

AUTISM ACCREDITATION PEER REVIEW



SERVICE REVIEWED: The Holmewood School

DATES OF REVIEW: 21 -22 March 2017

TEAM MEMBERS: Team Coordinator: Jackie Macey Team Member: Suzanne Farrell

OVERVIEW OF PROVISION

The Holmewood School is an independent day school located in North London which caters for autistic young people between the ages of 7 and 19 and covers an ability range which is similar to that of a mainstream school. The school is situated on two sites, one being newly opened for 6th Form students. There are currently 41 students on roll, of whom 39 are boys. The young people come from a wide geographical spread with placements funded by over 10 local authorities. The school has a strong emphasis on supporting students to achieve their potential across academic and broader life skills in order that they might flourish in mainstream society. A key factor in achieving this goal is a highly specialised and individualised approach which is supported by a strong multidisciplinary team.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

Observations

The review team observed 14 lessons or small group activities, as well as transitions, lunch and break times. These covered the full age range and a breadth of curriculum areas and included one off site swimming session.

Interviews and Discussions

Meetings were held with the Head Teacher, Autism Lead Teacher, Head of Welfare and Behaviour, College Transitions and Work Experience Co-ordinator, Head of 6th Form and SENCO, SMSC Co-ordinator and the Student Council.

Some brief informal discussions were held with individual teachers, members of class teams and students.

Documentation

Policies
Planning
Class record files
Individual Education Plans
Behaviour Support Plans
Performance Management observation records
Student Profiles
Evidence Files for: Behaviour, OT, SMSC, Autism
Students' work
Self Audit
Ofsted Report
Website
Questionnaires

KEY FINDINGS

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

Actions for development	Reasoning
<p>C32 Commitment P20 Outcomes E19 Enabling</p> <p>How does the school/college engage with the wider autism community, including autistic individuals and organisations run by or for autistic people, in order to inform the support provided to autistic students?</p> <p>The Review Team supports the school's intention to build on and extend its work in helping students to develop a positive understanding of their autism. This includes making links with positive role models and advice groups within the autism community.</p>	<p>The school has a strong desire to find positive role models for students and where possible to support them to become strong advocates for themselves. Recently a group were able to visit Birkbeck University and see the work of a small IT company who employ a high percentage of people with autism. Some of the older students are developing a good understanding of autism and were able to discuss this with their peers during the review. The team feel that positive autism connections beyond the school environment will help students to develop their confidence and understanding further.</p>

<p>P4, P16. P19 Outcomes</p> <p>How does the school/college evaluate the effectiveness of support and curriculum activities in enabling each autistic student to experience a sense of achievement and satisfaction?</p> <p>During observations many examples were seen of addressing autism areas of difference alongside the regular curriculum. The relatively recent appointment of an Autism Lead Teacher has led to some monitoring of this practice. The review team suggest that this work is further developed and that, where appropriate, training is identified and opportunities for sharing good practice take place.</p>	<p>The review team observed lessons where work on social communication and relationships, problem solving activities and sensory interventions were all routinely included. The consistency of this work is monitored by the Autism Lead Teacher in a regular schedule of observations which gives a clear overview of autism practice. From the information gained through this process specific training needs can be identified and addressed. In addition, where good practice is seen this can be shared and the possibility of peer observations considered.</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>C23 Partnership</p> <p>How do staff actively work in partnership with other professionals, who support each autistic student, to deliver a consistent and unified approach?</p> <p>The Holmewood School has a large and effective multi-disciplinary team which allows each student to receive a bespoke package of support according to their needs. This level of skilled intervention has great benefits for students' development and for extending the knowledge of teaching teams.</p>	<p>The Multi-Disciplinary team at The Holmewood School includes the following therapists: Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapist and Occupational Therapy Assistant, Reflexologist, Psychotherapist, Music Therapist and a Drama Therapist. This team of people meet together and are able to share their observations of students. Having such a broad team means that it is possible to adjust provision for each student and adapt this as their needs change over time. Most of the therapy team work in the school for a high proportion of the week and so are accessible for staff and able to be fully involved in the life of the school. This situation means that the sharing of approaches and identification of strengths or difficulties between staff is routine practice. This team also contributes to the holistic understanding of each student. The review team feel that the therapeutic interventions available to students, particularly those who have experienced severe difficulties in mainstream schools, make a significant contribution to the progress they clearly make once settled at the school.</p>

