

Autism Accreditation Assessment

Foxfield School



Reference No.	28159
Assessment dates	19-21 st June 2018
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External Moderator	Amanda Hesketh
Pre-Assessment Status	Working Towards

SECTION 1: CONTENT

About the provision

Foxfield School is a local authority special needs secondary day school for pupils with complex learning difficulties including PLMD, SLD, ASC.

The school supports a cohort of 134 pupils, 46 (48%) have a diagnosis of autism. The school has pupils with a diagnosis of autism at each age, ranging from 11-19.

The school is organised into three main areas. Key Stage 3 (11-14), Key stage 4 (14-16) and Key Stage 5 (16-19). Within each department pupils are placed in classes according to their individual learning, social and independence needs. The school delivers a broad and balanced curriculum that encourages independence throughout.

Within each department there is a SCERTS (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Supports) class for pupils who require the highest support with communication and emotional regulation.

The school has a wide range of facilities including a swimming pool and hydro pool. Each classroom has a walk-in safe space/1:1 quiet workspace. The school also has a calming room, sensory room, fully equipped gym, separate engine room and various outdoor learning spaces with bee keeping facilities. The school leases a house within the local community which is used for a variety of independent living skills lessons and overnight stays.

The school has a multi professional team of committed education staff along with therapeutic professionals including; OT, SALT, transition officer, and nurses. The school has an ethos in training its existing staff in particular approaches to support pupils further.

Outcome of most recent statutory assessment

The school was last inspected by Ofsted in October 2017. It was judged to be good overall in the one day inspection.

Some key areas of note from the report were;

- The school have created an ethos in the school that promotes pupils' welfare above all else.
- Staff are enthusiastic, compassionate and kind.
- Staff skilfully tailor resources to enable pupils to access their learning. Consequently, pupils across the school make good progress.

About the assessment

The assessment took place over 3 days. The school's adviser took over the role of lead assessor with support from a moderator.

The assessment team observed 18 sessions over a total period of 9 hours.

Observed sessions included; Speaking and Listening, PSHE, RE, SCERTS/Phonics, Independent Living Skills (ILS), PE, Snack time, Lunch, Cookery, Choir, Bee Keeping, English, and Art.

Various lead staff members were interviewed covering areas such as SCERTS, ILS, behaviour, staff induction, transitions and professional development. Along with the schools sensory lead, assessment lead, head of post 16, ASC co-ordinator, members of the autism task group and a number of staff new to the school.

The Head teacher, Deputy Head Teacher and Autism Co-ordinator gave a presentation to the assessment team giving an overview of the school and how it aims to meet the needs of autistic pupils.

Policy and procedure documents relevant to the provision for autistic pupils were also reviewed, in particular the ASC Policy, Communication Policy, Behaviour Policy, and Sensory Integration Policy.

Information on all pupils was made available, and a sample were reviewed, including positive behaviour management plans, pupil profiles, Individual Education Plans (IEP's), one page profiles, sensory profiles, and care plans.

The views of families of autistic pupils were obtained from questionnaires which were distributed by the school with 9 questionnaires (17%) being returned. 3 parents also attended a group discussion.

12 representatives from the student council were present and spoken to in a group. The school council currently has 8 pupils with a diagnosis of autism. 12 pupils who take part in the inclusion programme also spoke to the adviser as a group.

The views of 12 professionals who work closely with the school were also obtained through questionnaires.

SECTION 2: KEY FINDINGS

What the service does particularly well

What stood out as particular strengths:

The school provides an enriching curriculum with access to a range of community based purposeful learning opportunities. The schools ILS programme is embedded within lessons and accessed by pupils across the whole school. In particular the schools ILS house, located in the local community, is a unique provision offering pupils the opportunity to practise independent living skills outside of the classroom environment. The school offers all pupils the opportunity to stay overnight with a friend supported by staff members.

The layout and the environment of the school encourages pupils to develop independence. The assessment team would particularly like to highlight the school's use of signposts and colours relating to each key stage. The classrooms are consistent throughout the school based on the autism task group's "agreed classroom environment rules".

