



AUTISM ACCREDITATION PEER REVIEW

SERVICE REVIEWED: Heartlands High School – Autism Provision

DATES OF REVIEW: 14th -16th November 2017

TEAM MEMBERS: Barbara Dewar (Team Coordinator), Sarah Sherwood (Team Member)

OVERVIEW OF PROVISION

Heartlands High School Autism provision currently caters for 31 students with a diagnosis of severe or complex Autism. The students range from year 7-11, (ages 11 to 16). The provision is situated in the heart of Haringey with the student population representing the diverse nature of this local authority. The provision does have a few out of borough placements but these are an exception.

The provision was opened in 2011 and is co-located with a large mainstream secondary school, catering for around 1,500 students. The provision building is based within the campus in a separate two storey building however the students have opportunities to access areas in the main building including hall areas, library and school canteen. Additional rooms can be booked as required.

The provision has five class groups with a high staff ratio of approximately totalling 1:2 students. Two students are funded for 1:1 support through the local authority.

The provision is part of the Haringey's local offer and the provision works with other special schools in the borough. The Heartlands Community Trust has been working for some time on a bid to open a free school, this has recently been agreed and planning starts shortly with a view to open in September 2019. This will be a special free school meeting the needs of young people between ages 5 – 19 with a diagnosis of autism. The current student and staff

population at the autism provision at Heartlands will transfer to the new school. This development has reflected in the policies and documentation in that they have been created with a broader range of needs in mind; this has not been detrimental but has strengthened their content.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

Observations

The team observed and graded 13 hours of practice over a range of sessions including; math, PSHE, Cooking, Circle time (2 sessions), Forest School, Visit to a local library, Shopping, English, art, Step 2 into Dance, 2 Tuck sessions (totalling 19 sessions). Additionally the team observed a range of different activities that were not of sufficient length to make a full judgement but were used to inform comments within this report. These included; Entry and exit to the provision, break time, lunch in the main school dining hall, lunch clubs,

Interviews and Discussions

Formal meeting with the Head of the Autism provision

Combined meeting with SLT assistant and OT assistant

Meeting with SLT, funded through NHS visits who visits *one day per week*

Meeting with Occupational Therapist funded through NHS visits who visits *one day per fortnight*

Meeting with 5 members of student council from the provision.

Meeting with 10 parents / carers.

Informal conversations with teaching staff

Brief meeting with CEO Heartlands Community Trust

Brief meeting with the Head of school

Documentation

Welcome to Heartlands- A Guide for Visitors, Supply staff & Visitors. Only includes the fact that the provision is on site but no further details.

Heartlands High School Autism Provision: Autism Handbook. This 26 page booklet covers many features of difficulties that the students with autism have and how these can be prevented or supported. Comprehensive and well laid out, however including some photos to demonstrate some features may be of benefit. A good starting point for new staff and a refresher for those who have been working in the provision for a while.

Flexibility of thought Statement

Communication Policy (this is discussed later in the report).

All the policies and documents are available on line so that staff can access them at appropriate times, or when at home.

SIP

Lesson plans for a variety of lessons. These included Objectives, success criteria, Activities, Differentiation and resources, Assessment for learning, Opportunities to develop functional skills, opportunities to develop Social communication, Opportunities to develop Independence, Support for Emotional regulation.

KEY FINDINGS

As a actions for development	Reasoning
<p>Strand 2: Self-reliance and problem solving: <i>E8: How is each student enabled to become increasingly self-reliant (e.g. by staff being aware of when and how to phase out verbal and physical prompts).</i></p> <p>The school should explore opportunities for students to find their own solutions to manage naturally occurring challenges. For example through the use of sabotage, fading prompts and support. Whilst still having a scaffold of support systems available.</p>	<p>The staff are aware of and able to use a range of strategies to support the students. They are able to switch quickly from one to another if the first one is not working.</p> <p>The team observed them using visual cues, timers, task lists, now and next charts, schedules, opportunities to withdraw and have physical space and movement time, support with sensory issues (deep pressure), sensory chews, key rings of symbols to provide instructions, emotional keyrings, and time within the low sensory room.</p> <p>Whilst these strategies were used well when things were not going right for the students the team also used instruction and support systems when the student could have been left for a while to try and problem solve. For example when the pen did not work, staffs were quick to direct them as to what to do.</p> <p>Or in some sessions the emphasis on using the structure was encouraged when the student had already mastered part of the task and only needed to refer back to it if they became unsure, not all the way through; such as during the shopping trip where students were redirected to their key ring of what to do next when they were already achieving it.</p> <p>Staff should consider how can I step back, at what point and leave the student to figure it out? Practising in school with sabotaged events before tackling in the community.</p>
<p>Strand 2: Self-reliance: <i>E9: How is each autistic student supported in developing problem-solving skills and</i></p>	<p>It was positive to see that the students took with them strategies learnt in school when moving around the main school and out into the community. Such as PECS books, task schedules and activity key</p>

