



Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

The Positive Behaviour for Learning Policy is grounded in the understanding that behaviour is a form of communication. The policy states: 'Behaviour is a means of communication – we must ensure that all pupils are supported to communicate their needs safely and appropriately'.

Positive Behaviour Support Plans (PBSPs) are developed collaboratively and, where possible, include contributions from the student, the staff who support them and their families. Each PBSP is written from the student's perspective and is designed to help them engage in behaviours that lead to positive experiences, emotional wellbeing and meaningful relationships. Both Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and PBSPs outline each autistic student's personal preferences, strengths and skills in communication and social interaction. For example, one student's EHCP states: "A expresses his 'like' of something through smiling and reaching out for the favoured item, whilst pushing away, throwing or ignoring a less liked option."

These plans also record any individual challenges a student may experience in communicating or socially interacting with others. For example, one student's EHCP notes: "S struggles to understand complex verbal instructions and prefers to play alone rather than with peers. He prefers his own space and will become distressed if others are too close or attempt to interact."

Practical strategies and approaches to support each autistic student's communication and social interaction are clearly identified and shared with all relevant staff. Examples include: using clear, concise verbal language, Now and Next boards, photographs or pictures to support understanding, personalised objects of reference, communication books.

These systems ensure that students have consistent, predictable methods of expressing themselves and understanding the world around them.

Support provided to each autistic student in communicating and socially interacting with others is regularly reviewed with the autistic student and/or their circle of support in order that changes can be made if necessary and positive outcomes celebrated. The school has robust systems in place to ensure effective tracking of progress and the meaningful inclusion of student voice. All young people have an EHCP, and their Progress Passports are reviewed on a half-termly basis to monitor development and adjust support as required. Each student works towards highly personalised targets, reflecting their individual needs and strengths. Student involvement is central to our approach, with opportunities to contribute to annual reviews, provide feedback through Progress Passports, participate in pupil surveys and engage with talking walls.

Staff are confident in explaining how they support autistic students with communication and social interaction. Each class has a Communication Mentor who ensures resources are available and audits classroom environments to meet learners' communication needs. Staff understand the risks of limited communication, such as isolation or frustration, and use a wide range of personalised approaches. These include Makaton, body signing, objects of reference, sensory cues, switches, communication boards and books, Now and Next boards, Intensive Interaction, PECS and high-tech communication devices, which are a key development focus this year.

Staff shared Anecdotal Case studies describe personalised approaches to support individuals in the communication and interaction and identify outcomes achieved from this support. For example, the school has introduced the Hanging Out Programme (HOP) within the Explorer pathway, providing each student with ten minutes of undivided adult attention every day. Sessions are highly individualised and may include Intensive Interaction, playing games, singing or spending time outdoors, depending on the young person's preferences and needs. Since implementing HOP, the school has observed notable improvements in key areas of engagement, including increased vocalisations, enhanced eye gaze, more purposeful body positioning and greater overall alertness and responsiveness towards staff. These outcomes demonstrate the positive impact of consistent, attuned interaction on students' communication and engagement.



Assessment findings - completed by the assessor



Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

Across all observed sessions, staff demonstrated an exceptional and deeply embedded understanding of each student's individual communication profile. Spoken language was consistently modified to ensure clarity and accessibility, with practitioners using simplified phrasing, structured instructions, and autism-informed strategies. This approach enabled students to process information effectively and engage confidently in learning activities.

Each autistic student was supported through bespoke strategies and visual aids that were seamlessly integrated into daily practice. Visual scaffolds, symbol-supported text, and communication aids were evident throughout the environment, alongside consistent use of Makaton to reinforce verbal instructions. Processing time was routinely respected, allowing students to respond at their own pace. These adaptations reflected a highly skilled and proactive approach to communication support.

Students were consistently empowered to express their views, feelings, and preferences through a range of personalised tools. Staff facilitated meaningful participation using AAC systems, visual choice boards, sentence starters, and structured discussion frameworks. Opportunities for student voice were intentionally embedded within both individual and group contexts, ensuring that decision-making processes were inclusive and accessible to all.

Social interaction between staff and students was exemplary. Relationships were characterised by trust, respect, and a strong emphasis on emotional literacy and self-regulation. Staff employed trauma-informed strategies and visual emotion scales to help students identify and manage their emotional states. Regulation toolkits and structured reflection prompts were used effectively to support students in navigating social situations and developing independence.

Peer interaction was actively promoted through a culture of inclusion and shared interests. Students were encouraged to collaborate during lessons and participate in group activities that fostered communication and social competence. Staff provided graduated support to ensure these interactions were positive and purposeful, enabling students to build confidence in social settings.

