



Evaluation of the North Midlands Autism in Schools Pilot Project (MNAIS)– Phase 1

Acknowledgements

‘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 coproduced 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.’ Nicola Bromage, Co-Chair of the Leadership Group for the North Midlands Autism in Schools Pilot Project (Head of Strategic Commissioning Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS)

Sarah Thomas, Participation Lead and Pilot Co-ordinator NMAIS (Shropshire PACC & Action Consortium), and the evaluators from the Autism Education Trust would like to thank everyone who has made time available to be involved in this evaluation.

Date: November 2022

Evaluation team - Autism Education Trust

Report compilation by - Catherine Eaton, Midlands and Lancashire Commissioning Support Unit



Table of Contents

Executive Summary and looking forward	4
Schools' view on what we have achieved in Phase 1	5
Recommendation.....	6
About this report	6
Background and objectives	6
Objective 1 Developing and implementing a practice-based Learning and Development Programme, which seeks to develop a positive school environment for autistic pupils through reasonable adjustments ..	7
Objective 2 Developing school-based participation and developing a positive partnership between families and schools, building on and supported by the established Parent Carer Forums in each local authority area	7
Objective 3. Building a new relationship between CAMHS and schools which is focused on developing autism friendly environments and practice	7
Objective 4. Hearing from Children and Young People (CYP) with Autism and developing self-awareness and resilience	8
NMAIS project leadership.....	8
Recommendation	9
Evaluation methodology.....	9
Recommendation -	10
Performance Indicators.....	10
Baseline data for performance indicators 1-5	10
The metrics collected, by academic year, and results	10
Recommendation.....	12
Case study material.....	12
Methodology -	12
Recommendation.....	12
Issues encountered with developing the case studies.....	12
Recommendation.....	12
Learnings from the case studies.....	12
Key findings by Objective.....	14
Objective 1 - A Learning and Development Programme which seeks to develop a positive school environment for autistic pupils through reasonable adjustments.	14
Reflection on the achievement of the Learning and Development Programme	14
Key messages from Learning and Development Reflection Session 1.....	15
Key messages from Learning and Development Reflection Session 2.....	16
Widgit.....	16
Objective 2 Developing school-based participation and developing a positive partnership between families and schools, building on and supported by the established Parent Carer Forums in each local authority area	16
Recommendation.....	17
Staffordshire PCF baseline data	17

Assessment and recommendation	17
Assessment and recommendation	18
Assessment and recommendation	19
Assessment and recommendation	20
Assessment and recommendation	22
Assessment and recommendation	23
Review of changes in schools brought about by Phase 1.....	23
Assessment and recommendation	23
Objective 3 - Building a new relationship between CAMHS and schools which is focused on developing autism friendly environments and practice	23
North Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent	23
Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin	24
Some of the evaluation considerations provided by BeeU.....	25
Staffordshire CAMHS environmental audits and arrangements for transition to Y7.....	26
Assessment and recommendations.....	26
Arrangements for transition to Y7	26
Safe and support spaces	26
Support strategies.....	27
Assessment and recommendations.....	27
Objective 4. Hearing from Children and Young People (CYP) with Autism and developing self-awareness and resilience.....	27
Restorative Ambassadors & Champions training in Staffordshire	28
Staff and student feedback to consider for Phase 2	28
Assessment and recommendation	29
Stoke-on-Trent My Autism Path (MAP) Course	29
Assessment and recommendation	30
Assessment and recommendation	30
Telford and Shropshire – Autism Confident programme.....	30
Feedback from students and parents	30
Feedback from Autism West Midlands.....	31
Conclusion & Next Steps	
Appendices	33

Executive Summary and looking forward

We were delighted to be chosen by NHS England as one of three areas in the midlands region to be part of Autism in Schools, a national pilot to improve the support and awareness of autism in schools. Our area is the North Midlands and includes Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The Autism in Schools project started in the North East region and was developed in response to the fact that an increasing number of young people with autism (without a learning disability) were facing mental health breakdown and possible hospital admission. Following the successes of the North East project, which ran over the two years 2018/19 and 2019/20, NHSE rolled it out across the country for the 2021/22 period, known as Phase 1, and NHSE has awarded further funding for Phase 2 2022/23.

From the outset a dynamic new partnership was created between health, social care, Parent Carer Forums and school staff and students to co-produce and lead the project.

This evaluation report was commissioned by our Leadership Group to identify outcomes and learnings of the North Midlands Autism in Schools (NMAIS) project Phase 1. At the start of the project we collected information from schools on a range of measures that we will be using as evidence to check how we are doing in terms of achieving change and improvements for autistic students. It is too soon in the project to identify how we are doing in terms of this quantitative data, we will work over Phase 2 to update and analyse the data.

The core of the NMAIS project has been the extensive Learning and Development programme, which was coproduced by 12 mainstream secondary and primary schools and Parent Carer Forums and aims to address the key issues identified by these groups. All training course and development activity has been individually evaluated and the feedback is used as the basis for this evaluation report.

Feedback from partners has identified challenges with embedding the learning on a school wide basis and we plan for Phase 2 to offer a combination of further bite sized learning on a whole school basis. We will continue to strengthen the direct relationship with local CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) services, enabling sensory and communication audits to be carried out in all participating schools.

We have also learned that more work needs to be done on engaging school's Senior Management Teams (SMT) in the project to ensure a whole school approach. Building on the initial engagement of SMT we plan to hold a face-to-face conference for senior managers to share our successes and hear from national leaders. Parent Carer Forums are a key asset in the project they will have a stronger voice in working with school leadership teams to jointly achieve a bigger cultural shift, and to help ensure staff time is dedicated to implement ideas and support wellbeing

We have worked with parents on developing Case Studies about their autistic child, this has helped with all our learning. In Phase 2 we will use this approach further, so that we can share learning and understanding.

The direct work we have done with a number of children and young people to support self-awareness, understanding and resilience will continue in Phase 2. Courses will be offered to more schools so we can build on the learning from this work.

The creative workshops, to hear the voice of autistic children and young people, will be completed and the final resources produced. We will then showcase the CYP voice and these resources in a conference for all schools in the project area.

Parent Carer Forums will continue to play a key role in the project, both strategically and in delivering support for school-based parent carer communities. Parent Carer Forums have different capacity, existing parent carer groups will continue to be supported, and where possible support will be extended to new schools to develop their relationships with parent carers.

School staff participating in the Learning and Development Programme have told us how much they have valued being able to connect with each other, the Parent Carer Forums and other practitioners. They say that they would like the opportunity to continue to do this on a face-to-face basis. To facilitate this, we propose to develop two peer networks, one for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and one for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. They will run bi-monthly and will be topic based to develop cross system understand and relationships.

In summary the sustainability of the North Midlands Autism in Schools project will be strengthened by embedding the role of senior management teams in this work, the ongoing relationship with CAMHS, supporting the focus on whole school training and culture change and developing parent carers understanding of the wider system and how it should support them.

