


Ofsted

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# Ofsted drops 'clumsy' and 'offensive' guidance linking autism and extremism

**Training document used to teach inspectors updated after campaign backed by celebrities including Chris Packham**

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Sun 5 Jul 2026 07.00 BST

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Ofsted, the body responsible for safeguarding in education in England, has dropped guidance for inspectors that linked autism and extremism after an outcry from campaigners.

An education minister has disclosed that an updated training document "no longer includes reference to children with autism" after claims that it was "offensive" and "clumsy" discrimination.

It follows demonstrations involving the naturalist Chris Packham and the comedians Paul Whitehouse and Johnny Vegas and comes amid deepening concerns over the number of autistic children who have been referred to Prevent, the government's deradicalisation programme.

Dr Mine Conkbayir MBE, the researcher and early years specialist who led the campaign, called the decision "fantastic news". In a social media post she wrote: "Autistic children are not threats. They are children."

The Guardian disclosed a year ago that a document used to teach hundreds of inspectors said that autistic children are "at increased risk of being susceptible to extremism" and "can be drawn into extremism".

Entitled Inspection Safeguarding Session - Prevent Extract 2024, the document, first identified by the human rights group Rights & Security International, said: "Children and young people with autism are at increased risk of being susceptible to extremism. This is because they are more likely to develop special interests.

"Due to this and any social communication needs, children with autism are more likely to experience social isolation and so use the internet as a way to find friends. They trust the information they read and the 'friends' that they find online and so can be drawn into extremism," it said.



Naturalist and TV presenter Chris Packham, who has Asperger syndrome, a form of autism, has called for the guidance to be stopped. Photograph: Kristian Buus/In Pictures/Getty

The National Autistic Society said the document risked stigmatising autistic traits, while a human rights organisation said the manual's teachings "draw a target on autistic children".

Packham, the TV presenter who has been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, a form of autism, called for the advice to be stopped "before even more young people are discriminated against in school and in society".

Ofsted defended the document in June 2025, saying that its training offers an understanding of different circumstances in which children might be more susceptible to extremism.

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But in a recent response to a parliamentary question, Josh MacAlister, a junior education minister, disclosed that an updated manual for inspectors no longer makes the links.

Asked by a Liberal Democrat MP what assessment had been made of Ofsted materials "that suggest children with autism are at increased risk of being susceptible to extremism", MacAlister wrote: "Ofsted are now delivering the renewed education

inspection framework, with new training for inspectors, including updates on the Prevent duty, which no longer includes reference to children with autism."

An Ofsted spokesperson said: "Ofsted does not - and has never - labelled children with autism as 'likely extremists'. It is preposterous to suggest otherwise. An old piece of training for inspectors highlighted that some vulnerable children could be more susceptible to manipulation. We have recently renewed our school inspection framework. This new framework required new training for inspectors, including updated training on the Prevent duty."

This article was amended on 7 July 2026 to add a quote from Dr Mine Conkbayir, a researcher who led a campaign on this issue.

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