Structured and purposeful social skills activities were embedded within the curriculum and extended into enrichment opportunities. Lunchtime clubs, including Scrabble, Uno, Dance, Gaming, and Fitness, offered students a choice of enjoyable and relaxing activities. Notably, some clubs, such as Scrabble, were student-led, reflecting a commitment to autonomy and leadership development. Older students regularly access clubs and the canteen within the mainstream Melton Vale Post-16 (MV16) College, promoting inclusion and broadening social experiences. A well-established Makaton Club, attended by MV16 peers, fosters communication, shared learning and positive relationships, while the Befrienders Group provides structured opportunities for social interaction and peer support. Additionally, the half-termly MV16 Open Mic concert consistently features two acts from Birch Wood, offering pupils a highly motivating opportunity to showcase their talents and build confidence in a supportive, inclusive community environment.

Overall, the school demonstrated advanced practice in creating a communication-rich environment where student voice, independence, and wellbeing were central. The consistent use of autism-specific strategies, combined with a whole-school culture of inclusion, ensures that every student is supported to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.





Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Birch Wood School's ethos is firmly rooted in the principle that education enables young people to make meaningful choices within their community. This commitment is reflected in a culture that prioritises personalisation, independence, and the development of functional life skills for every autistic student. The approach is holistic, ensuring that individual strengths, preferences, and challenges are understood and addressed through tailored strategies.

Each autistic student's personal preferences, skills and strengths in relation to functional life skills and independence are clearly recorded within their plans. For example, one student is able to engage in short, focused one-to-one sessions for up to ten minutes at a time, and can make choices from two or three highly motivating objects, such as food items. These strengths help staff plan meaningful opportunities that build confidence and autonomy.

Any challenges a student may experience in developing functional life skills or managing independence are also detailed. For instance, one student's EHCP notes: "At transition times, S can become upset or frustrated when the change is not a motivating task for him." This information allows staff to anticipate difficulties and implement proactive, personalised support.

Practical strategies and approaches to help each autistic student become more independent and to develop daily living skills are identified and shared with all relevant staff. Examples include: 'offering two concrete choices, using simple, clear instructions, providing sufficient time to process information, providing preparation for transitions through symbols, visual timetables or First-Then/Now & Next boards, using sensory cues such as music to support transitions between activities, maintaining environments that are highly predictable and easy to navigate'. These strategies are tailored to each learner and are consistently applied across the school environment, ensuring students build confidence, independence and functional skills that can be generalised to home, community and future settings.

Support provided to each autistic student in becoming more independent and developing daily life skills is regularly reviewed with the autistic student and/or their circle of support in order that changes can be made if necessary and positive outcomes celebrated. Progress Passports serve as a central tool for documenting achievements. They include specific examples of skills gained and milestones reached. For instance, a student may now participate in a "Good Morning" routine using PECS, demonstrating an understanding of the sequence of activities within the timetable.

Staff are confident in talking about how they support autistic individuals in becoming more independent and developing daily life skills and what progress has been made. One member of staff explained: 'Developing functional skills and promoting independence sits at the heart of our practice. The first aspect we consider is the environment, ensuring it enables students to navigate, understand and participate in daily routines as independently as possible.'

We create a Total Communication Environment, where multiple forms of communication are embedded into every space and activity. This includes:

Tactile and visually stimulating corridor walls, supporting students to independently find their way around the school and access their classrooms with confidence. Personalised timetables and Now & Next boards, enabling students to understand what is happening now and what will follow, reducing anxiety and supporting self-management. Clear zoning of classrooms and consistent routines. Clutter-free, well-organised classrooms, where resources are clearly labelled—tailored to the communication needs of each group. This supports students to access materials independently and understand how to use the space.



Assessment findings - completed by the assessor



Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

Throughout all observations, students were consistently supported to understand what was going to happen and what they were required to do through the highly effective use of structured frameworks reinforced by visual prompts. Personalised visual schedules, now-and-next boards, and individualised checklists were embedded across lessons, enabling students to anticipate next steps and engage meaningfully in directing their own learning. This approach reflects a strong commitment to person-centred practice and the promotion of autonomy.

Non-verbal prompts and reminders were readily accessible, with visual success criteria and self-check tools observed in use during a Science lesson. Clear modelling and visual exemplars, combined with graduated levels of support, enabled students to complete each step of a practical experiment with confidence. These strategies encouraged reflective learning and the development of flexible problem-solving skills, while ensuring that each student experienced a sense of completion and success.

