect their response to light, sounds, smells, tastes and touch.

Autistic people are more likely to have some physical and mental health conditions such as epilepsy, eating disorders, anxiety or depression. ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is also more common amongst autistic people.

Autism is something a person is born with and is not an illness. There is no treatment or cure but there are ways to manage it and get support.

(Information from the NHS website as at 19/06/26, [What is autism? - NHS](#))

Why is this important?



Autism can affect everyday life and autistic people can have differing support needs. Some live fully independently while others need high level care and support

What is the local context?

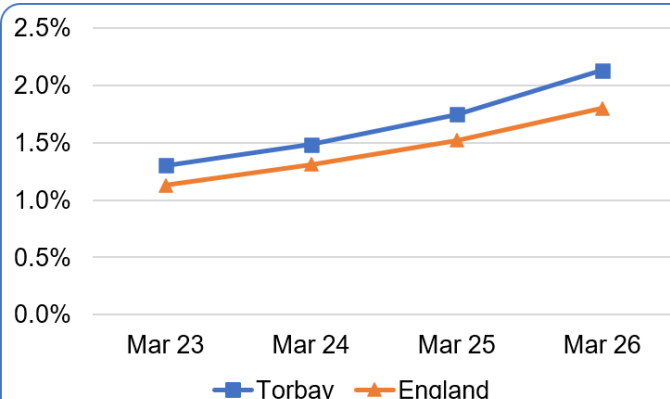


In Torbay the percentage of the GP registered population who have a diagnosis of autism is significantly higher than the England average and on an increasing trend (Fig 1)

Diagnosis on GP registers: The percentage on Torbay GP registers who have an autism diagnosis is 2.1% on 31 March 2026 (Fig 1), equating to 3,146 people. This is significantly higher than the England average of 1.8%. Both Torbay and England see an increase in the percentage over the 4 years shown.

This data comes from the Direct Enhanced Services part of the GP contract which is optional but all Torbay GP practices take part, nationally it appears the vast majority take part. One measure is the number of patients recorded on GP registers as having a diagnosis of autism. It should be noted that this shows diagnosis rates rather than rates of prevalence in the population.

Fig 1: Percentage of the GP population with a diagnosis of autism

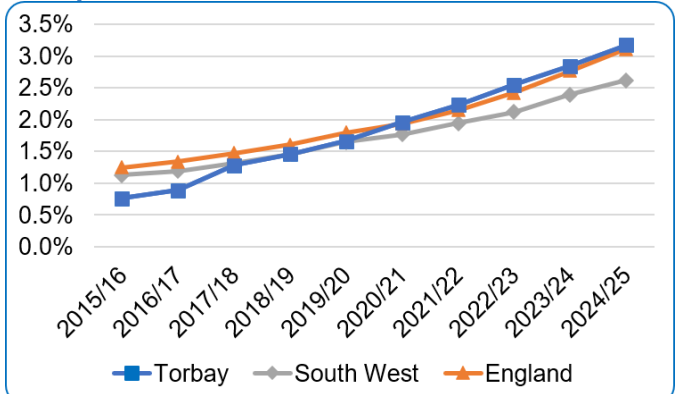


Sources: NHS England- [\[MI\] Network Contract Direct Enhanced Services](#) & [Patients Registered at a GP Practice](#)

School pupils: Special educational needs (SEN) support is provided to pupils identified as requiring different or extra help to that normally provided through the school curriculum. Pupils needing more support than available through SEN support can be issued an Education, health and care (EHC) plan.

'Autistic spectrum disorder' (ASD), (the term used), is one primary need identified for why children need SEN support or an EHC plan. In Torbay's state funded primary, secondary and special schools, 3.2% of pupils are identified with a primary need of ASD in 2024/25 which is on an increasing trend. This is the primary need, so not including those with ASD as a secondary need.

Fig 2: Percentage of state school pupils with ASD as a primary need for SEN support or an EHC plan



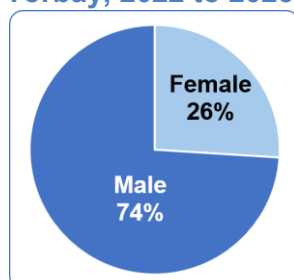
Source: Department for Education (DfE)- [Special Educational Needs in England- Explore education statistics](#)

Free School Meal eligibility: In the 4 years of 2022 to 2025 combined, 4.4% of Torbay state school pupils eligible for Free School Meals have ASD as a primary need for SEN support or an EHC plan. 2.1% of pupils not eligible for Free School Meals have ASD as a primary need. Therefore, the percentage is double amongst Free School Meal eligible pupils. (Torbay Council SEN Joint Strategic Needs Assessment)

School pupils, by sex: Fig 3 shows that in 2022 to 2025 combined, boys make up 3 out of 4 (74%) of the Torbay state school pupils identified with

ASD as the primary need for SEN support or an EHC plan, and 1 out of 4 (26%) are girls.

