

AUTISM ACCREDITATION PEER REVIEW

SERVICE REVIEWED: Portland College

DATES OF REVIEW: 10th and 11th May 2016

TEAM MEMBERS: Barbara Dewar (Team Co-ordinator) and Sally James

OVERVIEW OF PROVISION

Portland College is a large campus based in a rural location supporting 171 learners with a broad range of disabilities; including 71 with a diagnosis of Autism. The campus includes buildings for education, arts, including media and recording studio, leisure facilities, multi-faith religious centre, office spaces, hall, student bar, gym, shop, and therapy building with nursing area, physiotherapy suite and large hydro pool. In addition the campus contains an Emporium and café and hotel open to the public and offering work experience for the learners, also a small teaching farm, hairdressers, and print shop. There are residential units for both respite and longer term provision; these were not reviewed by the team as the focus was on the educational department.

The learners enter on a Route to Learning based on ability, Route One – Life skills learning , communication and sensory programme, Route Two- Independent living focussing on improving their skills including work experience, Route Three – Skills for employment. All learners have courses at the appropriate level in Maths and English. Whilst working within a Route the learners are able to undertake a range of different options making their own pathway, accessing sessions from other Routes where this is appropriate, creating a person centred programme. The learners are supported to undertake appropriate qualifications in Maths and English and in vocational subjects, ranging from single unit credits to full qualifications, from Level 1 through to Level 3 and GCSE. Vocational courses are offered in Catering and Hospitality, Horticulture and Animal care, Retail, Sports Leadership, and Art design and Media. Learners have the opportunity to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The focus of qualifications is always that it should be meaningful and realistic for the learners. The Routes take place three days a week with different groups being in College on different days, but all being present on a Wednesday. For some learners additional funding is available for Portland Freedom, which allows them to access some of the facilities on the other two days, often combined with residential support.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

Observations

The team observed 18 sessions that were graded, across a range of subjects, ability levels and settings. Additionally observations were made in general situations around the college that were too short to form a valid judgement on outcomes for the learners to score but informed the team's conclusions.

Interviews and Discussions

Transition and Outcomes Manager

Learning Service Co-ordinator

Occupational Therapist

Job Coach

Horticulture Lead

Behaviour Support manager

Coordinator for 'Autism are Us' and two learner representatives from 'Autism are Us'

Learners on the Learner Council

Physiotherapist Manager

Lead Nurse

Speech and Language Therapy Manager

Inclusive Sports, Enrichment and Duke of Edinburgh coordinator

Quality Assurance Manager

Documentation

Learners' Individual Files including:

- Individual Learning Plans
- Individual Sensory Plan
- Behaviour Support plan
- The Lalemand Red Behaviour Scale
- Risk Assessments
- Communication Plans
- Assessment Report

Incident Forms

Portland College Brochure

Autism Strategy

Positive Behaviour Support Strategy

Physiotherapy Strategy
 Communication Strategy and Individual Communication Plans
 Examples of Person Centred Reviews
 Quality Assurance Cycle
 Learning and Teaching Training Calendar 2016
 Communication box used by the Nursing Team
 Speech and Language Therapy files – examples for individual learners
 Social Stories
 Staff Information File
 Student Council file including Learner Job descriptions.
 Teaching files, including differentiation of needs in each session/ subject

KEY FINDINGS

As a result of this process, the following actions were identified for the service to work on:

Actions for development	Reasoning
<p> Topic 3 – Enabling the Autistic person Strand 3: Sensory Experiences: E10 How is each autistic student enabled to understand, self-regulate and manage sensory experiences? </p> <p> The College should review how the detailed sensory programmes developed are used to provide the learners with support in developing self-regulation of their sensory experiences and needs. </p>	<p> The team reviewed a range of examples of Sensory Plans and discussed with staff the formulation and use of these. The plans are detailed and demonstrate an understanding of the sensory issues of individual learners. </p> <p> Some observations demonstrated sensitive support for the learners with awareness and redirection when needed, however this was not consistently seen in all sessions. However only in two observations did this indicate that sensory needs were partially met. </p> <p> The development that was apparent was the need to encourage learners to self-regulate their sensory needs and not always be reliant on adult prompts even sensitively handled. Additional support and training for staff in this area may facilitate confidence in encouraging sensory independence. </p>

