

Autism Accreditation Assessment

Birch Wood School

Reference No.	28433
Assessment dates	8 th -10 th October 2019
Lead Assessor	Stephanie de Vries
External Moderator	Emma Griffiths
Status prior to the assessment	Working Towards
Advanced status applied for	N/A

Section 1: Context

About the Provision

Brief description of the provision made for autistic people:

According to information provided by the school:

Birch Wood School is a successful and vibrant area special school that serves Melton and surrounding areas in Leicestershire. Within the Birch Wood School community we have 179 students on roll across two separate sites. We provide a highly specialised learning environment that allows us to meet a wide range of needs. All students have Education, Health and Social Care Plans (EHCP). At Birch Wood we cater for children from EYFS through to Post 16 with PMLD, SLD and MLD. We also offer a highly successful Autism Provision where students can access an autism specific learning environment whilst also benefiting from the wider facilities that the school has to offer. Students within the Provision are viewed as individuals and individuality is encouraged and celebrated.

There are students with autism in every class throughout Birch Wood School and therefore we provide an environment and curriculum that is organised to best meet the needs of autistic children and young people. Our school strives to ensure that each classroom is organised in a way that is structured and meaningful for pupils with an ASC. Due to the diverse needs of the pupils across Birch Wood School, classrooms may differ in how they are set out. The majority of children and young people at Birch Wood have more than 1 SEND. However, we have a commitment to all pupils with an ASC and by making simple adjustments to our school we have created an environment which is mindful of the 4 areas of difference and conducive to a positive learning experience for all.

Number of autistic people supported by the provision: 78

Range of autistic people supported by the provision:

According to school prospectus:

At our Grange Drive site we cater for children from EYFS to-Key Stage 4 (4yrs-16yrs) with PMLD, SLD and MLD.

We are also very proud to offer a high functioning Autism provision situated on the site. Birch Wood Vale caters for pupils aged 11-19 with multiple learning difficulties on the moderate learning difficulties spectrum including Autism. We also offer a secondary high functioning Autism provision situated on the Birch Wood Vale site.

Outcome of last statutory assessment (Body; date, outcome):

OFSTED, June 2018, 'The school continues to be Good'.

About the Assessment

- The assessment took place over 3 days.
- The provision's adviser acted as assessor with support from a moderator.
- The assessment team observed 15 sessions. These included pupil's arriving and transitioning to classrooms, communication, English, Maths, break times, social time, interventions and discovery play, Moving Together.
- Discussions were held with staff members, including the Head Teacher, Deputy Head teacher, Transition Manager, Autism Lead, SENCO and Assistant Head teacher, EYFS Specialist Leader of Education, SaLT, communications lead, autistic pupils and their families.
- Personal files were sampled across each key stage.
- The results of surveys carried with the families of autistic pupils were also considered.

Section 2: Key Findings

What the provision does particularly well

What stood out as particular strengths:

- The ENABLES vision and ethos is clearly established across the school creating a positive, solution focused culture. Staff spoke enthusiastically about the change in culture and the commitment to create an inclusive learning community and a positive, autism friendly learning environment. There is a culture of high aspirations for all pupils that focuses on individual, personal and academic achievement.
- The calm, well-structured environment of the school creates an enabling environment for autistic pupils. Classrooms are well organised and provide clearly planned areas to facilitate group work areas, independent areas and leisure areas. Displays are purposeful and confined to display boards and resources are clearly labelled. This helps to create a more predictable and accessible environment for autistic pupils.
- The specialist autism provision provides a highly bespoke learning environment, providing autistic pupils with a safe, nurturing and calm environment. Staff within the provision are highly trained and have an in-depth understanding of autism which enables staff to support pupils in reaching their full potential.
- Good and positive relationships were observed between staff and pupils in all sessions. There was lots of positive praise and encouragement. Throughout all observations pupils presented as calm, happy and engaged in their learning. Signs of anxiety and distress were uncommon or were addressed in ways which prevent them escalating.
- The pupil led sessions using pupil's special interests to motivate them in their learning are an area of strength. Which is backed by the data, which shows that these sessions are having a positive effect on pupils well-being and happiness.
- Throughout the assessment it was evident that the introduction of the 'Chirpy Scale' across the whole school has had a positive impact. Both pupils and staff spoke openly about how they were feeling that day using the 'chirpy scale'. Pupils can 'bounce' up the scale or down throughout the day allowing pupils to 'check' in with their emotions regularly throughout the day. This supports pupils to understand and-regulate their emotions.
- Transitions both in and out of the school are thoroughly planned around the needs and wishes of the pupils helping to reduce the anxieties of pupils either coming to the school or moving on. Much evidence was seen of the person centered approach to transitions and the great detail and thought put into the planning of transitions.
- There is a robust on-going CPD package which creates a culture of growing professional development through the school's commitment to putting Research

Lesson Study, reflective practice and coaching at the heart of staff development.

