

Autism Accreditation Assessment

Birch Wood School

Reference No.	28433
Assessment dates	14 th – 16 th November 2022
Lead Assessor	Stephanie de Vries
External Moderator	Sally James
Status prior to the assessment	Accredited

About this Assessment

This report states key findings on how well autistic individuals are supported according to our framework of good autism practice. Evidence has been primarily obtained from observation, supplemented by evidence from interviews, a sample of support plans and information provided by the provision. If opportunities to observe has been problematic or limited greater weighting has been given to other sources of evidence.

Where appropriate, feedback has been obtained from autistic people supported by the service and/or family members and this feedback has been taken into account in findings.

Findings from the Assessment

Differences in Social Communication

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Support plans identify each autistic pupil's skills and challenges in social communication and interaction and any challenges they may experience in expressing themselves. For example, one pupil's communication plan states *'I am verbal communicator, although I can be a little reluctant to join in conversations with unfamiliar people. I can use my verbal communication to communicate my thoughts, feelings and needs. I have a great sense of humour and I like to use this as a foundation to support my communication with others'*.

Support plans describe how staff should modify their communication or what communication aids they should employ in order to make themselves understood by each autistic pupil. For example one pupil's profile states, *'I may require additional processing time. Please say my name before talking to me. Please clarify with me that I have understood what you have said to me'*.

Support plans provide evidence that each autistic pupil is set realistic goals related to their communication and social engagement. For example one pupil's goal is to;

- I will communicate my needs more effectively, through objects of reference, visual aids to make a choice of two items or activities.

Progress and Aspiration reports provide evidence that autistic pupils achieve positive outcomes in their social interaction and communication, for example one pupil's report states, *'X is showing an awareness of her needs and wants through pointing, signing, and beginning to say words and sounds. When requesting food X does get frustrated at times but is beginning to sign more and going to the picture and taking this off her strip, which is helping her calm'*.

Case studies also provide evidence that autistic pupils achieve positive outcomes. One case study submitted provides details of a school 'Pupil Voice' initiative *'for students and staff within the Autism Provision to use their voice, knowledge and expertise around Communication and Interaction differences to improve school outcomes and experiences for other autistic children and young people'*. The initiative resulted in *'students shared a rich, honest and meaningful portrayal of their experiences. Students expressed feeling empowered and inspired by the project'*.

In interviews, staff spoke about having a *'total communications environment'* and that communication was at the *'heart of everything they do'*. Staff spoke knowledgeably about the overarching approaches used across the school including, Makaton, Objects of Reference, PECs, Symbols and Intensive interaction. Staff were keen to highlight that many approaches are personalised within each classroom and that it was also important for staff to adjust their communication to the appropriate level. For example in one classroom only key words are used supported by objects of reference which are personalised to the pupil, whereas in another classroom there is more speech supported with visual cues such as symbols, photos or written instructions.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

In all observations staff made themselves understood by adjusting their verbal and non-verbal communication to the needs of the pupils. Staff were observed to skilfully use a range of communication approaches, for example, staff were observed to simplify and structure verbal language, provide processing time and use visual cues and/or Makaton where appropriate. Objects of reference, gestures, music, photographs and intensive interaction were also observed to be used where appropriate to ensure that pupils were able to understand verbal instructions.

In all classroom observations autistic pupils could make themselves understood by using their preferred communication method. For example, some pupils were observed to use PECS, Makaton and communication boards while some preferred to communicate verbally. In one observation a member of staff was modelling the use of 'eye gaze technology' with a pupil to support them to make choices and answer simple

Yes/No questions. Talking buttons were also used where appropriate to enable pupils to reply 'good morning' or 'good afternoon' where appropriate.

There were no visible communication systems in the outside play areas. The school should consider how to extend the 'total communications environment' outside through the use of choice boards, visuals, zones of regulation boards, etc. in order to provide pupils with a means of communication at all times.

In all observations autistic pupils were provided with opportunity and purpose to communicate as part of a group, 1:1 with staff, with each other and where appropriate members of public. Four pupils gave the assessment team a tour of the school, they spoke confidently about the school and answered questions. Other pupils were observed engaged in group class discussions about the topic they were learning. While many pupils were observed to be speaking with staff using their preferred communication method. For example in one lesson pupils were observed to use Makaton to ask for an activity to be repeated during an Attention Autism session, whilst in another session pupils were given a choice of 2 colours and one pupil signified their choice using eye gestures.

Problem Solving and Self-reliance

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Support plans identify each autistic person's skills and challenges in independent functioning. For example, one pupil's profile states;

- I like to understand what is happening now, and what will happen next.
- I like to understand what my expectations are.

Support plans describe how best to support autistic pupils in their independent functioning. Examples include;

- X benefits from a highly structured environment where he is clear what is happening, how long it will take to happen for and what comes next.
- Routine, structure, visual clarification, simple and clear language and a calm approach are all vital when supporting X
- X benefits from a highly structured environment where she is clear what is happening, how long it will take to happen for and what comes next

Support plans provide evidence that each autistic pupil is set realistic goals related to their independent functioning. For example one pupil's goal is;

- I would like to consistently make choices by exchanging photos or symbols with staff.

Support plans provide evidence autistic people achieve positive outcomes in carrying out activities and making choices with increasing self-reliance and autonomy. For example, one pupil's Progress and Aspirations report states, '*X is able to make clear choices between objects, whether that be choices relating to activities (e.g. paint colours in Write Dance) or choices between motivators for self-regulation. X also communicated choices through our personalised objects of reference, letting us know what she wants to happen next*'.

In interviews, staff spoke about providing a calm, predictable environment through the use of visual timetables, consistent routines, a structured classroom environment, using visuals to label resources so that when a 'young person wants something they know where to find it' and ensuring tasks are broken down to allow young people to complete tasks more independently.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

All classrooms displayed differentiated visual and/or written timetables, some timetables showed morning or afternoon lessons (as appropriate) whilst other classrooms displayed whole school day timetables. Some pupils had Now/Next boards which were used effectively by staff. One pupil was observed to be given a percussion bell as an object of reference to indicate it was now time for their music therapy session.

Classrooms were clutter free and all resources were labelled to encourage pupils to be as independent as possible. For example snack boxes and coat hooks were all labelled with pupils photos. 'Who's here?' boards were on all classroom doors in the Birch Wood Vale site showing photos of both staff and pupils.

Clear routines, differentiated to the level of the pupils were observed at the start and end of lessons which provided predictability and enabled smooth transitions. For example in one lesson music was used to support pupils to transition from outdoor play into the classroom and ready themselves for learning, whilst in another observation the lesson began with a review of previous learning supported with written visuals on the whiteboard.

Autistic people are supported to do things by themselves rather than needing to be directed by a member of staff, for example, some pupils were observed to use personalised lesson schedules and two pupils who conducted the school tour had a visual and written plan to refer to whilst showing the assessment team around the school. This supported the pupil to independently lead the tour and it was clear that they enjoyed the responsibility.

There is a significant focus across the school on promoting independence of autistic pupils. It was clear throughout observations that pupils had ownership of their learning. Pupils were confident to explain what they were learning, the objective of the lesson and how what they were doing now would be used and expanded on in later lessons.

Autistic pupils are provided with opportunities to consolidate and develop daily functional skills, this was observed across all classrooms. For example, in one observation pupils were working on laptops using written checklists and Communication in Print to support them to complete their tasks.

Sensory Experiences

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Support plans identify sensory experiences which have a positive experience on each autistic pupil. For example, one pupil's PBSP states, *'I like to take my shoes off in school and wear socks. I need reminding to wear shoes/sliders when leaving the classroom'*.