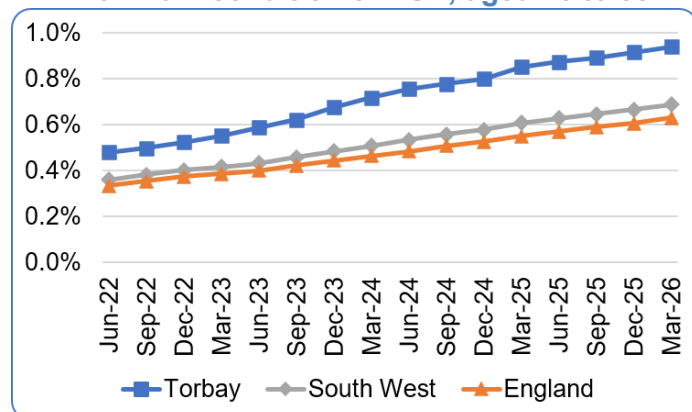
Fig 3: State school pupils with ASD as a primary need for SEN support/an EHC plan- split by sex, Torbay, 2022 to 2025 combined



Source: Torbay Council- [Torbay Special educational needs JSNA](#) (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment), 2025

Personal Independence Payment (PIP): This can help with extra living costs if a long term physical or mental health condition or disability makes it difficult to do certain everyday tasks or get around ([GOV.UK](#)). Fig 4 shows that the percentage of the Torbay 16 to 66 year old population, who claim PIP with their main condition as ASD, is significantly higher than in the South West or England- 0.9% in Torbay compared to 0.6% in England in March 2026. Over the 4 years shown the gap has widened.

Fig 4: Percentage of the population claiming PIP with main condition of ASD, aged 16 to 66



Sources: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)- Stat-Xplore, Office for National Statistics (ONS)- Mid-year population estimates- [nomis](#) website

PIP, by age: Looking further into the data shows that in Torbay in March 2026, 4.4% of 16 to 24 year olds were claiming PIP with a main condition of ASD, compared to 2.4% in England (Fig 5). Torbay is not far off double the England average and this is a far higher percentage than amongst the other age groups.

In Torbay, 1.1% of 25 to 34 year olds and less than 0.5% of the 35+ age groups were claiming PIP with a main condition of ASD in March 2026. England is also lower in these age groups. (Fig 5)

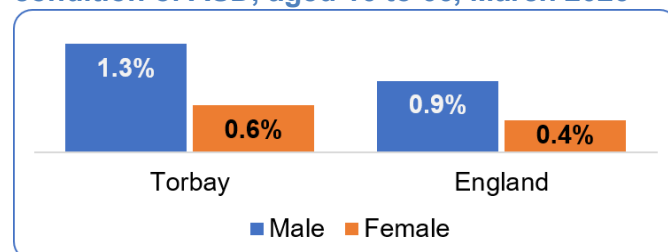
Fig 5: Percentage of the population claiming PIP with main condition of ASD, March 2026

Age	Torbay	England
16 to 24	4.4%	2.4%
25 to 34	1.1%	0.7%
35 to 44	0.4%	0.2%
45 to 54	0.1%	0.1%
55 to 66	0.1%	0.1%

Sources: DWP- Stat-Xplore, ONS- Mid-year population estimates- [nomis](#) website

PIP, by gender: In March 2026, 1.3% of males and 0.6% of females in Torbay claimed PIP with a main condition of ASD (Fig 6). This is over double the percentage of males compared to females as is also the case in England, but Torbay is higher in both male and female percentages.

Fig 6: Percentage claiming PIP with main condition of ASD, aged 16 to 66, March 2026



Sources: DWP- Stat-Xplore, ONS- Mid-year population estimates- [nomis](#) website

Prevalence: The [Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2023](#) (APMS) reports autism prevalence in people aged 16+. However, the APMS has withdrawn the data due to a processing error and states that revised figures will be produced.

An [independent review](#) interim report states that the APMS is useful for showing trends over time, but also that the assessment used doesn't fully capture key elements of diagnosis and applies a relatively conservative threshold that may limit identification. It says that certain groups such as women may be under-ascertained. (Department of Health and Social Care- DHSC). This shows that the thresholds for autism prevalence can vary.

References:

- DHSC: [Independent review into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism: interim report](#) Updated 10 June 2026
- GOV.UK: [PIP](#), Accessed 26 June 2026
- NHS: [What is autism?](#) Page reviewed 6 May 2026, Accessed 19 June 2026
- NHS England: [Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2023/4](#)
- Torbay Council: [Torbay SEN JSNA](#) 2025

All data used is referenced throughout the profile.
All data & information was accessed in June 2026.