

Autism Accreditation Assessment

Westfield School

Assessment dates	May 19 th – 21 st 2025
NAS Advisor	Sonia Berglund
External Moderator	Simon Jaggard
Status prior to the assessment	Advanced
Advanced status applied for	Yes

Summary

Pupils at Westfield School benefit from a highly individualised educational experience tailored to their needs. Staff provide effective communication support, using personalised strategies and visual aids to enhance pupils' interaction and social development. Their deep understanding of each child ensures that pupils receive consistent guidance, fostering confidence and independence. Embedded routines create a calm, structured learning environment where pupils feel engaged and supported.

Pupils benefit from staff expertise in recognising early signs of dysregulation, enabling them to receive positive reinforcement and non-intrusive support that promotes autonomy and emotional well-being. The school's nurturing atmosphere helps pupils focus, regulate their emotions effectively, and develop self-expression. Pupil voice is actively considered through observation and informal feedback, ensuring that children feel valued and heard.

Parents and carers consistently provide overwhelmingly positive feedback, praising staff dedication, kindness, and expertise. They report significant improvements in their children's communication, behaviour, and overall well-being.

The curriculum is carefully designed to equip pupils with essential life skills, world knowledge, and functional independence. Case studies affirm the school's commitment to continuous curriculum development.

Observations have identified opportunities where existing good practice could be further developed or reinforced. However, these areas for growth do not detract from the overall high standard of practice outlined in this report.

The committee is delighted to award the school Advanced Accreditation.

Social communication, interactions and relationships

Assessment Findings - completed by the Assessor

The Best Practice Plans provide a record of approaches to communication support (e.g., visuals, spoken adaptations, etc.). These approaches assist the autistic pupil with communication, interaction, and regulation support. For example, the plans outline triggers a pupil may experience when their communication needs are not met (e.g., not being able to share their own views or agenda with a staff member or peer, which may lead to distressed behaviours). And as a response, a list of supporting strategies that staff must implement to help the pupil overcome barriers and provide them with effective communication and interaction support are provided. During discussions, staff are able to give examples of specific, individual-led interests they use to support pupils' communication development. For instance, they cited the example of an autistic pupil whose interest in trains was used to familiarise them with the use of talk boards. Another example cited, was the use of toy cars to support a pupil's communication and language development.

As previously explained, supportive approaches are clearly written into the plans to address identified challenges or barriers experienced by pupils. For those autistic children who have no spoken language or use a very limited amount of words, the plans explicitly state the supportive strategies staff must implement. This ensures that staff are able to provide active communication support throughout the day, enabling pupils to develop their communication skills.

The Assess-Plan-Do-Review (APDR) plans outline the short-term targets pupils are working on in each area (e.g., communication, regulation, etc.) and are reviewed each half-term based on pupils' progress. These plans indicate whether targets will be met through universal provision (e.g., weekly lessons) or specialist interventions (e.g., Speech and Language Therapy sessions). Therapists, teachers, and support workers meet regularly to discuss whether pupils have met their communication, interaction, and language targets.

During interviews, staff clearly articulate specific examples of progress they have observed in the pupils they support over time. There is a clear sense that they know each individual pupil well. One support worker described the progress of a non-speaking pupil in the younger phase who, through the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication sentences sentences, has been supported to build their vocabulary and understanding of syntactic structure. This pupil is now able to use subject-verb constructions in a sentence. This progress is also reflected in

their spoken language use on the playground, where they now refer to objects and actions using appropriate verbs. Another example cited was a pupil for whom the use of visuals has enabled them to develop skills in using choice boards and build confidence in communicating with support workers. A further example involved a pupil who previously used the word 'no' repeatedly and would expressed distress through self-harming behaviour; this pupil now uses a regulation poster to request support when they need to regulate.

One case study about an autistic pupil describes how the pupil now actively participates in group learning, small group, and 1:1 adult-led tasks, and has formed positive relationships with both staff and peers.

