



Autism Leads Project

Woking Schools Learning Partnership 2015-16

Premise

Through the work of Freemantles Outreach team and the relationship between Freemantles and local schools through the Woking school Learning Partnership, we were aware that the Woking area has a high number of children with autism in mainstream school. In July 2016 the Freemantles Outreach team was supporting 94 children from the 13 participating schools. The feeling has been that these children are not only great in number, but that a large number of these pupils show a complexity of need not seen in mainstream schools in the past.

Aims

- To influence good autism practice across the schools settings, at all levels.
- To give one member of the school staff an enhanced understanding of the needs of children with autism and strategies that can be used to support them, so these can be shared across the school.
- To learn about the most recent developments in good autism practice particularly in relation to social understanding.
- To ensure that a member of the senior leadership team understands the role of the leadership team in whole school development of autism practice
- To develop a support network of autism leads in the local community who are able to support one another into the next phase of development.
- To empower staff to be able to support within their schools and resolve some issues internally, reducing the waiting times for Outreach visit.
- To research through auditing provision the effectiveness of the project, so that if it is successful it can be developed for further cohorts.

What the project entailed

13 schools took part, making 12 autism leads, as two confederated schools decide to share one lead between them. The program was led by Vanessa Clark (Leader of the Outreach and Training team) and Justin Price (Head teacher).

- Each school sent two delegates (one autism lead and one member of the leadership team) to participate in all three tiers of Autism Education Trust Training;
 1. Making Sense of autism
 2. Good autism Practice
 3. Leading Good autism Practice

- We went to visit each school and supported them to self-assess using the AET National Autism Standards and to identify target areas to work on. We did this at the start of the project and again at the end of the year to track progress.

- We provided a range of training to look more deeply into particular strategies and interventions. These were led by the Freemantles Training Team and Interventions leaders within the school staff. The sessions were compulsory only for the autism lead, although some senior leaders attended these sessions voluntarily.
 - Social Understanding (including Social Stories[™], Comic Strip Conversations and Social Context)
 - Structured Teaching
 - Structured Communication
 - Intensive Interaction
 - Autism and Happiness
 - Supporting Sensory differences

- Towards the end of the academic year the autism Outreach team hosted a revision session at Freemantles School, including time to observe in the classroom and see strategies in place.

- We held half termly network meetings. These included short presentations on topics such as PDA, assessment, local support, Attention Autism and managing challenging behaviour. These meetings also allowed valuable time to reflect, problem solve and share experiences as a group.

Evaluations

Over all of the AET sessions combined, we received 59 evaluation responses;

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The training was worthwhile				9	50
The delivery of the training was high quality				9	50
I am now able to promote more understanding of pupils with autism			2	13	44
What I have learned will impact on my working practice			2	13	44
I would recommend this training to other people working in similar settings.				10	49

To summarise;

% of delegates who rated training as overall good or very good	99%
% of delegates who rated training as overall very good	80%

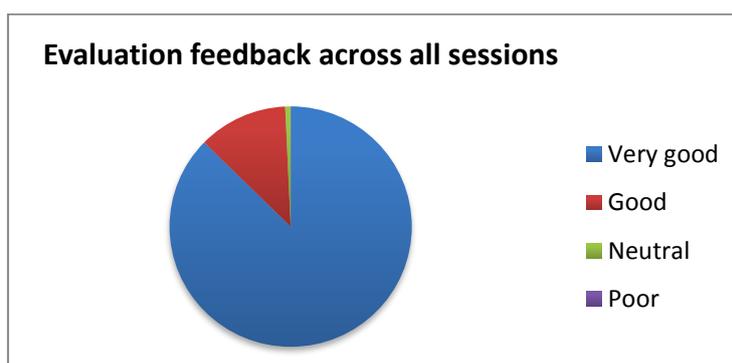
Across the Freemantles-based training sessions, we received 67 evaluation responses;

	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very Good
Meeting the aims of the session				2	65
Presenter knowledge				3	64
Clarify of information				4	53
Pace				3	64

To summarise;

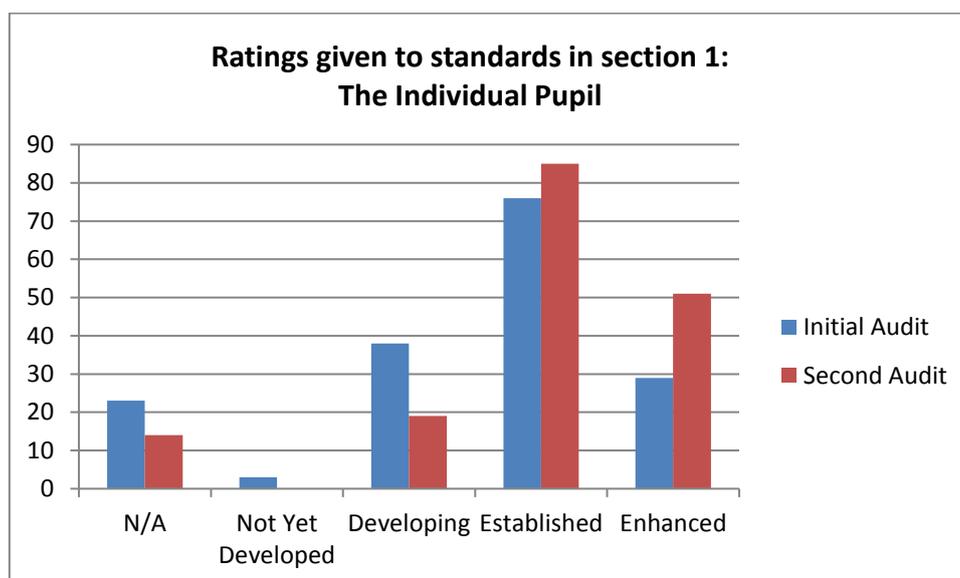
% of delegates who rated training as overall good or very good	100%
% of delegates who rated training as overall very good	96%

