



NORTH MIDLANDS AUTISM IN SCHOOLS

Project Newsletter



I WAS BULLIED FOR BEING AUTISTIC

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH](#)

AI S PROJECT REVIEW

by Nicola Bromage, Pilot Co-Chair

As our initial pilot ends, the project leadership team is now preparing for the second phase of the project to begin when the new school term starts in September 2022.

The core of our initial pilot has been the extensive Learning & Development programme, which was co-produced by schools and PCFs. These have enabled the pilot to create strong autism champions in each school. The creative workshops to hear the voice of CYP with autism are being completed and final resources produced.

From September, we want to build on the core learning from the initial phase and embed the learning on a school-wide basis. We will offer a combination of further bite-sized learning on a whole-school basis, further strengthening the direct relationship with local CAMHS services, enabling sensory and communication audits to be carried out in all participating schools, with a focus on developing whole-school policies that support neurodiverse students. The CYP work supporting self-awareness, understanding, and resilience will continue, and courses will be offered to more schools.

Building on the initial phase of engagement with the Senior Management Team (SMT) within schools we will deliver a conference aimed at SMT, with high-profile speakers looking at topics such as the Equality Act 2010 and showcasing the successes from Year 1.

PCFs will continue to play a key role in the pilot, both strategically and in delivering support for school-based parent carer communities. I would like to take the opportunity to particularly thank them, all the participating schools, and the pilot leadership team for all the work and time they have given over the past several months, and how pleased I am that we can continue this exciting pilot into the new school year and realise the impact we can make together to deliver improvements for our children and young people.

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WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Learning & Development programme review and next steps

Spotlight on Schools

Voice of children and young people

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME REVIEW & NEXT STEPS

by Sarah Thomas, Participation Lead & NMAIS Pilot Co-ordinator, Shropshire PACC & Actio Consortium

We have now completed the 6 sessions which formed the NMAIS Learning and Development Programme. There was a great level of participation from Schools and Parent Carer Forums, which was really appreciated considering the current circumstance and extra pressures being faced because of the impact of Covid.

The programme covered a range of core ideas and approaches and the response to all the sessions was very positive, participants particularly valued learning opportunities where trainers had personal lived experience of the issues being discussed. Participants have highlighted the importance of the messages around developing quality relationships and looking beyond the behaviour to why behaviour is happening. A key message that came from our reflection sessions was the value in creating a supportive physical environment and how much can be achieved by considering how a classroom is arranged and ensuring that quiet spaces are available for example. The reflection was that these have potential to be important quick wins, showing what can be achieved with a person-centred approach and promoting wider culture change.

The biggest challenge identified was how these core messages were communicated throughout the school environment, bringing all staff on board with the principles of the pilot. It was again emphasised that the Senior Management Team need to play a key role in this, and more opportunities were requested to engage these roles in discussions. Both these issues need time and forward planning, and it was acknowledged that the timeframe for the pilot delivery had not been helpful and caused some difficulties for the participation of the schools. Training and meeting dates need to be booked well in advance to ensure attendance.

The pilot leadership team would like to thank all those who attended the learning development session and contributed to the resulting constructive and informative discussions. It is key for the pilots next steps that we understand the impact of these sessions and what change they have prompted in schools. An Impact Form has been created for the pilot and we would encourage you to capture any change or impact resulting from your involvement in the pilot on this. Please complete a separate form for each impact noted. The form can be found [here](#)

Going forward all those participating in the pilot are keen to maintain contact and in fact there was a general request for ongoing opportunities for those involved to be able to come together regularly and in person. This would provide opportunities to benefit from peer support, share good practice and to build an understanding of the wider system.

Following the welcomed announcement that the Autism in Schools national pilots will continue into 2022/23 plans are now being made to continue this work and to build on the progress already made. The pilot's leadership team look forward to continue to work with you all to deliver positive outcomes for autistic young people.



SOME COMMENTS ON L&D TRAININGS

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The training about sensory and environmental considerations was highly valued. This was recognised to have already enabled change that had made a huge difference to individual, which was a great quick win

“

I love this approach to children it should be the approach all schools take - Understanding Behaviour as Communication Training

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Relational and restorative practices - I understand more about the brain and its development in relation to trauma. Definitions of trauma and attachment, the attachment cycle and toxic stress. The resources signposted by the trainer are valuable

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOLS

Marches Academy Trust, Shropshire



At Marches we feel it has been great opportunity to network with providers, listen to others' experiences and look at effective, evidence-based methods of affecting change. There have been some stand-out moments in the training and all sessions have been useful.

Amy Chevin-Dooley, Director of inclusion says:

The Autism in Schools project is a unique program for schools, parents and carers, and multi-agency professionals, to open the discussion beyond the parameters of their own thoughts or institution, to discuss ideologically the best provision for autistic children and young people, but also beyond this, children for whom there are specific needs (FSM, PP, SEND, trauma-experienced); the opportunity to receive training from highly experienced and qualified professionals is the key to this ideology.