The review team would also like to highlight the work of the autism task group who ensure that the school has a robust specialist knowledge of autism specific best practice methods and approaches. The task group also recently hosted their first "Autism Fair", for parents and professionals, with a variety of informative stalls and talks on a number of current topics.

What else the service does well:

The review team would like to highlight the role played by the highly skilled intuitive support staff across the school who offer individualised and differentiated support based on a sound understanding of the diverse needs of the pupils.

The school has a range of consistent visual strategies which are implemented across the whole school and differentiated based on the pupil's needs. The school's well delivered "how is your engine running" programme allows pupils to identify self-regulation tools based on how they feel.

The school has a well-planned CPD programme including autism specific training tracked throughout the year by the ASC coordinator on the training matrix.

The SCERTS model, which has been implemented in some classes, prioritises the specific needs of the pupils. Since starting the programme the school has seen huge progress in some pupils.

Staff are highly skilled communicators across many mediums, often simultaneously. In all observations language was differentiated to reflect each pupil's cognitive and communicative level.

Bee keeping and the related enterprise activities offers pupils unique opportunities. Pupils are involved at each stage of the process including looking after the bees, extracting the honey, designing the labels and selling the honey.

The passion and enthusiasm of the staff is clear throughout the school. Staff are encouraged to create opportunities to share their passions with pupils e.g. choir, bee keeping, and football.

Each class has a "class information file" which contains all of the pupil's information and is formatted consistently throughout school. This includes an informative class overview with key information on the pupils for any cover or new staff members.

Transitions are well signposted with consistent transitional cues, visual schedules and a strong focus on routine. This ensures that autistic pupils manage such transitions without confusion or anxiety.

Governors take an active role in the running of the school. All the governors received training on "Autism – and how it affects our pupils at Foxfield" and "A day in the life of a pupil".

There is a bank of autism specific reading, PowerPoints and training resources available in the shared area for all staff to access.

The school has a well-established inclusion programme with two mainstream schools allowing pupils the opportunity to interact with pupils from other schools and participate in specialised lessons such as Art and PE.

The school constantly shares good practice, documentation and assessments with similar schools across Merseyside. The ASC coordinator has set up an "ASC coordinators group" for schools across Merseyside who meet termly to discuss current topics and to share good practise.

The work of the transition manager offering support, guidance and training allows parents to make informative decisions about their child's future.

What the service could develop further

Priorities for the service

The school should include a sensory section on the one page profile which would indicate to staff key tools and strategies. This information is currently found across a number of documents and the assessment team feel that it would be more beneficial to the school and staff if it was in one place.

Other areas to consider

The school have recently updated their IEP format – moving towards IEP's and a curriculum that is more closely aligned with EHCP and personalised targets. Work has already been done by the autism task group breaking down SCERTS targets. Further work should be done so that this is implemented effectively throughout the school.

Further training should be given to staff so that documentation is consistent throughout school.

The school should continue to develop the induction programme for new staff so that it complements the schools current induction process. Future developments identified by the school are an online autism specific module and opportunities to meet with the autism task group. This will be expected of all staff within school.

The school must implement a succession plan for the ASC coordinator, as the present post holder is leaving the role in July.

The school should continue to develop the woodland area so that it is accessible to all.

SECTION 3: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The school has a robust induction process including autism specific training for staff. For the 2018 inductions, the school aims to implement a new process making it compulsory for all staff to complete an autism specific module, which will be overseen by the ASC coordinator. All new staff will also be given a copy of the autism policy which highlights key areas and approaches.

All new staff currently receive a range of communication training specific to the needs of the pupils in their class. In house training for staff includes; PEC's, Objects of reference, Body Signing, Colourful Semantics, Cued Articulation, PODD, Makaton, and Eye gaze. Staff also receive training on SCERTS, Team-Teach and the "how is your engine running" programme.

There is a clear commitment to the training of staff in all roles across the school. Staff receive an on-going programme of professional development. Over the last year there has been training in PODD, autistic girls and women, Team-Teach, sensory integration, pathological demand avoidance (PDA), Makaton and SCERTS.

The SaLT has worked closely with staff to implement interventions within the classroom. More work is planned to be done on upskilling staff in a range of strategies next year.