Support plans identify what challenges each autistic person may experience in regulating sensory experiences. Examples include;

- Loud noises
- Touch (non-initiated)
- Busy environments
- Seeks vestibular feedback – rocking/swivelling on a chair
- Needs regular movement breaks
- Difficulties around clothing (doesn't like school uniform)

Support plans identify what approaches or tools should be employed to help autistic pupils regulate sensory experiences or avoid sensory overload. For example PBSP have a section which explain 'The things that others can do or say to keep me in the green for as much time as possible'. Examples include;

- Fiddle toys
- Movement breaks offered
- Use a fiddle toy/squishy
- Use a chew

Case studies provide evidence of the positive outcomes achieved by pupils when their sensory needs are met through a range of approaches. For example one case study

explains that, 'A was experiencing many crisis behaviours and struggling to self-regulate throughout the day.' To support the pupil the school introduced a number of tools including 'A sensory bag which A could access whenever A felt she needed this or staff felt this would help support, throughout the day and keeping to the structured routine and also keeping things consistent for example when outside 5 swings and finished'. This resulted in the pupil having 'increased confidence in managing emotions, choices and social interaction'.

In interviews, staff spoke about how the 'sensory curriculum is embedded into everything that we do' and that 'each pathway meets individual needs'. For example in one classroom there are lots of sensory stimulating approaches, whilst in another class the environment is much lower arousal and less visually stimulating.

One member of staff spoke about a pupil that was very anxious and found it difficult to be in the classroom. The school provided a personalised sensory diet which included specific therapies such as twice a day sensory circuits and rebound and hydro therapy but also incorporated personalised approaches such as chews, using shaving foam to write and having their feet in water. The pupil is now able to access the full learning curriculum

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

The calm, well-structured environment of the school creates an enabling environment for autistic pupils. Careful consideration has been given to the needs of pupils across the different pathways, as a result the school has created an enabling environment which supports the differing needs of the pupils. For example, in the Engagement pathway sensory stimulation is rooted in the learning intentions of pupils, sensory approaches are used to stimulate and engage pupils in their learning. Whereas for pupils on the Independence pathway a lower arousal approach is needed in the classrooms to support pupils to access the curriculum.

As a result of well-planned lessons in which a variety of sensory activities had been incorporated autistic pupils were observed to be engaged in a range of sensory based learning activities in a safe and secure context which they seemed to find enjoyable. For example, in one lesson pupils' were engaged in a sensory story and were using their hands to mix two different coloured paints and in a music therapy session one deaf pupil was observed exploring the sensations and vibrations of different musical instruments.

Across the school a range of sensory approaches were observed to be used to support pupils to regulate sensory experiences. . For example, during an Attention Autism session one pupil accessed the session from a 'tent', another pupil sat on a trampet and gently bounced during the session while another pupil sat on a bean bag. Another pupil played with a bowl of rice crispies during the session to enable them to remain in the session. Whilst another pupil was brushed on their arms and back with a large

paintbrush to help them regulate and access the session. In another lesson a pupil was observed to ask a member of staff to massage their hand and arm which supported them to focus on the lesson. Pupils have access to personalised sensory support tools such as ear defenders, chews and fidget toys.

The Atrium is a busy environment with lots of people walking through which at times can be distracting for pupils who are being taught in that area. The school should explore ways in which this area could be made less busy when lessons are taking place.

Emotional Well-being

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Positive Behaviour Support Plans show an appreciation of activities which each autistic pupil finds enjoyable, relaxing or provides them with a sense of achievement and purpose. Example include;

- I like to play football for my choose/reward time, sometimes with staff and sometimes with friends.
- I enjoy sports and need to move often. I like going for walks around school.

Positive Behaviour Support Plans identify approaches to help maintain the well-being of each autistic person including where appropriate proactive and preventative strategies to avoid anxiety or distress and support emotional regulation. Examples include;

- Use my Zones chart
- Talk to my teachers
- Remind myself of expectations
- Use a fiddle toy/squishy
- Use a chew
- Use a calm tone of voice
- Remind me of expectations
- Re-direct and re-assure me

Progress and Aspiration reports identify positive achievements and progress impacting on the quality of life of each autistic pupil. For example one pupil's report states '*This*

academic year X has demonstrated incredible progress with her Community Inclusion/friends and relationships target, by developing a friendships and spending time with her friend in and out of school. This friendship has developed throughout the year and has supported X to learn the unwritten rules and conventions of friendship’.

The school has developed a creative, bespoke curriculum that meets the needs of each pupil and enables them to reach their personal best. The three curriculum pathways are purposefully designed to meet the varied needs of pupils. It was evident through staff interviews and observations that communication, developing independence, sensory differences and the wellbeing of pupils are at the heart of the curriculum.

Every pupil has a Positive Behaviour Support Plan written using the structure of Zones of Regulation containing information about the activities and strategies needed to get them back to ‘Green’ according to which Zone the pupil is in.

In interviews, one member of staff spoke about how wellbeing is ‘built into everything we do, it’s built into our values and is the golden thread woven into everything we do, our language, our curriculum, the approaches we use and the environment we create’.

Another member of staff spoke about embedding Zones of Regulation across the school and as part of the PSHE curriculum. The member of staff spoke about how young people were better able to relate their feeling to the coloured zones, for example one young person was able to understand that both the feelings of excitement and frustration were in the yellow zone and it helped them to put into context their feelings and facilitate better conversations about feelings and self-regulation.

Feedback from family members surveys show that overall they are happy with the support their relative receives. In total 41 family members provided feedback to the assessment team by returning completed questionnaires. The full results are shown as an appendix to this report.

- 41 family members stated that the support their relative is given is always or mostly good.
- 41 family members stated that staff understanding is mostly or always good.
- 38 family members stated that advice given by the school was good or always good.
- 34 family members stated that the way they are kept informed was good or always good.

Comments included;

Birchwood is an absolutely amazing and supportive setting. The staff from the head down always go above and beyond for the students as well as the students families.

Birchwood is a fantastic school where the staff truly care about every child. They have helped my son find coping strategies and boosted his confidence and self-esteem so much which has had an enormous positive impact on his life.

I think that the care and attention that my autistic son receives during school is good as he always returns quite happy

Feedback from autistic people's surveys show that overall they are happy with the support they receive, and staff understanding of their skills and needs. In total 18 autistic people provided feedback to the assessment team by returning completed questionnaires. The full results are shown as an appendix to this report.

- 16 stated the support they were given was good, 2 stated it was sometimes good.
- 13 stated that staff understand my needs, 5 stated staff sometimes understand my needs.
- 15 stated that staff listen to me on how I want to be helped, 2 stated that staff sometimes listen to me on how I want to be helped, 1 autistic person stated that staff did not listen to them on how they wanted to be helped.

Comments included;

I love Birchwood I have been at Birchwood for 6 years and for all those 6 years I have been given all the support I need, and the progress I have made being at Birchwood is incredible, I even have my own job now.

Birchwood has helped me to understand myself and to be more confident in myself and my abilities. Not only do they understand and support me very, very, very exceptionally well, but they have taught me how I can support myself and to understand my emotions and to recognise and verbalise what I need in different situations.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

Autistic people are fully supported to understand and regulate their emotions. Zones of Regulation is embedded across the school providing pupils' with opportunity to understand their emotions as appropriate to their age and cognitive ability. During lessons pupils were observed referring to the zones, for example, in one observation pupils used the zones framework to 'check in' and express how they were feeling. This was followed by a structured session exploring various triggers and how different

scenarios might make them feel in relation to the zones. One pupil commented *'I like Zones of Regulation, I like zone red because I can be wild, elated and over-excited not just depressed. If I get too overwhelmed I can't speak so I point to the emotion'*.

The school has a comprehensive reward system across all settings as appropriate to the needs of the pupils. One pupil explained in-depth how the reward programme worked and commented that it provided greater incentive because *'you can earn points which equal money tokens, for example 100 points is equal to a £5.00 token and you can choose a prize that you like'*.

Targets for older pupils are framed as 'Preparation for Adulthood Targets' and pupils had a copy of these targets stuck to their desks and a copy was displayed on the wall.

Throughout all observations, pupils were treated with dignity and respect. In interview staff spoke passionately about supporting pupils to achieve their best possible outcomes. Staff were observed to be caring and thoughtful and appear to have developed positive and trusting relationships with the pupils. Staff across school provided meaningful and positive feedback which appeared to boost the confidence and self-esteem of pupils.

Staff are passionate about their work and ensure that the wellbeing of the autistic pupil is at the heart of every decision. During interviews staff were able to give many examples of how they had supported pupils by using a variety of different approaches that have enabled autistic pupils to reach their full potential.

