

Autism Accreditation Assessment

Abbey Hill Academy



Reference No.	27522
Assessment dates	19 th – 21 st June 2018
Lead Assessor	Anja Cole
Moderator	Dionne Steadman
Pre-Assessment Status	Not accredited

SECTION 1: CONTENT

About the provision

- 'Abbey Hill Academy' is a day school which provides for 305 children in total.
- Currently only one part of the school (the 'Walker Building') is registered with the accreditation programme, where the majority of the students with autism are based. This part of the school has a cohort of 63 pupils altogether, 60 of whom have a diagnosis of autism, aged 11-16. However, from September this will be 70 students aged 11-18, with two new classrooms being added to the provision.
- The students have a wide range of ability and needs ranging from those working academically between P3 and Level 1. The students' social and communication needs also widely range across the spectrum.
- The academy works closely with the internal OT and SaLT to ensure students are assessed correctly and an appropriate curriculum/ support is put in place. A range of approaches are used, according to students' individual needs. The school has introduced the SCERTS approach and also uses the Zones of Regulation and the 5-point scale.
- Some students are able to follow the strategies used by the main body of the school.
- The school has high expectations and aspirations for all students. Their statement of 'Where amazing children do amazing things' reflects this.
- A wide curriculum is covered across all ability levels, enabling teaching staff to personalise and differentiate on a very individual level.

Outcome of most recent statutory assessment

- The school was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2015. It was judged to be good in all areas; with the Sixth Form provision being judged as outstanding. Key findings of particular relevance to provision for autistic provision:
 - Leaders successfully promote tolerance and respect among students and with staff. Students say staff help them understand the difference between right from wrong. Excellent relationships promote a good understanding of equality, different beliefs and issues of discrimination. Discrimination is not tolerated. As a result, students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- Leaders ensure they communicate effectively with parents about their child's progress. Parents are very supportive and value the academy highly. 'My child has made excellent progress since starting the academy' reflects a typical comment.
 - The behaviour of students is good. They are respectful, polite and work hard. Students are confident, show good attitudes to their learning and take pride in their work. They want to do well.
 - Prior to arriving, some students have had difficult experiences at school and are reluctant to engage with work. Very caring staff support them extremely well to get on with their work. Parents particularly appreciate this aspect of the academy's work. 'My child is much more settled and happy in herself. She has new friends and has developed her social skills well.' This reflects a typical parental comment.
 - Staff are highly skilled in maintaining a positive atmosphere at all times. This is because they use skilled techniques to ensure students are calm and stress free. Comments from parents, staff and students are positive about the good standard of behaviour they see in the academy.
 - Students with speech and language difficulties make good progress as a result of the successful integrated therapy that improves their access to learning.
- This report reflects the whole school, rather than just the Walker Building which is being reviewed.

About the assessment

- The assessment took place over 3 days. The school's adviser took over the role of Lead Assessor with support from a Moderator (for one day).
- The assessment team observed 15 sessions over a total period of 7 1/2 hours. Observations covered each class in the Walker Building, or students from the Walker Building accessing activities in the main part of the school.
- Observed sessions included lesson times (Thinking and Learning, P.E., a communication session, Art, Enterprise, English, Maths and Science), as well as arrival/ end of day transitions, morning routines, lunch time routines, a reading session and rebound therapy.
- The principal and the vice principal gave a presentation to the assessment team on how provision is made for autistic pupils.
- Interviews were carried out with teaching staff, the Parent Support Adviser, the transition lead, the head of 6th Form and lead on professional development, the vice principal for Pastoral and Wellbeing as well as Mental Health champion, Anti-Bullying champion and head of PSHE, the teacher of PSHE and Enterprise, the OT and SALT.
- Personal documentation was sampled across each key stage and in each lesson, as part of the observations. The Lead Adviser also looked through the online personal document files, the CPOMS account and sampled 6 personal files, one for one student from each class.
- Policy and procedure documents relevant to the provision for autistic pupils were also reviewed, in particular the 'Transition' policy, the 'Teaching and Learning' policy, the 'Behaviour and Pastoral' policy, the 'Positive Mental Health' policy, the 'Marking Guidelines', the 'Options' booklets and the annual curriculum document.
- The views of families of autistic pupils were obtained from questionnaires which were sent out by the school with 7 questionnaires being returned.

