

## Autism Accreditation Assessment

### Oakdale School and Nursery Autism Discrete Provision (Classes - Dove, Eagle, Jay, Magpie, Robin Chaffinch)

Reference No.	28129
Assessment dates	10 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> February 2020
Lead Assessor	Rachel Gittens
External Moderator	Tracy Cresswell
Status prior to the assessment	Accredited
Advanced status applied for	No

## Section 1: Context

### About the Provision

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

A local authority generic special school, Oakdale School caters for pupils aged from 3-11 and autistic pupils are present within each key stage although Autism Accreditation is only being considered for the autism discrete provision at this time which is the following classes: Dove, Eagle, Jay, Magpie, Chaffinch and Robin. Magpie and Eagle are being assessed for the first time.

All children who attend Oakdale School must have a statement / EHCP or are under assessment for an EHCP. Admissions are coordinated through the Local Authority.

Resources include:

- sensory processing room
- classroom based sensory 'zones' and/or activities
- low distraction corridors
- low distraction classroom environments – with 'zoned' areas
- A range of outdoor learning areas and equipment

**Number of autistic people supported by the provision:** 66

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

For many autistic pupils, their diagnosis of autism is also accompanied with a significant learning disability.

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

Following a short inspection in October 2017 the school was given a rating of 'Good' by Ofsted. The full report can be found here; <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/2732707>

## **About the Assessment**

The Autism Accreditation Assessment took place over two days. The school's Accreditation Adviser took the role of lead assessor with support from a moderator on one day.

A presentation on how provision is made for autistic pupils was given by the assistant head teacher with support of the head teacher, two governors also present and one governor phoned in to the meeting.

The assessment team undertook 10 observations, including all 7 classes and with opportunity to observe all pupils at some point during the day. Observations included: circle time, lunch, and P.E., Inclusion and Literacy, and transition micro-transitions throughout the day.

Observations were carried out over a period of approximately 5 hours.

The adviser met with and interviewed the following staff with the following focus:

- Occupational Therapist – role of the therapist, meeting sensory needs, practice strengths and areas to develop
- Speech and Language Therapist – role of the therapist, meeting sensory needs, practice strengths and areas to develop
- NQT and 2 TA4 who work in the designated roles of Teaching Partners – induction and professional development opportunities

The adviser also spoke to 4 parents.

The moderator met and interviewed the Early Years Outreach and Family Support Team and had opportunity to speak to a parent of a pre-school child that is currently receiving support from the Outreach Team.

Key policies were reviewed and working documentation relevant to pupils sampled. Supplementary documentation was shared to evidence staff training and development, and to evidence parent views.

The following working documents were sampled across all autism discreet classes; pen portraits, sensory profiles, annual review documentation, SaLT reports and targets, OT programmes, and behaviour strategies and risk assessments.

## Section 2: Key Findings

### What the provision does particularly well

**What stood out as particular strengths:**

Visual communication strategies are embedded and staff are focussed on helping children to become effective communicators. Staff differentiate visual aids and support communication through the use of objects, symbols, PECS, and sign. Support systems for both receptive and expressive language are in place.

Person-centred approaches lead to practice which is informed by a good understanding of each autistic young person. Class meetings, line management, consultation with SaLT/OT, documentation – profiles/pen pictures.

Learning environments have been designed to make them more conducive to learning for autistic pupils; quality monitoring processes are in place to support staff with managing learning environments and to consider individual teaching practice in relation to autistic pupils.

There is strong evidence, in the form of the pre-assessment survey, the school's own data, and from parent interviews, that partnerships between school and parents and carers are effective. Parental feedback was by majority good and sometimes excellent, showing that the service is held in very high esteem and its work is greatly valued.

**What else the provision does well:**

Senior leadership are committed to providing high quality provision, centred on each young person and their family, they have active involvement in overseeing daily practice and in the established quality monitoring processes.

Staff are invested in Autism Accreditation and are enthusiastic and passionate about providing the right support for autistic pupils. Staff report they have excellent CPD.