During all observations pupils appeared engaged in their learning. The school's curriculum is differentiated to meet the specific needs and long-term aspirational outcomes of pupils. Pupils appeared to find the classroom activities fun and interesting, lessons also included elements of challenge and opportunities for pupils to extend their learning or develop new skills.

Autistic pupils were engaged in meaningful activities which they found fun and interesting and are encouraged to enjoy the challenge of trying out or learning a new activity or skill. This was evident in the range of clubs, sports, cultural activities, and community trips available.

Section 3: Summary of assessment

What the provision does particularly well

What stood out as particular strengths: in supporting autistic people:

Throughout the assessment it was evident that the schools 'ENABLES' ethos is embraced across the school. Staff are passionate about empowering pupils to be the best they can and have high aspirations and unwavering passion and determination to provide outstanding outcomes for every pupil.

The school provides a total communication environment that enables pupils to understand and communicate to the best of their abilities and engage with the curriculum. Staff were observed to be skilful in adjusting their communication and using a wide range of communication approaches.

The calm, well-structured, clutter free environment of the school creates an enabling environment for autistic pupils. Careful consideration has been given to the needs of pupils across the different pathways, as a result the school has created an environment which supports the differing needs of pupils across the school.

Autistic people are fully supported to understand and regulate their emotions. Zones of Regulation is embedded across the school providing pupils' with opportunity to understand their emotions as appropriate to their age and cognitive ability. Both staff and pupils spoke knowledgeably about the approach giving examples of how it has supported pupils to better understand their emotions and develop personalised strategies to help them self-regulate.

The school has developed a creative, bespoke curriculum that meets the needs of each pupil and enables them to reach their personal best. The three curriculum pathways are purposefully designed to meet the varied needs of pupils. It was evident through staff interviews and observations that communication, developing independence, sensory differences and the wellbeing of pupils are at the heart of the curriculum.

Throughout all observations, pupils were treated with dignity and respect. In interview staff spoke passionately about supporting pupils to achieve their best possible outcomes. Staff were observed to be caring and thoughtful and appear to have developed positive and trusting relationships with the pupils. Staff across school provided meaningful and positive feedback which appeared to boost the confidence and self-esteem of pupils.

The Pupil Voice initiative is a fantastic example of how the school empowers young people to not only better understand themselves but to enable them to express their thoughts and feeling and share their stories with others to help improve outcomes for others.

Staff are passionate about their work and ensure that the wellbeing of the autistic pupil is at the heart of every decision. During interviews staff were able to give many examples of how they had supported pupils by using a variety of different approaches that have enabled autistic pupils to reach their full potential.

What the provision could develop further

Priorities for the provision in ensuring consistency and quality in supporting autistic people:

There were no visible communication systems in the outside play areas. The school should consider how to extend the 'total communications environment' outside through the use of choice boards, visuals, zones of regulation boards, etc. in order to provide pupils with a means of communication at all times.

The Atrium is a busy environment with lots of people walking through which at times can be distracting for pupils who are being taught in that area. The school should explore ways in which this area could be made less busy when lessons are taking place.

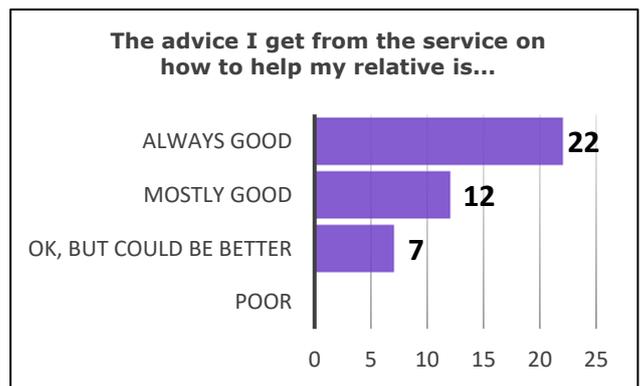
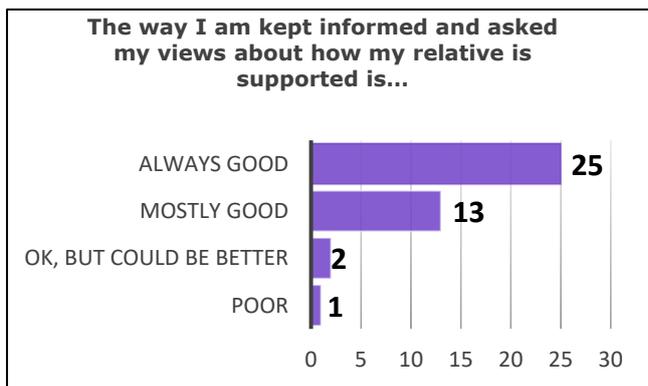
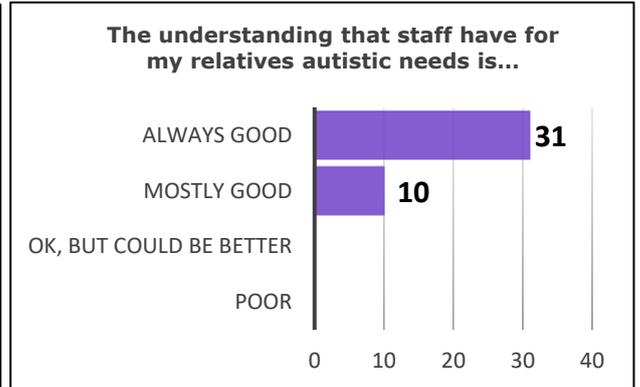
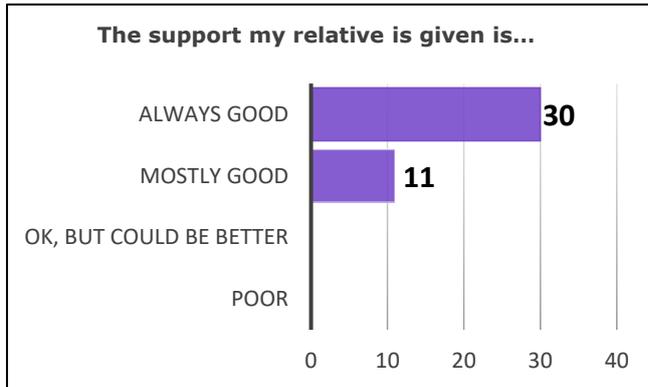
The assessment team fully supports the school's ambitions in expanding the provision further by developing the following areas as identified by the school;

- The successful transition from Post 16 Birch Wood College into FE colleges, apprenticeships, or employment.
- To explore the potential of a pre- traineeship/apprenticeship coaching module with employers.
- To lead on the development of a Leicestershire and Rutland SEND and Inclusion Hub, leading to improved outcomes for more children and young people across the county.



APPENDIX: SURVEYS

Families of Autistic Persons - Questionnaire Responses: 41



Comments

Birchwood is an absolutely amazing and supportive setting. The staff from the head down always go above and beyond for the students as well as the students families. They've always provided excellent education, support and opportunities to my child/our family from the day my child started. Since starting at Birchwood my child has been so well supported they are thriving which we've never had in any other school. This setting and the staff there are second to none.

The staff are wonderful and caring towards all the children and it's genuine and have there best interests at heart. Theo has coke along great since attending Birchwood. Xxx

Birch wood school is the place I could have hoped for my autistic son to attend. As parents we are listened to how best to support our children and the communication is great, meaning we are



always informed about our child's day at school. The smooth transition process alone proves how welcoming and supportive school is for children with autism. Children are accepted for who they are and each progress is celebrated.

My child receives outstanding support at Birchwood School. Everything from how the children are welcomed into the school in the morning, to the way the curriculum has been developed, how the classrooms have been set up to cater for each individual person really is amazing. My child thoroughly enjoys being at school and that is 100% due to the support she receives there. The staff go above and beyond in ensuring her needs are met.

Birchwood is a fantastic school where the staff truly care about every child. They have helped my son find coping strategies and boosted his confidence and self-esteem so much which has had an enormous positive impact on his life.

