



AUTISM ACCREDITATION PEER REVIEW

SERVICE REVIEWED: Oak View School

DATES OF REVIEW: December 5-6 2017

REVIEW TEAM MEMBERS: Clive Osborne (team co-ordinator), Sally James (team member)

OVERVIEW OF PROVISION

Oak View is an all age, local authority special school catering for a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities. Around half of the pupils have been diagnosed with autism spectrum conditions. All pupils have, or are being assessed for, an EHC plan.

In organising class groupings attention is paid to age, learning style and individual need. There are young people with autism in most classes.

The ethos at Oak View is to celebrate everyone's individuality, and to work to enable individuals to develop to their full potential. As part of this the school places great emphasis on the importance of its carefully designed provision intended to produce a Total Communication service.

The school is increasingly recognised within its local authority as a centre of good autism practice, and is preparing for a new cohort of up to 24 pupils with autism who are more able than the current pupils but who still require specialist provision.

In 2013 OFSTED found the school Good, with Behaviour and Safety of pupils Outstanding.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

Observations

The review team conducted 18 observations, taking around nine hours. Sessions included art, dance, PE, transition to and from

the swimming pool, swimming, literacy, breaks, cooking, music and bakery-based work experience.

Interviews and Discussions

Individuals/roles interviewed

Head teacher

Chair of Governors

Governor with responsibility for safeguarding

Assistant Head (Autism)

Assistant Head (Assessment)

Senior teacher in charge of outreach and Sensory provision

Music Therapist

SaLT assistant

Telephone conversations with three parents

In addition to formal interviews, informal conversations were held with teachers, classroom support staff and pupils.

Documentation

The documents seen include:

Autism and Behaviour Policy

Communication, Language and Literacy Policy

Advocacy Policy

Autism and Flexibility of Thought Policy

Display Policy

Family Links Policy

Physical Contact and Touching Policy (including Physical Intervention)

Policy for Promoting Independence in Students with Autism

Sensory Issues Policy

Sensory Room Policy

Session Planning Policy for Students with ASD

Understanding of Autism Policy

Pupil induction and transition documents

Pen Portraits

Behaviour Plans

Learning Journals - Evidence of Progress

Postcards of Achievement

Speech and Language Therapy Care plans

SCERTS assessments

Pupil and Family views summaries

School Improvement Plan

School website

School Prospectus

Multi-Schools Council meeting minutes

Summary of HUB and Outreach Support 2017

Draft Essex Autism Strategy 2017-2020

Autism Accreditation documents including Self-audit and Advisor Report

KEY FINDINGS

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

Actions for development	Reasoning
<p><i>E10 each autistic student enabled to understand, self-regulate and manage sensory experiences</i></p> <p>The school has a clearly defined strategy to further embed sensory provision.</p>	<p>Oak View has been developing its sensory provision, and in September 2017 a well-equipped Sensory Integration room was added to those already in place.</p> <p>The school has employed Jump Start with input from the company’s director Claire Pemrick to further develop the provision of sensory integration by building on existing assessments to identify a wider range of pupils who would benefit from sensory integration.</p> <p>The school plans to embed sensory practice by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining and improving existing provision • providing training for parents and staff • developing sensory circuits • linking sensory needs to Zones of Regulation • embedding sensory regulation into the curriculum, including self-regulation • including sensory information in pen portraits • monitoring use of the new SI room. <p>The review team support this development, which will underpin established good practice across the setting.</p>
<p><i>Education Standard P4: effectiveness of support in facilitating each autistic student to carry out tasks and activities with increased self-reliance and confidence</i></p>	<p>SCERTS was introduced by the school about a year ago, and now it is underpinning its autism practice.</p> <p>The SCERTS assessment has enabled the school to show progress other than academic. The B Squared assessments continue to be used to show more easily measured progress, including academic progress. The school wishes to continue to explore methods of appropriate assessment,</p>

