



Birch Wood Area Special School

Head teacher's Annual Report to Governors- June 2023

Since we last met the Governors' three sub committees, have met and will report to this meeting. Detailed reports were submitted for quality of education, complex behaviour including physical intervention, site development and safety, safeguarding and attendance. In January Governors received an updated version of the school evaluation form (SEF), which concluded the school is outstanding in all areas. This academic year the school has commissioned and worked in partnership with a number of external professionals to validate our own internal evaluation of the school's performance; this has included Elizabeth Needham- Independent School Advisor, Stephanie De Vries- National Autism Society (NAS) Advanced Award, Iain Davidson- LA Education Effectiveness Partner, Emma Spiers- Phonics Quality Assurance, Jason Brooks and Kasia Glinka- Quality Assurance Partners- Maplewell Hall School and Raksha Mistry-Food for Life- Silver Award.

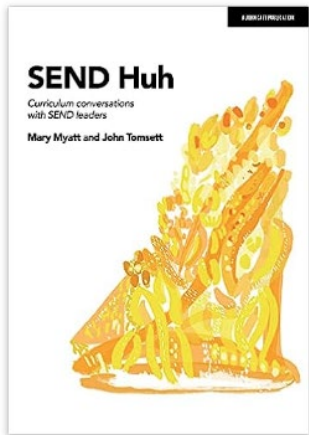
Two particularly rigorous QA exercises were carried out by the NAS and quality assurance partners from Maplewell Hall School. The NAS Advanced Award was gained through an intensive process of self- evaluation against a rigorous framework and concluded with a 3 day inspection from Stephanie De Vries and colleague. Our quality assurance partners Jason Brooks and Kasia Glinka spent 2 full days in school meeting with teachers, students and governors, visiting lessons and scrutinising students work. Detailed reports of these visits have been shared with relevant governors committees. Although we have confidence in the exceptional education we provide, our staff mission statement; - *"We have an unwavering passion and determination to continuously improve our school to provide the best outcomes for every pupil, not because we aren't good enough, but because we can always be better"* permeates our school improvement approach. In this way we are always reflecting on practice and striving to be the very best we can, through a comprehensive cycle of monitoring, evaluation and the implementation of research based improvement strategies.

Wider School Impact- Our commitment to promoting inclusion

We take a research informed approach to our work in school which has increasingly led us to work in collaboration with others. Through this outward facing approach and drive to champion inclusion we have undertaken the major development of our SEND and Inclusion Hub this school year. The Hub was developed in collaboration with Leicestershire and Rutland Teaching School Hub and was launched in November 2022. The SEND and Inclusion Hub offers a comprehensive package of training and support in the local region and is led by Deputy Head for Quality of Education- Phil Leaney in the capacity of Director of the SEND and Inclusion Hub. Through the hub we have delivered a range of training sessions for schools, which have received very positive feedback. We are planning a regional conference next academic year to promote a culture of inclusion within school leadership.

Both Phil Leaney and Joe Knowles- Assistant Head have been involved on SEND Reviews at local schools as well as supporting the LA with a quality assurance of independent special schools. Both SEND Reviews and independent school QA has involved visiting schools and evaluating them against an agreed criteria to aid their continuous development and assess value for money (in the case of independent special.)

Phil and I have also continued to act as Visiting Fellows for the Ambition Institute via the Leicestershire and Rutland Teaching School Hub. This has involved us delivering the content for the new suite of NPQs including NPQSL & NPQLTD, as well as new Headteacher mentoring. This has further helped us ensure we are up to date with the latest in training and research here at Birch Wood, whilst promoting inclusive practices across Leicestershire schools. The money we earn from this commissioned work is put in to a staff wellbeing budget.



On June 23rd the SEND Huh book by Mary Myatt and John Thomsett will be launched. Phil Leaney and I were invited to contribute via a chapter about the Birch Wood approach to curriculum thus providing a SEND school perspective. Mary and John interviewed us in November 2022, the transcript of which will be included in the book, which is already available for pre-order on Amazon. The book is part of a successful series of books which Mary and John has written about curriculum. Our involvement with this publication was followed by an invitation to join some roundtable conversations about special education which were facilitated by the Ambition Institute and The Confederation of School Trusts. These high level sessions were a fantastic opportunity to debate some of the most current questions in special education and shape direction ahead of the SEND and AP Improvement Plan which was published by the DfE this March. The roundtable discussions consisted of 4 sessions which covered: What is the SEND system for? (Roundtable 1), Three tensions and contradictions in the SEND system (Roundtable 2) and Five Principles for a better system (Roundtable 3) and finally What needs to change if we are to make schools better places for children identified as having SEND? (Roundtable 4). Contributors to the sessions included; Leora Cruddas – Confederation of School Trusts, Tom Rees – Ambition Institute, Ben Newmark- Author, Professor Becky Allen, Chris Jones – Ofsted, Anne Heavey – Ambition Institute, Charlie Lang- DfE, David Thomas- DfE and Juliette Cammaerts- Children’s Commissioners Office. Being part of these discussions has allowed us to continue to seriously consider our agency to improve the SEND system for young people both at Birch Wood and locally and shape the direction for the future of SEND.

Food for Life-Silver Award

On June 6th Birch Wood had a special presentation event to celebrate us achieving the Silver Food for Life Award, we are currently the only special school in Leicestershire to achieve this award. The Food for Life initiative has been woven in to many areas of the curriculum across the school to enrich the pupil’s educational experience and support connections with the local Melton community and industry. Pupil’s positive feedback as seen them talk enthusiastically about their experiences of linking with farms and food producers as part of their work towards the Food for Life award. The school have used resources such as the Leicestershire local food producer films as well as making links with local food producers such as Brockleby Pies to help the pupils connect with where food comes from and understand how it is produced. The pupils have visited March House Farm and undertake work experience, which supports links with the local community as well as career opportunities.





Food for Life activities in the school, have enhanced the pupil's experience of food and created a positive food culture that has allowed passions in growing, cooking and food production to develop. As a result, pupils have moved on to college courses in horticulture, completed cooking career qualifications and have started jobs working in local restaurant kitchens.

As part of the Silver award celebration event, pupils showcased the school's links with March House Farm and the catering skills they have learned by designing, sourcing and creating an incredible buffet to celebrate the occasion. They had visited the farm shop the day before and purchased a delightful array of locally produced foods including pork pie, cheese, fruit and home-made smoothies. The wonderfully presented feast was enjoyed by all.