<p><i>coping strategies relevant to independent functioning outside or afterschool.</i></p> <p>To consider how support systems can be adapted as the students move through school to ensure they are age appropriate and more discrete.</p>	<p>rings, visual /symbol shopping lists. However in some cases these identified the students as being 'different' and this was particularly noticeable as the students became older. Whilst it is important that the students have access to strategies to help them the provision may like to consider more age appropriate systems; such as smart phones for a visual shopping list; a PECS book within a rucksack; a timetable within a credit card holder. There are many different ways to develop age appropriate but still supportive strategies.</p>
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The following areas were also identified as examples of what the service does well.

Specific areas of strength	Reasoning
<p>Strand 2 : Commitment</p> <p><i>C19: How do the staffs reflect on how they supporting each autistic student learn effectively from their experience and refresh their knowledge base?</i></p> <p>The staff team have reflective practice, with support from the senior leadership team, support from external therapists, and peer support. This leads to a strong emphasis on supportive development, both through formal documentation and development plans and through group meetings.</p>	<p>The Senior Leadership team has been developing and changing since Head of the Provision took up her role in April 2016. Further new members to the senior team have been appointed including the deputy and a member of the team who has responsibility for pastoral care. The Head and Deputy provide cover in classes for teachers to have PPA time, thus understanding the issues of each class group and sharing positive practice. The teachers have supportive observations from the middle managers to help develop practice. Additionally when the Speech and Language therapy assistant (HLTA grade 4) was appointed in September 2017 her first task, under the direction of the SLT was to do an audit of communication systems being used and where these might need reviewing or further training offered. Similarly the OT therapy assistant (HLTA grade 4) appointed at the same time undertook a stock check of equipment and how this was being used. Following these audits the therapists created with the teachers a development plan which was clear and contained smart targets to develop practice. These plans are available on the provision intranet.</p>

	<p>Both assistants regularly support in class and observe particular issues.</p> <p>Class meetings are held regularly either to discuss general issues or a particular student; in this case a therapist may attend if possible.</p> <p>The team observed staff consulting each other for ideas on how to tackle a particular problem.</p>
<p>Strand 1: Commitment: <i>E3 Communication: How is each autistic student enabled to understand and participate in different social interactions and social situations; and with different people?</i></p> <p>The school uses a total communication approach with each student having access to a range of strategies. These strategies are developed in a range of settings with students being encouraged to engage with staff, their peers and people in the community.</p>	<p>As identified later the provision uses a Total Communication Approach; which is supported by a high quality communication policy. One feature that they identify is the need to facilitate the use of social communication skills through direct targeted work and also reinforcing and generalising these throughout the school day.</p> <p>Thus students are taught to recognise that the use of a symbol strip, or PECS strip which can be used to make a request in the classroom; then used again in the lunch hall or out in the shop. This was observed in several situations.</p> <p>For those students who had a higher level of verbal ability but still required more support with turn taking, interacting with others and initiating communication the team observed this occurring in a PSHE session and a tuck break. The use of conversation starters was observed being taught. Later in the week the team observed one student, with no prompt or staff intervention, use a conversation starter with his mainstream peers over lunch. This developed into a genuine episode of communication enjoyed by both sides and was evidence that the technique had been of benefit.</p>
<p>Strand 1 Commitment: <i>C9: How does the school ensure that all the staff including administration and ancillary staff, understand and implement a strengths based person-centred</i></p>	<p>The provision organise an Autism awareness week to develop understanding across the school.</p> <p>The team observed three lunch times where staff and students from the provision eat in the main dining room becoming both part of the main school but also sharing strategies. During one of these</p>