- Two family members were also interviewed. They had been invited to attend a focus group, but were not able to come to school at the same time, so were seen separately.

SECTION 2: KEY FINDINGS

What the school does particularly well

What stood out as particular strengths:

- **Staff: Student – staff relationships** were seen to be trusting and positive throughout all observations, as well as in student interviews. Staff were seen to interact in a positive, encouraging and person-centred way, with lessons showing a great level of differentiation and personalisation. It was clear that staff know the students they work with very well, and that they cared about the students' wellbeing. Students presented as relaxed and engaged in meaningful activities throughout all observations.
Staff were happy to step back and provide prompts for thinking a problem through rather than provide the solution. A range of approaches were used, depending on students' individual needs and staff seemed comfortable to try different things.
Families and external professionals emphasised staff's flexibility and openness, and relationships with families and external staff are positive (see feedback).
- **Training:** The school have put in place a detailed, varied and comprehensive training schedule. SALT and OT provide regular training, as well as working alongside staff in classrooms. Staff also take part in a weekly meeting to share good practice. Although there may be areas where the theoretical training still needs to be put into daily practice or for approaches (such as SCERTS) to be fully embedded in all classes, it is felt that training needs are addressed and staff have a variety of sessions to choose from to tailor training to their classes.
- **Transitions:** These are clearly planned and well prepared. The Year 11 transition week into college/ 6th Form was happening at the time of the review. Transition processes are described in detail in the 'Transition Guarantee' policy, listing different levels of vulnerability during transition and giving guidelines on the overall process for macro and micro transitions, with timescales for macro transitions and key factors to consider, as well as questionnaires to be completed by students and families to complete prior to transitioning into the school in Year 6/ leaving the school after Year 11.
Preparations for students who transition from the Walker Building into the 6th Form start in Year 10 in assemblies and presentations. The formal transition process then starts after December, including student visits to the building (taster sessions), meeting staff, coffee mornings for parents, meetings between staff to exchange information. Towards the end longer sessions happen over a number of days or weeks, depending on individual needs. 6th Form staff shadow staff in the Walker Building with specific students to ensure consistency of support. Following transition into 6th Form, parents are invited to school after three weeks for an afternoon to discuss any ideas or concerns.

What the school could develop further

Priorities for the service

- Communication: The review team feel that the school should work towards a more consistent use of visual aids. It is felt that an increased use of visual schedules and prompts during lessons and to refer back to would not only enhance the students' communication, but also encourage greater independence. The use of Now-Next to sequence activities could be increased and incorporated more frequently in lessons, especially in 'lower ability' classes. In 'higher ability' classes, there may be a potential of over-reliance on verbal communication and the review team feel that it may aid students to increase the use of visual prompts and references to visual timetables. A great variety of training is available to staff, and in addition to this the school have a full-time SALT. Staff would benefit from being reminded of communication tools available to them, as well as strategies to apply these in day-to-day practice.
- 'Communication' is included in the overall 'Teaching and Learning' policy, but does not have its own stand-alone document. It may be beneficial if the school were to focus on this in a separate document, to make it more comprehensive and more easily accessible for all staff.

Other areas to consider

- SCERTS has been introduced recently in the Walker Building and the school is aware that this needs to be more fully and consistently embedded across all classes, ensuring a consistency of approach. In connection to this, the school also plan to do further work on the zones of regulation. The school may want to introduce clue cards regarding emotions, available to all students.
- The school could consider a greater use of sensory resources in all classes, including 'higher functioning' students (these may include breathing techniques, visualisation or teaching coping strategies). This may apply particularly for classes accessing the main school building, where provision is not ASD specific.
- As part of promoting the school's offer, it may be of benefit to develop a school prospectus. This could be done in connection with opening two new classrooms in September, or in changes happening around the school's 6th Form provision.

