Welcome to Portfield School
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Portfield School
Portfield School Prospectus

Portfield School is a Non-Maintained Special School in Christchurch, Dorset. It was founded in 1971 by The Wessex Autistic Society to meet the needs of students on the autism spectrum.

Students aged from three to nineteen attend the school on a daily basis or as boarders.

We hope you will find this prospectus helpful in providing you with information about the school, and that it fulfils its purpose of enabling parents and professionals to gain an insight into the education and care we offer.

We know that this prospectus probably cannot answer all your questions, and you are therefore most welcome to contact the school for further information.

In addition, if you feel a visit to the school would be helpful, then please arrange an appointment through the school office by phoning 01202 573808.

We look forward to welcoming you to our happy, vibrant and innovative school.
At Portfield School we aim to provide and promote:

- **P**ersonalised education and care.
- **O**pportunities to achieve.
- **R**espect for all.
- **T**eam work.
- **F**amily support.
- **I**ndependence.
- **E**nriching environments.
- **L**ife skills.
- **D**iet and healthy living.
- **S**ocial experiences.
- **C**ommunication for all.
- **H**appiness.
- **O**ngoing assessment.
- **O**penness and honesty.
- **L**eisure activities.

Portfield School aims to provide education tailored to individuals’ skills as well as their needs, and each student’s personal curriculum to reflect their ability, not just their disability. In a context of security, enjoyment and respect, prepare young people to enter adulthood equipped to maximise their independence and quality of life and to engage in their communities as active citizens.
Underlying Principles
Autism affects three key areas of the developmental process and results in students with autism experiencing difficulties in their ability
to communicate
to socialise
to use their imagination or think flexibly.

At Portfield we recognise that all our students have a combination of difficulties within these three areas and that many also have additional sensory difficulties. Our focus, therefore, is to understand how these difficulties affect each individual student and impact on his or her learning needs.

The Wessex Autistic Society
Portfield School is administered by the Wessex Autistic Society, which was founded in 1968 by parents of children with autism.

The Society is a registered charity (no. 1000792) and is governed by a voluntary and unpaid board of directors. Membership is open to everyone.

The Society is committed to offering a range of services for children and adults on the autism spectrum, including Asperger's Syndrome. It also offers emotional and practical support to families and carers.

The Wessex Autistic Society is based at Bargates Court, 22 Bargates, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 1QL. Telephone: 01202 483360.

The Chair of the Board of Directors for The Wessex Autistic Society is Mary Claire Boyd.

The Chair of the Portfield School Governing Body is Paul McGee.

All can be contacted at any time at the Bargates Court address. Find out more. Go to: twas.org.uk
The majority of students at Portfield are diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum.

**Autism**
- severely impairs a student’s ability to communicate
- think flexibly
- use his or her senses to understand the world
- express their feelings
- use his or her imagination

*It is three to four times more common in boys than girls.*

Most students have a learning difficulty – often a severe one.

Some have normal intellectual functioning but find it difficult to work to their full potential because of their autism.

Many are not able to communicate using language.

They are all aged between three and nineteen.

Some are day students. Some are residential.

Autism – severely impairs a student’s ability to communicate – think flexibly – use his or her senses to understand the world – express their feelings – use his or her imagination

It is three to four times more common in boys than girls.
Students who have English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Although all the students who attend Portfield School have difficulties with language and communication, the school recognises that students for whom English is an additional language may experience further problems in this area.

The autism friendly environment within the school serves to support such students not only with the difficulties they are experiencing in relation to their autism but also those related to having English as an additional language.

The safe, secure environment encourages students to feel confident.

The clear, concise language used by staff, including visual cues such as photographs, signs and symbols, helps with the development and understanding of English language and communication skills.

The high staff to student ratio enables students to receive focused support in order to ensure they have full access to the curriculum.

If necessary, the school is able to liaise closely with the local education authority in order to access specialised support for EAL students.

The school endeavours to cater for individual dietary and religious requirements and staff fully appreciate, respect and make use of the knowledge, culture and language of an EAL student and of the student’s family.

The school is keen to support parents who have English as an additional language in being actively involved in their child’s education. This includes taking an active part in important meetings such as the annual reviews. If necessary, the school will seek to provide an interpreter, either a family member or a professional sourced through social services or the local education authority.
Our Staff

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All the teachers at Portfield have specialist training in approaches which support students with autism.

In addition to our qualified teachers we employ teaching assistants. This means that, in every class, there are at least four adults working with seven students, usually more.

There is an occupational therapist who helps the students to perform tasks in their daily living and working environments and develop their sensory awareness.

There are two speech and language therapists who help students who have difficulties with communication, or with eating, drinking or swallowing.

There is a Behaviour Specialist who helps understand and respond to behavioural issues.

