

AUTISM ACCREDITATION PEER REVIEW



SERVICE REVIEWED: Wirral Hospitals' School

DATES OF REVIEW: 26-28 September 2017

TEAM MEMBERS: Melanie Finley and Sally James

Joseph Paxton campus is a small school setting for children and young people who are currently unable to attend mainstream school and have been referred through medical services. Many students have been out of school for prolonged periods. All students have medical needs which often involve aspects of mental health e.g.: Anxiety, depression, self-harming, eating disorders, chronic fatigue syndrome and personality disorders. These can often be combined with Autism Spectrum Conditions.

Observations

17

Interviews and Discussions

Initial meeting with Head Teacher and SENCO
Meeting with Assistant SENCO- responsible for Post 16 transition
Meeting with SENCO and SEND Department Assistant about Sensory and Mental Health
Informal discussions with staff and students during and after lessons
Meeting with three parents
Meeting with 4 Governors including Chair
Meeting with SENCO re Personalisation and Individual Learning plans
Meeting with SALT re Social thinking programme

Documentation

The review team also reviewed a range of documents including school policies and pupil related documentation:
Draft Autism Policy
New Student Induction Process

Behaviour Support Plan
 You and your environment check list
 School Improvement and Development Plan
 Minutes from Autism Consultation Group (ASC pupils)
 Staff Induction Pack
 'Autism Friendly School' guidelines in Staff Handbook
 SEN Policy Document
 ASC Presentation – staff training
 'Challenging Behaviours displayed by pupils with ASC' staff training
 Risk Management Plans
 'Social Thinking' Presentation to Parents' Group
 Exam results for summer 2017
 Examples of assessment of students' Initial Sensory Significant Sensory Sensitivities
 Individual Learning Plans
 Person Centred Plans
 School improvement/development plan
 Social thinking programme whole school approach
 Sensory provision plan

KEY FINDINGS

As a result of this process, the following actions were identified for the service to work on:

Actions for development	Reasoning
<p>Sensory Needs</p> <p>E10-E15</p> <p>School has carried out training in Sensory Processing Differences. All staff are sensitive to and make arrangements for individual sensory regulation needs.</p>	<p>The staff acknowledge that sensory processing differences can be a barrier to engagement and learning. They have already made significant progress in addressing these issues and have a sensory provisions plan in place. Including continuation of CPD/INSET to embed staff understanding and continue to train new staff as part of induction. To develop 'sensory champions' amongst the staff to share good practise.</p> <p>The school is in the process of budgeting and costing a multi-use sensory</p>

<p>The next step is for students to be enabled to develop skills and experience in their self-regulation, understanding and take ownership of their sensory needs.</p> <p>The team considers school would benefit from specific guidelines in their Autism policy or creation of a stand alone sensory policy to support consistency in practice.</p>	<p>environment/classroom gym in a large space formally used as a home education area. It was observed, during a PE lesson, pupils playing dodgeball whilst really experiencing proprioceptive feedback from throwing and dodging, perhaps monitoring how they feel after this sort of activity? They certainly became more and more animated and engaged, it was a great lesson.</p> <p>The school has a small sensory room; they are currently deciding how this will be used and what sort of equipment is needed for it. It is important to get the provision right as sensory rooms for younger children will not necessarily work for older pupils, this could be in consultation with the ASC focus group.</p> <p>See also recommendations in Sensory Experience section in observations</p>
<p>Social Thinking Programme</p> <p>E1 E2 E3 E20</p> <p>To continue to develop the whole school approach of this programme, to generalise the knowledge, understanding and skills through all areas of teaching in order to move towards students using these social understanding skills spontaneously in different settings, including home and environments beyond school.</p> <p>To continue offering training in this programme to families to reinforce the development of these skills.</p>	<p>There is a whole school programme for social thinking skills for the autumn term. At the moment, these skills are taught discretely by the SENCO, Speech and language therapist and during form times in class. There are weekly social thinking themes.</p> <p>The Speech and language therapist has trained the staff, and is really enthusiastic and dedicated to embedding the programme across the school. They are considering videoing some staff members to demonstrate good practise for others.</p> <p>It will be important for the staff the consistently use the language and strategies of the programme across all teaching and pupils become familiar with using these tools in different settings. Pupils to have social thinking targets in their Individual learning plans.</p> <p>Parents are having ongoing training opportunities; the second training session took place while we were in school.</p> <p>A specific Social Communication and Interaction policy could be helpful to ensure consistency of approach.</p>
<p>Learning plans</p> <p>The school has identified the need to capture all learning plans in one shared document. This document will describe student's primary needs, concerns and</p>	<p>The school has invested in the development of individual Learning plans and Provision map (Edukey) in order to closely track the impact of Autism specific provisions.</p> <p>Having all documents on one electronic programme will enable accessibility to all staff and allow ease of information input, changing goals and targets and monitoring effectiveness of</p>