Staff and pupils were able to show the guests around the gardens and growing area. The staff shared how, as a result of the Food for Life work, the pupils are connected with nature and understand their environment. The staff explained how local community venues have been used as a community café, which has allowed pupils to develop cooking skills for a purpose as well as build relationships with the local community, allowing people to connect over food.

Birch Wood staff and students welcomed Councillor Louise Richardson, Mayor Alan Hewson and Mayoress Jane Hewson as well as representatives from Food for Life and Leicestershire Traded Services to share the impact the Food for Life work has had on the school. Councillor Louise Richardson presented pupils with their Silver Food for Life award, congratulating them for all their hard work and enthusiasm for Food for Life.



Curriculum- A continuous cycle of review and development

We continue to develop our school curriculum and physical environment in key areas to provide greater opportunities for our students. Over the last 12 months our Aspire Pathway Post 16 curriculum has had major development to promote greater inclusion and preparation for adulthood. Details of this can be found below as we discuss progress towards 'Key Priority 3 – Overhaul enrichment opportunities at Birch Wood to further enhance the curriculum.'

This year also saw our new EYFS group flourish in their new surroundings after the major internal development of 2 new EYFS classrooms following the last minute demand in county for EYFS SEND places. Our EYFS provision is a clear strength in the school, where the lessons observed both by internal low stakes lesson visits and external evaluation highlight EYFS is an example of best practice particularly in the area of early reading and phonics.



Summer Site Development

In order to provide more adequate space for the numbers of students who are now on roll at Birch Wood Vale and to improve and upgrade facilities generally, a mezzanine will be installed in the atrium at BWV over the summer holidays. This will provide an enclosed multi use space downstairs and an art studio upstairs at Birch Wood Vale. The existing art room will become a modern staffroom, whilst the existing outside mobile will provide a base for Post 16 students. These developments have been funded by the local authority and will be overseen by the contractors Tanwoods as part of an extension of their existing arrangement with the LA.

At Grange Drive another of our larger class spaces will be divided to create 2 classrooms which will match the smaller class sizes which predominantly our students with communication, interaction and sensory needs require. This will ensure we are able to target groupings and provision at student's primary needs.

Extensive sensory lighting and sound system has now been installed in the hydrotherapy pool which has been renamed the 'Ellis Page Hydrotherapy Pool' in memory our wonderful student Ellis who died last September. A plaque and signage with Ellis's photo has been added outside the pool. His family will be invited to see this tribute in the near future and it will serve as a fitting reminder of how Ellis loved hydrotherapy and of the benefits it brings to many of our students.

Holiday activities and food programme (HAF)

HAF is designed by the government to support children in receipt of free school meals through holiday periods. Research has shown that the school holidays can be pressure points for some families. For some children this can lead to a holiday experience gap, with children from low-income households being:

- less likely to access organised out-of-school activities
- more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health
- more likely to experience social isolation

The HAF programme is a response to this issue, with evidence showing that free holiday clubs can have a positive impact on children and young people. This holiday provision is for school aged children from reception to year 11 (inclusive) who receive benefits-related free school meals.

We know that families whose children have the most complex needs are additionally vulnerable during the holiday period which is why annually Hannah O'Mara Assistant Head makes a bid for Birch Wood to the LA to become a HAF provider for our students who are identified as being most at risk for the reasons above and because of their very complex needs. For the third year running Hannah has worked incredibly hard on a bid, which she successfully secured so that we can make this offer exclusively available to students who meet the criteria at Birch Wood.



Intake and Staffing

We are still liaising with SENA with reference to admissions for next term. At this point in time we hope to have stabilised numbers on roll, but have concerns about tribunals which could see us forced to take students beyond our planned capacity. Further to this the closure of Melton College could see some of our students who are under 19 without their planned transition for next academic year; this currently impacts 5 students. We are working with stakeholders to see what the alternatives are for these young people. Both these situations make it harder to plan for next academic year, a problem which is compounded by difficulties in recruiting to teaching posts in particular. In part this is due to a national shortage of teachers, but also because we require teachers with both primary and SEND experience/interest at Grange Drive. We short listed 5 candidates for a KS2 teacher post, only 2 were available by the interview date and neither were deemed suitable after their interview day. Currently we have a shortage of at least 1 teacher for next academic year, which we have currently re-advertised for.

We have launched a new campaign to attract LSAs to the role with a video campaign highlighting staff experience of working at Birch Wood and how staff are supported. This video can be seen during our governors meeting.

Finance and Budget

Financial planning remains difficult due to unfunded pay rises, general costs and lack of government clarity over funding. We have a healthy carry forward (£500k) from last financial year ending April 2023 **redacted**

Academy Status and MATS- redacted

Parents and Community

Our community beyond Birch Wood remains a real feature of our school identity. This is important for our student's inclusion in society and fits in with our drive to promote understanding of disability, diversity and inclusion. Our biggest community event is also our newest; led by Deputy Head Phil Leaney, the Birch Wood 10 community running walking/event will be held on September 10th this year. This is great way to bring the community together and raise money for the school. The school is supported by many local charities and businesses including the Triumph Motorcycle Club, Rotary Club, Melton- in-Bloom, The Romy Fund, Melton Building Society and Ragdale Hall Spa, plus others. These links not only help us raise money but provide a platform from many other connections which both enrich our school offer and raise awareness and understanding about disability and SEND. Most recently Music Therapist Neil Eaves applied to Ragdale Hall's Community Chest for more music instruments achieving a £500 donation. To receive the cheque Neil and I attended a presentation event which allowed us to meet up with other community groups such as Breathing Space, Melton-in-Bloom, Oasis Nursery and Melton Learning Hub amongst others. The event was covered by the Melton Times and will feature in their newspaper on June 15th. We have also had significant donations from Melton Building Society and the Romy Fund, which have enabled us to buy an additional mini bus this year, which will further support our students to get out and about in the community.



Incredibly we also have staff who take on massive physical challenges beyond the workplace to raise funds for the school. Last month Tom Bradley Hewell- Head of School- GD, Jordan Meads- Teacher and David Grimes- IT Manager undertook the Adidas Maverick Marathon. None of them had completed a marathon before but were motivated to try and raise money to purchase outdoor equipment for Birch Wood School. To date the team have raised almost £1600, we are all very proud of them..