Everyone who works with students at Portfield is committed to continuing professional development so that they can constantly update their skills and understanding.

"Teachers have extensive specialist knowledge and experience of working with autistic students, and this is supplemented effectively by expert professional development and appropriate outside agencies. Outstanding features of the learning activities include the very strong focus on addressing individual students’ social and emotional needs. As a result, staff demonstrate exemplary practice in engaging students in their learning and are endlessly flexible in adapting to the sensory, social and emotional requirements and challenges of each individual.” (Ofsted report on Portfield School, May 2009.)
Specially for students with autism
We employ autism specific teaching techniques. These techniques are supported by the school’s stable, structured and caring environment where students can feel emotionally secure and supported. Staff receive training in:-

**PECS**
One of these techniques is PECS – the Picture Exchange Communication System. It works like this, when a student reaches for something they want, a picture is introduced in between the student and the object or activity they are reaching for. When the student then gives the adult the picture, the adult immediately gives them the thing – or activity – they want. The process starts with very simple requests and develops to embrace complex sentences – in pictures and/or words.

**TEACCH**
Another technique which works well for students with autism is TEACCH, which stands for Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children. The main goal of TEACCH for students on the spectrum is to help them achieve independence. This provides them with a structure which enables them to understand the world around them, acquire communication skills that will enable them to relate to other people, and give them, as far as possible, the necessary competence to be able to make choices concerning their own lives. The TEACCH approach achieves this by focusing on each student as an individual and developing a programme around their own individual skills, interests and needs.

**Signalong**
Signalong is a language programme which uses signs and symbols for the teaching of communication, language and literacy skills.

**Sensory Integration**
Many of our students experience sensory integration difficulties, this means that at times they may find certain sounds, sights, tastes, touches, smells and movements frightening or painful whereas, at other times they may appear not to be using these senses at all. The problem is with how the brain is interpreting and organising the signals it is receiving from the senses. We are very pro-active in helping and supporting our students with these difficulties. All classrooms have sensory equipment such as ear defenders and chewy toys available, many of the students have a ‘sensory diet’ which is drawn up by the Occupational Therapist and teachers employ aspects of the ALERT programme throughout the day to help students learn about and manage their own levels of sensory input.

**Intensive Interaction**
Intensive interaction is used to develop early communication and interaction skills. This involves using a range of one to one interactive games to enable the student and the teacher to focus on each other. It is student led rather than teacher led with the emphasis being of enjoyment and pleasure so that the student is encouraged to want to take part in the activity again.

The school uses these and other approaches in providing an holistic approach to student needs.

“I have never worked with such a passionate, professional team. Everyone supports and encourages you.”
The main school is purpose built and is an exciting, innovative design.

It is colourful, airy, calm and very well resourced.

A key feature of the design is the central playground courtyard. It allows the students to be safe and seen at all times.

On the campus there are four purpose built eight-bedroom residential bungalows.

Some older students access an educational ‘lifeskills’ centre in the centre of Christchurch and a four-bed residential house situated nearby.
History
The original Portfield School was founded in 1971. The new main school building was opened in 2002 by the Princess Royal, HRH Princess Anne.

The learning zone
Within the main school the curriculum is delivered in a variety of settings including bright, airy classrooms and specialist rooms such as:
- Main hall.
- Science lab.
- Food technology room.
- Art and design room.
- Soft play room.
- Communication therapy room.
- Information technology suite.
- Library.
- Sensory room.

Life skills department for older students
The school’s life skills department for some students aged from 14 to 19 is located approximately five miles away from the main school in Christchurch.

Residential accommodation
Each of the residential bungalows has facilities for up to eight students. The Residential unit in Christchurch has four bedrooms for older students.

The Friends of Portfield School
The school is supported by The Friends of Portfield School – FoPs – who raise funds to buy equipment and support the School in a number of different ways. The Friends’ group is made up of staff, parents, family members and others who have a genuine interest in the school.

It is a registered charity, no. 262877.
How the school is organised

The School has five main departments: Lower School, Middle School, Upper School, Senior School and the ‘Lifeskills’ provision.

The main school at Parley has four colour coded wings. The Lower and Middle School departments are situated in Red Wing and consist of two class groups each.

The Upper and Senior School departments are situated in Blue Wing and also consist of two class groups each.

The Lifeskills provision is situated in a separate building in the centre of Christchurch approximately five miles from the main school and has up to 16 students.

Each class is able to cater for up to eight students, although six or seven is the norm.
How students are grouped
Students have a registration group which is, as far as possible, based on their age. However, throughout the school day the majority of students work in ability groups across the two classes in each of the five school departments. Ability groups are determined by the academic levels, communication system and learning styles of the individual students.

