



## **AUTISM ACCREDITATION PEER REVIEW**

**SERVICE REVIEWED:** Breakspeare School

**DATES OF REVIEW:** 5/6 July 2016

**TEAM MEMBERS:** Team Coordinator: Jackie Macey Team Member: Sally James

### OVERVIEW OF PROVISION

Breakspeare School is a local authority special school for pupils aged 4-19 who have severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have additional needs and over 40% have a diagnosis of autism. There are two classes which are predominantly for pupils with autism all other classes are mixed groups.

### SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

#### Observations

The review team observed 22 sessions which included whole class lessons, small group activities, snack, break and lunch time. Observations of transition times also took place.

#### Interviews and Discussions

During the review meetings were held with the Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher, Heads of Department including the Autism Lead teacher, Speech and Language Therapist, Therapy Assistant, Family Support Officer, Chair of Governors. More informal discussions took place with pupils, teachers and support staff.

Documentation

Policies  
Guidance Documents  
Autism Handbook  
Learners Evidence Files  
Case Studies – Intensive Interaction  
Communication Passports  
Social Stories  
Behaviour Risk Assessments/Plans  
Planning  
Extensive Photographic evidence  
Video Evidence  
Self-Audit  
Ofsted Report  
Website

KEY FINDINGS

As a result of this process, the following actions were identified for the service to work on:

Actions for development	Reasoning
<p><b>Core Standard 12: Behaviour Support</b> <b>Specialist Standard 9: Well-being Promoting Independence</b></p> <p>The review team observed the work the school has carried out in order to support pupils to manage their own arousal and emotional state and support the school's intention to expand this. It is hoped that further work will enable pupils to begin to identify their own needs and request a sensory strategy or other supportive activity for themselves when necessary. The review team see this as a potential area of development for the school.</p>	<p>Sensory work and a thorough understanding of behaviour are well embedded across the school. A wide range of strategies are readily used by staff in order to maintain a pupil's calm and alert state for learning. The experience for pupils is that effective support and individually chosen strategies help them to have a successful day, as they become more familiar with this pattern of behaviour they can be encouraged to initiate support or select activities themselves and so self regulate.</p>
<p><b>Core Standard 8: Individual Plans</b></p> <p>As a potential area of development the review team suggests that the school considers ways in which pupils can gain a greater understanding of the targets that are set for them. The school may wish to select one target and display this in a visual/child friendly format as a regular prompt for the pupil and to monitor progress towards achievement.</p>	<p>Breakspeare School demonstrates excellent practice in terms of using visual systems to communicate with pupils and support their understanding. As an extension to this work the review team feel that the sharing of individual targets would support pupils to achieve these and in addition be more aware of the progress they are making. The school may wish to trial this practice in one class before sharing it across the school.</p>

The following areas were also identified as examples of what the service does well.

Specific areas of strength	Reasoning
<p><b>Core standard 15: Sensory Issues</b></p> <p>The extent to which sensory practice is embedded across the school and the curriculum is seen as a potential area of strength for the school.</p>	<p>The school has developed its understanding of sensory processing differences and now employs a considerable range of personalised tools and activities to meet the sensory integration needs of individuals. This was observed to have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and ability to access learning. Further evidence is included later in this report.</p>
<p><b>Specialist Standard 10: Well Being - Community Participation</b></p> <p>The review team congratulate the school on their development of extensive and imaginative opportunities for community participation for pupils of all ages since the last review. This wide range of opportunities enables learners at all levels to have a developing and positive community experience.</p>	<p>Since the last review the school has dramatically extended the range of opportunities to participate and learn within the community that are now part of the curriculum. This is further described in a later section of this report.</p>
<p><b>Core standard 9: Communication</b></p> <p>The review team were impressed by the high level of visual supports which are readily used in the school. Symbols and photographs were seen to support positive behaviour, inform pupils as to what was to happen and direct individual activity. The quality of this work was extensive and consistent across the school and was seen to have a significant impact on pupils' understanding.</p>	<p>Staff understanding of the value of developing and using visual supports in a consistent manner is well developed at Breakspeare School and a routine part of everyday practice. This was evidenced through: schedules both group and individual, for lessons as well as for the breakdown of activities within a single lesson, the use of PECS books, choice formats, transition materials and prompt symbols carried by staff. Effective use of symbols to communicate often without accompanying language was a regular feature during the review and delivered in a very calm manner appropriate for the individual pupils concerned.</p>
<p><b>Core standard 2: Professional Development</b></p> <p>Breakspeare School offers extensive and relevant training to its staff who show an in depth knowledge of autism and of the individual pupils with whom they work. Teaching staff have attended a good number of key autism specific external courses. Good practice is identified in the way information and understanding gained is then shared with all staff and practice is modified to incorporate new approaches to the benefit of pupils with autism.</p>	<p>Relatively recent attendance at TEACCH and SCERTS training has clearly made an impact on practice and this was evidenced through observation of staff at all levels and confirmed through discussion with the Speech and Language Therapist. Training for staff starts at the induction stage and this is well thought through, the Autism Handbook is an excellent resource at this stage and useful activities are planned, e.g. a session with the Speech and Language Therapist.</p>