The environment was thoughtfully designed to promote independence. Low-arousal classrooms were well organised and sensory-informed, with visual clutter minimised and adaptations tailored to individual sensory profiles. Distinct areas for therapies and regulation were purposefully structured to extend learning opportunities and support emotional regulation. Corridor displays, such as Zones of Regulation with attached sensory resources, reinforced routines and expectations in an accessible and meaningful way.

Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of how to provide the right level of support to foster self-reliance and resilience. Transitions were managed effectively through personalised timetables and individual communication systems, which students were observed referencing independently. This strengthened predictability and confidence in managing change.

Supported decision-making was evident across all pathways, with students offered meaningful choices regarding tasks, resources, pacing, and preferred methods of engagement. Guided questioning, visual choice boards, and communication supports empowered students to express preferences and make informed decisions, reinforcing self-advocacy and essential life skills.

Blended learning approaches further enhanced opportunities for independence and consolidation of functional skills. The use of laptops and tablets mirrored content displayed on the whiteboard, providing consistent visual prompts and enabling students to revisit materials, practise skills, and work at a pace suited to their needs. This integration of technology supported self-directed learning and promoted autonomy.

Daily life skills are fully embedded into the curriculum, with purposeful community visits and real-world learning opportunities forming a core part of provision. Community access is carefully structured and developmental; pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 visit local parks, churches and shops each term to build familiarity and confidence; Key Stage 3 pupils access the community more regularly for shopping trips and visits into town; and Key Stages 4 and 5 engage in meaningful work experience and workplace placements. Travel training is integrated into journeys to and from placements, enabling students to develop independence, safety awareness and confidence in navigating their community. These experiences are closely linked to ASDAN modules, ensuring learning is purposeful and accredited. Students practice functional numeracy and communication skills through real-life activities such as shopping, budgeting and interacting with staff in community settings. Units such as Making the Most of Leisure Time are brought to life through visits to the local leisure centre, where students learn how to join, plan visits and explore what activities are available locally. This approach ensures that pupils develop practical, transferable skills that support independence both now and in adulthood.





Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

All students at Birch Wood School have an individual sensory profile which provides detailed information about their unique sensory experiences. Each learner also has a one-page profile, giving staff an accessible working document that clearly reflects their sensory needs and preferred regulatory experiences. Sensory activities that have a positive impact—such as supporting calm, focus, enjoyment, or emotional wellbeing—are identified and recorded. For example, one student's profile notes: "I love lights and other multi-sensory stimulus."

The profiles also capture the sensory challenges each autistic student may experience. For instance, one pupil's one-page profile states: "I am very sensitive to noise; sudden loud sounds can startle and upset me. I also find unexpected touch or being moved without warning very distressing." In addition, practical strategies and approaches to help each student regulate their sensory input are clearly identified and shared with staff. This ensures that personalised support is implemented consistently, enabling students to feel safe, regulated, and ready to learn.

Support provided to each autistic student to help them regulate sensory input are reviewed with the autistic student and/or their circle of support in order that changes can be made if necessary and positive outcomes celebrated. Each young person has an Engagement Profile, which helps staff understand how they learn, interact with the world and respond to different experiences. Used alongside each student's Sensory Profile, this information informs personalised learning approaches that are responsive to individual strengths, preferences and regulation needs. Student involvement is central to this process.

Birch Wood School has fully embedded individual sensory profiles across the whole setting to ensure every learner receives consistent, personalised regulation support throughout the day. Case Study evidence shows that as a result, learners show enhanced emotional regulation, reduced dysregulation incidents, and increased engagement in learning, evidencing the effectiveness of embedding sensory approaches within both the curriculum and daily classroom practice.

Staff are confident in talking about how they support autistic individuals to regulate sensory input and what progress has been made. Staff explained how Sensory Circuits are integrated into daily routines to support students' regulation. For example, after breaktime—when students have often been highly active and in an 'alerting' state—some maths lessons begin with calming, organising activities such as sorting tasks to help settle the sensory system. Students may then access deep-pressure or other calming opportunities, ensuring they are regulated and ready for learning.

Case studies describe personalised approaches to support individuals in helping them to regulate sensory input and identify outcomes achieved from this support. One case study submitted demonstrates how Birch Wood School has implemented personalised sensory-regulation approaches through its on-site Forest School programme, providing structured, low-arousal, multi-sensory experiences tailored to individual sensory profiles. The intervention has led to clear outcomes, including improved functional communication—where students increasingly request regulating tools through symbols or verbal prompts—greater independence in accessing sensory resources autonomously, and enhanced emotional regulation reflected in fewer dysregulation incidents and improved readiness for learning.





Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

Autistic students consistently accessed sensory activities that they found enjoyable and relaxing. Observations highlighted a wide range of opportunities for sensory engagement, including movement-based activities such as sitting on a spinning chair in a quiet room, which reflected individual preferences displayed on the 'Talking Wall'. Students demonstrated confidence in selecting sensory resources that supported their regulation and engagement, such as weighted items, tactile tools, and personalised sensory kits.

Students tolerated and explored a variety of sensory experiences within a safe and secure context. For example, during a smoothie-making session, students were observed smelling, touching, and tasting foods such as avocado, coconut milk, and rocket. Staff supported these experiences with exceptional skill, using personalised communication methods to ensure students could indicate whether they wished to continue or stop.

Sensory experiences were woven into everyday teaching. For example Early Years students were observed exploring different tastes and textures during cooking sessions, promoting curiosity and positive engagement.

Students were effectively supported to regulate sensory experiences that could interfere with learning or cause discomfort. A whole-school sensory framework ensured proactive strategies were embedded in daily practice. Visual regulation tools, sensory choice boards, and AAC systems were consistently used to help students identify and communicate their sensory needs. Staff demonstrated strong co-regulation skills, scaffolding the development of independent self-management strategies and enabling students to maintain focus and emotional wellbeing.

The environment was intentionally maintained and adapted to support self-regulation. Low-arousal spaces were strategically located and clearly signposted, allowing students to independently access these areas to manage sensory load and transitions. Classrooms and shared spaces offered flexible seating, postural supports, and movement options tailored to individual sensory profiles. Colour-coordinated areas with tactile markers promoted independence in navigation, while communal displays were purposeful and accessible, reducing visual clutter and supporting predictability.

Overall, the environment functioned as an active partner in learning and wellbeing, empowering students to understand, communicate, and manage their sensory needs in ways that were transferable beyond the school setting. This practice reflected a consistently applied whole-school sensory framework led by highly skilled staff at all levels.





Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Birch Wood School's approach to teaching and learning is underpinned by the core belief that all behaviour is a form of communication. This principle informs every aspect of curriculum design and delivery, ensuring that the school's vision and values remain central to decision-making. The ENABLES ethos provides a clear framework for what the curriculum aims to achieve for all students, while the staff mission statement ensures that provision remains dynamic, reflective, and responsive to individual needs. The Teaching and Learning Policy emphasises a holistic approach, prioritising wellbeing alongside academic progress.

Support plans are developed to focus on the wellbeing and quality of life of each autistic learner. These plans actively reflect individual preferences, interests, and what matters most to the person. For example, where an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) highlights the importance of motivating stimuli and intensive interaction, these elements are embedded within the curriculum to promote engagement and emotional regulation.

Each support plan identifies potential triggers for anxiety, stress, or distress. For instance, a learner may experience heightened anxiety during transitions or when an activity ends unexpectedly. These insights enable staff to anticipate challenges and implement proactive strategies. Practical approaches include creating highly predictable environments, preparing for transitions through clear routines supported by visual symbols, and using tools such as visual timetables, "First and Then" strips, and music cues to signal changes.

Each plan identifies factors that may lead to anxiety, stress, or emotional dysregulation. For example, transitions between activities, changes in routine, or sensory overload may be highlighted as potential triggers. By anticipating these challenges, staff can implement proactive strategies to reduce distress and promote emotional regulation. Practical strategies and approaches are clearly documented within support plans. Examples include: 'Embedding an adapted Zones of Regulation curriculum within the learner's timetable to develop understanding of emotions and strategies for self-regulation. Providing a highly predictable environment with clear routines supported by visual aids such as timetables, "First and Then" strips, and symbol-based prompts. Preparing for transitions through consistent cues, such as music or visual countdowns, to support predictability'.

Support is regularly reviewed with the autistic individual and their circle of support to ensure that activities remain meaningful and rewarding. Adjustments are made where necessary, and successes are celebrated through established recognition routes, such as reward assemblies, postcards home, and "Brilliant at Birch Wood" acknowledgements. Updates are captured in annual reviews and reports, ensuring transparency and continuity.

Staff demonstrate confidence in articulating how they support autistic individuals to maintain emotional wellbeing and participate in socially inclusive activities. One member of staff explained; 'Zones of Regulation are embedded across the school to develop emotional literacy and support students to recognise and express how they feel. Regular Zone check-ins are built into daily routines, and a range of regulation tools is always accessible so students can independently choose strategies that help them manage their emotions. This approach acknowledges that sensory experiences affect individuals differently and reinforces that all feelings are valid'.