SECTION 3: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- One of the learning pathways offered is an induction pathway, including safeguarding and Health and Safety training, two sessions with SALT regarding communication, a session with the educational psychologist on developmental stages of young people and a generic autism session. Once the mandatory training is complete, specific training is put in place for staff, depending on their classes and learning needs. New staff complete a learning log through their first year and evidence what training has been completed. As part of their initial induction new staff attend a communication session led by the SALT.

session in 'An Introduction to autism?' delivered by the one of the Speech and Language therapists.

- There are different training pathways, tailored to individual staff needs. One pathway in 2016/17 was an autism pathway, focusing on social communication, sensory needs/ profiling and safeguarding/ vulnerabilities of people with autism. Pathways are changed every academic year. This year the focus of one pathway has been on SCERTS, disseminating the information within the staff team. There are also mental health pathways (with staff trained as mental health first aiders). Pathways have 4 or 5 sessions spread across the academic year, with tasks set to implement in the classroom/ video recordings taken to share good practice. This is an attempt to make training applied and real.
- A twilight calendar details weekly sessions available. Staff can pick and choose areas they feel would benefit their practice. Staff pick 5 to 6 sessions from this timetable (sessions include SCERTS, understanding autism, autism updates, sensory diets and profiling, use of symbols/ Boardmaker).
- Some staff trained in therapeutic teaching (music, art therapy). Staff are happy to try new things and ask for advice.
- One member of staff stated that the recent rebound training she completed was 'the best training she has ever done'.
- Teaching staff are encouraged to take video clips (AVIK) to reflect on practice, student interaction or other areas they would like to examine further.
- Appraisal targets for this current year focused on 'Spirals of Reflective Practice', capturing and recording student voice and encouraging reflective practice and highlighting areas that need some changes, areas of learning and class projects as part of the enquiry process. Some of these projects looked at 'making lessons more practical and relevant', 'communication' and 'emotional regulation and implementing the 5- point scale'. Staff feedback at the end of the year of learning and changes that have been implemented and feedback gathered. This has encouraged different staff teams to work together and share good practice across the school. This will be continued next year, with staff continuing reflective practice, as well as 'bidding' for new projects (for example funding or time needed).
- External courses this year have included amongst others Boardmaker, SCERTS, PECS, ASD and Technology, Attachment training, Sensory Stories training, a Communication conference and Rebound training.
- The internal SALT provides training. Recently staff have received SCERTS training through the SALT. She also shares Makaton skills regularly and as needed, for example in twilight sessions for staff to sign up. An external provider delivered 'Communication Partner' training in May around facilitating interactions with people who have communication aids.
- Parental learning sessions are offered at least termly. These have focused on Social Stories, Safeguarding, early help support/ provision, Phonics, Numeracy and E-Safety. These have been delivered in a mix of internal and external staff.
- Staff know whom to turn to for advice, there is a clear pathway to asking for training via class teams and link SLT members. Supervision and annual appraisals also cover training needs.

In conclusion, high-quality programme of continuous Professional Development is in place. It ensures that staff have a robust specialist knowledge of autism specific best practice methods and approaches. Systems are in place to ensure that practice is highly personalised and maintained at a consistent high level throughout the provision.

