

# Autism Positive Practice visits.

## Background.

As part of the written statement of action section 1.4 'Young people and practitioner research of what 'good' looks like. Feedback to senior leaders and inform the structure of the annual survey,' and part of our 'you said we did' pledge with our parent and young person's forum.

Surrounding local authorities were contacted to ask for recommendations for mainstream schools or colleges that offer very inclusive provision, especially for autism. So that we can visit with two parents, a young adults and supporter, plus a teacher/SENco.

We received a number of recommendations from Oxford, Hampshire, and South Gloucestershire councils. As well as offers from Devon and Banes. Due to the availability of representatives from the parent carer forum, and the distance involved in travelling – schools in Bristol were chosen. Almondsbury CE Primary School, and Downend Secondary school. We did attempt to visit City of Bristol College, however they didn't respond in time.

The visit took place on Wednesday 18th September 2019 and was attended by; Jayne Smith SEND Commissioning Officer, Paul Dobson Manager Swindon STEP and Michelle Lloyd Parent representative Swindon SEND Families Voice. Due to other commitments, and staff absence there were no SENco champions available to come.

## 1 Almondsbury CE Primary School (1.5FE)

### Overview

Almondsbury is a 1.5FE school. The original building was built in the 1970s, a further 1 form of entry was added in the last 15 years, and added to. There are 13 children with EHCP's, 25 children on the SEN register – 23 with ASD traits, 1 cognition and learning and 1 ADHD. The school has seen an increasing number of children with anxiety over recent years, either because of an underlying condition, family dynamics, or trickier cases of there being no known reason. We met with Jo Duffy SENco.

### 1.1 School Ethos

The school has a very strong ethos of 'every teacher / TA is a teacher / TA of SEN'. Staff are very proactive in their approach to this. They also encourage the pupils at the school to help where they can. All teachers and TA's believe that all behaviour is communication. They strive to get to know each child, with a clear knowledge of their background and build a good rapport with the parent. They believe in asking 'What's wrong?' and 'How can we put this right' at an early stage, so that in certain cases, it nips things in the bud.

*There is a year 6 – Reception buddy system in place before school, each new reception child is paired with a year 6 who can help and encourage them to come into school in the mornings – this helps with separation anxiety from their parents. There is a similar system in place at break and lunchtimes. There is a separate year 5 buddy system, and allocated playground leader to make sure there are no children left out or feel anxious or upset in anyway.*

During our visit, there was an incident with a child ('E') with PDA and Autism. (South Gloucestershire Council do not recognise PDA) Her usual TA was off sick and an agency TA was assigned to her. This caused extreme anxiety. Jo invited the child to come along on our tour of the school to refocus her. 'E' has had 16 previous exclusions from other schools. She came to Almondsbury with no EHCP – her previous schools had not applied for one. Jo applied for an assessment and was told there was not enough evidence as she hadn't been at their school for long enough. Jo encouraged her parents to ask for E to be assessed, and after a long battle the LA has just agreed to assess her. (There is a 2 year waiting list, so her parents paid privately to take her to Oxford) 'E' has PDA, ASD and anxiety and it boils over in to extreme anger which can be directed to her teachers and TA's or at objects in a room.

Once our tour was finished, 'E' was taken to the hub with a laptop and asked to make a PowerPoint all about the tour she had taken us on.

## 1.2 Using the space available

As with all old build schools, space and storage can be at a premium. Almondsbury have come up with clever storage solutions, and changing rooms around internally to provide the best 1:1 care for their most vulnerable children.

*There is a 'sensory circuit' (mindfulness) in the hall at 08:45 every morning, ran by the 1:1 TA's. It is attended by approx. 6 children. There are motor skill activities for them to do in a timed manner. There is a trampette, beanbags in hoops, and a belly board on wheels for them to 'play' on. This has been proven to help with transition from home to a school environment, and also focus the children and get them in a learning mind-set for the day.*

*A ladies toilet was transformed into a sensory room for 2 reception children. Jo Duffy signed up to the 3 Peaks Challenge, and asked parents for sponsorship. Children of the school raised money by making and selling slime.*

*A store cupboard was converted to a 1:1 room for twins with complex needs. This room is now a 'Cwtch' room. (Welsh for cuddle)*

