



**Autism Accreditation
National Autistic Society**

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Dear Colleague

Re: Willow Dene School

It is with great delight that I am able to confirm that the Autism Accreditation Award Committee have awarded the above registration an Advanced Accredited Award according to our expectations for specialist schools.

Please find attached a report from the Committee which identifies how the school met each of the criteria in order to achieve the award. Congratulations on demonstrating the highest standards of good practice in supporting autistic children and young people.

Yours Sincerely

Stephen Dedridge
Head of Autism Accreditation (South)

CRITERIA	NOTES
<p>A high-quality programme of continuous Professional Development is in place. It ensures that staff have a robust specialist knowledge of autism specific best practice methods and approaches. It also provides staff with insight into the personal experiences of autistic people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous Professional Development Training is strategically planned based on the needs of the staff and children. The appraisal system enables staff to reflect on their autism practice and identify developments at an individual, class or whole school level. • Staff are highly skilled practitioners and, throughout the observations, were consistently seen to effectively use a range of evidenced-based autism-specific best practice methods and approaches • The school has supportive systems to analyse and support teams with implementing strategies and interventions for children struggling with self-regulation. • <i>The school would like to invite more autistic speakers to share their experiences, developing an understanding of life from an autistic perspective.</i>
<p>Practice is informed by an excellent understanding of how each autistic person communicates and socially interacts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff consistently make themselves understood by using a range of approaches, including simplified verbal language, Makaton, visual supports and modelling. • Staff gave children plenty of time to process and praised them when children completed the instruction • Children have ownership of their individualised communication systems across the school which are clearly differentiated based on the children needs and reflect the information within the communication passports.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff provide regular opportunities pupils to practice and develop social communication with staff and peers which are carefully planned into the lessons. • <i>In a few observations, staff should reduce their language when making demands or giving instructions.</i>
<p>Practice is informed by an excellent understanding of how to support autistic people to become more independent,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff provide opportunities for children to express opinion and make choices and decisions. • Children are provided with opportunities to consolidate and develop daily functional skills. • Staff effectively used open questions to gauge understanding and promote road safety and independence skills. • Creative, playful and sensory motivating resources were used to great effect, engaging children, bringing lessons to life and consolidating skills. • <i>Where practice could be improved; Covid 19 restrictions have halted the organisation of the "communication shed" and resources in the play areas. The school could consider reviewing the use of the portable communication systems available to children outside of the classroom to promote expressive language and formalise transitions at the end of play.</i>
<p>Practice is informed by an excellent understanding of how to support autistic people in their sensory regulation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careful consideration has been made to the whole school environment to ensure low arousal and structure. • Children were offered independent access to highly differentiated resources to help them sensory self-regulate.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autistic children tolerate a wide range of sensory experiences within a safe and secure context and are supported to regulate sensory experiences which interfere with what they are trying to do or cause them discomfort. • Sensory engaging and motivating activities are used creatively to support learning. • Autistic children are encouraged to enjoy the challenge of trying out, learning, exploring and choosing new experiences.
<p>Practice is informed by an excellent understanding of how to support autistic people in their emotional well-being</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive and preventative strategies are in place to avoid anxiety, confusion or distress from occurring or escalating. • Autistic children are treated with dignity, status and respect and are provided with meaningful positive feedback to boost confidence and self-esteem. • Autistic pupils are encouraged to experience completion and achievement reinforced by staff through positive feedback using visual supports. • Staff and pupils have clearly developed positive and trusting relationships with the pupils, • Lessons are fun, engaging and interactive. • Autistic children are encouraged to enjoy the challenge of trying out or learning a new activity or skill. • Where children start to lose focus or find it hard to maintain their attention, staff were quick to step in with strategies of support or reassurance. • In a small number of observations where children showed signs of dysregulation outside the classrooms, staff missed

	opportunities to recognise behaviour as a form of communication.
The provision can demonstrate how it empowers autistic people to inform decisions about how they are supported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school aims to meet the needs of each individual child and facilitates this by offering bespoke communication tools to facilitate Child Voice. • The school has two school councils based at the primary and secondary site. • To develop the school's curriculum, the school regularly gathers the children's opinions and aspirations. • Key Stage 3 students have their own blog where they post updates on things they like to do, thoughts and achievements.
Feedback from families and/or autistic people shows that an overwhelming majority are happy with the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around a quarter of all parents completed the Autism Accreditation online survey. Whilst the Committee would have appreciated a higher response rate, it noted that feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Over 70 % of parents rated the support their child receives and the understanding the staff have of their child's autism as consistently good. • Comments from parents confirm that they clearly feel their children are well cared for, well supported and makes excellent progress. • In their application form the school highlighted the role of the Family Support Advisor in adding another layer of bespoke and unique support to children and their families
Validation from other bodies or professionals confirms the quality of practice within the provision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the last Ofsted Inspection:

	<p><i>Willow Dene School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a section 5 inspection now</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Challenge Partners National Programme have rated the school as outstanding.
<p>The provision shares its specialist expertise in order to impact on how well autistic people are supported within its community and to activity contribute to knowledge and understanding of autism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school shared a description of a research project into the benefits of music therapy at Willow Dene. Four key areas of benefit were identified: (i) relationship; (ii) emotional wellbeing; (iii) self-regulation; (iv) attention and focus. • Willow Dene school is part of Compass Academy Trust and offers outreach, training, support and advice to the schools and the two schools with autism provisions. Willow Dene school is the only special school within the trust. Willow Dene takes part in the joint school projects and working parties as well as the annual conference. • The school has links with Kings College, Goldsmiths and Greenwich University, providing training and work placements for students. • The school provides training to other schools in the community, such as Forest School and TeamTeach.
<p>There are many considerable areas of strength within the provision and examples of outstanding and/or innovative practice. Outcomes achieved by autistic people are outstanding and directly impact on their quality of life.</p>	<p>The report highlights a number of strengths and excellent practice within the provision including the on-site health clinic. Case-studies submitted by the school describe a number of initiatives. For example, the school has implemented a planned vocational pathway for Key</p>

Stage 4 students which enables them to build upon and celebrate their personal interests, skills and strengths. The school also describe the Food Fun Groups which have produced a number of benefits including helping children to express and communicate likes and dislikes and supporting them to feel more confident and relaxing in touching, smelling and tasting different foods.

Although some developments are highlighted in the report, the Committee are satisfied that they relate to fine tuning existing good practice. The findings from the assessment report as well as case-studies on individual pupils submitted by the school has left the Committee in no doubt that the school achieves excellent outcomes for autistic pupils and clearly deserves Advanced status