SECTION 4: PERSON CENTRED SUPPORT

Differences in Social Communication

- The school's 'Teaching and Learning' policy expresses a commitment to an individualised approach to communication, and a commitment to develop a communication programme, 'regardless of the language ability of the child', including opportunities for 'social interaction, play, leisure and life skills'.
- The school has started to use SCERTS, as well as working with the zones of regulation. Particularly during observations of the morning routine it was clear that the students are familiar with their visual timetables, as well as their morning routine which includes communicating how they feel. This task is differentiated, with some classes using a greater variety in symbols/ feelings, and some using only 'sad' and 'happy'. In the latter case, one boy picked 'sad', and then had his own personalised emotions board to explore his feelings further. He spent some time 1:1 exploring what had happened in the morning.
- Intensive interaction and personalised timetables are used and in place.
- The school employs specific communication aids such as PECS, photos, objects of reference, as well as Makaton. These were present in all classrooms, but not consistently observed as embedded in daily practice during some observations. There may be a potential for staff to rely on verbal communication. However, all observations carried out showed a thorough understanding staff had of individuals' communication preferences, and due to the support available, communication was effective and appropriate. Staff mainly used simple language, with information being repeated if necessary, as well as established key words/ phrases. Staff knew the students very well and picked up on any signs of discomfort or potential issues, using body language, gestures and facial expressions to find out more. Time was given to the students to process questions and information and respond. Clarification of understanding was sought by support staff when discussing choices made or activities planned.
- A baseline assessment of communication skills is carried by the teachers when an autistic student starts at the school. Information is also gathered in Year 6 visits and in Year 6 EHCP meetings.
- This assessment is shared in the 'Communication Skills, Needs and Targets' document, as well as in pen portraits and a pupil profile (kept online and accessible to all staff). Students who have particular needs have a communication passport created for them when they leave the school, to aid their transition.
- Communication targets are set by the speech and language therapist, and/ or by the student's teacher and reviewed as part of the review process in individual plans.
- The speech and language therapist who is at the school full-time identifies children who need further support, picks up any specific queries from teaching staff, and completes a bespoke assessment personalised to each child. She also does whole class teaching alongside teaching staff.
- The speech and language therapist creates the 'word of the week' and the 'sign of the week', which are displayed in classrooms and corridors, talked about in assembly and used in lessons.
- Visual schedules were available, but were sometimes not referred to. It was felt that visual aids and Now – Next boards could be used to support students' understanding of expectations and tasks.

In all observations, it was found that autistic people were well supported in their communication. Staff knew the students very well and students presented as relaxed and at ease. Staff are open to trying new things and encourage students to do the same. One class has recently introduced I-Pads/ talkers. On arrival one morning, the adviser

observed a student going to reception with his talker to ask for something independently.

Although in some observations, practice could have been improved by an increased use of visual aids or objects of reference, students seemed to always be on task and know what was expected of them. Routines are clear, and students knew what was expected and what was coming next. Staffing levels were appropriate and there was always a member of staff available for children to turn to, or to spend additional time with an individual who needed more support at that point.

Self-reliance and problem solving

- The school message, as detailed in the 'Teaching and Learning' policy is 'to do more and do it better', and as part of this 'for all students to achieve their full potential, and to gain the highest level of independence possible'. Part of the curriculum are activities in the wider community, such as swimming, outdoor activities, trips (for example to the seaside) and regular activities (such as supermarkets, parks, cafes).
- Making choices seemed to be embedded into all classes, activities and lessons.
- The introduction of the SCERTS approach, as well as work around the zones of regulation and the 5-point scale enable students to develop greater independence skills.
- Teaching staff are very familiar with the students they teach and are therefore aware of triggers, likes and dislikes. Specific seating provisions are in place to accommodate these.
- TEACCH stations are available in classes, depending on individuals' needs. However during the review a great amount of group work was observed, with all students engaged and involved and able to cope with being part of a group.
- Behaviour profiles are created for individual students by the class teacher, SDALT and the educational psychologist following observation of behaviour and triggers.
- All assessments are shared via CPOMS and are accessible to all staff in EHCP plans, pupil profiles and regular staff comments shared on the site.
- Routines are clearly established and students appeared to follow basic verbal instructions around these, such as 'finished', 'go to classroom' and 'choice'.
- Students are actively involved in running activities or organising and implementing things that matter to them (for example the introduction of a house points board, the introduction of tuck shop and running a recycling project).
- Students are encouraged to take responsibility for others and help them. Some have a 'wheelchair driving license', which qualifies them to push wheelchairs around the school.
- There is an 'Aspirations Tree' in the corridor, increasing student involvement and providing an opportunity for students to put their ideas of what they would like to do or learn, examples include 'I want to learn more life skills', 'I want to be independent', 'I would like more drawing', 'Have friends'.
- Careers education is ongoing throughout the year, with visits to local provision and charities, as well as providers visiting the school to share information. Students (for example in PSHE and in Enterprise lessons) are actively prepared for their transition into college and into adulthood. Lessons provide links to real life skills, such as dealing with money, team work, communication, being on time.
- Stress, anxiety, worries, anger management and risks are covered in PSHE sessions, as well. Students are also encouraged to learn to name their own strengths and areas people struggle with and feelings/ emotions and how to self-regulate and how to keep safe.

