

Schools autism pilot to enhance support for children and families

West Sussex is one of two areas in the South East chosen to pilot a national scheme to improve the support and awareness of autism in schools.

Schools taking part receive funding to allocate an Autism Champion who is trained to drive new and innovative measures that will support autistic children.

A new Autism Schools Project Team has been set up and has co-created a transformative programme which is already being rolled out to schools who are signed up.

The team is an exciting collaboration of West Sussex County Council's Autism and Social Communication Team, West Sussex SEND Commissioning Team, the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum, disability charity ASPENS and the West Sussex Youth Voice Group.

The project's key aims include:

- Whole school cultural change, spearheaded by individual school leaders to promote positive autism support and practice
- Working directly with children with autism and their families, offering the individual support they need
- Working with the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum to build strong relationships and networks of support for families

Nigel Jupp, West Sussex County Council Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, said: "This successful bid for funding has created an exciting new partnership between our Autism Team, the Parent Carer Forum and local charities who will work intensively with 21 West Sussex schools over the next year.

"The voices of autistic children and their families will be a key part of this programme of change and the exciting work will build on the already comprehensive training and support offered to West Sussex schools."

11 schools from Crawley and the Chichester district are the first to take part and began the training with the Autism Schools Project Team in November. Once completed, the team will work with each school, its pupils and parents to produce a bespoke package of training and engagement activities to suit the individual school community.

ASPENS will work directly with small groups of children in schools and appoint Autism Ambassadors made up of children with autism and neurological conditions, creating lessons and videos together to explain autism to fellow pupils.

West Sussex County Council successful bid for funding from NHS England will continue the Autism Schools Project into 2022, when a second cohort of 10 West Sussex schools will begin the training.

Each school involved with work towards achieving an Autism Aware Award. The awards are run by West Sussex County Council each year and are open to all West Sussex schools, who can achieve a bronze, silver and gold standard and are reaccredited every three years to ensure continual progress.

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