Neurodivergent News

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FRONT PAGE · FAMILIES

Building work under way on Havering's new 300-place SEND school in Gidea Park

Havering Council says work on a £38m special school in Gidea Park for SEND pupils aged 4 to 19 is well under way. It hopes the school will mean fewer local children travelling long distances to school outside the borough.

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Neurodivergent News desk, edited by David Gray · AI-written · AI fact-checked

Building work on a new special school in Gidea Park, in the London Borough of Havering, is well under way, The Havering Daily reports. The school will have 300 places for children and young people aged 4 to 19 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and a £38 million Department for Education grant is paying for it.

SEND is the umbrella term schools and councils in England use for children who need extra support with learning, communication, sensory needs or physical access. Many neurodivergent children come under it, though the report doesn't say which needs the new school will focus on.

What's being built

According to the report, plans for the school include:

- classrooms
- outdoor play space
- a sports hall
- a stage
- a hydrotherapy pool (a warm-water pool used for therapy and exercise)

Councillors were given a guided tour of the site. They included Councillor Kevin Gill, Havering's Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, and Council Leader Keith Prince, along with local ward councillors.

The developer, Galliford Try, told them that the first-floor concrete frames are now in place and that digging for the hydrotherapy pool has finished. Work has also started on the sports hall, and a sewer network is being built.

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Why it matters locally

The report describes the school as an important part of Havering's wider SEND plans. Those plans aim to create more specialist places locally, so that more children and young people with SEND can get the right support in their own communities.

Cllr Gill said the school would give local children with SEND access to good facilities and would also cut the number who travel out of the borough. In his words, it would reduce the need for children to be "travelling long distances to find schools to meet their needs".

That point about travel matters. When there aren't enough specialist places nearby, children may have to go to school outside their area. For children who find changes in routine, busy vehicles or sensory overload hard, a place closer to home could make a real difference to how the school day starts.

What we don't know yet

The report doesn't say when the school will open or how pupils will be offered places. It also doesn't say who will run the school or which types of need it will be designed for. These details matter to families deciding on school options, and we'll report them once they're confirmed.

The number of specialist places is only one part of how well SEND works for children. The quality of support, how well staff understand neurodivergence, and whether children are listened to matter too, and local families will want to know how those things will be handled once the school opens.

This piece summarises reporting by The Havering Daily. Read the original article for the full story.

SOURCES

Havering's New SEND School Taking Shape (The Havering Daily)
thehaveringdaily.co.uk/2026/11/19/haverings-new-send-school-taking-shape

This article online

RESEARCH

Autistic students face far more bullying, and prevention research needs a neuro-affirming rethink, review argues

A critical review using Australia as a case study finds autistic students are bullied more often and for longer than their peers, and argues that bullying prevention work should drop deficit-based views of autism in favour of a neuro-affirming approach.

International Journal of Bullying Prevention · Review · Peer-reviewed

This is a summary of research, not medical advice.

Neurodivergent News desk, edited by David Gray · AI-written · AI fact-checked

Autistic students are bullied more often, and for longer, than non-autistic students, according to a critical review published in the International Journal of Bullying Prevention. The authors argue that much of the research meant to protect autistic young people starts from the wrong place: it treats autism as a set of deficits rather than a difference.

What the study looked at

The paper is a critical review, not a new experiment or survey. The authors used Australia as a national case study. They first pulled together existing research on how common bullying is among autistic students, how severe it is and what effects it has. They then looked critically at Australian research and practice on autism and bullying prevention.

The authors say this work drew on a mix of lived

experience and expertise from several disciplines. The paper explains that the analysis was informed by the first author's own lived experience of autism and bullying.

What they found

According to the authors, the existing evidence shows that:

- bullying is much more common among autistic students than non-autistic students
- autistic students are bullied more frequently and over longer periods
- the effects include higher rates of school refusal (when a young person finds it too hard or distressing to attend school), along with a range of mental and physical health impacts

The abstract does not give specific figures for these findings.

The review's central point is about how the problem has been studied. The authors say bullying prevention research focused on autistic students is held back by deficit-based views of autism. In their view, these approaches do not match what autistic people say about their own lives, and they are out of step with recent developments in autism research and policy.

What they propose

To address this, the authors set out a "neuroaffirming" framework for bullying prevention. Neuro-affirming means accepting and accommodating autistic ways of being, rather than trying to make autistic people appear less autistic. The framework combines seven principles of neuro-affirming mental health practice with three broad ideals:

- respect autistic culture
- acknowledge intersectionality, meaning that autistic students may also face discrimination linked to things such as race, gender, sexuality or disability, and these experiences overlap
- commit to co-design with autistic people, so that autistic people help shape the research and programmes that affect them

The authors conclude that deficit-based approaches should be avoided if schools and researchers want better results for autistic students.