**Specialist Standard 11: Partnership with Professionals  
Core Standard 4: Consistent Understanding of Autism**

The review team identify as a potential area of strength the effective team working evidenced during the review. Staff clearly have a shared and agreed understanding of their methodology and deliver this with confidence. This joint approach was seen in the work of therapists and the supportive core culture and shared values which were evident across the school.

Breakspeare School has a calm and happy working atmosphere in which staff are confident in their roles and offer a good level of support to each other. Therapists report that staff are very receptive to their input and that they readily share their observations, the result is a strong team which supports a very diverse group of pupils to make good progress.

**PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendation	Action taken to address recommendation
<p><b>Specialist Standard 2: Teaching and Learning – Programme/Curriculum and Activity Content</b> <b>Specialist Standard 10: Well Being - -Community Participation</b></p> <p>The review team therefore suggests that the school reviews the opportunities it offers to pupils to participate and learn within the local community and identifies this as a potential area of development.</p>	<p>The school has developed a range of opportunities in which all its pupils can participate, provided by the local and broader community. An established link with a school in Germany has been extended to include pupil exchange visits. The school recently hosted a visit by pupils from the German special school and are preparing for a reciprocal visit by Breakspeare pupils this September.</p> <p>Each Key stage has a link with a local mainstream school: Early Years provision, primary school, secondary school and college. Breakspeare pupils visit the other schools and pupils from the other settings visit the Breakspeare pupils.</p> <p>Other examples include visits to the school by theatre and music groups as well as attending music, theatre and sports events involving local schools. In addition, pupils use the facilities provided in the local community for shopping and eating out as well as using community leisure facilities, for example: Snow Dome; Bowling, swimming.</p>

**Specialist Standard 2: Teaching and Learning –  
Programme/Curriculum and Activity Content**

**Specialist Standard 9: Well Being – Promoting Independence**

The review team suggest that the school carries out an audit of opportunities currently offered within the teaching day for pupils to develop independence, for instance timetabling a session each day when a pupil would be expected to work entirely independently on a familiar task, this might be only for a brief period initially but building towards a longer session.

Since the previous review the school has developed its practice in the area of independence. In all classes independent activity forms part of the morning routine and this supports transition into school as well as meeting other learning needs. Pupils have schedules of tasks to complete; these might include assembling their own timetable for the day, undertaking a classroom job and usually a work task or series of tasks which might be completed in a workstation. Staff are currently working on including independent activity in a wide range of curriculum activities.

Staff at Breakspeare School have a good understanding of the benefits of the TEACCH approach and the use of workstations for independent activity was seen within several schedules during the review and included in some behaviour plans as a calming activity.

Independence development is the priority within the Post 16 Programme. Work experience, college links and developing living skills all support this. A range of photographic evidence was seen where students were being independent in the community such as using a café. Pupils are given jobs to complete independently around the school and a sticker system has been introduced to indicate to staff in corridors that the pupil is working independently.

All pupils are assessed in terms of their independence skills and opportunities for these to be built on are included within class programmes and routines. One Year 6 pupil is able to set up the hall for the Sensory Circuit session which takes place each morning.