<p>The school is implementing and developing a broad range of tools which will support further personalisation of assessment.</p>	<p>including the recently added autism elements of B Squared, plus ways to make it easier to measure progress.</p> <p>In addition, over the current academic year the school aims to embed fully the use of SCERTS assessments to identify targets that could be used in EHC plans. To that end it has developed a customised method for recording SCERTS data.</p> <p>The review team endorse this potential area of development to support further personalisation of assessment.</p>
<p><i>Education Standard E20: autistic students supported to develop a positive and constructive understanding of what it means to be autistic</i></p> <p>Structures are being developed to allow young people to understand and celebrate their autism.</p>	<p>Oak View recognises the strengths and challenges presented by each individual's autism. Currently few students are able to reflect on the challenges they face, although the school is starting to develop skills in emotional regulation.</p> <p>The school sees a need to formalise the way it works with the language and concepts of autism, particularly with the forthcoming addition of a cohort of pupils with different cognitive abilities. Key to that is recognising individual students' strengths and potential as well as areas that require development. Senior leaders expect that to include dialogue with staff and parents. It will also be part of the continuing development of Student Voice.</p> <p>The review team acknowledge the importance of achieving this before the new unit opens, expected in 2019.</p> <p>Senior leaders are keen to build on an example from the school's celebration of World Autism Day, when two pupils were observed discussing the fact that it was "their day".</p> <p>The review team acknowledges the work already done and fully supports the intention to further develop ways for young people to understand and celebrate their autism.</p>

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

Specific areas of strength	Reasoning
<p><i>Educational Standard E9: each autistic student supported in developing problem-solving skills and coping strategies relevant to independent functioning outside or after school (e.g. in terms of work skills or independent living).</i></p> <p>Full advantage is taken of the opportunities for developing curriculum and life skills in the way the new multiple kitchen area is used.</p>	<p>The refurbished cooking facility features three separate kitchens in one spacious room. The modern and well-equipped kitchens are used by most of the middle and upper-school classes for food technology and life-skills sessions – key elements of the whole-school curriculum.</p> <p>For one other class the aim of accessing the kitchen is the focus of planning and development of transition skills.</p> <p>Medium-term planning and schemes of work stress the importance of cooking, including links to communication, social interactions, literacy and numeracy as well as forward-looking links to independence, problem-solving and following different systems of working.</p> <p>As well as cooking, students shop for ingredients, extending their interaction in the local community.</p> <p>This year the area is being used by the Upper School’s work experience enterprise bakery project, combining new skills with work opportunities.</p>
<p><i>Education Standard C9: all staff, including administration and ancillary staff, understand and implement a strengths-based person-centred approach, which is based on current knowledge and understanding of autism</i></p> <p>and</p> <p><i>Education Standard C12: staff induction and professional development programmes reflect a contemporary knowledge and</i></p>	<p>Induction begins with an initial 19 hours of delivery by a SaLT assistant and teachers, and covers a basic introduction to autism, autism communication, social understanding, flexibility and social issues.</p> <p>Once staff have an overview of autism they attended training which includes such key topics as PECS, Makaton, TEACCH and the use of visual supports, Attention Autism, Intensive Interaction, Colourful Semantics, and sensory integration including the SI room, behaviour management, Comic Strip Conversations and Social Stories.</p> <p>Staff value the training because it is relevant to the challenges their students face.</p> <p>The impact of the school’s commitment to quality induction and on-going training was evident in observations.</p>

<p><i>understanding of autism whilst challenging common stereotypes and myths</i></p> <p>The school has an extensive and established induction and training programme.</p>	
<p><i><u>Educational Standard C24: the school provides advice and training to other external professionals in how to support autistic</u></i></p> <p>Oak View is at the heart of work to disseminate good autism practice throughout the Local Authority.</p>	<p>Oak View's role in leading excellent practice among local schools has been developed in the past year by a senior teacher who has recently been appointed Specialist Lead in Education in Autism.</p> <p>Much of this work has been in connection with autism 'hubs' in a local primary and a secondary school which required support for young people who need specialist support within mainstream classes.</p> <p>Oak View's intention is to foster deeper understanding of the key issues by highlighting different educational and support perspectives, and the school is collaborating in this area with an LA Specialist Teacher.</p> <p>The outreach role is as a supportive partner – looking at quality assurance, conducting peer reviews and setting areas for development. In one case training given to an organisation to support transition of a young person with complex needs, has led to a continuing working relationship.</p>