*We were invited to attend the twin's session with their 2 TA's. They were given coloured 'spots' to sit on to encourage them to sit still. There was the 'bucket' game, with a catchy song which the twins joined in with. 3 sensory objects were placed in the bucket and pulled out 1 at a time. The TA signed what the object was, and made a noise with the object, or lit the object up. There was a clear picture board of what was happening now, and then. With a drawn picture of a bucket and a toilet. The girls support team of parents and TA's have been working hard to get them toilet trained since the summer.*

*There is a small kitchen off from the hall where breakfast club is held. This room is also used for phonics, spellings and 1:1 TA support. 'E' has an individual programme, as she finds it hard to learn in the classroom, and see's school as purely for the social aspect. She mainly uses Power Point, cookery and gardening to learn.*

*The kitchen is used to make biscuits and cakes. The children are taken to the shop to buy the ingredients, they research the recipe and then give the food to their classmates.*

### 1.3 Inclusion for all.

Almondsbury CE Primary School does not exclude any child from school trips. There was a class 6 school trip to France when we visited and 4 children didn't attend. This was because they chose not to attend because of anxiety, ASD or ADHD. The decision to go is left with the child and the parent.

*The 4 remaining children were given extra French lessons where they could eat croissants and butter and jam so they did not feel like they were missing out by not going.*

*There was 1 child with ODD attending the trip with his TA. They know his process. They've asked him how they can help him, and they work together.*

*They know to stay with him, and then talk about the problem.*

### 1.4 Movement breaks.

Some children benefit from being able to get up in their lessons and go for a wander about. In some cases a TA is usually required to stay with the child so that they can do this.

*Almondsbury CE Primary School asked for donations from parents for rocking chairs. These were put in the classrooms, breakout spaces and library so that should the children need a movement break, they can decide when to go and take themselves. This also leaves the TA in the classroom.*

### 1.5 Fundraising.

As well as the TA's taking on personal challenges in order to secure funds for the school.

Almondsbury believe in community fundraising. They contact local businesses to set up reward schemes and encourage the children and parents to have fun while fundraising.

*The school teamed up with a local garden centre, to set up a scheme with the parents of the school so that a % of their sales go back to the school and can go towards gardening equipment to help the children learn. Each class has a raised bed with pumpkins and sunflowers.*

*Each year the school holds a 'Tour De Almondsbury' sponsored family bike ride. Which is 20 laps around a specified route. Money raised is then put towards equipment and items around the school that the children take a vote on with the school council. This year the funds will go towards changing the wooden play equipment in the playground. Last year they donated £2000 of the money raised to the sensory room project.*

### 1.6 Feeling safe.

The school runs a lunchtime club for the children too anxious to go outside to play, they may find it difficult to make friends, or have anger issues. These children are allowed to go to the library with a TA where they can use laptops, read books, sit in the rocking chair and play other educational games.

### 1.7 "Playpod"

Bristol, like Swindon has a Scrap Store. Bristol Scrap Store offers a 'play pod' subscription. A van will deliver 'den building' and other creative material to the school at the start of term. Everything is stored in an outside shed. This equipment is then brought out at break time and lunch times. Each term the resources are changed.

Swindon Scrap store offer memberships.

[https://www.scrapstore.co.uk/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=7&Itemid=195](https://www.scrapstore.co.uk/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=7&Itemid=195)

## 1.8 Alternate therapy

*A Yoga instructor has been hired with some of the PE money to provide mindfulness to a targeted list of 30 children, as well as others who wish to attend. Children are taken in groups of 6 for a 30 minute slot. This benefits the children with ASD, Anxiety, PDA.*

*Formal Lego Therapy sessions are held during assembly time. These are ran by SENco's and TA's. Children are encouraged to follow the instructions. It is a free course offered to children. The school buy the 3 in 1 sets for £5. They can run the course on £30.*

## 1.9 Barriers

Staff are frustrated with the access give to the Education psychologist, Children only get 4 visits and then they are discharged whether they are ready or not.

Speech and language specialists are also difficult to get access to at the right time. There is no support for children after KS1. This creates a huge pressure to get children the help they need as soon as possible. This does not help any new children entering the school in KS2 that have maybe not received the help they needed earlier enough.

*Almondsbury have a boy with double cochlea implants, who was refused an EHCP as he can hear when he has his implants on.*

## 1.10 Year 6 - SATS

One of the questions from Parents via the Swindon SEND Families Voice Facebook page was around year 6 SATS. The revision process, and how do they combat anxiety in the children?