In most observations, staff consistently adapt their spoken language to support autistic pupils' comprehension and engagement. This is particularly evident in Forest School, where younger pupils from the early years phase (Apple) participate in child-led play aligned with their intrinsic interests. During these sessions, staff use supportive strategies such as prompting, labelling emotions or actions to aid with regulation. In the middle phase (Pear), during snack time, staff rephrase and pace their language to accommodate pupils' processing needs and reinforce behavioural expectations, such as waiting for an adult to cut a pear or serving their own snack appropriately. Similar approaches are observed in the Cherry Base (the older phase), where staff support pupils in completing their Literacy activities by rephrasing instructions to enhance understanding. In some instances where staff use questioning to promote deeper thinking, for example during one-to-one supported work, it was felt that staff would benefit from using additional techniques—such as retrieval strategies (e.g., providing retrieval grids to pupils, using a brain dump exercise on a whiteboard, etc.) — to further enhance pupils' understanding.

Autistic pupils are supported in understanding what is communicated to them through bespoke strategies involving the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools and visual support tools (e.g., writing frames). In all observations, it is clear not only that staff are confident, but also that a variety of communication visuals are in use (e.g., individual strips, timetables, now and next boards). When asked, staff are able to describe each pupil's communication profile, their individual progress, and how they adapt spoken language and/or Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools effectively to give purpose to the social interaction with the autistic child. The use of signing to reinforce spoken language, such as Makaton, was observed throughout the day..

However, there is variation in how frequently it is used. The school could work towards a more clearly defined and consistent implementation of it across the setting.

Autistic pupils are effectively supported in expressing their views, feelings, and needs through the use of tailored resources and tools. This is consistently observed during the five-hour visit, particularly through the use of choice boards and visual books. In the older phase (Cherry), pupils demonstrate confidence in communicating their preferences and needs to staff. For instance, during a Forest School session, pupils initiated the creation of tool replicas from a popular video game using sticks. This reflected their expressed interests. In the early years classrooms, visual posters enable pupils to independently request regulation breaks, supporting both self-regulation and co-regulation, as staff redirect pupils to these visuals to encourage independent use. Staff use observations of behaviour to guide the implementation of visual supports, enabling even the youngest pupils to communicate their needs independently in a timely manner.

Autistic pupils are supported to socially interact with groups, staff (with or without 1:1 support), and external teachers or visitors. These opportunities are specifically facilitated through the carousel system of activities used in each class to promote early independent engagement and to help pupils develop positive interactions with the adults facilitating their learning. In interviews, staff demonstrate a thorough understanding of the pupils they support, including their communication preferences and the social goals set for them.

Each autistic pupil is supported to socially interact with peers. There are many opportunities to observe group work; pupils sit together as a group in class, which is excellent to see. There is potential to further promote peer learning interactions during class activities—for example, during carousel tasks, through creating opportunities to engage children in working with a buddy system that helps them to focus on desired social skills. Each autistic pupil is supported to take part in structured and purposeful social skills activities. Forest School plays a key role in this, offering numerous opportunities for child-led play exploration, during which staff are able to see the progress children have made come to life.

Functional Skills and self reliance

The school has developed its own Independence and Life Skills curriculum: the Living in the World curriculum, which includes clearly defined strands of knowledge that help pupils build functional understanding for later life; the Independence curriculum focuses on essential life skills such as feeding, personal hygiene, and economic awareness, thus supporting pupils in meeting their basic needs with increasing autonomy. Pupils' skills and strengths are carefully assessed, taught, and reviewed through structured lesson opportunities that allow them to practise each skill and revisit them. Based on this curriculum, each pupil's plan provide references to the individual's progress in relation to the independent skills the pupil is expected to develop, and it provides information on what they are able to do or the areas of learning that need to be reinforced.

The curriculum also addresses the unique challenges that autistic individuals may face in developing life skills and independence. These challenges are assessed and reviewed as part of the curriculum delivery and targeted planning. The ADPR plans provide specific examples of the targets pupils are working towards in relation to curriculum learning—for example, using appropriate language to describe safe and unsafe actions, or learning to reorient a coat that is inside out.