<p>P20 Outcomes</p> <p>How does the school/college evaluate the effectiveness of support and curriculum activities in enabling each autistic student to develop a positive and constructive understanding of what it means to be autistic?</p> <p>The school's proactive approach to developing students' understanding of autism and what this means for them is seen as essential to their future development and success in society and a potential strength of the school. This work forms part of some whole school and class activities and some is on an individual basis.</p>	<p>The school offers many opportunities for students to develop their self-awareness, this can happen in context when staff seize opportunities during the day, through the PSHCE curriculum and through individual therapy sessions with the Speech and Language Therapist or Psychotherapist. The school sees this work as important for students' self-esteem. As a consequence it has planned a number of activities during Autism Awareness Week, or as The Holmewood School sees it, Autism Awareness Fortnight. Autistic speakers, parents and a member of staff with a diagnosis are all taking part in events. There is a film showing and individually differentiated activities for each class. During the review a team member observed one class discussing autism. It was clearly a valuable experience for the students concerned with was managed with great sensitivity by the teacher who clearly knew her students well.</p>
<p>C8, C9 Commitment</p> <p>How does the school/college set out and define skills and knowledge each individual member of staff requires in relation to their role in working with autistic students?</p> <p>Training and the supporting of staff to become knowledgeable and skilled practitioners is addressed very effectively at Holmewood School. There is a strong induction and training programme in place but in addition there are weekly autism and behaviour briefings and focused meetings led by therapists concerning individual students. These regular opportunities to reflect on practice benefit staff at all levels of experience.</p>	<p>Training is an ongoing process at the school. Induction training is offered to all staff over their first term, this forms six after school training sessions. A member of the review team spoke to a member of the support staff who was in her first year to discuss the training she had received. Not only had the induction sessions been very useful but the range of regular meetings allowed her to revisit her understanding and to extend this in the context of particular students and classroom approaches. Weekly autism briefings are held as are behaviour briefings, class meetings and therapy meetings, so that practice is regularly reviewed and all staff are kept up to date with agreed strategies for individual students. The school also utilises 'SLACK' which is an instant messaging service to circulate updates and key information. This is reported to be very beneficial for communication between staff and ensures that staff are fully aware of any issues for students which need to be shared. During observations within lessons and in the less structured times it was clear that staff at all levels have a depth of knowledge of autism and how this impacts on individual students within the school.</p>

