



Welcome To

The Shires School

A PARENTS GUIDE TO OUR SCHOOL



This booklet should help to answer many
of your questions about The Shires

ACORN
Better days, Better lives



Our School at a glance...



Ofsted Outstanding



Co-educational



Day, 38 and 52 week residential school



11-19 + Years



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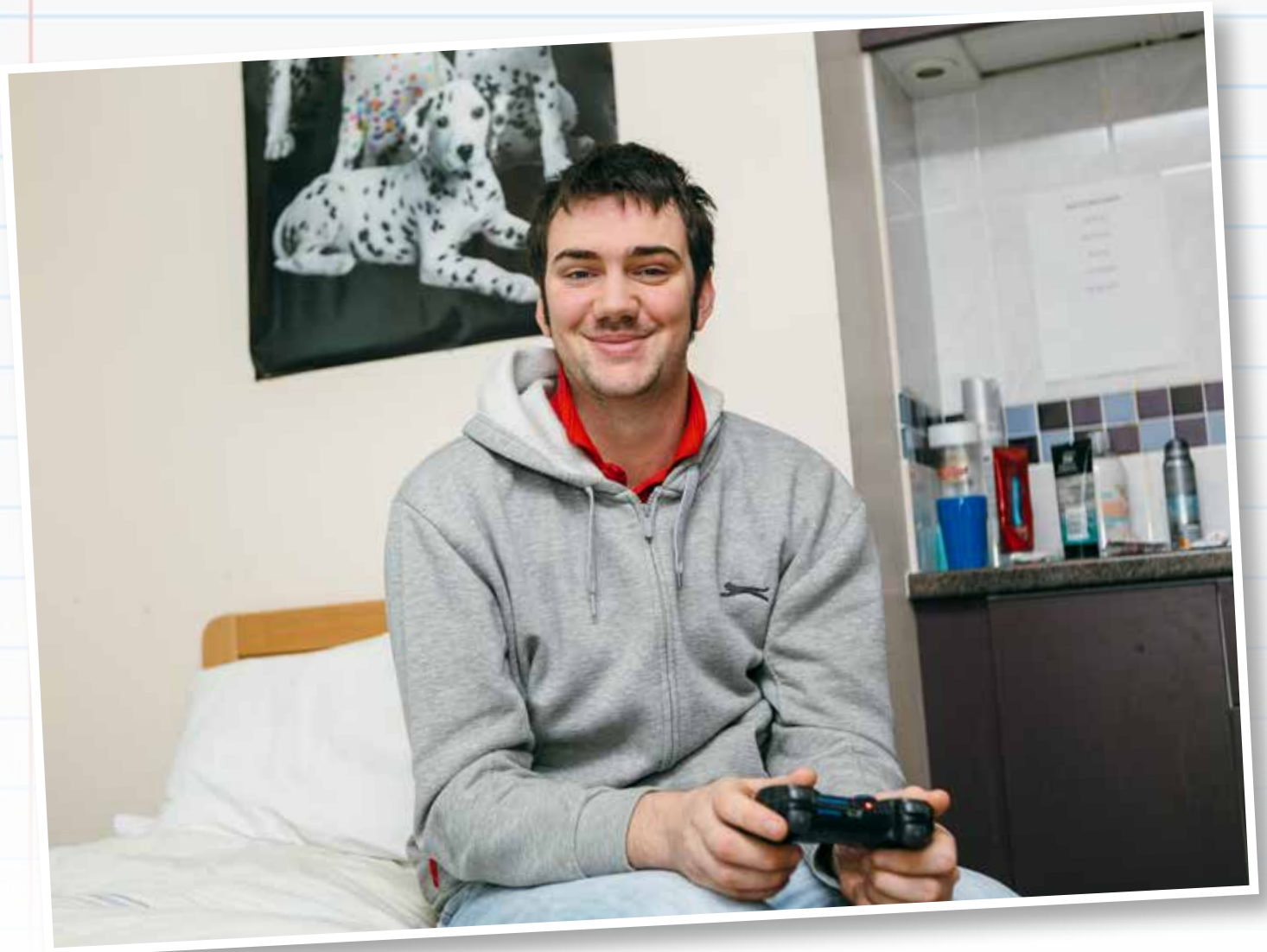
How does the school know when a young person needs extra help?