The change in my son since attending Birch Wood school has been amazing to see. His self esteem along with his academic progress has been really boosted since taking a massive hit in his mainstream primary school. I am grateful on a daily basis that he has a place at Birch Wood, it's been an absolute saviour for him. Where I think there could be some improvement is in connecting learners to their autism diagnosis in a positive way and educating them about the growing neurodiversity movement. Also some education around knowing their rights within society in connection to their diagnosis. I'd love to hear him talk with pride about being autistic. We obviously connect those dots at home but it would be great if there were more opportunities for those connections to be reinforced in school.

This school is professional, kind and always does it's best by student

I think that the care and attention that my autistic son receives during school is good as he always returns quite happy

We are so proud of our child's accomplishments, achievements & progress. All credit to all staff & the facilities available at Birch Wood School.

Absolutely fantastic school always put me at ease. Keep up the fantastic work guys and thank you. 😊

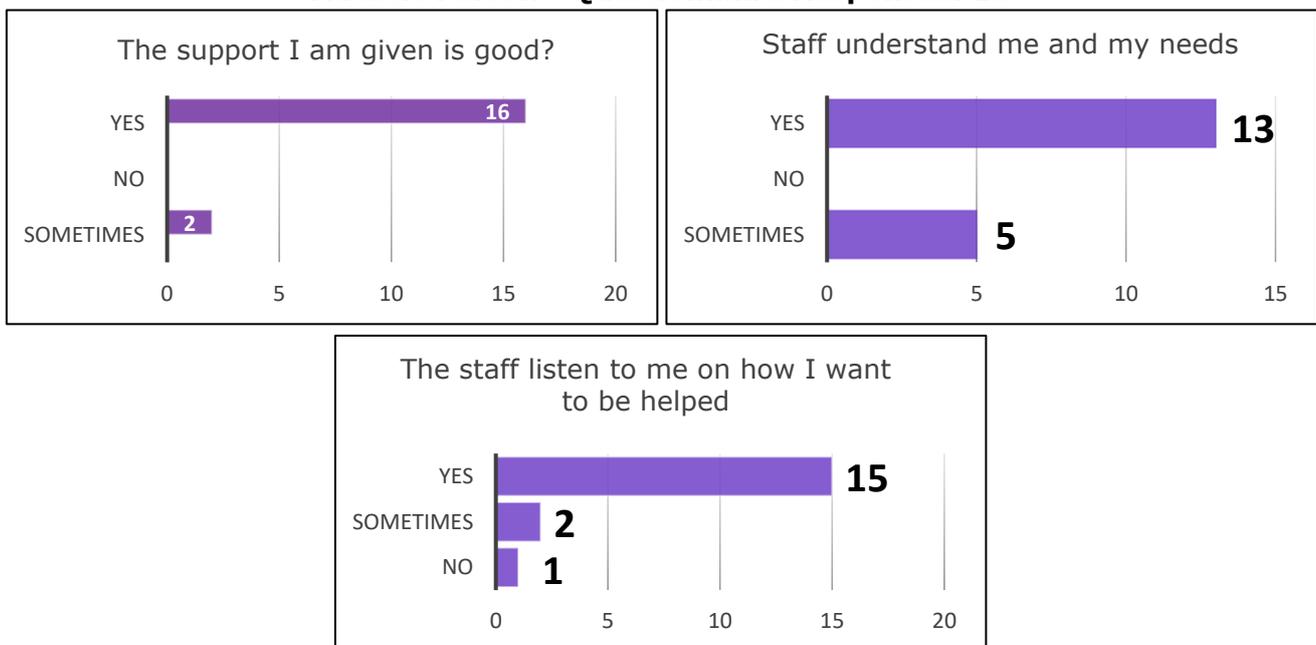
This school has given my child a chance at bright and happy future. The empathy and tailored provision is second to none!

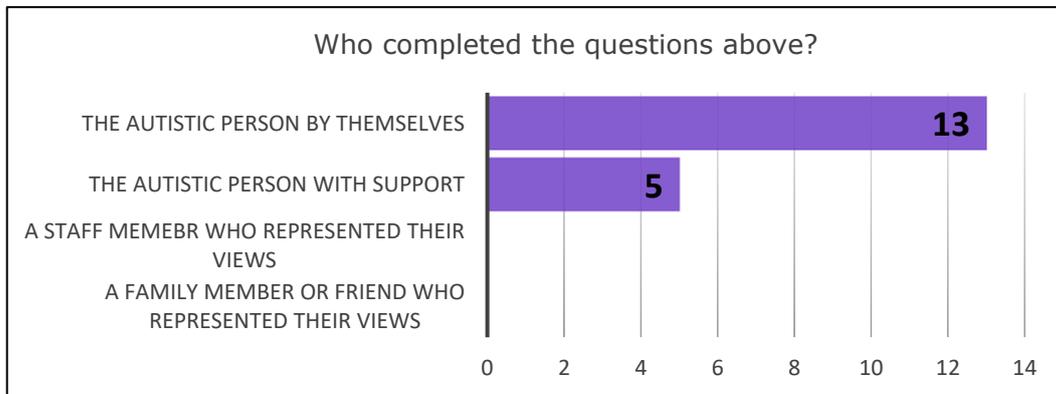
The staff truly care about my child. She isn't just another pupil with autism, she is unique and they take the time to understand what works best for her and adapt their teaching to help her thrive!

As my child has progressed through the provision I feel less informed about my relative

This school has changed our life, two of our children are attending Birchwood, and both have made amazing progress in how they feel emotionally and how they now interact socially. Birchwood staff has always been listening to us and the needs of our children and if something did not work they would ask us and our children how they could improve and make things work for our children so they felt secure and happy. Their communication with parents is continuous and it is really a team effort between them us and our children to ensure our children get the best experience out of their school. We really could not praise them enough and thank them every occasion we get for all the work they do with our children. They are truly amazing and this is why so many Autistic children strive in their school as they are able to unravel their potential and do not make them feel as the odd one out.

Autistic Person - Questionnaire Responses: 18





Comments

yes they do help me a lot

I really like how the staff meet us at the gate in the morning, I really like the school space and environment, it is a lot more relaxed then a main stream school, no one is rushing around, no one is getting bullied, everyone is happy and willing to learn.

The school is a major improve than my last school although I felt let down when studying for science GCSE because I was telling them that I work better when having work explained (specifically practical lessons). I found it hard to understand the YouTube video being put on that showed how to do the experiment.

I love Birchwood I have been at Birchwood for 6 years and for all those 6 years I have been given all the support I need , and the progress I have made being at Birchwood is incredible, I even have my own job now. at my old school in main stream I really struggled and had difficult days every day for a very long time then since I came to Birchwood I was really happy and felt understood and now I am ready to move on and go to collage. I don't only feel more self confident but I also have the key skills and knowledge to go into town or into society.

birchwood has helped me to understand myself and to be more confident in myself and my abilities . not only do they understand and support me very very very exeptionally well , but they have taught me how i can support myself and to understand my emotions and to recognise and verbalise what i need in different situations. when i first joined i had no idea of my self worth or what my future looked like and in a very short space of time they have helped me overcome my past traumas of mainstream while

creating a strong, self-driven, individual. and i wish everyone could go to a special school like this because the curriculum is more humane and nurturing. i have accomplished more educationally than mainstream because they also nurture us and from that we all can succeed

hi everyone who sees this we would not appreciate being named as the autistic person as that is offensive to myself and upsets me and to others.

I find it hard to speak to staff in my class.

I think I do need support dealing with my classmates immaturity and babyish behaviour as it is very upsetting to put up with. I have spoken to staff about how I am feeling and it is great that they understand me.

APPENDIX: INFORMATION FROM THE PROVISION

This section should be copied and pasted directly from the assessment introduction form

What is the range of autistic people supported by the provision? e.g., age; learning disability; verbal or non-verbal etc.

Birch Wood School is a successful and vibrant area special school that serves Melton and surrounding areas in Leicestershire. All students have Education, Health and Social Care Plans (EHCPs). At Birch Wood we cater for children from EYFS through to Post 16 with PMLD, SLD and MLD. We also offer a highly successful Autism Provision where students can access an autism-specific learning environment whilst also benefiting from the wider facilities that the school has to offer. Students within Birch Wood are viewed as individuals and individuality is encouraged and celebrated.