We also receive excellent support from our parents and seek to listen to them in terms of their experiences of having a child with SEND and also to understand how we can improve as a school. Recently we have launched the 'Ask the Expert-Parent Voice' podcasts where parents have spoken about their personal experiences of having a child with a disability. These interviews have provided a unique insight in to our parents lived experiences and are also a source of much inspiration and reflection on our role as a school.

Our most recent parent survey provided some useful insights and areas where we will keep striving to do better, as can be seen below.

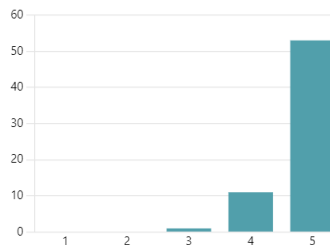


4. Birch Wood ensures that my child is well looked after

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

4.80
Average Rating

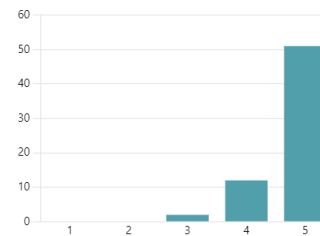


6. My child's learning journey at Birch Wood is appropriate

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

4.75
Average Rating

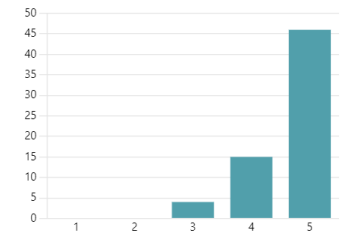


5. My child is making good progress at Birch Wood

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

4.65
Average Rating

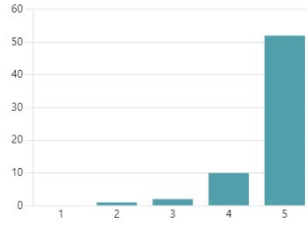




7. My child is safe at Birch Wood

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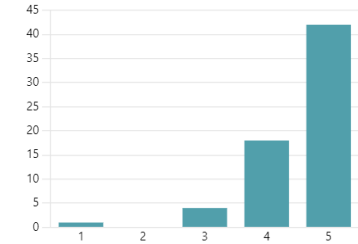
4.74
Average Rating



9. The curriculum planned for my child is appropriate

[More Details](#) [Insights](#)

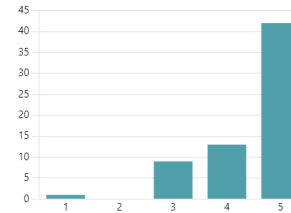
4.54
Average Rating



8. Behaviour and communication is well supported at Birch Wood

[More Details](#) [Insights](#)

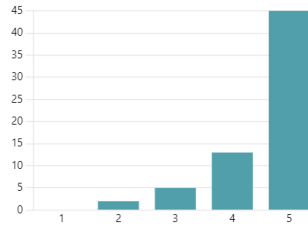
4.46
Average Rating



10. Birch Wood responds to my concerns

[More Details](#) [Insights](#)

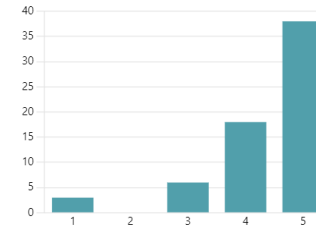
4.55
Average Rating



11. Birch Wood keeps me well informed about progress my child is making

[More Details](#) [Insights](#)

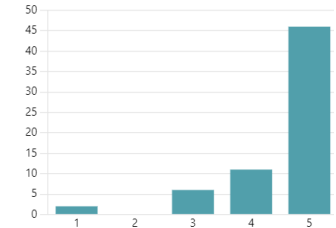
4.35
Average Rating



12. Birch Wood keeps me informed about engagement evenings and events at school

[More Details](#) [Insights](#)

4.52
Average Rating



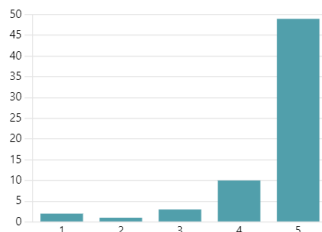


13. I feel I can approach Birch Wood if I have any questions or concerns

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

4.58
Average Rating

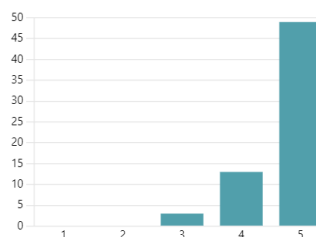


14. The teaching at Birch Wood has a positive impact on my child's learning and development

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

4.71
Average Rating

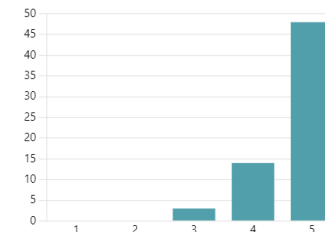


15. My child's learning is set at an appropriate level

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

4.69
Average Rating



Parental Comments

- Thank you to all the staff at Birch Wood for taking care of E and supporting her so well with her development. E loves going to school and I always feel happy leaving her in your care.
- Birch Wood is great generally, but the poor communication and it seems unorganised planning at times lets them down.
- I'm so grateful to Birch Wood for all that they continue to do for A
- N has absolutely amazed us this year, and has developed in so many ways and that is all due to the brilliant teachers at Birch Wood.
- M has really settled in and we have seen a massive change in her attitude towards learning. We hope to continue working with the school and her teachers to encourage her to build on her skills and her ability to progress.