<p>strengths.</p> <p>This will ideally be a bringing together all of the Person Centred Plan created during induction period, EHCP, Specific Autism targets, SALT and Social Thinking targets. The document needs to be user friendly and accessible to all stakeholders, including enabling students to have understanding and ownership of their progress.</p>	<p>interventions.</p> <p>The pupils could take ownership of the Person Centred Plan created during induction, they can review, update and monitor how things have changed, and see the progress they have made.</p>
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The following areas were also identified as examples of what the service does well.

Specific areas of strength	Reasoning
<p>Consistent practise, staff training and commitment</p> <p>C5 C6 C8 C9</p> <p>The Outstanding staff commitment and understanding, supported by an extensive programme of training has a significant impact on outcomes for the students.</p> <p>The consistent approach throughout the school enables students to make considerable progress managing their emotional well-being. This results in students achieving academically in Yr 11, which contributes to the widening of post 16 opportunities.</p>	<p>The positive feeling around the school is evident in all areas. The consistent practise by teachers and TA's with the pupils in lessons was remarkable, there were some outstanding lesson observations.</p> <p>The person centred approach makes the pupils feel fully supported, self esteem appears high which is a great achievement considering where some of the pupils have come from. The importance of managing their own well being is prioritised throughout the school, with a pro active approach being encouraged. Significant information sheets are shared with staff at morning briefings.</p> <p>The consistency in class room organisation plays a key role in pupils being able to engage in lessons quickly and without fuss. The schedule for the lesson is on the whiteboard, seating plans are in place, equipment needed is stored in the same place in each class.</p>
<p>Social thinking</p> <p>E1 E2 E3 E20</p> <p>The school has introduced a social skills programme</p>	<p>The Social thinking programme is the work of an American Speech and language therapist; Michelle Garcia Winner, and is designed for children and young people who may have highly developed verbal skills but underdeveloped receptive language and</p>

<p>called “Social thinking’ which is being taught in weekly sessions and reinforced by staff and students across the school day.</p> <p>The programme helps young people to better understand themselves, others and the world around them.</p> <p>Parents and guardians are being offered the opportunity to attend training so that they can support the programme at home to provide a consistent approach and promote social understanding and independence.</p>	<p>difficulties interpreting some areas of social communication.</p> <p>It is in the early days of implementation, but seems to be a really positive tool in the school’s curriculum. The staff have all been trained, with a highly committed Speech and Language therapist supporting them.</p> <p>Parents and families are offered training so skills can be generalised at home and in different environments.</p>
<p>Personalisation</p> <p>E8 E32 E33</p> <p>The team were impressed by the depth of knowledge and understanding of each student, by all staff. This enabled staff to tailor expectations throughout each day in response to the needs of each individual student.</p> <p>The flexibility, compassion and empathy demonstrated by staff was consistent across the classes; students trust in the adults was evident, and contributed to the students well being and confidence.</p>	<p>The person centred approach begins with the plan created during the induction period when the pupil first starts at school. A very concrete approach to: who are you? What is important to you? How can we support you? What do you want? The emotional well being of pupils is paramount, and runs consistently throughout the teaching.</p> <p>Small classes ensure teaching is tailored to individual needs, for some there are highly individualised personal timetables. A key aspect of this is extensive work with families and other professionals involved in the pupil’s life.</p> <p>The team felt the school’s work to meet the individual needs of pupils and families goes above and beyond usual expectations.</p>