### What the provision could develop further

**Priorities for the provision:**

Staff could better support micro-transitions by better use of applicable visual supports, better pacing of the transition and allowing adequate time for pupils to process what is happening before staff step in with additional prompts.

By further reducing non-verbal cues and prompts staff could also better promote opportunities to foster greater independence.

Staff should ensure that both pace and content are considered in the planning, delivery and evaluation of lessons, for example to ensure staff allow time for pupils to absorb what has been said, to process it at their own pace and to process sensory information.

The assessment team recognise the work to date to develop resources, staff knowledge and working practices in relation to meeting the sensory needs of pupils. This area of work should continue to be a focus, in order to fully utilise the current resources and explore new initiatives that will lead to best outcomes for autistic pupils.

**Other areas to consider:**

Whilst there were many examples of effective use of visual/individualised communication supports staff should also remember to be consistent in their use of the generic symbols (they have on lanyards) to support spoken language – traffic lights, wait, toilet etc.

The assessment team would endorse the school's project to support pupils to generalise the use of PECS to home and in to the local and wider community.

## Section 3: Professional Development

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

- Total Communication
- AAC: PECS, Voice Output Communication Aids, Signing
- Principles of TEACCH
- Intensive Interaction
- Low distraction teaching spaces

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

All staff induction programmes are planned around individual need which are considered at appointment and before their start date.

The induction process lasts a minimum of 3 months and can be adjusted according to need.

Staff induction includes information on communication, behaviour, and sensory needs. Teachers may be paired with a more experienced teacher / practitioner who will act as a mentor for up to 12 months in school.

All staff (and governors) receive awareness training on communication and AAC which includes:

- A definition of communication
- Communication and equal opportunities
- Definition of AAC and clear explanations of terminology
- AAC systems in school
- Experience of AAC systems
- Modelling good practice
- Understanding of the importance of positioning

All teachers are PECS trained, all staff will receive basic training in signing and staff receive Team Teach training, as required.

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

Work with the speech and language therapists and OT gives opportunity for consultation and advice.

Teach trained and will advise on positive handling strategies, which if used, are always recorded.

Staff access annual training and updates, relevant to their role and responsibilities, the systems of appraisal and supervision are used to discuss and prioritise training needs, examples of training undertaken within the last eighteen months include:

- BoardMaker
- Communication
- Making Direct Access Boards
- Riding the Rapids
- Moving and Handling
- Positive Handling
- Mental Health and Wellbeing

The staff interviewed during the assessment reported that they felt very well supported in their respective roles and that there were good opportunities for continued professional development for staff employed at all levels.

## Section 4: Person Centred Support

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

All children are assessed twice a year using the PIVATS document, with individual IEPs being reviewed 3 times a year.

All pupils at the school have an Education Health Care Plan and the school work in line with the requirements of each plan. Individualised plans are informed by the EHCP and clearly describe priority areas of development which are underpinned by targeted interventions and approaches. Firmly embedded processes of assess, plan, do and review are quality monitored and include evaluations of daily practice and termly review of IEPs.

Assessments take in to account needs, resources, working practices and lead to the development of individual programmes designed to meet the needs of each pupil. Where further professional advice is required the school consult with independent services, such as the ACE Centre North, as required.

Pupil progress meetings are held and associated documentation sets out the following:

- What we are pleased about?
- What we have tried?
- What we have learned?
- What do we still need to work on?

Next steps are also considered and are linked to specific individual learning priorities (IEPs).

The school operates a communication team, teachers work collaboratively with parents and the most relevant professionals. Professional involvement may include a speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, and specialist teachers of the hearing and visually impaired.

The school has in place a number of 'non-negotiables', a monitoring tool used to assess and review working practice and teaching and learning environments. Examples of identified 'non-negotiables' for staff working with autistic pupils include: consistent use of communication symbols, management of displays, appropriate use of tone and volume, appropriate handling of children.

## Differences in Social Communication

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

Class teachers and teaching assistants work closely with Speech and Language Therapists in order to develop appropriate, personalised communication systems and communication specific targets.

The school uses a breadth of approaches to meet the needs of individual children, including gesture, signing, symbols, communication boards and PECS.

