

## **Autism Accreditation Assessment Northern Countries School**

Reference No.	400
Assessment dates	19 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup> November 2019
Lead Assessor	Christine Flintoft-Smith
External Moderator	Becky Stead
Status prior to the assessment	Accredited
Advanced status applied for	Yes

### **Section 1: Context**

#### **About the Provision**

**Brief description of the provision made for autistic people:**

'We offer a specialist service for children on the autistic spectrum with additional learning and communication difficulties, who require an individualised, highly structured and integrated educational and therapeutic provision delivered within a Total Communication approach. We have developed from having 4 pupils with autism 15 years ago, in a predominantly Hearing Impaired provision, to 55 pupils within their own building. The building is not purpose built, however we strive to make the best of our space and we are continually growing and adapting to our cohort.

Our pupils in our Hillcrest Centre, require a bespoke package, typically in a small class group with at least 1:1 support. Some pupils require access to their own individual learning space, however intensive work is carried out to ensure pupils begin integrating with their peers as and whenever able. The majority of our placements come from either the in-patient assessment unit 'Ferdene' or LEA placements which have been unsuccessful and broken down. Following assessment and placement within our service, we very rarely have to seek an alternative placement.

We have also recently opened The Armstrong Centre, in response to local need for a provision which offers autism friendly approaches, small class groups, individual bespoke programmes, but not necessarily with 1:1 staffing. Currently we have 5 children on roll within the Armstrong Centre, with an aim to take up to 24 pupils.

We provide a low arousal, flexible teaching environment, with pupils following individual programmes, which are based on our detailed knowledge of each child. We use a variety of approaches such as Intensive Interaction, TEACCH principles, Forest/Beach School, Lego Therapy, Baking Therapy, smiLE programme and Music Therapy. Pupils may also have access to social communication groups, rebound

therapy, sensory circuits, yoga, residential visits, outdoor and adventurous activities in the local community, theatre trips and many more activities tailored to support individual learning needs.'

**Number of autistic people supported by the provision:** 55

**Range of autistic people supported by the provision:**

Age range from 3-19

Additional severe learning disability, attachment disorder, FASD, co-morbid conditions. Both verbal and non-verbal pupils.

**Outcome of last statutory assessment (Body; date, outcome):**

Ofsted; Sept 2017: Good

### **About the Assessment**

- The assessment took place over 3 days.
- The Head of Accreditation (North) acted as assessor with support from a moderator.
- Discussions were had regarding how provision is made for autistic pupils.
- 17 sessions were observed a range of lessons were seen including, Shopping in the community, Science, ASDAN, Baking, Lego, Music therapies and Interactive stories.
- Discussions were held with members of the therapy team, behaviour team, wellbeing steering group, school council, families and assistant head.
- Personal files were sampled across each key stage.
- The results of surveys carried out with families and external professionals were also considered.

## Section 2: Key Findings

### What the provision does particularly well

#### What stood out as particular strengths:

- Progress made by pupils through their time at the school is exceptional. Both academically but most of all socially. These individuals have often come from a broken down placement and isolation to gradually being integrated back into their peer group and the world of education.
- The Therapy team is thought to be a huge strength of the school. The model of joint and integrated working has been seen to have an extremely positive benefit to the pupils. The overall approach of training, empowering staff and pupils is thought to be outstanding.
- The total communication approach within the school is highly consistent. Information is presented in a meaningful way not only to give instruction but also to enable choice making and requesting. This has been seen to empower pupils and consequently decrease their anxiety and improve engagement.
- Pupils are treated as individuals and there is a highly personalised approach. These packages of support enable a behaviourally diverse group of learners to not only be themselves but also present the right level of challenge to progress them further.
- The school's investment in training and support for their team has resulted in staff that present as highly competent and confident in the strategies they are providing. In all cases staff work autonomously either individually or with a co-worker to provide direct support to a pupil with minimal teacher direct input during sessions.
- The relationship between staff and pupils is one of trust, a positive rapport was seen throughout, and the team know the young people they are working with extremely well.
- The communication and relationships between families/carers and staff has been revealed to be excellent. In many situations, the staff have re-established faith in the education system and aspirations for their children for parents that had previously lost it.

#### What else the provision does well:

- Due to high staffing ratios the strategy of lead communicators in situations where pupils have more than one support staff was seen to work incredibly well. Using this 'silent partner' as a note taker or as someone who can obtain resources is also thought to be effective.
- Outcomes are engrained in planning for each pupil this includes therapy targets, iaSend targets and SCERTS outcomes.
- Staff work collaboratively and recognise each other's talents resulting in a seamless delivery.

- There is a consistent focus on all environments being utilised as areas where teaching and learning can take place. Flexibility in staff approach ensured that if the pupil was unable to work in their designated area work was brought to them in their chosen environment.
- Lessons are planned carefully with deployment of staff, suitable resources and the appropriate degree of group and independent working.
- Pupils are supported to establish positive and meaningful relationships with their peers.