<p>ASC C38 C31</p> <p>The school has an ASC Focus Group of students who meet half termly with a member of staff. ASC students are invited to attend and contribute to joint decision making; make suggestions for improvements and developments; suggest trips and enrichment activities.</p> <p>This group has made a significant contribution to the quality of provision for autistic students at the school</p>	<p>A member of the team met with the ASC focus group, which is a changing group of pupils led by the assistant SENCO. The group meets termly. It has been running for 2 ½ years. There is an agenda and sometimes items SLT would like discussed will be added to this. This meeting was a general discussion and some pupils were quiet but they all seemed to listen really well, with some helpful prompts from the teacher. We discussed school trips, mentor time and enrichment activities. The school is planning a trip to Paris! Wow</p> <p>The pupils talked about what they liked doing in and out of school. They discussed their aspirations, work experience and possible college courses and apprenticeships in the future.</p> <p>The group is consulted on whole school decisions; they played an important role in the recent decoration and renovation of the school. They made decisions on paint colours, the placing of new display boards, colours of chairs and the introduction of the same set of stacking trays in each class, so everyone would know where to get equipment needed for the lesson.</p> <p>One pupil spoke comprehensively about his ASC and how it affected him, another explained that his anxiety about trips had been alleviated with the introduction of a visual schedule.</p>
<p>Support of families C30 C26</p> <p>The review team acknowledges the impact the school's invaluable support of families has on the</p>	<p>The school is always available to support families, some whom will have been struggling for some time with pupils out of school. Wirral Hospitals' school must seem like an oasis in the desert to them. The great understanding of the mental health issues and working with CAMHS and other outside agencies, must undoubtedly help families to feel the best is being done for their child's education and well-being.</p> <p>Parents can contact the school at any time and know that someone who knows their</p>

<p>lives and those of their children.</p> <p>Parent's questionnaires and meeting with a group, emphasised the quality of communication, availability of staff, understanding individual needs, responsiveness to issues as they arise, as well as training opportunities accessible to them.</p>	<p>child as well as they do will have time to talk and offer advice.</p> <p>A member of the team met with a group of parents who reiterated the positive comments from the parent questionnaires.</p>
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FAMILY QUESTIONNAIRE SCORES

SCORES					
	Number of Questionnaires sent out (please request from service if not available prior to review):				50
	Number of Questionnaires returned:				10
	Unscored	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am able to contact the service/school about my child/family member on a regular basis					10
I am given information about my child's/family member's progress on a regular basis				2	8
The service/school listens to my views about my child/family member and their support and takes them into account.				1	9
I am aware of how to raise concerns about any aspect of my child's/family members support and am confident that they will be considered and addressed.				2	8

The service/school has a good understanding of my child/family member and works well to meet their needs.				1	9
The service/school respects the complexities of caring for a family member on the Autistic Spectrum				2	8
The service/school provides opportunities for me to find out more about autism and my child's/family member's specific needs				5	5
The service/school has had a positive impact on my family member's life and learning					10
TOTALS				13	67
PERCENTAGES	%	%	%	16%	84%

'Excellent links and referral from hospital to this educational provision, always helpful and co-operation understanding mental health difficulties linked to ASD presentation'