The school has a service level agreement with speech therapy which provides 2 days input in addition to the NHS core service. The role of the therapist includes assessment, target setting, direct work and consultation and staff training.

Pen Portraits include specific reference to communication, this includes information on receptive and expressive language and on social communication. Likes and dislikes are also identified as are key motivators.

Individual Educational Priorities (IEPs) set out key objectives to support pupils with their language, communication and interaction. These are recorded alongside agreed strategies and are evaluated regularly.

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

There were good examples of the use of a number of different communication support strategies. This included good use of objects of reference, photographs, symbols, signing and adapted verbal instructions.

Key word signing is used to support comprehension and no children currently use Signing as their preferred communication.

Effective use of communication aids and approaches, that were observed to be used consistently, included:

- Now/Next being visual presented
- Staff making reference to visual timetables/schedules
- Lessons and activities being structured to help with sequencing
- Key word signing
- PECS

Where best practice was observed staff used differentiated visual aids to good effect, for example they were consistent in using 'Now/Next' to cue children in and to remind them of what was 'Next', using preferred activities as motivators.

Staff were confident in sign supported English, frequently signing key words alongside spoken language.

There were numerous observations where staff created reasons and opportunities for children to 'request' and for requests to be repeated. Best practice was observed when staff recognised and fully utilised contextual learning opportunities in which children could practice and consolidate these skills in order that they may become effective communicators.

The school actively promote and support opportunities, throughout the year, for parents to work with the speech and language therapist or therapy support assistant in establishing the use of PECS in the home. Recently the school has forged a new partnership with a local shop and they are working together to provide opportunities for children to generalise the use of PECS in to the local community.

On two occasions it was felt practice could have been improved by adapting the pace and content of each lesson. The pace of both lessons was too quick and involved too much information, had the lessons been structured differently they may have been more accessible and the learning objectives more achievable.

Lunchtime practices could be further improved if staff had one focus, for example to provide direct support. It was noted that staff were multi-tasking during lunchtime, providing direct support whilst also recording food diaries. On one occasion a child initiated communication but this was missed as the staff providing support was distracted.

## Self-Reliance and Problem Solving

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

Pen Portraits and IEPs (Individual Educational Priorities) were sampled these included the following key documents, all of which were considered to be individual.

A visually intensive approach is used to ensure that pupils understand what is expected of them, and to enable them to anticipate what comes next. Systems of this type typically include the use of objects of reference, now/next and individual or whole class visual timetables.

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

The autism policy states that, "*Underpinning all teaching and learning is an emphasis on the development of autonomy, social interaction, social understanding and a functional communication system*". During the assessment there were many observed practices that would support these commitments, for example:

- by enlarge staff allowed adequate processing time
- lesson planning supported children to socially engage at levels appropriate to their current functioning
- there were planned opportunities to generalise learnt skills and to communicate with different people and in different places
- children were given opportunity to do things for themselves

Staff were consistent in their use of a range of approaches to structure lessons and to manage time and expectations. For example music and song was frequently used to support micro-transitions and verbal countdowns and visuals such as traffic lights used to cue children in to activities coming to an end.

Staff understand and recognise that children are at different stages in their development and they provide a range of play based activities in response to this. Activities are developed to give opportunity for children to:

- engage in repetitive play
- access resources which are focused on their intense interest
- use objects in an inflexible way, for example spinning the wheels of a toy car rather than playing a racing game
- play by themselves
- to play alongside and with other children

Lunch time gave opportunity for children to do things for themselves, and staff recognised the different functional skills and levels of understanding of pupils, and adapted their support accordingly. For example children were seen to approach the food serving hatch and make requests and to manage the system of returning finished items. The different environments used for lunch were structured to support children to be independent, through both the physical set up and the use of visual cues and environmental print/symbols.

Best practice was observed when children had opportunity to make requests in different learning contexts, for example in classrooms, at lunchtime and in PE. Children were encouraged through preferred communication means, such as photographs and symbols and children were seen to be working at different phases of PECS. Individual visual systems, used to help children know what was expected of



them, for example 'Now/Next' and 'Working For...' were also used to good effect in many different scenarios beyond the classroom.