FAMILY QUESTIONNAIRE SCORES

<b>SCORES</b>					
Number of Questionnaires sent out (information provided by the service):					<b>27</b>
Number of Questionnaires returned:					<b>7</b>
Number of sections <b>not</b> scored (figures only reflect sections scored):					<b>0</b>
	VERY UNHAPPY	UNHAPPY	SATISFIED	HAPPY	VERY HAPPY
Contact	0	0	0	2	5
Support	0	0	0	2	5
Advice	0	0	1	1	5
Involvement	0	0	0	3	4
<b>TOTALS</b>	0	0	1	8	19
<b>PERCENTAGES</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>68%</b>

Although only a small number of questionnaires were returned the gradings given in these are very high. A selection of comments are given below:

**Communication:**

- The school communicates with us promptly, we share home-school notes.
- Excellent regular consistent communication.
- Open and constant conversation flow to ensure our child gets the most out of school.
- He is very happy and well supported in school.

**Support:**

- The school supports my son very well, he really loves going to school.
- Superb support for my child. The school is outstanding.
- The teachers are really committed to helping my child develop his potential.
- School supports the children positively.
- Very well indeed.

**Advice:**

- Needs or changes in needs are identified swiftly and communicated quickly in order to provide a consistent approach at school and home.

**Involvement:**

- You are involved 100% in their work with our children, can't fault them.
- Clear defined objectives and goals agreed with us. We work as a team to support our child's learning and development.
- We feel part of our child's learning and school life.

## OBSERVATION SCORES

Topic	Not Met	Partially Met	Majority Met	Fully Met
Differences in social communication	0	0	11	11
Self-reliance and problem solving	0	0	10	12
Sensory Experiences	0	1	11	10
Emotional well-being	0	1	9	12
TOTAL	0	2	41	45
PERCENTAGE	0	2%	47%	51%

The single session where a grade of partially met was given was planned and delivered by an Arts Project who were visiting the school.



## FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS

Topic	Comments
<p><b>Social understanding and Communication</b></p>	<p>Breakspeare School has a Communication Policy which highlights the many forms that communication can take and gives guidance to staff. It describes the role of the Speech and Language Therapist and also identifies the importance of pupil to pupil communication.</p> <p>The Autism Handbook is an excellent resource for staff, especially at the induction stage, it is comprehensive, well presented and the inclusion of photographs gives clearer meaning to the approaches and strategies described.</p> <p>The school has both a Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) and a Speech and Language Therapy Assistant allocated, both are part time posts. It is clear that practice has developed well over recent years and the level of joint approach and liaison between the therapy team and school staff is very high. Pupils are very rarely withdrawn from class for specific programmes. The SALT and assistant tend to focus on a class group intensely for a term or half term as this has greater impact on developing effective practice, as an example the SALT assistant has been attending snack time in one class for a term, this has allowed her to model interactions, identify further resources such as symbols needed, modify software programmes on electronic communication aids, assess pupils' development and discuss issues with the staff group. A further advantage is that the class team gets to know the therapy team better and is then more likely to use the drop in sessions they offer to discuss pupils' communication issues.</p> <p>Training at Breakspeare School is strong, it is well supported by the local authority who make courses available, such as PECS and TEACCH, further to this the school is proactive in ensuring all staff are well trained either through attending external courses or through cascaded learning at in house training sessions. A recent focus has been on the SCERTS model, five members of staff including the SALT have attended an external course and the Autism Lead Teacher has delivered an overview of this methodology to staff at all levels. Staff are now able to use aspects of this programme with their pupils, it is seen in target setting, more focused assessment and an increased awareness of how to support pupils to develop emotional self-regulation.</p> <p>The Speech and Language Therapist has delivered training for all staff on augmented communication and also the ELKLAN programme which supports staff understanding of language development and communication.</p> <p>Intensive Interaction is widely used as an approach for supporting communication and social development with early developers throughout the school. The school has a 'Make a Difference' support assistant who has a particular focus on individual intensive interaction sessions which are timetabled and take part in appropriate areas of the school, e.g. the soft play room. One of these sessions was observed by a member of the team. Records show the progress in engagement and initiation that have taken place during these sessions. Opportunities for intensive interaction are also seized by staff whenever this is appropriate.</p> <p>A Music Therapist is in school for one day per week and works with some of the pupils with autism when this is assessed as being beneficial.</p> <p>PECS and the more general use of symbol/visual communication is extensive across the school, recent work has focused on developing pupils' ability to use people's names and verbs when requesting e.g. 'Julie, give ball' as a progression from 'I want ball' and to focus on the social element of the communication. This is an example of the school's constant review of practice in order to see how it can be extended or improved. Each class has a member of staff who is identified as a Communication Lead, this helps to ensure that all necessary resources are in place and pupils' communication needs and progress are routinely assessed.</p>