'Wirral hospitals' school has positively impacted on our child's education and well-being. The staff appear aware and sensitive to the needs of Autistic children, and adapt their teaching accordingly, not just to the class but to the individuals within it. They do try to listen to any concerns and address them sensitively and appropriately'

'My son joined Wirral hospitals' School in year 8 and the improvement in his education and his ability to handle social situations has been immense'

OBSERVATION SCORES

Topic	Not Met	Partially Met	Majority Met	Fully Met
Differences in social communication			1	16
Self-reliance and problem solving			2	15
Sensory Experiences			6	11
Emotional well-being			1	16
TOTAL			10	58
PERCENTAGE			6%	94%

Fully Mets given

In sessions where each autistic student received highly effective and sensitive support based on a full understanding of their capabilities, strengths and challenges resulting in full engagement and participation in lessons.

Majority Mets given

Sensory Experiences: In sessions where it was considered that students had become partially unregulated manifesting in agitation and fidgeting;

Self-reliance and problem-solving: Where students hadn't been given adequate and relevant information to successfully complete a task independently; There were 2 instances where it was considered support could have been withdrawn with one pupil, who was being heavily supported by a TA; perhaps with some 'Intervention by stealth" XXX you carry on now I just have to go and do/get ...

Differences in social communication: There was a breakdown in communication where it may have been helpful to refer the pupil to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd finally instructions on the IWB

FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS

Topic	Comments
Differences in social communication	<p>The complexities of differences in social communication with the groups of pupils observed is significant. Some very verbal articulate speakers, but with difficulties with receptive language and social understanding, and some quite withdrawn, seemingly non-verbal pupils as well as selective mutes.</p> <p>The personalisation of communication was apparent in all lesson observations. Visual timetables on whiteboards were consistent in all classes. Look and Think symbols, some signing, clear written instructions and check lists as well as clear verbal instructions emphasising key words and plenty of processing time given for the pupils to respond. There were also symbols on each desk for pupils to point to who were not able to verbalise they were having a problem. Too noisy, New word, too quiet, too quick, too much to remember, difficult to understand or something else. The teacher could then intervene and break down the task to smaller steps, or give the child a break, or a something they may need to help them engage again in the lesson.</p> <p>Having said that, there was some great interaction between pupils. Good paired work, most classrooms were organised to encourage collaborative work, and many of the pupils talked to each other, asked questions and offered ideas and solutions. The pupils were given opportunities to predict, in a science lesson one pupil said 'I kinda want it to go wrong' because he knew it was going to be a wet mess (it didn't!) The pupils were animated and anticipated outcomes.</p> <p>Some groups were encouraged to take part in group discussions, which they found difficult; the teacher modelled the language by using an example. Some pupils could join in with support, though they did all become really animated about XXX paper round and how much money he made! An up and coming trip to the local shop was explained with a sheet with a map, photos and written instructions on what they were going to do. Social stories are used to explain and help reduce anxiety for some pupils.</p> <p>In another science lesson, visual cues were given on a worksheet 'Think/write/do'. Thinking skills were really encouraged, pupils had had great ideas and were really interested. During an English lesson calming music was played while the pupils had some thinking time for a task, some pupils had fidget items to keep their hands busy. Timers are used for visual reinforcement of how long they have to complete a task.</p> <p>There is evidence of social interaction around the school, pupils gathered around the water coolers for a drink, talking calmly in the corridors. Year 11 Base has a fridge and kettle for making drinks and snacks, pupils were sat around talking</p>