[Schools' view on what we have achieved in Phase 1](#)

At the end of Phase 1 the twelve schools that participated in the project were asked to complete an Impact Form using MS Forms to capture qualitative data relating to their views on the change or impact resulting from their involvement in Phase 1 of the project. Seven schools completed the form, including four Secondary schools, two Primary Schools and one parent carer forum. The main areas of change and impact experienced are:

- **Parents have become more knowledgeable** about local authority updates and support services available this has come about through newly established Parent Carer Forums that provide a peer-to-peer support group for parents. The school has benefitted from more engagement with parents and there is an enhanced understanding of Autism among the wider staff group. Staff have also been encouraged to consider their own best practice both in creating classroom environments and how they present learning opportunities and resources
- **Increased parental involvement and enhanced parent voice** achieved by holding regular parent carer forum meetings in school. Parents have developed new

supportive and empowering relationships between themselves. The school has benefitted from stronger parent to school relationships

- **Reduced feelings of isolation** for parent/carers by being brought together with other parents at the school, realising for the first time that they are not alone. The school has benefitted from stronger relationships.
- **Improved student well-being and increased confidence** to be themselves around others and feel included. This has been achieved by providing opportunities for pupil peer-to-peer support in the school that gave students the opportunity to meet and form friendships outside of their year group. The school and staff have benefitted through improved staff awareness and understanding of student's difficulties and having the knowledge of where support and advice can be accessed. Staff have confidence to raise student concerns and have discussions with students.
- **Greater consideration given to sensory impact in learning environments** by teachers who will ensure visual displays etc are not too overwhelming, some are encouraging a small area in each classroom to be a 'clear' area for students, to avoid sensory overload
- **Students have more confidence and are better able to deal with social situations and with conflict and friendship fallings-out** all achieved through the Ambassador scheme within the school.
- **Students will feel they have a safe space within school** which will in turn improve attendance, mental wellbeing, and performance. Some schools have applied for funding to provide and develop safe and sensory spaces

Recommendation - it is always encouraging to consider what a project has achieved, particularly from the view of people who the project is intended to benefit. Therefore, based on the findings, it would be good to conduct a follow-on review of the Schools Impact form in December 2022 and in the autumn term 2023 at the end of Phase 2.

About this report

This is the report of an independent evaluation of the North Midlands Autism in Schools pilot project (the project) Phase 1. The evaluation was commissioned by the North Midlands Autism in Schools Project Leadership Group and was carried out by the Autism Education Trust. The Midlands and Lancashire Commissioning Support Unit completed the report. Phase 1 of the project ended in July 2022. This report is both comprehensive and highly detailed as it is intended to provide an evidence base to inform the project leadership for the development of Phase 2 of the project which will run from September 2022 to July 2023.

Background and objectives

The North Midlands Autism in Schools project (NMAIS) is a two-year cross system partnership initiative to improve the experience and outcomes for autistic pupils, and those awaiting a diagnosis, in mainstream schools. The NMAIS project builds on the work and learning from the North Cumbria and North East Accelerator Autism in Schools Pilot Project.

The north midland's project will run over the two school years 2021/22 for Phase 1, followed by Phase 2 in 2022/23. The project is designed to demonstrate the impact that

joint leadership, across the Shropshire Telford and Wrekin and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent systems, can achieve in terms of creating capable environments. The project partnership has established a multi-agency Leadership Team as the core decision-making group for the project, and commissioned project support for Phase 1 from the Autism Education Trust (AET). A wider reference group, including a range of practitioners from across the project area was set up to support the Leadership Team.

The project has adopted all four key elements and associated objectives from the North Cumbria and North East Accelerator Autism in Schools Project

Objective 1 Developing and implementing a practice-based Learning and Development Programme, which seeks to develop a positive school environment for autistic pupils through reasonable adjustments

A core element towards achieving successful outcomes for the project is the development of the schools' workforce through the leadership learning and development programme. This programme was co-produced by schools and Parent Carer Forums (PCF) to ensure that mainstream schools offer capable environments in which autistic students can thrive. In particular by supporting good mental health and promoting inclusion for this group of young people. The project aims to make sure that support is provided to autistic young people from the earliest point so that wherever possible situations do not escalate to crisis. The focus on ensuring that autistic students are supported effectively at key transition points, is intended to ensure a positive experience in terms of change and moving forward. The project has sourced local training providers and has worked collaboratively with them to co-produce the Learning and Development programme.

Objective 2 Developing school-based participation and developing a positive partnership between families and schools, building on, and supported by the established Parent Carer Forums in each local authority area

The project aims to establish a co-production approach across education, health, social care services and the SEND community to support autistic young people and their families. The following PCF groups are members of the Project Leadership group, National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) West Midlands, Parent and Carer Council (PACC) Shropshire, Parents Opening Doors (PODS) Telford & Wrekin, Stoke-on-Trent PCF. These groups have been active in the design and delivery of the project. PCFs have worked with the schools to engage parent carer communities, and to establish school-based participation groups both face to face and online. Information sharing and peer connections are being facilitated through What's App and closed Facebook Groups.

Objective 3. Building a new relationship between CAMHS and schools which is focused on developing autism friendly environments and practice

The project aims to strengthen the direct relationship between CAMHS and schools. Participating schools have worked directly with local CAMHS services to enable sensory and communication audits to be carried out. Teams from three mental health providers in the north midlands; Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust Telford and Shropshire, Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust Staffordshire and North Staffordshire and North Staffordshire

Combined Healthcare covering Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire are involved in the project.

Objective 4. Hearing from Children and Young People (CYP) with Autism and developing self-awareness and resilience

The project has developed a CYP programme working directly with CYP putting the young person at the centre in order to build their resilience and self-awareness. Most elements of the training programme have been delivered including the Autism Confident Course in Shropshire, My Autism Path in Stoke-on-Trent, and Restorative and Relations Ambassadors project in Staffordshire. Creating Arts and Workshop elements of the project are ongoing and will continue into the 2022 Autumn term.

NMAIS project leadership

The North Midlands Autism in Schools (NMAIS) project is a cross system project funded by NHS England that aims to improve outcomes for autistic pupils in mainstream schools. Central to delivering impacts for the project is the commitment from all partners to demonstrate that strong local leadership is vital to support cross-agency working and to provide place-based oversight to the project. From the outset a multi-agency Leadership group was established for the NMAIS to enable the creation and development of new relationships and to achieve whole system change.

During Phase One the project Leadership Group consisted of the following organisations:

- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board
- Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board
- Autism Education Trust (AET)
- Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT) Shropshire
- Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT) Staffordshire
- North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare Trust (NSCHT)
- National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) West Midlands
- Parent and Carer Council (PACC) Shropshire
- Parents Opening Doors (PODS) Telford & Wrekin
- Stoke-on-Trent PCF
- Shropshire Council
- Staffordshire County Council
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- Telford & Wrekin Council

Lead partners have remarked that everyone involved in the project showed their passion, enthusiasm, and dedication, to achieve sustainable change. A core commitment from all partners involved in the project is that all elements will be coproduced, providing local systems with a real opportunity to innovate and to ensure a positive experience for children and young people that will have a lasting change within the school setting. System leaders involved in the project have commented on what an incredibly exciting initiative this has been.

The Leadership Group meetings were weekly and held on a virtual basis. Given the weekly commitment they were relatively well attended. The Leadership Group has agreed that

going forward for Phase 2 the Leadership meetings will be held monthly and two local groups will be set up. One meeting for the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent system and one for the Shropshire Telford and Wrekin system. The local meetings will be monthly and have the remit to discuss the delivery of Phase 2 at the local level.

Recommendation - feedback from a reflection session indicates that in order to achieve a bigger cultural shift in schools and to ensure staff are given time to implement ideas and support wellbeing, there needs to be more involvement and participation by school's leaders in Phase 2. Local SEND systems and PCFs need to work closely with school leadership teams including Governors.

There are 12 schools participating in the North Midlands AIS project, comprising four Primary Schools and eight Secondary Schools across four Local Authorities.

	LA	School	Type
1	Staffordshire	Walton High School in Stafford	Secondary
2	Staffordshire	The Hart School Rugeley	Secondary
3	Staffordshire	Clayton Hall Academy	Secondary
4	Stoke	St Peter's C of E Academy (Fenton)	Secondary
5	Stoke	St Thomas More Catholic Academy (Longton)	Secondary
6	Stoke	Burnwood Primary (Chell Heath)	Primary
7	Shropshire	Shrewsbury Academy	Secondary
8	Shropshire	The Grange Primary	Primary
9	Shropshire	Primary School Oakmeadow	Primary
10	Shropshire	The Marches School	Secondary
11	Telford & Wrekin	Charlton Secondary School	Secondary
12	Telford & Wrekin	Dothill Primary School	Primary

Evaluation methodology

This project is being evaluated both locally and as part of the national Autism in Schools programme. From the outset a North Midlands Project Evaluation plan was created, and an evidence informed approach was agreed to gather data and evidence about what works for all partners, what needs changing, gaps, and whether intended outcomes are being achieved.