	<p>During the review staff were regularly seen to use symbols to communicate with pupils, these might be instructions, choices or information and were seen to support behaviour, access learning and ensure successful transitions. Visual systems were seen to accompany pupils into different parts of the school, outside areas and the dining hall, it was clear that staff understand the importance and value of visual communication and were accomplished in using symbols effectively.</p> <p>The school has systems in place which support social interaction beyond the classroom. There is a strong link with a local primary school and pupils are able to visit the school and welcome their mainstream peers into Breakspeare on a weekly basis. A more adventurous link has just taken place: pupils and staff from a school in Germany visited for a week prior to a group of Breakspeare School staff and pupils going to Germany.</p> <p>All pupils have a communication passport which conveys their communication level, support required and interests, these one sided documents are thorough and include how communication needs to be adapted in order to support positive behaviour.</p> <p>The school offers many opportunities for the development of social skills throughout the school day and within particular activities such as snack, lunch and break times. There are a number of lunchtime clubs where pupils can use their social skills with a different group of pupils. Staff also understand the need for a balance between social expectation and social protection, so that for some pupils time alone without social demands being made is as important as time when social interaction is expected and encouraged. Some social skills are directly taught within the PSHE programme.</p>
<p><b>Self Reliance and Problem Solving</b></p>	<p>Staff understand the challenges that their autistic pupils face in coping with changes and the need for structure and routines to support independent functioning. Pupils were prepared for the end of activities and transition to the next by the use of a range of strategies including timers, countdown and music reinforced by the use of Now/Next boards, class and individual visual schedules. Teachers use the interactive white boards to present visual information about a session and choices to be made within the session. Individual choice boards were also used. Music videos played on IWB were used to cue in pupils to a change of activity, for example: tidy up time; snack time; lunch.</p> <p>Pupils are enabled to be self-reliant through the use of visual supports and structure. One example of this is the use of symbols in sensory circuits which inform the pupils where to start, wait and finish as well as what to do on each piece of equipment. There were many changes taking place at school during the review (Create team; District Sports Day) and social stories had been used to prepare pupils for the changes.</p> <p>Much attention is given to supporting macro transitions as well as micro transitions. There is a formal transition guidance document detailing plans to support transition into school as well as on to other educational settings, as well as transitions that take place within school. The older pupils have a link with a local college and mainstream students doing Health and Social Care course which supports the two year transition process for autistic pupils moving on to placements at that college. Work experience is included for pupils where appropriate.</p> <p>Some pupils are involved with a link to a special school in Germany. The pupils from that school have recently visited Breakspeare school. In order to help Breakspeare pupils prepare for their visit to the school in Germany, pupils recently took part in 'sleepovers' at school and a stay at a nearby field centre.</p>

	<p>Most pupils complete tasks independently first thing in the morning or during the day. A range of visual supports were seen to be used: two photos showing activities and a third photo representing the reward activity; schedule strip relating to numbered packets of work; individual schedule in symbols for the day including 'Independent morning work' that was set for the pupil in numbered trays.</p> <p>Pupils are given choices throughout the day: choice of rewards; choice of instruments in music; food choices at snack time; choice of sensory activity or equipment.</p>
<p><b>Sensory Experiences</b></p>	<p>The school has implemented training in sensory differences. Staff have received training internally and some staff, externally. All pupils with autism have a sensory profile which is used to design individual action plans which detail sensory preferences; processing differences; a daily sensory plan; sensory support needs. The staff team complete the profile in conjunction with parents. An occupational therapist with expertise and interest in sensory integration works in the school part time and supports staff to design and implement sensory diets for individuals.</p> <p>The team saw an extensive range of personalised tools being used to support pupils in maintaining the calm/alert state required for learning, for example: brushing, sprinkling, swinging, crackle spray on hands to awaken the senses and these were seen to be implemented/offered on a regular basis. Pupils are beginning to be taught to recognise which activities and resources help them to self-regulate their sensory needs and are offered choice boards of activities from their personalised sensory diet. Sensory circuits each morning are accessed by some pupils and include activities to alert, organise and calm ready for learning. It was noted that pupils used the same piece of equipment in different ways according to their sensory diet, e.g. the peanut ball was used to squash, roll and bounce on by different pupils. Also the vibrating blanket was used in different ways for different pupils. The team noted the cross curricular opportunities the Sensory Circuits offered for communication and decision making when pupils were asked after some activities: 'More or finished?'; 'How many more?' and encouraged to count.</p> <p>Pupils are given opportunities to experience new and varied sensory experiences. Pupils are given 'down time' in which they can carry out sensory activities they find enjoyable and stimulating e.g. playing with sand.</p> <p>Staff understand that autistic pupils can experience sensory overload and discomfort and employ a range of strategies and equipment according to individual needs and preferences, for example: ear defenders; squeeze vest; weighted blanket; use of outside areas, quiet rooms and sensory rooms. Staff respond at the first indication of potential distress and pupils were observed accessing sensory activities that helped them restore a calm/alert state. All environments within the school are low arousal and pupils can access quiet areas as required. Staff appear aware of the effect their voice and use of language has on stimulating and calming pupils. Parents and school share sensory processing ideas via the home/school diary.</p>
<p><b>Emotional Well-Being</b></p>	<p>Breakspeare School has a Behaviour Policy and a Restrictive Physical Intervention Policy. These policies reflect the ethos of the STEPS programme, which is used throughout Hertfordshire schools and focuses on supporting pupils so that incidents of problem behaviour are avoided or much less likely to occur. Clear guidance is given so that staff understand how to support pupils when they are presenting challenging behaviour and their response is as least intrusive as possible for pupils.</p>

