

Autism Accreditation Assessment

Woodcroft School

Reference No.	190
Assessment dates	4-6 May 2022
Lead Assessor	Hannelore Bout
Status prior to the assessment	Accredited
Advanced status applied for	Not applicable

About this Assessment

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

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

Findings from the Assessment

Differences in Social Communication

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

The school has recently expanded the Speech and language team to the equivalent of 9 days a week with the help of the therapy assistant. SALTs carry out assessments, deliver training, facilitate support in class, they spend extended periods in the classroom, where they deliver sessions, but also observe and model practice.

Next to SCERT trained SALTs, the school has in house Elklan and Makaton trainers, who deliver regularly. The school developed an online training resource during lockdown called Woodcroft College, where staff can access training and resources in addition to face to face training.

A similar training resource is set up for families and carers, parents valued the training opportunities before the pandemic but also felt that the support and resources during lockdowns have been excellent.

Emily Rubin provided remote mentoring during autumn 2021, online and using video footage and helped the school with embracing the appreciative enquiry model. She also assisted with the implementation of the Woodcroft Approach to Goal Setting (WAGS) which is linked to SCERTS targets and aims to "set 9 outcomes which are largely based upon their EHCP. WAGS are created in this way to ensure they are personal, achievable but yet challenging to the individual." End of year Reports

(EOYR) and End of Year WAGS provide evidence of positive outcomes achieved by each student in their communication and social engagement such as looking at storybooks together, learning to gain attention before initiating an interaction or learning to take part in shared activities. Other pupils may have goals to use appropriate language with female peers.

Communication Plans identify what SCERTS language partner-level each autistic pupil communicates at and identifies their likes, such as Lego or playing with friends, or Minecraft. These plans also identify how each pupil prefers to communicate for example, "I am able to communicate in a two-way conversation to something I am motivated at".

The Communication Plans also identify what their challenges are, for example, "I find it difficult to maintain joint attention when peers/the environment are distracting."

The communication Plans identify what each pupil is working on, such as engaging in extended reciprocal interaction, or "I will use 2 spoken words to request – person's name + object/action in structured activity (SU 5.6)"

Transactional supports are identified in a visually accessible format, objects, signing, communication book, language boards, or AAC.

Each student also has an OT pupil profile, some of these include detailed information on how each pupil communicates, and what communication supports they use. These are not always synchronised across and vary in detail, which may be confusing when accessed by newer or unfamiliar staff. The school should review if communication information should be kept in the OT Pupil profile, which would fit well and supports the integrated therapy model, or keep these documents separate.

In interviews and case studies, staff can give examples of how autistic pupils have been supported in their communication and social engagement and the positive outcomes they have achieved. Such as recent introductions of the Coreboard have facilitated a pupil to begin to hold a conversation with parents at home. Another child is using a Talkpad, which has encouraged the development of spoken language. Another pupil has progressed from social partner to emerging language partner, and another pupil is reported to, through the development of language skills, beginning to make progress in other areas.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

In almost all observations, staff make themselves understood for example by simplifying or structuring verbal language and by providing visual cues. Where this was done well, staff provided pupils with visual cues through a total communication approach offering symbols, using core boards and Makaton.

In almost half of the observations, staff could have reduced adult language or one adult could lead, to avoid overstimulation.

Many autistic pupils are language or conversation partners and can make themselves understood verbally. There was a high level of differentiation for emerging language

partner pupils, and those who require visual supports to express themselves, for example by access to augmentative or alternative communication systems such as a TalkPad; the school recently introduced Coreboards this year and some students were confidently communicating through these, and other pupils were signing or using writing frames.

Autistic pupils are routinely provided with opportunities and purpose to communicate as part of a group or 1:1 with staff or with each other. Staff are tuned into pupils' interests and motivations and use this to build a good rapport with the pupils, through intensive interaction, playing games, joining in favourite activities, but also understanding when to give them a break. From interviews and observations, it is clear that the school puts a lot of thought into the formation of class groups, compatibility and group work. Connecting with peers can be highly motivating for some pupils and may become a source of anxiety or a barrier to learning for others. Staff assist pupils appropriately in navigating social situations and expectations.

Problem Solving and Self-reliance

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Communication Plans identify each autistic pupil's skills and challenges in functioning life skills related to everyday life and education. Each plan details "Learning supports: I work best when my environment is..." for example "Provide me with visual supports (e.g. task planners, schedules) so I know what's coming next and so I can listen by myself." As well as "interpersonal supports: I work best with pupils who ..." making learning accessible by adjusting activities to interests and language levels.