The ASC coordinator and a parent governor have provided training to the governors on autism. This was at the request of the governors who wanted more information on autism.

The ASC coordinator at Foxfield has attended a range of NAS training events. The ASC coordinator has also delivered training to the whole staff, external professionals and parents on autism and girls. All staff are encouraged to continually upskill in areas which they are passionate about.

The school has 5 "Team-Teach" trainers who also train local services. The trainers run refresher courses for the whole staff team every year as well as specific training sessions. Training by the team is continuously led throughout the year by the needs of the pupils. The school's 3 advanced team teach trainers have been recognised by the Team-Teach programme and have worked closely in the development of the programmes documentation and training manuals.

Training needs are identified by staff in performance management meetings. Future training is then led by these. Staff training is also tracked on a training matrix by the ASC coordinator. This allows the school to identify any areas where further training is required. Staff are encouraged to attend courses relevant to their current cohort of pupils after which they are asked to feedback to the whole school team so that all staff are aware of the programmes purpose and outcomes.

Staff also attend and contribute to the Mersey schools training day. Staff sign up to one of many workshops delivered at the Mersey schools training day once a year; workshops include a wide variety of training including understanding autism, sensory integration and positive behaviour management.

The school has hosted a public Autism Fair for parents and professionals. There were stalls with information about other service providers across Merseyside and speakers on a variety of topics including; Autism and Yoga, Therapy Dogs Nationwide, PDA,

Autistic girls and supporting siblings of autistic people. This allowed staff to develop relationships and information on other service providers.

In conclusion, a high-quality programme of continuous Professional Development is in place. It ensures that staff have a robust specialist knowledge of autism specific best practice methods and approaches. Systems are in place to ensure that practice is highly personalised and maintained at a consistent high level throughout the provision

SECTION 4: PERSON CENTRED SUPPORT

Differences in Social Communication

The schools communication policy states that "Communication underpins all aspects of the curriculum and therefore we are committed to providing an environment that develops all pupils' expressive and receptive skills through a total communication approach".

The policy highlights key approaches for staff to support communication in the classroom, all of which were observed during the assessment. They included:

- Simplified precise language
- PODD books
- Board maker and WWS for individual visuals
- PECS
- Makaton
- Visual timetables

The school staff have access to a range of communication assessments referenced in the communication policy. Each pupil is assessed using the "WellComm" assessments at the beginning of each year to track progress and plan future intervention. Supplementary assessments as detailed in communication policy, may be used to further analyse the expressive language skills of some pupils. Further assessment of communication and language skills are carried out if needed by the Speech and Language Therapist.

The SCERTS model has been introduced as a tool to identify areas of development in social communication and to track progress. Communication targets are integrated into each pupil's IEP including SCERTS targets where appropriate, which are reviewed on at regular intervals throughout the school year.

Information about each pupils preferred method of communication is shared on the pupil profiles and one page profiles. This identifies 'what I understand' 'how I communicate' and 'how you can support me'.

Throughout observations staff understood and used pupils preferred method of communication. Visuals, to aid communication, were seen throughout school and also within the community house. Makaton was also used where appropriate by staff alongside spoken language.

An objects of reference programme is in place for some pupils with individualised detailed plans.

Augmentative communication is used for pupils on school tours. When the pupils point the iPad at the classroom door the iPad will play a video of someone signing and reading the classrooms name.

In all observations it was found that the autistic pupils were supported in their preferred method of communication. For example at snack time pupils were given a variety of individualised communication tools including individual placemats, PODD books; staff also used Makaton alongside these visual supports.

Where best practise was observed, in all sessions, differentiated language reflected each pupil's cognitive and communicative ability. Staff also use a variety of visual aids to support pupils depending on the need of the pupil, ranging from written instructions to more symbolic aids.

In the majority of sessions staff waited for pupils to respond, sometimes taking up to 15 seconds, before offering prompts. This was seen as good practice as pupils were given time to process the information. In two sessions the assessment team thought that the pupils were being prompted too soon by the staff not allowing enough processing time.

Self-reliance and problem solving

The school's prospectus states that "Developing pupils' independence skills is a priority for the school"

Staff use their knowledge and understanding of the SPELL framework to create a predictable, safe and accessible environment.

