

NEWS

Parents call for free school to offer autistic children specialist therapy

Parents have called for a free school offering specialised therapy for children with autism to open in the borough.

Applied behaviour analysis, or ABA, involves studying behaviour in order to teach social and life skills.

And while it is a recognised and common therapy to help those on the autistic spectrum, it is not currently offered by any schools in Newham.

Fifty parents have signed a letter asking for the plans to be approved. They are members of Let Us Communicate, a group supported by the People's Empowerment Alliance for Custom House (PEACH).

Zahra Kheyre was able to secure charity funding for her five-year-old son Zayn Embealo to receive ABA therapy.

SOPHIE MORTON

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"He didn't know how to play," the mum-of-three said. "He would pick up a train and not know what to do with it.

"I couldn't go to visit friends because he would break things. Now, though, he can sit and do a jigsaw for five minutes."

Zahra, from Manor Park, supports the opening of a free school offering ABA as an option.

"It's not about me," she said. "My son has got really good teaching assistants at his school who support him.

"I've had my struggle, I don't want other mums to struggle.

"It needs to offer a choice. Autism is a spectrum, and for some, ABA is the right choice, for



Parents are calling for a school that will offer ABA provision for autistic children.

Picture: KEN MEARS

some it's something else."

Another mum who has secured ABA therapy is Sadia Nakimera, who says it has changed her eight-year-old son Jayden's life.

"He can now sit at a table and eat a meal," she said.

"It's about learning life skills, making him not dependent on one to one support for the rest of his life.

"My son is never going to get a GCSE, but he can now sit and do his bits."

The Custom House mum-of-two

found out about ABA after speaking to the special educational needs co-ordinator at Rosetta Primary School.

She was able to secure funding for a therapist to train her, her son's teacher and other members of staff, but acknowledges other parents in her situation who could not get funding would struggle to afford it.

"Other people don't have to pay for their child's education," she said.

Sadia explained that ABA

would benefit not only severely autistic children like her son but those on the more high functioning end of the spectrum.

"High functioning children, you hold an intelligent conversation with but they can't tie their shoelaces," she said.

When approached for comment, Newham Council referred the Recorder to the Department for Education, who said they were unable to comment on free school applications that had not yet been approved.