The Communication Plans identify each individual's transactional supports that help in carrying out activities, transitioning, copying with changes and making choices.

WAGS and EOYR identify positive outcomes in terms of autistic pupils developing academic and functional life skills and becoming more self-reliant and autonomous. Such as learning to "recount a short sequence of events", learning to remember and follows two-part instructions, or "there has been development in X independence. They now can take on more responsibility, like making their drink and monitor duties."

The school employed a consultant OT in the Spring term, who did observations and made recommendations, some of these reports fed back on EHCP outcomes regarding individuals developing their functional skills in English and Maths, together with suggestions on how to adapt the task or the environment to enable participation, such as rearranging furniture or use of visuals to support oral instructions.

The school continues to deliver detailed support with Micro and Macro transitions. The school has continued to provide education for children that were not ready to make a transition after Key Stage 3 and has clear plans in place on how to make

transitions to other settings a success. The school also continues to deliver in house transport for pupils who find travelling and transitions difficult and have designed bespoke packages for pupils who are currently unable to access the full school programme.

In interviews and case studies, staff can give examples of how they have supported autistic pupils in following routines, such as learning to understand visuals and sequencing of timetables, being able to join group-based learning, being able to travel safely on transport, or coping with a change in staff.

Pupils are encouraged to learn functional life skills and staff described creative ways of encouraging pupils to get involved in tasks, that are not necessarily motivating, such as cooking, laundry, learning to get dressed or washing up.

The school offers a broad range of offsite learning, which provide opportunities for pupils to engage with learning and help consolidate functional skills and community participation, through meaningful, motivating and multisensory activities.

The school reported that some pupils have progressed significantly in their ability to communicate which has increased progression in other areas such as expressing choices or being able to express feelings.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

In almost all observations, autistic pupils can work out what they must do now and what they are expected to do next, through the use of sand timers, visual or written schedules, checklists, and differentiated worksheets.

On a few occasions, the transition was less clearly defined. During one observation a transition was verbally extended a few times, as pupils were clearly motivated by the task and wanted to continue the mark-making and turn-taking activity.

In the majority of observations, pupils are supported to do things by themselves, through differentiated work sheets, checklists and gentle encouragement. Pupils appeared confident in finding or requesting equipment to complete their tasks.

In almost half of the observations, staff could have given pupils more time to process or resolve a problem and possibly 1 adult facilitating and guiding the lesson may help reduce intervening or helping or doing for the pupils.

All pupils appeared confident to make requests, share opinions, making and taking decisions. Staff sensitively navigate issues around working with preferred or more familiar staff or pupils, to ensure pupils could access their learning fully.

During all observations, autistic pupils are provided with opportunities to consolidate and develop daily functional skills using creative and motivating activities to engage pupils in tasks they find challenging such as mark-making using treasure maps; reading shopping lists; communication through songs; incorporating games as a warm up and motivating topics to encourage participation in a writing activity.

As a result of Covid, there were reduced opportunities for community-based and action learning, the school has fully reintroduced a broad range of offsite learning such as horse riding, equine therapy, football, tennis, adventure play, outdoor centre, forest exploration, allotment and soft play.

Sensory Experiences

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

The school has an in-house OT and recently an OT consultant worked with the school on helping the staff more fully understand pupils' sensory differences and how they can support children throughout the day with sensory regulation.

The OT delivers training and OT support and assessments but also works closely with the multi-disciplinary teams, families and external therapists. The school developed online learning portals during the pandemic for both staff and families and some students requested to contribute to the learning resources.

The multi-sensory policy states that "The Multi-sensory curriculum can be used as a tool to differentiate work, adapt the environment, to provide guidance on the assessment, planning and implementing of sensory sessions as well as the use of multi-sensory approaches generally." This was evident in the observations where all learning had a sensory engaging component.

OT Pupil Profiles identify sensory experiences autistic pupils like such as outdoor learning, messy play or a soft toy that may distract them when upset.

These plans identify what challenges each pupil may experience in regulating sensory experiences for example avoiding particular foods, seeking extreme input and sometimes risky input or not coping well with loud sudden noises.

The OT Pupil profiles identify each pupil's profile and what sensory input they seek, avoid or are learning to be able to regulate.

The profiles identify each person's sensory diet, what is calming, for example drawing or a beanbag-hug, what organising support they use, such as therapy putty, finding a treasure in the putty or work standing up, followed by what activities are alerting, such as catching a ball or counting the steps. The sensory diet also identifies just-right support, such as outdoor time, or Tac Pac.

