

## Creswell Junior School

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Headteacher: Mrs. A. Pymm  
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To Whom it May Concern,

I have had the privilege of working with Stephanie, at Riding for Smiles, for the past eighteen months and witnessing, first-hand, the positive effect the opportunity to participate in riding lessons has had on our society's most disadvantaged children, and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

We all know that interactions with animals can have a transformative effect on people: encouraging communication, social interactions and feelings of wellbeing. This impact can be particularly pronounced when it comes to children with special educational needs. My staff and I have observed the almost instantaneous feeling of calm wash over a child suffering from anxiety as they have stroked one of the many horses, formed a bond and then were able to ride them to Creswell Crags (a local heritage site).

To be able to offer a course of horse-riding lessons to our most disadvantaged children has meant we were able to open their eyes to the joys of interacting with animals and the benefits of outdoor pursuits. Over 50% of my children are eligible for free school meals, our school is situated in one of the most deprived areas in Derbyshire and to be able to offer groups of children the opportunity to learn to ride, at no cost to them or us, is truly remarkable. Without exception, every child who has participated in the Riding for Smiles program has loved their experience; they adore grooming the horses, cleaning out the stables and riding. Undoubtedly, each child has grown from their experience, whether they became calmer, more talkative, happier or more confident, their growth in confidence and mental well-being has been measurable and long-lasting.

Stephanie's structured approach to each course of lessons ensures that every child knows what to expect and also what is expected of them. We have offered several children with significant behavioural issues an opportunity to participate in this initiative, the expectations were made clear to them and they rose to the challenge – they did not wish to jeopardize their opportunity and their weekly horse-riding session.



We have also found that children who find communication difficult, are able to engage with their horse, they have gone on to develop skills which has helped with their day-to-day interactions, communication and cooperation.

In summary, to date, over thirty children from our school have been fortunate enough to experience the joy offered through Riding for Smiles. Anxieties have been alleviated, confidence raised, negative behaviours successfully addressed and the thrill of horse riding felt. We feel incredibly privileged, as a school, to have been offered these lessons and would encourage others to participate, should they be offered the opportunity; your children's lives will be richer for them.

Alison Pymm

Head Teacher

Creswell Junior School