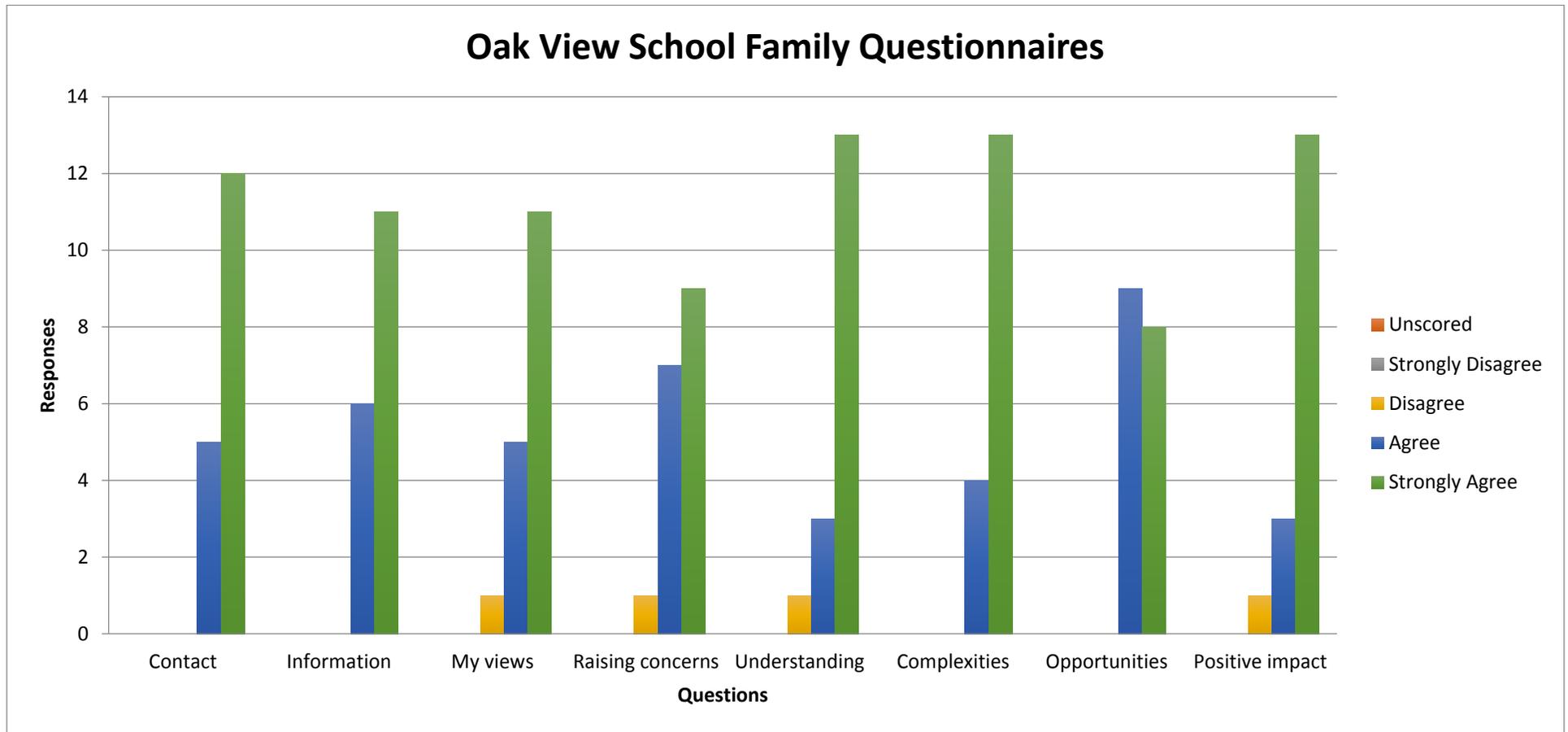
PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Action taken to address recommendation
<p>Specialist Standard 1: Environment Specialist Standard 2: Teaching and Learning - Programme/Curriculum and Activity Content</p> <p>The review team see the refurbishment of the Food Technology and Life Skills area to be a positive step and identify the development of broad curriculum opportunities which include social, cooking and independence skills within this facility as a potential area of development for the school.</p>	<p>The use made of the new multiple kitchen area, in terms of curriculum and life skills, has been seen as a specific area of strength by this review team (see above).</p>
<p>Specialist Standard 2: Teaching and Learning - Programme/Curriculum and Activity Content</p> <p>It is clear that the school recognises the importance of pupil voice however the review team consider this could be a potential area of further development. This might involve reviewing opportunities that exist for pupils to express themselves and to extend opportunities to self-evaluate their work and express their aspirations and goals for now and in the future.</p>	<p>Oak View supports pupil voice as a means to strengthen well-being. It has analysed pupil and family preferences expressed during EHC planning and has published the data for parents/families as well as using it as a part of lesson planning.</p> <p>The school is also developing plans for more pupil-friendly language to be used when ascertaining opinions, such as in preparing ECH plans.</p> <p>The School Improvement Plan identifies the importance of promoting young people’s well-being, including their awareness of how to stay safe, and a working group is producing specific displays to back up safeguarding messages such as “who can help” and “where to go for support”.</p> <p>The school maintains its intention of being a Total Communication environment, and in this context the</p>