Almondsbury like other schools, hold a breakfast club during the SATS. They are aware that these can increase anxiety in some children, as they are almost emphasising that there is something different happening in school that day. In those cases they take the child's lead, if they don't want to attend the breakfast, then that is their decision.

SATS revision is carried out in small groups, so that the children are not overwhelmed with other pupils being there.

## 1.11 Resources

The one document that the TA / SENco's use that stood out the most for us was the 'Intervention pupil provision map'. This is filled out every year, so that you can see at a glance what intervention a particular child accessed during which year. This intervention is linked to targets on an EHCP. (Copy of form attached)

## 2 Downend Secondary School

### Overview

Downend Secondary School is based in the suburban village of Downend in South Gloucestershire. There are 24 students with EHCP's – this has increased from 16 in the last 2 years. The school have applied for 4 during that period, and 3 have been approved. 2 students are at a different setting, (Pathways learning centre) but still come under Downend. There are 125 children on the SEN register – a below average number. Out of the 24 with EHCP's, 7 have been identified as having ASD. 10 on the SEN register have ASD Traits. Downend has 20 feeder Primary Schools in the area. We met with Rachael Corns SENCO.

### 2.1 Transition

The day after our visit to Downend was the transitions open evening for all year 5 and 6 pupils (sometimes younger). The school has a strong ethos around making time for parents.

*SENCO's from Downend will attend any year 6's annual review ahead of them joining the school. It gives them the opportunity to consult in an open and honest way, when discussing any needs, or concerns.*

*Any children who are anxious about transitioning to Secondary school, and have concerns around how they are going to get there? How to they get through the gates? Where is reception etc, are where appropriate, walked from their feeder primary school with their SENCO to deliver letters to Downend to get them used to it.*

*Downend have 6 staff who visit the 20 feeder Primary Schools. They work in pairs – 1 meets the children, 1 meets the class teacher. This way they can learn more about each child. The class dynamics, peer groups, whether they have a male or female teacher, how they feel the child will manage going from a year group of 30/60 to 240.*

*For vulnerable students. TA's / SENCO's will meet with parents prior to them, so that by transition day, staff will know the family background of all those children.*

*The house colours at Downend School are clearly visible as the students wear a tie signifying their house colour. Transitioning students are sorted into houses as soon as possible after confirming their place, and their uniforms are available to them almost immediately so they can adjust to it.*

*Students with sensory issues around some of the uniform, for example shirts and jumpers, are given the opportunity to source a similar looking uniform item that they do feel more comfortable with. In one case a student felt more comfortable in a particular sweatshirt material, so Downend arranged for the school logo to be added to the front, at no cost to the parent.*

*They hold a parent only open evening the day before the transition days, so that parents feel at ease, and can ask any questions they have without their children there to over hear any concerns they may have. This has been proven to help with parental anxieties. It gives them an agenda for the following day, and a chance to meet with the tutors, and ask any questions they need to – therefore reducing barriers.*

*During their Transition days all new starters are given different timings to the rest of the school. TA's from Downend attend, and also their TA's from primary. All vulnerable students are offered 3 additional sessions of Art, Technology, and science – which they choose 3 weeks before. They will also meet their heads of house and tutors at this time.*

*Students who are particularly anxious about the transition process, they will come to the school with their TA over the summer to take photos of the school, the layout, the different buildings and classrooms so that they have an idea of what they're coming into in September.*

*Timetables are given before the summer, to give the new starters a chance to meet their specific teachers before they start in September. They also colour code them to indicate which SENco's are available during certain lessons.*

*New starters with ASD traits are offered extended lunch breaks for the first few weeks to help them adjust to queuing and noise in the food service areas.*

## 2.2 Pupil Passports

Pupil passports are a working document. Students are encouraged to write their passports at home with their parents, students carry it around themselves. (Copy of pupil passport included in this report)

Subjects covered on them are: Likes and things that are important, Difficulties (Parents and SENco's), any other information, what helps?

All supply teachers have the lesson plan and pupil passports left for them, along with a copy of the seating plan with those children highlighted, so they can adapt the lessons accordingly. This promotes consistency in teaching and provides them with the knowledge they need to teach that class. Some students get anxious having to hand over their pupil passport themselves.

## 2.3 Micro Inset days / Training

Staff hold a 20 minute training session each week, which they refer to as a 'Micro Inset day'. These sessions are totally student focused. TA's and SENco's are invited to lead a session. Subjects include; what are their needs? The no blame culture, going back to basics, and prevention is better than cure.