- Best move on moving B to here
- Excellent school second to none. They have amazing staff and are very supportive to the pupils and their families.
A Suggestion only for parents whom can't attend evening event held at the school that there's an alternative way to access the important events.
- All the staff at Birch Wood Vale are amazing.
- P loves going to school. We would like more updates on Kinteract so we can see what she's been up to. Car parking at drop off and pick up always an issue, very busy and sometimes feels unsafe. Staggered drop off might be better but staff do seem to be coming out at 8.55 now which is helping. Keep up the great work!
- Very good and helpful
- Amazing team, all so kind and easy to approach about anything regarding my child
- Birch Wood is an Excellent School. And extremely good staff. Thank you all
- Thanks as always for all the staffs dedication to the children, it is noticed and appreciated. Birchwood continues to be M's favourite place to be 😊
- Thank you for your support with my family. You all are amazing 🙌. Thank you for helping me get S to school after my accident and our bereavement in the family. Once again THANK YOU XXX
- Birch Wood Vale is a fantastic school the support they have given us is brilliant
- The progress O has made since she started has been amazing. Birch Wood have gone above and beyond to tend to O's needs and wellbeing. She has made amazing progress. I'm so proud of who O has become, a clever bright young lady
- The only down fall is there less communication at the end of the day for those on transport. When there is communication about their day it is often incorrect. However teachers when asked by email directly respond quickly and diligently. It would be great to have daily or even weekly updates on little moments as my child can't express how his day has been or what he enjoyed.
- Brilliant school, A is so happy in all he does at school and very well cared for. Thank you to everyone that works so hard to support his needs

Conclusion from Parental Survey

The overall results from the parent's survey were very good, with particular strengths in care, safety, learning and development. We did not fall below a 4 star rating for any questions, the lowest score being 4.35, the highest being 4.8. However, it also usefully highlighted that the automated parents evening booking system we introduced during Covid is now causing more problems than helping with regards to communication. We have therefore decided to go back to our previous method of direct contact from tutors. Many parents also seem to want a variety of ways to be communicated with about their child's progress, general wellbeing and school day despite our online system with Kinteract, half termly newsletters and school calendar information with key dates. We will drill down in to this and look to further develop communication. Many actions have been taken over the last week to respond to parents individual comments for improvement.



Summary of Progress towards Whole School KPI's 2022-23

Progress towards Key Priority 1 – Enhanced strategic focus on the continuous professional development and learning (CPDL) of support staff

The appraisal process will be re-designed to enable both teaching and support staff to have greater and more strategic input into their own CPDL and ensure they have the skills and support they need to carry out their role effectively, feel highly motivated and valued in doing so. Existing skills and strengths will be identified allowing staff to utilize these and contribute to the life of the school. This will include a focus on ensuring all staff are skilled at supporting reading and communication

By redesigning the appraisal process, we have created a platform for both teaching and support staff to have greater and more strategic input into their own Continuous Professional Development and Learning (CPDL).

Through this re-designed appraisal process, we have been able to identify and recognise the existing skills and strengths of our staff. It has given us, as leaders, the space to recognise the invaluable contribution our support staff make. This recognition has allowed our staff members to utilise their unique talents and actively contribute to the vibrant life of our school. By tapping into their expertise, we have fostered a collaborative environment where every staff member feels empowered to make meaningful contributions that benefit our students' learning and development.

One particular focus area resulting from this re-design is the development of skills related to supporting reading and communication, including early reading, phonics and pre-phonics. All staff members are now equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively support students in these crucial areas. Through a combination of external and internal professional development we have been able to provide staff with a consistent approach that they are increasingly confident to deliver.

The focus on strategic input, skills recognition, and targeted support has resulted in highly motivated and valued staff members who are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of our students. By enhancing reading and communication support skills across our staff, we are strengthening our ability to provide a high-quality education that empowers and enables our pupils to thrive and succeed.

The following points and examples showcase the action taken and progress made against Key Priority 1:

- Re-design of teacher appraisals including a 360 Opal Review and professional development conversations with colleagues
- Re-design of STA appraisals to mimic the structure of the teacher appraisal to provide individualised support. – **Appendix 1A**
- Re-design of LSA appraisals to ensure alignment of priorities with the class team, including the teacher.
- All appraisals procedures now include a strong element of self and peer reflection to help identify strengths.
- Enhanced 2 day induction for new support staff – **Appendix 1B**



- Continued partnership working with Jacqui Warrington, Diana Nurse, to ensure staff are trained, refreshed and up to date re: medication and health care needs including:
 - Oxygen training
 - Epilepsy training
 - Medication training
 - Inhaler training
- Dedicated time during INSET sessions to ensure professional development conversations were able to take place in a timely and professional manner
- INSET design which tailored weekly sessions to the role of the individual. For example, there may be separate sessions for teachers, STAs, Aspirants teachers and LSAs on at the same time.
- Introduction of a Level 3 Future Leaders Apprenticeship course with the National College of Education
- Continued access to a wide range of free distance learning courses for all staff provided through SMB College Group. Courses include:
 - Understanding Adverse childhood Experiences
 - Understanding Personal Care Needs
 - Understanding Specific Learning Difficulties
 - Working with Individuals with Learning Disabilities
- New online training request form has introduced efficiency and accessibility to training outside of the school for all staff.

Action-Conclude Priority 1: Keep CPDL high on the agenda by evaluating new processes put in place this year in the new academic year

Progress towards Key Priority 2 – Introduce a program of peer coaching for teachers underpinned by a new ‘Wellbeing Code’

Introduce a program of peer coaching for teachers underpinned by a new ‘Wellbeing Code’ providing more regular opportunities for teachers to reflect on their individual development targets and also facilitate structured peer support for teachers. Clear training and guidance around coaching and our wellbeing ethos will help sustain and motivate teachers to continue to provide world class outcomes. As a result there are better mechanisms for school to maintain a resilient workforce and increase social capital. This will further support efficient working practice in all areas, creating a culture where feedback is a non-negotiable but also a positive aspect of working at Birch Wood.

We believe that everyone working at Birch Wood should have the opportunity to enjoy the highest possible standard of wellbeing and mental health. Our staff are a precious resource; valuing them, and their wellbeing and mental health, is a duty we all share. We do not see wellbeing as an event, but aspire to ensure that is engrained as part of our wider school culture.



Wellbeing Culture at Birch Wood = Respect + Professionalism + Empathy

At Birch Wood we:

- build relationships rooted in mutual respect.
- maintain exacting standards of professionalism, people understand and know what to expect in our workplace
- endeavour to understand and share the feelings of others, leading to a caring and supportive environment

As a direct action of Priority 2 we have introduced a Wellbeing Code informed by the Department for Education’s Wellbeing Charter. In signing this charter, Birch Wood commits to placing the wellbeing and mental health at the heart of our decision making. We will support staff to make positive choices for their own wellbeing and encourage a collegiate culture across and between all roles in the school.