OT observations also make recommendations on how the environment or activities can be adapted, strategies related to Zones of Regulation and how individuals can be supported to engage in, for example, seated activities, or why play is an important tool for positively teaching children.

The sample of EOYR summaries highlights that some pupils make progress in interoception, being able to state when they are hungry or thirsty. Targets are set such as learning to use appropriate voice volume with visual supports.

In interviews and case studies, the school gave examples of how they have supported autistic pupils in their sensory regulation or avoiding sensory overload and positive outcomes achieved as a result. Taking a break is a well-established routine for most pupils, and the outdoor areas and additional rooms are used for pupils to have some time away from moments they are finding overstimulating. Some pupils reportedly weaned themselves of ear defenders, but may use hats instead. The Food School helps pupils to explore different foods, without the pressure of having to taste them, and some pupils are engaged in cooking but may not necessarily try the result. Some pupils are described as seeking deep pressure activities and much of the offsite activities involve sensory-stimulating or engaging activities. One case study stated that as “staff have gained a greater understanding of their sensory needs , there has been a marked reduction in the number of incidents”.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

All observed lessons were built around sensory activities which pupils find enjoyable engaging or relaxing, such as music, games, or using interesting resources to facilitate learning.

The staff know the pupils well and plan learning around energising and calming activities to help students tolerate a range of sensory experiences within a safe and secure context.

Autistic pupils are supported to regulate sensory experiences which interfere with what they are trying to do or cause them discomfort. Some students wear or have access to ear defenders, some students were seen to wear a hat or sunglasses. Break cards were available in each class and students were confident to request or take a break. Some pupils have access to their own work, workstation or other rooms to work; some pupils have putty or chewies and take a rucksack with sensory resources when accessing community-based learning.

The school environment is creatively designed to be adapted for different types of learning and pupils can access the outdoor areas and forests to take a break or continue learning outside.

Low arousal approaches are clearly considered, staff to student levels are high for smaller areas, sometimes making it more important for staff to reduce language and consider 1 voice to reduce overstimulation when required.

Emotional Well-being

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

The school has in house Team Teach trainers and well-being mentors who are on hand to help out when a pupil goes into crisis but also provide proactive support where analysis of Integris incident data has identified spikes in behaviour at for example the beginning or the end of the school day.

The school is in the process of reintroducing weekly focus groups, where well-being mentors, therapists and teachers can analyse and discuss interventions for pupils.

There is a clear culture of multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary teamwork between therapists, class teams and well-being teams, where reflective practice is used to develop quick responses and adjustments to support and interventions. The therapy team currently consists of OT, SaLT, Music therapy, Equine therapy, and Physiotherapy. Professionals work closely with allocated Local authority professionals when these are involved in care.

All support plans show an appreciation of activities which each autistic pupil likes, or finds motivating or relaxing. Using play and motivation is routinely incorporated whilst using multi-sensory approaches to engage pupils in their learning.

Communication and OT Plans and reports identify approaches or activities to help maintain the well-being of each autistic pupil, by describing the challenges and how to support each pupil. Positive behaviour profile/ risk assessments include proactive and preventative strategies to avoid anxiety or distress and support emotional regulation, through likes, such as small world toys or spending time in the garden with a chosen adult and distractors such as humour or using visual supports for expected behaviour.

EOYR and WAGS identify positive achievements and progress impacting the quality of life of each autistic person, such as "I can focus my attention, remain regulated and express my wants and needs. E.g. responds appropriately to adult-led activity once a day. – achieved in June 2021". Case studies and EOYR describe that pupils are learning to regulate for example "X will have developed specific strategies to safely express and manage a range of emotions, especially around feelings of anger and anxiety. X started to tell staff about his feelings and when he feels anxious, angry, or scared." Integris behaviour incidents data in the case studies illustrated that the number of incidents has reduced significantly for some pupils which is attributed to using data to reflect and implement tailored well-being programmes.

EOYR and WATS demonstrate positive achievements and progress impacting the quality of life of each student including greater access to and inclusion within community activities. Such as learning to take part in off-site activities such as football and tennis, and making good progress in following instructions

In interviews, staff can give examples of how autistic pupils have been supported that resulted in positive outcomes in terms of quality of life and life opportunities including greater inclusion and involvement within the community. The school offers an extensive and exciting range of offsite activities for pupils to explore meaningful and challenging activities.