The Shires at Stretton is a 52 week school and children's home that caters for young people who have autism across the full ability range. The Shires is particularly successful in managing youngsters who exhibit challenging behaviour and who have been excluded from previous placements. Youngsters are referred to The Shires by their placing authorities. A team of professionals, including a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist, a music therapist and a clinical psychologist works alongside the teaching and care staff to ensure that additional needs are identified and addressed.

All youngsters who attend The Shires have an individual education plan that identifies their current targets based on the objectives stated in their Education, Care and Health Plan (formerly statement of special educational needs). Individual education plans are shared with parents and carers and are reviewed every term.

The progress of young people is tracked on a termly basis so that teaching staff have a clear understanding of the areas of relative strength and weakness in young people's learning. All progress information is shared with parents and carers on a termly basis. Annual reviews provide further opportunity for parents and carers to discuss their child's achievement and attainment, and to discuss future options.

Parents who believe that their child may have additional needs or who have queries about any aspect of their child's education are encouraged to contact the school at the earliest opportunity. Staff are available to talk to parents at any mutually convenient time and aim to work in partnership with parents so that the child's experience of school is happy, successful and rewarding.



How will school staff support my young person?

The Education, Health and Care Plan provides the basis for the young person's educational provision at The Shires. Objectives from the plan are broken down into small and achievable targets which in turn become the young person's individual education plan. Teaching staff review the young person's progress towards their targets on a monthly basis to ensure that activities are providing opportunity for the young people to gain the experience necessary for them to achieve their targets. On a termly basis, reviews of the individual education plans are held with parents and carers so that they can share their child's successes, and work with the school in supporting their child in achieving those targets which are more challenging.

The process of setting targets is shared with the young people themselves where this is appropriate and meaningful. Those young people who are able to take responsibility for setting some of their own targets enjoy the sense of achievement they feel when they meet their targets, especially when they have found them challenging. Wherever possible, teaching staff involve the young people in monitoring their progress so that they have a good appreciation of the areas in which they excel and those where they may need a little more help.

In addition to individual education plans, those young people who are residential also have care plans which contain targets that are linked to the objectives stated in their Education, Care and Health Plan. Care plan targets are shared with those young people who are able to engage with staff, and are monitored on a monthly basis by the young person's primary carer. On a monthly basis teaching staff and primary carers meet to discuss the progress of the young person for whom they have direct responsibility in terms of the achievement of their care and education targets. This process ensures that staff from both the care and education settings work in a consistent way to reinforce learning across the 24 hour curriculum.

The team of therapists employed by The Shires works closely with staff providing training and support so that the needs of individual young people can be fully met. They are happy to interact with parents and carers to ensure that programmes can be consistently implemented across home and school settings.



How will the curriculum be matched to my young person's needs?

The young people at The Shires all access the National Curriculum at a level that is appropriate for them. The Shires caters both for young people who have learning difficulties, and who are working at 'p' levels, and those who are more cognitively able, and who are capable of achieving nationally recognised qualifications such as vocational awards and GCSEs.

Young people are taught in small classes of between 2 and 6. This organisation enables teaching staff to group youngsters according to ability and disposition. Typically youngsters with autism have a 'spikey' profile in terms of their attainment. In mathematics, for example, some youngsters are very competent in terms of number work, but less able when carrying out exercises relating to shape, space and measure. Likewise, a student who is competent in mathematics may find life skills very difficult to master. In order to meet these varying needs, each young person has an individual curriculum that is tailored to his/her specific needs.

Staff ratios are high enabling all young people to have the support they need in order to achieve success. Staff training is given a high priority within The Shires to ensure that staff understand the nature of autism and how it can impact on learning styles. In particular, staff are well trained in the management of challenging behaviour so that occasional outbursts from youngsters who are having a difficult time do not adversely impact on the learning of others.