### **What the provision could develop further**

#### **Areas to consider:**

- The school may wish to consider how they can use the photos of progress made by pupils on Earwig as a reference point for pupils to aid understanding and confidence in completion of tasks in ongoing areas of development.
- The assessment team agree with the schools plan to build on the increased use of TEACCH principles to aid independence for those pupils who have settled into their new support strategies is a proactive way forward.
- Continuing to review and build on the Relationships and Sexuality curriculum is thought to be a much-needed input for these young people.
- The continuing adaptation and growth of the Armstrong Centre is thought to be of benefit to the new pupils being referred and also opens up possibilities for current pupils in the Hillcrest centre who may be able to progress to being able to access this level of support and input.
- The work around self-reflection is thought to be very valuable and the team welcome its ongoing development to make it accessible for all.

## **Section 3: Professional Development**

#### **Main approaches or methods employed by the provision in supporting autistic people**

PECS  
Intensive interaction  
TEACCH  
Sensory integration  
BSL  
Total communication approach  
Fully integrated therapy  
PBS  
SCERTS

### **Training staff receive in these approaches and in understanding autism as part of their induction**

A comprehensive induction package is provided to all staff including, health and safety related programmes, NAPPI training, autism awareness, communication, intensive interaction, appropriate language levels for the pupils, PECS, BSL level 1 and level 2 for those classes that require it.

Staff are also trained in medical approaches specific to the needs of the pupils within their class.

3 NQTs are currently signed up to NQT induction programme run by Newcastle Uni and supported by a new teachers group facilitated by the deputy head, where they have an hour after school each week to discuss a particular issue related to their new role.

### **On-going support and professional development available to staff in working with autistic individuals**

Monday 1.5 hr training programme, these can be whole school, class specific, teacher, therapist, individual pupils specific (associated with certain issues e.g. CPR). Some sessions can be created throughout the year to meet arising needs.

Teaching and Learning, foetal alcohol syndrome- key staff and then filtered

The school has a number of internal roles designed to support the staff teams further and develop practice these include:

The school has a number of **steering groups** for maths, literacy, core vocabulary, wellbeing- they run specific slots for staff to attend and can provide extra support upon request.

Within in each class there are 1-2 **communication champions** who are responsible for ensuring that each pupil has the correct symbol/visuals and VOCA programmes (where necessary) and receive extra training from the SALTs to undertake this role

The school has an **extensive therapy team** and input, with specialist dysphasia practitioners, a lot have completed or are currently undertaken a masters in sensory integration.

The team deliver internal training around specific pupils and general sensory needs, as well as attending team meetings. Teachers and therapists have a weekly sensory integration team meeting relating to their specific classes.

Training includes:

- Sensory vs behaviour
- Sensory intervention
- Sensory room and interactive mat training

Therapists will come and work with a child during a lesson and do their therapy intervention through the particular lesson-taking place. The school also has a particularly long lunch break and so now also undertake therapy during this slot so that it provides structure to pupils and is an effective use of time.

There is an established **behaviour intervention team**, who will hold challenging behaviour workshops to whole school or individual teams, which could be based around a specific child. They also support debriefs to incidents that may have occurred.

There is also a **behaviour response team** are trained to higher level of NAPPI and will react and support to specific incidents. This also ensures that other staff are only using their level 1 PBS strategies.

Each class has a team meeting weekly.

Supervision meetings occur according to role, this can be from 3 times per year for senior staff up to monthly for Learning assistants.

External training can be requested and this is linked to performance management cycle.

Some staff have the opportunity to apply for masters in Autism, which can be supported by the school or self-funded.

## Section 4: Person Centred Support

### **Brief description of how individual support is planned, implemented and evaluated:**

- Referrals can be made from local units, parents or LEAs due to placement breakdown.
- School staff will visit the current placement or home to undertake an initial assessment. Families are then invited to come and look around the school.
- The child will be invited into the school for an assessment or in their own environment if this is all they can cope with.
- Some children may start straight away others may need to have a varied transition depending on their needs.
- Once in school they will have their baseline assessment and sensory assessments will take place with the class staff and therapy team. From this their individual programme will be developed, including their IEPS, SCERTS targets and PBS plan.

- Each pupil will be placed within the thematic curriculum according to their age group and will have a specific therapy programme.
- Throughout the weeks staff teams will review their progress and needs, and half termly pupils progress is analysed through the schools iASEND data collecting system.
- IEP reviews occur every term, along with annual reviews.
- Each pupil has a bespoke learning file, within it is their pen picture, IEPs, PBS plan, EHCP plan, long-term targets, mid-term planning, daily record of comments from sessions, sensory profiles, diets.
- The school produces individual lesson plans for each pupil containing objectives, key learning and therapy targets and next steps.
- The school uses Earwig to demonstrate key achievements and pieces of work and progress towards targets, this is shared with families and also automatically links in with the iASEND data system.