The next step is how do we shift ideology to implementation and practical application; what does best practice and forward-thinking policy, school structures, intervention models, training for whole-school, look like? If that can be incorporated into the program, or a focus group formulated to look to developing models for the above – then the impact could be infinite.

Carla Whelan, Executive Director of Education says:

This training has provided practical suggestions & summaries of research and strategies.

Our schools involved have been able to review their own practice and look at how these can be incorporated to enhance practice and further their inclusive practice. The feedback from schools has also stated the sessions on sensory needs, EBSA, restorative practice were particularly useful as they were also interactive.

With the project, at times, there has been a lot of information at once and it can be administratively heavy (emails, comms, attendance on courses, feedback to colleagues). However it has provided schools with a lot of resource and knowledge to ensure they can now make an impact from this.



SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOLS



At St Peter's CofE Academy we are a family, we strive to be inclusive and support all of our students. Students are central to the work we do and our aim is to equip them with the skills that they need to become successful adults.

Autism Acceptance Week at St Peter's CofE Academy Stoke-on-Trent



Autism Acceptance Week
28th March- 3rd April 2022.



What is autism?

Autism is a life-long condition that affects how a person interacts with the world and how they communicate. There are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK.

What you might see...

Autistic pupils often find the school environment and other people as unpredictable and this can result in feelings of anxiety, frustration and anger.



Competition.

Give the answers to these questions to a member of the SEN Department to win!
True or false...

1. All autistic people have the same needs, challenges and strengths
2. All autistic people like the same things.
3. Autism is a mental health condition.
4. All autistic people are geniuses.
5. People of all genders can be autistic.

Famous people with Autism



Anthony Hopkins



Daryl Hanna



Craig Nicholls

We created the above slide

- It has been printed and displayed around the academy
- It has been shown to all students during 'Rock' (tutor time)
- It has been posted on our Facebook page
- Students have taken part in the above competition
- We invited students to a buffet lunch on Friday, 1st April and asked if they would contribute to write on a word board



BENEFITS OF DEVELOPING SCHOOL BASED PARENT CARER PARTICIPATION

*A Case Study on bringing parent carers together
by
Michelle Craggs
PEGiS. Stoke-on-Trent*

For us, one of our biggest outcomes is ending isolation for families. On our selective autism workshop, two parents who live in the same street didn't know their child had SEN. This is because the children go to very different schools and the street didn't really mix. They were shocked they had walked past each other for years and as they spoke to each other after the workshop they talked about how they had seen each other's struggles but didn't think the other child had special needs. Out of our parents they were very new to the group and a little nervous. They were quiet. As parents joined our zoom meeting they started to talk to each other casually it was then that they recognised each other. It was like they were long lost family members.

They remained on zoom after our workshop and talked. They laughed about their experiences and promised to stay in touch. This zoom session went on till around 11pm. Both parents had said they were lonely and just joined the workshop because they needed to have adult talk. What we later found out is that those two parents went out for coffee a few days later. From their Facebook activity it's clear to see they are becoming good friends. They tell us they just never knew about each other but wish they had. We are due to have a night out soon with our parents and yes both mums have booked up to come. They have told us they haven't been out in the evening for years so this is a huge achievement

One thing I do know is they will become very firm friends and without the forum they wouldn't have mixed with each other. Both would have been at home in the same street feeling isolated.

VOICE OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Relational and Restorative Practice Student Ambassador Development

by Deb Ryan, Staffordshire Parent Carer

The Staffs Parent Carer Forum had been working with our County Council on the Relational and Restorative Practice (RRP) project, as we had made a link that it helps SEND students with this whole school approach. When we started the Autism in School (AIS) project we linked the work we were already doing with the RRP/ trauma informed in schools project, along with the great work that the Autism Outreach Team (AOT) were already doing in schools. When starting to talk about the Children and Young person (CYP) part of the AIS program the idea came up to use the RRP project Student Ambassador Development to include neurotypical children and neurodiverse students together, to build their life skills and to bring them together to build a more inclusive environment. This was the chance to work with students to see the benefits that neurodiverse and neurotypical students bring to each other and change the approach which sometimes seems to be focused on segregation.

We have had our first sessions delivering the CYP training with all our schools now. I loved the interaction between neurodiverse and neurotypical students and the way they had each other's back, listened to each other, learnt from each other, talked things through with each other, and problem solved, jointly coming up with solutions.

It was lovely to see students' self-esteem grow as the day went on. One student went from saying nothing, to coming out of their shell with some amazing views and coming up with a fantastic idea like having 'worry boxes' around the school. A teacher commented that she had not heard this student speak as much for 2 years in her class and by the end the student went home with a beaming smile and told staff members it was their best day ever in school!

The communication, interaction, teamwork, ideas and views between the group blew me away. I noticed the staff and their commitment, and I could really see the love for the children within their school, but also the challenges they faced as well.

With the CYP training being a team effort between the School, AOT, RRP team and Staffs Parent Carer Forum, we were able to recognise unmet needs, prompting discussions with schools and AOT which resulted in the reasonable adjustments needed. There was an understanding for the students to have a voice and be heard in a non-confrontational way by both peers and staff.