What else the provision does well:

- Using the Tapestry platform to communicate with families how each child has developed in their learning journey. This is an excellent way to share such successful learning experiences that the child is having at Birch Wood that parents/carers would not necessarily get to see without the use of this system!
- Pupil Voice is strong across the school and the evidence shows that pupils' suggestions are being implemented which gives pupils a sense of pride and ownership of their school

What the provision could develop further

Priorities for the provision:

As identified in the school's autism accreditation development plan the assessment team would encourage the school to further develop these areas:

- To collaborate with the local authority to share a successful model for delivering Provision for Autistic learners through developing further mechanisms for providing support, training and best practice ethos to other schools.
- Further development of the 'sensory lifestyle' within the school. Whilst there are areas of the school where the sensory needs of the pupils are met, well planned and delivered and sensory diets/activities are evident, there is a need for sensory integration theory to be more deeply implemented across the whole school. The school recently commissioned an independent OT to come and work within the school in order to support this development
- Excellent progress has been made by the school in providing practical experiences for students in preparing them for adulthood, including a more robust work experience and careers advice program. The school is encouraged to establish greater links with employers and to promote the inclusion of young people with autism within the local workforce.

Other areas to consider:

- The language used for target outcomes in some classes should be simplified into language that the child can understand at *their* level in order to provide a better understanding of what is expected of them.

Section 3: Professional Development

Main approaches or methods employed by the provision in supporting autistic people

The school states in the assessment introduction form:

We do not have 'blanket approaches' for supporting our autistic learners. We are passionate about ensuring that approaches or methods of support are adapted in order to meet the needs of the individual. However, we do employ strategies that are influenced by many evidence based approaches. Some of our children and young people use PECS as a way to communicate and we have highly skilled staff and SALT who support them with this. Makaton signing and the use of symbols is commonplace within the school, especially at our Grange Drive site. We lead in the training and development of the EDR: Positive Behaviour for Learning package which is used by school leaders across Leicestershire. The EDR Theoretical Framework is based on five components they are; are Positive Behaviour Support; Behaviour for Learning; Token Economy; Restorative Practice; and Pupil Voice. These 5 components influence our approach significantly. We have structured approaches to certain learning opportunities that are influenced by TEACCH. As a school we have used the SPELL Framework to shape and influence the way we support autistic individuals.

Training staff receive in these approaches and in understanding autism as part of their induction

The school has a robust induction training programme which includes training in Child Protection & Peer on Peer Abuse, Positive Behaviour for Learning Training which includes exploring the principles of Positive Behaviour Support, Restorative Practice, Pupil Voice, Behaviour for Learning and Token Economy. An Introduction to Autism and an Autism Friendly School Training and Autism Education Trust Tier 1 Making Sense of Autism Training is also part of induction training.

On-going support and professional development available to staff in working with autistic individuals

The school is committed to encouraging and developing a reflective culture amongst the staff team in order to provide best outcomes for all the students. The school has developed 'Lesson Research Groups' which create opportunities for staff to reflect on practice and consider how this practice can be improved. Lesson studies have included research into the benefits of Rebound Therapy, the use of Colourful Semantics and the impact of using special interests with students with autism.

All staff have Autism Education Trust Tier 2 training. Staff receive regular professional development opportunities delivered by the Autism Lead. All staff have regular communication training including Makaton (new staff are trained to Level 4 and all experienced staff have been trained to Level 8) PECS and Communicate In Print. The school has developed an Autism Champions Initiative which ensures that there are Autism Champions working within the school, who through extended training and development opportunities are able to support the students to achieve their own personal best.

Staff have training in structured approaches and use the SPELL Framework as a regular reflection tool. All staff receive training on Chirpy and Bounce- a system created by the Educational Psychologist which enables students to gain an understanding of their emotions and develop strategies to regulate these emotions. Staff also benefited from the interactive, group training session delivered by our Educational Psychologist 'How to talk so children will listen and how to listen so children will talk.'

Through a partnership with Stephenson College the school also offer staff an opportunity to gain Level 2 Certificate in Understanding Autism. Staff use the Autism Education Trust- 'Competency Framework' to audit their own understanding of Autism and the Autism Lead then uses the results from these audits to ensure that appropriate professional development opportunities are provided.