Where practice could be improved; staff should be mindful of the subtle prompts given, for example looking at objects when waiting for a child to initiate and placing a hand on a shoulder to guide rather than wait for the child to move independently. Staff should also ensure they allow adequate processing time before repeating requests or giving additional prompts. More consistent use of visual supports, such as symbols on lanyards, would also better support micro-transitions.

## Sensory Experiences

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

The school employs an occupational therapist to work with them once day a fortnight, the remit of her work is to inform and support the development of sensory provision at the school and to support staff in meeting individual pupil need.

Currently teachers work collaboratively and take the lead to develop planned support to address sensory needs, this approach incorporates a period of assessment and review. A profile of a child's sensory needs is developed as required, and these are reviewed and updated in line with school policy.

Where additional support needs are identified a request to OT is made. This internal triage and referral system is reported to be working effectively.

The school provides a multi-sensory curriculum. Evidence of staff training was shared as were examples of the visual communication systems that have been developed in support of learning opportunities.

The school has written a display policy, seen to be working in practice, included in this are the expected standards for its autism specific classes, most notably: displays and visual stimuli will be minimal, minimise visual distractions, pupils' work and achievements will be celebrated through display on the designated display boards throughout the school, as opposed to within the classrooms themselves.

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

The school clearly describe its commitments in addressing the sensory needs and experiences of autistic pupils in the autism policy. Below are some of the school's commitments which reflect examples of best practice observed during the period of assessment:

- providing an environment which is consistent, predictable, calm, distraction free and has a low level of visual and auditory stimulus
- providing pupils with a high degree of visual and physical structure/routine

- providing pupils with a means of requesting withdrawal to a quiet area when their levels of anxiety become raised
- provide pupils with access to a range of sensory processing opportunities across school
- provide pupils with access to sensory processing opportunities within individual classes

The environment is set up so that it helps to provide calm, distraction free areas of learning which have low levels of visual and auditory stimulus. Pupils' sensory needs are taken into consideration and strategies are put in place to help them overcome or manage their sensory differences.

Staff were seen to provide proactive support at the first signs of dysregulation which was, by enlarge, reinforced through visual means. Staff recognised the benefit of sensory breaks for some and used distraction to good effect for others.

Following the previous Autism Accreditation Assessment the school developed a sensory processing room, Some children access this as part of their Curriculum and for others it is accessed as and when required.

Work to develop zoned areas in classrooms, along with individual resources such as therapy balls and fidget toys, has also been a focus of work in collaboration with both the speech therapist and occupational therapist.

In order to continue to improve and develop provision and practice in this area the school needs to ensure the full range of resources are being fully utilised. For example there is scope to better use equipment in outside areas and to better utilise the other sensory spaces in school, within planned approaches such as sensory diets, for those who need them.

If provisions can be made children would further benefit from enhancement of the current resources in order to provide for more challenging equipment, such as those that provide for climbing, hanging and balance.

Whilst there were some sound examples of staff supporting pupils to regulate through different means, future work should have a focus on how staff can better support pupils to become more able to self-regulate.

## Emotional Well-being

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

The school has an EY Outreach Team and a Family Support Worker, the staff work closely with families, key aspects of their role include:

- home visits
- contribution to ECHPs
- support transition to secondary school
- support parents with applications for various funding, for example DLA

Some individual pupils have Positive Behaviour Management Strategies in place. All staff involved with pupils have a responsibility to implement any identified positive behaviour management strategies. Working practices and approaches are monitored and evaluated and can be discussed and amended as needed. Reviews include parents, healthcare and education professionals. This information also contributes to supporting documentation for Annual Reviews, as appropriate.

Pen Portraits include specific reference to behaviour, staff cite key behaviours and provide a simple explanation to identified causes. For example a child likes his own space and will lose concentration if others join him.

Positive Behaviour Plans include reference to identified behaviours, agreed strategies and evaluation. Of the Plans sampled strategies include many visual approaches, such as use of visuals and key words to support transitions, use of verbal countdown and traffic light systems and use of 'working for...' strategies.