<p>Topic: Enabling the Autistic person Strand 2 – Self- reliance and problem solving: E7 How is each autistic student enabled to manage transitions? (E.g. being provided with and trained in the independent use of schedules, timetables or other materials).</p> <p>The College may wish to review further ways in which they can develop the use of visual or written timetables and how the learners can use these independently to manage micro transitions.</p>	<p>The College have symbols timetables available for each learner within their home/school diary. Different formats of these are available created by the SLT team.</p> <p>Throughout the review the team saw session timetables in use on the boards in the teaching rooms but these were infrequently referred to and of little value as a system of indicating what was happening or what had just finished. They were not removed or changed at the end of an activity and remained a static display.</p> <p>The learners were not observed referring to the timetable but rather were guided by staff, or the routine and this allowed little opportunity for the development of independence in managing a timetable themselves.</p> <p>The use of the system should be reviewed to ensure it remains a live and supporting system.</p> <p>In a few sessions staff made good use of symbol work sheets to order the work, but this was not consistent.</p>
<p>Topic- Enabling the Autistic person Strand 1: Differences in Social Communication. E2: How is each autistic student enabled to understand directions, requests or information? (E.g. by staff consistently modifying the way they communicate with each autistic student.</p> <p>Building on the detailed communication plans for each learner the college should ensure that communication support skills such as symbol use and signing are used consistently.</p>	<p>The College provide staff with training in communication support, the use of symbols to support language and Makaton signing. Guidance sheets as reminders were observed displayed in most session rooms, and all learners had detailed communication plans. The College have a team of Speech and Language Therapists and assistants who have allocated caseloads to ensure support is always available; the SLTs are each linked to tutors or subjects so that staff know who will provide support.</p> <p>However the team observed a lack of consistency in communication from staff towards learners. In most cases there was clear speech but the use of signing and symbols was less consistent. Opportunities for learners to further develop their communication skills were observed (including the use of AAC) but would benefit from more consistent modelling and supported communication.</p>

Specific areas of strength	Reasoning
<p>Topic: Commitment and Consultation Strand 3 : Consultation- E29 How does the school/college ensure each autistic Student has personal goals that reflect their preferences, interests, hopes and wishes, and which have meaning and value to them?</p> <p>The person centred approach across the College was reflected in all aspects that the team observed; in discussion with staff and parents and carers, is an area of strength.</p>	<p>Through discussion with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and Carers • Learners • Middle managers • Teaching Staff including the subject leader for Inclusive sport and Enrichment • Job coaches <p>Review of paperwork including Individual person centred reviews and plans and direct observations, the outstanding feature of the College was the person centred approach. Beginning before entry the focus is on the individual's preferences and aspirations and the college works to make these achievable.</p> <p>For example one learner demonstrated an interest and ability in photography. The college developed the course to allow him to pursue this and gain a qualification in this area allowing access to further opportunities post Portland. Another learner has shown an aptitude for working in horticulture, beginning on the College farm then work experience at Newstead Abbey and finally gaining a voluntary placement in the community using the skills and qualifications he has gained whilst at the College. A less able and recently arrived learner needs opportunities to self-regulate through bouncing on a trampoline and this is built into his daily schedule both linked to physiotherapy support and as time away from demands.</p>
<p>Topic: Commitment and Consultation: Strand 1: Commitment – C1 How does the school/college express a public commitment to provide consistently high-quality education and care for autistic students, which takes into account their wishes and feelings, supports their autonomy, well-being and personal development, and helps prepare them for the future?</p>	<p>The College undertook a reorganisation; including some redundancies during the previous year however there was no indication of this in the attitude of the middle managers. A series of team training and meetings have promoted positive departmental links and further developments are planned.</p> <p>In discussion with all staff at this level they had clear plans for development, implementation and monitoring to ensure the service continued to further improve the provision for learners with autism.</p> <p>Their enthusiasm was evident and demonstrated evidence that they were aware of what needed to be done.</p>