The ADPR plans also outline the approaches and tools used to support autistic pupils in carrying out activities, transitioning between tasks, coping with changes, and making choices. Supportive strategies such as Now and Next boards, visual checklists, visual timetables, and signalling strategies are seen in these plans. Timetabling is thoughtfully designed with the pupils' needs in mind. During interviews, staff demonstrated confidence in organising both whole-class and individualised schedules, and in adapting them dynamically to suit each child. The staff are highly experienced and knowledgeable in this area.

The ADPR documents also indicate whether pupils have made progress towards their targets. When a pupil achieves an outcome, it is reviewed collaboratively by the support assistant, teacher, and family to ensure the skill is embedded before introducing a new target. Forest School provides an additional opportunity to observe how pupils apply their learning in an unstructured environment. During this pupils are encouraged to play and

complete activities independently. The Forest School practitioner and teacher conduct weekly observational snapshots to monitor progress in this setting. This is positive, however based on observational reviews of the Forest School activity planning, there is some scope for staff to further strengthen the impact of those sessions by incorporating clearer learning goals, modelling specific skills, and aligning activities more closely with pupils' individual targets on the planning.

In interviews, staff shared examples of how they have supported autistic pupils in following routines, copying with change, and making decisions—highlighting the positive outcomes achieved. Examples included a pupil who progressed in using visual communication tools independently, and another who transitioned from being spoon-fed at home to feeding themselves with increasing independence.

Individual case studies illustrate personalised approaches used to support pupils in developing greater independence and essential daily life skills, while also highlighting the outcomes achieved through these interventions. The Impact of an Initiative case study showcases how Westfield School has designed and implemented a structured Independence Curriculum to address pupils' core life skill needs.

In most observations, autistic pupils are able to understand what they need to do and what is expected of them, often with the help of visual supports such as schedules and checklists. A now and next visual system was observed in use during the middle phase (Pear) transitions, and also in the older phase (Cherry) for individuals who benefit from this visual structure. In the same phase, a staff member explained how a pupil was supported with a visual schedule and had learnt to use it independently to aid their executive functioning. This pupil had memorised their timetable and was able to recall upcoming events while completing a task with a support worker. During the same observation, when the stop button was activated, all pupils promptly left their literacy computing carousel activity and returned to their seating areas. Routines are consistently seen embedded across the observations of the school, this enables pupils to anticipate and understand what is happening around them with minimal difficulty. They appear calm and settled within these routines. When spoken to, pupils listen attentively to staff expectations and are generally happy to engage with their work.

In most observations, pupils were supported to complete tasks independently rather than being directly instructed by staff. Strategies such as graded assistance and active support were observed being consistently used. Staff consistently prompted pupils to refocus on tasks when their attention wandered. On one or two occasions, the level of prompting could have been reduced by using visual supports. For example, during snack time in one class, individual checklists could have been used to help children serve their own snacks and understand expectations around the activity of serving themselves (e.g., waiting for adult supervision before cutting the pear).

The environment is designed to support autistic pupils in completing tasks independently. A carousel system of activities is used in all phases, allowing pupils to rotate through a self-directed task, a teacher-led activity, and a regulating or play-based task based on their interests or a specific topic. Pupils accessed all types of tasks independently and used communication effectively to support themselves, and the youngest pupils were supported through staff's observations and active support during those carousel activities. Staff consistently prompted pupils to stay on task when needed. Individual timers were provided to help pupils understand how long they should focus. Visual cues were used throughout the environment—for example, photos of lunch options were shown before pupils made their choices, and classroom trays were clearly labelled. In some classrooms for younger pupils, toys were only accessible when cupboards were uncovered, which pupils recognised as a cue. Overall, the environment is meaningfully used by pupils, who appear confident, focused, and well-attuned to their routines.