Specifically, we commit to develop a long-term strategy for improving staff wellbeing that will:

1. Prioritise staff mental health
2. Give staff the support they need to take responsibility for their own and others’ wellbeing
3. Give managers access to the tools and resources they need to support the wellbeing of those they line manage
4. Establish a clear communications policy
5. Give staff a voice in decision-making
6. Drive down unnecessary workload
7. Champion and enable flexible working and diversity
8. Create a good behaviour culture
9. Support staff to progress in their careers
10. Include a sub-strategy for protecting leader wellbeing and mental health
11. Hold ourselves accountable, including by measuring staff wellbeing

Below is a table outlining some of the actions taken and progress made against the above points:

Supporting Workload and Wellbeing: Actions Taken		
Rank order of importance to staff	General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding parents evening on the same evening as teacher INSET. • Sending weekly QofE bulletin to minimise number of emails sent to staff. • Aspirant teachers meet half termly to discuss how they’re feeling and what is going well. • Provided free school meals to all staff to help with the cost of living crisis



1	Prioritise staff mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After school session with Breathing Space for all staff. Close links with the company so that staff can link up to focus on their wellbeing privately if required. • Open door policy by Senior Leadership team for staff • SLT are flexible with family commitments so that staff can support their family during emergency situations.
2	Give staff the support they need to take responsibility for their own and others' wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-designed the appraisal cycle for teachers and STAs. Focus on professional development conversations and coaching • Teachers assigned coaching partners with which they set and review targets • Coaching Training 15th sept 2022 by external professional • Opal 360 Reviews • Time giving during INSET for professional development conversations • Better communicating deadlines and key dates so staff are able to plan their own workload – QofE bulletin • Revising the marking and feedback policy to enable DIRT to happen when it is suitable in the sequence of learning, not just in a set week, meaning that staff can plan their term to help manage workload.
3	Drive down unnecessary workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revising the expected frequency of DIRT based on number of lessons taught. • Re-launching the Curriculum Resource Library to reduce unnecessary workload in creating resources. • The creation of coherent and differentiated schemes of work across all subjects for all teachers. (Drives down workload over the longer term) • Access to Twinkl premium package (and other resources libraries) so that resources can be prepared and amended in a timely manner. • Workload a standing item when discussing new initiatives at SLT level.
4	Give staff a voice in decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development and wellbeing survey sent out at the start of the academic year 22/23 and repeated over time. • Staff suggestion box in the admin corridor/ staff room at BWV • Introduction of staff briefings twice a week at Grange Drive (BWV/AH have twice weekly briefings as well)
5	Establish a clear communications policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff handbook provides information on communication • Revised absence procedure has made communication expectations clear. • Documents signposting how to make efficient use of emails has been circulated and demonstrated. For example, scheduling emails.



6	Give managers access to the tools and resources they need to support the wellbeing of those they line manage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum Leaders meetings with SLT half termly enable workload reduction agenda to cascade through to middle leaders.
7	Create a good behaviour culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brilliant at Birch Wood Staff handbook Positive Behaviour for Learning culture established with regular training for new and existing staff Whole day behaviour training for new staff
8	Support staff to progress in their careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to new suite of NPQs National College Future Leaders Course Distance Learning Courses Training Request Form
9	Champion and enable flexible working and diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of part time members of staff Actively engaging in research and literature around schools who have implemented this successfully including on the DfE website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-in-schools/flexible-working-in-schools--2

In addition, the following points below outline the actions and progress made against Key Priority 2:

- Professional Development Conversations used as the mechanism by which appraisal targets are reviewed and created ensuring that intrinsic motivation is high. **Appendix 2A.**
- All teachers and STAs had training on coaching over 2 sessions by an external provider – Julia Hancock of Boundless Learning Ltd.
- We survey staff on their views on their own professional development and wellbeing. The responses have helped leaders to prioritise actions – **Appendix 2B**
- Teachers were assigned coaching pairs (colour coded on the table below – **Appendix 2C**). Each coaching pair/group have clear line management structure which helps communication and support.

Action-Conclude Priority 2

This area will remain high on our agenda, but the at this point, I feel we should move on to replacing it with a new key improvement priority ready for next academic year.

Progress towards Key Priority 3 – Overhaul enrichment opportunities at Birch Wood to further enhance the curriculum

Overhaul enrichment opportunities at Birch Wood to further enhance the curriculum intent of the school in line with our ENABLES ethos by providing students with opportunities to



engage with potentially inaccessible cultural capital. Students will have a wider range of opportunities throughout their educational journey at Birch Wood, this will develop character, resilience and motivation, and encourage them to pursue wider goals.

This academic year we have worked hard to embed trips, community visits and residential opportunities throughout our curriculum. This forward planning has enabled us to show progression from EYFS to post 16, ensuring our students get a range of experiences throughout their Birch Wood journey. The impact of this is that all our students have had the opportunity to access the community throughout this year. Community visits have varied from going to the park, theatre trips, having a snack at the cafe, shopping for cooking ingredients to horse riding, climbing at outdoor pursuits and developing animal care knowledge at New Leaf Triangle. There are many examples of how we have continued to make curriculum links with community experiences, such as; year 9 (BWV) completed a historical tour of Melton and buildings that were linked to the war, which supported their understanding of their local community. Year 9 also travelled by train to Leicester exploring independent travel whilst also developing local history knowledge by visiting the Richard III Centre.

To develop our residential offer we have worked in collaboration with Beaumanor Hall, Lea Green and Calvert Lakes to provide students with the opportunity to experience nights away from home with their peers. Our offer provides 1 residential per key stage. This academic year we have offered the opportunity of a residential taster days/ 1 night residential / 2 night residential to 60/98 students at our Grange Drive site. At Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House an increase in our residential offer saw all students in Ashton House being given the opportunity to attend a residential at Lea Green, whilst students in 7DP attended Beaumanor Hall at the end of May. Further to this the Post 16 Duke of Edinburgh Award group at BWV/AH have experienced camping overnight as part of their Bronze expedition.

Many of our families struggle to provide these opportunities due to a lack of access and facilities in the wider community. Short breaks and respite services have continued to decline in availability to children and young people with the most complex needs. The cost of living crisis has had a further negative impact on many families' opportunities to access wider life experiences for their children. In response to this we have aimed to reach a wide range of students through our enrichment offer and heavily subsidised trips, visits and residential stays. This term our expenditure in this area has been approximately £4000 minus parental contributions, this is over a 50% increase than previous years. This is illustrative of our commitment to enhancing our curriculum and enrichment provision.