<p>U19 Understanding E32 Enabling</p> <p>Where appropriate, how do staff identify and record proactive strategies to support the autistic student in avoiding behaviours that have a negative impact on their best interests and well-being?</p> <p>The school's work in the area of positive behaviour support is a potential strength. The recently created post of Head of Welfare and Behaviour ensures that there is strong leadership and support for students, staff and families. There are close working partnerships with the multi-disciplinary team and liaison with external agencies as needed. There is a consistent approach to behaviour and staff are well tuned in to individual needs. Students are supported to develop self-regulation strategies in order to manage their own behaviour and develop appropriate alternatives.</p>	<p>The underlying causes of behaviour that impact negatively are well understood by staff at the school and are addressed as a priority. Teaching and therapy staff work together to identify appropriate interventions to support students' development of positive behaviours. In addition the broad curriculum available for students has been developed to support many aspects of development which can have a positive impact on behaviour, e.g. by reducing anxiety, helping students to regulate themselves and learn alternative and more appropriate behaviours.</p> <p>The school also recognises the challenges that staff experience and offers a good level of support to staff in general and in particular following more difficult incidents. Staff have a practice of sharing their appreciation of other members of staff and a positive and supportive atmosphere was evident during the review.</p> <p>The general atmosphere of the school is calm, with minor disruptions being managed promptly and skilfully. During a number of observations students were given movement/learning breaks or simple encouragement to remain focused on their work. They were also observed to take the lead in managing their own behaviour eg by requesting a 'break' or time away from the main activity. In a primary class a student who has a high level of need is spending a further year in a primary class so that he can be better prepared to manage the challenges and transitions of the secondary timetable. This student has difficulties with attention control and frequently became distracted from his work. His teacher clearly understood his needs well and on each occasion he was encouraged to return to his task and when focused he showed a clear interest and ability to make progress with the work. The calm and persistent approach of this member of staff prevented escalation of difficulties and supported the student's learning.</p>
<p>E18 Enabling</p> <p>How is each autistic student enabled to identify and take part in recreational and leisure activities within the school and in the wider community?</p> <p>The Holmewood School offers its students a wealth of out of the classroom experiences which enrich the curriculum, build self-esteem and enable students to interact in</p>	<p>Many of the events offered are part of the 'Footprints Life Camp' which is a not for profit social enterprise programme which has been developed by The Holmewood School staff and works alongside the school. It was the winner of this year's NAS Professional Award for the 'Most Creative Community Project'. Activities include farming, outdoor education and life-skills with the purpose of increasing independence in young people, developing their social skills and self-esteem. Many students at the school take part in the holiday camps that are run. The organisation offers paid internships to autistic young people. Employing more autistic people in</p>

<p>different settings where they can try out new activities. These include: Forest School, farm activities, cultural days, trips and residential. This balance to the academic curriculum which supports students' well-being is viewed as a potential strength of the school.</p>	<p>various roles is one of the schools aspirations. Within the main school regular events are held such as 'empty classroom' days where trips are planned, a French breakfast, reward events and regular lunch clubs. These changes to routine offer opportunities to mix in different social groupings, generalise skills and try out new activities.</p>
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PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Action taken to address recommendation
<p>No recommendations were made in the previous Panel Report</p>	

FAMILY QUESTIONNAIRES

	Number of Questionnaires sent out (please request from service if not available prior to review):						41
	Number of Questionnaires returned:						13
	Unscored	VERY UNHAPPY	UNHAPPY	SATISFIED	HAPPY	VERY HAPPY	
Contact	0	0	2	2	2	7	
Support	0	0	1	1	5	6	
Advice	0	0	0	4	3	6	
Involvement	0	0	0	3	2	8	
TOTALS	0	0	3	10	12	27	
PERCENTAGES	0%	0%	6%	19%	23%	52%	

Thirteen questionnaires were returned and of the responses received 75% were grades of 'happy' or 'very happy'. A selection of comments is given below:

Communication:

- Sensitive individualised support. Great home-school communication.
- Unlimited opportunities to see teachers/therapists. I cannot fault the staff in how they support and guide us through.
- Our child has been so eager to go to school every day. They communicate with us every day.
- Excellent daily communication in home-school diary.
- This has improved in the last month thanks to a new Head of Behaviour and Welfare.
- School is improving greatly, not so great at involving parents socially.
- Any issue, large or small, means I get a phone call that afternoon.

Support:

- The school is absolutely brilliant in the support and help they give our child.
- From OT, SLT to Psychotherapy, whatever my son needs they do their utmost.
- The school has concentrated on academic testing at the expense of the pupil's life skills.
- Wish they had more access to mainstream schools.
- There is always somebody my child can go to and talk about his problems.
- The school supports my son very well.
- The school has made a life changing difference to my son. He is happy at school for the first time. He says himself, this school understands him.

Advice:

- They let us know that we should always feel free to ask questions if we need to.
- Good reward system and opportunities to develop social, communication and independence skills for life.
- The school helps me with advice to help me at home with my child's needs.
- The call could do better with more frequent updates of child's progress and needs.
- They are very open with parents and you feel like they see the best in pupils and parents!