Case studies illustrate personalised approaches and their impact. For example, one learner who experienced high anxiety in shared spaces benefited from graded exposure, scaffolded cooperation, and predictable routines during Forest School sessions. These strategies enabled increased participation in group learning, improved social inclusion, and enhanced quality of life, as evidenced by contributions to Student Voice initiatives.





Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

Behaviour for learning and engagement in all sessions observed was consistently strong and underpinned by highly skilled, targeted adult support and trusting, respectful relationships. Staff demonstrated an exceptionally well-developed understanding of students' individual profiles, including nuanced awareness of how anxiety, sensory sensitivity and emotional regulation present for different learners. This informed calm, proactive and flexible responses throughout the day, enabling students to remain emotionally secure, regulated and ready to learn.

Autistic students are supported to understand and manage their emotions through timely, sensitive check-ins and structured opportunities to communicate their needs before behaviours escalate. This proactive approach demonstrates a strong, whole-school commitment to emotional well-being as the foundation for learning.

A comprehensive framework for self-regulation is evident across all settings, including the consistent use of sensory resources, movement breaks and structured calming routines. Zones of Regulation displays were observed in every classroom, with photographs placed in the different zones according to how students were feeling—clearly embedded into daily practice. On the Birch Wood Vale site, Zones of Regulation packs have been developed, containing feelings visuals, flipbooks and restorative behaviour supports, and are carried by staff to each lesson to maintain consistency.

Staff interactions were consistently warm, thoughtful and highly attuned to individual needs. These relationships are a significant strength of the provision, fostering high levels of trust, emotional safety and readiness to learn. Students responded positively to praise, encouragement and restorative language. At Ashton House, students were able to articulate their own progress, strengths and learning strategies with confidence. The school operates a comprehensive and motivating reward system across all settings, adapted to pupils' needs. One pupil confidently explained the reward process, describing how they reflected with staff after each lesson and awarded points based on achievements.

Autistic students are encouraged to enjoy the challenge of trying new activities and developing new skills, with opportunities designed to build confidence, resilience and positive peer relationships. Experiences at the Leicester Outdoor Pursuits Centre, such as abseiling, archery and high ropes, provide safe but appropriately challenging environments that strengthen teamwork and friendships. Horse riding offers valuable physical and mental health benefits, supporting confidence, regulation and communication. All pupils are also offered a residential experience, including trips to Paris, Disneyland and Kendal Outdoor Pursuits, where activities such as sensory swings and rock climbing enable students to develop independence and self-assurance. The school may wish to consider developing an even more ambitious programme to broaden students' experiences and extend challenge, for example by offering opportunities to participate in activities such as a Three Peaks challenge or a triathlon.

Across all observations, students appeared highly engaged in their learning. The curriculum is carefully differentiated to meet the specific needs, starting points and long-term aspirational outcomes of each student. Birch Wood offers four curriculum pathways tailored to the diverse needs of the cohort, ensuring all students can thrive within the school's ethos of Ambition Without Limits. The Voyager pathway shows a clear commitment to academic ambition, providing access to a rich range of accredited courses delivered by highly trained specialist staff. The newly introduced Adventurer pathway adopts a low-demand, play-based approach to support engagement, emotional well-being and regulation for students with complex learning disabilities.

The school maintains a carefully balanced approach that combines academic rigour with accessible, motivating and highly scaffolded learning experiences, supported by consistent, affirming feedback.





Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

Survey ratings

Version one

| Number surveyed | Number of responses |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| | 40 |

Version two

| Number surveyed | Number of responses |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| | 17 |

| Question | No | Sometimes | Yes |
|--|----|-----------|-----|
| The help I get is good. | | 7 | 33 |
| Staff know what I find hard and what I am good at. | 1 | 10 | 29 |
| Staff ask me how best they can help me. | | 8 | 32 |
| Staff help me to do things in my life that I want to do. | 1 | 14 | 25 |

| Who filled in the form? | Number |
|----------------------------|--------|
| I did by myself. | 39 |
| I did with support. | 16 |
| A friend or family member. | |
| A member of staff. | 2 |

| Question | I do not know | Poor | Ok but could be better | Good | Excellent |
|--|----------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| The support I get is: | | | 1 | 10 | 6 |
| Question | I do not know | Never | Sometimes | Often | Very often |
| Staff understand my skills, challenges and what my autism means to me. | | | 1 | 12 | 4 |
| Staff ask me about how best to support me and act on what I tell them. | 2 | | 4 | 6 | 5 |
| Staff help me do things that I enjoy doing and that are important to me. | | 1 | 3 | 4 | 9 |
| Staff help me to set and achieve important goals in my life. | | 1 | 6 | 9 | 1 |