The Shires places a good deal of emphasis on the 24 hour curriculum for those youngsters who are residential. This means that youngsters have the opportunity to reflect upon and reinforce any new learning and to practice newly acquired skills.

In the 2012 Ofsted inspection, where the school was deemed to be 'outstanding' overall, the curriculum was praised highly for the emphasis placed on supporting the young people in learning life skills which in turn support them in their ultimate goal of achieving independence.

'The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. The curriculum provides a strong focus for students' personal development of life and social skills and enables them to achieve success in becoming more independent and in making impressive academic progress, given their needs. Planning is highly personalised and supporting adults know how activities are to be presented in an individualised manner.' (Ofsted 2012)

Youngsters from The Shires access a wide range of extra-curricular activities which are of particular individual interest to them. Strong links have been formed with a local music studio where young people go to learn how to create, perform and record music. Swimming is accessed throughout the week at local pools, and young people are also able to go horse-riding, cycling and canoeing.

As a minimum we believe that young people should have the same entitlement as their mainstream peers irrespective of the difficulties they sometimes experience because of their autism. The over-riding aim of The Shires is to provide a curriculum that is enriched, fulfilling, challenging and relevant to each and every young person.



How will both you and I know how my young person is doing and how will you help me to support my young person's learning?

All young people at The Shires have an Education, Care and Health plan, which is the basis for individual education plans, and care plans, for those youngsters who are residential.

Review meetings are an excellent way of ensuring that both the school and parents/carers are clear about the current targets the young person is working towards. They provide a valuable opportunity for the home and school to share knowledge, experience and expertise so that there is 'joined up thinking' in terms of approaches and emphasis.

Prior to a young person starting at The Shires, senior staff take time to complete a detailed assessment which encompasses the families views and ideas. This assessment

feeds into care plans for residential youngsters and individual education plans.

Termly reports of progress provide detailed information for parents/carers about their child's progress and attainment. Progress levels are provided for parents/carers so that they can see from term to term how much progress their child is making. Discussions at the termly individual education plan meetings provide a forum for parents/carers and Shires' staff to discuss ways in which home and school can work in partnership in terms of supporting the young people in achieving their targets.

What support will there be for my young person's overall well-being?

The Shires makes every effort to involve young people in their care and education. The student voice is given a high priority and there are many opportunities, both formal and informal, for young people to make choices and decisions about aspects of their lives. Monthly student councils provide a forum for youngsters of all abilities to meet and consider a range of themes. In the recent past the student council has chosen to have a pond in one of the garden areas and a new bucket type swing.

An independent advocate is employed by The Shires to ensure that the views of all young people, including those who are non-verbal, are represented. The advocate is able to highlight areas where improvements might be made through her observations of individual youngsters. The Shires very much values this independent input.

Each young person in The Shires has a Key member of staff who co-ordinates aspects of their care and education. Residential students have primary carers who meet with the key teaching staff on a monthly basis to check that the young person is making expected levels of progress across all aspects of their life. Staff regularly engage with the therapy team to ensure that the young person's needs are being met, and to seek advice if the young person is experiencing any difficulties.

In addition to the staff team, young people are able to access external counselling services should they require them. Care is always taken to ensure that any professional working with the young people is conversant with the specific needs of youngsters with autism and that he/she is able to communicate with them in a way in which they understand.



What specialist services and expertise are available at or accessed by the school?

The Shires is fully staffed by a team of well qualified teaching and care staff. In addition, The Shires employs an Occupational Therapist, a speech and Language Therapist, a Music Therapist and a Clinical Psychologist. The therapy team works individually with young people and also supports them in small group and whole class situations. Therapeutic programmes are designed by the professionals, and shared with staff so that they are able to implement them consistently over time and evaluate the outcomes.

The Shires has developed excellent working relationships with its local CAMHs teams. Staff accompany both day and residential students to any appointments with doctors, dentists, opticians and other health workers, and support parents in following any recommended communication, social or behaviour management programmes.