I am so glad we worked with the AOT and were able to include the training development of the RRP and the Ambassador program in the Autism in Schools pilot. I really have seen how the AIS and RRP projects needs to be the centre of education systems, moving forward as a whole school approach. One thing that stood out was how the two projects were different standalone projects, but the core values seem to be the same, inclusivity, culture change, to have safe places and inclusion instead of isolation rooms, looking at policy changes to become more relational, embedding reasonable adjustments, looking at how exclusions can be avoided and working to be more restorative, and solution focused. I have also seen the value of the involvement of AOT and those with lived experience in this work, bridging the gap between neurodiverse and neurotypical to start the culture change needed.

I came away from the first session of CYP training feeling so proud to be part of the AIS project, I saw the benefit for both staff and students well-being, as they started to build new skills to start to navigate the world around them together.

CREATIVE WORKSHOPS BY IGNITION

Ignition CIC have been supporting The North Midlands Autism In Schools pilot by working with 6 schools in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin to deliver engaging workshops using drama and the creative arts to enable autistic children and young people to share their experiences of being in school. The sessions have been led by professional theatre maker Hannah Prior, who has shaped the sessions to enable young people to express themselves through a variety of methods including drama and visual arts. Sessions were designed to stimulate conversation in a light touch, age appropriate, supported way. The arts and creative play encourages conversations that might not take place in other environments. Several of the schools have commented on how pleased they were with how much their young people were able to reflect and share around their experiences of school.

Topics shared include; experiences of bullying, thoughts on peer and staff connections within schools, what makes a 'great day' and also a not so great day, what's working well for them and what could be improved.



What children & young people told us:

"I can come to the [Hub Space] here if things are difficult in Class. The only problem is I find it too hot and noisy."

"I feel supported by my friends at school. They get who I am"

"Some teachers make me take my [scarf] off and when I refuse they send me out the lesson"

The workshops are the starting point for collating and collecting stories and experiences from autistic children and young people locally that will be captured in a series of digital talking heads performed by young autistic actors. The digital videos will be made available to schools, alongside a supporting resource pack for teachers to use with both autistic and non-autistic pupils.



No, autism is not a 'gift'. For most, it is an endless fight against schools, workplaces and bullies. But, under the right circumstances, given the right adjustments, it can be a superpower



GRETA THUNBERG

POST-16 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME BY AET



The Autism Education Trust are pleased to introduce their new Professional Development Programme for Post-16 learners. These training modules and resources are delivered in a variety of teaching methods and they make up the only DfE-supported, CPD-certified professional development programme that is co-produced with autistic people, parents and education professionals.

Our updated professional development programme consists of 7 Training Modules:

Post 16 Making Sense of Autism

For everyone involved in the Post-16 sector who would benefit from having an understanding of autism. This includes teaching and support staff, office staff, caterers, transport staff, governors, employers and careers advisers.

Post 16 Good Autism Practice

This module is for practitioners and staff working in a range of Post-16 settings, including General Colleges of Further Education, Independent Specialist Providers, Mainstream and Special Schools with Post-16 provision, Sixth Form Colleges, Work Based Learning Providers and Adult and Community Learning Providers.

Progression Framework

This training module will introduce the Progression Framework and accompanying documents and show you how to use the framework to identify key learning intentions.

Understanding GAP and the AET Frameworks for Leaders (Suite of Resources for Leaders)

This module introduces leadership teams to the Good Autism Practice (GAP) Report to help them understand how the 8 principles of GAP emerged.

Inclusion, Leadership and Structural Reasonable Adjustments (Suite of Resources for Leaders)

This module will help leaders to understand what is needed to fully embed an inclusive culture. It looks at education legislation and guidance surrounding inclusion, the steps required to lead culture change and the importance of considering structural reasonable adjustments and AET resources to support leaders with this.

And two new topic-based modules:

Anxiety

This module on autism and anxiety will provide delegates with an understanding of what we mean by anxiety, how it appears in autistic children and young people (CYP), what the key triggers are, and what teaching staff can do to support autistic children and young people.

Transition to Employment

This module looks specifically at the section for employers and provides editable templates such as a One Page Profile and Traveling to the Interview and Workplace. You will learn about the strengths, talents and skillsets of autistic people. The module also covers interview and selection practices and reasonable adjustments that can be beneficial for autistic people seeking employment.

[You can read more about the Post-16 Professional Development Programme on the AET website](#)

Newsletters and video's from initial AIS project in the North East

[**Click Here**](#)

Recordings and presentations of Learning & Development programme trainings

[**Click Here**](#)

Capable environment checklist

[**Click Here**](#)

Equality Act guide for schools

[**Click Here**](#)

Blog by CDC on Equality Act guide for schools

[**Click Here**](#)

Immie's Signs to Spot Autism as featured in Good Morning Britain TV Show

[**Click Here**](#)

Link to Impact Form

[**Click Here**](#)



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My needs are different and when they are met I excel; and when they are not, I struggle

OLLIE
AET Young Experts Panel