	<p>to each other at lunch time.</p> <p>The planning given to the team was consistent across all lessons with individualised notes on pupils re communication.</p>
<p>Self-reliance and problem solving</p>	<p>The review team found a great deal of support for self-reliance, problem solving and reflective thinking embedded in lesson planning and generally across the school. There was effective use of questioning to promote problem solving across all lessons. Lesson planning consistently addresses individuals' progress and requirements; plans indicate how work is differentiated to meet a wide range of abilities within classes. Support and planning aims to build on each student's strengths, interests and positive qualities to enhance their self-esteem and self-worth. Classes were observed completing work independently: checking their work against a check list to see what they needed to complete then moving on to work pre-prepared for them on the computer. There was a high degree of individualisation regarding content and support including 'scaffolding'. Each student's level of independence and participation is monitored after each lesson using the Readiness to Learn grades. This information is used to inform Individual Learning Plans.</p> <p>The interactive whiteboard (IWB) is a tool frequently used to good advantage. The review team observed lessons in which an IWB display showed the activities planned for the lesson and the same format was used consistently across the school.. This approach sets up well-structured lessons which support self-reliance. Each classroom contained a set of labelled drawers containing equipment (e.g. pencils, pens, glue sticks) enabling pupils to independently gather what they needed for the lesson, as depicted on the lesson plan.</p> <p>The whole school timetable was displayed in the corridor in both written and pictorial form. Changes happening that day are displayed on a board in the entrance. Students are presented with visual information about trips and special events the day before as requested by the student Autism Focus Group. The team saw examples of this visual information along with detailed risk assessments. Micro and macro transitions are carefully considered and planned for. The team saw evidence of PowerPoint presentations to prepare students for trips and transition from Year 9 to Year 10. The latter PowerPoint included information about what will stay the same and what will change. The fostering of a problem solving attitude in students was exemplified by the inclusion of a section titled:</p> <p>"What shall I do if I have any questions or worries about September? - Talk to us!" Listed under this title was the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “ If you don't feel like talking to staff on your own you could - Ask a friend – they might know the answer - Ask a friend to go and speak to staff with you

	<p>- OR ask someone at home – they could telephone school and find out for you.”</p> <p>Discussions with staff revealed that one of their core aims is to develop emotional resilience along with practical skills and the necessary exam results to transition to further education at a local sixth form or college. The aim is for all students to travel independently to school in Year 11. Arrival at school is 9.15 allowing for pupils to catch buses when quieter and after mainstream peers have travelled. School finishes at 2.30pm and pupils can leave then or stay for Enrichment activities which are suggested by pupils.</p> <p>Year 11 is a very demanding year for the students because it includes Work Experience, exploration of post-16 options and exams. The school, supported by the governors, would like to extend to include a Year 12 to facilitate more extensive transition to and preparation for the post 16 placement.</p>
Sensory Experiences	<p>The Staff Handbook contains ‘The Autism Friendly School’ which includes information relating to classrooms, the general school environment and displays. It was evident that the pupils have been consulted and their preferences included in this document. Throughout the school the environment is low-arousal. Chairs and paint colours were chosen by pupils and the fabric of the school is in very good order. Decorating and installation of IWBs took place over the summer break (2017). Public areas, such as corridors, are wide and can accommodate movements of large numbers at lesson changeover times without appearing overcrowded. The review team observed no pupils finding such mass transitions challenging. The calm overall ambience, plus uncluttered classrooms and clearly labelled cupboards and drawers reduce the sensory input for students and give a sense of academic purpose. Students choose what they wear to school and parents commented on the difference this has made to their children’s ability to attend school due to their sensory preferences around clothing.</p> <p>The school is spacious and includes range of quiet rooms and a sensory room available in the school which pupils can use as required. Each Key stage/ year group has a staffed quiet base where pupils can take their work and receive support as required. The review team noted that being self-aware and requesting time out is encouraged and praised – it is certainly not viewed in any sort of negative light. The KS3 and Year 10 and 11 bases are welcoming places where students can go at lunch times or when they need to do their work outside of their lesson. The Yr 11 Base had the feel of a ‘common room’ where students relaxed at lunch with a comfy seating, fridge, kettle where students can make drinks and snacks. There is an enclosed garden with raised beds and seating that has been renovated using ideas generated by the Autism Focus Group and the work carried out during Enrichment. Raised beds included herbs and plants included for their sensory properties including edible plants.</p> <p>An independent therapy company has provided training on Sensory Integration to the whole school and staff are aware of the individual sensory needs of their pupils. Staff are becoming skilled at considering sensory needs and making adjustments in their lessons. In one lesson the teacher had modified the environment by turning the main lights off for one</p>