In interviews, staff describe how pupils are actively engaged in determining how they are supported in the school. The student council meets once a week where pupils discuss things they like to do or what play equipment they like or dislike. The head teacher has an open-door policy for pupils, staff and family and is often found listening or talking with pupils. Pupils are encouraged to be involved in their learning and have requested particular programmes as they feel this will help their learning. Pupils are involved in their pupil-centred planning, and what goals they are working towards according to what is appropriate for their age and capacity. For example, some pupils are aware of what safe Teamteach holds may be used to support them, or classrooms teams have bespoke de-escalation scripts.

In interviews, staff can describe how family or carers are supported and involved, for example having tailored ways of communication, where some prefer emails and others a phone call at the beginning and end of the week.

Feedback from families and carers is very positive, and they value the detailed understanding and support their children are receiving.

All feedback from family members obtained through interviews or surveys shows that they are happy with the support they receive and staff understanding of the pupil's skills and interests. Parents felt the support and online resources developed throughout Covid have been of a very high standard and expressed that the unique and complex support needs of their child are understood. One parent reported to be particularly pleased with the school's detailed understanding of how to support children with a PDA presentation. Parents appreciate the highly individualised programmes and all report the children are happy to go to school, where this has been difficult in previous settings. Parents are happy with the progress the children make, particularly in confidence and well-being.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

In almost all observations, autistic pupils presented as feeling safe and calm or were supported to regulate or take a break.

Most children attending Woodcroft school, require considerable support in regulating their anxiety levels. It is clear that the school has individualised programmes in place and interventions are designed to help pupils regulate their anxiety levels.

Proactive and preventative strategies are in place to avoid or reduce anxiety, confusion or distress from occurring or escalating, such as communication strategies, break cards and sensory regulation.

On one occasion a student did become dysregulated, possibly as a result of the absence of familiar staff, less familiar faces in the room, overstimulation or positioning at the group table. This resulted in a rapid escalation in impulsive and unsafe behaviour. The team tried to deflect and redirect using visual cues, and the team responded quickly to make the area safe. A TeamTeach help hug and caring C was used as a last resort under the strictest controls to ensure the safety of all involved, to help the student to calm down and get to a safe space to take a break and self-regulate. The remainder of the pupils returned to learning. A write up was seen with antecedent and consequences reflecting on the incident and how to prevent the incident from re-occurring. The school reported there are systems in place for the well-being and staff teams to reflect after each incident, and the reintroduction of the weekly focus groups assist with analysing incidents further.

Woodcroft school uses Zones of Regulations or Autism Level Up to support students understanding and regulate their emotions and choose calming or alerting activities. These are adapted and implemented to reflect the level of understanding of the pupils. Pupils were seen to request breaks or time out. These systems were not observed to be accessed or updated when pupils had entered different zones.

Pupils are routinely treated with dignity and respect and are provided with meaningful positive feedback to boost confidence and self-esteem, such as "good effort", "great question", "I know you will be good at this" or "what a lovely random act of kindness" when a student invited a peer to come and join the group.

Pupils are routinely engaged in meaningful activities which they find fun or interesting. According to the schools' assessments, many pupils present with Attachment, Trauma or PDA profiles, and the school is adept at disguising or incorporating elements of (academic) learning when the student is ready to take on a challenge, through fun or motivating activities.

Successes are celebrated or rewarded according to the pupils' preferred way, this may be reward systems or discreet praise acknowledging their completion and achievement.

Section 3: Summary of assessment

What the provision does particularly well

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

The school continues to deliver detailed support with Micro and Macro transitions. The school has continued to provide education for children that were not ready to make a transition after Key Stage 3 and has clear plans in place on how to make transitions to other settings a success. The school also continues to deliver in house transport for pupils who find travelling and transitions difficult and have designed bespoke packages for pupils who are currently unable to access the full school programme.

Pupils are routinely engaged in meaningful activities which they find fun or interesting. According to the schools' assessments, many pupils present with Attachment, Trauma or PDA profiles, and the school is adept at disguising or incorporating elements of (academic) learning when the student is ready to take on a challenge, through fun or motivating activities.

Staff sensitively navigate issues around working with preferred or more familiar pupils and pupils, to ensure pupils could access their learning.

Most children attending Woodcroft school, require considerable support in regulating their anxiety levels. It is clear that the school has thoroughly considered individualised programmes in place and interventions are designed to help pupils regulate their anxiety levels.

Feedback from families and carers is very positive, and they value the detailed understanding and support they and the children are receiving, also throughout lockdowns.