<p>The collaborative drive of middle and senior managers ensures the continuing development of the provision for learners with autism, supported by staff engagement.</p>	
<p>Topic: Commitment and Consultation Strand 1 – Commitment -C15 How does the school/college ensure that staff employ positive and proactive strategies in addressing behaviours that are a threat to the well-being of the autistic student?</p> <p>Through training and personal development, the staff team demonstrated understanding of the needs of the learners and enthusiasm combined with positive relationships with the learners reducing challenging behaviour.</p>	<p>The team reviewed training plans and observed practise within sessions and noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The respect that was shown by all staff to the learners. • The age appropriate way in which they were addressed and the curriculum and equipment used • In all sessions learners were engaged in their learning or being skilfully supported to engage. • A wide range of opportunities were being offered • The environment and atmosphere were stimulating and purposeful • Staff appeared relaxed even when learners became anxious. <p>No incidents of challenging behaviour were witnessed by the team although opportunities for learners to withdraw when anxiety was increasing were seen on a few occasions. These were supportively managed.</p>
<p>Topic: Positive outcomes for the autistic person. Strand 2 – Self-reliance and problem solving-P10: How does the school/college evaluate the effectiveness of support and curriculum activities in facilitating each autistic student to develop competence and confidence in managing ‘real life’ challenges away from school including, where relevant, within the workplace?</p>	<p>The College work with all learners to develop skills towards employability. Those working within Route One may be developing the skills of communication and self-management, whilst at Route Three vocational qualifications and employment may be the ultimate goal. The College has a wide range of vocational opportunities on site giving learners a chance to test out different careers. The skills learnt in class can be moved to these settings before moving into off site work experience supported by job coaches. The job coaches gradually withdraw their support when the learners are ready and then support the work placement staff to undertake this role.</p> <p>Vocational themes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horticulture and Animal Care • Admin and events organisation • Hospitality and catering • Sport, Leisure and Fitness

<p>The programme of work experience, supported by job coaches, offers learners opportunities to develop relevant skills and qualifications in the relative safety of the college environment. Where appropriate, work experience opportunities are sought in the local community and in a few cases have led to paid employment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative Arts and Media • Retail and Marketing • Communication and Life skills <p>However if a learner demonstrates an aptitude in a different area this is encouraged and opportunities sought.</p> <p>The team observed an off-site work experience placement and were told of how this was leading to voluntary work post Portland. One learner has gained a paid apprenticeship following vocational training.</p>
<p>Topic: Enabling the Autistic person. Strand 4 – Emotional Wellbeing – E20 Where appropriate, how are autistic students supported to develop a positive and constructive understanding of what it means to be autistic?</p> <p>The development of a social enterprise “Autism are us” which supports learners to provide training to a wide range of services about the impact of autism was shown to have clear benefit to the learners involved and to the wider community.</p>	<p>The College have supported learners to establish a social enterprise providing speakers with autism to explain about how having autism affects them. Originally funded by a grant from a local authority the group now charge for their presentations. They have provided training to a range of services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education staff • Police • Social services • Minister for Education • Child protection teams <p>These services both local and further away. Feedback from these services has been very positive. The member of staff supporting the group expressed how valuable their service was to these groups.</p> <p>The team spoke to two of the eight members of the group and were impressed by their attitude, fluency of communication and willingness to share their experiences. They present a section on ‘Myth Busters’ demonstrating that people with autism do not fit the stereotypes of autism. It was apparent that the learners had benefitted from being part of this group and both wanted to continue with the social enterprise once they left Portland although new students would be recruited to join the group so that it could be maintained.</p>

PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

This was Portland College’s first review, no previous recommendations

FAMILY QUESTIONNAIRE SCORES

SCORES					
Number of Questionnaires sent out (information provided by the service):					71
Number of Questionnaires returned:					28
Number of sections not scored (figures only reflect sections scored):					2
	VERY UNHAPPY	UNHAPPY	SATISFIED	HAPPY	VERY HAPPY
Contact	1	2	4	8	13
Support		1	2	5	20
Advice	1	1	5	8	12
Involvement	1	1	4	10	11
TOTALS	3	5	15	31	56
PERCENTAGES	2.72%	4.54%	13.63%	28.18%	50.90%

Statements from the questionnaires included:

The following statements represent the comments made. Grammar and spelling are as written on questionnaire responses. Additionally the team spoke to some of the parents and these conversations reflected the comments below. It should be noted that within the questionnaires the parents responding happy or very happy made fewer comments than those with other scores:

1. How well does the school keep in touch and communicate with you?

- Communicates through diary as to what she has done that day also puts in diary if anything specific is happening in the future.
- The College have always contacted me if there is a problem and also attended meetings if necessary.
- We have excellent communication between us as parents and the tutors and LSAs at college with face to face chats, phone calls, emails, home/school diary messages – I think the only thing that could be improved upon is a bit more detail of what the students are being taught on a daily basis. Bit more background on that would be very useful.
- Then never keep me in Touch OR COMMUNICATE with ME About EVERYTHING
- I feel I am always the one seeking communication.
- The college is always keen to communicate how well my child is doing and any concerns or issues are sorted out. We are always there to listen and help where we can.
- Receive regular updates by email & also the days attended at college, the days events are written in a diary
- Very limited communication from college. The progress report in Jan was useful but raised issues with how she had settled in- I didn't know – this so had not been supporting her with it as much as I might have.
- I have valued my son's annual reviews very much as an opportunity to discuss his progress and to work towards the future. I think that more use could be made of the home /college diary. I am not kept up to date with my son's progress in maths and English, for example. I have no idea how well he is doing in these areas.

2. How well do you feel the school supports your child?

- The college have worked with me to increase my son's independence, particularly in relation to his independence in coming to and from college by public transport. This has been a huge joint success.
- Caring & understanding buying items to help with anxiety and coping with a sensitive and difficult young man. Very happy.
- X is very happy with the support given. She says she doesn't like holidays because she misses her teacher & friends
- Portland College has been the most amazing place for X. His confidence, ability, everything about him has changed for the better. He finishes in June, but has been offered an apprenticeship at a work placement we are so proud of him and the staff.

- Portland training College is absolutely fantastic at Supporting my child and couldn't ask for anything more he has a place to belong.
- I do feel there needs to be more training for autism to understand the complexities of the condition.
- My child obviously gets the support he needs. He comes home very happy and tells me all about the staff and how they help him.
- Then never Do ANYthing with him OR TAKE him SHOPPING when he Runs out of Things.
- The support has been second –to-none. Any problems that occur, we are told The 'door is always open' and we've always been very well supported as parents through the tough times. Our child has had a lot of support, care & nurture whilst being encouraged to gain personal independence.
- The college has changed my son's life, he is a different person now from before he came here.
- My child is supported 1-1 with everything from lessons and mealtimes