	<p>policy is to offer a range of communication supports to ensure an individual's preferences and needs are met. This level of support is reflected in the way choices are presented in lessons and other activities.</p> <p>The review team notes that the school recognises how development in this area will never be complete: management acknowledge that the use of self-evaluation in lessons is an area for continuing development, and there are two working parties working on pupil voice, one focusing on the classroom and one focusing on work around EHC plans.</p>
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FEEDBACK FROM FAMILIES

Envelopes Sent					
Envelopes Returned	17				
Statement	Response				
	No Response	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am able to contact the school about my child on a regular basis				5	12
I am given information about my child's/family member's progress on a regular basis				6	11
The school listens to my views about my child and their education and takes them into account			1	5	11
I am aware of how to raise concerns about any aspect of my child's/family member's education and am confident that they will be considered and addressed			1	7	9
The school has a good understanding of my child/family member and works well to meet their needs			1	3	13
The school respects the complexities of caring for a family member on the autistic spectrum				4	13
The school provides opportunities for me to find out more about autism and my child's/family member's specific needs				9	8
The school has had a positive impact on my family member's life and learning			1	3	13
Total Replies			4	42	90
Percentages			2.9%	30.9%	66.2%



Parent responses

The overwhelming majority of comments made were positive. A sample of these are shown below. A more critical comment received from one parent is also included.

Of the 17 returned questionnaires, 14 included statements from families. They included:

- Our child hasn't been at the school for long. But coming from a mainstream school where our child struggled daily because of lack of autism awareness, this is a vast improvement.

- The whole school has an air of acceptance and celebration of children. It is wonderful. It is the first time for us as a family that there is an understanding of how she can be at home i.e. fine at school, meltdown at home.
- Sending "X" to Oak View was the best decision I ever made. The school is fantastic.
- The school has a strong team of professionals who understand all aspects and complexities of autism.
- Great school, but referrals for therapy can take a while.
- My daughter has made great progress. I cannot praise Oak View enough. If I ever have a problem I know I can contact the school for advice on any subject.
- Home/school diary is a very good communication tool.
- [...] a huge improvement in his anxiety levels and emotional well-being. The staff are extremely kind and understanding.
- Progress reports are often misrepresentative. For example "X is a confident communicator however, on occasions, he can be difficult to understand." "Y" is difficult to understand by the family and yet the word "confident" is used.
- The school recently provided a Sensory Integration Training For Parents session, giving us a better understanding of autism and our son's needs.
- My son went backwards. All the good work in primary was undone. He is often unsettled and nothing appears to be done about the bullying by others.
- This school is the best thing that happened in our son's life. They meet individual needs of each child. They are very professional, helpful and friendly.
- Oak View school has demonstrated a wealth of experience and understanding. They have always been a support to me in managing my child's needs.

The review team spoke to three parents over the phone.

All were agreed that the school had had enormous positive effects on their children, who were now clearly more happy and settled than at their previous placements. All were grateful for the support given by the school, ranging from advice from the Speech and Language therapy Assistant, through to formal training and support in the developing use of PECS at home. One parent said their son had struggled with school before Oak View; "he now comes home singing a song".

In her most recent Record of Visit, Accreditation Service Advisor Hannelore Bout met three parents and noted: "All parents were very complimentary about the school. They felt the communication was good, home-school diary worked well and teachers made time to discuss concerns.

"The families felt the school worked well as a team with the families and made bespoke adaptations to meet the needs of the students."