- The school's and students' involvement in the Stockton Anti-Bullying Board encourages students to become anti-bullying ambassadors. They meet regularly with a member of staff assigned to this task and feed back on any issues they have witnessed or would like to address.
- Weekly themes are planned for assembly (topics are changed half-termly, such as justice, friendship, humanity and bullying), these topics are linked to the sign and word of the week. The school has recently received the silver award for the 'Rights Respecting Schools Award'. There are Rights Respecting Ambassadors in the school. There is one in each tutor group, and they meet once every half term to develop areas to be addressed. For example they have created a school charter with the five main rights chosen by all students and led by the ambassadors. All children's rights as defined by the United Nations have been converted into Boardmaker symbols. Each tutor group has a scrap book to use to document work around rights and discussions had.
- The school has close links with CAMHS and TAMHS and two councillors are at school twice a week for students to speak to.

In all observations, it was found that autistic people were encouraged to carry out tasks with minimal staff intervention. For example, one student asked whether he could take some work home that he was proud of to show his parents. The teacher immediately suggested to photocopy it and he was able to take it home that day. Students were also observed to ask independently for things they needed or knew would help them, such as head massages, deep pressure or by asking 'can I have a hug?'. In one lesson observed students had made things to sell, then did a stock take and calculated their profit. They were encouraged to work independently and as a team. Students expressed their opinions about why some items did not sell.

Sensory Experience

- The school provides guidance to staff on maintaining a low arousal environment. All classrooms are low arousal environments, with seating arrangements to suit the class. Sensory equipment and access to outdoor space is available in all lessons. Some classrooms have individual sensory rooms, and quiet spaces are used for students to self-regulate.
- A Sensory assessment is completed by the Occupational Therapist on any individual who is identified as having significant sensory issues. Sensory needs are identified following teaching staff and OT observations, parent feedback and written feedback from external sources.
- Sensory assessments are shared via CPOMS and feed into EHCPs, pupil profiles and IEPs and followed up in observations.
- An OT is at the school regularly to deliver training, work with individuals and support staff. She makes recommendations and creates OT programmes for individuals, setting specific goals. Reviews are arranged regularly and can be brought forward as needs change. During the review, the OT discusses progress with the teacher, observes the student and works 1:1 with them. She also offers support to parents, and flags up training needs within class teams.
- Particular emphasis has been given by the OT this year to work with staff on ideas on how to work on self-regulation, as well as giving staff the skills to assess students' state in-the-moment. Self-regulation has been embedded in all classes, with sensory needs embedded in all lessons/ streams within curriculum. There is scope to work further on sensory/ self-regulation for the higher achieving end of the spectrum.

- Where appropriate, sensory integration equipment was used effectively, for example ear defenders, twiddle toys, a physio ball and a rocking chair.
- Specific seating provisions are in place to address individuals' needs to work on their own or more independently. Students worked in groups or pairs in all lessons observed, and those students who sat a little further away from the group were still involved and engaged, whilst having their own space.
- Some classes use TacPac as a sensory programme to help students relax.
- Mindfulness and meditation are already planned as weekly sessions from September 2018. Currently, this has been practiced with the staff team.
- There is a 'Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms' in place for the school.
- There is a close working relationship between the all staff, OT, SALT and educational psychologist, enabling the team to follow a holistic approach.

In all observations, it was found that autistic people were well supported in sensory regulation. For example one boy chose to spend his morning routine outside rather than in the classroom, removing himself from the situation he found challenging. Another boy had chosen to wear ear defenders, and then took them off when he felt more settled.