Section 4: Person Centred Support

Brief description of how individual support is planned, implemented and evaluated:

Birch Wood School takes great pride in focusing on a person-centred approach throughout all aspects of a student's education. This approach comes through robust monitoring of a young person's progress against their EHCP Outcomes. The school have developed Progress Passports where on a half termly basis, students are able to reflect how they are progressing against each target and staff have an opportunity to see whether alternative support may be required to benefit the young person. The system ensures that the objectives identified within the EHCP are fundamental to the provision provided for the individual.

Differences in Social Communication

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

All pupils have a communication plan which identify each autistic pupil's skills and challenges in social communication and any challenges they may experience in expressing themselves. For example in one pupils' file it is noted that 'I can follow simple instructions. If I am not sure of a question I will appear confused and not answer.' Another plan states 'I am a verbal communicator and I like to talk about things that I find interesting. I am able to process and understand language that is delivered in a structured manner.'

Communication plans describe how staff should modify their communication and what communication aids they should employ in order to make themselves understood. For example, in one person's plan it states that staff should use 'objects of reference and simple concise language alongside Makaton.

Progress passports provide evidence that each autistic pupil is set realistic goals related to their communication and social engagement and evidence that pupils achieve positive outcomes in relations to these goals. For example all pupils have a 'My outcomes progress passport' section detailing targets such as 'X will be able to communicate via language to an adult what he wants/would like to do.' Progress is monitored termly.

During one interview a member of staff explained that one pupil was having a difficult time and staff felt it may be due to their receptive communication difficulties. With the help of the SaLT staff introduced strategies such as modifying language, chunking

information and giving processing time. The pupil is now much more settled and has reacted positively to these changes.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

In all observations staff made themselves understood by modifying and simplifying their spoken language. Staff were observed to give simple whole class instructions and deliver information in manageable 'chunks'. Processing time was given to pupils to allow them time to think before answering questions. Makaton was used consistently by staff across the school

A range of communication techniques were observed to be used by autistic pupils across the school. For example the use of low-tech alternative augmentative communication devices, PECs, tablets with communication apps and Makaton signing. Staff were able to adapt with ease to each child and their preferred communication method, which made lessons flow. In one observation the use of music and singing was a strong feature throughout the class, allowing the children to communicate their greeting in a meaningful way.

Pupils were frequently provided with opportunity and purpose to interact with staff and each other. In lessons opportunities to work in small groups and pairs were observed. The lunchtime clubs which all pupils attend provide an excellent opportunity for pupils to interact with others who share the same interests and develop their communication and interaction skills.

Self-reliance and Problem Solving

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Progress passports describe how best to support autistic pupils in their independent functioning. For example one pupil's goal is to 'follow adult instructions to make a smoother transition between school and transport.' Strategies described to support the pupils to achieve this include 'staff will support x to have a calmer last 30 mins of the day so that he is ready for transition. Staff will use countdowns through timers. X will be last to leave classroom so there are less distractions. Praised for the days efforts.'

Progress passports provide evidence that each pupil is set realistic goals related to their independent functioning; for example X will begin to choose her own dinner from the hatch.' Strategies to support pupils to achieve this target include, using a 'visual schedule to ease anxiety about the hall and to reassure return to class. Use talk pad to support choice at the hatch. Transition early to the hall before noise.

Staff were able to talk knowledgeably about transitions and the different strategies used to help reduce pupil's anxiety around these times. The adviser was shown examples of personalised transition timetables which provided clear instructions of timings of meetings, supporting staff, where the person was going, for one young person photos were also included in his timetable.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

In all observations autistic pupils could work out what they must do now and what they are expected to do next. Whole class timetables in written, symbol and objects of reference format were observed in all classrooms. Pupils were observed referring to individual timetables and where appropriate Now and Next boards were observed to be used.

All classrooms were found to be well organised and the resources accessible to students, resources were clearly labelled in both pictorial and written forms, as required

In all observations autistic pupils were supported to do things for themselves rather than constantly wait to be told what to do by a member of staff. Where best practice was observed work was differentiated to the level of the pupil and special interests were used within the task to keep pupils motivated and engaged. Pupils were observed using checklists independently to check off completed tasks and move on to the next task.

In all observations pupils were observed making decisions and expressing opinions. For example in one observation the pupils were asked to give the teacher a story from the news after having watched a 60 second news clip. All pupils were able to recall a news story and share their thoughts with the class.

Sensory Experiences

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Progress passports identify sensory experiences which autistic pupils find relaxing or enjoyable as well as those that cause discomfort. For example sensory issues are clearly identified in Behaviour support plans, in one pupil's file it describes sensory issues such as 'loud noises may upset or over stimulate, busy environments..'