This report follows the agreed framework included in the NMAIS Evaluation Plan and provides information and data to support the outcomes for each of the project elements and their associated objectives. All providers of activity within the project were required to work with participants to evaluate input and outcomes to enable the project to inform best practice.

The delivery of all four objectives of the project (as listed in the section Background and Objectives) has been monitored throughout the academic year 2020/21 and forms the basis for this evaluation report.

This report includes a review of both quantitative data, that will enable the project to identify and track baselines and the achievement of performance indicators both on an individual school's basis and collectively across the north midlands qualitative data, to

identify the experience of individuals who have taken part in the project and enable the analysis to identify key themes and lessons for the development of Phase 2

Recommendation - a key message from the Learning and Development Reflection Session 1 - Reflect and Review that took place at the end of Phase 1, identified that 'to have reflection and evaluation sessions at the start of the pilot scheme to give a clear structure for how partners would be evaluating the pilot project would have been useful'. It is recommended that 'reflection and evaluation sessions' are held at the start and end of Phase 2.

Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators for the project have been agreed with NHSE and are reported in this evaluation. Reporting on these indicators will be the main input from NMAIS into the national evaluation, along with case studies illustrating the difference the work has made to individuals at two schools.

1. attendance levels for autistic young people
2. the number of autistic young people on part time timetables
3. permanent and fixed term exclusion levels for autistic young people
4. the number of autistic young people who have experienced a school move in the last two years and why
5. the percentage of pupils with SEN or EHCP meeting their short-term targets
6. parent carer satisfaction levels around their relationship with school - see Section xx
7. the shared experience of autistic students - see Section xx

Baseline data for performance indicators 1-5 (See **Appendix A** for an analysis of baseline data)

A questionnaire, designed to capture baseline data across eight performance measures, was sent to all participating schools in January 2022. The aim of the questionnaire is to identify each school's individual performance level across the two academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21, and the average level of performance across the twelve schools for these two years. Tracking the movement from the established baseline over subsequent years will enable the project to measure the overall impact of the combined elements of the project. All schools responded to the request.

The metrics collected, by academic year, and results

(Note some schools did not report data, this was mostly due to the question (Q) either not being relevant or the number of incidents being zero.)

Q1: Attendance levels for suspected / autistic pupils with identified SEN / EHCP

11 of the 12 schools reported data

Overall average for 19/20 was 90.8% and 20/21 was 87.4%

Only one school, which provided data, was under 80% (Charlton Secondary School)

Some schools cited COVID as a factor for non-attendance. This may have an impact on future assessment of progress from this baseline

Q2: Attendance levels for suspected / autistic pupils without identified SEN / EHCP

Half of schools responded that this question was not applicable

Overall average for schools where this is applicable for 19/20 was 92% and 20/21 was 88%

Q3: Number of suspected / autistic pupils on part-time timetable

4 schools reported data

19 pupils in 19/20 and 18 in 20/21

Q4: Number of permanent exclusions for suspected / autistic students

2 schools reported data

3 permanent exclusions in 19/20 and two in 20/21

Q5: Number of fixed-term exclusions for suspected / autistic students

10 schools reported data

36 in 19/20 and 24 in 20/21

The Hart School Rugeley reported 13 fixed-term exclusions in 19/20 and 8 in 20/21

Shrewsbury Academy reported 9 fixed-term exclusions in 19/20 and 0 in 20/21

Q6: Number of suspected / autistic students with identified SEN/EHCP who have had a school move in the last two years and why

9 schools reported data

15 in 19/20 and 19 in 20/21

Walton High School reported three in 19/20 with leavers moving to college, and nine in 20/21 with six leavers moving to college and three to specialist schools

Q7: Number of suspected / autistic students with identified SEN/EHCP who have moved to home education in the last two years

3 schools reported data

4 students in 19/20 and 4 students in 20/21

Q8: The percentage of pupils with SEND or EHCP meeting their short-term targets

7 schools reported data, there was no response from 4 schools, and one school advised it does not collect this data

average of 75% in 19/20 and 75% in 20/21 across the region where data was provided

In July 2022 a second Baseline Questionnaire was sent to schools requesting the same data but updated for 21/22. The updated information provided would enable the project to identify whether there had been any change brought about by activity in Phase 1 of the project. A reminder request has been sent to seven schools to complete the 21/22

Questionnaire. Due to the short timeframe, there is currently insufficient data available to draw any conclusions in terms of the impact of Phase 1 on performance.

Recommendation

The project team should continue to request progress updates, at intervals, from the schools to enable effective data analysis and track sustainable change. Messages from parents at the end of Phase 1 Review sessions included 'Things don't work as fast as we wanted within a school'. Takes time to implement and see the impact. Talking about massive cultural shift. This does not happen overnight.

Case study material

This evaluation report includes case studies from two secondary schools in Staffordshire to illustrate the difference that the NMAIS project work has made to individuals.

Methodology - the project evaluation team from AOT held interviews with the parents of four children who attend school 1, and two children who attend school 2. Both schools have considered the case material and issues raised and have addressed any immediate issues and put plans in place to address other issues.

Recommendation - A further follow up on the progress of the six young people is needed to identify areas where the NMAIS project can assist.

Issues encountered with developing the case studies

AOT found it very hard to get interaction with some parents through the school. They finally identified that parents did not want to come into school and engage because of bad experiences engaging with the school and outside agencies. The solution was for AOT to engage with parents directly and face to face.

Recommendation - A key learning for Phase 2 is to make sure that all parents feel comfortable in their relationship with the school. This will be achieved through a keen focus on Objective 2 - Developing school-based participation and developing a positive partnership between families and schools, building on, and supported by the established Parent Carer Forums in each local authority area.

During engagement with the families, it became apparent to AOL that there were incidents requiring Safeguarding intervention. These were then dealt with appropriately. However, the AOL focus was placed on these issues, and they were not able to engage in creating a parent community peer support group which would have made a difference to all of the individuals referenced in the case studies.

Learnings from the case studies

School 1

Child 1 – the parent described their worries about how their child struggles to make friends and is lonely. They expressed their concerns with their child being taken advantage of because of lack of social skills. The parent just wants their child to be happy and to stay at a mainstream school. However, they are concerned about the future and transitions, and the

lack of appropriate level of skills development options starting in Y9 as the child struggles with the academic side.

Outcomes for Child 1 –

- They will be advised by the school of the safe places they can go to
- Transitions - the school will set up arrangements with the local college and sixth form for students to go to on one day a week to attend lessons outside of school, for example hairdressing or animal companion courses.

Child 2 and 3 - two parents advised that they have not found the agencies connected with their children to be of any help. They identified safeguarding incidents with the school including bullying and children going missing from school for periods of time without the school being aware.

Child 4 - No EHCP and being bullied, school avoidance is an issue the child has been missing and this has not been noted in school. Child has been off sick with stress didn't want to go to school, detention for not doing work

Outcome for Child 2, 3 and 4– and key learning

- one student agreed to keep a diary log which they will share with a TA in the safe area to help to understand and then tackle the issues, and help all students feel safe. The school will use the log to make any changes needed. The student shared that it was easier to be silent in class so that they were not bullied, this included not asking questions of the teacher. The student indicated that they have seen other bullying and would like to be involved in finding a solution
- agreed that all groups currently looking at bullying should be brought together into the RRP Ambassador project and work with existing groups in the school to find a solution. The aim is for SEND students to gain a voice and be themselves
- to include the RRP ambassador program within all peer group programs, and to feed into the parent's groups
- the school will work on a plan to engage with parents based on the format that has been successful in the Hart school.