Assessment findings - completed by the assessor



| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Comments included in surveys:</p> | <p>the support I get at the collage is amazing and really helpful. I am happy with the support I get. They help me and help me out with maths. I like my class team. Sometime I have to wait for the staff to support me if they are dealing with another student. I know this isn't always their fault. Staff will periodically check on me how I am feeling, and whether I need support on something. If they know how to do it, they will help me on it if I am stuck. Staff are kind to us, they politely have a talk in a nice manner and tone. Staff are kind to other members of staff and have humour in them. I receive all the guidance and support I need to develop my teaching skills from my mentor and my colleague. the school is helping me sometimes and they don't I get more support at birch wood school that I did at my old school My support is pretty good and I they solve my questions that i wonder about. do not tell me to stay friends with someone if i don't want to it's better here than when i was in mainstream The student said I would just like to thank you to the staff here.</p> |
| <p>Additional relevant information:</p> | <p>Learners are encouraged to contribute to annual reviews, share their views through Progress Passports, take part in pupil surveys and engage with Talking Walls, ensuring their voices meaningfully influence provision.</p> <p>The Student Council provides a structured platform for representation, with each class electing a student to speak on behalf of their peers. Council input has led to tangible changes, such as the installation of outdoor fitness equipment and a new basketball court. Students have also influenced the organisation of whole-school assemblies—highlighting that the previous schedule felt rushed—which led to adjustments ensuring pupils have sufficient time to arrive calmly and return to class without anxiety. Ideas from lunchtime clubs are also shared and acted upon where appropriate, further reinforcing that student voice is valued.</p> <p>The introduction of Talking Walls has been particularly impactful for non-speaking students, enabling staff to capture authentic preferences and emotional responses through observation. This approach allows staff to notice subtle indicators of enjoyment or discomfort. For example, Talking Wall observations during lunchtime revealed a strong dislike for blended pizza among pupils with blended diets. As a result, the school now blends foods separately, allowing individual preferences to be better understood and respected. Talking Walls also enhance playtime practice by helping staff identify activities that naturally engage students, enabling them to bring pupils together for group experiences they genuinely enjoy. This ensures pupil voice is captured in a meaningful, accessible way that does not rely solely on verbal communication.</p> |



Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

Survey ratings

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Number surveyed | Number of responses |
| | 48 |

| Question | Poor | Ok but could be better | Mostly good | Always good |
|--|------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| The support my relative is given is... | | 2 | 4 | 42 |
| The understanding that staff have for my relative's autistic needs is... | | | 7 | 41 |
| The way I am kept informed and asked my views about how my relative is supported is... | | 2 | 8 | 38 |
| The advice I get from the service on how to help my relative is... | | 5 | 7 | 36 |



Assessment findings - completed by the assessor



Comments included in surveys:

The support Birch Wood have given my son is amazing, he has come along so much since joining the school and is so much happier in himself. Everyone at the school is very approachable and understanding. The adults all seem to know the children, even those who they do not have in their class. A real effort is made to make all the children feel welcome and included and understood. My child is 10 and has recently been diagnosed Autistic. They have been at the school for just over two years, having started school in mainstream. My child is thriving at Birchwood and this is due to the support, patience and care shown by everyone at the school he comes into contact with. Adaptations are constantly being made to support my child's learning and the communication between school and home is excellent. This school is truly incredible the staff are amazing with the children giving them opportunities they wouldn't normally get understanding them learning them my son has come on so well since being here the staff go above and beyond if there struggling they support not only the child but the families that care for them any help or advice for parents they are there to help no matter what they are compassionate and caring in a way that is just so amazing

Fantastic teachers and wonderful people
I cannot praise this school enough for how they have helped my grandson. They are truly amazing. Thank you so much to the wonderful staff for everything you do. You have all made a massive difference to j's life which is priceless

My son spent his first year of school in a provision that were unable to meet his needs, which was distressing and stressful for not just him, but us as parents too. After he moved to Birch Wood the relief for us all was amazing, he was accepted for who he was, the staff's knowledge of Autism/ADHD was an incredible help, we are so grateful he got a place

Additional relevant information:

