

Riding for smiles

Report for Deprivation Group November 2021

This school brought a group of mixed year 3 and year 5 children who were either on the school SEN Register or in receipt of Pupil Premium or both. They had a cross section of additional needs including anxiety, extreme shyness, poor attention span, learning delay, low attainment and aspirations, ASD, obsessive tendencies and behaviours, ADHD, poor social skills and lack of confidence and self-esteem. Objectives for this group included building confidence and self-esteem, improving interaction and verbal/language skills and development of social and team building skills, concentration and application to tasks. We also wanted to widen the horizons of these pupils by offering and introducing them to new opportunities, activity and skills. The children also, by collecting facts, knowledge and lots of photos, extended their experience back in school, and produced a Power Point to present to the whole class. This developed language and IT skills as well as confidence.

The group of children arrived at their first session very vocal, bouncy, eager and excited. After going over the rules and answering their questions they began to calm down. All were confident enough to mount the pony without fuss but needed reminding to listen carefully to and follow instructions. During the hack out they engaged well with the pony leaders and asked lots of questions relating to the activity. All children were also happy and confident enough to answer questions asked of them. They all returned to the yard with big smiles and sitting in a relaxed position. After a tour of the stable yard and a basic introduction to the activities they could be involved with over the following weeks the children were keen to say what they wanted

to do. All except one child was confident enough to go close to the small pony and stroke him. The one child who wouldn't had ASD and needed time to familiarise himself with everything new. He was happy to observe, standing by the member of school staff, on this initial visit, but soon became involved as the weeks passed by.

Over the course of the Project the group had a combination of hacks out and riding lessons. This group especially enjoyed the lessons and the challenge it gave them. During lessons they listened well and tried hard with every task they were given. As a group they were all very similar in physical riding ability and soon learned how to make the pony walk, trot, stop and turn. All pupils were able to perform the sitting trot with their arms out, sitting deep and relaxed. By the end of the 6 week block of sessions 3 children had mastered the rising trot, which made them very proud. The child with ASD often needed instructions breaking down and presenting in precise terms (e.g being told to put **each** heel down). Once this was done he usually focussed on the task in hand and put in good effort. Although they preferred a lesson these children also enjoyed the hack out. During these times they chatted away to the pony leaders and asked many good questions which increased their knowledge on horses, riding and the environment.

The pupils took part in a variety of stable yard activities, including grooming and leading a pony, cleaning a stable, filling up hay nets and water buckets, learning body part names and how to measure a horse and collecting droppings from around the yard. Throughout this time they were able to practise using and developing their listening, thinking and communication skills. These pupils were going on to make and present a PowerPoint session back in school for their peers and so were eager to collect information and photos to use. They also had chance to enhance their language skills to describe and explain the gathered information. During the sessions they were able to practise this on each other and the stable staff. Each week every pupil

would include in their Presentation a fact (eg why riders need to wear a helmet) and a fun fact (such as - “a brush which has the same name as a meal is a Curry comb”) Over the period of weeks all developed increased confidence in speaking and the ability to choose relevant pieces of information. Focussing and attention skills were also developed, especially for the pupil with ASD who could easily become distracted.

Over the 6 weeks this group of children made excellent progress with their social skills. Some children take part in social play activities and social stories in school due to poor skills. When undertaking stable yard activities they were encouraged to share and take turns with both objects and space, as well as to positively comment on the actions of their peers. This was done by staff modelling behaviour and conversation and by praising good actions and language. By the end of the 6 weeks these pupils were able to undertake the activities using all the practised skills without prompting. The children who were initially shy, reserved and quiet began to open up and offer conversation. Positive attitudes were developed and children began to show emotions. Seeing such children with beaming smiles demonstrates how beneficial the sessions are. This group finished the block of sessions grateful for their time with us but, as always, wishing that it didn't have to end.