

Breckenbrough School Annual Report to Quakers in Yorkshire

20 July 2024

Ruth McTighe, outgoing Chair of Governors

This school year has been a very pleasing one for Breckenbrough. Staff changes, and the introduction of a new holistic curriculum with emphasis on “Quality of Life” have produced a remarkable change in the atmosphere and morale within the school.

The OFSTED report of our residential provision in 2023 was rated “Good”. However it was obliged to comment on the fact that although our Independent Visitor had been appointed, we were still awaiting the safer recruitment checks before she could start work, so we were considered not to be meeting the relevant National Minimum Standard. Louise Metali is now in post and has taken up her role with enthusiasm and expertise.

The OFSTED report on our educational provision in 2021 was good in all areas except quality of education, which required improvement. This appeared to be because we were rated against our success delivering the national curriculum, without making any allowance for the necessary work involved in getting severely autistic students to a level where they could function in school well enough to participate in the national curriculum. The Senior Leadership Team have since been inspired by the work of Swalcliffe School in Banbury who have implemented a holistic curriculum using the “Quality of Life” Framework, which OFSTED have accepted. This addresses four areas of development: communication, self-management, independence and achievement. Needs and progress are closely monitored and every student has a personal key-worker, who is the main link between the student, the home and the school. We are now nearing the end of the second year of the Framework. The key-worker system is well embedded, and we are now able to see how our students are developing. I am delighted to report that the OFSTED inspection in May 2024 rates us “Good” in all areas, although there is still work to be done on assessment of progress, and transition from the primary to secondary phase. The highlight of the report for us was the statement that “Personal development is at the heart of the school’s work”.

At the end of last summer term all our students went on to employment, further education or training. For the first time in twelve years one of our leavers went on to Oxford, this time to read Maths. Our much loved deputy head is leaving this summer after five years to take up a head’s post, and I participated in the interview for his replacement, who I think will also be excellent.

Our boarding numbers have dropped, but there is an increasing number of students staying on for extended evening activities, mostly led by members of staff who stay on for the evening on a rota basis. Activities include cinema, swimming, walks, badminton,

board and card games, DVD nights and recently Dungeons and Dragons has been reintroduced, and is becoming very popular. We are able to offer a 24-hour curriculum, which enhances a wide range of skills, including independent living.

Our SEN team is led by one assistant head teacher. We employ our own psychologist, speech therapist and occupational therapist and have an active training programme for our much-valued learning support assistants. The team is working together well. The Hub, which was opened last year with excellent facilities for the therapists, is much used and enjoyed. The new boardroom is also sited there, and has excellent facilities for blended meetings.

We are excited that building has now started at Skutterskelfe, near Great Ayton, to provide new facilities to support students who find it difficult to cope even with the supportive environment of the main school. This will have up to 10 places, and will officially meet the requirements to be an Alternative Provision. This will enable us to bring back some of our students who are placed in APs elsewhere (for which we are paying), and also to offer places to local education authorities for an appropriate fee. We are very grateful to our benefactors who are paying the full cost of the building which is designed to meet our students' needs. The original plan was to lease it at a peppercorn rent, but due to rapidly rising building costs we have agreed to pay a reasonable near-commercial rent. We hope that the building will be completed in April 2025.

The school has recently become a founder member of a new network of schools called the National Association for Advancing Autism Education. It describes itself as the first umbrella organisation in the UK focused on making education better for and with autistic and neurodivergent children and adults. Their website is <https://advancingautismeducation.org.uk> and membership is open to all organisations and individuals involved in this area of education.

QIY has recently appointed two new Quaker governors. However, three of us complete our second terms this year, and in fact I have done as extra seven months as chair of governors, as none of our current Quaker governors had the capacity to take on the role. John Margham takes over from me next term to take us through to the end of Spring Term 2025. In the meantime we are changing our articles of association so that a co-opted governor may be a Director or Chair of Governors, as long as they are in agreement with the Quaker ethos of the school. QIY is continuing to seek Quaker Governors for Breckenbrough, and enquiries are welcome.

My last day as Chair of Governors was spent yesterday at "Fete day" at the school, meeting students and parents, and listening to amazing speeches from the leavers about their experiences at Breckenbrough. I have learnt so much in the last 8 years, and remain in awe of the superb work done by the staff at Breckenbrough.