Autism Accreditation assessment Summary of the assessment



National
Autistic
Society

Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

| Topic | What the provision does particularly well: | What the provision could develop further: |
|--|---|---|
| Social communication, interactions and relationships: | <p>Individualised communication support using simplified language, visuals, and Makaton. Strong promotion of student voice through varied AAC and choice-making tools. Highly positive staff-student relationships with effective emotional-literacy and regulation support. Inclusive peer interaction supported with clear scaffolding. Rich social-skills and enrichment offer, including student-led clubs and MV16 partnerships.</p> | |
| Functional skills and self-reliance: | <p>Effective visual frameworks supporting understanding and autonomy. Clear modelling and scaffolded support enabling confident, step-by-step learning. Sensory-informed environments promoting independence and regulation. Strong support for transitions and decision-making through personalised systems. Well-embedded life-skills and community learning, linked to ASDAN modules.</p> | <p>Continued review of technology use, ensuring digital tools are consistently accessible and personalised so all students can benefit equally from blended learning approaches.</p> <p>Continue to develop a wider range of meaningful, individualised employment and placement opportunities that actively recognise and accommodate the strengths, interests, and support needs of autistic students, ensuring they can engage in work experiences that build confidence, develop practical skills, and promote successful transitions into adulthood.</p> |
| Sensory experiences: | <p>Wide range of personalised sensory activities Skilled staff support enabling students to explore sensory experiences Sensory experiences embedded in daily learning, Effective use of visual and AAC tools to help students identify and communicate sensory needs. Well-designed sensory-informed environments that promote independence and self-regulation.</p> | <p>Continue refining environmental adjustments to ensure all sensory spaces remain consistently accessible and used proactively.</p> |
| Emotional wellbeing: | <p>Strong behaviour for learning, supported by skilled staff and trusting relationships. Highly effective emotional-regulation support. Consistent whole-school self-regulation framework, including Zones of Regulation and sensory-based strategies. Warm, attuned staff interactions fostering emotional safety, confidence and independence.</p> | <p>Expand the challenge and ambition of enrichment activities, offering additional opportunities for students to push boundaries.</p> |

Autism Accreditation assessment Summary of the assessment



National
Autistic
Society

Assessment findings - completed by the assessor

| Topic | What the provision does particularly well | What the provision could develop further |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Consultation with autistic people:</p> | <p>Across both survey versions, students report very high levels of satisfaction with the help they receive in school. The survey results indicate that students feel understood by staff, involved in decisions about their support and encouraged to pursue their interests and goals. The feedback indicates strong relationships between students and staff, effective communication, and a positive, supportive school environment.</p> | <p>A few areas for improvement were also mentioned. Some students noted that they occasionally need to wait for staff when they are supporting others, and one person felt that support is inconsistent at times. Another important point raised was that students should not be encouraged to maintain friendships they do not want, emphasising the need for staff to respect personal boundaries and preferences.</p> |
| <p>Consultation with the families, carers and/ or advocates of autistic people:</p> | <p>Feedback from parents and carers is overwhelmingly positive. Families describe Birch Wood as a highly supportive, nurturing and life-changing environment where staff go "above and beyond" for pupils and their families. Many report significant improvements in their children's happiness, confidence, communication and engagement since joining the school, with several describing "phenomenal" or "incredible" progress. Parents consistently praise staff for their compassion, understanding of autism, personalised adaptations and strong relationships with pupils.</p> | <p>Some constructive feedback was shared around communication, particularly relating to last-minute notifications about class changes and staffing transitions. A small number of parents also requested better notice for parent events and more resources to support learning at home.</p> <p>Overall, families express deep gratitude and admiration for the school, describing the provision as outstanding, life-enhancing and transformative for both pupils and their wider families.</p> |
| <p>Other areas:</p> | <p>The introduction of Talking Walls has been hugely impactful for non-speaking students, enabling staff to capture authentic preferences and emotional responses through observation.</p> | |



SECTION Five

- [Committee decision – to be completed by the Quality Manager](#)
- [Next Steps](#)

SECTION Five

Committee outcome



National
Autistic
Society

What happens at the end of the assessment?

At the end of the assessment, the consultant will arrange a meeting to give you verbal feedback.

The consultant will feedback on what the service does well and what it could consider developing further. The consultant will also summarise findings from the surveys.

The consultant cannot comment on whether you have met the criteria for Aspiring, Accredited or Advanced status as this is not their decision.

The consultant will complete an Assessment report which will be submitted to the Accreditation Awards committee.

Within a month of the completion of the assessment you will be informed by email of the Committee decision- whether you have been awarded Aspiring, Accredited or Advanced. This will be based on our award criteria.



SECTION Five

Committee decision and next steps - completed by the Quality Manager



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Committee decision:

Advanced

Date of committee decision:

06/02/2026

Comment:

The Autism Accreditation Committee found clear evidence from the report that staff at Birch Wood School have a robust working knowledge of evidence informed approaches associated with good autism practice. They adapt these specialist approaches to ensure support is highly person centred and tailored to individual abilities, interests, preferences and challenges.