Staff provide appropriate levels of support to help each autistic pupil experience success while fostering self-reliance and resilience. For example, in the older phase, during a Literacy lesson, support staff can explain the purpose of each activity and what each pupil is expected to work on. Here, one pupil was working on a rhyming game, another was matching photos to words, and another was completing a sentence. In another observation, during a table activity, a staff member asked questions to guide a pupil through questions based on a studied story. Another pupil, working independently, was able to verbally explain to the assessor the different activities they had completed to understand the book. In most observations, pupils supported by assistants were allowed to make mistakes, which helps develop a growth mindset and build resilience.

Each autistic pupil is supported to express preferences, make choices, and take decisions. Across most observations, staff make efforts to embed choice wherever possible. For example, greeting schedules allow pupils to choose how they wanted to greet others. Visual aids are used with younger pupils to choose songs and are part of regular opportunities for making choices. Pupils appear engaged and participate in activities with a focus on independence. This approach is further developed with older pupils who are being prepared for transition to secondary provisions.

Sensory experiences

In interviews, staff explained that they revise previous school plans when new pupils arrive to ensure the strategies are adapted to the school's environment. Pupils are also assessed by an Occupational Therapist (OT), and new sensory regulation objectives are established to support the development of regulation skills during their first term. Best Practice Plans, and also the individualised sensory toolkit visuals seen in class, present detailed information about the sensory regulation strategies pupils use to concentrate, relax, or seek stimulation. The school has implemented an interoception curriculum through which pupils receive explicit teaching to support their recognition of internal bodily signals; this helps them to develop self-regulation strategies.

Best Practice Plans outline the specific challenges each autistic pupil may face in regulating sensory experiences. These plans include a list of bodily sensations (e.g., high-pitched sounds, hunger, close physical proximity) and describe how these may manifest in the pupil's behaviour (e.g., shouting, covering ears, crying, nail-biting). They also detail the supportive strategies to be used (e.g., reducing learning demands, using visuals with individualised regulation activities, etc.). Staff understand that autistic pupils must first develop awareness of internal cues before they can identify emotions and communicate their regulation needs effectively.

The Arousal Wheel, is a visual tool introduced to help pupils understand their energy levels. It is later replaced by an Emotion Wheel, which introduces more nuanced levels of arousal and emotional states. As children begin to recognise sensations such as feeling hot, needing the toilet, or being thirsty, staff label these bodily cues and associated emotions to gradually build the understanding of

pupils and their vocabulary to express their sensory and emotional needs.

The ADPR plans, which include regulation strategies, are reviewed continuously in school. Staff reported that parents are contacted weekly with updates on sensory regulation strategies. The Occupational Therapist also provides guidance to parents to support regulation at home. The school uses an app to document and share pupils' achievements and progress with families.

In interviews, staff shared examples of how they have supported autistic pupils in managing sensory input and avoiding sensory overload, along with the positive outcomes achieved. One example involved a pupil with a strong need for movement, who was supported through OT-led movement breaks, additional sports sessions, Forest school, and sensory circuits. Another example described a pupil who initially avoided unfamiliar wet textures but, over time, was able to engage in activities such as making handprints for Mother's Day and playing with shaving foam.

The case study on the Interoception Curriculum reflects the school's commitment to improving interoceptive awareness amongst pupils. It is designed to support all pupils, particularly those with significant sensory processing differences, in developing awareness of internal bodily signals to enhance emotional regulation, independence, and overall well-being. As a result, pupils demonstrated progress in communication, self-regulation, and engagement.

Autistic pupils access sensory activities that they find enjoyable or relaxing. During play observations in the middle phase (Pear), pupils were seen accessing different zones on the playground, and they were engaging in a range of games and activities: building a track construction, jumping on a trampoline, swinging, climbing on poles. During discussions, staff explained that they facilitate access to regulation activities and equipment that align with each pupil's natural, intrinsic interests. Fun with Food sessions are organised weekly for pupils with additional needs. Sensory circuits and Physical Education (P.E.) also take place every week.