Balancing independent working with group working
Within all classes and ability groups staff endeavour to ensure there is a balance between individual working and group working and that each lesson provides opportunities for students to address their sensory needs, to practise and develop their communication skills, their social interactions and their flexible thinking skills in addition to their academic understanding.

Students are given as much or as little support as they need and, if a student is unable to complete a task independently, staff may help him or her, perhaps by using a physical or verbal prompt which is gradually faded out over a period of time.

Community Education and Inclusion
The school operates a number of vehicles which enable us to provide students with educational opportunities outside the school. These include horse riding therapy, shopping and curriculum based visits.

The school has established strong links with the local community and with various facilities in the area.

Where appropriate, students are also able to access inclusion opportunities within an appropriate mainstream setting. This may take one of many forms ranging from a whole class accessing a facility such as a gym or a canteen to pairs of students or individuals attending specific lessons for part of a day, for a whole day or for part of a week. All such opportunities are carefully planned to ensure that the students and the receiving schools are provided with support and guidance from a member of staff from Portfield School.

Most important of all, the personal touch
When delivering the curriculum our focus is very much on the individual. We assess the strengths and needs of each student, and address them through individual education / care programmes. These are devised by class teachers with the support of classroom staff and in full consultation with families, carers and, where appropriate, residential staff. Each student is also given emotional support and understanding in order to ensure they feel happy and secure and, therefore, able to learn. This is further supported by the use of visual timetables and clearly defined area within the classroom, a highly structured environment which the students find reassuringly predictable. This helps them to feel safe and decreases their anxiety which, in turn, helps them to cope better with daily life. The level of structure provided for each student varies according to his or her individual abilities and needs.
All Portfield School students access an autism specific curriculum integrated with a broad and balanced academic curriculum which is based on the National Curriculum.

The autism specific curriculum
This has a strong focus on developing independence and self help skills and uses approaches such as TEACCH, PECS and the ALERT programme to develop individual skills in the three areas of difficulty associated with having autism along with those associated with having sensory and behaviour difficulties.

All classrooms are structured to provide both group and individual learning and all students have an individual visual timetable.

Communication is encouraged by providing a total communication environment through the use of modified speech, PECS, signing, symbols and writing.

Planned changes and problem solving situations are worked into daily schedules so that students can begin to think in a more flexible way.

Progress in this aspect of the curriculum is monitored through Individual Education Programmes (IEP’s) and the annual review process.

The academic curriculum
The majority of students are working at an academic level that is below National Curriculum level 1. This means they are working within what are commonly known as ‘P’ levels. Students work in ability groups for the majority of subjects and are able to move between groups depending on their particular academic strengths or needs. Each student has an individual target to achieve in each subject. Progress in this aspect of the curriculum is monitored through ‘P’ level assessments and the end of year reports.

The school’s curriculum is dynamic and is continually revised and updated to ensure it meets the needs of all students.
Early Years
Our Early Years students are placed within the lower school and access the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum which has six areas of focus:
Personal, social and emotional development
Communication, language and literacy
Mathematical development
Knowledge and understanding of the world
Physical development
Creative development.

The student is then supported in using a range of communication systems, including the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), signing, speaking, writing and reading.

Lower and Middle School
The curriculum for students in our Lower and Middle School is based on the National Curriculum. Each student follows a programme of study drawn as appropriate from the following subject areas:
- English.
- Mathematics.
- Science.
- Information and Communication Technology.
- Design and Technology.
- Physical Education.
- Music.
- Art.
- History.
- Geography.

Programmes of study are tailored specifically to address individual ability levels and enable students to achieve appropriate goals and progress in their learning.

Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE)
All students are taught personal, social and health education skills. Teachers create opportunities throughout the school day to encourage skills such as hand washing and appropriate table manners. Other subjects such as healthy eating and caring for clothes are taught through carefully planned lessons.

Sex and Relationships Education
Sex and relationships education is taught through the PSHE curriculum and through the science curriculum. It is also taught on an individual basis according to the needs of the individual student. In close consultation with families, older students are helped to understand the changes they experience on reaching puberty.

Religious Education
Red wing and Blue wing hold their own ‘proud’ assembly each week where students are able to celebrate their own and others’ achievements, develop a sense of self awareness and self worth and learn about other religions and cultures.

Opportunities throughout the school day are used to teach students concepts such as right and wrong and mutual respect. Students celebrate Christmas by staging a show for families and friends.

Parents have the right to withdraw their child from sex and relationships education and also from religious education.
The curriculum has a vocational and life skills emphasis for students aged 15 to 19 as the school prepares them to be as independent as possible.

They continue to work on their academic skills, alongside a number of practical activities such as work experience and meal planning and preparation.

Careers guidance and counselling is provided by the local Connexions service.