Breakspeare School meets the needs of many quite complex and often challenging young people. Class sizes are relatively large (9 or 11) and the ability range within these groups is quite wide in some cases. However behaviour is well managed, environments are adapted and staff show strong skills, drawing on a depth of understanding of autism to support pupils' diverse needs. In one case a pupil in the Post 16 group has an individual space which gives him security and goes some way to meet his sensory issues. Having had access to this valuable space for some time he is now able to choose to access the learning within his class group for about three quarters of the week. This is an example of individual assessment and programme modification to meet an individual need which was repeated many times across the school. Staff were observed to draw on a range of strategies quickly and calmly in response to pupils when they were becoming unsettled. Sensory approaches, distraction, choice and motivators were seen to be used. Staff also worked together very successfully as a team when supporting several complex pupils without the need for discussion or task allocation.

The Hertfordshire STEPS programme underpins behaviour practice. It is a very sound model which looks at 'roots and fruits' and specifies minimal intervention, in other words the causes of behaviour are always investigated and carefully considered and physical intervention is a very last resort.

Where there is a need Behaviour Support Plans are in place, these include a focus on reducing frustration caused by difficulties with communication and promote prevention of challenging behaviour through increasing communication skills and giving specific strategies to support a pupil to manage their behaviour. Visual supports are used on an individual basis to support behaviour, one pupil has a symbolised chart showing which behaviours are acceptable at school and which are reserved for home as she tends to want to touch and hug people inappropriately.

The strong understanding of sensory practice amongst staff as well as the good level of resourcing for sensory interventions is a key element in the achievement of the calm and purposeful atmosphere which exists within the school.

The SCERTS training that has taken place has helped staff to consider pupils' needs and the interventions and interactions that will benefit them in greater detail. This level of focused work has also supported pupils to either remain calm or to regain their composure more rapidly following an incident of more problematic behaviour. The school are working to extend their work in this area with the aim of pupils beginning to identifying their own needs and the activities that will support them, e.g. taking a movement break or needing a weighted blanket.

Social Stories are written to support pupils to understand and manage situations they find difficult. During the review one was seen to support a pupil to manage the changes that resulted from a musical project that was visiting in school.

The school employs a family support worker for an hour per week to carry out specific pieces of work. Usually a family is identified by the school and the family support worker visits the home to discuss the child, assess the difficulties and give some guidance. The school and family support worker report that the intervention has had a positive impact on the pupil.

Whilst behaviour is well managed there are some pupils who present challenges and these can be difficult for staff. There is a counselling service which is available for all staff as well as a policy of class team debriefing when behaviour issues cause concern.

## CONCLUSION

High quality practice is routine at Breakspeare School. It is delivered by a well-trained, highly skilled and knowledgeable staff team who are committed to supporting pupils to be successful in all that they do. During the review the team were impressed by the high level of consistency that was observed and how training in all forms is prioritised and delivered to ensure that this quality is maintained.