Positive Handling Plans also describe identified behaviours and triggers, intervention strategies and preferred handling strategies. These plans set out clear expectations for recording and notification.

Where applicable children have Health Care Plans, of those sampled there was clear evidence that the school work in partnership with parents and with different health services, for example in respect of the management of Epilepsy, Asthma and Pica.

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

The following good practice approaches were observed, staff consistently:

- supported behaviour through promoting positive behaviour strategies
- provided a positive example by modelling behaviour
- intervened early through identified proactive strategies
- used favoured things to encourage active involvement

Where best practice was observed class teams were seen to work collaboratively and each staff member remained calm throughout all interactions and ensured the well-being of pupils was at the forefront of their consideration.

A number of pupils were supported by 'Working for...' visuals, staff demonstrated an understanding of this approach and they used the individualised systems well, resulting in children being on task and achieving the identified reward/chosen activity.

An Inclusion session was observed where children from Oakdale shared an activity with pupils from a local mainstream primary school. This session was wonderful, it gave opportunity for children to learn together and for the autistic children's skills and qualities to be recognised, reinforced and celebrated. Autistic children used PECS to request snack, going first they modelled how to create sentence strips and followed this up with transporting and exchanging, their mainstream counterparts then used the same approach to ask for snack items. Symbols were also used to choose songs and this gave opportunity to engage in cooperative activities. On two occasions mainstream pupils interpreted non-verbal communications and were seen to advocate for their peers.

Where practice could be improved; On one occasion two groups of children that had previously been working in separate areas came together for snack, the coming together resulted in the focus being disrupted and an increase in noise and movement, which for some pupils seemed to create over-stimulation. The staff in the session recognised this and spoke to both the moderator and the adviser about how they could plan this session differently.

## **Section 5: Consultation With Autistic People**

It was not possible to gain the views of the young people directly during the assessment as they were mainly non-verbal or had limited spoken language.

Evidence indicated that staff work together to find ways to ascertain pupil voice. For example they observe responses to situations and experiences, they consult with parents and carers and they seek the views of other agencies. Observed practice that was in support of this included, pupils were given opportunities to make choices, staff used trial and error to work out current motivators and staff responded to behaviour they recognised as communicative.

During the assessment the pupils were seen to be happy and engaged with all staff. Relationships between adults and pupils were positive and respectful.

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

28 family members provided feedback to the assessment team by returning completed questionnaires. 23 parents report that the support they receive and the understanding staff have of their relative is always good and 3 said it was mostly good. 2 family members disagreed with this by stating things were okay but could be better. The full results are shown in the appendix to this report.

There is strong evidence, in the form of the pre-assessment survey, the schools own data, and from parent interviews, that partnerships between school and parents and carers are by enlarge effective.

The school shared supporting evidence of parental views from the Parents Meeting in Autumn Term 2019, the following is whole school data, 38.5% returns:

- Did your teacher share a review of your child's progress? 90% yes 10% N/A as having an EHCP meeting this term
- Do you feel able to share your worries and concerns? – 100% yes
- Did you get ideas on how to help your child at home> 100% yes

End of year parent questionnaires were also shared from 2016, 2017 and 2018 that demonstrated a high level of parental satisfaction.

Further evidence shared was an evaluation following Riding the Rapids Training delivered to a group of parents in the Autumn Term, 2019. The evaluation evidenced how the training had impacted positively on parents and showed how staff are reflective in their practice.

The school operates a Stay and Play session once a year for parents of autistic children within the Foundation Stage Unit. Stay and Play feedback included:

- *"Really loved seeing my boy playing"*
- *"We really enjoyed the video"*
- *"Was really good – nice one!"*

During the assessment the moderator met the parent of a child on an autism diagnostic pathway, the mother was very emotional yet praiseworthy of the support that Oakdale School staff have given her. After her son found Stay and Play sessions too difficult they gave her the opportunity to come to an afternoon session on a 1-1 basis to help put strategies in place to support his communication.