All students study for and gain certificates in the externally accredited ASDAN Towards Independence element of the National Youth Award Scheme, along with AQA units.
Advice and guidance for students and families
The Wessex Autistic Society provides an information and advice service.

The service can provide advice, information and assistance on a wide range of subjects for families and young people with autistic spectrum disorders including:
- Health Issues.
- Benefits – including Educational Maintenance Allowance and Incapacity Benefit, both available for students aged 16 or older.
- Employment services.

The Information and Advice Service can be contacted at:
The Wessex Autistic Society
South Grove Cottage
Trinity Street
Dorchester
DT1 1TU

Tel:01305 213135
E-mail: advice@twas.org.uk
Website: www.twas.org.uk/advice

To date all students leaving our Lifeskills provision have accessed appropriate adult services. These take a variety of forms, including:
- The Wessex Autistic Society Adult Services.
- Specialist residential colleges.
- Part-time courses for students with SEN at local mainstream colleges.

Transition to post-19
The process for transition to post-19 provision begins when our students are 14 and forms part of the annual review meeting each year after that.

Staff are happy to accompany parents on visits to potential post-19 placements.
The boarding houses provide a safe, homely environment with a caring and supportive atmosphere.

Up to thirty-six of our students board at the school.

Every boarder has their own bedroom.

Parents are always very welcome to come and visit and share in the care of their child.
The School offers a range of flexible boarding options from 39 to 52 weeks.

The boarding houses
There are four purpose built boarding houses adjacent to the main school building at Parley Lane, each of which can accommodate up to eight students. There is additional residential boarding for those attending our Lifeskills.

Looking after the students
24 hours a day
Every student has an individual care plan and their own key worker, who liaises closely with parents and carers.

The welfare and continuing education of our students outside school hours is organised by a team of residential support workers under the supervision of the residential services manager.

All the support workers spend time supporting students in the classroom during the school day. This enables the residential team and the educational team to work closely together and ensures there is a consistent approach across the 24 hour curriculum. A team of waking night staff and sleep-in staff ensure that our boarders are closely supported and actively cared for 24 hours a day.

Outside school hours the focus of the curriculum is on self-help skills and independence.

Busy and fun
They also experience a number of leisure activities which make life as a boarder busy and fun. These activities include regular visits to cinemas, bowling alleys and theme parks. They also include bike rides, walks in the local country parks and visits to places of local interest such as the beaches and the New Forest.

The residential environment
The boarding houses aim to provide a safe, homely environment with a caring and supportive atmosphere. Each has a shared living area consisting of a living room, a dining room, a kitchen and a spacious play room, along with single bedrooms that enable each student to have their own personal space which they are encouraged to personalise. Bath, shower and toilet facilities are located near to the bedrooms.

Parents welcome!
Parents are always very welcome to come and visit and share in the care of their child. Students are encouraged to keep in close touch by phone, letter and email.
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Portfield students learn to fill their leisure time with purposeful activity.

There are regular visits to the local leisure centre to go trampolining and use the gym,

horse riding therapy at the Fortune Riding Centre,

trips to local parks and indoor fun centres,

visits to shops and supermarkets,

walks in the New Forest and on the local beaches,

cycling and bowling,

visiting local cafes and restaurants,

curriculum focused visits to museums and sites of interest.
Closely monitoring progress

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Teachers and residential key workers keep continuous written records of each student’s progress and achievements.

This allows the school and parents to evaluate a student’s progress in relation to the targets outlined in their Statement of Special Educational Needs.

These records are used as the basis for planning a student’s individual education and care plan (IEP) and Annual Review of the Statement of Special Educational Needs.
Academic Performance Data
The students at Portfield School are assessed using ‘PIVATS’ and the school’s own in-house breakdown of ‘P’ levels. Older students also undertake externally accredited awards within ASDAN and AQA unit award schemes. If you would like to know the current achievements within the ‘P’ levels and the award schemes then please contact the Head Teacher at the School.

Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) is also assessed through ‘Pathways to Independence’.

These records enable the school and parents to evaluate a student’s progress in relation to the targets outlined in their Statement of Special Educational Needs. They also enable OFSTED to evaluate the quality of teaching and pastoral care.

These records are used as the basis for planning a student’s individual education / care plan (IEP), which sets Specific, Manageable, Assessable, Realistic, Time-specific or SMART targets for academic achievement and for developing skills in the areas of difficulty associated with autism. The IEP is revised at least three times a year and new long term targets are set annually.

Data relating to incidents of behaviour is also collected and analysed to identify patterns, areas of improvement and areas of concern.

Annual Review
The school’s Annual Review procedures take full account of the requirements detailed in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES 2001). Each student’s Statement of Special Educational Needs is reviewed annually. A written review of progress – the Annual Review report – is circulated to parents and all professionals in advance of the meeting. The student and his or her parents are also invited to make a written contribution.