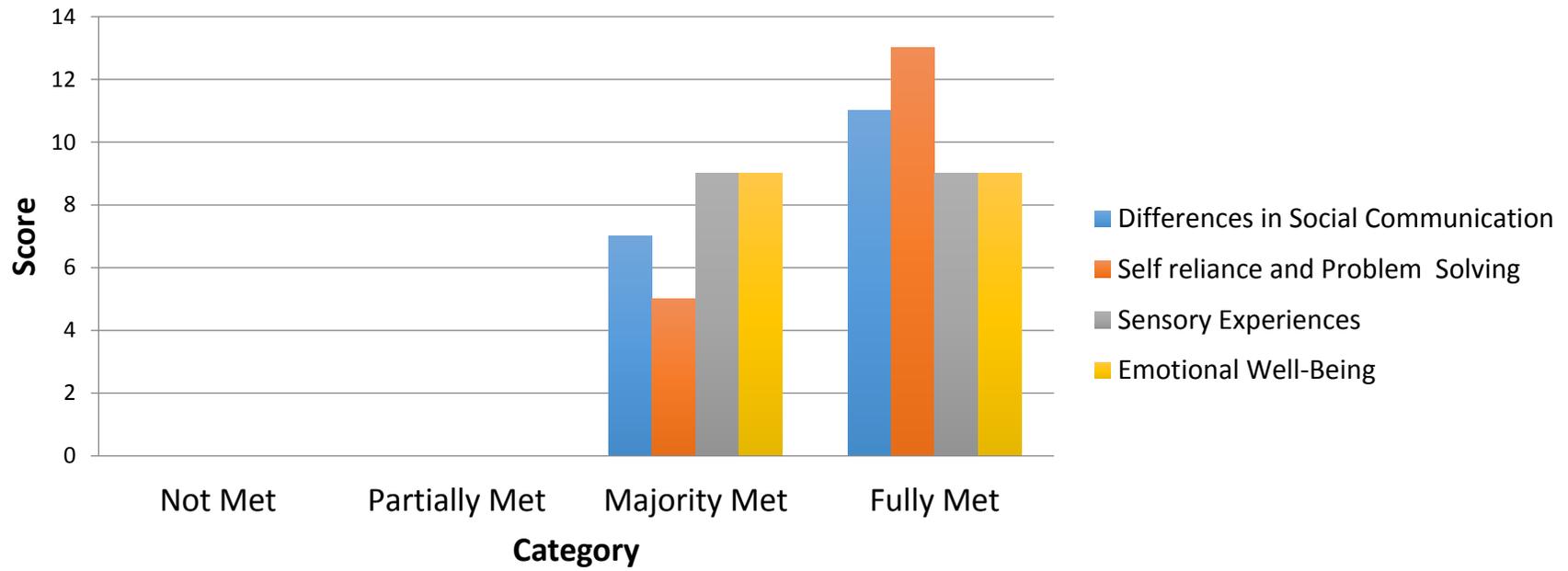
The parents suggested that more Makaton training would be helpful. One pointed out that the end-of-day transition through the gates "can be intense."

OBSERVATION SCORES

Number of sessions observed: 18

Topic	Not met	Partially Met	Majority Met	Fully Met
Differences in social communication			7	11
Self-reliance and problem solving			5	13
Sensory experiences			9	9
Emotional well-being			9	9
TOTAL			30	42
PERCENTAGE			41.7%	58.3%

Oak View observations



Examples of standards Fully Met include:

- Staff recognise indicators that a student's anxiety is building, and calmly put effective measures in place
- Particularly effective use of "Now", "Next" and "Then"
- Great use of visual cues, excellent use of individual schedules
- Pupils focused and working independently at differentiated tasks
- Opportunities for sensory exploration of objects used in the lesson, and for familiar concepts such as a special tactile box for Tuesday, including the smell of oranges
- Appropriate interactions – including jokes – between students, peers and staff members
- Session includes a range of activities to suit different preferred learning styles
- Session set up to maximise independence with work systems and resources.

Examples of standards Majority Met include:

- Lesson resources handed out to pupils – missed opportunities to engage students in distributing items
- TAs gave excessive help to pupils with bags and coats, and removed symbols from schedules, reducing opportunities to develop independence
- Inappropriate responses to behaviour: "I need you to come and wait by me or there's no playground when we get back to school"
- Student answered staff question, but it was repeated several times more
- Inappropriate symbols: "Seal" meaning closed represented by the animal, or symbols lacking: "Today's menu" sheet in dining room blank
- Short notice given for micro-transitions, especially where students are particularly enjoying activities.

FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS

Theme	Comments
<p>Differences in social communication</p> <p>Majority Met 38.9%, Fully Met 61.1%</p>	<p>The school holds the expressive and receptive communication needs of all its learners in high priority. A range of supports, including the use of alternative and augmentative communication, were observed including Makaton signing, PECS, a VOCA and symbol-aided communication. The school aims to be a Total Communication environment. In addition, Intensive Interaction, Colourful Semantics and SCERTS are used.</p> <p>The school employs a SaLT Assistant who works with children to get them started using PECS and has a method of working with individuals that combines PECS, SCERTS and Colourful Semantics. She also delivers a large part of the induction and on-going training for staff; training in PECS and TEACCH is considered a priority.</p> <p>In observations a range of visual supports were seen to be used very effectively. All staff carry frequently-needed symbols on a lanyard and were observed using these often to direct and inform students. Just a few of the many examples of visual support used include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a symbol card showing 'Red Class' used to show a pupil reluctant to leave reception on arrival at school. The adult used the occasional verbal prompt too, "Go to Red class". There were many examples of symbols effectively being used to direct pupils, sometimes without additional verbal prompt including "Sit" and "Wait" • use of simple schedule strip showing 'Now, Next, Then' used throughout the school in a range of situations • targets for a swimming lesson presented using one symbol so each student knew what to work on in the lesson • "green voice" card shown to pupil to prompt them to use a quieter voice • symbols presented by teachers to help explain lesson content and instructions. <p>Staff also demonstrated their understanding that some students need to be shown/given information or an instruction individually because if presented to the whole class, they might not realise they were included.</p> <p>On the whole, staff used appropriate levels of language for example: "Bench now, XXXX come" with accompanying gesture. However, the team also saw examples where staff use of language was potentially confusing for the students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "You're not running, you're getting dressed" meaning "stop running, get dressed".

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I need you to come and wait by me or there’s no playground when we get back to school.” <p>Whilst there were no observations of an Intensive Interaction session, staff were seen to respond to students in the way encouraged in Intensive Interaction in a spontaneous manner. Examples include responding to a student’s vocalisations and movements while waiting or in other spare moments.</p> <p>The review team observed extensive use of Widget symbols. Although this appeared to be generally effective, there were examples on display which used the symbols so extensively that the meaning would be beyond the students they were intended for. In one case the word “seal” for closing a plastic freezer bag was represented by an image of the marine mammal.</p>
<p>Self-reliance and problem solving</p> <p>Majority Met 27.8%, Fully Met 72.2%</p>	<p>Oak View School understands the need to provide structure, routine and strategies that are transferable from setting to setting with the aim of achieving independence.</p> <p>Structural support is evident in the variations and elements of TEACCH observed around the school – the tools from this approach are personalised to match individual need, although the basic components, such as “work bays” are pretty universal.</p> <p>Visual schedules were observed in use to support students to transition calmly and independently, for example pupils were shown Now/Next card including a symbol for swimming. Elsewhere class rules/expectations were displayed in text and visual format on the interactive whiteboard.</p> <p>Particularly good practice included routinely giving pupils opportunities to participate in activities such as using photographs to indicate who is in class, or giving young people the time and space to ensure they were adequately emotionally regulated before joining in the core activities of a session.</p> <p>Support of individuals’ independence was balanced by an understanding of individual limitations: for one pupil staff made the decision to take a five-minute break – a decision beyond the abilities of the young person involved. In another session the lesson plan explicitly stated individualised strategies to be used for certain pupils if needed –they had been required and were in place.</p> <p>Sessions for older students were clearly designed to strengthen self-reliance and decision-making in a work-based and adult way. The new kitchen unit was particularly well-used in this respect, and the staff approach, through questioning and leaving students to complete a job which they did not find particularly easy, did much to foster an authentic workplace ethos.</p>

	<p>Another sound practice observed with older students was getting them to tell their peers what they had done in a session marked by a high level of individual work.</p> <p>Where the review team found standards were Majority Met it was usually where staff missed opportunities to fully empower young people – such as taking over chores such as clearing away after eating at lunchtime, or being too quick to work with the symbols on a daily schedule, hereby reducing an individual’s autonomy.</p>
<p>Sensory experiences</p> <p>Majority Met 50.0%, Fully Met 50.0%</p>	<p>The school’s facilities include a hydrotherapy pool, sensory room with both light and dark sections, a recently added Sensory Integration room, and other calm rooms. Many classrooms have a low arousal area curtained off and containing cushions for occasions when students need to be somewhere quiet. Work stations and privacy boards provide distraction free work spaces for students that need them.</p> <p>Most classrooms have access to outside areas including a playground and sensory garden. The school is fundraising to add more play equipment in order to offer students improved facilities.</p> <p>One of the challenges the school faces is that the building was not designed for the current cohort. Some classrooms were good examples of a low arousal environment whilst others were quite cluttered. This was mostly a feature of the classrooms in the lower school where students need access to a large amount of stimulating equipment for staff access which was stored in an array of plastic boxes of different sizes and colours. The school might like to consider using labelled boxes of all one colour and size to create uniformity if building cupboards is not possible.</p> <p>The staff of the school understand that sensory issues and differences can present significant difficulties for autistic students and have employed a local company, Jump Start, who specialise in Sensory Integration, to develop their ability to meet sensory needs. SCERTS assessments have helped to identify students and Jump Start have begun to produce individual Sensory Diets, adding to those already in place. Some lesson plans detailed the sensory needs of students. Currently this information is not generally included in ‘at a glance’ Pen Portraits. It is planned that Jump Start will provide more training for staff and also run training for parents which will help embed the understanding of the need for some students to access activities which are alerting, organizing and calming before they engage in learning across the school day.</p> <p>Students were observed using a range of supports: therapy balls to sit on in circle time, Lycra stretchy blankets, fiddlies, special cushions and ear defenders. Staff recognised the need for some</p>

	<p>students to have movement breaks. In one observed session a student used his 'Time out' card to tell the teacher he needed to leave for a short break. Both teachers and teaching assistants were observed recognizing and responding to the first signs of agitation in students and reacted by giving them a favourite toy, massaging their shoulders or taking them for a walk.</p> <p>Staff were observed offering their students a range of sensory experiences. In one class each day of the week is represented by a plastic box with a different texture on the lid for each day and containing a different smell. The KS4 and 5 students make bread each week and mixing and kneading the dough was observed delivering a very sticky sensory experience.</p> <p>The school recognize that sensory provision at the school is a work in progress. (see Development).</p>
<p>Emotional well-being Majority Met 50.0%, Fully Met 50.0%</p>	<p>High degrees of personalisation throughout the school underpin a developed sense of well-being among the young people.</p> <p>Good practice in social communication and an understanding of individuals' sensory needs also go a long way to ensuring young people's safety and welfare.</p> <p>A key note observed throughout the school was the positive and upbeat delivery of sessions (which encouraged pupils to engage), including opportunities for pupils to interact together. One episode observed during lunch break time involved two students (one with, one without, an autism diagnosis) who were quietly sitting and together chatting. Staff were delighted to see this, and reported that such social interaction represented a massive step forward for the student with autism.</p> <p>When the review team observed good practice, the understanding of individuals was reflected in personalised delivery right down to ensuring that praise for, say, work completed, was appropriately couched in terms that had special relevance to the young person.</p> <p>With older students, staff were observed supporting fun conversations and working with young people to develop jokes and other age-appropriate social interaction.</p> <p>Classrooms were frequently observed to have high levels of information, such as pen portraits and communication diaries, to support staff working with young people.</p> <p>When pupils began to show anxiety staff smoothly moved in with appropriate responses – foot massage and arm and back massage were observed being delivered, while on other occasions a young person was supported to move away from sources of concern.</p> <p>On some occasions the review team found standards were Majority Met when insufficient time was allowed between announcing the end of an activity and it ceasing – especially where pupils were</p>

clearly enjoying what they were doing.

At other times staff indicated the behaviour they expected, but did not follow through – for example during lunchtime one student ignored a request to sit down, and then further ignored an instruction not to run. The staff member did not intervene further.

At other times opportunities appeared to have been missed to ensure pupils remains well-regulated – for one session the team member and another new face joined the class, causing some anxiety.

However, no visual support saying that unknown people would be joining the class was apparent in the room.

CONCLUSION

Oak View has a clear sense of purpose in preparing its students for life after school. Full advantage is taken of the opportunities for developing curriculum and life skills, and staff are aware of the importance of supporting this with personalised support for young people and an embedded sensory provision designed to make all young people feel safe and comfortable. In particular structures are being developed to allow young people to understand and celebrate their autism.

The extensive and established induction and training programme keeps skills and expertise up to date, allowing Oak View to further develop its role as a centre for good autism practice within the local authority.