School 2

Child 1 - Low attendance is an issue and they may be sent to AP. Parent is unfamiliar with the graduated response, and whether it was being used, or if their child had been discussed in SEND and Inclusion hubs. There has been no offer of an EHCP referral from school. Communication is inconsistent outside of pastoral care. Child benefits socially from being in school. Parents concerned that child will be forced to leave the school.

Child 2 - parent raised the issue that the whole school approach to dealing with autistic children was not consistent. The use of language by staff was also not consistent. They were also concerned that PE was too shouty, and that their child is still struggling to self-regulate after many years.

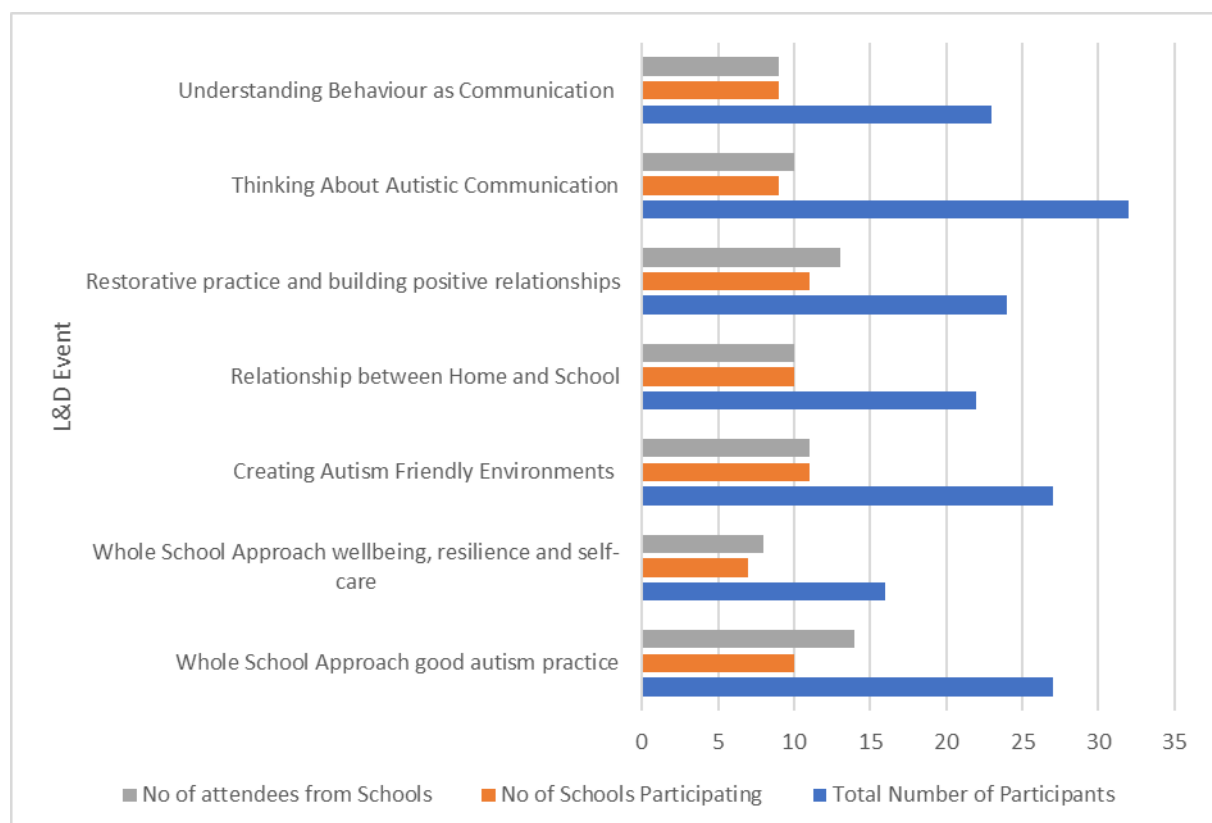
Outcomes and key learning – the school is now very engaged in the Restorative and Relations Ambassadors project in Staffordshire. The school will work on a plan to engage with parents using the format that has been successful in Hart school.

Key findings by Objective

Objective 1 - A Learning and Development Programme which seeks to develop a positive school environment for autistic pupils through reasonable adjustments.

A workshop was held on 15th of Dec with participating schools, parent carers, and practitioners to discuss the key challenges faced in school by autistic students. From these learnings an extensive online learning and development programme was co-produced and delivery partners were identified mostly from local providers. Key project stakeholders, including all the schools involved in the project, attended the learning events which were all delivered by the end of March 2022. The learning programme aimed to support whole school development. The schools participating in the project committed to sharing the learning from the training throughout the whole school and to using it to review school policies and practices.

The table below shows the number of participants for each Learning Event and identifies that all of the learning events were well attended by schools and other partners.



Reflection on the achievement of the Learning and Development Programme

The project held two workshops in May 2022 to encourage representatives from schools, Local Authorities, Parent Carer Forums and CAMHS to reflect and review their experience of

Phase 1 and to have the opportunity to consider planning and next steps for Phase 2. In particular how the learning will be implemented at a school-based level.

One session focussed on the reflection and review of Objective 1 the Learning and Development Programme. The session was well attended as shown below and provided a representative view of the progress towards achieving the Objective 1.

NM Autism in Schools project– Learning and Development Reflection Session 1 - Reflect and Review

Organisation type	Number of Attendees
School	11
Local Authority	3
Parent Carer Forum	3
Total attendees	17

Key messages from Learning and Development Reflection Session 1 - Reflect and Review relating to Objective 1 (in no particular order). Please note that reflections on training that was delivered to achieve other specific project objectives are included in the relevant sections. **Appendix B** provides a detailed overview from each session and the complete response.

Overall, the training delivered in Phase 1 was well received and found to be very useful and of good quality.

Most useful elements of Phase 1

1. creating and supporting an autism friendly environment training with the focus around sensory processing
2. trainers having lived experience
3. pupil involvement and hearing the young person's perspective
4. whole school approach and links to the wider community
5. collaborative working and building relationships through the project

Suggested improvements

1. hold some of the sessions in person and keep much of it online to facilitate people being able to attend
2. more CPD about quality first teaching and accommodating autistic children
3. give schools more time to fully consider their needs and the training input they need
4. more notice to schools so they can organise and facilitate the training to be delivered in school

The second session Learning and Development Reflection Session 2 focussed on Action Planning and Next Steps. This session was also well attended by a range of key partners as shown below

Organisation type	Number of Attendees
School	7
Local Authority	4
Parent Carer Forum	1
Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust - CAMHS	1
Total attendees	13

Key messages from Learning and Development Reflection Session 2 relating to Objective 1- (in no particular order)

1. make sure that training is included in school's Training Calendar for the roll out to the wider school (typically 12 months in advance).
2. develop WhatsApp groups for communication and support networking (PCF)
3. include school's senior leaders from the outset of Phase 2
4. consider having Parent Ambassadors
5. share best practice between settings

Additional benefit of the success of the learning and development programme is that further funding has been secured from the National Education Union (NEU) in Stoke-on-Trent to support the ongoing training offer to schools in the project.

Widgit

Schools and parent carers identified the need to include a learning and development event on supporting communications with autistic students. The North Midlands Autism in Schools project worked with Widgit to make their online symbol software available to all schools participating in the project for a 12-month period, with the ability to share resources with families. Nine representatives from eight schools attended an online introductory training session in February 2022.

Objective 2 Developing school-based participation and developing a positive partnership between families and schools, building on, and supported by the established Parent Carer Forums in each local authority area

Parent Carer Forums (PCF) have been active in the design and delivery of the project. PCFs worked with all of the schools to engage parent carer communities, they have established school-based participation groups, both face to face and online. Mini PCFs are now active in all localities for the project, these are the Parent and Carer Council (PACC) Shropshire, Parents Opening Doors (PODS) Telford & Wrekin, and Stoke-on-Trent PCF.