## Differences in Social Communication

### **Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:**

- All pupils have their communication needs and strategies outlined in their pupil profile and are covered in more depth in their Positive Behaviour Support Plan.
- Discussions with teaching staff and SALTs revealed a high awareness of the need to effectively teach communication strategies as well as providing more than one means of communication in case one is unavailable. For example, there are a lot of VOCA users in the school but they are also taught other communication strategies in case they are in environments where an electronic device can't be used such as a swimming pool, or it is broken.
- Key outcomes identified for pupils include areas such as attention, listening, turn taking, asking for help.
- Outcomes progress through the school years with a greater focus as they reach post 16 on functionality of communication, such as interactions with peers and confidence in communicating with a variety of people to reduce reliance on staff.

### **Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:**

- Visual supports were seen to be used consistently throughout the school in all observations. Each were individualised and pupils were seen to use them with a high degree of confidence.
- Staff were seen to confidently and consistently model communication strategies, adapting their own communication whilst always promoting the technique used by the pupil.

- In best practice examples pupils were given time to process directions, they showed an appropriate level of persistence, and it took the pupil 5 minutes before they initiated the request, however they were given time to do so.
- A core vocabulary project is currently taking place with one class with the view to then extend it to others. Within these sessions and throughout school where this group of children were seen, core vocabulary communication boards were provided for them to access and staff were seen to consistently prompt pupils or model their use. This approach was seemed to be highly effective with this group of pupils.
- In a number of lessons, staff had built in the need for pupils to request equipment from each other or staff, encouraging interaction.
- A session using the principles of Lego therapy but applying them to building a Mr Potato Head saw a fantastic example of the promotion of sentence building and verbal communication through the purpose of building a Potato character. Each pupil had personalised communication aids in the form of a communication board and PECS book. This was a highly effective lesson with all involved allowing pupils to approach it at their pace and successfully interact with one another.
- Intensive interaction was seen to be used well with 2 pupils, time was taken to establish the link between pupil and staff members and then the staff member was then able to encourage the pupil to interact with sensory items and activities within the session.

## Self-Reliance and Problem Solving

### Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:

- All pupil's needs relating to structure, transition and choices along with their associated strategies are outlined in their pupil profile and are covered in more depth in their Positive Behaviour Support Plan.
- Discussions with staff revealed that their approach to 'careers' does not only cover employment but the person's overall journey through life. This refreshing take on supporting pupils in this way ensures that staff all have a strong wish to build on a person's ability to become as independent as possible and are prepared for life beyond school.
- The school has done extensive work in their local community establishing work placements and effective places for pupils to experience community life and increase their confidence within it.
- One area the school has invested in for many years is the weekly hike, where each class has an allocated afternoon where they can either undertake an 8-mile hike or 4 mile depending on the fitness levels of the pupils. This not only supports regulation but staff also incorporate other elements of learning, such as pupils preparing their own pack lunch, being provided with a kit checklist of what they should bring with them and also task sheets for things to look out for when they are in the countryside.



- A number of social stories were seen to have been developed, they varied in the presentation and complexity depending on the pupil who was to use them. These covered a number of areas including medical issues, growing up and activity related guidance.
- The school have recognised a slight change in the ability of some of their pupils now being referred. Due to this they have recently created an additional class located in what is called the Armstrong School. These pupils do not require such high support levels and present with a higher baseline to acquire skills and strategies. Observations in this class saw more structured strategies based around TEACCH principles and pupils were seen to communicate more effectively using the aids they were provided. There is a stronger focus on promoting independence with class related tasks in this setting. There is an overall aim for this model to gradually be integrated into the main body of the Hillcrest School in time to come.

**Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:**

- In the majority of classes pupils had a 'who am I working with today' board. Due to the high staffing ratio in each class this enabled them to know which key people they should access for help.
- Visuals to structure sessions and aid increased independence were seen to be consistently used in all observations. These ranged from Now and Next boards to full in task red and green boards. Pupils were seen to use these with staff support and independently when able.
- The school holds a strong ethos around individualised learning and strategies, and this could be seen in its sensitive use of TEACCH principles used in differing degrees with pupils to suit their specific needs.
- On a couple of occasions there were missed opportunities to promote independent transition between tasks, staff were seen to move over strips and symbols on timetables and task checklists.
- In all formal and informal observations pupils were seen to have their structure and communication aids with them when out and about around school and in the community. Staff were seen to use these effectively to support pupil understanding.
- In the majority of sessions self-evaluation of the session was put in place, this varied from a simple request to point to like/dislike symbol on their communication board, to drawing their best/worst things about the session and writing what it was they liked/disliked and why.
- In best practice examples, staff encouraged pupils to undertake self-help tasks such as putting on their own coats, collecting items for the lesson and tidying the classroom at the end of a session.