3. How well does the school support and advise you in relation to your child's needs?

- Makes sure she is happy and calm and try to minimise any upsets
- At a meeting with social workers, paediatrician and our child's tutor. We could not get the extra help we needed because the tutor put too much of a positive report about our child. "Painting a rose coloured picture" of her and not telling the truth.
- The college will talk to me or email re my child's needs.
- We have had a lot of support and advice from the college – the college have some brilliant tutors and LSAs. The only problems I would say is that more staff are needed and the new staff would need more autism awareness training- greater understanding of autism traits would be great. I guess there's never enough time for staff to get the training and spend time getting to know the students. More staff, more pay, more training, better funding!
- Then never support me OR give me Advise About his needs
- To be fair I haven't asked for support as I don't feel I need it. I'm sure they would offer both advice and support if I approached them
- I have not received anything on this subject
- I have to ask and push for issues to be addressed/followed up. This is usually done when I have asked or reminded.
- Portland training College has always had my child's needs at the forefront of it's thinking and how they help him deal with his autism and what it means to him

- Have bought additional equipment to support her needs ie. Weighted chair and blanket
- I know that my son is very well supported within college, so I am very happy with his college experience. As I have stated elsewhere , the Annual Review is very valuable. Maybe reviews could be more frequent?

4. How well does the school involve you in their work with your child?

- I have mixed comments. I can speak with my son's tutor anytime. He is highly approachable. I do find that there can be a lack of communication via the home/ college diary.
- Not much involvement she seems to be doing the same course as she did last year at school. Not sure what she is focussing on at college which means no reinforcing it.
- Have shown us ways to support our daughter when she has challenging behaviour. I cannot fault Portland one bit. Have been a life line for us. So glad we chose Portland as my daughters placement
- Then never involve me with Any Thing
- All the staff are very friendly and always willing to help me out when needed & X
-The staff do some great work they just need to duplicated ten fold!!...
- The college keep me informed as to what is happening even though my son is in residential. Just wish he could have more time at college – 3yrs opposed to 2

OBSERVATION SCORES

Topic	Not Met	Partially Met	Majority Met	Fully Met
Differences in social communication	0	0	10	8
Self-reliance and problem solving	0	1	6	11
Sensory Experiences	0	2	11	5
Emotional well-being	0	0	5	13
TOTAL	0	3	32	37
PERCENTAGE	0%	4%	44%	51%

FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS

Topic	Comments
Differences in social communication	<p>Individual communication plans were seen in all teaching files – detailing the best method of communicating to the learner and the best way of presenting information to them. These plans were detailed and provided communication differentiation in the session plans. Increasing consistency with identifying social interaction within lesson plans would be beneficial.</p> <p>The team observed :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence of visual resources to support greetings and conversation • Visual resources to support communication during work. • Some examples of social stories (one to explain our presence in a lesson; one to explain to a learner why he can't have a member of staff as his girlfriend) • In most sessions modification of communication by staff to support learners' understanding including use of one or two key words. • Use of communication devices used to support individual's participation in lessons. • Simple Makaton signing to support instructions <p>However the consistency of these support techniques varied between groups regardless of the level of understanding of the learners. A focus on increasing adult to learner communication support and modelling of appropriate communication would be of benefit.</p>

