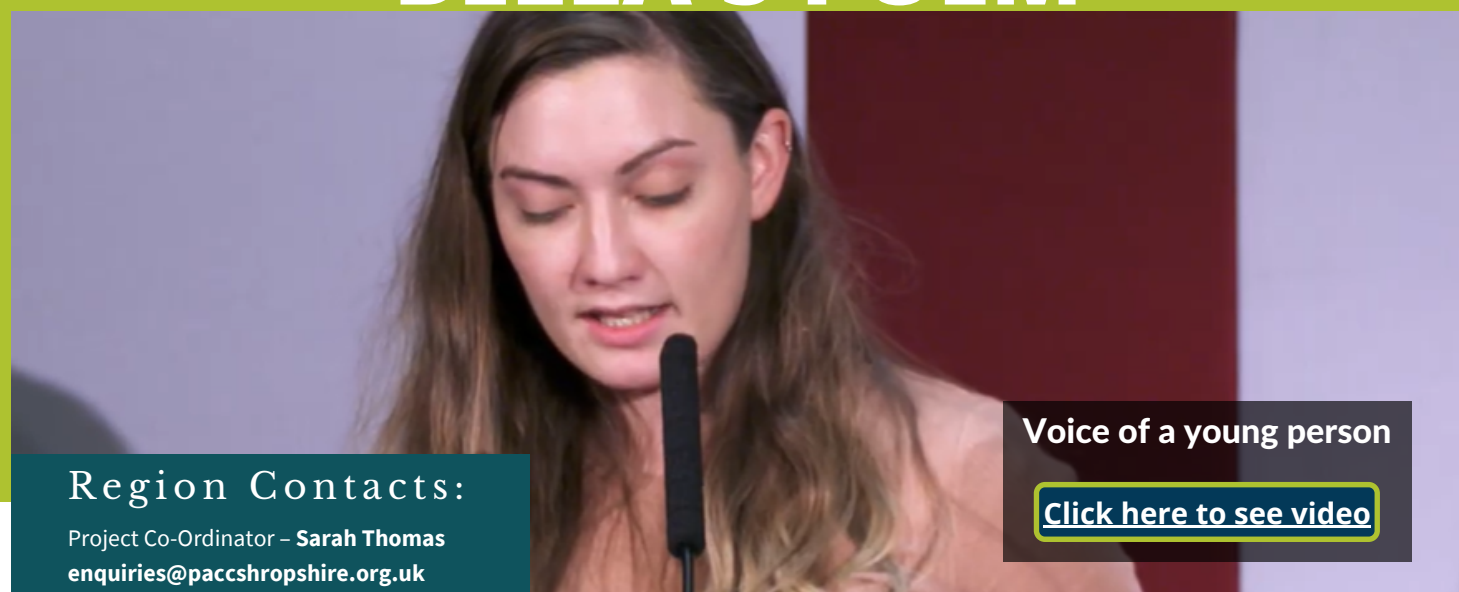


NORTH MIDLANDS AUTISM IN SCHOOLS

Project Newsletter

BELLA'S POEM



Voice of a young person

[Click here to see video](#)

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The Journey so far...

NICOLA BROMAGE
 HEAD OF STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING
 STAFFORDSHIRE, STOKE-ON-TRENT CCG'S

The North Midlands Autism and Schools Project is a cross system initiative to improve experience and outcomes for Autistic students and those awaiting a diagnosis in mainstream schools. The project is in its initial stages but is already demonstrating the impact that joint leadership can achieve across CCG's, Parent Carer Forums, Local Authorities, Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust; Educational Providers as well as key partners in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VSCE). I want to thank all that are involved in the project for their passion, enthusiasm, dedication, and pace they are working to implement the programme. This is an incredibly exciting initiative that has been co-produced from inception and is giving us a real opportunity to innovate and evidence how we can ensure a positive experience for our children and young people that has a lasting change within the school settings.

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The journey so far...

Learning & Development Programme dates

Hearing the voice of children and young people

Learning & Development Programme Update

A workshop was held on the 15th of Dec with participating schools, parent carers, and practitioners to discuss the key challenges faced in school by autistic students. The session started with short presentations introducing restorative practice and person-centered approaches (see resource section)

The Parent Carer Forums and Schools shared their experience of areas that they felt they wanted to further explore as part of the learning and development programme. Some of the Forums had carried out surveys of the wider population of parent carers and the key issues identified included;

- Expectations around homework
- Impact of unstructured times and difficulties with friendship
- Sensory issues relating to uniforms/noise/smells
- Demands in terms of getting ready for school
- Issues with sleep impacting schooling
- The need for compassion, empathy, and understanding– these are not naughty children
- Lack of flexibility in approach



Our Training Partners

In addition to these points schools highlighted the need to understand how to support autistic student to manage change and transitions, the need for a person-centred approach to communication and understanding behaviour as communication. There was also an interesting discussion on the importance of supporting staff well-being and the need for active leadership. From these discussions, an outline learning and development programme has been developed and we are in the progress of sourcing delivery. Some dates for these modules have been agreed and are shared in the table below. The Learning and Development programme is aimed to be completed by the end of March 2022. The intention of the programme is to support whole school development and so the schools participating in the pilot are committed to sharing the learning from the training throughout the whole school and to using it to review school policies and practices.