Progress passports describe how best to support autistic pupils in regulating sensory input, examples include use of; Ear defenders in noisy environments, chew tubes, fiddle toys, provide deep sensory massage/squeezes.

Progress passports provide evidence that autistic pupils achieve positive outcomes related to experiencing and regulating sensory input for example one pupil's target is to develop his tolerance of different textured foods within his mouth.' Progress is clearly being monitored in the outcomes section of the progress passports and to-date the pupil is managing to 'sample different foods within preparation for adulthood weekly sessions and is clearly developing in his progress.'

During one observation a member of staff explained that they were using acetate and laminated paper for one pupil to support him to write on paper as he had sensory issues with paper which prohibited him from writing on it. This strategy was observed to be working well enabling the pupil to write a small amount of text, whilst working towards eventually being able to write on paper without using acetate.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

In all observations autistic pupils had access to activities which they found enjoyable and relaxing. For example in one observation the teacher was using the 'bucket' to pull out objects which were both visually and auditory stimulating for pupils. A Balloon was pumped up and let go which pupils obviously enjoyed.

Outdoor playtime was observed at the Birch Wood Vale site with children seeming relaxed and happy to interact with each other. There was a good balance of staff to pupil ratio and there were group games of basketball and children who preferred their own company. Break times offered a great opportunity for pupils to explore a range of outdoor playground equipment, such as climbing frames, pitches and other sensory equipment for them to explore.

In most observations where appropriate autistic pupils were observed to be wearing ear defenders and using fiddle toys and chews to help regulate sensory experiences. One pupil was observed to be supported to request some time outside when he was obviously finding it challenging to settle in the classroom.

Emotional Well-being

Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

Progress passports identify preferred activities and interests of each autistic person. For example, 'X enjoys rhymes and repetitive songs, singing and 'performing' to adults. Another passport describes that pupil X 'loves the wind'.

Progress passports provide evidence that autistic pupils are set realistic goals related to their emotional well-being. For example, one pupils' target is to 'To engage in an

activity with another student during choosing time, play time or an activity.’ Another pupil’s is to ‘develop relationships with more appropriate responses to actions.’

Behaviour support plans focus on proactive strategies to avoid an autistic person becoming anxious or stressed. For example, in one pupil’s file strategies described included ‘refer to your target card, access small classroom, refer to the rewards system’.

One page profiles describe what is important to the autistic pupil: For example, one pupil’s profile stated ‘I like to be with people so that I can build up a relationship with them. I like structure and routine, knowing what is happening next is important to me’.

Progress passports provide evidence autistic pupils achieve positive outcomes. Evidence shows that EHCP objectives/targets are regularly tracked and monitored showing clear progress made by pupils.

During interviews one pupil showed the lead assessor his ‘okay/I need help’ card and explained that when there was a lot of people around and it was difficult for him to say what he wanted he could use his card and staff understood and would help him.

Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:

In all observations autistic pupils presented as happy, relaxed and content. Relationships between staff and pupils were positive and nurturing there was a genuine ethos of care across the school. Staff were consistently heard to use positive praise and encouragement.

In all observations autistic pupils were supported to understand and regulate their emotions. It was evident through observations that the introduction of the ‘Chirpy Scale’ has had a positive impact throughout the whole school. Where best practice was observed one pupil was reflecting about the lesson, his mood score in the morning was a 4, he was asked, ‘What has made you bounce as you were a 4 this morning and now you are a 7!?’ He replied that he had ‘enjoyed the construction lesson’ and his mood score was much higher as a result.

The school has a reward system which was observed to be used consistently across the school and differentiated according to the pupils as well as the class needs. Some pupils were working towards a class reward, such as watching a movie with popcorn and others were working towards individual goals, they selected and negotiated rewards with the staff. In one observation a pupil was observed putting a star in his reward chart this enabled him to experience a sense of completion and achievement.

Section 5: Consultation

With Autistic People

No questionnaires were returned from autistic pupils. The school explained that they had used their Facebook, website and school newsletter to encourage responses.

The school shared data from their January 2019 student survey which showed an overwhelmingly positive response from students with regards to the following questions;

- Teaching helps me to do activities by myself
- Teachers listen to me
- Teachers help me to be better
- Children are well behaved in my school
- Teaching is good at my school
- I feel safe at my school
- I am happy at my school

There is a strong Student Voice at both sites, this has impacted in the change to IT, outdoor facilities, lunchtime clubs, transport and the points system.

Interviews were held with 6 autistic pupils from across the school, comments included;

'I like swimming.'

'I like soft play.'