Involvement:

- At every stage we are involved but with a great balance of knowing what will work / what is best.
- I am kept up to date on his progress, a weekly report is produced.

FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS

Topic	Not Met	Partially Met	Majority Met	Fully Met
Differences in social communication	0	1	6	7
Self-reliance and problem solving	0	0	9	5
Sensory Experiences	0	0	8	6
Emotional well-being	0	1	5	9
TOTAL	0	2	28	27
PERCENTAGE	0	2	50	48

Topic	Comments
Differences in social communication	<p>An understanding of autism is at the heart of the work of the school and this is intrinsic to the curriculum and how it is delivered for each student. The Curriculum Framework Policy speaks of an emphasis on PSHCE and that '<i>structure and positive intervention with built-in opportunities for change and risk-taking achieve the best results for students with autism</i>'. It further states that '<i>Students learn best when teaching approaches allow for generalisation and concentrate on real-life situations rather than abstract concepts</i>'.</p> <p>The school's curriculum is broken down into three areas, The Core Curriculum, The Tailored Curriculum and The Enrichment Curriculum. The Core Curriculum includes the main teaching subjects; The Tailored Curriculum includes additional interventions and support such as Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Music Therapy, Yoga, Behaviour Support and Health and Well-Being Programme amongst others.</p>

The Enrichment Curriculum includes Travel training, Work Experience, Life Skills etc. This structure shows a clear understanding of the broad needs of students and overall the curriculum supports them to develop the knowledge and skills needed for their future lives as successful adults. The Teaching and Learning Policy describes how students require an approach that is highly individualised and often relatively specialised. It explains the need for small class sizes with high staff ratios which exist.

The school currently has two Speech and Language Therapists with one working for three days per week and one for four. This is an excellent level of provision and reflects the schools prioritising of broad communication skills and social understanding as many of the pupils have above average levels of language development. Work on developing effective communication skills was demonstrated by the student council that met and were able to discuss relevant issues in a respectful manner ensuring all were included and listened to.

During the review a member of the team observed a session led by the Speech and Language Therapist. The session had a focus on the development of auditory memory skills, an area in which both students required support. The work was fun but focused and had an appropriate level of challenge. This specific input is only possible in a provision where there is a good level of therapeutic input. Both Speech and Language Therapists are fully involved in the life of the school. They are able to discuss and set targets with teaching staff and share information with families. The Speech and Language Therapists attend regular multi-disciplinary meetings where individual student's needs are discussed, views of different therapists are shared and this results in a more holistic picture of the student being gained and joint decisions about interventions can be agreed. Meetings are also held with teaching staff where the Speech and Language Therapist together with the Occupational Therapist are able to present their assessments of an individual student including their response to therapy and suggestions for classroom support. The Speech and Language Therapist is able to attend class meetings when there is a need. In addition she joins trips out from school, including residential trips, where different aspects of student's functioning are often evident.

The Speech and Language Therapist works individually, with small groups and with whole class groups where social skills, including self-awareness are addressed. Lego therapy is used with some pupils as are Social Stories. Some joint sessions with the Occupational Therapist are run for younger groups in particular. These often centre on games where physical, organisational and social/communication skills are all involved.

All students have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) which includes targets under the headings Social, Emotional and Mental Health as well as Communication and Interaction. Targets include: to follow simple and short instructions independently, interact with peers during lunchtime (supported by a social story), recall and retain a list of 12 items.

Appropriate reference was made in planning seen during the review to show how the lesson would meet the