## Sensory Experiences

### **Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:**

- All pupils have their sensory needs outlined in a sensory passport which includes, their behaviour, the reason why and strategy to help. These are then formed into a sensory diet which is integrated into the pupil's timetable and colour coordinate to represent which sensory system should be worked on in a particular session.
- Individual guidance documents are provided to staff relating to specific sensory interventions such as body socks, weighted blankets, the swing room and so on. These outline the rationale for their use, session structure, safe usage, when will they need it, how does it help and how do you know it is working.
- Pupils have access to a variety of physical activities throughout their week including, outdoor areas, hiking, visits to local leisure schools and swimming. This helps them to regulate and are programmed into the weekly timetable as well as being available at request for learning breaks.
- All pupils are provided with and are trained to use regulation choice boards tailored to their specific needs.
- A number of lessons can also be taught in areas such as the swimming pool such as maths or literacy.
- The school is not purpose built and with the continual growth of the provision and ever changing needs of the pupils the school does extremely well in adapting the environment to meet need. It has been observed through the years the construction of internal rooms, quiet spaces and outdoor areas.
- The school has undertaken a number of desensitisation programmes for pupils in areas such as blood taking, hairdressers, dentists, shoe and clothes wearing and many more. One best practice example is a piece of work that is currently taking place for a young man due a kidney transplant. Joint work with the local hospital is resulting in a programme of medical machine noises being played into his workspace, and mixing different staff into his day so that he is used to a variety of people talking to him which will occur whilst he is in hospital.
- As mentioned previously many pupils begin their journey at the school being taught in individual classrooms, this are tailored to their needs and often personalised. As they progress it has been observed over the years pupils are then brought into smaller joint workspaces and provided screens, this is then (if possible) gradually reduced and the space opened up as the person gets used to being around other peers.

### **Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:**

- Pupils were seen to be given opportunities to explore different sensory experiences in a variety of sessions including, baking and music therapy.

- Staff were seen to be conscious in all observations of the needs of pupils relating to movement and learning breaks, these were facilitated in all situations.
- Pupils were seen to use a variety of sensory aids to meet their needs. Pupils were seen to access these independently or via staff prompts.
- Enjoyable sensory experiences were seen to be offered in choice time and as rewards for completed tasks.
- For those that needed it, staff were seen to carry backpacks with individual sensory toys with them at all times for the pupils they were working with that day. This was so they could access them wherever they may be if required.
- The school is well resourced to offer pupils a range of sensory experiences, including Forest School, Soft play, Swimming and hydrotherapy, sensory rooms, rebound along with a mobile magic carpet and immersive theatre.

## Emotional Well-being

### **Key outcomes identified from personal support documents and staff discussions:**

- The school takes a highly individualised approach to both the therapy and education each pupil undertakes, this has been observed first-hand and also echoed in the attitudes of staff and feedback from parents. One example of this moving one young man into the Post 16 department despite him only being 14 years old. He has been a pupil at the school for many years and has progressed considerably with his ability to regulate and participate in class. The staff team recognise that his learning style is best suited to the more skills based active learning. He has moved up and is now thriving even more.
- The whole school team have been working on the *Carnegie School for Excellence for Mental Health in Schools Bronze award*. Which has led them to look at pupil and staff wellbeing and has resulted in the formation of a wellbeing steering group. They work closely with the local CYPS, which works well for pupils being seen quicker as the staff team will have already done a lot of the behaviour analysis that would usually be done by a psychologist the CVYPS team first. The team are due to submit their audit and evidence for this next week.
- The behaviour team work extremely closely with the OTs and staff team in order to fully understand each pupil's varying needs, this then provides them with the knowledge to tackle incidents. Because of the tight working of the teams, physical interventions are kept to a minimal.
- The school now has a wellbeing room for staff and pupils to access.
- Pupils have wellbeing sessions built into their class timetables once per week, this will entail a variety of activities tailored to the group e.g. yoga, Zumba, relaxation.