The school host a weekly parent group, of those parents consulted they said they have really valued the group. The group is a time where they feel really well supported and can talk about anything that is of concern to them.

Practice advice and support is also available from the school such as help to complete forms and support to access assessments and funding for specialist equipment.

Further comments made by parents included:

"I know they know my child well"

" My child is happy and safe"




"I feel like I am part of the school community"



"The staff are all angels"


**APPENDIX 1: SURVEYS**





**Oakdale School and Nursery Autism Discrete  
Provision FAP 27/01/2020**



Feedback questionnaire on Oakdale School and Nursery ASC Classes to be completed before 27/01/2020

The support my relative is given is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		7.14%	2
3	mostly good		10.71%	3
4	always good		82.14%	23
			answered	28
			skipped	0



The understanding that staff have for my relative's autistic needs is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		0.00%	0
2	ok, but could be better		7.14%	2
3	mostly good		10.71%	3

The understanding that staff have for my relative's autistic needs is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
4	always good		82.14%	23
			answered	28
			skipped	0

The way I am kept informed and asked my views about how my relative is supported is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		3.57%	1
2	ok, but could be better		10.71%	3
3	mostly good		17.86%	5
4	always good		67.86%	19
			answered	28
			skipped	0

The advice I get from the service on how to help my relative is...				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	poor		3.57%	1
2	ok, but could be better		17.86%	5

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

			<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
3	mostly good		10.71%	3
4	always good		67.86%	19
			answered	28
			skipped	0

Comments: Please note you are not required to comment below, if you do so they may be quoted in the final report. Our questionnaires are anonymous and Autism Accreditation cannot be held responsible for comments which identify any individual. (9)

1	27/11/2019 08:36 AM ID: 131592542	All staff at Oakdale are brilliant in relation to autism awareness and support. They are constantly very informative with how they can support my son, Vabeesan, as well as ideas and strategies that could help us at home. Overall a brilliant school for ASC children.
2	27/11/2019 09:01 AM ID: 131593615	All services and teachers and other staff at oakdale are brilliant. They are supportive and helpful to the children and families. Always listening and advising in a very gentle way. My daughter is 4 and just in her first year and we are already seeing progress. She is a genuinely happy child there and that for me as a mother and the rest of her family are grateful for the time and effort they put in with the children. All services in tameside have been extremely helpful.
3	27/11/2019 09:01 AM ID: 131593631	All services and teachers and other staff at oakdale are brilliant. They are supportive and helpful to the children and families. Always listening and advising in a very gentle way. My daughter is 4 and just in her first year and we are already seeing progress. She is a genuinely happy child there and that for me as a mother and the rest of her family are grateful for the time and effort they put in with the children. All services in tameside have been extremely helpful.
4	27/11/2019 15:01 PM ID: 131619380	Oakdale school is amazing,my son is really well looked after,his needs are definitely met and he has come on so much,the staff give 100% and work hard to make sure the individual needs of every child are met,I couldn't ask for any more
5	17/12/2019 10:39 AM ID: 132984543	My sons only been at oak dale for a short time he really enjoys going the only thing I'd like to would be abit more feedback on what is being done to help him communicate so I could do the same at home with him to try encourage him more



The advice I get from the service on how to help my relative is...			Response Percent	Response Total
6	17/12/2019 10:39 AM ID: 132984556	My sons only been at oak dale for a short time he really enjoys going the only thing I'd like to would be abit more feedback on what is being done to help him communicate so I could do the same at home with him to try encourage him more		
7	10/01/2020 12:18 PM ID: 133739131	My son's teacher Victoria Jarvis is amazing with him! She talks to me about what they have been doing often and asks how he is doing at home with everything and also asks me how I feel about what they are doing. I couldn't ask for a better person to be teaching him!		
8	10/01/2020 12:23 PM ID: 133739481	Please note that all the staff are excellent. My daughter is fully supported and cared for.		
9	23/01/2020 17:23 PM ID: 134483389	Can't fault how oakdale is at all		

## **APPENDIX 2: COMMENTS FROM THE PROVISION**

No further comments.