<p><i>approach based on current knowledge and understanding of autism.</i></p> <p>All staff demonstrated an understanding of the communicative needs of students from the provision.</p> <p>Staff confidence in using a range of strategies relevant to supporting the students allowed them to be flexible within their teaching and support.</p>	<p>observations the team observed dining room staff supporting a student who was using PECS.</p> <p>Within the provision the level of understanding of the difficulties for the students by staff was notably high. The support for each student was based on both good autism practice and a depth of knowledge of the individual pupil's needs.</p> <p>Within the structure and formal strategies the provision used the staff also demonstrated a confidence to go off plan when this was needed, even under the strain of being observed.</p>
<p>Structure:</p> <p>The provision provides a structure for the students through the environment, daily timetable and schedules, communication patterns and behaviour support. However the staff recognise when flexibility is needed to support a student's needs either on a particular day or through the behaviour support plan and adapt their practice accordingly.</p>	<p>It was notable within the observations that the class groups were managed in a structured way. This included a group timetable, individual schedules and task based structure.</p> <p>Routine activities occurred and routine phrases were used at certain times within the day. From having formal greetings and other communicative patterns; repeating activities in set ways. For example in a group session demonstrating activities the teacher and staff encouraged phrases such as 'shake, shake; spray, spray; a- ant a- ant. The students' responses to this indicated the phrases were used consistently.</p> <p>Movement breaks and off task activities were also brought into the routine. Sometimes linked with a particular behaviour programme.</p> <p>Despite this positive use of structure the team also recognised when it needed to change to support the students' needs. Flexibility was written into some student's behaviour support plan, or it may be used on a particular day when a student was having to manage stressful personal events.</p>

PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS - First Review.

FAMILY QUESTIONNAIRE SCORES

SCORES					
	Number of Questionnaires sent out (please request from service if not available prior to review):				31
	Number of Questionnaires returned:				11
	Unscored	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am able to contact the school about my child/family member on a regular basis				6	5
I am given information about my child's/family member's progress on a regular basis			1	7	3
The school listens to my views about my child/family member and their support and takes them into account.			1	8	2
I am aware of how to raise concerns about any aspect of my child's/family members support and am confident that they will be considered and addressed.				10	1
The school has a good understanding of my child/family member and works well to meet their needs.			1	5	5
The school respects the complexities of caring for a family member on the Autistic Spectrum				4	7

The school provides opportunities for me to find out more about autism and my child's/family member's specific needs				9	2
The school has had a positive impact on my family member's life and learning			1	4	6
TOTALS	0	0	4	53	31
PERCENTAGES	0%	0%	4.54%	60.22%	35.22%

Parental Comments:

Whilst the number of responses to the questionnaire was low this is typical for documents sent out. The team were able to see the school's own questionnaire completed in December 2016 where the response number was 12.

Within the questionnaires all aspects were ticked. The comments below reflect those made; all spelling and grammar are replicated exactly.

- The staff are caring and my son has made a lot of progress during his time here.
- The staff are very good and they keep informed parents about any changes regarding the supports they provide.

A meeting was held with 10 parents (12 had been expected); only 4 of whom had returned the questionnaire. Their views in general matched those of the questionnaires returned, they were all happy with the school and felt well supported. There were individual issues; like the wish for more homework, which was not universally held. All were looking forward to the move to the new school.

Professional Comments:

SCORES					
Number of Questionnaires sent out (please request from service if not available prior to review):					5
Number of Questionnaires returned:					1
	Unscored	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have a good working relationship with the school					1
The school keep me regularly updated of and changes or progress in relation to the person we are both supporting					1
I am able to take part (if the person wishes) in all format reviews involving the person we support					1
The school is contactable and easily accessible should I require information					1
The school provides a person focussed approach with those that it works with					1
The school promote a knowledge and					1

understanding of autism amongst professionals					
Any concerns I have raised to the school have been listened to and acted upon					1
The school provides a positive and quality service to those on the Autistic Spectrum					1
TOTALS	0	0	0	0	8
PERCENTAGES	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

- I am the local authority SEN Officer and I have absolutely no concerns about this school's approach to autism. All cases are dealt with in a professional manner and the with the greatest care for the individual student.

OBSERVATION SCORES

Topic	Not Met	Partially Met	Majority Met	Fully Met
Differences in social communication	0	1	8	10
Self-reliance and problem solving	0	2	10	7
Sensory Experiences	0	0	12	7
Emotional well-being	0	0	12	8
TOTAL	0	3	42	32
PERCENTAGE	0%	4%	54%	42%

FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS

- In all observations the autism practice was strong.
- It was evident the staff know the students well and have a range of autism strategies to support the young people when they have heightened anxiety.
- Staffs works well as a team.
- Staffs are able to swop in and out seamlessly between roles in order to support the students and each other.

Topic	Comments
Differences in social communication	The provision has a comprehensive but concise Communication policy. This begins with 'Explaining the rationale of a Total Communication Approach.' Their Ethos and values – 'Everybody has the right to communicate using the approach that works best for them and the right to be communicated to in a way that best meets their individual need, so enabling them to understand the message being communicated.' It identifies how this is achieved; which the team identified as occurring.