The PCF's have conducted baseline school surveys with Parent/ Carers and with Staff from seven schools.

- parent/Carer and Staff groups were both asked to rate their experience relating to the same five questions.
- they were also asked to rank how well the school setting provides support to six areas around the relationships with SEND families.

- parents/Carers and School staff were then asked the following question *In what ways can parent carer involvement be strengthened at your setting?*

Recommendation - a significant amount of information is now available to the NMAIS project Leadership Group, participating schools, and Parent Carer Forums to monitor and to identify actions to contribute to positive change. See **Appendix C** for the full survey results.

This evaluation report highlights the baseline data as provided for Staffordshire PCF and Telford and Wrekin PCF.

Staffordshire PCF baseline data

The tables below capture the key results from the baseline surveys provided parent/carers and schools.

Table 1a The parents/ carers (PC) and staff were asked to select from a choice of four scores to each question. The table highlights the highest and lowest scores only. Approximately 47 parent/carers and 60 staff provided responses.

Table 1a	Question	Highest and lowest score and number of scores
1	PC - How welcome do you feel at your child's school?	Very - 23 Not at all - 2
1	Staff - How welcome do you think parent carers feel at your setting?	Very – 36 Not at all - 0
2	PC - How well do you know how your child is doing at their school?	Quite - 15 Not at all - 5
2	Staff - How well do you keep parent carers of children and young people with additional needs, informed of their progress?	Very – 28 Not at all - 1
3	PC - How often do you participate in decisions regarding your child's development and education?	Frequently – 17 Never -5
3	Staff - How often does the school in your opinion promote and enable participation for parent carers in decisions regarding their child's development and education?	Frequently – 30 Once in a while - 14
4	PC - How well do you know what additional needs support is provided for your child at their school?	Quite – 14 Not at all - 7
4	Staff - How well do you inform parent carers of the additional support provided at school for their child?	Very – 24 Not at all - 2
5	PC - How often do you and your child's school communicate about your child together?	Monthly – 12 Never - 6
5	Staff - How often do you and parent carers communicate together about their child with additional needs?	Once/twice a term- 22 Never - 1

Assessment and recommendation - Table 1a shows that on the whole parents/carers and staff are positive about their relationships and communications. There are a couple of areas

where the baseline data shows some fairly widespread differences in perception between parent/carers and staff. The data indicates that staff on the whole are of the view that their school has a better relationship with SEND families than the families themselves experience. It would be helpful for each individual school to consider the variations in scores with the PCF to unpick areas of concern. Progress against this data needs to be monitored in Phase 2

Table 2a The parents/ carers (PC) and staff were asked to rank the following from 1- not well, to 4 -extremely well, according to how well they feel that the setting supports each area. For reporting purposes, the rankings in the table are grouped together 1 & 2 to indicate less than well and 3 &4 to indicate better than well. Approximately 47 parent/carers and 60 staff provided responses.

Table 2a	Area	Rank and number of responses
1	PC - Creating a friendly school environment	Rank 1&2 - 10 Rank 3&4 - 27
1	Staff - Creating a friendly school environment	Rank 1&2 - 5 Rank 3&4 - 62
2	PC - Establishing home-school communications	Rank 1&2 - 18 Rank 3&4 - 29
2	Staff - Establishing home-school communications	Rank 1&2 - 9 Rank 3&4 - 52
3	PC - Involving parents	Rank 1&2 - 18 Rank 3&4 - 26
3	Staff - Involving parents	Rank 1&2 - 13 Rank 3&4 - 47
4	PC - Building community partnerships	Rank 1&2 - 21 Rank 3&4 - 23
4	Staff - Building community partnerships	Rank 1&2 - 21 Rank 3&4 - 37

Assessment and recommendation– Table 2a shows that on the whole parents/carers and staff are positive about how well the school supports involvement and creates a friendly environment. The data shows some areas where there are differences of view about the support schools give to the settings identified. This is particularly marked for area 1.- Creating a friendly environment, where some parents felt that the school did not do well in this area whilst many staff felt they did this extremely well.

The other area where there is a difference in view is area 2. Establishing home-school communications, where a fair number of parents did not feel this was done well whereas staff on the whole thought, they did this very well. It would be helpful for each individual school to consider the variations in scores with the PCF to unpick areas of concern. Progress against this data needs to be monitored in Phase 2

Table 3a The parents/carers (PC) and staff were asked to rank the following two questions. Approximately 47 parent/carers and 60 staff provided responses

Table 3a	Area	Ranking	Number of responses
1	PC - Overall, how much do you feel your child's school values parent carer input?	A little bit	11
		Very	18
		Quite a bit	12
		Not at all	6
1	Staff - Overall, how much do you feel your setting values parent carer input?	A little bit	11
		Very	22
		Quite a bit	27
		Not at all	2
2	PC - How well do you feel the school's parent carer involvement policy and plan provides opportunities for successful involvement of parent carers to support their child's achievement and wellbeing?	Not well at all	10
		Quite well	19
		Extremely well	10
		No policy/plan	6
2	Staff - How well do you feel your school's parent carer involvement policy and plan provides opportunities for successful involvement of parent carers to support their child's achievement and well-being?	Not well at all	4
		Quite well	37
		Extremely well	11
		No policy/plan	1

Assessment and recommendation - Table 3a shows that parent/carers and staff feel that the school's parent carer input is valued, and that the involvement policy provides opportunities for involvement. It would be helpful for each individual school to consider with the PCF why in some cases parent/carers do not feel well involved. Information from the narrative collected, as shown below, will be helpful to inform conversations and the actions needed.

All of the SEND families were asked *In what ways can parent carer involvement be strengthened at your setting?*

This question elicited a large number of comments and suggestions which can be seen in Appendix C. Whilst the question was seeking suggestions for strengthening involvement there were some lovely comments made by Parent/carers (PC) in appreciation of the support received from staff and saying how helpful and capable many staff are.

The following provides a summary of the suggestions made

Communications from schools

- schools need to respond to emails from PC
- share their email contact details
- listen to parent about the needs of their child
- re-instate face to face meetings with time to discuss assessments and needs

- regular feedback/updates on how their child is coping or progressing - both related to their additional needs and their accomplishments
- hold regular parent's evenings
- upskill TAs to have the confidence to deal with parent's questions

Schools appreciating that the PC knows their child best

- discussing the intervention plan to work on at home and follow up on actions promised
- discussing with PCF how to be mindful of age-old practices such as 'picking pairs (finding a partner) in PE and make the necessary changes to avoid embarrassment and difficulties
- avoid the feeling of assigning blame when things go wrong, considering change in approach to create a better atmosphere
- more meetings with the PC and child together

The school staff were also asked the same question '*In what ways can parent carer involvement be strengthened at your setting?*'

The following provides a summary of the suggestions. All suggestions are included in **Appendix C**

Communications from PCs –

- more frequent PC voice, PCs to communicate their child's changing needs

PC knows their child best

- briefing note from PCs to staff giving feedback and advice to schools
- both school and PC communicating and working together on what can be done to support child at school and home

Communications from schools

- hold drop-in sessions to discuss issues
- discuss and explain the school approach
- have face to face communications
- give staff dedicated time to communicate with PC without delay
- share staff's direct contact links
- develop community projects and involve parents in extracurricular activities

Assessment and recommendation – the suggestions from parent's carers and staff are very similar, all suggestions made would help to strengthen the parent carer involvement and relationship in schools. The schools and PCF need to review all comments and suggestions and take action where possible.

Telford and Wrekin PCF baseline data provided by around 55 parent/carers (PC) and 27 staff from two schools

The tables below capture the key results from the baseline surveys.