*Teachers will not shout at lateness, instead they welcome the students into class, and give them a brief overview of what they're looking at. If students forget a pen, teachers have a supply of these that they can loan them. This lessens anxiety.*

All SENco's attend a SENco Course when they join. This is then taken in and then reflected in what the school does, via the micro inset days where necessary.

## 2.4 Flexible approach

*Should any student suffer from anxiety, a flexible approach is taken. Should they stay off school because of this, then the SENco's and TA's will go and visit them at home to see if they can help get to the root cause of it. In one case a TA visited a student 6 times before they felt strong enough to return to school. Work that the student missed that day was taken to them, so that they didn't worry about being behind when they returned.*

*Students are given the option to swap out of lessons where there may be a problem or source of anxiety. Maybe they are finding it hard building rapport with the teacher – TA's and SENco's will work to switch that student where possible to another lesson with a teacher they feel more comfortable with.*

*PE changing can trigger anxiety in some students. At Downend students can register their attendance in the PE lesson and then use the smaller private changing room. They are also able to finish their PE lesson early, should it take them longer to get dressed again. PE is always set as a double lesson.*

*Lunch time queue passes or 'jump to the front' passes are issued to those who constantly battle with the noise of the canteen. Staff will look out for these students and help to usher them through quickly. There is consistent staff in the lunch areas so that the students will recognise them.*

*Students with physical disabilities or anxiety are allowed to leave class early to give them enough time to get to their next lesson without the corridors being full up.*

*Reasonable adjustments are made for students with physical disabilities being late to lessons.*

*Should a student need a break from class, they are given a 'refocus' card. This allows them to either go for a wander around the halls for a short time, or go directly to the inclusion hub. Should they be asked what they are doing, they simply show the refocus card.*

*Interpreters are used at meetings where the parents do not speak English. Downend also have diverse staff who can interpret some languages. Downend will put in whatever is required to make that contact and build rapport with individual families.*

*Downend has no specific autism package, the package offered is available to all students.*

## **2.5 Inclusion hub**

**The inclusion hub is over seen by teaching assistants. The same teaching assistants each day to give consistency.**

**All students have a place to go where they will feel safe.**

*Part-time timetables are only used in the short term. Students will negotiate which lessons they attend. Work is then brought to them in the inclusion hub. Lessons are indicated in a simple red and green system.*

*Friends of those who are in the Inclusion hub are encouraged to meet with them at social times. This has been proved to get the students back to their lessons, as they want to spend more time with their peers.*

*Any student attending the Inclusion Hub over a lunchtime needs to let the TA know they are attending.*

*No student needs a label to access the support they need, reasonable adjustments are made where necessary.*

## 2.6 Student Support Team

*Downend have a Student Support Team made up of the assistant heads of house. No matter what house a student is in, there is help for them. The EWO officer closely monitors the attendance register. Downend are the 2<sup>nd</sup> in the country for attendance. Students hitting below 97% attendance get a letter home to their parent to encourage open communication. They are then invited to a 'SAM' meeting – Student Attendance meeting so the TA's can take their voice. Students who don't feel they can come into school for these meetings, are offered the meeting at their home.*

## 2.7 Individual Health care Plan.

Each student has an individual health care plan (IHCP). This lists all the health issues, and anxiety. This is a partnership working document. SENco's will write to the doctors so that all professionals are included. Any reasonable adjustments are documented in the IHCP.

## 2.8 MINT

Downend use MINT a seating plan policy app. Staff can call up where a student sits in any lesson. This is printed out for support staff where needed.

Students having problems in certain lessons or being unproductive – Staff can see instantly who they're sitting next to in which lesson, and potentially move students to improve productivity and wellbeing.

Mint can also be used to record notes on individual children after a particular lesson. Information sharing is key to good teaching. Staff share what works well, and what doesn't work so well so that individual students needs can be met, and staff can be kept up to date of any changes.

## 2.9 Raising Achievements Plan

Each SENCO at the school carries round a purple folder, full of student information. This is used for information sharing with other SENco's and teachers in order for each student to achieve more.

