

Riding for smiles

Report for Deprivation Group October 2021

This school brought a group of children, aged 8 and 9, with a variety of additional needs including poor attention, concentration and listening skills, hyperactivity, learning delay, poor social and language skills and low self-esteem and confidence. Most were in receipt of free school meals and Pupil Premium and had limited outlooks and opportunities. None had ever ridden or been near horses before and so the experience was entirely new to them. They arrived at the first session very nervous but excited. This manifested itself in exuberant chatting and poor listening to begin with. However, after going over the rules, explaining what was going to happen over the next few weeks and showing them around, they began to relax and quieten. By the end of the first session they were beginning to ask sensible thoughtful questions. Initially 2 of the children needed a little encouragement to get positively and actively involved but after week 2 they ceased to stand on the periphery and voluntarily got involved. Over the course of the 6 weeks the group settled well and made good progress with both riding and wider skills.

Over the course of the 6 weeks this group of children took part in both treks out and riding lessons. Each week they mounted swiftly without fuss and were eager to learn and master riding skills. They particularly enjoyed their lessons and the challenges that these brought them. They listened well to instructions and tried very hard at all times to accomplish the task which was given to them, such as riding and stopping the ponies between poles. They soon remembered how to hold the reins and began to sit up tall rather than hunched over. By the 4th lesson some children could perform the

rising trot and were sitting in a good position. Throughout their ride, on both lessons and hacks, the children always chatted away to their pony leaders about riding, horses and general topics. Some children liked to have the same leader each week who they were familiar with and who they could continue discussing a topic. By engaging in conversation they were able to build their knowledge and practise their language skills. This was important for those children who had poor listening skills or those who were shy and reserved. By reiterating the instruction, and discussing it with the child, the leaders were able to keep the child focussed and engaged on the task in hand during lessons. Out on hacks, in a more relaxed environment, the children were able to talk about points of interest and learn new things in a non- threatening way. Some children asked especially thoughtful questions over the period of 6 weeks.

On the yard the group took part in a variety of activities, including grooming, leading a pony, cleaning a stable and poo collecting. With adult support they shared the equipment well and worked together as a team to complete a job. This group especially enjoyed leading a pony. They not only listened well to instructions and followed them carefully but they were able to support each other and pay each other compliments on their achievements. When grooming a pony they were able to take turns with the different brushes and show each other positively how to best perform a task. This group remembered the facts which were given to them each week and often verbally reminded each other of them each week. This was especially true with the rules. They were eager to please and wanted adult recognition for their good behaviour and achievements. At all times these pupils rose to the occasion and therefore gained maximum benefits from their time with us. They had learned new skills and increased their knowledge, developed their social and language skills and increased their confidence and self-esteem. They were all sad to

be finishing and we had enjoyed working with and providing them with a new and extremely beneficial experience.