Transitions are well signposted with consistent transitional cues, visual schedules and a strong focus on routine. This ensures that autistic pupils manage such transitions without confusion or anxiety.

Whole class visual timetables were found to be representative of activities that pupils were engaged in and staff made reference to these when transitioning between activities. Individualised timetables were also available for some pupils. Progression was seen throughout school with the higher ability KS5 group having a more traditional weekly timetable.

Now and next boards were used in some sessions to aid transitions between activities.

The layout of the school encourages pupils to develop independence with signposts and colour coding. Each key stage has a colour which runs throughout the corridors, classrooms and even on the window sills.

The Independent Living Skill (ILS) programme is embedded throughout school. Each class in KS3 and KS4 have one morning timetabled per week taking part in an ILS session. Classes follow a rolling programme throughout the year focusing on 3 key areas; community, domestic living and personal care. In KS4 and KS5 these are linked to qualifications such as ASDAN.

The school has a house within the local community which is available for classes to access during lesson time as well as for overnight stays. This allows pupils to practise domestic skills such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing, making the bed and other independent living skills within a real world environment.

During ILS sessions staff create opportunities for problem solving for pupils. An example includes not having enough money to buy food or missing the bus. Pupils are

supported through these situations by staff. Classes also learn the value of money through these session by having a class bank account. This helps pupils learn the value of money when in the community or on trips.

Enterprise activities such as the post 16 soup kitchen and bee keeping give pupils the opportunity to develop purposeful independence skills.

The school has high expectations for all pupils to develop independence. Parents stated that they had seen a "huge change" in their child's independence since attending Foxfield and that they "couldn't believe what they were actually capable of".

All lessons observed encouraged pupils to be independent, differentiating work so that it was accessible to each individual pupil. Visual supports were also seen in all lessons so that the autistic pupils could work out what they had to do. This was found in a range of formats including lists on a personal whiteboard, print outs, individual timetables, work sheets, and now and next boards. Where best practise was observed staff members offered differentiated visual support within lessons.

Where best practise was observed pupils took control of their own learning. For example in the SCERTS class pupils followed their individual timetable to work through a number of different tasks. One pupil also used their emotional key cards to identify self-regulation strategies.

Where best practise was also observed, in most sessions, pupils were presented with situations where they needed to problem solve. Where appropriate, staff let pupils try tasks with little staff input before prompting. In two sessions the assessment team felt that pupils were prompted to soon after being asked a question. Staff should ensure that they allow pupils adequate processing time before prompting.

Sensory Experience

The school's policy for "Sensory Integration and Modulation" states that "Sensory Modulation aims to provide pupils with supports so they are able to balance out their sensory needs and are able to be "Just right and ready to learn"".

The phrase "just right and ready to learn" was used by staff when referring to the "How is your engine running" programme. Pupils are initially encouraged to use the terms "too slow" "too fast" or "just right". The programme provides strategies so that pupils can learn to self-regulate. As pupils transition through school the emotional literacy is increased on the emotional regulation charts.

Pupils were seen to be supported by a range of tools including fiddle toys, weighted blankets/jackets, ear defenders, chew toys, wobble cushions and more. Staff recognised the importance and timing of these inputs.

The school's environment is low arousal and consistent throughout. Each classroom is free from clutter with an outside space and break out room for pupils to access safely during lessons. The layout of the school means that pupils also have safe spaces on internal corridors which were used when transitioning into the classroom.

All classrooms are consistent throughout the school, based on the autism task groups "agreed classroom environment rules". Termly checklist are completed by staff to ensure that the standards are being met consistently.

Staff seemed attuned to children's behaviour and responses. To help staff understand and analyse new behaviours the school uses video analysis from the CCTV in each room. The class team and Team-Teach trainer will then review the footage to try to identify the function of the behaviour.

A sensory checklist has been completed for each autistic pupil at home and in school. The data from this was used to highlight a cohort of pupils with the greatest sensory need. This has led to sensory diets being created by the school in conjunction with an occupational therapist.

Sensory Profiles are completed by an Occupational Therapist on any individual who is identified as having significant sensory issues. The therapist has compiled sensory plans for some of the school's most complex pupils.