Table 1b The parents/ carers (PC) and staff were asked to select from a choice of four scores to each question. The table highlights the highest and lowest scores only.

Table 1b	Question	Highest and lowest score and number of scores
1	PC - How welcome do you feel at your child's school?	Quite a bit – 25 Not at all - 2
1	Staff - How welcome do you think parent carers feel at your setting?	Very much so -16 Not at all - 0
2	PC - How well do you know how your child is doing at their school?	Little bit – 29 Very much so - 3
2	Staff - How well do you keep parent carers of children and young people with additional needs, informed of their progress?	Quite a bit – 16 Not at all - 0
3	PC - How often do you participate in decisions regarding your child's development and education?	Once in a while – 26 Never -7
3	Staff - How often does the school in your opinion promote and enable participation for parent carers in decisions regarding their child's development and education?	Frequently – 20 Never - 0
4	PC - How well do you know what additional needs support is provided for your child at their school?	Little bit – 27 Very much so - 2
4	Staff - How well do you inform parent carers of the additional support provided at school for their child?	Quite a bit – 16 Not at all - 0
5	PC - How often do you and your child's school communicate about your child together?	Once or twice a school year -38 Never - 2
5	Staff - How often do you and parent carers communicate together about their child with additional needs?	Once or twice a school year – 14 Weekly - 4

Table 2b Note this data, that records the views of PCs and Staff as to how well the setting supports selected areas, is currently not available

Table 3b The parents/carers (PC) and staff were asked to rank the following two questions. Approximately 54 parent/carers and 27 staff provided responses

Table 3b	Area	Ranking	Number of responses
1	PC - Overall, how much do you feel your child's school values parent carer input?	A little bit	24
		Very	6
		Quite a bit	12
		Not at all	11
1	Staff - Overall, how much do you feel your setting values parent carer input?	A little bit	0
		Very	8
		Quite a bit	1
		Not at all	18
2	PC - How well do you feel the school's parent carer involvement	Not well at all	7
		Quite well	14

	policy and plan provides opportunities for successful involvement of parent carers to support their child's achievement and wellbeing?	Extremely well	2
		No policy/plan	32
2	Staff - How well do you feel your school's parent carer involvement policy and plan provides opportunities for successful involvement of parent carers to support their child's achievement and well-being?	Not well at all	0
		Quite well	19
		Extremely well	3
		No policy/plan	5

Assessment and recommendation - Table 3b shows that parent/carers feel that the schools could value their input more as 'a little bit' is the third lowest ranking out of four rankings, this is supported by the response from staff as 18 of whom rank their school's value of the PC input as 'not at all' It would be helpful for both schools to consider with the PCF why this is the case. Suggestions for improvements from the next section will help to inform the conversation.

All of the Telford and Wrekin SEND families at the two schools were asked [In what ways can parent carer involvement be strengthened at your setting?](#)

This question elicited a large number of comments and suggestions which can be seen in **Appendix C** Whilst the question was seeking suggestions for strengthening involvement there were some lovely comments made by Parent/carers (PC) in appreciation of the support received from staff and saying how helpful and capable many staff are.

Summary of the suggestions made

Communication from schools –

- more joined up communication between teachers and support staff
- updates in addition to parents evenings even when things are going well
- showing parents are heard and valued, face to face communications, respond to emails, timely responses
- call parent when there is a behaviour problem,

Regular feedback/updates on how the child is progressing –

- on what our children are up to / learning about in school
- formal plans and notes from meetings for PCs
- what support is being given/withdrawn and the outcomes of the support
- feedback on child's emotional well-being, updates on changes to support

Schools appreciating that the PC knows their child best

- child displaying signs of autism at home but not at school
- working together when the parent has a concern
- positive responses from school to parent's input/suggestions/questions

- listen to the parents
- daily home/school learning books
- talking to students and parents together – involving the student

Assessment and recommendation – the suggestions from parent’s carers and staff are very similar, all suggestions made would help to strengthen the parent carer involvement and relationship in schools. The schools and PCF need to review all comments and suggestions and take action where possible.

Review of changes in schools brought about by Phase 1 - A Schools Impact Form, designed to capture any changes implemented in schools as a result of NMAIS project, was sent to all schools at the end of Phase 1. The establishment of Parent Carer Forums and the change and impact they have made was reported and is summarised below. For full details on the Schools Impact Form see the section ‘Schools’ view on what we have achieved in Phase 1.

- 1) we now hold regular school-based parent carer forum meetings. A representative from our local parent carer forum organisation also attends the meeting and is able to share wider updates from the Local Authority and provide a range of external support opportunities for our parents
- 2) regular parent carer forum meetings are now held in school and enhance our parent voice opportunities
- 3) school-based parent carer forum meetings have enhanced understanding of Autism among wider staff group and has encouraged staff to consider their own best practice both in classroom environments and how they present learning opportunities /resources
- 4) PCF meetings have established stronger parent to school relationships and have allowed parents to develop new supportive and empowerment relationships between themselves
- 5) a PCF WhatsApp group has been developed to provide a communication/support network
- 6) PCF have worked with the SENCO in one setting to host workshops. Visits from social workers and other key workers have also delivered the session. The SENCO attends some sessions but not all so that those that attend the forum also have space without feeling constrained

Assessment and recommendation – the responses to the questionnaire indicate that there are encouraging impacts from the Phase 1 activity that could be shared more widely.

Objective 3 - Building a new relationship between CAMHS and schools which is focused on developing autism friendly environments and practice

North Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent work is ongoing connecting CAMHS services and schools. The CAMHS provider for the area has offered a menu of support to the three

schools, Burnwood, St Peters Academy, St Thomas More, see the table below. The schools have ranked their preference for the scheduling of the delivery of the options. The training is due to start in the Autumn term 2022. An evaluation of the outcomes of training and other CAMHS offers will be conducted and reported in the NMAIS evaluation report for Phase 2.

Option available from CAMHS
<p>School Staff Training: Topics covered – what is ASD? What does an ASD assessment involve in CAMHS? How can we support schools with children with ASD? How can schools support CAMHS with referrals and assessments? Mental health support for children with ASD or those waiting for assessment, Autism in Girls / Different presentations you may see.</p>
<p>Behaviour Support Training – training for supporting children with ASD in schools and behaviour techniques. This would be followed up with support in the form of consultations via telephone or MS Teams.</p>
<p>Autism Walk around school – to identify adaptations.</p>
<p>Telephone consultations – around referring children, supporting children with a diagnosis</p>
<p>Understanding a child’s ASD diagnosis: strategies and support for teaching staff to help support a child who has been given a diagnosis in understanding their diagnosis and the impact this has on their school life.</p>

Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin the North Midlands AIS project has worked with the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT) and the BeeU CAMHS Service to consider how to support the development of autism friendly environments. The NMAIS project is looking to develop a relationship, where schools and BeeU CAMHS work together to share skills and understanding for the benefit of children and young people.

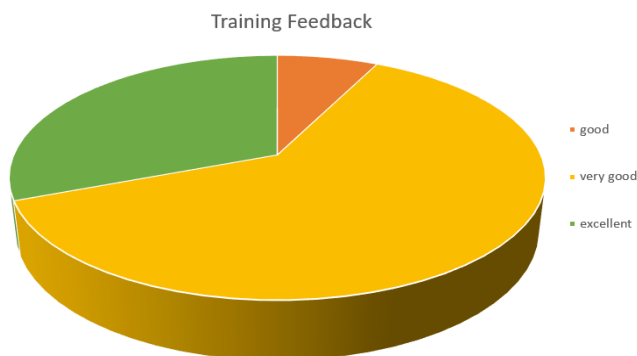
BeeU has been commissioned to provide between 10- and 15-hours direct support to the schools participating in the AIS project in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. Schools can choose how they use this time with BeeU staff to help them to develop a school environment where autistic pupils can thrive. The support will be based on whole school needs, instead of the needs of individual cases. This could include considering the sensory environment, professional development and building knowledge in specific issues relating to autism. It will also provide an opportunity for schools to reflect on and discuss some of the learning from the AIS Learning & Development programme and discuss how that can be implemented in the school environment.