There are students with Autism in every class throughout Birch Wood School and, therefore, we provide an environment and curriculum that is organised to best meet the needs of autistic children and young people. Our school strives to ensure that each classroom is organised in a way that is structured and meaningful for Autistic learners. Due to the diverse needs of the pupils across Birch Wood School, classrooms may differ in how they are set out. We have a commitment to all students with a Communication and Interaction difference and, by making simple adjustments to our school, we have created an environment which is mindful of the areas of difference and is conducive to a positive learning experience for all.

- 1. Birch Wood Grange Drive School**
- 2. Birch Wood Vale School**
- 3. Ashton House Autism Provision**
- 4. We have also developed a partnership with Brooksby Melton College to establish 'Birch Wood College', which consist of a Post-16 Satellite Base providing a 'bridge' back to mainstream FE for our students at Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House.**

Provision is offered over two school sites and within three main buildings, excluding our new Post-16 Satellite at Brookbsy Melton a College approximately 10 minutes away in the car in the centre of the town. There is a single governing body; both school sites provide community special schools for students with SEND offering different curricula to meet the various special educational needs and phases.

Within the Birch Wood School learning community, we have approximately 225 students on roll across all sites including our Post-16 students. We take an individual approach to every child.

Birch Wood Grange Drive was purpose-built in 2005 for students with SEND aged 4-19 with a range of needs (PMLD, SLD, MLD).

In 2016, to meet county demand, we developed a primary Autism-specific provision. This provision is across 3 classes catering for children whose learning and cognition is broadly in line/slightly below mainstream peers, but whose communication and interaction needs required a highly specialised environment and approach. Some of these students have been excluded from mainstream or had a difficult introduction to education in primary school. Most of these students transition to Ashton House Autism Provision at Burton Road at approximately age 11.

Birch Wood Vale at Burton Road was established in 2010. The existing leadership team have made significant alterations and modifications to fully utilise the site and create a school for 11-19 year old students with lower levels of learning and

cognition within the SLD-MLD range. Students are generally able to access secondary-style subject-specific teaching and with SEND expert teaching and learning many achieve Entry Level and GCSE/BTEC qualifications. Students on our Aspire pathway at Grange Drive transition to Birch Wood Vale at age 10/11. Birch Wood Vale also has a significant intake at KS3 from local mainstream primary settings and units.

Ashton House Secondary Autism Provision is a separate building at the Burton Road site for 11-19 year olds with a diagnosis of Autism and/or communication and interaction and associated social, emotional and mental health needs. Ashton House was established in September 2020 and the building was named after the first student who joined our Primary Autism Provision back in 2016- He is very proud to have a building named after him. Students here have learning and cognition needs, which are broadly in line with mainstream peers but whose C&I/SEMH needs require a highly specialised environment and approach. Students access a similar secondary curriculum as Birch Wood Vale students and are taught together with Birch Wood Vale classes for Option subjects. Ashton House provides a secondary transition for Autism provision students from Grange Drive. When established in 2020 intake was primarily external to Birch Wood and provided a setting for students who had previously refused to attend secondary school and for whose profile is C&I/ SEMH. Many of these students were badly impacted by Covid in their previous setting. Post-Covid many students have required additional support to develop their readiness for FE; this has precipitated the development of our partnership with local FE provider Stephenson Brooksby Melton College (SBMC) to develop and a specialist Post-16 satellite at Brooksby Melton Campus.

Birch Wood College - The launch of our new Satellite Provision Classroom, based at Brooksby Melton College, is an exciting development for the Birch Wood community. In August 2022, Birch Wood College opened. The specialist learning environment at Birch Wood and our expert staff, combined with partnership work with Brooksby College enables us to create a Post-16 provision that provides a sustainable curriculum that is meaningful and aspirational for our young people. Birch Wood College will enable us to provide a blended approach, with some time spent at Birch Wood and some time spent at Brooksby Melton College supported by Birch Wood staff. This approach avoids the typical 'cliff edge' experience that many young people have expressed feeling in the past. Through our partnership with Brooksby College we will be better placed to effectively prepare our students for the opportunities and challenges that the future will bring. We will continue to work with the young people and their families to identify the College Provision in the future that best supports their needs and future aspirations.

It continues to be hugely important to us that we work in partnership with parents to provide the best possible opportunities and outcomes, therefore we will continue to work closely with parents throughout their young person's time at Birch Wood College. The hopes and aspirations that sit at the heart of this project have been a long time in creation and we are genuinely excited to see how our partnership with Brooksby College will improve outcomes for the young people at Birch Wood School. Students from the Secondary Autism Provision who continue to study at Birch Wood will generally access Birch Wood College, providing them with a 'bridge' back to mainstream FE.

Outcome of last statutory inspection if applicable.

Body	Date	Outcome
Ofsted	28 th June 2018	Good

Please include a hyperlink to the report:

https://www.birchwoodschoo.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/10048132_birch-wood-melton-area-special-school_final-inspection-letter.pdf?_ga=2.13136823.1295710041.1662027771-660437135.1651057963&_gl=1*mjwptu*_ga*NjYwNDM3MTM1LjE2NTEwNTc5NjM.*_ga_XZWMDXKYQN*MTY2MjA0MTk1Ny4xMy4xLjE2NjIwNDE5NjguMC4wLjA

What are the main specialist approaches used in supporting autistic people in their social communication and sensory regulation and promotes their independent and well-being?

As a school we do not advocate for 'blanket approaches' when supporting our autistic learners. We are passionate about ensuring that approaches or methods of support are adapted in order to meet the needs of the individual. However, throughout Birch Wood lessons are well structured with consistent cues and routines that enable students to distinguish between activities and provide predictability and structure. Staff are skilled in recognising the additional processing time which our young people require and the use of language is well considered. Our school environment is kept as distraction-free as possible, with designated low-arousal spaces identified for those young people whose needs require them. Within classrooms, clutter is avoided and rooms are clearly laid out, with designated areas for specific activities wherever possible. Rooms have an appropriate level of visual labels, enabling students to identify where things belong and encouraging them to be as independent as possible. As a school we have used the SPELL Framework to shape and influence the way we support autistic individuals.

Birch Wood employ strategies that are influenced by many evidence-based approaches. Some of our children and young people use PECS as a way to communicate and we have highly skilled staff and Speech and Language Therapists who support them with this. Makaton signing and the use of symbols is commonplace within the school, especially at our Grange Drive site. We lead in the training and development of the EDR Positive Behaviour for Learning package which is used by school leaders across Leicestershire. The EDR Theoretical Framework is based on five components which are: Positive Behaviour Support; Behaviour for Learning; Token Economy; Restorative Practice; and Pupil Voice. These 5 components influence our approach significantly. We have structured approaches to certain learning opportunities that are influenced by TEACCH. Birch Wood have a range of therapists who work within the school providing targeted support to individual students, small group sessions and extensive guidance, training and support to the wider staff team. These therapies include, but are not limited to: Rebound Therapy, Music Therapy, Lego Therapy, Counselling, Hydro-Therapy, SaLT and Occupational Therapy. The school also has an Independent Educational Psychologist who works in a variety of ways throughout the school on a weekly basis.

What training or support do staff receive in delivering these approaches?

All student-facing staff at Birch Wood undergo a specific induction training package at the start of their Birch Wood career.

Birch Wood School's CPD aims to create a culture of growing professional development through our commitment to putting research, reflective practice, and coaching at the heart of staff development. Underpinning this is a belief in the power of creating professional capital and associated social capital in the school environment.

Learning Walks in 2022 showed: 1. Calm and purposeful learning environments that meet the needs of all pupils. 2. Relationships are really strong. Positive language is used to support pupils in their learning. 3. A range of assessment was evident in teacher dialogue as well as pupils' books. This included evidence of spaced repetition. 4. Teamwork between teachers and support staff is excellent with the partnership resulting in pupils engaging with learning and interacting with stimuli.

