

## **Are we hearing voices?**

### **Introduction**

In last year's newsletter, we wrote about working in partnership with two universities and another specialist school to validate a newly developed measure of Quality of Life in Autism (QoLA). Two versions of the QoLA - one for adolescents on the autism spectrum and another for their parents, were found to have strong psychometric properties and the findings from this validation study were accepted for presentation at the APAC conference in Sydney, Australia in September 2017. This marked the beginning of systematic Quality of Life (QoL) data collection from students and their families at Swalcliffe Park School across the academic year. This brief report will describe how the data was collected, analysed and used to support individual students and their families, and how the collective data has influenced school improvement planning.

### **Implementation of QoLA**

Students are supported to complete their version of the questionnaire 3 times per year, towards the end of the Autumn, Spring and Summer terms. The results are analysed and the information, along with other sources of evidence, contributes to the target setting process for each student for the following term. In addition to this, issues arising from the collective student group are used to provide a 'student voice' and to update the School Improvement Plan (SIP) at the end of each term. Information is gathered from families at the same points in time as the students, and this is used to inform discussions on how we can best support individual families. The collective 'family voice' information also feeds into the school improvement planning process in the same way as the student voice information. A visual model of the implementation of QoLA is available on the school's website.

### **Main findings**

QoLA information provides insight into how students and their families are feeling about their lives (Part A of the questionnaires) and about how the behaviours/characteristics of autism are affecting the lives of students themselves and their families (Part B). The first round of data collection revealed some very interesting group trends with students reporting high levels of overall satisfaction with many aspects of their life but their parents reporting much lower levels. With respect to their autism, apart from coping with their anxieties, the majority of students did not feel that they had major problems with such things as socialising, sensory issues or doing daily tasks independently. In stark contrast to this, the majority of parents did find that these same areas were hugely problematic from a family perspective. Details from these findings were reported at the 2018 National Autistic Society's Professionals' Conference and at the May 2018 SWALSS Deputies' Conference, and again, can be found on the school's website.

## **Next steps**

We have now developed electronic versions of the QoLA questionnaires and recently, four schools have expressed an interest in joining our QoL partnership. Representatives from these schools visited Swalcliffe Park in June 2018 and we would like to encourage other schools to join us in this work. Please contact [khingorani@swalcliffepark.co.uk](mailto:khingorani@swalcliffepark.co.uk) to find out more.

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