Across all training;

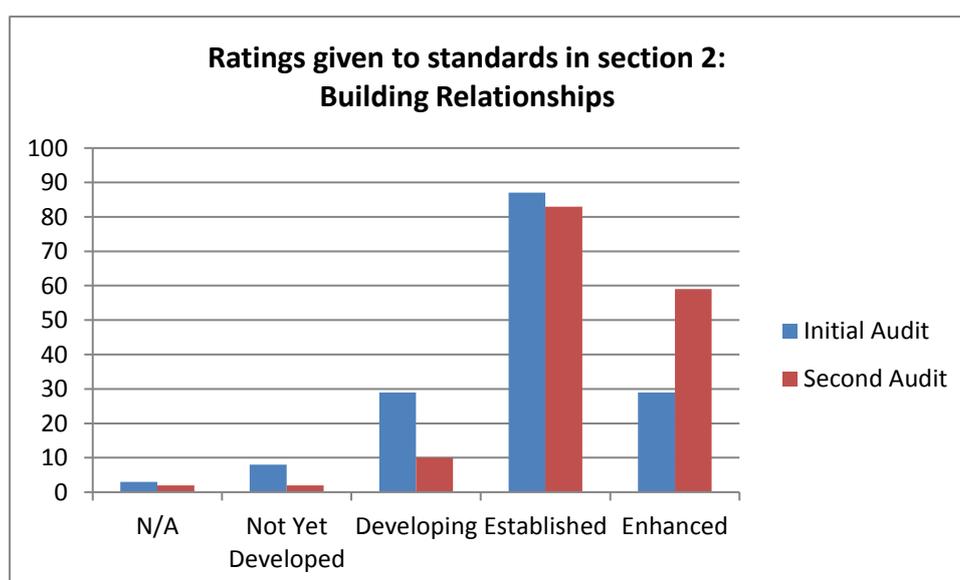


Impact

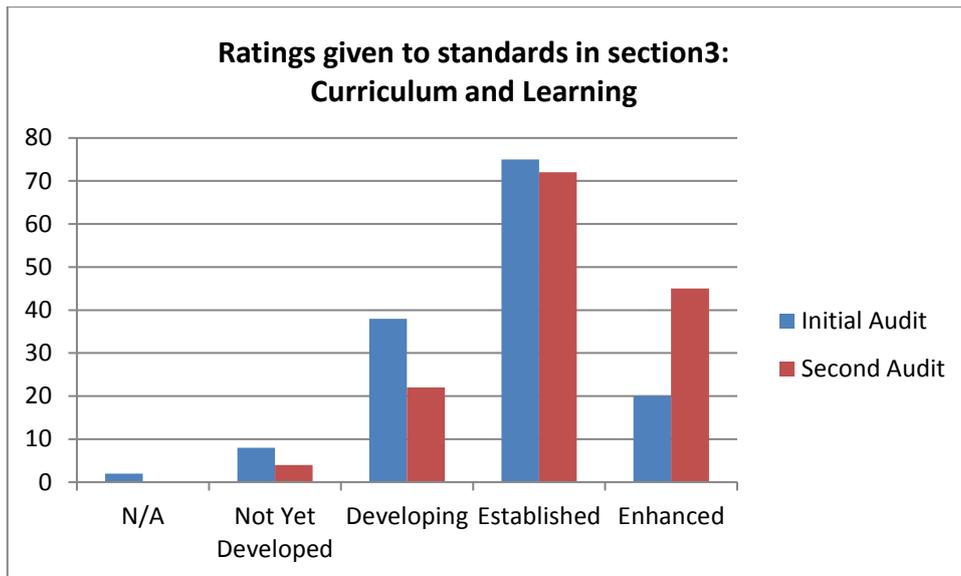
The AET National Autism Standards consist of 43 standards split into four areas: The Individual Pupil, Building Relationships, Curriculum and Learning and Enabling Environments. Each standard is split into four levels: Not Yet Developed, Developing, Established and Enhanced. Overall schools made an average of 11% progress between their self-evaluations at the beginning of the project and a review at the end.