The professionals involved with the student, together with school staff, parents and, where appropriate, the student, are invited to attend the Annual Review meeting where full account is taken of the views and feelings of parents in finalising arrangements and making recommendations for the student’s educational provision for the coming 12 months.

An Annual Review which takes place in the academic year in which a student turns fourteen includes a Transition Plan that outlines proposed strategies and educational provision for the student post-16, and arrangements for making the transition from school to the adult world.
At Portfield we know that students with autism often experience frustration and anxiety which may lead to difficult or challenging behaviour.

When it comes to behaviour our approach is proactive and supported by our Behaviour Specialist.

We try to establish what the student is trying to tell us and help them find a more appropriate way of saying it.

Ours is an autism friendly environment. There are quiet areas next to the classrooms which enable students to remove themselves from the source of their distress and regain self control.

We let students know that we are on their side. We praise and reward good behaviour. We tell the students what we want them to do, not what we want them to stop doing.

The students start each day with an exercise session and then have small exercise routines throughout the day.

We also use special equipment such as wobble seats, rocking chairs and Velcro waistcoats known as bear hugs so that the students can get the stimulation they need whenever they need it.

Many of the staff use a multi-sensory approach when communicating.
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**Challenging behaviour**

The many difficulties experienced by students with autism often lead to frustration and anxiety which can result in incidents of challenging behaviour. This behaviour can take many forms and includes hitting, kicking, hair pulling, throwing objects, self-injurious behaviour, swearing, obsessive, repetitive actions and withdrawing.

We take pride in being pro-active in preventing such behaviour from occurring. We consider such behaviour to be an intrinsic part of the students’ make up and regard it as an attempt to communicate something to us: “I’m hungry”, “I’m in pain”, “I don’t like that smell”, “Go away”, “I don’t understand”. Our approach is never to regulate such behaviour by the use of corrective methods. Instead we try to establish what they are trying to tell us and support them in developing a more appropriate method of saying it.

We recognise that our students are dealing with very high levels of anxiety throughout their day. We try to reduce this anxiety by providing an environment which enables communication, and is structured and predictable. We support our students in learning how to recognise when they are reaching a crisis point. We teach them self management strategies to use in such a situation. We provide quiet areas adjacent to the classrooms which enable us, over a period of time, to teach students that it is okay to remove themselves from the source of their distress, regain self control and return to the class when they are ready. In addition, we teach students relaxation techniques.

The use of sanctions is extremely rare in school. Instead, we let students know that we are on their side and use a positive approach whereby we reward and praise good behaviour and use positive language, telling the students what we want them to do, not what we want them to stop doing: “Good walking” instead of “Stop running”, “Good sitting, hands down” instead of “Don’t push”.

**Behaviour Management Policy**

On the occasions when our pro-active support has not been sufficient and an incident of challenging behaviour does occur, we use positive behaviour management strategies which include, if necessary the use of physical interventions. All staff are trained in the use of ‘Team Teach’ which is only ever used as a last resort in order to prevent a student injuring themselves or others.

In the event of a student experiencing a number of challenging incidents over a period of time the Behaviour Support Specialist will co-ordinate a behaviour support meeting. At the meeting possible reasons for the behaviour are discussed and a behaviour support plan drawn up which details the proactive and reactive strategies to be used. This ensures there is a consistent approach to the behaviour by all staff. The plan is reviewed on a regular basis and amended as necessary in order to ensure it continues to be effective in reducing the number of challenging incidents. The ultimate aim is that, in time, the plan should no longer be necessary.

*The School’s Behaviour Management Policy is available on request from the School office.*
In partnership with Parents and carers

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We believe that it is essential to work in close partnership with parents and carers.

“The spirit, energy innovative ideas and never say never attitude, is a complete inspiration, and our child has simply flourished and grown in every area of development without exception. The incredible team at Portfield has completely transformed our son...The staff have been able to successfully stimulate, awaken, and build on our son’s social skills, in such depth that it is difficult to find adequate words to describe the gratitude and appreciation that we feel.

He wakes up in the morning with a smile on his face and cannot wait to get to school, his life and consequently all our lives have been positively impacted because of miraculous results achieved by Portfield School, and we fully commend this placement.”

(Parent)

Only by working closely together can we provide the best possible education and care for your child.

We want our students to take the skills they have learned home with them.

Communication between home and school is regular, clear and informative. Response is immediate.
All students have an individualised home–school book for daily and weekly correspondence.

Staff working with residential students make weekly phone calls home.

There is a termly newsletter to keep parents and carers up-to-date with everything that is happening at school.

Parents and carers are encouraged to phone the school at any time to discuss issues or concerns, or to make an appointment to visit the school and talk to staff about their child.