Emotional well-being

- The school's Positive Mental Health policy expresses a commitment to the physical and mental well-being of autistic people: 'At Abbey Hill Academy we aim to promote positive mental health for every member of our staff and student body. We pursue this aim using both whole school approaches and also specialised individual targeted approaches aimed at specific staff and students'.
- Alliance counselling services are at school twice a week to offer independent sessions, and CHAMS are available monthly to work with individual students.
- Classes have been working with the 5-point scale to learn to express emotions and how to recognise/ identify triggers when emotions change. Students are working on developing coping strategies and tools. Some students have detailed 'emotion boards' to refer to.
- SCERTS and the zones of regulation have been introduced and are embedded in some classes whilst others are working on implementing these in the coming year (school target for 2018/19). Zones of regulation will be rolled out across the whole school for every student, students who have greater needs and are able to differentiate will also use the 5-point scale.
- All students have an hour's lesson of PSHE a week. Lessons are planned around themes and adapted to individual needs. PSHE is the largest factor of the 'Open Awards' scheme which Year 10 and 11 students work towards.
- The PSHE curriculum includes half-termly topics around wellbeing and healthy relationships (KS3), and links to the Open Awards Qualification for KS4 (emotional wellbeing, careers, risk taking, sex and relationships).
- Pupil profiles and Behaviour Plans, as well as IEPs identify strengths and interests of autistic students are identified and recorded by the school, as well as likes and dislikes and what helps make individuals relaxed, happy or alternatively stressed and anxious.
- CPOMS is used to track any individual issues, patterns in behaviour, potential safeguarding issues and progress made, as well as offering a platform for staff to document what has happened in lesson and exchange information amongst the team. Information gathered is used in EHCP meetings and for any potential referrals.

In all observations, it was found that autistic people presented as relaxed and engaged in rewarding activities. For example the rebound session observed demonstrated the knowledge and understanding staff have of the individual students, as well as students' trust in staff. All students, staff, external staff and parents spoken to also commented on how 'good it feels' to be in the school.

SECTION 5: CONSULTATION AND WORKING

With autistic people

- Views of autistic students are obtained and recorded in student council meetings and during tutor times, in PSHE lessons, as well as through involvement in the Anti-Bullying Board and through the 'Rights Respecting Schools Award'.
- Four autistic students were interviewed during the review. They gave extremely positive feedback:
 - It's amazing. I am happy with it. I really like the lessons.
 - The staff are friendly.
 - It's awesome.
 - I am the king of Maths.
 - It's hard to pinpoint what I like best, because everything's really good.
 - There is never a dull moment here.
 - Cooking is my favourite, it's preparing me for when I leave.
 - I can't wait to reach Year 11, because I can join the others on the great adventure of life.
 - It's really, really good. Staff and children are really nice and friendly.
 - When there is a problem, it gets sorted out the same day. The teachers always say: 'talk to us'.
 - It's good that we learn to do independent things, even things like crossing the road.
 - There's always lots of options to choose, and staff always make sure you are happy.
- 21 autistic students provided feedback to the assessment team by returning completed questionnaires. The full results are shown as an appendix to this report. The majority of them stated that the support they received was good but 1 thought it was poor. Comments included:
 - I sometimes feel that other people and staff don't believe that I have issues I say I have or don't understand them
 - the staff will listen to you if you have something to say.
 - the staff listen to me when I ask for help
 - I Like the walker building
 - I as autistic would like to thank for all the support, confidence, and help giving to me throughout this school that includes [names omitted] id like to thank all of them for such amazing and outstanding support thank you - [initials omitted]
 - the walker building is a nice a place to be and everybody is very frendly
 - they are very good