Birch Wood lesson observation format is robust, includes work scrutiny and prioritises developmental feedback which informs future CPD and staff collaboration. The criteria are shared with all staff and a professional dialogue is

encouraged to constantly develop teachers' ability to deliver high quality lessons with clear progression outcomes. This lesson observation format is built in to Blue Sky to personalise the software making it specific to different SEND groups. Regular whole school training relating to specific approaches used includes: Makaton, Positive Relationships, Sensory Integration, EDR, Zones of Regulation, Chirpy and Bounce, Attention Autism, Social Stories, Structured Approaches, Distract Defuse and De-escalate Training, Trauma Informed Practice, Autism Education Trust (AET) Good Autism Practice full day training (All Staff) AET EYFS Good Autism Practice full day training- all staff working in Early Years and Foundation Stage. Training for staff who support children and young people on the Engagement and Independence Pathway also includes 'Dance Massage', 'Tac Pac', 'Intensive Interaction' and 'Sensology'.

What processes are in place to ensure that each autistic person has a regularly reviewed personal support plan that identifies strategies and sets targets in their social communication and sensory regulation and promotes their independence and well-being?

All students at Birch Wood School have an individual Positive Behaviour Support Plan (PBSP). These plans are a collaborative creation between the student, school staff, families and other relevant professionals. PBSP's are a working document that are reviewed, updated and continuously referred to. PBSP's are routinely checked and reviewed by Senior Leaders on a termly basis. PBSP's are signed by the class teacher, parent/carer, Senior Leader and young person (where appropriate) Student ownership of their progress and achievement is developed with the implementation of our Directed Improvement & Reflection Time feedback which builds in student participation. Half-termly students have an opportunity to reflect on their individual targets in a way that is accessible to them. All Students within the Autism Provision have an individual 'Autism Student Profile' This document covers how the key areas of difference are experienced by the individual, their individual strengths, interests and motivators and strategies and action points for how best to support the individual. The school now embraces social media in positive way to reach out to the local community to promote acceptance of disability and to celebrate our pupil's achievements. These are all used as a mechanism to support our pupil's positive self-identity and foster a sense of pride and belonging in the school community.

How are autistic people consulted in the support they receive?

All students have an individualised 1 Page Profile, students are encouraged and enabled to directly influence, create and input into the document. Student involvement in interview/recruitment process is commonplace at Birch Wood and their feedback and reflections directly impact on the recruitment process.

Students from the Autism Provision were interviewed as part of a Webinar that was watched and enjoyed by a wide range of professionals across Leicestershire. Student voice is in action through a very active student council, which combined with closer attention to student surveys has also grown our capacity for student participation in their own learning.

Autistic students were interviewed as part of Leicestershire's recent SEND Review and their thoughts, reflections and suggestions formed part of this review.

How are the family who represent the best interests of the autistic people consulted about the support their relative receives?

Through our collaborative work with 'Kinteract Software' Birch Wood provide a student progress tracking tool, which supports inclusive and consistent parental and student engagement and allows staff to capture students' progress and development across both EHCP targets and academic specific targets. Families are regularly consulted via a Parent/Carers survey. The results and findings from these surveys form part of continual school improvement plan. Parents evenings happen twice a year, Annual Reviews once a year to ensure that progress is being met against EHCP outcomes and that aspirations for young people are realistic and ambitious. We send out parent surveys at least once a year to hear the parent's voice in how we can better our school and also recognise and celebrate what we are doing well.

What do you consider to be the main areas of development for the provision?

- The successful transition from Post 16 Birch Wood College into FE colleges, apprenticeships, or employment.
- To explore the potential of a pre- traineeship/apprenticeship coaching module with employers.
- To lead on the development of a Leicestershire and Rutland SEND and Inclusion Hub, leading to improved outcomes for more children and young people across the county.

What do you consider to be the main areas of strength for the provision?

- Behaviour and attitudes at Birch Wood are exceptional because students feel a deep sense of belonging in this school community and as a result respect staff and want to succeed. This is significant because many students have complex communication and interaction and SEMH differences that require staff to have a deep understanding of their needs and an ability to form positive relationships through consistency and trust.
- The Autism Specific Provision is hugely successful and continues to evolve and improve. It was established in 2016 when it was recognised that there was a significant deficit in specialist provision for pupils with a diagnosis who were struggling within their settings and at risk of exclusion or school refusal. The provision started with just 1 ten year old boy who, without the development of the Autism Provision, was destined for out of County Provision despite living only minutes from Birch Wood. The Provision now caters for 43 children and young people across 4 Autism Specific Classes and Birch Wood College. The Provision is referenced by Ofsted 'the leader for autism has quickly identified the needs of pupils in her provision and tailored the provision to meet those needs, The pupils are happy and making progress. The expertise of the leader has now been shared with all staff.'
- We have developed a wide range of areas in which we can offer school to school support through the development of highly effective, specially trained school leaders. We have adopted a distributed leadership school model which has built capacity throughout the school to work externally to support other school leaders. This has included receiving funding from the LA to provide highly successful outreach within our locality. At an operational level we have ensured staff have built in time for outreach and coaching support and ensured that there is strength and capacity within our leadership team and beyond to allow sufficient time to work externally to support leaders outside of our school. Examples of how we have built capacity include our '**Autism School Support Service**' We also have an **EYFS network** which is run in partnership with the Paragon TSA and is led by our EYFS Senior Leader in Education who also provides outreach and support for EYFS and KS1 leaders. Additionally, we lead in the training and development of the EDR Positive Behaviour for Learning package which is used by school leaders across Leicestershire. Furthermore, one of our Deputy Heads is a trained Pupil Premium Reviewer and another is a trained SEND Reviewer. We open our CPD out to other schools and offer specific coaching to local SENCOs and leaders of SEND provision as is advertised on our website.

- We now have a cohesive and thorough approach to therapy access. Therapies include Speech and Language Therapy, social communication, Music Therapy, Lego Therapy, Rebound Therapy, Pet Therapist and school dog and TAC PAC to support all forms of progress. We also have an independent Educational Psychologist and Speech and Language Therapist working within the school weekly and we have commissioned an independent OT to work within the Autism Provision weekly. Combined these promote emotional learning alongside academic progress. Therapies are tracked to assess impact and planned in a strategic way to meet needs.
- Our CPD package creates a culture of growing professional development through our commitment to putting Research Lesson Study, reflective practice and coaching at the heart of staff development. Senior Teaching Assistants and Learning Support Assistants are included in the Monday and Thursday night INSET programme for teaching and learning and we have a rolling programme with many staff completing a Level 2 NVQ in Autism and other SEND areas in collaboration with Stephenson College. An inclusive approach to CPD ensures support staff have a bigger impact on learning outcomes. Our whole staff team has accessed AET Good Autism Practice training and many of those working within the Autism Provision have also completed AET tier 3 training. Autism Champions have been a huge success and having a staff member within each class group who is constantly reflecting on the needs of Autistic students and providing advice and feedback has improved outcomes.
- Our commitment to create an inclusive learning community and a positive, autism friendly learning environment is a strength.
- The 3 curriculum pathways that we have created at Birch Wood are designed to meet the needs of a wide range of learners with an EHCP. We provide a bespoke approach to our pupils' very individual needs and so movement between pathways is fluid. Aspects such as Mental Health and Wellbeing, Community Inclusion and Communication & Interaction are woven into the fabric of each pathway. The intent of each pathway is summarised below.

Engagement	Independence	Aspire
<p>An education at Birch Wood ENABLES Empowered for Independent Lives – Nurturing – Aspiring – Belonging – Love of Learning – Enables – Safe & Happy</p>		
<p>Empowering pupils, enriching lives and giving opportunities to make progress towards fulfilment and independence.</p> <p>Providing methods of communication and a desire to engage.</p> <p>Ensuring pupils with complex health needs maintain their progress.</p>	<p>Maximise opportunities to build independent lives; including developing advocacy, personal safety and supported employment opportunities.</p> <p>Core literacy/communication and numeracy.</p> <p>Link in to colleges, which build on interests and life skills Post 19.</p>	<p>Reach full academic potential whilst developing life skills to be safe, independent and fulfilled.</p> <p>Progression through school develops a positive work ethic & key skills for employment.</p> <p>By the end of KS4/5 young people are ready to build on qualifications at college (L1 or 2) or employment pathway to build towards future aspirations.</p> <p>Be responsible citizens. Developing self-regulation, positive relationship supporting mental health and wellbeing</p>

- We are passionate and committed about celebrating difference and championing inclusion to improve the SEND landscape in Leicestershire through outreach, support and training in our locality. We have a shared sense of responsibility with the LA to support SEND and inclusion in mainstream.
- Students and families have a real sense of identity and belonging to the school community and wider community as is shown through surveys, interviews and observations. Student and staff wellbeing is promoted in every aspect of school life and is an inherent part of the curriculum in order to support happy healthy children and young people who have a genuine 'voice' in school life through a robust student led school council. As such the key British values of democracy, tolerance and equality are embedded in the school culture.