Autistic people tolerate a range of sensory experiences within a safe and secure context. Best practice plans and risk assessments provide positive strategies to support regulated behaviour throughout the day. Children are learning to recognise their needs and how to support themselves. Most children have learnt to identify their regulation needs and will communicate these to staff. In numerous observations, pupils were seen using workstations, taking regulation breaks, using rocking chairs or ear defenders. All pupils seemed very familiar with following regulation routines. They could perhaps be further supported or encouraged to refer more independently to the calming, organising, or focusing cards before or after sessions, as these were not observed being used frequently.

Autistic pupils are supported in regulating sensory experiences that interfere with their activities or cause discomfort. Co-regulation support is provided throughout the day, as observed through staff interactions with pupils. For example, when working with pupils who have minimal spoken language, staff rely on observational cues and use visual supports to guide the pupil towards regulation. Staff were frequently observed labelling emotions verbally and providing individualised support through chosen regulation activities. Some pupils are supported with weighted blankets and pressure-based exercises. In most observations, pupils appeared to be well-regulated. However, there were one or two missed opportunities to use the arousal or emotion wheel, and the school may wish to conduct its own evaluation to ensure these tools are consistently referred to.

The environment is maintained or adapted to support autistic pupils in self-regulation. During sensory regulation, pupils were observed using a spinning chair, drawing spirals with pens, and playing with playdough and kinetic sand. In the younger phase, pupils access trays with different textures to support sensory exploration and learning. Posters with choosing boards for sensory regulation activities are displayed across classrooms. The Forest School area has been organised into different zones: a sensory den, an elastic band line, a mud kitchen, a digging pit, a hammock, and an art area. All pupils were seen engaging with their preferred play in those defined zones during the Forest school observations.

Emotional Wellbeing

During interviews, it is evident that staff possess a deep understanding of their pupils. They can articulate how each pupil regulates their emotions, how they engage in play, and the specific games they particularly enjoy or show a strong interest in. Staff are also able to explain the reward systems they implement to motivate pupils or support them during targeted interventions.

Best Practice Plans outline proactive and preventative strategies designed to reduce anxiety or distress and to support emotional regulation. Each plan includes a behaviour section that identifies the types of behaviours most commonly observed, which may signal emotional dysregulation and/or anxiety. Some plans also feature a crisis management section for pupils with known triggers (e.g., school trips), detailing preventative strategies to support them (e.g., a visual timetable of the trip with key events; preparation using a social story daily for at least a week beforehand). In interviews, staff demonstrated a strong understanding of the barriers children face. One example involved a pupil who experiences anxiety when using a braille machine. This pupil is supported through a regulating activity before information is introduced with each step carefully explained.

ADPR plans record the progress and achievements of pupils in all areas. The curriculum is tailored to each pupil, designed to meet their individual needs. It integrates therapy, the National Curriculum (delivered through an enquiry-based approach), independence, relationships, and Forest School. Seesaw provides parents with photos of their children's achievements. Through Seesaw and phone calls, staff can keep parents informed about daily activities. Tapestry also allows instant messaging with parents, providing real-time updates on what is happening in school. In interviews, staff described how considerable time is spent working with therapists to understand each child's needs and to develop effective, individualised strategies to help them make progress.

Staff speak confidently about how they support autistic pupils in maintaining emotional well-being and self-esteem, and in participating in a variety of meaningful and rewarding activities that promote social inclusion. One example shared involved a pupil who has access to a quiet area within the classroom, equipped with drawings and preferred activities.

This pupil benefits from visual supports to help prepare for and plan lesson objectives, and their personal time and enjoyment are prioritised.

It is recommended that the school introduces a concise pupil profile page within each planning document. This would highlight key information to support new or less experienced staff, as well as external professionals working with the children.

In most observations, autistic pupils appeared to feel safe and calm. After transitioning from the taxis, pupils are given time to engage with their visual timetables, helping them understand what to expect throughout the day. During the middle phase observations (Pear), pupils were seen entering the classroom calmly during transitions. In Forest School, the majority of pupils, many of whom were either non-speaking or developing spoken language, attended to the teacher's instructions during the session. In the Music lesson, the teacher introduced various musical instruments, and pupils waited attentively as each one was presented.