With the families of autistic people

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- The school has a close working relationship with parents/ carers. This happens through home – school diaries, direct contact, emails, text messages and phone calls, twitter comments and the website. There are regular parent meetings (for example the EHCP reviews, parent evenings, informal drop-in sessions and the forum) and coffee mornings, events throughout the year (for example a careers event for older students to choose options with local providers and charities), as well as parent training/ information sessions.
- The school has achieved the 'Leading Parent Partnership Award' quality mark, demonstrating that the school communicates well with parents. This award is reviewed 3-yearly.
- The adviser spoke to the Parent Support Adviser who described her role in supporting parents/ carers, as well as students and the kind of support offered (local offer of support and out-of-school activities, contacts, referrals, social service involvement). She offers a link between home and school, trying to understand students' home life and hence working to provide a consistent approach between home and school. There is a great emphasis on working as a team and focusing on the individual student and their needs.
- Two family members were interviewed during the review. Their feedback was positive throughout:
 - Not just academic, but also emotional needs are met, as well as how the child's autism affects the rest of the family.
 - Communication with the school is really easy and I can always speak to someone.
 - They have a very good understanding of the individual children.
 - There is good team work (school and family working together).
 - I feel listened to and have great input into what happens at school. Staff take on board what I say. I know what is going on at school and I feel involved.
 - The last two years have shown quite a big change, the school day seems to flow much better and information filters down to all staff.
 - It is easy to speak to staff and they always make time, and what I say will be acted on.
 - One family member said it would be good to have a greater focus on independence skills, but that this was already starting to happen.
- 7 family members provided feedback to the assessment team by returning completed questionnaires. The full results are shown as an appendix to this report. Most parents strongly agree that the school has had a positive impact on their family member's life and learning, whilst 2 agree. Only 1 parent stated that communication is 'ok, but could be better'. All comments received were extremely positive about the work of the school. For example:
 - Staff are amazing. My [relative] has TS which has put him on the autistic spectrum with other complex needs. They continually support him and myself.
 - Abbey hill is a fantastic school.
 - Abbey Hill Academy has been a God send for my family. My [relative] was in mainstream primary school, he was miserable! He had complete melt downs daily where he was physically abusive. When he started at Abbey hill the change in him was almost instantaneous! I have my [relative] back and I believe that to be a direct result of Abbey hills teaching methods.

SECTION 6: SUMMARY

Abbey Hill actively presents a varied curriculum and a great amount of opportunities to the students. Many of these activities are based in the wider community. There is great emphasis preparing young people for adulthood. Part of this is the thorough work that focuses on transitions in and out of school, acknowledging the fact that these are times of potential crisis.

It was clear that the whole staff team are motivated and keen to provide the best service possible. They work together well, with the senior management team still involved in day-to-day teaching and running of the school. The school has a well-established staff team. Staff members stated that they 'enjoyed' working here, that they have are 'proud of their students', 'happy to see great progress', 'it's an amazing school to work in' and 'pastoral support for students is excellent'. Staff were consistently seen to interact in a positive, encouraging and person-centred way. Throughout observations, autistic people presented as relaxed, engaged in rewarding activities and well supported in their communication and sensory regulation.

As mentioned above, communication and independence skills may benefit from a greater variety of communication methods used, by embedding SCERTS as well as the use of pictures/ symbols/ photos and referring to these aids more frequently. This is particularly advisable in the 'higher ability' classes, where a greater reliance on verbal communication was observed.

APPENDIX 1: RESPONSE TO QUESTIONNAIRES

Family Questionnaire (number of questionnaires returned 7). As only 7 questionnaires were returned, the school has suggested to submit their family feedback questionnaire results. This would be available on request.

Question	Poor	Ok, but could do better	Mostly good	Always good
The support my relative is given is...	0	0	2	5
The understanding that staff have for my relative's autistic needs is...	0	0	2	5
The way I am kept informed and asked my views about how my relative is supported is...	0	1	0	6
The advice I get from the service on how to help my relative is...	0	0	4	3
TOTAL	0	1	8	19

Comments:

- Staff are amazing. My [relative] has TS which has put him on the autistic spectrum with other complex needs. They continually support him and myself
- Abbey hill is a fantastic school
- Abbey Hill Academy has been a God send for my family. My [relative] was in mainstream primary school, he was miserable! He had complete melt downs daily where he was physically abusive. When he started at Abbey hill the change in him was almost instantaneous! I have my [relative] back and I believe that to be a direct result of Abbey hills teaching methods.