Some of the pupil's self-regulation tools were identified on their positive behaviour management plans. The assessment team felt that the school needs to create a section identifying each pupil's sensory tools on the pupil passport. For example "Things to help me regulate". This would then allow all staff and pupils to identify these the tools.

The schools engine room is available for the pupils to access throughout the day. The room contains a mixture of gym and sensory equipment. The room can be used as a sensory circuit or just accessed as a regulation activity.

In all observations pupils had access to sensory activities which they found enjoyable and relaxing. In many cases pupils were able to access these independently.

During a number observations pupils were encouraged to try new sensory experiences.

Where best practice was observed staff utilised sensory resources such as ear defenders, chews, wobble cushions as appropriate. These resources were seen to be used around the whole school.

Further best practice was observed when staff worked calmly and consistently to support children that presented as anxious or who were displaying behaviour associated with sensory overload. Staff utilised the resources well and worked at the child's level and pace to provide effective and timely support. Staff understood each pupil's needs and how they regulate. Pupils were seen accessing the engine room, breakout room, sensory room and outside spaces throughout the assessment.

During observations the outside space for each classroom was used effectively with staff understanding when pupils needed a break between tasks.

Emotional well-being

One of Foxfield's four distinct aims for the school as a whole is "to provide a happy, caring, stimulating, supportive, respectful and safe environment."

The school's prospectus states that "Our overriding priority is to provide an environment in which all pupils are happy and enjoy being a part of our school. We want pupils to develop self-respect and confidence".

Each pupil's one page profile is written from their perspective and includes "Important people" and "Why people like and admire me". This document also includes sections on "how best to support me" "How I communicate" and "likes and dislikes". This document promotes emotional well-being by identifying information which is important to each child individually.

The function of communication is identified on the Positive Behaviour Management Plan so that staff can understand why the pupil is displaying certain behaviours. Key strategies to keep students regulated are also highlighted in this document as well as in the pupil's one page profile.

The school has also been working on further developing pupils understanding of their emotions with every class having an emotional regulation display with class strategies. A number of pupils have individualised strategies on keyrings which identify regulation tools to the pupils depending on how they are feeling.

Independence is promoted throughout school and staff have high expectations of pupils. Staff's passion and enthusiasm is clear throughout the school and provides pupils with positive role models. Praise and positive reinforcement were observed throughout school in both planned and incidental observations. Staff joined pupils for dinner and acted as facilitators to promote positive interactions and communication.

Pupils create a "my aspirations" document within their file which references aspirations as they move through the school. Pupils are asked to think about the future and the school aims to offer opportunities for pupils to complete a number of work placements in roles which they identify. Where appropriate pupils in post 16 take part in work experience once a week throughout the year, across a number of different settings.

Self-regulation has been a focus of the autism task group who have worked to break down targets so that staff can understand what constitutes to a successful outcome.

The school choir gives pupils the opportunity to perform with others. Makaton is also signed throughout the choir so that everyone is able to access the sessions. The choir recently performed at a local festival. The school also has a signing choir with South Wirral School as part of the inclusion programme.

The inclusion programme gives around 30 pupils the opportunity to attend two local mainstream schools. The pupils spoke highly of this programme and said that it has allowed them to "make more friends" and "try new things".

Where pupils needed support to self-regulate and to manage behaviour, staff support was seen to be timely and effective. Individual Positive Behaviour Management Plans are developed in consultation with families and therapists, based on a detailed assessment of the behaviour. These plans identify strategies to minimise triggers and de-escalate situations with physical intervention regarded as a last resort.

In all observations, it was found that autistic pupils presented as relaxed and engaged

in rewarding and purposeful activities. Where best practise was observed in all sessions pupils were confident to express their own opinions.

In all observations staff remained calm and gave sensitive support to children that presented as upset or anxious.

All but one lesson was seen to offer sufficient challenge to autistic pupils with pupils feeling a sense of completion and achievement in purposeful activities. In one session it was thought that the staff could provide more challenge.

SECTION 5: CONSULTATION AND WORKING

With autistic people

Pupils play an active role in the running and the development of the school. Pupils have led on developments such as the school logo and the honey labels.