	<p>communication and social needs of the students, e.g. ability to process verbal instructions... visual checklist of lesson stages... questioning will be differentiated... necessary processing time given... students supported for peer questioning. In many observations an approach which supports the development of social and communication skills was noted, e.g. pair work, group sessions, sensitive management of students so that verbally strong students are not able to dominate the lesson. This was seen across different curriculum areas and shows the parallel curriculum of addressing common deficits in autism alongside more academic learning.</p> <p>The school believes in presenting a positive understanding of autism both within school and to external agencies and providers – e.g. work experience placements. This work forms part of the Life Skills Curriculum and is currently building up a bank of relevant resources to use in this work, appropriate to individual needs.</p> <p>During the review a member of the team observed lunch and it was pleasing to see older and younger students sitting together with staff in a relaxed manner.</p> <p>The good range of off-site and outdoor activities which take place are seen to offer valuable opportunities to develop social skills.</p>
<p>Self-reliance and problem solving</p>	<p>Opportunities for problem-solving are consistently built into lessons e.g. working in pairs to solve a maths challenge or to swim through a hoop in swimming; coming up with solutions to an issue within student council. Staff scaffold support to allow students to achieve the goal independently e.g. “what do you need to do?” or providing a closed choice. Students had more difficulty when transitions were less structured e.g. ‘find a partner’.</p> <p>Students are encouraged to be self-reliant e.g. putting on own aprons; taking self away for a break; getting changed for swimming. In the latter a visual ‘reminder’ list was effectively used to encourage students to check they had collected belongings etc. Sixth form students have opportunities to prepare their own lunch together with members of staff, making for a relaxed and enjoyable joint activity where many skills can be addressed.</p> <p>Lessons have a clear structure with visual schedules ticked off. Students are prepared for change/transitions e.g. frequent use of countdowns and timers (on one occasion a final activity had to be missed due to lack of time which one student found difficult but managed to self-regulate).</p> <p>Students are encouraged to tidy up /put equipment away and were observed asking for help where required. When offering help, staff encourage students to be independent by supporting them to find solutions to a problem rather than doing the task for them eg laying out an apron for the student to see it the right way up rather than putting it on for him.</p>

	<p>Alternatives are provided for areas of difficulty e.g. a choice of chromebook was offered in a drama lesson as an alternative to writing. However, the student chose to 'have a go' at writing demonstrating the effectiveness of a non-direct/student-led approach in reducing anxiety about a demand.</p> <p>Creative /imaginative thought is encouraged and supported e.g. coming up for ideas for a 'new' school; Suggesting their 'ideal' country; character work within drama.</p> <p>Secondary students follow a secondary model of moving around the school to specialist rooms and teachers, e.g Science in the Science room taught by a specialist teacher. Transitions were observed to be generally calm and well managed. The small scale of the school supports a family/relaxed atmosphere which contrasts to that of a large secondary school where some students have experienced difficulties. The team believe that the nature of the school where everyone knows everyone and differences are accepted is very supportive of students and their reduced anxiety levels.</p>
<p>Sensory Experiences</p>	<p>The school benefits from a full time Occupational Therapist (OT) and an Occupational Therapy Assistant. There is a well-equipped Occupational Therapy room and smaller office space. In addition there are several relaxation areas around the school where students can go to calm when they have found a situation stressful or simply to spend some time alone. One student often needs some time in one of these rooms before he feels ready to join his class at the beginning of the day. The playground has a trampoline which is shared effectively through use of a three minute timer.</p> <p>Sensory equipment is available for students in each classroom.</p> <p>When felt to be beneficial the Occupational Therapist works jointly with one of the Speech and Language Therapists, e.g. when supporting a student who found difficulty in occupying himself at home. They made some home visits and over time were able to help him to develop a repertoire of activities which he could enjoy. Input to families is an important part of the OT's role as is training for staff. There is an emphasis on training staff to be able to judge when a movement break might be needed or a student requires a 'fiddle' item rather than providing sensory diets for individual students. This approach appears to be effective because the OT is in school full time for discussion and staff understanding around sensory interventions is strong.</p> <p>Currently the OT is investigating 'fiddle' items which meet the students need but are more age appropriate for older students. Also an effective alternative to ear defenders is being sought for a student who feels self-conscious about them and requires something more discrete. Fiddle cubes and pipe cleaners were frequently chosen by students. In one observation a member of staff gave a student some crocodile clips she was using within the lesson as a 'fiddle' resource.</p>