	<p>Additionally as identified as an area of development the use of visual support to provide timetable and programme would be beneficial.</p>
<p>Self-reliance and problem solving</p>	<p>Most lessons had some form of schedule showing the order of activities: words only; symbols with words. However they were not often referred to and when they were the learners were not always engaged in this activity.</p> <p>The team observed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some examples of tasks broken down into steps and visually presented, in a few cases learners ticked off actions as they were completed and in one session removed symbol card for each finished activity but this was not a consistent practice. • Lots of opportunities to make choices were observed. (Linking to the person centred approach) • Observed learners expressing their opinions in relation to music (Good song/bad song) • Learners given opportunities to collect equipment 'what do I need board?' 'What could you use to measure this?' • In one session learner photos being moved onto the symbol of an activity to show which activity they would be doing next. <p>The team observed some missed opportunities for developing self-reliance where staff collected resources (e.g. glue and scissors).</p> <p>In several cases the rooms did not appear to be set up to support learners in finding their own equipment e.g. symbols/ photos on doors and drawers of storage and more emphasis on organising environment to support independence and self-reliance; this could also support learners having access to sensory equipment as mentioned in area for development.</p>
<p>Sensory Experiences</p>	<p>In discussion with the Occupational Therapist a sensory need assessment is included as part of the initial multi-disciplinary assessment. Detailed sensory profiles are written for most learners and Sensory diets are written for learners who need them. Sensory needs were noted as included on some lesson plans. Some Positive Behaviour Support plans reference sensory needs and strategies.</p> <p>Some students were observed to use personalised tools to help them manage their difficulties with sensory processing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of ear defenders • Protac Sensit beanbag chair • Sensory breaks (learner observed having a break sitting on the sofa relaxing before returning to next activity).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One learner wore rubber gloves when handling fruit. • One classroom had a gym ball and trampet (not observed being used). • Classrooms generally spacious and uncluttered and organised for individual and group work. <p>In a few rooms it was noted that there was bright artificial lighting however it was very inclement weather outside, fluorescent tubes all had diffusers on. In some lessons background noise of radio or music was also observed, sometimes linking to the topic e.g. summer songs whilst creating summer painting, but in other cases the purpose was not clear.</p> <p>The learners were observed being exposed to new sensory experiences e.g. fruit tasting, listening to different music styles.</p> <p>As identified as a development the team identified that the detailed sensory plans are not being used consistently to support lesson planning. Additionally the team noted that in almost all cases observed it was the staff that directed the learner to seek out and use their sensory management tools or techniques. Where a learner has an independence target such as “I will be able to consistently use my traffic light strategy (stress balls) to manage my anxieties”, learners should be supported to seek out and manage this system by themselves to learn to self-regulate their sensory issues.</p> <p>Review of staff training indicated that only an overview of sensory issues has been undertaken by staff. Whilst this has included all staff further more specific training would be beneficial.</p>
Emotional Well-being	<p>Learners were observed to be happy and enjoy their time at Portland College. In discussion with learners they all expressed that the College had met their personal needs and helped them to achieve their goals. This was mirrored by most parental comments.</p> <p>The College undertake yearly Person Centred Reviews, the team reviewed documentation, these were reported to be very positive and focussed on building self-esteem by identifying the learners’ strengths and interests.</p> <p>Detailed Individual plans were reviewed for learners with individual targets. Opportunities for self- evaluation were observed at end of some sessions. Opportunities were built into sessions for learners to choose activities which they find enjoyable and relaxing including ‘downtime’ between learning activities.</p> <p>Staff were observed to employ de-escalation techniques at first sign of potential distress.</p>

	<p>Some learners have positive behaviour support plans detailing problematic setting conditions and preventative strategies. Learners are supported to reflect on major incidents by considering through a visually presented debrief sheet: What happened? What were you thinking?; How were you feeling?; How do you think the other person felt?; What can we all do differently next time? It is recognised that this may not be appropriate for all learners as it may retrigger the event and is therefore sensitively used. Staff are also offered both a debrief meeting and recording sheet. Incident reports are reviewed and collated for individual learners and the service to identify any trends and establish strategies to address issues.</p>
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The self-esteem and well-being of the learners is enhanced in the way the staff interact with them. Work experience programme supports learners to make a contribution to the college community. Examples include work experience in the hair salon and café. The college employs job coaches to support the development of skills in work experience within the college and in the local community. Travel training is included where appropriate to facilitate independent access to work experience placements. One student will be leaving college in July and becoming a part time volunteer working in the gardens of Southwell Minster.

CONCLUSION

Portland is a college that provides bespoke education for each learner to ensure the most positive outcomes. This includes learners with the most profound difficulties increasing their communication and independence skills through to those who develop the skills to move towards mainstream college or employment. These are achieved by collaborative working across the teams and a drive by managers to constantly improve the College offer.

As several learners expressed to the team 'Portland has changed my life'.