Autistic pupils often face significant barriers to learning within the educational environment. These can be overcome by ensuring we create supportive teaching environments that are structured, consistent, and respectful of differences

Training Topic	Date
WIDGIT Training	15th February 2022
Whole school approaches	28th February 2022
Creating an Autism Friendly Environment	2nd March 2022
Relationship between home and School	7th March 2022
Restorative practice and building positive relationships	14th March 2022
Thinking about Autistic Communication	30th March 2022

Widgit is supporting the Autism in Schools Project!

Supporting communication with autistic students was one of the key areas identified by schools and parent carers, when discussing the AIS learning & development programme. The Pilot has worked with Widgit to make their online symbol software available to all schools participating in the pilot for a 12-month period. Schools will be offered 6 logins per school and the ability to share resources with families.

Sue White, Senior Education Specialist from Widgit says “Widgit are delighted to be supporting the North Midlands Autism in Schools Pilot and to provide a training session on how to create visual materials using Widgit Online. Widgit Symbols and software titles have been used in schools for over 30 years to support communication, education and understanding. Widgit have developed a large and widely recognised symbol set of over 20,000 symbols that can enhance access to learning, reduce anxiety and frustration levels, improve independence, support speech and language development, reduce EAL language barriers and encourage faster academic progress and are used globally. Staff working in schools love using our software, tools and resources as they save time, produce high quality materials and deliver great outcomes”.

Further information about how to access this resource will be sent out soon, please note details of the training session on the 15th February 2022. In the meantime further information about the product can be found here: www.widgit.com

Developing School-Based Participation

The Parent Carer Forums in each local area are leading on this element of the Autism in Schools pilot. Relationships between the schools and Forums are being developed and baseline data about the quality of the school and parent carers relationship is being collected. The forums are working with local parent carer communities to create peer networks, to share information and gather feedback on their experiences.



In Stoke-on-Trent, our PCF is working with three schools that have amazing parents and SENCOs. Each school has started its own engagement with parents, and this has been very well received by everybody involved. Parents really want this to work, and they come to our coffee morning with ideas on how to engage and develop things across our city. Today as I sat in our virtual coffee morning, I was extremely lucky to watch a group of parents come alive as they offered support, care, and honesty in a safe environment. It is in these meetings that parents offer affordable solutions around communication. This was shown by parents wanting to improve communication around their children and school and a discussion about developing an app to help everybody with this – super exciting. As our coffee mornings start to come face to face I am truly excited to be part of this amazing project and I know this will enrich everybody involved.

Michelle Craggs
PEGIS Representative
On Behalf of Stoke-on-Trent Parent Carer Forum

The Voice of Children and Young people

We have received some exciting proposals which will involve direct work with children and young people, ensuring that their voices and experiences are central to this project. We are looking at the introduction of restorative circles in Staffordshire, including the development of restorative champions and student ambassadors, who will support staff and students to problem solve, de-escalate situations and to implement a structured strategy for schools to handle conflict. In Shropshire and Telford, we are working with Autism West Midlands, building on their 'Autism Confident' programme to make it available to participating schools and across different age groups.



Also, in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, the Leadership Group has commissioned 'Ignition', a local arts organisation to work with us to capture the experience of autistic children and young people in the area. This will involve a short-story competition for autistic children and young people to share their experiences of school life and creative workshops for autistic students at the participating schools to explore friendships and peer relationships, resulting in a short 'talking-heads' style film resource. The Leadership Group is continuing to discuss options for similar activity in the other pilot areas.

Other News...

Developing a New Way of Working with CAMHS

The pilot's Leadership Group has held discussions with all of the CAMHS providers in the pilot area to discuss how we can work together. As in other areas these services are facing particular pressures at the moment and capacity is an issue. All the providers were supportive of the approach that the pilot is taking and are currently considering how they can contribute.

Evaluation

The pilot will be evaluated both locally and as part of the national programme. Baseline data has been requested from all participating schools which will enable us to measure the overall impact of the combined elements of the pilot. (This has been requested for the last two years to reflect the impact of Covid). This will be the main input to the national evaluation, along with case studies illustrating the difference the work has made to individuals. We will also ensure that each individual activity within the core elements of the pilot is separately evaluated enabling us to inform best practice.

THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY EDUCATION REPORT (2021)

What did autistic children say:



- 54% said they needed quiet spaces to go to when there is a problem
- 7 in 10 said that the thing that would make the biggest difference was having teachers who understood autism
- Only 26% felt happy at school and only 24% felt included at school.
- Only 1 in 12 autistic children thought their peers knew enough about autism. Being bullied by their peers was a common experience for autistic children.
- Being seen by teachers as rude, awkward, purposefully disruptive was also a common theme for autistic children

The Autism Education Trust (AET) has developed this set of competencies with funding from the Department for Education in England, to describe the knowledge, understanding and skills that staff working in schools and other educational settings require to work effectively with pupils on the autism spectrum.

The AET Competency Framework provides a clear structure against which staff can reflect upon and evaluate their practice and aims to provide a source of guidance to help schools assess and develop capacity within their workforce to improve outcomes for pupils on the autism spectrum.

AET Frameworks

[Click here](#)



[CLICK HERE](#) **Recording of Learning & Development workshop**

[CLICK HERE](#) **Government survey on improving school attendance. Looking to deliver consistent support for families across England and focus better, targeted multi-agency support on pupils who need it most.**

[CLICK HERE](#) **New resources on LBQT+ and Autism**

[CLICK HERE](#) **Good practice guide For professionals delivering talking therapies for autistic adults and children**

Resources