Our enrichment of the curriculum is also crucially targeted at the development of life skills and preparation for adulthood. At Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House there has been a clear focus on developing opportunities which target employability, with employers from the community working closely with us to support students in applying for college places and entering the world of work. This has included mock interviews with our students, various careers advice meetings and work experience. Qualifications which are targeted towards employment have also been very successful this year, for example students taking BTEC Construction had the opportunity to work with a local concrete company to construct their bricklaying bases. The feedback from the construction company was overwhelmingly positive about our students and their suitability for future employment.

Students have also experienced success within the arts and literacy, for example as part of the celebration for National Poetry Day students from Birch Wood Vale and Ashton House were involved in the Writer's Power of Poetry Competition. We are delighted that some students from 9CM, 10KJ, 5PW and The Den have been selected to have their poems published in a book. Drama and Dance at Birch Wood has continued to evolve to offer our students the opportunity to express themselves, build confidence, and develop



communication skills through speaking, listening and exploring their creative side. It was great to see the school Christmas production return with a live audience for BWV and AH and with all of the classes making a contribution. Students in Year 7 and 8 & KS2 & 3 at GD went to see the Christmas panto at Melton Theatre which allowed them to observe the skills of the performers and relate this to their own experiences of performance. Further to this Key Stage 3 had the opportunity to go to the Curve to see an 'Unexpected Twist', whilst Year 11 went to see an 'Inspector Calls' which was the text they studied for their GCSE.

The 'Moving Together' Dance and Arts provider has continued to be a key partner, supporting the curriculum through the Bronze Arts Award. Through his students get the opportunity to perform a dance routine in front of a big audience at the Curve in June. This has proven to be an incredible experience over the last 5 years that it has been offered.

Sport and PE remain a strength within the curriculum, where again community inclusion provides further opportunity for our young people. This has included visiting Leicester Riders Basketball for a competition, wheelchair basketball, sports hall athletics, disability games and leadership opportunities. Students have the opportunity to attend weekly 'Clubbercise' sessions and there is a weekly after school sports club. We have also had regular visits from Leicester Wheels for All who have offered sessions across the school.

Birch Wood College

Birch Wood College was launched in September 2022 with the development of a new Post 16 Satellite base at the Brooksby Melton College. The provision has met the needs of our young people within the Autism Provision, as they transition from Birch Wood Special School to mainstream Further Education, apprenticeships and employment. The base was developed to prepare students leaving Ashton House for adulthood, enhancing their ability to live as independently as they are able. This curriculum is focused on 4 key areas of 'Preparation for Adulthood', -education and employment, community inclusion, independent living and health. It is aimed at preparing students with the relevant learning and experiences they require to make the positive transition from Ashton House with the skills and tools needed to move on to their next steps. This initiative allowed us to act on external quality assurance advice which came out of our 2019 NAS Autism Accreditation report, which identified; 'The school is encouraged to establish greater links with employers and to promote the inclusion of young people with autism within the local workforce'. Our 2018 Ofsted Inspection report also recommended 'To continue to develop the curriculum to support preparation for adulthood by giving older pupils more practical experiences'.

As part of the Birch Wood College curriculum students have been working towards the ASDAN Personal Development programme, covering the following modules: Communication; My community; Sport and leisure; Independent Living; My environment; Number handling; Health and wellbeing; World of work; Science and technology; The wider world; Expressive arts and Beliefs and values. The course is individualised and allows for learning opportunities to include educational trips, presentations, practical activities (cooking, shopping, handling money, travel training, independent living skills e.g. washing, ironing etc.), independent and collaborative learning, investigations and the use of technology. Students undergo many visits to other education and training establishments and take part in taster and employability sessions to give them a full understanding of what opportunities are available to them. Since attending Birch Wood College we have supported our young people to be able to access part time vacancies in the following organisations:



Specturm Sensory Sports	Youth Worker
Dominoes	Catering assistant
Sports Direct	Shop assistant
Sk8House	Roller disco assistant

Work experience was accessed by all of our ten Post 16 students involved in this pilot and included the following:

- Coaching within the School PE department
- Child care (with Early Years)
- IT and Computer support (Click and Simple)
- Gardening and general maintenance within the school garden
- Pablo's Horse sanctuary
- Bike maintenance
- Collection of recycling around the school
- Student organised Christmas party for the Autism provision KS2

Students have had the opportunity to link with the local colleges through careers fairs, tours and taster sessions. The response from parents and students about the Post 16 has been overwhelmingly positive and we have seen students grow in confidence and independence with half the group now ready to move on to the mainstream colleges next academic year. Our plan is now to extend this model for all of Post 16 at BWV, working in a new partnership with Melton Vale Post 16, an Ofsted Outstanding provision who share the same campus as BWV/AH. Part of this change was precipitated by the recent announcement of the closure of Melton College where we had been previously based, however the change of base has promoted a positive change which will allow more of our students access to mainstream college within close proximity to BWV/AH, helping both transition and transport problems of attending 2 sites.

Action-Conclude Priority 3

This area should be further evolved next academic year, due to its success and high impact on student experience this year.

Progress towards Key Priority 4- To continue to develop the strategic implementation of the therapeutic curriculum

To continue to develop the strategic implementation of the therapeutic curriculum, broadening the offer and providing quality assurance to maximise impact



towards outcomes. Continue to use specialists in identifying and supporting needs across school, further ensuring all students have access to appropriate therapies and support and that staff receive specialist training to meet student needs.

Therapies and interventions are vital in supporting our students to achieve their targets and enjoy a fulfilling and settled life, both at school and in the wider world. For any child or young person, growing up can present many challenges and, for our students, the ability to cope and manage these challenges can appear to be more complex and lead to increased anxiety and frustration. The therapy team offer a range of therapies and interventions that support our students, covering their physical and communication needs as well as their mental health and wellbeing. Our aim is to provide various approaches for our students so that they can all feel settled, safe and motivated to engage with others and the world around them. From an educational point of view, when a child or young person is able to feel engaged and less anxious, they are more able to learn and retain the information taught during their lessons.