Learners are routinely provided with the opportunity and purpose to develop social communication as part of a group or 1:1 with staff or with each other

What else the provision does well:

Many autistic pupils are language or conversation partners and can make themselves understood verbally. There was a high level of differentiation for emerging language partner pupils and pupils who require visual supports to express themselves.

All pupils appeared confident to make requests, share opinions, making and taking decisions. Pupils are listened to and their views are considered, where appropriate they are actively engaged in determining how they are supported in the school.

All observed lessons were built around multisensory activities which pupils find enjoyable, engaging or relaxing, such as music, games, or using interesting resources to facilitate learning. The staff know the pupils well and plan learning around energising and calming activities to help pupils to tolerate a range of sensory experiences within a safe and secure context.

There is a clear culture of multi-disciplinary teamwork between therapists, class teams and well-being teams where teams work together and reflective practice is used to develop quick responses and adjustments to support.

What the provision could develop further

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

In almost half of the observations, staff could have given pupils more time to process or resolve a problem and possibly 1 adult facilitating and guiding the lesson may help reduce intervening or helping or doing for the pupils.

Other areas to consider:

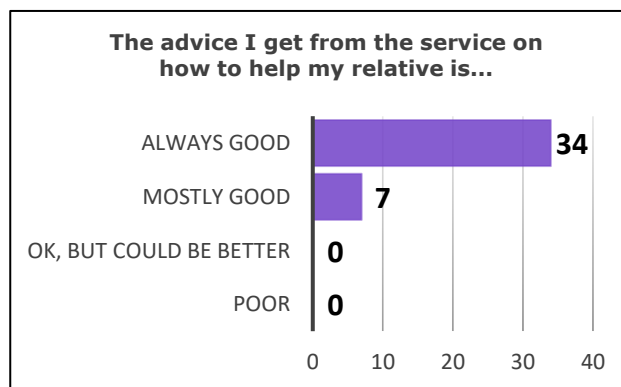
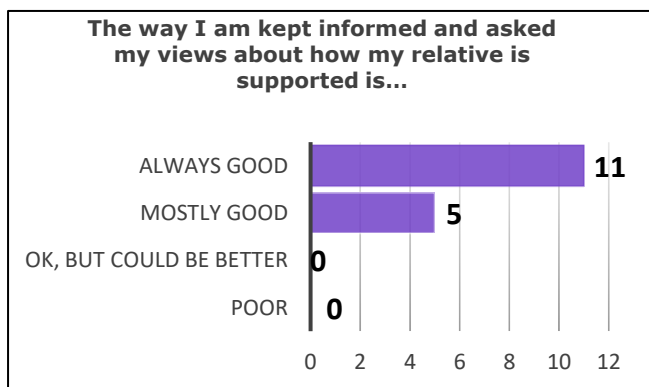
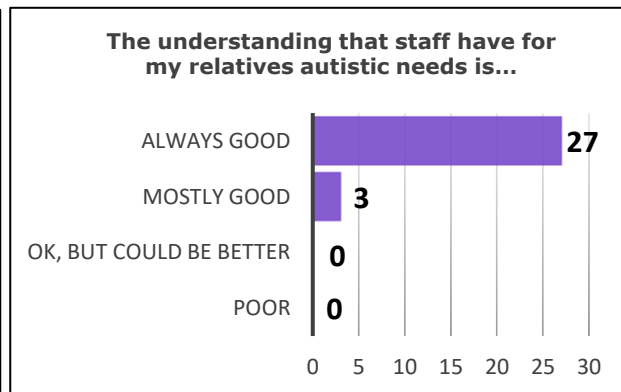
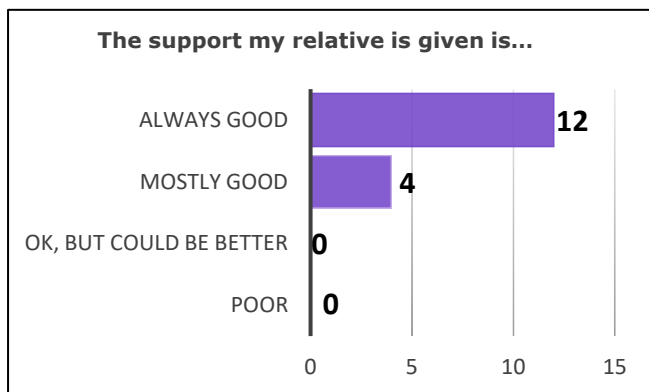
The school should consider reviewing if communication support information should be kept in the OT Pupil profile, which would fit well and supports the integrated therapy model, or keep these documents separate, if the information is shared in both documents the school should make sure information is synchronised across documentation.