What training are the staff supporting children and young people with SEND had or are having?

Training is given a high priority at The Shires and staff are encouraged to stretch themselves by completing courses and training that exceed the recommended minimum. Class groups are taught by qualified teachers who are supported by teaching assistants and learning support assistants, all of whom have achieved, or are working towards, NVQ Level 3 in either social care or classroom support.

All staff complete mandatory training in physical intervention and restraint, health and safety, food hygiene and safeguarding. The HR manager maintains a training record that shows when mandatory training needs to be renewed or refreshed. The Shires uses MAPA (management of actual and potential aggression) as its physical intervention strategy and the Registered Manager for the children's home is a qualified trainer. This enables The Shires to offer refresher training and top up training on a very regular basis. Additionally, the Registered Manager is able to monitor the use of physical interventions on a daily basis and to ensure that staff are following agreed protocols.

The Shires has recently started working towards National Autistic Society accreditation. This process engages all staff in regular training about autism and supports them in looking at different ways of helping the young people to manage their condition.

During annual performance management reviews, staff identify with their line manager the next stage of training they should pursue to ensure they are constantly developing their skills, knowledge and understanding about their role. Staff are encouraged to complete accredited courses and currently several staff are enrolled on a Masters programme in autism.

On an ongoing basis staff receive training in the management of challenging behaviour from the therapy team. Staff are able to discuss any specific difficulties with the clinical psychologist who helps them to develop new programmes or approaches.

Both the Speech and Language Therapist and Occupational Therapist support staff through training in the implementation of communication and sensory programmes. The therapists work with individual staff to improve their levels of competence and understanding and also regularly deliver whole-staff training events so that staff are aware of the difficulties that youngsters with autism may face on a daily basis.

How will my young person be included in activities outside the classroom including school trips?

Off-site activities form a significant part of the curriculum for all young people. In addition to extending their knowledge and understanding, off-site activities provide opportunity for the young people to develop and practice their social skills, and for them to manage new experiences.

Young people spend Wednesdays off-site, visiting places of educational interest such as museums, aquaria, houses and gardens. Rutland Water is easily accessible to The Shires and provides a wealth of opportunity for the young people to study natural habitats and to enjoy the freedom of being outdoors in a beautiful location. During the summer months there are weekly visits to the local seaside where young people can engage in beach sports, collect shells, build sandcastles and moats and generally experience the seaside environment.

On a regular basis all young people are encouraged to access restaurants and café environments so that they are confident about eating and drinking in public places and so they learn the social conventions of selecting and buying snacks and meals. Young people use the means of communication with which they are most proficient so that they can independently make choices. High staff ratios ensure that the young people are individually supported so they can make their views understood.

The Shires encourages older students to engage in work placements. These placements are carefully chosen so that they are closely matched to the needs of the individual. One of the more able young people has recently completed his first year working one day a week in a nearby superstore. This very positive experience has given him the confidence to seek a part-time job at weekends, and has proved to him that he is capable of having a job despite the difficulties he experiences because of his autism.

All off-site activities are planned and prepared well in advance. Risk assessments are undertaken for each location and for each of the young people. Staff evaluate all off-site activities and provide feedback about how each young person responded to the experience, and whether activities are worth repeating at a later date.



How accessible is the school environment?

The Shires has a three year rolling accessibility plan which is updated and reviewed annually and which seeks to identify ways in which the learning environment and resources can be continuously improved. The school is a listed building and this limits the changes that can be made to its fabric. Whilst some parts of the building and grounds are easily accessible to wheelchair users, other parts, such as the upstairs classrooms are only accessible via stairs.

The Shires is situated close to a main A road and is very easy to access by car. It is close to mainline railway stations but is not easily accessible by bus.

Where parents or carers do not have English as their first language we seek to engage with interpretation services and would commission these from local authority approved providers.

How will the school prepare and support my young person to join the school, transfer to college or the next stage of education and life?