A raising achievements plan is a handwritten working document where SENco's note down strategies on how to overcome difficulties. They then share the information about each student with other teachers in a proactive way. Each teacher will then know what works and doesn't work with some students. This is then linked to the monitoring tool in the MINT system. (A blank form is attached)

## 2.10 Ready to Learn - being disruptive in lessons.

The school use a system called 'Ready to Learn'. A number of schools use this system in its 'off the shelf' state. This would mean that if a student is late to a lesson for any reason and taken to isolation for a whole day, Downend believe this is unfair on the student, is counterproductive to their learning, and can attribute to anxiety.

*Instead they use some of it. If a student disrupts their learning or the learning of others in a lesson then they are given 1 warning. They are then given redirection and left to get back to work. Should they continue to disrupt the class then they are asked to leave and go directly to the 'ready to learn' room. The teacher will click a button on the MINT system to record that the student has been sent. The onus is then on them to get there. Once there, there is a triage system. The student books in at the student support team and this is their chance to vent, to get it all out of their system so that they*



*can enter the ready to learn room calmly. Once in there they are given some work to complete, based on their year group. When the lesson finishes, they are allowed to leave and go straight to their next lesson.*

*The students sent to the RTL room are also given a detention. The teacher who set the detention will go along and have a calmer conversation with that student about what triggered the disruption, and if there is anything they can do together to make sure it doesn't happen again. This will link to the MINT system, if the student feels that are not sat in the best place to achieve the most out of their lesson. This sets clear expectations for the students and the teachers.*

Detention is held twice a week. If a student is disruptive on a Friday, Monday, Tuesday they attend on a Wednesday. If they disrupt the class on a Wednesday, Thursday they attend on a Friday.

*For students on the SEN register, they are sent to SEN triage and then to the inclusion hub.*

They implemented this system in 2018. From January to February half term they prepared the students for what was coming. They held assemblies telling them what was expected of them. Students on the SEN register were told separately in much smaller groups of 20. This was received well and proactive in preventing students from being sent out of class.

## 2.11 GCSE revision and exams

There are several online systems that are suggested to students for revision. (Heggarty maths, Seneca) Most of these systems use video clips a bit like you tube. There are specific systems for maths, Science and English. Which use the same question styles as in the exams in their practice questions, they also provide a flashcard model, and tutorials.

When planning a revision time table there has to be a good balance of mental health and wellbeing. Students are told not to give everything else up, eg any classes or groups they attend in their spare time. Their parents are involved, and there must be a realistic approach.

*The revision timetable is released in January. A full revision programme, making sure that subjects do not clash, and there is an agenda for each session so that those who could not attend that particular session know what they're missing.*

*There is an individual timetable for SEN students. This also includes help with college applications, SENCO's either help or write it for them working from their predicted grades.*

## 2.12 Nurture group

For students in years 7, 8 and 9 who are behind in their learning. There is a nurture group which is a separate classroom which provides concentrated learning to improve their outcomes so they can be reintegrated back to normal class.

## 3. Recommendations

What was very apparent in both schools we visited was the whole school very proactive and inclusive top down approach adopted by all the staff. Staff work together to do what is needed to improve the educational outcomes of all of the children and young people. Every teacher is a teacher of SEND.

- Their passion to work together with the parents and carers is clear to see. There is a very strong ethos of community spirit. The parents and carers know that staff are doing their best to improve outcomes despite budget and time constraints and are happy to do what they can to help achieve that.
- Staff think innovatively, taking on personal challenges and organising sponsored events for the children in order to raise the funds needed to better outcomes for certain children who have additional needs.
- TA's and SENCO's go above and beyond during the transition process to make sure that all of their new starters feel comfortable and have all the information they need. They also alleviate the concerns of parents separately.
- The children and young people are not punished for their SEN needs. The school environment is very inclusive. There are places they can go so that they feel safe and listened to. There are steps in place so that all children do not have to feel uncomfortable asking for the help they need.
- The schools have the right technology in place to better each child and young person's outcomes. Intervention is tracked, information is available to all staff on one system.
- Encouraging older pupils in the school to help out the younger ones. Breaking down barriers and fears.
- Community engagement – Working with local businesses to improve school outcomes.
- Innovate alternative curriculum ideas. Children that aren't coping with lessons aren't just given reading or a worksheet to complete. The staff capture their engagement in such they don't realise they're learning.
- All behaviour is communication. Break down the barriers and build rapport with the families in whatever way possible to learn about that child or young person.

These were the main areas that shouted good practice at us as we visited each school.

What we also noted was the staff at these schools didn't realise they could be setting a potential example to other schools on what best practice looks like. They are just doing what is needed.