	<p>One younger student sometimes wears a weighted jacket. There is quite a high level of diagnosis of ADHD amongst students.</p> <p>In a Maths lesson for a primary class sensory issues were addressed by a movement break being given for the whole class part way through the lesson. Individual needs were identified by staff and intervened with as appropriate.</p> <p>The Occupational Therapist works in a number of ways with students. Some require regular Occupational Therapy sessions to develop skills and strengths which are poorly developed. For some students work focuses on developing organisational skills and for others it is sensory integration. One OT session was observed for a student who had an interest in cooking. He was being taught how to make sushi which involved a number of skills and the OT supported him to be as independent as possible in the task. He and one or two other students have put their skills and enjoyment of cooking to a practical purpose by holding a Café and they were preparing for a second event during the review. The first event was well attended and enjoyed by staff and students alike and this time they have received some 'pre-orders and requests'. Tasks are allocated and one student who has good mental maths skills manages the till and takes real pride in this. Vocational experiences such as this are introduced at an early stage in school wherever possible in line with the schools endeavour to prepare students for a future working life.</p> <p>The Occupational Therapist is part of the strong multi-disciplinary team which includes a Reflexologist, Music therapist, Drama Therapist, Psychotherapist and two Speech and Language Therapists.</p>
<p>Emotional Well-being</p>	<p>The school has detailed procedures for managing behaviour as described in the Behaviour Support Policy. Students have positive reward systems and prompts (e.g. voice level, take a break cards) that are used consistently and displayed within classes. Students are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour at a designated time at the end of the day. Parents receive a weekly summary of rewards received.</p> <p>A member of staff has responsibility for Behaviour and Welfare and works closely with the therapy team (and external agencies where appropriate) to support staff, students and parents. This includes regular input to class meetings, home visits, behaviour briefings, training in proactive strategies, modelling input, recording and analysing behaviour incidents, drawing up Behaviour Support Plans. There is a detailed protocol for action following an incident of Physical Intervention and staff are required to fill out a checklist of action taken.</p> <p>An SMSC well-being programme runs three times a week at the beginning of the school day where students choose between yoga, meditation, running or gym. Staff also join in with these activities and this reflects a culture of doing things</p>

	<p>together (staff and students) which exists in the school. This approach helps students to get to know and trust staff and to gain some insight into how adults think and act which can often support their own understanding and reflection.</p> <p>Students have access to a range of therapies and well-being programmes including psychotherapy, music therapy, drama therapy, reflexology and yoga.</p> <p>Staff were observed to be 'tuned in' to anxiety levels/ low mood and adjusted demands accordingly e.g. offering additional support or giving student a choice or using humour in order to diffuse a request.</p> <p>Good use was made of 'learning breaks' to allow students time to self-regulate. Students also take responsibility for self-regulating their own behaviour e.g. leaving the room to calm down.</p> <p>The recently elected School Council provides opportunities for students to discuss and report issues to senior management staff who take account of views and respond accordingly. Students were seen to work effectively as a student body, making considered judgements and allowing each member their say.</p> <p>The school offers a range of opportunities for inclusion including accessing lessons at local secondary schools and a local FE college. There are also a range of work experience opportunities for older pupils which have been chosen based on individual strengths and interests (derived from Person Centred Planning processes). An information sheet about autism has been produced to assist employers in understanding and supporting pupils. Following a cyber bullying incident at college staff worked closely with college staff to resolve the situation.</p>
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CONCLUSION

Many students attending The Holmewood School have come from mainstream schools where the provision has been inappropriate and they have not been successful in these settings. Some have had an extended period of time out of school and their placement at The Holmewood School has been a new start for them where they have been able to settle and to begin to experience success. The school has a happy atmosphere in which students in the main appear to be at ease and as some parents commented in the questionnaire, they feel understood. The school not only addresses the complex needs that many students present resulting from their autism but also offers a strong curriculum with specialist teachers and the chance to complete accredited courses. Overall there is a focus on preparation for future positive participation in mainstream society which involves an individual programme which reflects a deep understanding of student's needs and draws on a broad range of possible interventions.