

## Case Study - The Ridgeway Community School



### Project Title:

SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) Light Therapy to improve the mental health and wellbeing of pupils.

### Healthy Schools Theme:

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

### School Context:

The Ridgeway is a school for children between the ages of 2 and 19 with severe and complex learning difficulties with an additional expertise and provision for pupils with an additional diagnosis for Autism. At the core of our work are high expectations. We have small class groups 8-10 pupils and a ratio of 1 staff: 2 pupils.

Our Ethos is to provide personalised education with approaches and strategies founded on research and to be active in pursuing and undertaking research and enquiring ourselves.

### Identified Priority:

Mental health and wellbeing is a high priority for us as a school and we wanted to look at the benefits of using SAD therapy lighting for some of our complex needs pupils to improve this aspect of their education.

### Outcomes:

- To improve attainment levels for complex needs pupils during the winter and spring months
- To Increase attendance as a result of improved mental health
- Staff to report an improvement in the mental health of complex needs pupils.
- If the trial is successful to present to LMT the project and look at rolling out the use of SAD therapy lighting for whole of the complex needs department and possibly the school.

### Activities / Interventions:

- Initially input and permission from parents, the visual impairment advisor and pupil's GPs was obtained.
- Staff then collected data (weekly personalised learning plan with targets and evaluations) on the 3 identified pupils for 3 weeks pre intervention. The use of the SAD therapy lighting was then used for an additional 4 weeks and the data collected again.
- *Barrier: Due to starting the project later than planned because of GP permission the*

*weather had improved and the SAD lights were used inconsistently due to pupil illness.*

- Unfortunately the data sheets have been misplaced so the data has not been analysed carefully. I did have a brief look at the information and pupil attainment was positive suggesting that pupils were engaged during this period which is reportedly an improvement to this time of year last year.
- Additionally: Due to the noted qualitative positive effects of the LED lighting – during the trial period lighting had to be replaced – so to ensure that spending was efficient – the decision was made to install SAD therapy lighting (LED lighting with blue and white lighting that mimics daylight).
- The plan was not rigidly followed due to a number of variables – however the plan ensured that consideration was given to all decisions made.
- Due to the positive feedback the school plan is to eventually replace all lighting in the school with SAD therapy lighting as and when lighting requires replacing.

### **Impact:**

Due to the project changing throughout the trial period impact is difficult to identify. However, initial focus and planning for the project generated detailed discussions around SAD therapy lighting and how it can improve the emotional health and wellbeing of our pupils, particularly our complex needs cohort.

Staff felt that pupils were more engaged and achieved their targets during this period but this is subjective. All the pupils had time off due to illness during this period which would impact on the effects of the SAD lighting as it needs to be daily exposure.

The Head Teacher and staff are very positive about trying to provide an environment which improves everyone's mental health and wellbeing. Now when lighting needs to be replaced the Head Teacher replaces it with SAD lighting and plans to do this eventually throughout the whole school.

### **Next Steps:**

To gain feedback from staff at the end of February about any improvements in pupil's moods compared to last year due to the installation of SAD therapy lighting.

### **Senior Leader Quote:**

As a school we are committed to improving the outcomes for our young people with SEND, especially in terms of their mental health and wellbeing. We know that a high proportion of our pupils have additional needs which impact adversely on their mental health, due to their learning and communication difficulties it is difficult to be sure of the impact of interventions but it certainly seems as though the lighting has impacted positively on general mood and levels of anxiety. We have recently received a lot of feedback from visitors that the atmosphere and environment of the school seems to be very calm.