'Every day is interesting, I go to Melton to have lunch and walk through the town on Friday's. I do work experience on Monday's in a café. I clean tables and serve customers.'

'We have good support.'

'I do think there are staff to talk to when you need to.'

'When my dog passed away they helped me a lot, they gave me a chilled two days and told me to write stuff down, that really helped.'

With families of Autistic People

The lead assessor had the opportunity to speak to 3 parents, comments included:

'My son didn't want to come home last night, he loves school so much.'

'It's a great school, so much support, he so much more confident here, he loves school.'

'We are seeing a change in our son already, we are seeing a happy, content child. The progress he is making is incredible.'
'The staff really understand autism.'

22 questionnaires from the families of autistic pupils were received.

- 77% stated that the support their relative receives is always good
- 77% stated that the understanding that staff have for their relative's autistic needs is always good
- 59% stated that the way they are kept informed and asked their views about how their relative is supported is always good
- 32% stated that the way they are kept informed and asked their views about how their relative is supported is mostly good
- 68% stated that the advice they get from the service on how to help their relative is always good
- 18% that the advice they get from the service on how to help their relative is mostly good

Comments included:

The Birchwood staff in the Autism Provision have a fantastic knowledge and understanding of autism and the different presentations of this. They are flexible around needs as well as being brilliant at focussing on the strengths of the young people, whilst constantly striving to enable them to meet their targets in areas of difficulties.

The support received at school has been excellent and the staff have been very proactive in making changes for my child when they've been needed. They go above and beyond to make sure all children are included regardless of their needs. My child is very happy at school and loves the routine there.

APPENDIX 1: SURVEYS

Families of Autistic People

The support my relative is given is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		4.55%	1
3	mostly good		18.18%	4
4	always good		77.27%	17
			answered	22
			skipped	0

The understanding that staff have for my relative's autistic needs is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		4.55%	1
3	mostly good		18.18%	4
4	always good		77.27%	17
			answered	22
			skipped	0

The way I am kept informed and asked my views about how my relative is supported is...

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		9.09%	2
3	mostly good		31.82%	7
4	always good		59.09%	13
			answered	22
			skipped	0

The advice I get from the service on how to help my relative is...

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		13.64%	3
3	mostly good		18.18%	4
4	always good		68.18%	15
			answered	22
			skipped	0

Comments: Please note you are not required to comment below, if you do so they may be quoted in the final report. Our questionnaires are anonymous and Autism Accreditation cannot be held responsible for comments which identify any individual. (8)



The advice I get from the service on how to help my relative is...			Response Percent	Response Total
1	11/07/2019 09:57 AM ID: 121830145	My son has attended this school for 7 years and has been incredibly happy and well supported. I cannot speak highly enough of the school and staff. He has sailed through his education with no issues at all which David's an awful lot of how amazing the staff have been		
2	11/07/2019 10:01 AM ID: 121830612	Overall my relative gets the help, support and guidance that he needs on a daily basis and we, as a family, feel included on how the school achieves this.		
3	11/07/2019 10:10 AM ID: 121831447	When a child is non verbal, it should be mandatory that the day diary is filled in.		
4	11/07/2019 11:12 AM ID: 121840146	The school not only assists my son they make sure I am informed of everything going on and communicate to me any information they feel would be of benefit to me. There dedicated staff are a credit to the school.		
5	11/07/2019 11:57 AM ID: 121846196	The support received at school has been excellent and the staff have been very proactive in making changes for my child when they've been needed. They go above and beyond to make sure all children are included regardless of their needs. My child is very happy at school and loves the routine there.		
6	11/07/2019 13:05 PM ID: 121854197	A strong improvement in the School's 16-19 provision with the appointment of the new Head R. Hopkins a few years ago taking the initiative to improve the estate and teaching. Highly recommend.		
7	27/07/2019 20:34 PM ID: 123140837	The Birchwood staff in the Autism Provision have a fantastic knowledge and understanding of autism and the different presentations of this. They are flexible around needs as well as being brilliant at focussing on the strengths of the young people, whilst constantly striving to enable them to meet their targets in areas of difficulties. The Leader, Amy Dunstan, is inspirational as is Poppy Marriott, and the team work really well together for the benefit of the young people. There is a real sense of compassion and care, and this extends to their wider families. We would highly recommend Birchwood ASD school for accreditation as it is a first class facility.		
8	19/09/2019 22:16 PM ID: 127551676	My child lost all confidence in previous mainstream school. Birchwood has given our family a new lease of life. We no longer feel disheartened about our childs ability to acheive future aspirations.		

APPENDIX 2: COMMENTS FROM THE PROVISION