Birch Wood provides highly individualised communication support using simplified language, visual frameworks, Makaton and a wide range of AAC options that promote genuine student voice and choice. Staff-student relationships are warm, attuned and supportive, contributing to strong emotional literacy and effective regulation. Peer interaction is encouraged through clear scaffolding, and students benefit from a rich social skills and enrichment offer, including student led clubs and partnerships with MV16. Functional skills and independence are developed through well structured visuals, clear modelling and step by step learning approaches that build confidence and autonomy. Sensory informed environments support regulation and self reliance, while life skills and community learning are meaningfully embedded through ASDAN modules. Sensory experiences are personalised, embedded into daily routines, and supported by staff skilled in using visual and AAC tools to help students identify, express and manage sensory needs. Emotional wellbeing is a clear strength, supported by consistent whole school use of Zones of Regulation, sensory strategies and nurturing, trusting relationships that promote confidence and independence.

Case studies submitted by the school highlight initiatives aimed at improving practice, including the creation of an onsite Forest School, the embedding of individual sensory profiles across the school, and the development of an Informal (Adventurer) Curriculum Pathway. Other case studies describe the impact of bespoke programmes of support on individual autistic learners, including improved emotional regulation, increased access to shared activities, strengthened communication and choice making, greater independence in selecting regulation tools, and enhanced social interaction through interest led opportunities.

Feedback from autistic students and their families is strongly positive. Students consistently report feeling supported, listened to and understood. Parents and carers also express deep trust in the school's ethos and gratitude for the positive impact it has on their children. While the feedback is excellent overall, the school may wish to reflect on a small number of comments and ratings that highlight opportunities to further strengthen student voice and parent partnerships.

Some suggestions are made in the report about how existing good practice can be further strengthened. However, these areas do not detract from the overall high quality of the provision, and Birch Wood School should be awarded the Advanced Award. Congratulations for demonstrating standards of excellence in supporting autistic young people.

SECTION Five

Next Steps



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Maintaining and progression

Once you have agreed terms and conditions you can expect to receive your certificate and logo. You can continue with your current Autism Accreditation plan or amend it by increasing or reducing the number of consultation visits.

Please contact your consultant to discuss your options.

You will also be asked to complete an online survey about your experience of the process. Your feedback is very important to us so please take the time to complete it.

You can expect to receive a final version of your assessment report and the date and level achieved will be published in our directory. We do not publish the assessment report but you are welcome to share or publish it if you want to. You may wish to share or publish a sample of the report, rather than the full manuscript. We are happy for you to do so but request that this is done in a way which does not misrepresent our findings, for example by only publishing what we found that you do well without acknowledging that we may also identified some areas of development. If you are not sure what would be acceptable please feel free to ask.

We recommend that you undergo another assessment in three years' time to show that you have maintained standards or progressed to a level where you can be given a higher Award. You can request an earlier reassessment if you don't want to wait this long.





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SECTION Five

Committee outcomes

Applying for Beacon Status

If you have achieved an Advanced Award you can now apply for Beacon Status. This is awarded to provisions which in addition to providing consistent high quality support to autistic people, share their knowledge and understanding of good practice with families, external professionals and the local community.

Application forms can be obtained from your consultant and should be returned to the Autism Accreditation Quality Manager at

Stephen.dedridge@nas.org.uk.

The Panel can award Beacon status if the application form provides clear evidence that the provision carries out exceptional work that has had a significant impact on how:

- Families understand and support relatives who are autistic.
- Other professionals understand and work with autistic people, including helping them to appreciate the personal experiences of autistic people.
- The local community or members of the public understand and work with autistic people; autistic people are socially included within their community.
- The provision contributes to developing knowledge and understanding of autism, for example by contributing to research.

The application form should also explain how the provision works in partnership with autistic people. Beacon status will be withheld if the provision requires improvement in meeting statutory requirements.





About the National Autistic Society

The National Autistic Society is here to transform lives, change attitudes and create a society that works for autistic people.

We transform lives by providing support, guidance and practical advice for the 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK, as well as their three million family members and carers. Since 1962, autistic people have turned to us at key moments or challenging times in their lives, be it getting a diagnosis, going to school or finding work.

We change attitudes by improving public understanding of autism and the difficulties many autistic people face. We also work closely with businesses, local authorities and government to help them provide more autism-friendly spaces, deliver better services and improve laws.

We have come a long way but it is not good enough. There is still so much to do to increase opportunities, reduce social isolation and build a brighter future for people on the spectrum. With your help, we can make it happen.

The National Autistic Society is a charity registered in England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England (No.1205298), registered office 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG. 3718 30/11/21