Meetings have been held with five schools who have requested the following input

- Whole School Environmental (Sensory / Communication) Audit
- Additional Whole School Training (written resources/ tips/ strategies)
- Additional SENCO support
- Live CPD event

Additional training resources were also requested by schools and shared by BeeU with regard to specific sensory and communication topics so that they could be shared wider.

BeeU held a CPD staff event on Autism for one school, with over 55 staff attending.
Feedback from the event:



Some comments included:

“Really interesting and informative”/ “I've always wanted to learn more and I was inspired to investigate more”/ “Informative and good to raise awareness of Neurodiversity”

“Clear explanations of key terms and diagrams, with links to strategies to focus on”

“Video clips were excellent and supported the learning” / “videos and info was very useful”

“Not every normal is normal, but it's ok to be your normal”, “It's ok to be different”, “Relationships are key”

“raised my awareness in a clever way, enjoyed this a great deal, feel the video clips were perfect....”

“Good handout, with practical tips”

Feedback on environmental audits

“Sensory Audit around classrooms and new SEND Hub area have given us a really useful insight into how to make some relatively minor changes which will have a beneficial impact –e.g. a quiet area with minimal visual distraction in each classroom. Also, really useful input into colour scheme for floors/ walls in Hub, plus suggestions for sensory equipment. Really helpful –Thank You 😊”

“We are developing the school site and they gave lots of recommendations regarding furnishings etc. that can be taken into consideration to support students with sensory needs”

Some of the evaluation considerations provided by BeeU

1. The short turn-around for this phase of the pilot may have had an impact on uptake. We noted some of the schools made requests for input, but even with prompts, didn't manage to follow up to book in times with BEE U
2. External factors such as holidays and the exam timetable may also have had an impact on uptake and engagement (between April and July 2022)

3. In general staff across all schools told us that they had already had a lot of training. This may have affected momentum and drive to take on board further
4. Capturing feedback was difficult due to the end of term and therefore this would need to be considered in future projects.

The full report on the BeeU commissioned input is included as **Appendix D**

Staffordshire CAMHS environmental audits and arrangements for transition to Y7

As part of the Autism in Schools project Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust was asked to conduct a walkthrough, in June 2022, at two Staffordshire schools, the Hart School and Walton High School to identify any environmental quick wins that could be implemented and review arrangements for transition from primary school.

Assessment and recommendations - it is important for schools to be able to review their own environment. The CAMHS team provided both schools with a framework for the school to review for both the school environment as a whole and the national autism standards sensory audit to enable the participation of a student with Autism. These frameworks could be used by all schools, a copy is included with the full report on both environmental audits in **Appendix E**

Arrangements for transition to Y7, good practice identified at the schools

- the transition coordinator meets with the SENCOs of primary schools before meeting with the parents
- students are offered three visits to the new school so that they can experience the school under different circumstances - with and without other students and during different times of the day
- the Autism Outreach Team will accompany the student on the tours of the school if needed
- students are given a transition booklet containing photos of the school so that they have the booklet for the summer holidays
- all students with a SEND are given a keyworker, a SEND passport is created to help teachers to understand the student and to put strategies into place

Transition arrangements - improvements suggested

- regularly review passports to make sure that the passport fits the pupil's growth as they go through the school
- regularly remind staff of these passports and seek support from the SENDCO if there are any issues with the use of the passports
- if there is any building work or changes to the environment inform the autistic students as they may find change difficult

Safe and support spaces – improvements suggested

- have bookable dedicated support spaces
- develop a green area with students, use for a movement break

- all dedicated spaces need to have a way of making the lights brighter or dimmer so that the room can meet pupil's sensory needs.
- check support spaces for paintwork and any holes in walls so that they do not distract students
- make sure spaces are as free of clutter, furniture and shelving as possible
- make sure equipment including computers do not emit any sounds - they could affect children's learning
- equip the spaces and classrooms with screens that don't need a projector
- identify suitable routes around the school that avoid 'difficult' areas like narrow corridors

Support strategies – good practice identified

- use of time out cards.
- early lunch passes/ passes to leave school early enabling the student to easily travel though the school.
- a softer school bell designed to have a gentle tone compared to a traditional school bell
- use movement/brain breaks to help students to settle into lessons
- use of Life Skills classes accredited by ASDAN, including gardening classes
- provision of outdoor space with heating and benches for quiet time and lunchbreaks
- students allowed to use ear plugs if agreed by the SENCO
- attach headphones to some instruments in music rooms to reduce noise
- students use passports to inform staff of strategies used by pupil
- use of plastic gloves in food technology for students who are sensitive to textures
- use of a one-way system in corridors

Other benefits arising from the delivery of this Objective

Additional funding has been secured in Staffordshire from the CCG's Learning Disability & Autism Programme which will enable

- two schools to create new sensory/quiet safe spaces for autistic students
- all participating schools in the area to complete AET's Autism Competency and Standards Framework.

Assessment and recommendations – there is a wealth of suggestions for improvement and good practice identified that schools can consider adopting to make a difference to their environment. The information needs to be cascaded to all schools so they too can make quick wins and help create an autism friendly environment.

Objective 4. Hearing from Children and Young People (CYP) with Autism and developing self-awareness and resilience

The project has worked directly with children and young people to support self-awareness, understanding and resilience. The creative workshops and the courses delivered directly to young people have ensured that the voice of young people is central to the project's ongoing development, both at an individual school level and a strategic level. All providers

of the work with children and young people have gathered individual feedback from CYP and parent carers and this is included below.

The following training courses were delivered during Phase1, and detail is provided below

- Restorative Champion's and Student Ambassador Programme within Staffordshire
- My Autism Path (MAP) course in Stoke-on-Trent
- Autism Confident Course (primary and Secondary ages) – Shropshire Telford & Wrekin
- Creative project with Ignition Community Interest Company (CIC) to hear from CYP about autism and school - Shropshire Telford & Wrekin (detail not available for this report)

[Restorative Ambassadors & Champions training in Staffordshire](#)

The AIS project offer builds on Staffordshire County Councils Relational and Restorative Practice Programme seeking to create both 'Champion' and 'Ambassador' support networks within our settings.

The project worked with the Virtual School to develop Staffordshire County Council's Relational and Restorative Practice Programme (RRP) to offer RRP Student Ambassador Development to include neurotypical children and neurodiverse students together. This element of the schools training aims to develop a network of Autism Champions and Ambassadors in schools who are able to be self-sustaining and supportive of one another, creating autism friendly environments, providing constructive challenge to policies and listening to the young person's voice.

Two Staffordshire schools participated in the Student Ambassador programme, Clayton Hall Academy and Walton High School. Both schools have provided case study material for this evaluation and have identified that the RRP programme will benefit these individuals. See section on Case Study material

[Staff and student feedback to consider for Phase 2](#) – (See **Appendix F** for detail on the feedback)

1. for Teaching Assistants the biggest factor is time, or lack of it to enable the school to deliver further training sessions and expand the number of students.
2. training has been a springboard for staff to develop relationships with some students
3. students were happy with the training and were keen to take ownership and start to use some of the skills and techniques 'Giving me a new way to negotiate' 'learning how to not point blame and avoid causing shame'
4. the Ambassador programme could be more effective if it was known about by students and other student groups in the rest of the school
5. link all of the different groups, including PCF, who are looking into the issues of bullying to the Ambassador Group to share work and gain an understanding of the different forms of bullying that may affect neurodiverse children in different ways

Plans for launching the Ambassador Programme for Phase 2 include

- make video presentations about the programme to show in assembly
- have a post-box system for people to be able to request support
- develop a space 'Wellbeing Room' for Ambassador meetings with students
- recruit more Ambassadors, train Prefects in RRP
- train whole school staff in RRP – this has been agreed at Walton School

Assessment and recommendation - One of the key messages from the Learning and Development Reflection Session 1 - Reflect and Review that considered the most useful elements of Phase 1 was that 'Relational and Restorative Practice (RRP) was in some schools seen as transformative for some students.' Implementation of the feedback captured, into the roll out for Phase 2, will be helpful to secure the ongoing success of the Ambassador programme.