Limitations

This is a critical review, a type of narrative review. The authors followed a published step-by-step guideline for critical reviews, but they still chose and interpreted the literature themselves rather than carrying out a full systematic review. It focuses on Australia, so its conclusions about research and practice may not carry over directly to the UK or elsewhere, where school systems and policies differ.

The paper collects no new data. The framework is a proposal, and the paper does not report testing whether it reduces bullying in practice. The findings on how bullying affects autistic students come from earlier studies, and links between bullying and health problems in those studies may show association rather than proving one causes the other. The abstract also gives no detail on which groups of autistic students, such as non-speaking students or those outside mainstream schools, are well represented in the evidence.

Why it matters

The paper adds to a growing push to shift the focus of anti-bullying work. Instead of asking autistic children to change, it asks schools and researchers to change how they understand autism, and to involve autistic people in designing the solutions.

This piece summarises the paper, which is open access. Read the paper for the full methods and findings.

SOURCES

Preventing the Bullying of Autistic Students: A Critical Review and Proposal for a Neuroaffirming Framework (International Journal of Bullying Prevention)
doi.org/10.1007/s42380-026-00394-w

This article online

RESEARCH

Small study looks at how autistic TikTok creators tell their own stories

A new peer-reviewed paper analysed four #ActuallyAutistic TikTok videos and 20 comments, and argues autistic creators are shifting public talk about autism away from deficit. The sample is very small and hand-picked, so the wider claims need caution.

Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences · Qualitative study · Peer-reviewed

This is a summary of research, not medical advice.

Neurodivergent News desk, edited by David Gray · AI-written · AI fact-checked

A paper published on 16 November 2026 in the Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences looks at how autistic people use TikTok to tell their own stories, and how viewers respond. It is by Shuling Zhang of the University of New South Wales in Australia. It appears in a volume of papers from an international conference (IMPES 2026).

The paper focuses on the #ActuallyAutistic community on TikTok. The author says the community has moved from clinical stereotypes towards what the paper calls "self-constructed digital narratives": stories autistic people tell about themselves.

What was studied

The author draws on cultural theorist Stuart Hall's theory of representation. Put simply, this is the idea that meaning is made by how people and groups are shown, and by how audiences interpret what they see.

The study uses a method called multimodal critical discourse analysis. In plain terms, this means looking closely at everything in a piece of media (words, pictures, settings and sound) and asking how it shapes ideas about power and identity.

The material was:

- four TikTok videos made by neurodivergent creators between May and November 2025
- 20 audience comments from the same period, which the paper describes as "highly participatory"

The researcher picked the videos and comments on purpose, rather than at random.

What it found

According to the abstract, the creators used a neurodiversity framing, treating autism as a difference rather than a deficit, across several layers of their videos:

- Language: retelling traumatic experiences as a source of empowerment
- Visuals and space: reclaiming physical environments
- Sound: the paper lists sound as a third layer, though the abstract gives no detail

The paper says the comments largely matched and backed the creators' messages. Commenters treated "non-standard" behaviour as a valid way of communicating.

The author concludes that the #ActuallyAutistic community has used TikTok's accessible mix of formats to push back against clinical stereotypes. The paper argues this has moved public conversation away from defect and sympathy, towards acceptance, advocacy and inclusion.

Limitations

This is a qualitative study of a very small, hand-picked set of material, and the abstract's conclusions go further than the data can carry.

- Tiny sample. Four videos and 20 comments cannot represent autistic TikTok as a whole, let alone public opinion.
- Purposeful selection. Choosing videos and comments on purpose may favour examples that fit the argument. Critical or dismissive responses may be under-represented.
- No measure of public attitudes. The study looks at what was said in a few posts. It does not survey or track the wider public, so it cannot show that public discourse has actually shifted, or that TikTok caused any shift.
- One platform, one short period. Findings may not apply to other platforms or other times. The paper itself calls TikTok "algorithm-driven", and the algorithm shapes which creators get seen in the first place.
- Who is left out. Autistic people who don't use

TikTok, don't post publicly, or communicate in ways that don't fit short video are not represented.

- Involvement unclear. The abstract doesn't say whether autistic people helped design or carry out the research, or whether the creators were consulted.

Even so, the paper treats autistic self-advocacy online as something worth taking seriously on its own terms, rather than as a symptom to be studied.

This piece summarises the paper's abstract. Read the paper for the full methods and findings.

SOURCES

The Impact of TikTok on Self-expression and Public Cognition of Autistic Groups (Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences)
doi.org/10.54097/wbfd9624

This article online

How we make this

Written and fact-checked with AI from named, linked sources. Stories on sensitive topics are approved by David before publishing.

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