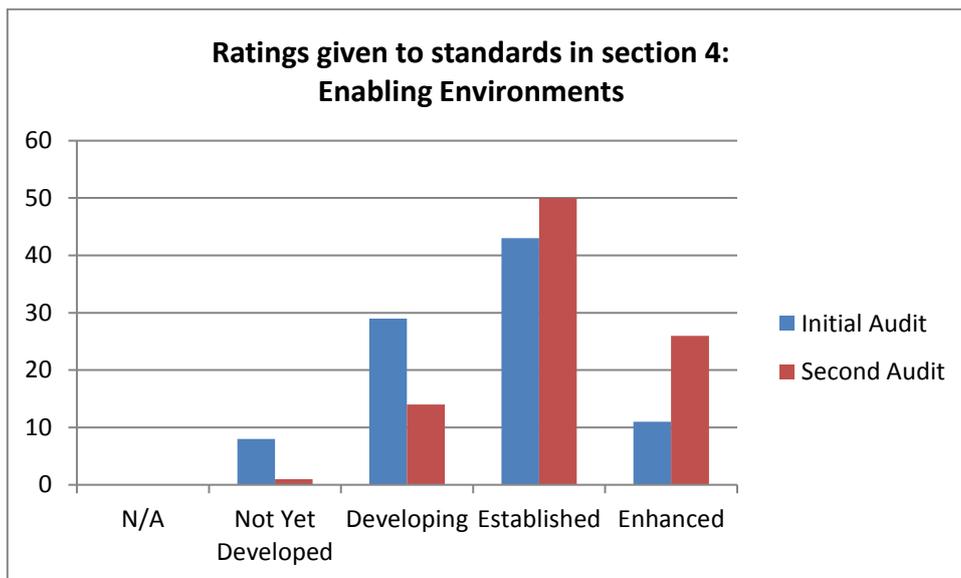
The Individual Pupil – Schools made an average of 5% progress in this area. At the time of the second audit, schools self-evaluations told us that, on average, 80% of standards in this area were Established or Enhanced.



Building Relationships - Schools made an average of 6% progress in this area. At the time of the second audit, schools self-evaluations told us that, on average, 91% of standards in this area were Established or Enhanced.



Curriculum and Learning - Schools made an average of 6% progress in this area. At the time of the second audit, schools self-evaluations told us that, on average, 82% of standards in this area were Established or Enhanced.



Enabling Environments - Schools made an average of 5% progress in this area. At the time of the second audit, schools self-evaluations told us that, on average, 54% of standards in this area were Established or Enhanced, representing an area still developing in most of the schools.

Following the initial self-evaluation, each school made 4 targets to work on throughout the year. 75% of these were met with many exceeding expectations. The remaining targets are ongoing and were not met largely due to external influences e.g. waiting for the AET Progression Guidance to be released in order to inform assessment.

At the final network meeting, the Autism Leads were asked to evaluate the impact of the project on the pupils in their setting, the school-wide autism provision and on their own practice. The following is a selection of quotes from this session;

Impact for individual pupils:

- "It has impacted on my pupils by the fact that I have been able to provide suggestions to staff e.g. sensory needs, using their interests, trial of Intensive Interaction and Shared Attention"
- "So many children at school have benefitted – even those without ASD (EAL, low ability). Intensive Interaction (attention/enjoyment). Individualised work books (following own interests). Happy children and supported staff (not just in one or two classes)."
- "Greater awareness. Specific strategies used – PECS. Intensive Interaction. Better understanding of reason behind behaviours."
- "Lowered anxiety"

Impact on School-wide practice:

- "Autism awareness across the school. More tolerance therefore better awareness of individual need and a more consistent approach."
- "I plan to lead staff training next year (especially if we have an unit coming) so it will have a whole-school impact by developing everybody's knowledge"
- "A point of contact ensuring a more consistent approach. All working together for a more autism friendly school."
- "Class teachers know the best practice e.g. visuals, break out areas and personalised learning"

Impact on the practice of Autism Leads:

- "I feel more confident in my ability to support staff and suggest strategies. I have used lots of strategies within my own class (I have 2 children with ASD in my class)"
- "I have gained more understanding of why children may behave in certain ways and when and how to support them"
- "So much more confident and able to try things from a different angle because of all the different programs you have shown us"
- "I feel more confident to try different techniques with likelihood of needing to use another one if original, second and third failed!"

Next steps / follow on

Following the project, the Autism Leads plan to keep in contact as an ongoing supportive group. Freemantles will host half-termly meetings over the coming year to support the leads to enhance their knowledge of particular strategies. They will split into three groups; Social Understanding interventions (Social Stories™ and Comic Strip Conversations), Intensive Interaction and Supporting Children with Structure (Structured Teaching and Structured Communication). These groups will continue to develop their skills, by sharing videos and examples of their work, with support from a Freemantles Intervention Leader.

With continue involvement, we hope to be able to evaluate the impact of the project over a longer period of time. This could take the form of future supported self-evaluations and the tracking of outreach data.

It is the intention to offering the Autism Lead project to other confederations. We strive to make the program as good as it can be and therefore we have taken on board feedback and will make the following changes;

- Create an email group early on in the program
- Give each delegate an Autism Lead file, containing all presentation handouts
- Create opportunities for joint observations
- Give more time in network meetings for sharing of videos / examples of work done