Autistic Person Questionnaire (number of questionnaires returned 21)

Question	Sometimes	Yes	No
The support I am given is good	0	20	1
Staff understand me and my needs	3	17	1
Staff help me as I want to be helped	4	16	1
TOTAL	7	53	3

Comments:

- a staff member who presented by themself

- I sometimes feel that other people and staff don't believe that I have issues I say I have or don't understand them
- the staff will listen to you if you have something to say.
- the staff listen to me when I ask for help
- I Like the walker building
- I as autistic would like to thank for all the support, confidence, and help giving to me throughout this school that includes [names omitted] id like to thank all of them for such amazing and outstanding support thank you – [initials omitted]
- the walker building is a nice a place to be and everybody is very frendly
- they are very good

Who completed the questions above?

The autistic person by themselves	19
The autistic person with support	
A staff member who represented their views	2
A family member or friend who represented their views	

Professionals Questionnaire (number of questionnaires returned 6)

Question	Poor	Ok, but could be better	Mostly good	Always good
The support the service provides for autistic people is...	0	0	1	5
The understanding and knowledge the service has of autism is...	0	0	1	5
How the service works with other professionals in the best interests of autistic people is...	0	0	0	6
TOTAL	0	0	2	16

Comments:

- I work in Abbey Hill Academy on a weekly basis. Their understanding of autism is developing all the time. They work collaboratively with me and always strive to meet the needs of students so that they achieve their potential. School have invested in training and resources and have adopted tools in school, i.e. SCERTS, zones of self regulation.
- I have delivered training on sensory processing difficulties for students on the autism spectrum and have attended formal training with staff from the academy. They are forward thinking and are looking to adopt new ways of working and new tools.

- Abbey Hill Academy is a great school to work with. I learn a lot from staff and students. Their knowledge of autism and their tools for practice are expanding all the time! The staff work very hard. They are very skilled in their work with many levels of students, i.e. low level all the way to high level. I work closely with teachers, teaching assistants, a speech therapist, an educational psychologist, physiotherapist and external agencies, e.g. CAMHS, LD CAMHS.
- We work closely with Abbey Hill to ensure a smooth transition for all our pupils, including those with autism.
- As a member of the Disabled Children's Social Work Team I can honestly say that the working relationship we have with Abbey Hill is excellent. Regular meetings and contact via e mail ensures that we are all working together with the interests of the young people as a priority. Staff at Abbey Hill have a "can do" approach to working with their students.
- In my opinion there has always been good communication between Abbeyhill and social care. The school works closely with LD CAMHS regarding behaviours. They have a good understanding of young people who are diagnosed with Autism and provide excellent support.

APPENDIX 1A: TABLE OF OBSERVATIONS

Differences in Social Communication	1	2	3
Staff make themselves understood for example by simplifying or structuring verbal language and providing visual cues.	9	3	1
Autistic people can make themselves understood for example by access to augmentative or alternative communication systems; communication tools; writing frames etc.	7		2
Autistic people are provided with opportunity and purpose to interact with staff, with each other and where appropriate members of public.	12	2	
Self-Reliance and Problem Solving	1	2	3
Autistic people can work out what they must do now and what they are expected to do next e.g. visual schedules; to do checklists etc.	12	2	
Autistic people are supported to do things by themselves rather than constantly wait to be told by a member of staff.	9	4	
Autistic people develop skills and confidence in expressing opinion, making decisions and taking decisions.	9	1	
Sensory Issues	1	2	3
Autistic people access sensory activities which they find enjoyable or relaxing.	7	1	
Autistic people tolerate a range of sensory experiences within a safe and secure context.	8		
Autistic people are supported to regulate sensory experiences which interfere with what they are trying to do or cause them discomfort e.g. ear defenders; request for time out; work stations; low arousal approaches etc.	10		
Emotional Well-being	1	2	3
Autistic people present as happy, relaxed and content. Signs of anxiety and distress are either not observed or are addressed in ways which prevent them escalating.	14		
Autistic people experience a sense of completion and achievement.	8		
Autistic people are supported to understand and regulate their emotions.	5		

Relationships between autistic people and staff are purposeful and positive.	12	1	
Physical restraint is either not observed or only employed as a last resort with minimal force.	15		

APPENDIX: Additional comments from service

(This should be any further information that the service believes will provide a context for the award committee. Compliments and complaints should be referred directly to the relevant Senior Adviser)

'Abbey Hill School and Technology College' should be 'Abbey Hill Academy'