Staff know the pupils well and maintain consistent expectations and boundaries. They use consistent language, which helps foster a sense of security about expectations. In most observations, staff were active and attentive in meeting pupils' needs. Leaders were seen to proactively support their teams in a low-key, unobtrusive manner. Restrictive practices were not observed, and staff indicated they are only used as a last resort, under strict controls and in extreme circumstances. Positive behaviour support and reinforcement were consistently evident, with staff clearly and calmly requesting desired behaviours. Pupils were attentive and engaged, showing interest in what staff had to say about them.

Proactive and preventative strategies are in place to minimise anxiety, confusion, or distress. Clear routines and pathways are established before and after sessions to support regulation, enabling staff to easily identify signs of dysregulation.

In most observations, autistic pupils were treated with dignity, status, and respect, and received meaningful, positive feedback to boost confidence and self-esteem. Incentives and praise were used effectively to support behaviour management. Staff consistently

employed strategies such as praise and distraction. Several systems were observed in use: a Dojo system to reinforce learning and behavioural expectations; a 'Bucket Filling' system, where children are encouraged to perform kind acts and 'fill their own buckets'. This system culminates in a school trip reward, which motivates pupils to collaborate and support one another. Sticker charts and other individualised systems are seen in class. 'Golden Time' at the end of the day allows children to choose preferred activities, including visiting peers in other classes. Pupils were frequently seen engaging positively, being warmly greeted as they entered, and sitting in a circle. They were praised for their listening and participation.

Autistic pupils were observed engaging in meaningful activities that they found enjoyable and interesting. In Forest School, staff described activities tailored to pupils' interests. For example, one child who enjoys sprinkling soil and sand has progressed to allowing staff to join in their play. Another child enjoys constructing with sticks, and staff actively participate in this activity. Teachers shared examples of neuroaffirming play, including spinning, tapping, sprinkling, exploring different areas of the room, and pouring liquids. Sensory trays with messy or tactile materials are provided in the Early Phase to encourage shared enjoyment.

Autistic pupils are encouraged to embrace the challenge of trying new activities or skills. There is a culture that values learning through mistakes. Forest School supports pupils in choosing and engaging in activities that promote exploration, reasoning, communication, and interaction.

The environment is carefully maintained and adapted to support the well-being of autistic pupils. Play and snack times are embedded into the daily schedule to support emotional and physical well-being. Pupils are given choice and autonomy, and the environment does not feel overly controlled or monitored by adults. In the Early Phase, songs are used to support routines.

Parent comments from surveys

'Absolutely fantastic school and every single person working there is brilliant. I could not be happier that my child is in a place where he is thriving!'

'Everyone at Westfield is truly amazing. The support and the impact on my two autistic children has been incredible and my husband and I are beyond grateful to everyone and the school itself for everything that they do and the fact that as a result our children are moving forward, despite their challenges, in such an amazing and positive way.'

'The school always support our son and us with anything we need. Their understanding of our child is wonderful and we feel they are constantly in communication with us.'

'Amazing school and staff we are extremely happy with our child's experiences at Westfield'

'Westfield is a wonderful school. My son started in September and even though his communication is very limited- I know he absolutely loves it. He eagerly can't wait to get out of the car in the mornings and head into school. All staff are so kind, caring and knowledgeable. The senior leadership team do a fantastic job at running this amazing school. I know when I leave him there each day he is in the very best of hands.'

'We could not be happier with the service provided by Westfield School. The teachers are knowledgeable, kind, supportive, understanding and extremely helpful. Our son is finally understood and able to learn in an environment that allows him to be himself - this means the world to us.'

'X has come on leaps and bounds since starting in September and have seen so much improvement in his talking and behaviour'

'I've always found the support and communication at Westfields excellent. When there has been a concern, I've been spoken to quickly and have been kept up to date on my relatives day and support.'