

Riding for Smiles

Report for ***** Primary School

July 2021

This school brought a group of Year 5 and 6 children who had a multitude of additional needs. Some pupils had school Individual Education Plans and diagnosed conditions but others were awaiting clarification. Difficulties ranged from ADHD, Autism, Anxiety, poor social skills and behavioural difficulties, lack of confidence and self-esteem, delayed learning, poor sleep patterns and physical illnesses.

At the stables they presented as a very polite and well behaved group who listened well and put in maximum application to all activities. They arrived at their first session excited but fairly nervous and quiet. They all followed instructions and mounted without fuss though one child was fairly apprehensive and frightened for the first few minutes. Once mounted and having taken a few steps he soon started to relax and was very proud of himself on returning to the yard.

This group had a combination of hacks out and riding lessons and each child was very determined as to which they preferred. They did, however, easily accept undertaking their least favourite option and understood the fairness of doing both. They were also able to vocalise and explain their preference. The ones who prefer lessons described how they like a challenge and to feel they have learned something new. The ones who preferred hacks talked about how they liked being able to look around at the countryside and how it helped them to relax. During lessons all the children tried very hard to perform the tasks asked of them and made good progress with riding skills. They remembered the aids for walking, stop, turn and trot and were able to hold the reins correctly. Over the course of the 6 weeks some had mastered the rising trot and the others were almost there. During hacks out this group were eager to transfer the skills they had learned

rather than simply sit on the horse and look around. They displayed good thinking skills and often asked questions relating to riding, such as how the bridle and bit worked in controlling a horse and how the horse moves 4 legs during the different paces. Some children in this group enjoyed trying out the practical aspect of moving 4 legs (using arms as legs) like a horse in trot and this cemented their understanding.

From the onset this group were very kind and thoughtful towards the horses and ponies and treated them with upmost respect, often commenting on how they must feel in certain situations and how things would affect them. They loved grooming the pony Jack and performed the task with purpose, sharing brushes and taking turns without prompting. When undertaking a task which was out of their comfort zone (e.g. poo collecting) they did so quietly and without fuss. During the activities the children engaged in detailed and informative conversation sharing knowledge and learning new things. This often related to incidental things, such as watching the swallows returning to their barn to feed their young and finding broken egg shells. Together the group shared facts and information in a respectful and informative way.

Riding for Smiles sessions was successful in delivering many outcomes for this group of children. Furthermore, at the end of the block of sessions the children themselves were able to understand and voice their own thoughts on how our provision had helped them. This centred mainly around emotional and empathy skills. They believed that the animal contact had helped them to relax as horses are able to sense the moods of humans. They also thought that interacting with and learning about horses had helped them to understand how to treat animals and not frighten them. They also believed that, by learning to read the horse's behaviour they have become more confident around them and other animals. The group also displayed pride in their new physical skills, how they had learned a new skill and

developed their muscles and flexibility. The children had clearly grown in confidence and self-esteem and were more willing to try something new. They had also developed language and conversation skills as well as the ability to work with others in a team. For one child, who has a physical health condition which severely restricts his out of school activities, and who needs the constant supervision of a support worker, our provision has given him a unique opportunity to take part in an enjoyable activity alongside his peers. This child has grown in positive motivation and self-belief, widening his horizons and enjoyment.

This group were very sad to come to the end of their block of sessions and politely thanked us for their opportunity and enjoyment.