

Spotlight on Pontville School

Pontville School in Lancashire was the winner of the 2018 SEN School / Group of the Year Award at the Shine a Light Awards. Pontville School is part of the Witherslack Group and benefits from sharing clinical services and Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT) from across 15 provisions throughout England.

Communication is a primary need in Pontville School's admissions criteria and underpins everything they do, from the first 12 weeks of a pupil's journey, when detailed assessments are made, to their very last day at the school.

Tackling each half term individually, Pontville's team of speech and language therapists (SaLT) and personal, social and health education (PSHE) coordinator collaborate to create a school-wide plan for communications. Their plan is then incorporated across all subject areas. Alongside this, pupils attend weekly SaLT sessions with a therapist, and practice a range of communication skills in a special timetabled lesson with their teachers.

In another highly commendable approach, new staff members undertake a six-week training course delivered by clinical services teams, and all staff receive regular top-up training from SaLTs. The SaLTs themselves are also supported to undertake higher-level professional qualifications.

Our judges were very impressed at the school's commitment. And they are not the only ones. In its latest report, Ofsted has recognised Pontville as outstanding, while the National Autistic Society recently commended the school's strong collegiate approach across education, care, and therapy teams.

In considering Pontville for a Shine a Light Award, the judges admired its pupil-centred ethos, as well as its work with families. Here, bespoke approaches to speech, language and communication include a siblings group, home communication programmes, and parent/pupil target reviews.

The results are positive, with pupils achieving a range of qualifications to prepare them for further education, charity and/or employment. In the words of the school, "The pupils feel they have a voice, and communicate effectively with a range of audiences."

This sentiment was echoed by the Shine a Light judges, with judge Teresa Redmond, Lead Professional Advisor at The Communication Trust, highlighting the measurable evidence and impact the school had shown, and pinpointing their "holistic approach". Fellow judge Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust, also praised staff for "encouraging students to dream big."

For further information about the 2018 Shine a Light Awards visit www.shinealightawards.co.uk and follow us on Twitter #awards_SAL