- Pupils have the ability to achieve various accreditations for their work, this is most prevalent in the Post 16 group with ASDAN, Duke of Edinburgh and now also AQA units being available.
- Sex education training undertaken by nurse and lead teachers has been brought back into school and disseminated to the remaining staff teams. A plan has been developed as to how this will then be rolled out across the age groups and resourced accordingly. The school has also recently achieved a bronze award in sexual health.
- A variety of puberty based social stories were seen that covered general growing up, periods and changes to our bodies. These had been personalised for the pupils.
- Pupils have a variety of reward based working strategies, there is a star of the week for each class, and on a daily basis there are a range of strategies from Now and Next to working towards reward boards. Due to the variation in learning needs some pupils are at the initial stage of just requesting a learning break (or choice) when they need it rather than working towards it for a prolonged period of time.
- Case studies were seen that showed a range of objectives for specific pupils, the strategies that were put in place and the positive outcomes that came from these as they were achieved. These included, visits to a barber, engaging with peers, choice making, communicating needs more effectively and many more.
- OTs have been working with key pupils on self-reflection as a means of proactively understanding a pupil before an incident occurs and also as a debrief tool. This is seen to be a positive approach in providing pupils with an alternative strategy to communicating their well-being in place of what may have resulted in a physical incident.
- In other situations one parent reflected that their son had developed his language so much that his physical outbursts had almost completely stopped because in the place of them he was now able to verbalise how he was feeling.

**Key outcomes identified from observation/review of key activities:**

- Many of the pupils that come to the Hillcrest school have had broken down placements in other schools, time out of education or even admissions to specialist mental health units. Due to this, their ability to access learning is limited and first and foremost the school's aim is to prepare them and give them the strategies to tolerate new environments, being with peers and in general be ready for learning. As a result, many pupils begin their career at the school being taught in their own classroom spaces. The overall aim of the staff is then to gradually introduce them to their peers and access more group work. Over the years of development visits that have been provided by the adviser, it has been seen first-hand how these pupils gradually integrate back into their peer group and in some cases move beyond the school and are taught in more mixed pupil settings. The staff should recognise the huge success they have achieved in finding a model that works and the outstanding

progress they achieve with these pupils in this area. This was also echoed in comments made by family members.

- On the one of two occasions where signs of anxiety were seen staff dealt with them quickly and calmly allowing pupils to lead the strategies they needed to help regulate them.
- Positive praise was seen to be given throughout all observations.
- The relationship between staff and pupils is extremely positive and one of trust. One parent reflected that due to the negative experience her son had had with staff in their last placement it had meant that their trust in staff was limited, but this had been overcome by the approach of staff at the Hillcrest School.

## **Section 5: Consultation**

### **With Autistic People**

- The school's pupil council is made up of pupils from the Hillcrest school and those from the Northern Counties School. This gives pupils the opportunity to mix with other peers they would not usually work with and give them a sense of being part of a wider community.
- The team met with key members from the school council, who explained that they meet once per month and are responsible for identifying key events in the school and other areas such as school lunches.
- They said that they felt listened to by staff and that staff supported them when they asked for help in events.
- 6 pupils completed the questionnaire, results can be found in the appendix.

### **With families of Autistic People**

- Sign and singing group for parents
- Family and friends of Hedley's Facebook page
- Training workshops
- Phone calls were made to 3 parents of pupils who have come to The Hillcrest School from other school placements. All parents spoke incredibly highly of the staff and progress their child had made. Comments that were made included:
  - 'The whole school experience is totally different to what I am used to'
  - 'He is more like my little boy'
  - 'He loves going'
  - 'I can't believe the parent to staff relationship'
  - 'We have been astounded by what he can do'
  - 'The level of communication is out of this world'
  - 'Can't praise them enough'

*'The treat him as an individual, he is unrecognizable from what he was like 18 months ago'*


*'They respond to us. We ask for a meeting, we get one, we request a call they make one.'*

- Only 3 families responded to the questionnaire sent out. They gave 100% in all areas. Results can be found in the appendix.
- A recent whole school survey (25% returns) undertaken in April 2019 found that:
  - 100% of families agreed/strongly agreed that the school understood their child's needs
  - 96% stated communication between school and home was good
  - 96% stated they were happy with their child's progress
  - 100% said they felt listened to by therapists and teachers

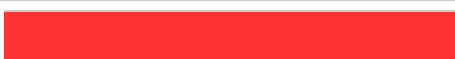
**APPENDIX 1: SURVEYS**



**Autistic Person**

The support I am given is good?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		100.00%	6
2	No		0.00%	0
3	Sometimes		0.00%	0
			answered	6
			skipped	0

Staff understand me and my needs				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		100.00%	6
2	No		0.00%	0
3	Sometimes		0.00%	0
			answered	6
			skipped	0



The staff listen to me on how I want to be helped				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		100.00%	6
2	No		0.00%	0
3	Sometimes		0.00%	0
			answered	6
			skipped	0
Comments: Please note you are not required to comment below, if you do so they may be quoted in the final report. Our questionnaires are anonymous and Autism Accreditation cannot be held responsible for comments which identify any individual. (4)				
1	30/09/2019 14:36 PM ID: 128117665	I like everything about school and I like the staff as well		
2	30/09/2019 15:15 PM ID: 128121588	I like DT and swimming. My staff are funny and happy.		
3	30/09/2019 15:18 PM ID: 128121811	I like my class mates.		
4	30/09/2019 15:24 PM ID: 128122315	They help me with my work. I sometimes like the work I do. The staff care about me.		