The appointment of a specific Therapies and Interventions Co-ordinator 1 day a week via experienced therapist Neil Eaves has facilitated an expansion of our therapeutic offer, which now includes:

- Neil Eaves – Therapies and Interventions Coordinator & Music Therapist
- Steph Shuttlewood – Speech and Language Therapist
- Willem Van Royen – Educational Psychologist
- Jo Walton – Counsellor
- Sarah Wallis – Art Therapist
- Andy Reeves – Occupational Therapist (Sensory Integration)
- Megan McNabb – Occupational Therapist

Birch Wood School Staff

- Sarah Wilson – Communication Lead
- Amanda Bell – Social Communication Support

NHS and Local Authority Staff

- Gina Thompson – Speech and Language Therapist (NHS)
- Meera Solanky – Speech and Language Therapist (NHS)



- Sarah Lawrence – Hearing Support Teacher (Leicestershire)
- Vicky Wilson – Vision Support Teacher (Leicestershire)
- Claire Waterfield – Hearing And Vision Teacher (Leicester City and Rutland)
- Julia Way – Physiotherapist (NHS)
- Angela Paling – Occupational Therapist (NHS)
- Bev Sexton – Physiotherapy Technician (NHS)

We have developed stronger quality assurance processes and a greater multi-disciplinary approach, which is student-focused. Professionals have regular meetings for all the team to come together, ensuring that a collaborative and best-practice approach is offered.

Many of our students have a need for therapies outlined in their EHCP and we have access to NHS, Local Authority and independent therapists who provide the services necessary to meet these requirements. Where a need is not included in an EHCP, there is 'request for involvement' process through which any student can be referred for support.

Some of the therapeutic work will require a short input from a therapist who may then provide guidance and a program for the teaching staff and student to work with over a period of time. Other requests may require a longer-term approach with weekly sessions being held with a therapist. All therapists will liaise with parents and carers where appropriate as well as completing reports which are then included in the annual review process.

This another area where we have increased our budgeted expenditure to provide high quality provision which is positively impacting our students to achieve their personal best.

Impact

- **Termly Multi-disciplinary meetings**

These have been a vital step in ensuring that the therapists are all aware of which students are accessing which therapies and interventions as well as liaising to share their knowledge and expertise with one another, therefore providing a more informed, dynamic and professional service for all of our students.

- **A new request for involvement system**

A new digital form on the staff intranet system is available for anyone to make a 'request for involvement'. This terminology has been used as the word 'referral' was seen by some as passing a student's needs over to another professional, rather than requesting additional support from another professional. These forms can be seen and monitored by any of the senior leadership team, ensuring that the therapists are meeting the needs that are requested. It is the role of the coordinator to liaise with the therapists, class team and SLT to ensure that the request is suitable and is directed to the correct professionals as soon as possible.

- **The increase of provision to include Art Therapy, Counselling, Occupational Therapy (Functional and Sensory Integration)**

At the start of the academic year, the aim was to provide a broader range of therapies and interventions as well as provide more equity amongst all of Birch Wood's sites. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the ability for students to access some therapies was not possible and the needs of our students, particularly with regards to their mental health needs, has risen. By increasing the variety of therapies available as well as where these are based has been instrumental in meeting the needs across the entire



school provision. Neil has liaised with various professionals and also therapeutic companies to provide the school with new therapists who are motivated to meet our pupil's needs and are aligned with our ENABLES ethos. At times, Neil has worked with the SLT to address issues when therapists were not meeting the expectations and professional levels required by our pupils. Changes have been made quickly so that new therapists can be brought in to help ensure best practice is given at all times.

- **A register of attendance/impact**

A digital register has been created that quickly produces data to show the input of any of the therapies and highlights any challenges that may be being faced, such as a student repeatedly declining to attend or a therapist not fulfilling their timetable to see students.

- **Review dates are shared and reports are requested and included in EHCPs and annual reviews**

Our therapists have been working hard and providing some excellent support for our students for a number of years, but this has not always been included or celebrated in a student's annual review and included in their EHCP. By having a coordinator, we have been able to ensure that all therapists are aware of annual reviews and that more of the impact and support that they offer is detailed in the EHCP.

Individual Therapist registers and case studies

Our register and impact data collation was begun at the start of this current term and is now something that all therapists are completing for us. This will mean that we have more data and are able to demonstrate the impact of therapies and interventions from some of this data. Some therapists have also been able to provide a short case study highlighting the progress made for one of the students on their caseload. Examples of these cases studies can be found below for Art Therapy, SALT and Counselling. A full annual report about therapies is available with more case studies as part of our QA processes.

Example of Therapies on Offer:

Speech and Language Therapy – Steph Shuttlewood

Steph has provided speech therapy for a number of years now across all 3 Birch Wood sites and has also been involved in supporting students when they have been attending college through the Birch Wood college links. Steph offers both group and individual sessions and is proactive in supporting students and staff in a variety of ways to best meet the needs of the students and the teachers too. Steph also liaises with the parents/carers of a student and works with students who may not meet the threshold required for Speech and Language therapy to be included in an EHC plan, or can make assessments and work with a student whilst a referral is made to the NHS therapists. By having our own independent Speech and Language therapist, we can provide support to a student more quickly and also ensure that any programmes that are set in place by the NHS therapists. Our Multi-disciplinary team meetings have further developed this link between the NHS therapists and Steph.

Counselling – Jo Walton

Jo offers individual counselling sessions for students with a variety needs. She began working at Birch Wood shortly after the start of the current academic year, as our previous school counsellor had retired last year. It had been acknowledged that, whilst the previous counsellor had made a positive impact for many students, because she also worked as a teaching assistant, there was a blurred boundary and some students may not have felt as able to open up and share things in a confidential space. Jo was approached to take on



this role and initially worked for one part-day, increasing this to two after the Christmas break due to the immense success and the number of requests for her services that were being made by the staff team.

Jo is contracted directly to Birch Wood and is based at Birch Wood Vale but has the opportunity to work with students from all 3 sites. Recently, discussions with Jo have been held concerning whether she will begin to look at any group sessions after the summer, potentially offering a supportive environment for those who may share common anxieties or reasons for their requests for involvement. The feedback from students and staff has been positive, and Jo has seemingly settled into this role and developed the service with a wider breadth of skills and opportunities for the students to engage in counselling.

Art Therapy – Sarah Wallis

Sarah began working at Birch Wood after the February half term in 2023, initially as an 8-week assessment and has demonstrated how the use of art materials can support our students to express and explore their emotions in a non-verbal manner, often then opening pathways for the student to begin to verbalise their thoughts, anxieties and emotions. Sarah is contracted through Catharsis, a Derby-based therapy company. Sarah has been working at Birch Wood Vale as well as Birch Wood Grange Drive. The students and teachers alike have provided highly positive feedback about the sessions and about Sarah herself.