Prior to joining The Shires, staff complete a comprehensive pre-admission questionnaire with parents/carers and, where possible, with staff from the previous placement. This pre-admission information is used to inform both the individual education plan and the care plan for youngsters who are residential.

Parents and carers are encouraged to visit The Shires at least once before a young person commences his/her placement. Where possible the young person is also encouraged to visit so that he/she can start to become familiar with the building and staff. All new youngsters are given a guide to the school which is presented in the way most easily accessible to them. Transition for new starters takes varying periods of time depending on the needs of individuals. In most cases young people start on a short week which is increased over a three week period until they feel confident about attending on a full-time basis.

The annual review provides valuable opportunity to discuss the young person's transition to the next stage of his/her education, or transition to the workplace environment. The young person's views are very much at the heart of any discussion about future plans. Careers guidance is offered as part of the curriculum and is an important support for the young person. Those students who are able enjoy periods of work placement.



How are the school's resources allocated and matched to young people's special educational needs?

The most valuable resource in The Shires is its staff team. Recruiting procedures are rigorous and robust to ensure that the young people are taught and cared for by staff who have the necessary skills and attributes. Staff ratios are high so that the young people's individual needs can be fully met. Staff are highly trained so that their interactions with the young people impact positively on the youngsters' learning, well-being and happiness. Staff are carefully matched to individual students to ensure that the best possible outcomes can be achieved by the young people.

The Shires provides an autism friendly learning environment that takes account of the fact that many young people who have autism can suffer from sensory overload. Careful consideration is given to the layout of classrooms and to the way in which young people are grouped. Learning resources are robust, attractive, and fit for purpose. Wherever possible resources are age appropriate, and appealing to individual students in terms of their particular interests.

Specific resources such as therapy input are allocated on the basis of individual need.

How is the decision made about what type and how much support my child will receive?

The decision about the nature, level and frequency of support provided for the young people at The Shires is largely determined by their Education, Health and Care Plan. The needs of the young people are articulated in their individual education plan and are met through the curriculum, and the programmes designed for them by the therapy team.

Throughout their time at The Shires there may well be periods when the young people need additional support perhaps on a short term basis. For example, a young person who is due to have a minor operation under anaesthetic would almost certainly need support before, during and after the event. The level and type of support would depend on the individual young person and would be bespoke to meet his/her specific needs.

On occasions when staff believe that a young person would benefit from additional or targeted support, perhaps in managing a new behaviour, contact would be made with the parents to discuss the matter and to agree a suggested way forward. Wherever possible The Shires would aim to work in partnership with parents to achieve the best outcomes for the young people.



How are parents involved in the school? How can I be involved?

Parents and carers are viewed very much as partners in the education of their children. The Shires does what it can to involve parents in activities, to keep them informed, and to share decisions about their children's education and care.

All parents and carers are fully involved in the process of setting targets for development and in monitoring the progress of their children. There are regular formal opportunities throughout the year for parents and carers to meet with their child's teachers including termly individual education plan reviews, and annual reviews. Reports of young people's progress are sent out to parents three times per year. Additionally parents or carers may contact the school staff at any time to discuss aspects of their children's education or to share any concerns.

About one quarter of the young people who attend The Shires are day students. These students travel daily from home and spend all of their holiday periods with their parents or carers. The Shires sends home daily diaries to the parents/carers of day students and encourages parents/carers to contribute to the diary on a daily basis so that a whole picture can be built up about the young person's behaviour and learning across both the home and school settings.

Those young people who are placed at The Shires on a residential basis have regular contact with their parents and are encouraged to share their news by phone, email or letter where appropriate. Staff in the care and education settings have regular telephone and email contact with parents of residential students and parents are able to visit whenever they wish and to maintain as much contact with their children as they wish.

Parents are asked to support the school and the young people through their attendance at formal occasions such as reviews, and informal occasions such as the annual sports day and Christmas production. They are also asked to complete feedback questionnaires on a regular basis so that The Shires can continue to improve its provision and the ways in which it works in partnership with parents.





Who can I contact for further information?

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