The student council play an active role in decision making within the school. This year the student council have worked closely with SLT to identify 1 target for the school development plan.

8 pupils with autism from the school council attended a meeting with the adviser. The pupils feel that they have a key role within school and wear their school council badges with pride. The school council is selected by an election; all pupils in school have the option to run for election.

Pupils spoke about the opportunities they have to attend a 5 day residential each year as well as the chance to stay over at the ILS house with staff. These were both highlighted by the pupils as their "favourite thing".

Pupils feel that they are listened to and respected. All post 16 pupils who are able to access work experience, have the opportunity to do so. One student stated that he wanted to work at ASDA and so the school arranged a 12 week work experience programme at the local store.

12 pupils attended 2 different meetings to discuss the schools inclusion programme. Pupils have the opportunity to attend a mainstream school on a rolling programme throughout the year. The pupils also take part in joint events with other schools such as the signing choir and football tournaments.

One student stated that "the school lets me be independent so I feel grown up".

Nine pupils provided feedback to the assessment team by returning completed questionnaires. The full results are shown as an appendix to this report. 78% of the pupils believed that the support they were given was good or sometimes good. 89% of responses stated that staff understand their needs and listen to how they want to be helped.

The only comment present from the questionnaires was "When I feel angry they listen to me."

With the families of autistic people

The school's prospectus states that "Foxfield has an open door policy. This means that parents and carers are entitled to contact or come into school at any time to discuss problems or concerns".

The school employs a transition manager to support pupils and their parents when making a transition out of school. Person centred planning with the pupils and parents starts in year 9 with a broad focus on future aspirations.

From year 10 the transition manager works closely with parents providing them with information and support. One parent stated that it was "reassuring to have someone who understands all the options to support me through the process".

The impartial advice provided by the transition manager allows parents to make an informative decision about future placements.

The transition manager also organises and hosts parent workshops fortnightly. The workshops are well attended by parents, with each session having a specific focus.

Recent workshops include;

- Transitions and post school planning
- Social care transitioning
- Financial planning
- Using visuals at home
- E-safety
- Sex Education
- Residential courses
- Behaviour

External services are also invited to come and speak to families about future placements during the workshops.

3 parents attended a parent forum at school during the assessment. The parents all spoke very highly of the school and its "open door policy" towards parents. Some parents have volunteered in the school which has helped them to understand the approaches used.

Parents stated that the communication between school and home was good with staff writing in the student's diaries and sending pictures home. This means a lot to some parents whose children find it difficult to communicate.

The parents highlighted the work that the school does in encouraging independence through trips, community work, and residential trips. One parent stated that "The school goes above and beyond to include everyone in trips".

9 family members provided feedback to the assessment team by returning completed questionnaires. The full results are shown in the appendix to this report. 78% of family members stated that the support was good or always good for their child, with the other 22% stating it was ok, but could be better.

78% of returns stated that staff's understanding of their child's needs is good or always good with 67% of responses stating that the advice they receive from the school is good or always good.

Some comments from the questionnaires are found below.

"The ASC coordinator has always answered any questions or concerns I've had regarding my [relative]. The staff have lots of things in place in school to help my [relative's] daily school life"

"The support I have received from Foxfield over the years has been invaluable. The staff are extremely knowledgeable, caring and know how to get the best out of severely autistic children. No wonder they are oversubscribed!"

"We always received wonderful support and encouragement for our [relative] through Foxfield School. We are very happy with his progression through the years."

SECTION 6: SUMMARY

Foxfield is an inclusive, positive and supportive environment which nurtures its pupils and provides individualised support. Staff are passionate, knowledgeable and enthusiastic which was seen throughout the assessment.

The schools ILS programmes offers pupils unique opportunities to develop independence.

All staff in the school have a good knowledge of autism and the strategies used within the school which allows a consistent approach at every part of the pupil's day.

In observations undertaken during the assessment, both planned and incidental, children were seen to be on task in lessons, staff provided differentiated learning opportunities and children appeared engaged and motivated. Relationships between staff and pupils were positive and staff understand the needs of each pupil.