



AUTISM
ACCREDITATION



The National
Autistic Society

AUTISM ACCREDITATION IN SCHOOLS

Oak Lodge School

Oak Lodge in North London is a special school that caters for pupils aged 11 to 19. Almost 50% of pupils are on the autism spectrum.

Reason for joining

A few years ago, the school wanted to change from having a separate autism provision to being able to accommodate autistic pupils throughout the whole school. They decided to contact Autism Accreditation to use its widely recognised standards as the basis for this transformation.

“We decided to reorganise and become wholly inclusive for children with autism.”

Benefits

The first step was for Oak Lodge to undertake an audit of its autism provision – to assess the school’s curriculum, physical environment, staff skills, and the autism-specific approaches they used, such as TEACCH and PECS, to see where they met the Autism Accreditation standards or where there was a need for improvement.

Next, the Assistant Head Teacher, Ginny Mason, and the school’s Accreditation Adviser put together an action plan for the school based on the results of the audit. This included Ginny working with the Deputy Head to reduce distractions in the physical environment and look at noise levels, colour schemes, odours, fixtures, lighting and the organisation of furniture. The plan also introduced changes to the layouts of classrooms to make it easier for pupils to learn independently.

Ginny explains, “We created zones in the classrooms so that the pupils could see, for example, that this is an ICT zone, this is a social space for the morning where we sit and do our registration, this is a learning space where



we do our group work, and this is an individual work station space. We had every classroom set up physically in the same way so that whichever room a child was in, they weren’t anxious about where to go”.

Our Accreditation Adviser also identified a need to train staff to understand specific behaviour management strategies. By establishing a team of autism champions and identifying staff members to work collaboratively with a less experienced peer, Ginny was able to share knowledge and understanding of autism between staff members through peer-to-peer team teaching.

“The audit made it apparent that I needed to address the issue of staff using old behaviour management strategies like ‘time out’,” says Ginny. “We developed more flexibility in staff approaches to behaviour, so they understood more about the rigidity and the inflexible thinking associated with autism. There was a significantly lower incidence of children having time out or children being brought to our pastoral manager because they weren’t coping.”

“Fewer children were having meltdowns and we certainly saw improved behaviour.

“We also saw teachers communicating with each other much more in the staff room about autism – it was lovely because you could really feel the culture of autism in the school.”

“We’ve just won a leading parent partnership award and I don’t think we would have even attempted to register for that award before accreditation. But we’re confident now and you can see that.”

It wasn't just the staff who noticed the change. The school also had really positive feedback from parents.

“Parents have reported that things are better at home for their children. We have high numbers of children with autism who aren't able to go home and tell their parents about their day, so we made sure that every teacher had a 15-minute slot at the end of the day to actually write in the home-school books. Parents are now able to talk to their children about their day because teachers are able to write it in the book.”

Now that Oak Lodge has achieved full accredited status, Ginny looks back with pride on the changes that she and her colleagues have brought about. “Without a doubt I'd recommend the Autism Accreditation scheme to other schools,” she says. “It's a bit scary initially but once you're in it, you realise how useful it is, how easy it is and how well the advisory team work with you.”

Ultimately, the real benefit was not just to the school's reputation, but to the autistic pupils who now attend integrated, inclusive sessions in a safe and predictable way.

Autism Accreditation was established in 1993 and now supports over 500 organisations to achieve and recognise good autism practice within their settings.



The National Autistic Society is a company limited by guarantee registered in England (No.1205298) and a charity registered in England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427), registered office 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG. 3049 100616

www.autism.org.uk/accreditation