Box 1

Signs warranting referral for a formal autism spectrum disorder assessment

Difficulties with social relationships:

- Few or no sustained relationships; those that exist are likely to be either distant or intense
- Persistent aloofness
- Awkward interaction with peers
- Unusually egocentric
- Little concern for others or awareness of their viewpoint
- Limited empathy or sensitivity
- Lack of awareness of social rules
- Problems in obtaining or sustaining education or employment

Abnormal communication:

- Odd or monotonous voice, often at an unusual volume
- One-sided conversation
- Stilted or pedantic language and difficulty understanding figurative speech
- Rather stilted, impassive appearance with limited gestures and rather odd or avoidant eye contact
- Awkward or odd posture and body language

Absorbing and narrow interests:

- Unusually circumscribed interests
- Obsessively pursued interests
- A set approach to everyday life that may include unusual routines or rituals
- Resistance to change

The behavioural presentation has a childhood onset

A known history of a neurodevelopmental condition, including learning disabilities and ADHD or other mental health disorder