	<p>pupil; another sat throughout the lesson with his hood up. Students are permitted to wear hats and chew gum in lessons. Some lesson plans included reference to individual's sensory needs: XXX likes to sit by a wall; XXX often needs a sensory break. The students learn about sensory regulation in sensory PE lessons and about sensory diets with the aim of students becoming more aware of their own needs. Sensory evaluations relating to these lessons indicated that some students were beginning to understand the impact of sensory regulation on their anxiety and stress and ability to learn. A jar of 'fiddlies' is available in each classroom and were observed on a few occasions being used by pupils. The review team suggest that the next step for the school is to extend the work they have begun in supporting students to develop skills and experience in their self-regulation, understanding and take ownership of their sensory needs. Increased knowledge about what helps them might decrease the need for students to take sensory breaks outside of the classroom. The school would benefit from specific guidelines in their Autism Policy or creation of a stand-alone sensory policy to support consistency in practice.</p>
Emotional Well-being	<p>The team observed the emotional well-being of every pupil being key to success; the staff consistently had the pupil's best interests at heart, their dedication to them was obvious. The general feeling throughout the school was of happy, interested and engaged pupils. Staff attitude to pupils fosters mutual respect which they then extend to their peers.</p> <p>Home education and school work together to support transition into school – Parents' Room are available and used a lot – parents can stay on school premises to provide reassurance for their child and the knowledge that they can be taken home when needed. Two members of staff greet pupils at the main entrance on their arrival each morning. Significant Information about pupils is shared in morning briefings with all staff.</p> <p>The review team noted high levels of student focus and engagement in most lessons, aided by effective differentiation based on ability and previous achievements. Lesson planning illustrates the extent to which individual needs are routinely considered – about pupils' emotional needs are included in lesson plans. Pupils are treated with warmth and sensitivity.</p> <p>We observed some great teaching, teachers having great rapport with pupils. Loads of praise and reinforcement, everyone is listened to and given self-esteem boosting encouragement. During a spot the difference activity, the teacher said 'it's really ok if you don't get them all, I didn't'. At the end of this lesson the teacher told the pupils which part she had really enjoyed, and said they had sparked some great ideas for a debate in the next lesson.</p> <p>Teachers prepare more than one lesson for each session so they can deliver the lesson most appropriate for the levels of anxiety being experienced by the pupils on arrival in the lesson. Due to the medical needs of the pupils, staff are aware of the importance of supporting students, especially when they begin to display anxiety. Staff used low calm voices and open relaxed body language.</p> <p>Alongside the ASC focus group, students are consulted with other matters e.g. design for the garden, which is a fantastic</p>

place for chilling at lunchtime, a group of students were observed working in the garden on the autumn clean up.

Enrichment groups are held 4 times a week after school and include dance, board games, manicures, gardening, Art PE games in the hall. The school also has a MUGA which local schools use, it is hoped, in the future to engage the pupils in some joint football sessions. The school also offers the Duke of Edinburgh award for year 11 pupils. There is a Peripatetic young male music teacher one day a week who teaches drums, bass guitar and guitar – this is oversubscribed and very popular. He holds drum workshops and helps with the school band.

In the last month of the school year pupils move into their new form groups, they are also prepared for new pupils joining their form.

CONCLUSION

Wirral Hospitals' school demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of Autism spectrum conditions. All staff seek to provide a stimulating and fun educational environment, where pupils feel safe and cared for, enabling them to take risks and extend their knowledge and experience. The school atmosphere is warm and welcoming, it was a pleasure to be part of the review team, and we wish them well in further developing their already really great school.