Who just completed the questions above?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	The autistic person by themselves		16.67%	1
2	The autistic person with support		83.33%	5






Who just completed the questions above?				
			Response Percent	Response Total
3	A staff member who represented their views		0.00%	0
4	A family member or friend who represented their views		0.00%	0
			answered	6
			skipped	0



## Families of Autistic People

Feedback questionnaire on Northern Counties School to be completed before 22/11/2019

The support my relative is given is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		0.00%	0
3	mostly good		9.52%	2
4	always good		90.48%	19
			answered	21
			skipped	0

The understanding that staff have for my relative's autistic needs is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		0.00%	0
3	mostly good		9.52%	2
4	always good		90.48%	19
			answered	21
			skipped	0

The way I am kept informed and asked my views about how my relative is supported is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		0.00%	0
3	mostly good		19.05%	4
4	always good		80.95%	17
			answered	21
			skipped	0

The advice I get from the service on how to help my relative is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		0.00%	0
3	mostly good		19.05%	4
4	always good		80.95%	17
			answered	21
			skipped	0
<p>Comments: Please note you are not required to comment below, if you do so they may be quoted in the final report. Our questionnaires are anonymous and Autism Accreditation cannot be held responsible for comments which identify any individual. (10)</p>				
1	21/11/2019 11:30 AM ID: 131314678	My relative as only been at the school a couple of years and he is loving it apart from his mainstream school.		
2	21/11/2019 11:46 AM ID: 131315918	Northern counties is a very specialised provisions which cares for autistic people with some of the most challenging difficulties I have ever encountered. Including my children. Without them, we wouldn't have a school or a feeling of belonging.		
3	21/11/2019 13:15 PM ID: 131322651	I am so grateful that my child attends Northern Counties School, the staff and education that he receives there are excellent. They understand his needs and how best to help him reach his potential. He is always happy to go to school.		
4	21/11/2019 13:55 PM ID: 131325465	Cannot fault Nortgern counties, our little boy started Sept 19 and it's the best choice we made, staff in his class are absolutely outstanding, communicate with us, help us, advise us, very reassuring for us as parents, all round outstanding teacher and staff my son we cannot wait to see him develop like he is more and more, thankyou		
5	21/11/2019 15:09 PM ID: 131331334	Since starting Northern Counties my child is much happier and settled. All the staff involved in my child's care are very professional but also friendly and easily approachable. I feel the staff keep me well informed with how my child is progressing and day to day activities.		

**The advice I get from the service on how to help my relative is...**

			<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
6	21/11/2019 17:13 PM ID: 131339915	what a difference since getting a place at this school. My child is eager to go to school in the morning and comes home with smiles and a happy mood.		
7	21/11/2019 19:31 PM ID: 131345880	The school provides specialised approach for those children who have both autism and severe hearing impairment. Our son has made demonstrable progress at the school. The school also provides a balanced range of educational activities and a variety of communication approaches. Visits to the wider community are regularly organised, including, on occasions, theatre trips and outings. The teaching staff are also well supported by the residential staff who carry on the curriculum in residence, including attendance at a local deaf club. We are delighted with the provision and feel that the work carried out by this school will be of lifetime benefit to our son.		
8	21/11/2019 22:07 PM ID: 131350504	The learning goals set for my son are realistic and well thought out. The support he gets is fantastic and very individualised		
9	23/11/2019 19:24 PM ID: 131424576	All staff are amazing with my son who has autism, very professional and always go an extra mile, I never worry about him at this school.		
10	02/12/2019 17:38 PM ID: 131344474	The school have supported us all as a family. An example of this is teaching assistants accompanying me to support my son at an out patients appointment as I would not have been able to communicate with the consultant and supervise him at the same time. I have always been able to speak with staff when I need to and this has been on a very frequent basis at times. My son has been very challenging periodically at school and has been (I imagine) very difficult to work with at times but I've always felt he's been supported positively emotionally and practically. There has been lots of work undertaken to identify and eliminate triggers and maintain positive behaviour support. This information has also been beneficial to inform medication reviews. I'm really pleased with my son's progress now he seems so much happier, and as a result he is able to be more independent and participate in home life more which I think has improved his self esteem		

**APPENDIX 2: COMMENTS FROM THE PROVISION**

**APPENDIX 3: ADVANCED APPLICATION FORM**  
**APPLICATION FORM FOR ADVANCED STATUS**

Name of registration:	
Date when provision was last accredited;	November 2016
Contact person:	Abi Cowie
Adviser:	Christine Flintoft-Smith

Comments made by the provision should be factual and if necessary can be evidenced.

