

Case Study 2

Jenny and Karen are 15 year old twins who were diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome when they were 13 years old. They have a particular talent for art. While they talked a lot at home and with people with whom they were comfortable, concerns were raised when the girls were 7 years old about them not talking to teachers and most classmates in primary school. This was investigated by a speech and language therapist who thought that the girls might have selective mutism. The girls were coping academically and had friends in school so it was decided that no further intervention or support was needed at that time.

When the girls went to high school, many staff raised concerns about their obvious anxiety and lack of communication, resulting in referral to an autism specialist teacher. The twins then took part in a group for girls with communication and language difficulties, run by the specialist teacher and a nurse from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. This, in turn, led to referral to the autism diagnostic clinic and subsequent diagnosis. Following diagnosis, the girls received input to help them understand their diagnosis from the autism specialist teacher

Jenny and Karen have thrived within the girls' group. They talk openly to staff and other group members, participate fully in all activities and have frequently initiated discussions and games. Progress has also been made in getting the girls to talk to their French teacher. Significantly, this teacher has worked hard at engaging with the girls on their special interest in horse riding and animals in general and she has used this to build a good relationship with them.

However, problems persist in finding ways to get them to talk to other teachers and to modulate their voices so that the teachers can hear them when they do speak. Their anxiety about talking in class makes it very difficult for them to alert staff when they need help. Ongoing work is being done to encourage the girls to use a card system to flag up when they require help in class.