Although low arousal approaches are clearly considered, staff to student levels are high for sometimes smaller areas, making it more important for staff to reduce language and consider 1 voice to reduce overstimulation.

On a few occasions, transitions could be supported more clearly, activities were extended or lost focus of the structure of the activity and making it less clear what was expected next.

APPENDIX: SURVEYS

Families of Autistic Persons - Questionnaire Responses (16)



Comments

The school have been very supportive and have worked with me to help support my child even when it doesn't work at first or they are masking and distressed later

Woodcroft have been fantastic with my son for many years. They have a good understanding of him and our family dynamic. They are always supportive and informative. They are approachable and understanding.

Mine and my sons lives have improved so much since attending Woodcroft, the care and understanding from the staff is amazing, my sons quality of life and education has improved so much, I am truly grateful for the support both he and I receive.

My daughter has attended Woodcroft for 4 years now, she started after attending mainstream school and was a complete shell of the child she is now. The staff have allowed my daughter to flourish into the amazing, confident little girl that mainstream destroyed. I will forever be grateful to Woodcroft for giving me my daughter back.

My child is very happy at Woodcroft The school has a very calm and nurturing ethos and my granddaughter is thriving. She looks forward to arriving at school each morning. I have regular updates with her teachers at home time and they are very positive and caring. She does well with her school work and receives a



lot of encouragement to help her achieve her goals. The choice of out door activities are outstanding and healthy. X is a fussy eater but she enjoys the school meals and often praises the chefs cooking. We consider ourselves blessed to have have been offered a placement at Woodcroft.

I am very happy with the support from all the staff. I am always up to date and a big thank you to all the drivers on the support worker on the day today transport, the male and female are very caring with my son an me his mum.

The support and help provided is nothing short of excellent.

Great school with great staff probably only one for PDA children

This is a brilliant setting if your child has very individual needs,time is given by each class teacher to asses and adjust accordingly.my son has extended this school for five years,and in that time we have been supported through Chris on more than one occasion,as well as altering his plan when the need arise .the starf are brilliant at there job as well as supportive to the parents .it's only my experience,but wodcroft school went above and beyond with the care of my son .no school working with children with such extreme needs can get it perfect every time . But I definitely felt that this school tried there hardest .

Sometimes in communications home via email, the information comes home late in the evening. When dealing with difficulties it's better when this information arrives earlier so you can deal with things straight away without wondering what's gone on.

APPENDIX: INFORMATION FROM THE PROVISION

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

Provide a brief description of the provision made for autistic pupils.

Independent school largely primary but accommodating some children in transition unit up until year 8 or as extraordinary Year 6

How many pupils are supported by the provision? 46

How many of this number are autistic? 43

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

5 – 13.6 Years
Pre-formal – More formal learners'
Small number; classical presentations not using spoken language functionally
Majority; autism, anxiety, attachment type presentation not motivated by National curriculum/dyslexic type literacy barriers
Significant minority pupils; who will be able to sit GCSEs go to University

What are the main approaches or methods employed by the provision in supporting autistic pupils?

SCERTS, Visuals, sign(Makaton), Elklan, Core boards, AAC –small number, Functional understanding of behaviour
Personalised programmes

What was the outcome of the provision's last statutory inspection (where appropriate)

Ofsted requires improvement March 2022

What training/ongoing professional development is provided for staff in delivering autism related approaches or methods?

Elklan, SCERTS, Mentorship Emily Rubins, SPELL, Appreciative enquiry, Transactional analysis, Specialist OT re Sensory Equilibrium/integration, Low arousal principles/environment, Team Teach autism/anxiety behaviour approach

What processes are in place to ensure that each autistic person has an individual support plan that considers their communication and sensory responses and promotes their independent and well-being?

OT, Slt and Well being Assessments and interventions to identify what individual considerations need to be undertaken – use of personalised programmes, pupil's interests and nurturing – therapeutic approach

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

Catching up with some of the interruptions of Covid upon school's cycle of staff development and training for new staff
Curriculum development to as fully as possible identify the best way of supporting our pupils and meet the requirements of the current Ofsted framework in relation to sequencing.

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

Personalised programmes
Understanding of Anxiety
Positive – pupil -centred culture
Commitment to continually be reflective and improve the children's offer.