Parents and carers are invited to attend regular parents’ evenings each year as well as the Annual Review meeting for their child.

Staff are always willing to visit the homes of students in order to provide support and guidance to parents and carers on issues such as difficult behaviour and communication systems.

There are regular social events organised by the Friends of Portfield School. These enable staff to meet parents and carers on a less formal basis as well as providing opportunities for parents and carers to meet each other.

Other services from the Wessex Autistic Society
The Wessex Autistic Society is able to offer a range of services to parents and carers of children with autism. These services regularly work in partnership with the school to provide additional support for families.

Community based short breaks
The Community Support Service is based at Christchurch and Dorchester and provides experienced staff who are able to work with children in the home and in the community.

Many families, some with children at Portfield School and some with children who attend other schools, make use of the Community Support Service. It offers respite for families either by taking the child into the community, or by supporting them at home. This enables the remaining family members to have quality time together.

The service is also able to offer parents and carers advice and support on issues that they may be experiencing within the home such as challenging behaviour, toileting, sleeping, and eating problems.

Short breaks at Wessex Lodge
The Society operates Wessex Lodge, which provides overnight short breaks for children and families.

Contact Wessex Lodge Registered Manager Paula Harvey-Gorbut on Tel: (01202) 331556.

These services can be contacted by telephoning the school.
Portfield School provides education for up to 70 students aged from 3 to 19.

It can provide residential accommodation for up to 36 students.

All students who attend the school have a Statement of Special Educational Needs and the majority are diagnosed as having autism.

If you feel that Portfield School might be right for your child, you are invited to telephone the school – 01202 573808 – and make an appointment to come and look round, and discuss the school’s approaches to education and care.

You should make an application for a place through your Local Educational Authority (LEA).
If you believe Portfield School is able to meet your child’s needs, we are happy to carry out an informal assessment either at your child’s school or at home, in order to confirm that we can.

Exclusions
Exclusions can take the form of a fixed term temporary exclusion or a permanent exclusion. Both are extremely rare at Portfield School.

If this assessment indicates that Portfield School would be able to meet your child’s needs then a place will be offered based on the following criteria:

1. Agreement from the LEA that they are willing to fund the placement.
2. The age and gender of the child, and whether there is room in a class, and, where appropriate, a residential house, with students of a similar age.
3. The match of learning styles with existing students.
4. The match of behaviours with those of existing students.

When a place becomes available and more than one student has been referred to the school by the Local Education Authority, the school’s Senior Management Team will make a choice based on the above criteria and in consultation with relevant staff.

In the event of Portfield School being identified as able to meet the needs of a student but unable to offer a suitable placement, the referral and assessment may be kept on file with a view to a placement being offered in the future.

If a student is presenting as a danger to other students, to staff or to themselves, the school will put in to action the strategies outlined in its behaviour management policy and ensure that all necessary steps have been taken to give the student the input and support he or she needs.

If, despite having provided additional input and support, the school feels that it is no longer able to meet the needs of a student, or that the quality of life being experienced by the student when at school is not acceptable then exclusion may be considered in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the student, other students and staff.

A fixed term exclusion may be used to allow the school to put in place further support and staffing. A permanent exclusion would only be used as a last resort and only after all other strategies to keep the student in school had been considered.

The school does not use exclusion as a means of punishing a student but would make a decision to exclude based on risk to others.

Complaints procedure
The school’s formal complaints procedure gives details of how parents and carers can make a formal complaint to the school. It is available on request from the school office. Parents and carers of students who are new to the school are sent details of the complaints procedure as part of the New Student Pack. Details of the number of formal complaints received by the school over the last school year are available from the head teacher.
Portfield School is situated in Dorset five miles from the centre of Christchurch.

**By road**, the postcode you need for your satellite navigation is BH23 6BP.

If you prefer a map, here is one …

**By rail** the nearest stations are Christchurch and Bournemouth.

**By air** we are situated close to Bournemouth International Airport.

If you are on your way to see us and you want to ring – if you are running late, the number is 01202 573808.
Parents can request the details of the number of staff employed at the school (including temporary staff) and their qualifications.

**Key staff members**

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- **Director of Portfield School**: Andrew Thomas
- **Head of Residential Services**: Lisa Jolliffe
- **Speech and Language Therapist**: Gemma Balcock/Jacqueline Lopez
- **Occational Therapist**: Rhiannon Beer
- **Behaviour Specialist**: Laura Lovell
- **School Nurse**: Katie Gibbons
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Dorset  BH23 6BP

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Portfield School is a residential school offering a specialist service for up to 36 children aged 5-19 years with an autistic spectrum disorder and associated disabilities. It is recognised that the children have a combination of difficulties within the areas of communication, social skills and their ability to use their imagination or think flexibly. They may also have sensory difficulties. Our focus therefore, is to understand how these difficulties affect each individual child and impact upon different aspects of their lives. In addition, most students have a learning disability, often severe.