APPENDIX: Case Studies

Name of school/service	<i>Birch Wood School</i>
Name of individual	<i>A</i>
Period of time covered	<i>Sept 21- Sept 22</i>
<p>What support was introduced? What approaches, strategies, methods were used?</p> <p>A referral was made to OT to support with A's sensory needs, from working with the OT a Sensory Diet was implemented to support A's sensory needs and self-regulation.</p> <p>A sensory bag was introduced in which A could access whenever A felt she needed this or staff felt this would help support, throughout the day and keeping to the structured routine and also keeping things consistent for example when outside 5 swings and finished.</p> <p>The sensory bag contained rough and soft sponges, massage frog and ball, bubbles, deep pressure all for A to choose from pictures and objects, or initially for staff to offer A the choice.</p> <p>Weighted blankets and deep pressure were also offered with the sensory bag for A to choose and staff to offer.</p> <p>Through pecs and pictures, A could chose to go into the quiet room, outside, classroom or a walk.</p> <p>The seating positon was also offered, of Sitting on the floor close to an adult or on a chair next to an adult, to support moving away from A wanting to sit on an adult's knee. Deep pressure, the sensory bag or the weighted blanket would be offered.</p> <p>A seeked self-regulation with her needing to eat crunchy foods. Through pictures, A could select Cheerio's or yoghurt (Pouches) to eat when needed to give her the sensory feedback she was seeking at the time, through the crunch.</p>	
<p>Pen picture of individual before support was introduced including challenges, difficulties etc.</p> <p>A was experiencing many crisis behaviours and struggling to self-regulate throughout the day. A was head butting, pinching, biting of others and self. Throwing herself onto the floor. Screaming and crying. Taking up to an hour to calm and self-regulate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A had difficulties with Communication and Interaction, Social, Emotional and Mental health, Cognition and Learning, Physical, and Sensory development. Some of her behaviours stem from frustration or development in these areas. • A got frustrated when she cannot communicate her needs and would get increasingly anxious or agitated when her immediate needs are not met. 	

- A could become fixed on activities or events and would not always understand verbal or visual explanations of what is coming next.
- A needs to experience sensory feedback from running around, swinging on the swing, slide, touching objects with her pointed fingers, eating crunchy foods, foods through a straw.
- Seeks pressure, deep pressure on her arms, legs and shoulders. She enjoys deep pressure through hugs.

OUTCOMES

Communication skills; social skills; relationships

Confidence in communication through Pecs, Pictures and Signing. Making choices to support self-regulation and sensory needs. Communicating with adults within class and interaction with other students through chasing each other, dancing, walking around holding hands.

Confidence; self-reliance; independent problem-solving

Finding ways to self-regulate, making choices and communicating needs and wants increased A's confidence in managing emotions, choices and social interaction.

Ability to cope with sensory input

A would go to the symbols, sensory bag, weighted blanket, quiet room and pictures to select cheerio's /yoghurt to support her self-regulation. A began to take the weighted blanket to an adult and seek deep pressure throughout the day.

Emotional self-regulation and well-being

A was a lot happier in joining in activities and managing routines and communication. A was beginning to recognise when she was happy, sad and angry. Managing emotions through self-regulation techniques, choices and communication.

Achievements, successes and quality of life outcomes

Communication
Self-regulation
Independence
Social Interaction

Happy
Initiating play
Joining in dancing and singing activities
Class visit to Belton Woods
Joining with other EYFS class
Transitions around school

Next Steps; transition

Transition September 22 to new class continue to support A's self-regulation and communication.

Case study to show impact of initiative

Name of school/service	Birch Wood Area Special School
Date initiative started: Sept 2021	Date of report: Sept 2022
Description (What was the initiative?)	
<p>Ensuring that the school's curriculum design, teaching and learning priorities and pupil assessment were built with autism best practice in mind. This was to ensure that the quality of education for young people with autism enabled them to fulfil their potential, for teachers to focus their development on strategies that would support young people with autism and, as a school, we are able to articulate the holistic impact of our curriculum (including communication, social skills and relationships, confidence, self-reliance and independent problem solving, ability to deal with sensory input and emotional regulation and wellbeing).</p>	
Context (What was reason for developing initiative?)	
<p>As a school we continue to engage in research, reflect on our own practice and listen to the views of the young people with autism. As we do so, we develop a deeper understanding of the nuanced barriers our young people with autism.</p> <p>Working towards advanced accreditation made us think about how we could remove barriers from a 'top-down' view.</p> <p>We asked ourselves the question: <i>What changes to our quality of education systems, structures and designs could we make to ensure that our young people are engaging with a curriculum designed to give young people with autism every opportunity to succeed?</i></p>	

Purpose of initiative (What were the aims and objectives of the initiative?)

Curriculum Design

Aims:

- Curriculum design enables young people with autism to fulfil their potential, removes barriers and reflects the vision and values of the school.

Objectives:

- Long term curriculum maps encapsulate the visions and values of the school
- Medium term plans outline individualised learning
- Curriculum golden threads ensure all young people with autism have access to high quality education

Teaching and Learning Strategies

Aims:

- Teaching and learning priorities, created through an autism lens, are explicitly outlined in the 'lessons at Birch Wood' document and result in better teaching and learning for pupils

Objectives:

- Create and implement guidance document to support teachers
- Quality assure teaching and learning against these expectations
- Provide support and training as required.

Holistic Impact

Aims:

- Create a basket of indicators, and accompanying process, which enables a triangulation of pupil progress.
- Holistic impact provides, and formalises, a broader definition of progress that includes aspects such as emotional regulation, communication, social skills and relationships etc

Objectives:

- Identify a list of assessment tools which will form Birch Wood's basket of indicators
- Process of triangulation to summarise the impact of the curriculum
- Any data analysis provides a focus on young people with autism with accompanying intervention where required.

- Moderation with numerous colleagues means the system is accurate and purposeful

Method (What did you do, and how were you going to measure, observe and record outcomes?)

From September 2021, and after asking ourself the question above, we set out a clear roadmap for how we wanted to re-evaluate and modify our curriculum. This included further embedding the vision and values of the school, articulating the 3 pathways, re-designing long term curriculum maps, embedding the template for medium term plans and developing how we measure the impact. At all times, we asked ourselves how our decisions would impact young people with autism.

What happened? (Describe how the initiative developed)

We have autistic pupils on every pathway. It was important, therefore, to take a whole school approach to the implementation of these changes and listen to the teachers who know our pupils well.

- We had a series of whole school INSET to introduce and discuss
- We held individual master classes with teachers who needed additional support or guidance
- We referred back to guidance and training in our decision making
- We integrated pocket sized professional development into our weekly bulletin

What were the actual outcomes of the initiative? (What progress was made by individuals for example in communication and social skills; in self-reliance and independence; sensory processing; emotional regulation and well-being)

Curriculum Design

- We now talk about our curriculum being dynamic. This is to reflect the fact changes we have to make to plans in order to meet the needs of our pupils.
- We introduced a document for teachers outlining minimum expectations for all lessons on all pathways. This includes aspects such as communication, environment, routines and how information is given.

Teaching and Learning

- 85.4% of criteria observed in all lessons over the year were considered as really good or exceptional practice. 0% of criteria observed required significant improved and only 14.6% of criteria were of no concern but were identified as areas that could be improved – ‘not because we’re not good enough, but because we can always be better’

Key: ■ Significant development needed ■ Further development needed ■ Good practice ■ Clear strength



- This percentage increased to 97.1% when we look at the statement referring to enabling pupils to thrive as individuals as well as learners.

As a result of positive behaviour and relationships, pupils feel they belong and feel safe. The environment allows all pupils to thrive as individuals and as learners.