Stoke-on-Trent My Autism Path (MAP) Course

A MAP course was designed and run for eight secondary aged pupils, with a diagnosis of autism at each of two secondary schools in Stoke-on-Trent. The six sessions provided a person centered approach to help individuals to better understand themselves, learn how to advocate for themselves, and to engage with school staff to help them better understand and support pupils with autism.

Individuals completed a pre and post Questionnaire for the training the main results are shown below.

Question	St Peter's		St Thomas More	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
<i>I understand my autism diagnosis</i>	5.7	7.1	7.7	7.6
<i>I know my strengths and difficulties</i>	7	8.3	7.3	7.6
<i>I feel that there are staff in school who understand me and know how to support me</i>	6.8	6.6	8.1	8
<i>I feel positive about school</i>	6.5	7	5	5.5
<i>I feel that I belong to the school community</i>	6.1	5.8	5.2	5.5
<i>If I have difficulties in school I know what I can do about it</i>	5.8	7.3	5.1	6.6

Mean score out of 10 (1 being 'not true' and 10 being 'certainly true')

Post course Questionnaire 2

Question	St Peter's	St Thomas More
<i>The MAP course has: helped me understand my autism profile, strengths and difficulties</i>	8.5	8.5

<i>helped me understand what is helpful for me in the school environment</i>	8.1	7.1
<i>helped me to explore my hopes and path for the future</i>	7.8	7.3
<i>given me an opportunity to discuss things that are important to me</i>	9	8.5

Mean score out of 10 (1 being 'not true' and 10 being 'certainly true')

Assessment and recommendation - the pre and post course questionnaire identifies two areas in particular, highlighted in red, where the school could consider follow up work and development activity. The results shown above from the Post course Questionnaire 2, show that the individuals have been helped in all of the areas the course was designed to target.

For the final Session 6 of the course pupils and staff got together at each school to collaborate on problem solving and action planning. The key areas discussed at both schools were

- understanding of autism
- pupil voice
- sense of belonging
- personal identity

General feedback from the individuals and schools staff also supports the need for both adaptations to the sessions and for more sessions. Key points are

1. more awareness training for staff, other pupils and parents
2. more working in groups with a mix of needs
3. more work around personal issues to help understand self and social skills improvement
4. more work around preparing for adulthood
5. more time more sessions

Assessment and recommendation – the feedback needs to be considered by both schools so they can consider how best to put the suggested actions in place. The feedback also needs to be taken into consideration for the development of Phase 2.

Telford and Shropshire – Autism Confident programme

Autism West Midlands delivered the Autism Confident programme for 14 students in two secondary schools in Telford and Shropshire. The programme was adapted for delivery in one Shropshire primary school for three students. Both pre and post programme questionnaires were completed by attendees and their parents. There were some administrative issues with the return of post course questionnaires by the schools, none of the post parent questionnaires were available for inclusion in this report. Further request will be made to schools for the return of the questionnaires. (See **Appendix G** for the autism west midlands report.

Feedback from students and parents, the pre and post evaluation questions requested scores against the following statements

- I understand how autism impacts upon me

- I have ways to manage my sensory needs
- I feel able to manage my anxiety
- I feel less isolated
- I can see the positive aspects of being autistic

Results of the evaluation show for the seven young people where comparative data was available from their questionnaires: four showed an improvement in their scores, two showed no change and one showed a reduction in relation to the question “I can see the positive aspects about being autistic”.

Feedback from Autism West Midlands - it is first time we have delivered Teens Autism Confident in a school environment with the school coordinating the attendees. It has been a learning experience for us, and we would be keen to hear from other providers who delivered similar programmes in the project as to whether their experiences were similar and whether we can learn from them to improve the delivery. From our experiences however we conclude:

1. Teens Autism Confident is more beneficial if delivered outside the school timetable, where there are no bells, distraction or limitations on session length or room availability.
2. It works better where the course leaders have a more direct relationship with the young person and their parent prior to the session, and where the course leaders can be involved in assessing suitability and then tailor the programme accordingly.
3. Young people should already have received an autism diagnosis and be aware of this in order to attend this programme. The issues we experienced could be avoided if AWM staff were more involved in selecting participants
4. Support staff played a key role in the project, the sessions were beneficial for their learning and understanding of how best to communicate with autistic children they support
5. We would be happy to deliver the programme again in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, however we would like to see some of the above issues addressed.

Conclusions & Next Steps

A huge amount of work has been done in Phase One of the NMAIS pilot and a lot has been learnt. We have seen that this approach can make a real difference to autistic students, parent carers and school staff. We have learnt how simple changes to the school environment can improve autistic students experience of the school day and discussed the importance of clear communication, along with the benefit of understanding how communication can be impacted by autism.

Across the whole pilot footprint we have explored different approaches to supporting the development of self-awareness, encouraging both students and staff to think about how their actions might impact others, through developing an improved understanding of themselves. We have brought students who often felt isolated, together and supported the

development of friendships and a sense of belonging, which is so important for good mental health. Parent carers have also reported benefits from the opportunity to come together, to share information and to benefit from peer support.








There have been significant challenges during the delivery of Phase 1, in particular the capacity of schools to commit to pilot activity, as they continued to deal with the impact of Covid 19. While the pilot Leadership Team made every effort to give as much notice as possible for meetings and workshops, the short national deadlines didn't always make this possible. Some areas within the pilot also struggled to secure multi agency engagement, which reduced the impact in part.

Going forward the Leadership Group has decided to devolve some elements of the pilot to local project groups, to enable pilot activity to be more embedded in local activity. We believe that it is essential that 'Autism In Schools' activity is co-ordinated with other local, related activity, to reduce capacity issues and to increase impact. We know that many local areas are developing training opportunities for schools which will support the ethos of AIS and we hope that by increasing our work at a local level we can join up and co-ordinate activity to greater effect. We are also keen to develop more local discussions about how the relationship between schools and CAMHS services can be developed further and how the initial work on developing young people's self-awareness and understanding of autism can be embedded in a local areas core offer.

In Phase Two there will be a greater focus on working with local leaders both in schools and local SEND systems. We will aim to ensure that we share widely what we have learnt so far and to widen to impact of the pilot. While the main contact will continue to be with the schools who participated in Phase One of the pilot, we will share resources developed with other schools, to develop a greater understanding of best practice when supporting autistic students in a mainstream school throughout the education system in the pilot area.

We would like to thank all who have participated in the pilot to date and look forward to continuing to work with them and others as we move forward.

Appendices

Appendix A Baseline data evaluation analysis	 NM%20AIS%20Pilot %20Baseline%20Data
Appendix B Reflection and Review Sessions	 App%20A.docx
Appendix C Parent Carer Forum Baseline data (may contain sensitive data)	Available on request from; Sarah Thomas Participation Lead & NMAIS Pilot Co-ordinator Shropshire PACC & Actio Consortium 07398120311
Appendix D BeeU report	 MPFT BEE U feedback summary v3 (002) (00
Appendix E Staffordshire CAMHS environmental audits	  app D Hart.pdf App D Walton.pdf
Appendix F Feedback from AIS schools – Ambassador Programme	 Appendix%20E.docx
Appendix G autism west midlands report on the Autism Confident Programme	 AIS-ShropTW-deliver y report_Aug 2022 (01