The school operates flexible boarding packages to meet the needs of individuals.

The children’s home is situated on the main Portfield School site at; Parley Lane, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 6BP and is administered by The Wessex Autistic Society, Bargates Court, 22 Bargates, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 1QL.

The Registered Manager and Head of Residential Services is Lisa Jolliffe, DipSW, RMA, NVQ4 Child Care Management.

The aims and objectives of the children’s home is to provide and promote needs led education and care and skills for life through building on student strengths, recognise their achievements and promoting independence all underpinned by the following Core Values which are at the forefront of all decision making and service delivery:

- To conduct our relationships with integrity and respect,
- To promote individual development, empowerment and quality of life,
- To promote high quality, professional and needs led services,
- To promote equal opportunities.

We believe that every student needs a safe, enriching environment and the continuity of positive relationships. All students need to feel supported, empowered, valued and respected to ensure their individual sense of self-worth is developed and maintained. We believe only the best practice and the highest standards of care are good enough for the young people we support.

The children’s homes, including the off site satellite unit based in Christchurch town is managed by the Head and Assistant Head of Residential Services with support from identified deputy managers based in each of the five homes. A specifically identified member of staff is responsible for leading each shift.

Each home is designed and equipped to cater for up to eight students however significant consideration is given to ensure positive outcomes for students living in larger groups is consistently maintained, this often results in less than eight children residing in the home. The students in each of the homes are of mixed age, sex and ability and are matched in order to provide, as far as possible an environment in which they will learn and develop positive relationships with their peers. The homes offer a modern, safe and homely environment with a caring and supportive atmosphere. Each student has their own bedroom which they are encouraged to personalise and have communal use of the kitchen, lounge, bathrooms, recreation and dining areas.
Children’s Home Statement of Purpose continued

**Admissions**
In order to be admitted to the children’s home, a student must fulfil the following criteria:
- They will have a diagnosis of autism or two or more related difficulties.
- Funding will have been agreed from a reliable body and confirmation of funding must be made in writing.
- The student’s parents or carers have visited the children’s home and agreed to the admissions procedures and policies.
- Representatives from the children’s home have visited the student in their current setting, observed their functioning and assessed suitability for the placement.
- The student has a statement of special educational needs indicating that provision such as that provided by the children’s home will meet their needs.
- Students are not admitted on an emergency basis.

**Be Healthy**
The children’s home benefits from an extended healthcare team to ensure that any health needs are attended to in a timely and professional manner. The extended team consists of a psychiatrist, educational psychologist, physiotherapist, play therapist, continence specialist, behaviour outreach service, community dental team, and a dietician. In-house health professionals make up the Specialist Support Team and consist of the following disciplines; Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Behaviour Support, Alternative Therapy and School Nurse. They work closely with the other professionals in order to ensure that all students have access to the appropriate support to ensure a healthy lifestyle is maintained and students are given broad opportunities to reach their full potential. In addition to the internal support and supervision process members of the specialist support team have access to external clinical supervisors. Each student is offered an annual paediatrician check-up in addition to the option of registering with the home’s General Practitioner.

**Stay Safe**
The welfare of students is a priority and we are proud of the positive relationship between staff and students. Male and female staff are carefully recruited to work within the homes from a cross-section of society and with varying amounts of experience in order to provide good role models to the students. The number of staff differs in each setting according to the number and needs of the students residing. It is required that all staff have an identified line manager to whom they are accountable. Monthly supervision is linked to an annual appraisal system that evaluates staff performance and development needs to maximise their contribution to the purpose of the service. An information sheet containing the experience and qualifications of all staff is available on request.

It is recognised that those providing services to students with autistic spectrum disorders require special skills and knowledge in specific areas. In addition to which, more general childcare skills and training are also considered an important addition to the development of staff and their ability to carry out their role in the paramount interests of the students. We are fully committed to staff development and training and exceed statutory requirements and service needs to ensure the highest standards of education and social care are provided to all those who use our services.

In addition to the welfare needs of the students, we endeavour to ensure that all students are able to develop in a supportive, caring and safe environment in which they can build trusting relationships and feel secure. We follow the Inter-Agency Safeguarding Procedures adopted by the local authorities within which we are located and adhere to statutory requirements and guidelines concerning the safeguarding of children including the recruitment, training and management of staff. We are committed to foster an ethos which; supports parents and carers and works in partnership with them, listens to and values students and maintains a safe environment for them, ensures all staff are aware of signs and symptoms of abuse, know the correct procedures for referring concerns or allegations and receive appropriate training enabling them to carry out these requirements, exercises their duty to work in partnership with other agencies and to share information with them in accordance with legislation.
Stay Safe continued

It is considered important to the students’ development that they are offered community based experiences. Due to the nature of their diagnosis, some students are vulnerable to putting themselves at risks and are unable to assess and manage them appropriately. This includes the risk of becoming a missing person. All students have a comprehensive risk assessment within their individual placement plans that identifies, amongst others, the risk of becoming missing and the necessary precautions that need to be undertaken to minimise the risk as far as reasonably possible. Whether in a community setting or the children’s home, in case of a missing person, the lead member of staff will follow the procedures identified in the policy manual.