Criteria 1: Does assessment of the provision confirm that there are many considerable areas of strength within the service in relationship to the Autism Accreditation Standards with no or minor actions for development? *This will be addressed within the assessment report and does not require further comment.*

Criteria 2: Is the service considered to have outstanding features in meeting statutory requirements related to outcomes for autistic people?

<https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/2679635>

[Our Ofsted report is currently good in all areas, having previously been outstanding in all areas. This was partly due to our attendance figures, which were lower than expected due to a terminally ill child. Despite being good in all areas, the work carried out by the Behaviour Intervention Team continued to be judged as outstanding.](#)

'The behaviour intervention team provides exceptionally effective support to pupils who face significant challenges in learning to manage their emotions and responses to the world. This approach leads to outstanding progress in the personal development of this group of pupils. ' Ofsted 2017.

'Leaders identify and assess the full extent of the needs of each pupil meticulously. They ensure that sufficient resources are in place to meet the needs of each pupil so that most achieve good outcomes. Leaders' focus on pupils' safety and welfare is highly effective.'

'The complexity of the pupils' needs, particularly those who have autistic spectrum disorder, has increased. There has been a significant shift in how local authorities commission places for individual pupils. Despite these challenges, leaders ensure that pupils achieve good outcomes because of their unrelenting focus on the holistic needs of each pupil.'

[Recent visits from our external School Improvement partner, Dave Smith HMI, also demonstrate the amount of progress we have made since the last inspection.](#)

Criteria 3: Is a high-quality programme of continuous Professional Development in place.  
Does it ensure that staff have a robust specialist knowledge of autism specific best practice methods and approaches?

Please provide a description of the professional development programme specific to autism (max 250 words)

All staff have a comprehensive induction programme, with both statutory and pupil specific training. All staff attend Monday evening training, which is planned according to needs between 3.30-5.00 pm every week. All staff receive training in Autism Awareness, NAPPI, SCERTS, Communication Approaches, Intensive Interaction, TEACCH approaches, Eating and Drinking, Positive Behaviour Support and Challenging Behaviour, Debriefs and Formulations. All staff have a weekly multi—disciplinary team meeting between 8.30-9, which is a good opportunity for staff discussion and additional training. Staff are supported by a number of lead professionals who have MA Autism to ensure all best practice methods and approaches are disseminated. Senior Leaders regularly do learning walks and lesson observations to ensure that standards and consistency are maintained. Where training needs are identified these are planned for and also form part of our performance management cycle. When we have a child placed with additional needs, extra training is provided, for example we have trained the whole school in both Attachment Disorder and FASD. Staff are supported to attend external training if appropriate and this knowledge is then disseminated to all staff, recent examples are sexual education and autism. Visits to other schools are also undertaken, following on from a NAS Accreditation at Tweendykes School in Hull, 5 teachers and 2 therapists went to observe best practice. Regular supervision is in place for all therapists, teachers, HLSSAs and support staff. External training is provided by school to parents, taxi and escorts, local leisure facilities and shops, universities, the NHS, teacher training providers, the Metro Centre and the adjacent primary school.

Criteria 4: Is feedback from autistic people and their circle of support excellent showing that the service is held in very high esteem and its work is greatly valued? *This will be primarily based on surveys carried out by Autism Accreditation as part of the assessment process.*

Please provide any further evidence of feedback from autistic people or their families e.g. results of surveys etc. (max 250 words)

Feedback is provided regularly from parents – this can be emails, telephone calls, Earwig comments and home/school diary entries. We keep a ‘happy book’ in school where positive feedback is detailed in a range of formats. Parents are very supportive of school and we have an active Parents and friends group. School does a regular parent questionnaire to ensure that all views are taken into account. The school numbers are constantly increasing, some of this is due to word of mouth from parents. Attendance figures for our children demonstrate that they are happy to come to school.



Criteria 5: Is the service established as a centre of excellence in the field of autism, sharing its expertise through quality consultation and training as well as actively contributing to research into autism and innovations in practice?

Please provide any further evidence of feedback from autistic people or their families e.g. results of surveys etc. (max 500 words)

The school has very good links with Ferndene, in-patient assessment unit at Prudhoe. We have many referrals from them, due to our knowledge and expertise of how to teach some of the most challenging and complex young people in the North-East.

The school carries out a wide variety of training within the North-East. Training was provided to Newcastle United Football Ground to help staff understand how best to support their supporters with autism. The training also focused on how they could use their sensory room and equipment that sensory toolkits may need to contain. This training was replicated with Northumbria Police, understanding how autism may affect someone who needs help from the police. External training has also been provided to City Farm, Hexetol and Jesmond Dene to ensure that their staff are able to not only support our young people who may access work experience placements with them, but also visitors who may have autism and their families.

Within the local area, we do lots of training to ensure that our young people are able to access public transport, hairdressers, cafes and local shops, this can involve going out to discuss using PECS, VOCAs, or to talk about desensitisation and positive behaviour support.