	<p>The provision has identified 19 resources and strategies which should always be available. These were used as part of the SLT assessment completed by the SLT assistant. These range from choice boards, schedules, to staff visual key rings to support communication, labelled resource areas, use of limited and simple language and 5 second rule to allow processing time.</p> <p>The rest of the policy explains specific strategies such as PECS, TEACCH and Makaton.</p> <p>The team noted that students who used PECS did carry the books with them, even into the main school to order their lunch and out on a walk where a snack would be bought during the trip. The team also observed the kitchen staff supporting their use.</p> <p>Within observations all these 19 strategies were observed being used consistently. Staff throughout used clear speech supported by visual cues and Makaton / gesture.</p>
Self-reliance and problem solving	<p>The provision has within their SIP identified the need to develop further the flexibility of thought and problem solving programmes for the students.</p> <p>The provision has a Statement on Flexibility of Thought which identifies some difficulties the students may have and strategies to support them. These focus mainly on providing structure rather than teaching the skills to problem solve.</p> <p>Lesson plans identify the need to develop independence but did not include problem solving within these.</p> <p>Within the observations, as already stated the team noted students getting a problem and being verbally prompted in solving it. The staff did not help directly but allowing the student to work things out for a short period longer would have been of benefit as in each case observed they would have been successful.</p>
Sensory Experiences	<p>The Staff were aware of the sensory challenges that students with autism encounter and plan activities accordingly – low arousal, wedge cushions, sensory balls, deep pressure and ear defenders were all evident.</p>

	<p>Some students were seen to request deep pressure whilst sitting on a sensory ball and this was delivered in a structured manner, using countdowns to alert the student to the end of the pressure.</p> <p>Students are supported to encounter different sensory experiences. Examples were seen in Forest Schools where students were given the option of using gloves or not to locate items hidden in a wheelbarrow of leaves, and during a cooking activity where students were encouraged to taste tomatoes.</p> <p>Opportunities to access sensory supports were seen across the provision, and time out at the Body Shop; a room with low arousal and small sensory equipment available was used effectively.</p> <p>Small sensory equipment was available in each room for example; chews, bean bags, bobble balls.</p> <p>Within the Autism handbook details of students' possible sensory needs were identified. These included: Vision, Audition, Olfaction, Gustation, Somatosensation, Vestibular, and Proprioception. This explains both how students may react when the student is hypo-sensitive and hyper-sensitive.</p>
Emotional Well-being	<p>The Staff are trained in Team Teach and the number of recorded physical interventions is low, with only one or two students receiving physical interventions this academic year. The school is liaising with a software provider regarding the opportunities for data analysis to ensure they are better able to track behaviour incidences and the possible causes for these.</p> <p>De-escalation techniques and positive behaviour support were seen across all environments, these varied according to the student's individual needs. One student had a staff member writing on a small whiteboard and adjusting the session to ensure he accessed all his learning objectives without raising his anxiety. Another student who, due</p>

	<p>to personal reasons, was having a particularly unsettled time was allowed time outside and on returning to the classroom began his work whilst lying on the floor before moving to a gym ball and finally a chair. This gradual support allowed him to reengage with the session.</p> <p>Emotions cards are used with students to facilitate understanding of emotions experienced.</p> <p>Staffs interact with enthusiasm and positivity to enhance students' self-esteem and well-being. Examples were seen at Forest Schools when students launched their rockets, and during a library session when a student asked for information from a library staff member.</p> <p>Circle time also gave opportunities for the students to reflect on how they were feeling and to share this with each other. In some sessions students were observed regarding another's work and praising it appropriately with prompts.</p> <p>Students take part in fund raising activities with their mainstream peers, such as bake sales and sports day and undertake work experience in a local community charity shop and garden centre.</p>
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CONCLUSION

Heartlands High School – Autism Provision is an inclusive part of the large secondary school; both from its physical location but also with the attitude of staff and students. Students from within the provision are included in activities within the main school and in return students from the main school visit and undertake activities in the provision. Beyond this inclusivity the most notable features of the provision was the structured and positive practise. The staffs' skills in using a range of recognised autism support and the confidence with which these were undertaken. The team were confident that the practice, based on a high level of knowledge of the complexities of autism and supporting techniques, were consistent practise.

The provision uses a Total Communication Approach; which is supported by a high quality communication policy. One feature that they identify is the need to facilitate the use of social communication skills through direct targeted work and also reinforcing and generalising these throughout the school day.

Thus students are taught to recognise the use of a symbol strip, or PECS strip can be used to make a request in the classroom; then used again in the lunch hall or out in the shop. This was observed in several situations.

For those students who had a higher level of verbal ability but required more work with turn taking, interacting with others and initiating communication the team observed this occurring in a PSHE session and a tuck break. The use of conversation starters was observed being taught. Later in the week the team observed one student, with no prompt or staff intervention, use a conversation starter with his mainstream peers over lunch. This developed into a genuine episode of communication enjoyed by both sides and was evidence that the technique had been of benefit.