Because of the nature of some students’ diagnosis, bullying is normally identified as part of a much wider pattern of behaviour. As a result, bullying behaviours are usually addressed through our behaviour management procedures rather than through the formal use of sanctions.

A pro-active approach to behaviour management is adopted but on occasion, it is necessary for the safety and welfare of individual students and their peers to adopt a degree of control and restraint. This is always undertaken within the context of positive handling strategies and a continuum of gradual and graded techniques. Where appropriate, the use of verbal non-physical de-escalation strategies are exhausted prior to the consideration of physical intervention which is only undertaken by suitably qualified staff. Regular behaviour meetings in consultation with parents, carers, and the in-house behaviour co-ordinator ensure that any physical interventions are agreed to be in the best interest of the student and monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

Fire precautions within each of the homes comply with current legislation and are monitored on a regular basis to ensure that they are in good working order. A process for recording faults is detailed in the fire log book which is located within each location. The emergency procedures are detailed within the fire log book and all staff are aware of the procedures and their individual responsibilities in the event of an emergency. Fire drills are undertaken with students and simulation drills are undertaken in the presence of a representative from the Fire Service.

Enjoy & Achieve

The students benefit from a curriculum which extends beyond their participation within the school setting. The extended curriculum acknowledges each student as an individual but share a common pattern of difficulties associated with having an autistic spectrum disorder. These fall within the five broad areas of social relationships, social communication, flexible thinking, sensory inputs and atypical behaviour. We view the extended curriculum as a range of organised experiences and activities designed to meet the individual needs of each student. We aim to provide students with a positive, safe and structured home-from-home learning environment which enriches the formal curriculum by offering a range of opportunities for individuals to generalise skills to other contexts, develop their independence and extend their leisure and social experiences. Within their bedroom, students have the option of furniture conducive to using their room for private study.

We adopt a range of different communication methods to assist the students to make choices and decisions about the activities they undertake and express their needs, wishes and feelings. It is acknowledged that some students may have English as an additional language. The clear, concise language used by staff include visual cues such as photographs, signs and symbols helps with the development and understanding of the English language and communication skills.
Children’s Home Statement of Purpose continued

Make a Positive Contribution
Students are given the option to attend or contribute towards statutory reviews, child-centred planning meetings and placement plan reviews that concern the care they receive. It is recognised that students develop and change and as a result, a constant process of monitoring and reviewing takes place. This is formalised through Individual Education Plans and welcomes input from parents, carers and professionals from relevant disciplines. Students are also encouraged, where possible to contribute towards the development and operation of the home. Each student is allocated a key-worker with whom they can discuss any concerns or suggestions which are then recorded for any action to be considered. Students also have the option of discussing issues with members of the governing body responsible for monitoring the home.

We have had positive feedback from parents and carers and pride ourselves in the relationships and partnership working that we have developed with them. Contact arrangements between parents and carers, staff and students are written in the student’s placement plans to ensure that contact and communication is maintained throughout.

Our policy in respect of Anti-Discriminatory Practice acknowledges that individuals or groups within society experience unfair discrimination as a result of prejudices and stereotyping pledges to eliminate this from its organisation and service delivery. In the event of Anti-Discriminatory Practice being identified, we strive to ensure that it is addressed at the earliest opportunity and addressed appropriately.

In striving for an excellent service, the home encourages a complaints procedure which is fair, transparent and offers the opportunity for learning. We have a policy detailing the arrangements for complaints and both the policy and related procedures meet the requirements of current legislation and guidelines.

Achieve Economic Well-being
In looking holistically at our students and not completely focusing upon their disability, we acknowledge that our students may have aspirations for the future and hopes and dreams of what they wish to do. This may be further education or employment. In both cases, we encourage and support students to fulfil their full potential.

We are committed to providing a broad range of learning experiences within a wide range of recreational activities. We appreciate the fact that some children and their families wish for them to follow particular religious or cultural instruction and observance. In both cases, students have the opportunity to learn about different religions and cultures through themed evenings and where identified full support to attend a place of worship or follow religious or cultural instruction or observance.

*Portfield School consistently strives for excellence in all aspects of care and education. We are a professional and skilled team dedicated to providing a child centred and needs led service.*