Action-Conclude Priority 4

This area should be further evolved next academic year, due to its success and high impact on student experience this year.

End of Year Summary

We have continued to make positive strides forward in all areas of the school and make a positive difference to the lives of some of the most vulnerable young people in society through a broad and rich curriculum and community approach, which we have evolved as part of our ENABLES ethos. We fully embrace our wider responsibility and are passionate about using our agency to champion inclusive practice beyond Birch Wood. Particular achievements this year have included:

- Further developments of the therapeutic offer.
- Curriculum enhancement, enrichment, development and improvement through a robust review and evaluation process
- Enhanced provision through Post 16 College and EYFS
- Greater opportunities for student's preparation for adulthood
- Site development through improvements to library, hydrotherapy pool and softplay & multisensory room.
- Staff development through NPQs



- Birch Wood 10 Community Run
- Development of a successful SEND and Inclusion Hub
- Vastly more opportunities for residential experiences
- Achieved Food for Life Silver Award
- Achieved NAS Advanced Autism Accreditation

Key Data

School data	Autumn 2022	Spring 2023	Summer 2023 (so far)
On Roll in each setting:			
Birch Wood Grange Dr	105	107	108
Birch Wood Vale	90	90	90
Ashton House	30	29	29
Total	225	226	227
Eligible for FSM and PPG	75/33%	75/33%	75/33%
Attendance Whole school	88%	88%	88% (so far) NB: National average for special education is 86.9%
“Looked after” children (eligible for pupil premium)	3	3	3
Child in Need Plan			
BWV	2	2	2
GD	7	7	7



Child Protection Plan			
BWV	3	3	3
GD	0	0	0
Early Help Referrals:			
BWV	1	1	0
GD	3	1	3
Early Help Totals (including referrals)			
BWV	4	1	0
GD	13	1	3
Families being supported by Family School Link Worker	Birch Wood Vale – 7 Grange Drive - 19		

Appendix 1A



Professional Development Conversations

STA Guidance

We would like all staff to have the opportunity to reflect on their professional development. The following guidance is for Teachers and STAs.

- Teachers will facilitate conversations with STAs.
- All support staff will take part in an Opal 360 review which will provide feedback for the basis of the professional development conversation.
 - Please see the guidance sent by P. Leaney on 9th November
- During the professional development conversation, you should;
 - Reflect on previous year's work. Think about classroom practice/ student progress/ professional development/ areas of strength
 - Review last year's targets (where relevant) and evaluate whether or not they have been met, partly met or not met (Teacher or STA leading the review will have an overview of entries on Blue Sky)
 - Review your Opal 360 feedback and use this as a basis (alongside relevant standards) to set two targets for 2022 – 2023
- In readiness for this meeting you should have:
 1. Considered your OPAL Review which should be released on Wednesday 16th.
 2. Come with an idea of your proposed targets for 2022 – 2023

Targets for 2022 -2023

STAs will have 2 professional targets

- 1 target rooted in feedback from your OPAL Review
 - This might be about utilising your strengths.
 - It could be about working on an area of development
- 1 target led by the teacher which works towards something specific for the class(es) you work in
- Targets should be in line with your level of expertise and experience.
- Part-time staff should speak to their teacher about the number of targets they are given.

Appendix 1B

Induction Training Record

[Insert Staff Name Here]

Training Focus	Date	Time	Staff Lead	Duration	Sign when Completed
Initial Welcome and Introduction <i>New starters only</i>	Mon 5 th June	9am-9.45am	Anita Lees	45mins	
Positive Behaviour for Learning and Ethos		10am-3.30pm	Amy Dunstan + Joe Knowles	1 day	
Admin, Logins and any Qs from Day 1	Tues 6 th June	9am-9.45am	P. Leaney + David Grimes	45mins	
Safeguarding		10am-11.30am	Claire Wood and Lauren Carroll	1hour	
Communication		11.30am-12pm	Sarah Wilson	30mins	
Time to Read Information <i>incl Staff Handbook</i>		12.45pm-1.30pm	Independent	45mins	
Supporting Learning in the Classroom		1.30m-2.15pm	Phil Leaney	45mins	
Personal Care		2.15pm-2.45pm	Hannah O'Mara	30mins	
Manual Handling, First Aid and Medication Overview		2.45pm-3.15pm	Hannah O'Mara and/or Rebecca Watson	30mins	



Appendix 2A

Teacher Professional Development Conversations Sequence

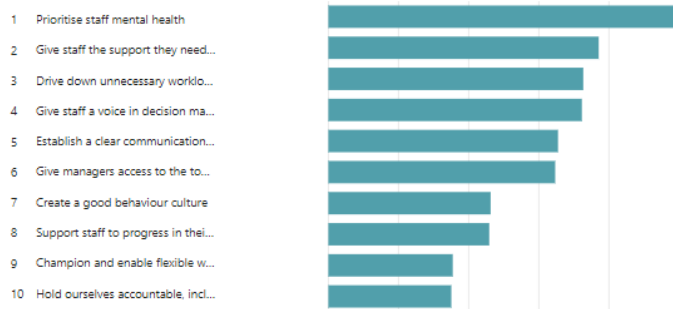


Appendix 2B



6. Rank the following aspects in terms of importance to you.

[More Details](#)



Appendix 2C

Line Management Responsibilities- Teaching Staff								
Tom Bradley Hewell (HoS)	Rosalind Hopkins (EHT)	Tom Smith (DH)	Phil Leaney (SLT)	Claire Wood (AH)	Amy Dunstan (AH)	Joe Knowles	Hannah O'Mara	Michelle Walker
Appraisal								
Hannah O'Mara	Tom Smith	Claire Wood	Michelle Walker	Deena Patel	Joe Knowles	Julie Peattie	Kate Hallam Jones	Alison Nix
Anneka Masson	Amy Dunstan	Kim Jackson	Helen Humpheys	Emily Savoy	Lise Goddard	Phil Worth	Becky Spence	Shavna Odegra
Joanna Mckay	Thomas Bradley Hewell	Metesh Mistry	Jordan Meads	Lauren Carroll	Poppy Marriot		Becky Curran	
Maria Zakrzewska	Phil Leaney		Dan Hudson	Catherine Mitchell			Janet Daye	
Charlotte Adu			Kate Harrison					
			Rob Peet					
			Di Alexander					
			Grace Bottrill					
			Matt Ormerod					
			Jason					