Holistic Impact

- By assessing pupils holistically, at a whole school level, we're able to provide tailored support and secure positive outcomes by 'joining the dots'. A good example of this is a year 11 pupil who was identified as having good academic potential but due to various factors, including mental health, was at serious risk of becoming a school refuser. Thanks to the use of the holistic impact document, colleagues were able to discuss the 'bigger picture', provide targeted support and adapt qualifications. This enabled the young person to feel supported, continue to come into school and still acquire qualifications which reflected her ability.

Next steps and lessons learnt

- Continue to embed teaching practices.
- Observe and receive feedback on any new pupils coming into school. Continue to ask, how can we remove barriers to learning for the young people we currently have in the school.

Case study to show impact of initiative

Name of school/service	Birch Wood School
Date initiative started: 0	Date of report: 01/09/22
Description (What was the initiative?)	
For students and staff within the Autism Provision to use their voice, knowledge and expertise around Communication and Interaction differences to improve school outcomes and experiences for other autistic children and young people.	
Context (What was reason for developing initiative?)	
As part of our 2019 NAS Autism Accreditation, the following was identified as a priority for our provision. <i>'To collaborate with the local authority to share a successful model for delivering Provision for Autistic learners through developing further mechanisms for providing support, training and best practice ethos to other schools.'</i>	
Purpose of initiative (What were the aims and objectives of the initiative?)	
The main aim for this initiative is two-fold. Initially, the project was created to enable the students at Birch Wood to reflect on their experiences and find their own words to tell their own story. This project had a sense of empowerment at its heart and strived to provide a structure within which our Children and Young people could express their thoughts and feelings. The second key objective was for us to work in collaboration with the students to take their 'stories' and willingly share them with a wider audience. The students were very clear that they wanted their stories to help improve the experiences of others.	
Method (What did you do, and how were you going to measure, observe and record outcomes?)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whole class/group sessions on 'Me and my Autism' - Celebration of diversity. - Opportunities for students to interview and question an Autistic staff member to gain an insight into their journey to working as an LSA at Birch Wood. It is the aspiration of one of our autistic Post 16 students to pursue a career within Special Education. - Conference Collaboration with Maplewell Hall School- 'Creating a Successful Autism Provision' Including a student presentation within the conference. (See leaflet attached) 	

- Birch Wood Podcast experience focusing on Autism. 3 students from the Birch Wood Autism Provision took part in this Podcast, which was shared on Social Media. Copy of Podcast included in evidence shared with NAS
- Birch Wood Webinar (can be found on our Website under 'CPD & Outreach') The Webinar entitled 'Enabling the Autistic Individual' featuring video clips from students who are sharing their Top Tips for supporting a student with a communication and interaction difference. (See leaflet attached)
- A P16 student from the Autism Provision to complete a Work Experience based in a primary provision class at Grange Drive Site. This experience will help to develop her understanding of the role of a Learning Support Assistant at Birch Wood School.

What happened? (Describe how the initiative developed)

The students shared a rich, honest and meaningful portrayal of their experiences. Students expressed feeling empowered and inspired by the project. Feedback from the wider community, including local mainstream and special schools, was overwhelmingly positive.

What were the actual outcomes of the initiative? (What progress was made by individuals for example in communication and social skills; in self-reliance and independence; sensory processing; emotional regulation and well-being)

- Students expressed feeling a greater sense of 'self' and increased confidence.
- Students took part in numerous activities that enabled them to share their experiences and thoughts.
- Students have engaged in meaningful work experience opportunities.
- Students have used their voice to develop understanding of neurodiversity in others. This has led to professionals adapting the way they work in schools- improving outcomes and experience for many.

Next steps and lessons learnt

The key lesson learnt or reflection from this initiative is that the power of student voice and the benefits of empowering and enabling autistic CYP to share their voice is immeasurable. Our next steps, are to continue to explore ways we can encourage students to recognise that they each have a 'powerful voice' and then consider how we, as a school, can capture, capitalise and learn from this voice.

Case study for an individual's response to Music Therapy Sessions

Name of school/service	Birch Wood Melton Area Special School
Name of individual	Julia
Period of time covered	November 2020 - Present
What support was introduced? What approaches, strategies, methods were used?	
<p>Music therapy sessions were offered to Julia to initially assess if she would engage in the sessions. The hope was that these sessions would offer her a space to develop her self-confidence, self-awareness and various social skills, through having the opportunity to express herself both verbally and musically, expressing the various emotions that she feels, encompassing the happy ones and supporting her with her anxieties, frustration and sadness.</p> <p>Weekly music therapy sessions were offered for 30 minutes and these increased to 40 minutes following a successful period assessment. The sessions are based upon an integrative model taking elements of psychodynamic, gestalt and person-centred theories.</p>	
Pen picture of individual before support was introduced including challenges, difficulties etc.	
<p>Julia comes from a home that she has often portrayed as lacking in warmth and there have been safeguarding concerns raised with regards to neglect since she has been at Birch Wood. Julia enjoys role play with others and it was felt by her staff team that music therapy could offer her a safe place in which to express and explore her emotions and relationship skills.</p>	
OUTCOMES	
<p>Julia has opened up directly about her feelings towards those in her home as well as indirectly exploring various dynamics through her role-play such as being a young girl locked up in a cell with a circus and a young girl who has been abandoned in the jungle on the edge of a city, with a powerful and sadistic governor.</p> <p>Julia is seemingly not cognitively aware of the links between her stories and the situations she portrays within her own life, but our sessions offer her a way to work through how we can support these young girls to feel empowered, to find safety and to have a sense of belonging and love.</p> <p>Her music making allows her to have power and control within the sessions as well as developing her creative side as she loves to invent new games and activities for us</p>	

both to join in with. Julia is also a very keen singer and has improvised many songs, expressing various emotions including joy, strength, loss, anger and silliness (as in joyful randomness). A CD is available to hear some of these songs as this is where we believe the strength of this intervention is most evident.

Description of the song on the accompanying CD to highlight the impact of this intervention –

Track 1 – Starland

The first track is called, “Starland” and was taken from one of our first sessions. Julia has often struggled to make friends and to find a space for herself in the class in which she can interact with her peer group. This song saw her ask for me to play some sad music on the piano whilst she began to sing. The song explores issues of friendship in a make-believe world where, “There is lots of lovely new friends there for us to meet”, and, “We are gonna make new friends”.

Track 2 - Music in my veins

This song was recorded in the same week to Starland, and was improvised by Julia after we had spent time exploring the lyrics in this previous song. The second song was, I believe, a reaction to the sadness and lack of confidence that Starland had contained. Julia's voice is more powerful in comparison to the fragile vocals she used in Starland, and she wanted the music to be more upbeat and powerful, allowing her to express the strength and confidence she already felt in our therapy sessions. The song contains lots of positive messages but also projected how she knew that she was in control and had power in our sessions – “Don't mess with me, you're gonna regret it”.

Track 3 – Everything will be okay in the end

This short song was recorded at the end of our assessment period, just before school broke up for the Christmas break. Julia had explained that being off school was not easy for her, as school is where she feels most loved and where she is able to be her true self. It opens up with the line, “I'm not doing so good but I know that everything's gonna be okay soon”. This resonated with a discussion that we had held about being at home for two weeks over Christmas and her belief that she will be grown up soon and can move into her own house.

Track 4 – Violet's story

This song is taken from around 6 months after we have been working together and this highlights how Julia uses her story telling and role play to explore aspects of family. I play the piano and am following Julia's story to provide the soundtrack under her

words. This story tells of a group of sisters and how one child is disliked by the mum. The sister's all eventually wake up in a better world where there are no troubles.

Track 5 – Spongey Cheese!

This track is pure joy from Julia and expresses how free and confident she now is in our sessions. This is one of the more recent songs we have shared together and shows how far we have come together, sharing such happiness and randomness together. Julia has begun to use moments like this to provide a form of escapism and that her therapy sessions are a sanctuary in which she can revel in being a child with seemingly no worries or concerns. The song is wholly unapologetic for being silly and fun.

These songs are shared with the understanding that the nature of this work will remain confidential and they will not be copied or shared in any way.