We have worked with Newcastle Theatre Royal, providing feedback on their ASD friendly shows for autistic youngsters, Christmas pantomimes and Shrek and suggested improvements for more complex youngsters. This year, we have been asked to provide advice and training to the Metro Centre, to enable them to offer Santa visits to children and young people with autism.

School have a Forest School autism specific teacher, who has shared their expertise with the local Primary School – West Jesmond, they have brought 90 reception children in to access the facilities and a smaller group of primary SEN pupils, including some pupils with ASD.

We work with the universities and school centred initial teacher training providers to deliver a training session on Autism in Education. Trainees also get to spend time in different classes within school and complete a project on communication. This is for both students who want to go into mainstream education, or special educational needs. We deliver training to medical students at the RVI, who also get to spend time in school to ensure that they have some knowledge of autistic people when working in hospitals or general practice.

Criteria 6: Are assessments informed by specialist expertise and grounded in a robust understanding of the nature of autism?  
Is assessment data collated and presented in a range of formats so that it is accessible and of practical value to staff who have different levels of contact with the autistic person, as well as the autistic person and their circle of support?

Prior to admission, multi-agency pre-assessment meetings take place to gather as much information as possible, this is then disseminated to staff teams who will be working with the young person. If extra training is required, this is planned in and staffing for each young person is carefully considered. A baseline assessment is completed and pupils are assessed using a range of school systems – iASEND, Therapy Outcome Measures, Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Supports (SCERTS), work is collated using photographs, videos and work samples, books and individual bespoke learning journeys are kept. Assessment is shared with parents/carers through informal coffee mornings, the annual review process and Earwig online system. Informal discussion about pupil progress happens with all staff members at their weekly team meeting. Pupils have access to self-assessment systems in various formats depending on need, have weekly achievement assemblies, certificates, photographs to share with parents/carers, staff discuss how they have done informally throughout each lesson. Pupils have access to a range of accreditation ASDAN, City and Guilds, Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme depending on their interests and level of understanding.

Criteria 7: Does the service provide highly creative and very personalised support based on a thorough and up-to-date understanding of how each autistic person communicates and socially interacts; their independent living skills and the impact of external factors including sensory input on their emotions and well-being? *This will be primarily based on observations of practice carried out by Autism Accreditation as part of the assessment process.*

Each child has a teacher, team of support staff (often core team) and therapists responsible for their individual bespoke programme. Each child's programme is written as part of an MDT with collaboration from parents and carers. All pupils have an EHCP, IEP, SCERTS programme and each of their timetables are needs and outcomes led. Pupils have their own sensory diets and toolkits based upon up to date thorough assessments from Occupational and Speech Therapy. Most lessons are interest based to increase engagement, school is very creative in engaging pupils who can be difficult to engage, this is also helped partly by the environment and staffing structure, training and support. Every pupil has a positive behaviour support plan which is entirely focused on keeping a child in the green. Our Curriculum and Enrichment programme for all pupils, also demonstrates creativity of approach. The curriculum and timetables are functional to allow for maximum teaching of independence and life skills. School is currently going for the Carnegie award for pupils and staff wellbeing. The most effective support in school comes from the very high numbers of specialist therapists working into each class and the hours of direct therapy that each pupil receives.

Criteria 8: Has the service collated an impressive range of qualitative and quantitative data which provides compelling evidence of the considerable positive impact it has had (both in the short-term and in the long-term) on the lives of autistic people? Can it demonstrate that it is truly inspirational in what it is able to achieve?

Most pupils in school come from previous placements which have broken down, or from the in-patient assessment unit at Ferndene, Prudhoe after the child has had a breakdown. Case studies are written to demonstrate the impact upon the child. Behaviour data shows the positive impact upon school placement and we have had placements where staffing levels have been able to be reduced, due to the work carried out in school. Assessment wise, school collects data for attendance, behaviour, Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Supports (SCERTS), Therapy Outcome Measures (TOMS to measure long term wellbeing, this is part of a longer term study from starting points to pupils leaving to demonstrate the impact of the placement over time), IEPS, iASEND and analyses it carefully to look at impact of approach. Pupils are settled, happy and able to achieve at Northern Counties School, where previously they have not engaged with learning and school, displayed a variety of challenging behaviours and often been medicated when highly anxious. We have one case study of a young man, who had 5 previous school placements, has attachment disorder and autism, is a looked after child, who came to school on a 3:1 staffing level with very high levels of challenging behaviour and is currently accessing a range of work placements in the local community on a 1:1 staffing level.

We are also currently doing the Carnegie Award for wellbeing and mental health in school, for pupils and staff. This is due to be finished in November 2019.

ADVISOR COMMENTS (These are optional and should only include additional information not already included in the assessment report)

Further areas to work upon: (Accreditation use only)

Adviser comments: