



## **AUTISM ACCREDITATION PEER REVIEW**

**SERVICE REVIEWED: Wilds Lodge School**

**DATES OF REVIEW: 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

**TEAM MEMBERS: Rebecca Leeson & Aaron Burgess**

### OVERVIEW OF PROVISION

Wilds Lodge School is an independent specialist boarding and day provision for boys with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties aged between 5 and 18. All the students at the school have a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The school was established in 2007 and aims to place an equal emphasis on the educational, social and psychological development of their students. The school feels the key to their success is a strong ethos, developed by a highly experienced and capable staff, and the strength of the relationships between the staff and the students.

The school currently has 62 residential students and 22 day boys. The students are grouped into five residential houses with close regard to their chronological age, their social needs and their personal maturity. The main needs of pupils with SEN at the school are social, emotional and behavioral difficulties and moderate learning difficulties, with 47 of the current students having a diagnosis of Autism Autistic Spectrum Disorder. As part of the school's development we now have a nurture group for our youngest students; this class currently has four students with a nurture co-ordinator and teaching assistant. They do pre-school activities learning through play to raise their self-esteem and to replace missed years of nurture. This helps prepare them for key stage 2 classes.

The school work closely with external professionals appropriate to the child's requirements. This includes Social Workers, GPs, Local Authority (multi-disciplinary team), CAMHS, and Youth Offending Teams. In addition there are strong links with community facilities such as Stamford School (swimming facility) and other partner schools/ colleges that the students play sport fixtures against; as well as a range of other life skill and therapeutic venues i.e. Stamford Boxing Club, Air Force Cadets, music lessons, horse riding lessons, Jem's Hip Hop lessons, shopping and soft play areas.

The school has a Therapy Department made up of five [multi-disciplinary] counsellors of mixed sex to conduct counselling sessions. Since the last review the school has employed an Occupational Therapist and Speech and Language Therapist (both one day a week) that offer students support. Students are referred to the Therapy Department, Occupational Therapist and Speech and Language Therapist through the Education and Care Staff. There is also a Pastoral Support, Head of Student Support and Senior Staff Support that helps boys during the school days to promote integration back in to classes during times of disruption or where there are specific issues that need to be resolved.

## SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

### Observations

Observations were considerably scheduled throughout the review, and offered the team a rounded, thoughtful and diverse picture of the provision the school and residential services offer to their students. The review team observed a ten structured hours practice during the review, with twenty one observations being completed, although during discussions with staff members and time reviewing paperwork, we spent time amongst the children and their home in more natural circumstances. The review team spent time with the nurture group – with the youngest students in the school (the youngest being seven), to the oldest students who have just transitioned into the Post 16 home (Rock House) in Stamford. Most observations were classroom based, however, there was also opportunities to spend time with students on a 1:1 basis when on tours of the homes and seeing interactions between children in House Meetings. We were included in the morning meetings within the homes of the children all the way through to the evening House meeting and after school activities, giving the review team a sense of the holistic approach to care and education within the school. A sample of the observations are as follows:

- Morning house Meeting – 8:30am – children within their house groups getting together in a relaxed environment, reading newspapers, playing on computer games and phones, chatting in groups. Led by the House Leader, children were encouraged to set themselves a target to work on throughout the day and were offered guidance where necessary.
- Nurture Play Time – With their own area to play, the nurture group have structured play times within their school day. Being some of the youngest children at the school, the nurture class prepares them for more formal classroom based lessons. Play time was scheduled into the school day regularly, allowing children who have not had the opportunity to build and develop play skills the opportunity to do so and helps to offer short bursts of focussed activity in the classroom to build the skills needed to achieve and accomplish in their successive years within the school. This was an excellent observation, well-coordinated.
- Sensory Circuits – Built into the beginning of Key Stage 2 children's day, the sensory circuits are a new development – led primarily by the Occupational Therapist and one of the Team Leaders. The review team observed two classes within the observation, both completing the same exercises, they offered the children short bursts of sensory activities at the beginning of their day (such as balance boards and a trampette), followed by a relaxation period. The children were very engaged during this time, with the newest student at the school (who had arrived the evening before)

joining in the full session and appearing more relaxed than he was seen any other point in what was obviously a very difficult day for him. The review team were able to observe the same class of children later in the day during a class and it was obvious to see the contrast from the engaged children receiving sensory input and being taught relaxation techniques to the fidgety, restless children struggling to contribute to their class. The teachers have reported an increased participation level within the classes on the days of the Sensory Circuits, the Occupational Therapist and the Team Leader were keen to include more of these circuits and sensory activities within the wider school community and the school appear to be committed to this. The review team felt this was excellent.

### Interviews and Discussions

The review team had scheduled meetings with a number of key personnel at the school, this included:

- Principal
- Student Support / Child Protection
- Heads of Departments (including Head of Care, Head of Therapies and Head of Education)
- Senior at Rock House
- Occupational Therapist
- Speech and Language Therapist
- Senior Team Leaders

The review team was impressed by the passion and drive of each member of staff they had discussions with, the pride and understanding of the students was emanated throughout the school as a whole, including the students who showed a sincere sense of pride of their homes and accomplishments. Core values were evident throughout the school, in classrooms, discussions with children and House Meetings.

The review team met with a parent of a day boy, who described how the school had changed her family's life. Her son has been a student at the school for a couple of years and the family were impressed by the level of planning and commitment to their son. The parent described the planning and preparation for her son before visiting a Formula One track recently and praised the school for the positive risk taking they do. The parent commented "They do things that should be a nightmare for kids with Autism, they take the whole school out on trips to the seaside on busses, it should be a nightmare, but it works. They know what they are doing and the kids trust them. We trust them".

Tours of each of the school sites were done by students, as noted before, they showed a great pride in their homes, staff and the school in general. One student, when asked what he liked best about the school, stated "The support, they are always there to support you and they know a lot about what they do, that is what is so different from anywhere I have been to school before – and there have been a lot of schools. They get me. I think I would be more autistic if I didn't go to this school".

### Documentation

Documents reviewed were professional and comprehensive, each student had a file which documented the care and support they will be receiving at the school. Support Plans recorded information on behaviour support, Lesson Support, communication and sensory. In addition to these, we also reviewed other documents relevant to the accreditation review, these included:

- Individual Learning Plans
- School Provision Document
- Individual Lesson Plans
- Students Personal Files
- Exam Results Table
- A selection of Policies relating to Autism

### KEY FINDINGS

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

Actions for Development	Reasoning
Sensory	<p>The school are committed to the sensory wellbeing of the students in the school and as such have a number of projects that they have started, this includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ The recent introduction of a state of the art sensory room. The school are in the process of timetabling this into the programmes and training the staff on how to make the best use of the room for the benefit of the children (including sensory diets)</li><li>○ Work on a large sensory garden</li><li>○ Recent addition of a Speech and Language Therapist and Occupational Therapist (approximately one year)</li><li>○ Advertisement for an equine therapist</li><li>○ Beginning of sensory Circuits for Key Stage 2</li><li>○ Sensory diets</li></ul> <p>The review team felt this was an excellent area for the school to continue to develop and with the schools continued pursuit and dedication, will be an outstanding area of strength in the future.</p>

Family contact and Links with Teachers	<p>Parent Questionnaires returned to the service were on the whole very good, with 81.25% being happy or very happy with the school, this is excellent. On reviewing the questionnaires returned, comments made from those who were unhappy (one person) or satisfied, reflected on the communication between the school and themselves. Comments such as:</p> <p>“I am unsure what my son is doing in his lessons”</p> <p>“Half termly contact with class teacher but could be more frequent”</p> <p>“Room for improvement”</p> <p>The review team suggest formalising the contact between teachers and families.</p>
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The following areas were also identified as examples of what the service does well.

Specific areas of strength	Reasoning
Culture and Ethos	<p>The review team felt that the school excelled in this area, there was a strong value system underpinning the work done at the school, this was reflected in discussions with every member of staff we spoke to and each student. Both staff and students were valued and embraced by the school. The positive attitude and dedication to the development of the students is clear from the moment you enter the school environment. The review team felt this was particularly evident within:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Termly ‘values’ promoted by the school</li> <li>○ Children setting daily goals in their Morning house meeting</li> <li>○ The excellent environments for both living in and learning in</li> <li>○ Celebration of success of all students and staff</li> <li>○ The feeling of community within all areas of the school</li> </ul> <p>The school have a clear pathway of development, enhanced by the highly qualified staff team at school. Once employed the staff are embraced and offered a continuous, high level of development in autism and other specialties that enhance the school environment and work. This level of encirclement and reflection is reflected within the pride of everyone we spoke to.</p>
Fostering of Peer relationships	<p>During the course of the review, the review team spent a number of hours among the children in the residential element of the school and were impressed by the relationships which were blossoming between children. It is important to note that children in the school have very often had extreme difficulty in mainstream education and have often been unable to develop relationships with their peer groups. The principle, during an informal discussion, explained how this has been embraced by the</p>

	<p>school and deliberate steps have been taken to build bridges and foster peer relationships whilst at the Wilds School. Although the review team are aware that this has been a complex and considered process, some examples of how the school have continued to achieve this are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ consideration of environments - placing of sofa's impelling children to sit together and not isolate themselves</li> <li>○ consideration of environments – shared bedrooms, matching children with other children of similar ages and maturity</li> <li>○ Advocating and mediation between children, allowing them to disagree and build the skills to reconcile</li> <li>○ House Meetings, encouraging children to give feedback to each other</li> <li>○ Recognising and celebrating the successes of other students</li> </ul>
Nurture Group	<p>The review team completed three observations of the Nurture Group, all of which were fully met in each area, and we feel this reflects the excellent practice within this class. This class is supported by a teacher and assistant, offering an emphasis on play and pre-school learning. It was particularly noted that the structure and communication within the class fully met the needs of the children within the class.</p>

#### PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Action taken to address recommendation
<p>The review team recognise that the staff at Wilds Lodge have completed sensory assessments and set up individual sensory profiles successfully, and have implemented a range of useful sensory strategies, however, we feel that this is an area which the school has the potential to further develop. The addition of a sensory room, a named member of staff with specific responsibility for this area, or physical sensory sessions such as sensory circuits, would add value to the good work that has been achieved thus far.</p>	<p><i>The school have made significant progress in this area, with the successful launch of a sensory room and physical sensory circuits / sessions with relaxation. The review team recognise the progress made in this area and the drive of the service to take its accomplishments forward further. The review team recognise that the service is on a road to excellence in this area of practice and as such have endorsed this area for further development for the service – please see actions for development.</i></p>

## FAMILY QUESTIONNAIRE SCORES

SCORES					
Number of Questionnaires returned:					<b>8</b>
Number of sections <b>not</b> scored (figures only reflect sections scored):					<b>0</b>
	VERY UNHAPPY	UNHAPPY	SATISFIED	HAPPY	VERY HAPPY
Involvement	0	0	1	4	3
Health	0	0	1	2	5
Environment	0	0	1	5	2
Staff	0	1	2	3	2
<b>TOTALS</b>	0	1	5	14	12
<b>PERCENTAGES</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>3.12%</b>	<b>15.62%</b>	<b>43.75%</b>	<b>37.5%</b>

*n.b. On one of the questionnaires in the Contact section someone has wrote "Teachers Staff" and ticked happy and "Care Staff & Personal Support Worker" as very happy it has been noted here as happy.*

- "I am unsure what my son is doing in his lessons"
- "Half termly contact with the class teacher but it could be more frequent"
- "School is brilliant in looking forward to new ways of helping our son"
- "He feels that they understand him"
- "The know him well and they respond quickly"
- I couldn't dream of a better place that this"

Those who noted that they were less than happy and some who were happy and not very happy, on the whole, commented on the communication between the school and them, indicating that they would like to feel more involved – or informed of what their child does in class and increased communication between themselves and the class teacher. The service noted in their IDR that links with family were something they were looking to improve. The review team felt that the formulation this would be an area the school could develop and as such has noted this within the actions for development for the school.

## OBSERVATION SCORES

	Not Met	Partially Met	Majority Met	Fully Met
Social understanding and Communication	0	0	6	15
Flexibility of Thought	0	0	9	12
Sensory	0	0	12	9
Behaviour Support	0	0	8	13
<b>TOTALS</b>	0	0	35	49
<b>PERCENTAGES</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>41.5%</b>	<b>58.5%</b>

## FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS

Topic	Comments
Social understanding and communication	<p>Communication within the school was observed to be tailored to meet the needs of the students who were being supported, offering no generic communication aids. The school now employ a Speech and Language Therapist one day a week who works with selected students, and is also looking at setting up a social group within the school to work with some of the students who need more help communicating within a group or social setting.</p> <p>Visual worksheets were used in classes to aid the understanding of the students and assist educational attainment. The class teachers had a high level of understanding of the communication abilities of the students within their classes and used this to pitch the level and type of teaching to suit the whole class. Where necessary, the language of the teacher was adapted to suit the class. This was observed consistently within classes.</p> <p>Students were encouraged to interact and engage with the lesson, in all classes observed children felt comfortable contributing and were encouraged and praised when appropriate to do so. There was a good balance between individual work, class work, and work in small groups. Students followed instructions and guidance given by teachers and support staff, and where it was through the class needed it, instructions were backed up by visual support and guidance with good use of projectors, handouts and white boards.</p> <p>Social interaction between students was a high priority during observations of classes, and students were confident and comfortable to talk within groups. The school appears to foster the peer relationships of students, and the review team felt this was an area of strength for the school. Students were comfortable talking to the review team and other adults visiting the school and communicated to adults well.</p>



<p>Self-reliance and problem solving</p>	<p>The school promote an outcome focused approach, and the review team observed House Meetings where children were encouraged to reflect and think about what they wanted achieve that day. Students had long term goals to work towards and these were clearly communicated to the children, who understood the expectations that were placed on them and believed themselves able to achieve them.</p> <p>Learning Plans form an initial baseline, during an informal discussion with the Heads of Care, Education and Therapies, the review team learned of a new tracker programme that is being rolled out, this is updated three times a year and reflects on the achievements towards set goals. This is then shared between care and education so it is accessible to all of those who support the student. Targets set are realistic and are achievable within three months. Students showed an awareness of the goals they were working on a pride in those they have achieved at the school so far.</p> <p>Students were aware of their structured timetable, and followed this throughout the day, there were check systems in place for children to check what their plans were for the day if they were unsure the House meeting in the morning offered children a chance to problem solve their day and any parts of it they felt they might find difficult. This was then followed by setting a target for the day, which the child was encouraged to do themselves, taking responsibility for their progression and expectations. This was observed on a number of occasions and with different class groups during the review.</p> <p>The afternoon House Meeting offered a further opportunity to reflect and problem solve. Students discussed how their day had gone and what they can do differently next time, reflecting on how things could go better next time. There is an emphasis on putting 'bad days' into perspective, learning and moving forward. The student's peers were able to offer advice and support, and often put problems that had occurred in the day into perspective, helping the child to problem solve and move forward to the next day. This was observed in house meetings by the review team who thought it was excellent practice and peer support.</p> <p>It was felt the structure of the lessons observed offered the students ample opportunities to problem solve and participate in class. Each student observed in class was comfortable contributing to the topic being discussed and the classes had a clear beginning, middle and end, allowing the children to understand the structure of the class. This structure was communicated in a number of ways, dependant of the teacher – examples how this was done are – visuals in class (handouts, schedules), verbal talk through of the class as it began or prior experience.</p> <p>Class rules were on classroom walls, and where necessary students were referred back to them when the need arrived. Students appeared to be well informed of what the expectations of the class room were and when this was 'too much' for them, they took themselves away from the rest of the class and were observed receiving pastoral care and support. The class being left intact and unaffected by the student who was struggling.</p>
<p>Sensory</p>	<p>The review team observed sensory considerations in practice within observations. Considerations such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low arousal environments</li> <li>• Preparing for transitions</li> <li>• Headphones offered for ear defenders</li> <li>• Tactile toys / twiddles / finger fidgets available</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensory breaks in time away from the classroom and other students / sensory stresses</li> <li>• Play grounds</li> </ul> <p>Staff teams were able to talk in an advanced and informed way about how the support they were giving was meeting the sensory needs of the individuals they were supporting.</p> <p>During an observation of sensory circuits, the review team saw in practice the consideration of sensory issues within the daily lives of the students of the school. The circuits offered an excellent sensory start to the day, followed by a period of structured relaxation, this was thoroughly enjoyed by the students and got their full attention and engagement.</p>
Emotional Wellbeing	<p>The review team found the students to be happy and confident young men, their wellbeing being at the forefront of the school and teachers. This was observed in observations in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Positive praise, encouragement and reward</li> <li>○ Hobbies and interests being used to motivate and increase self-esteem, interests were developed</li> <li>○ Acknowledgement of accomplishments</li> <li>○ Building of self-esteem – children were thanked for sharing and their participation was valued</li> <li>○ Students are encouraged to be themselves and their individuality is celebrated</li> <li>○ Strong emphasis of target setting</li> <li>○ Appropriate management of low level behaviours, using distracting behaviours</li> <li>○ Promotion and understanding of behaviour, the function and effect of this</li> </ul> <p>Teachers and support staff used verbal de-escalation skills to talk through issues with the students, emphasising reflection on emotions and empathy for others. There was an acknowledgement by the older students who were observed and talked to of their growth of emotional maturity.</p> <p>There was a strong emphasis on boundaries, structure and rules within the school. The students were aware of what was expected of them and they appeared to respect this. It was explained to the review team that “the adults are in charge, and because of this, the children learn to trust and grow”, this was certainly helped by the consistency in the adult’s expectations and the clear boundaries. Behaviour outside of these rules was not punished, but embraced learned from and reflected upon.</p>

## CONCLUSION

The Review of Wilds School was excellent the areas of strength highlighted in this report ran through every observation and throughout the school, each observation noted the young men at the school as being confident and engaged, and discussions with the older students mirrored this observation. The school has a strong pride in their accomplishments, and each of the team were valued for what they bring to the team – this included the efforts of the principle, students and all staff. The School were committed to the development and support of each person, staff and students and this showed clearly within each discussion the review team had.