

Annual Report 2022/2023



Education

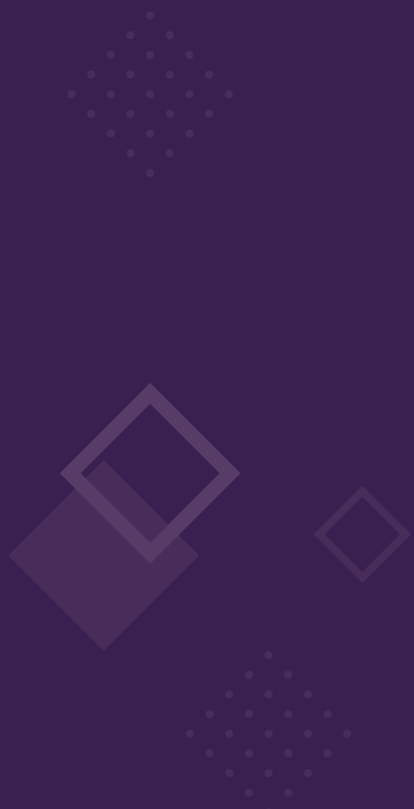
Therapy

Futures



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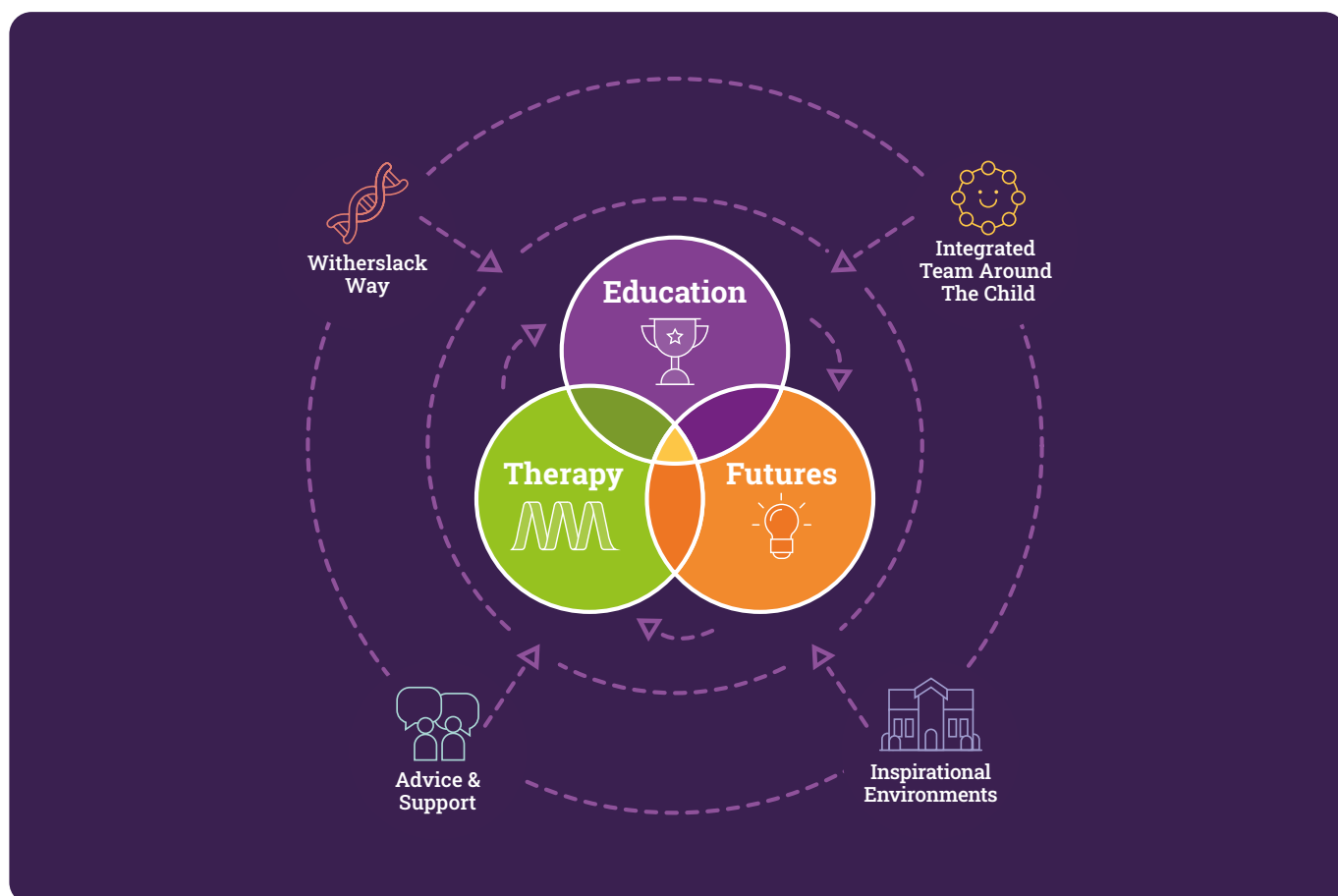


Who We Are

We are Witherslack Group. The UK's leading education provider for children and young people with special educational needs, as evidenced by sector leading Ofsted judgements and our unmatched placement stability, school attendance and outcomes for young people.

Our unique integrated team around the child model and inspirational environments are key to our seamless delivery of education, care and therapeutic support. This enables children and young people to thrive both in and outside of the classroom and coupled with our sector leading Futures programme, optimises outcomes and future contribution to society.

We don't give up, and by this we are seen as the destination of choice by parents, carers and professionals alike.



Foreword

There have been an incredible number of highlights and outcomes over the last 12 months. We can be so proud of the positive impact we have on the lives of young people in our settings and how much this means to their families and local communities. I am delighted that this annual report has been able to capture our key achievements alongside some real-life stories that mean so much to us all.

It is an incredible achievement to have had every one of our students leave directly into further education, employment or training yet again and for every one of our school inspections in the year rated as Good or Outstanding. To have attendance across all schools at 91% and placement stability at 97% is something to be truly proud of, knowing just how much creativity, dedication and commitment goes into this from our professional teams.

It is our relentless focus on the future which I believe sets us apart in our sector. I am so pleased to now have our innovative Futures programme in every one of our secondary schools, bringing together employers, entrepreneurs and education specialists to build pathways into employment. This ever-growing network of employer partners, providing outstanding career experiences and opportunities is an exemplar in education, not just SEND. Hearing the stories of our young people, how they have progressed to realise their career aspirations, is one of the highlights of my role.

I am privileged to be associated with the support we provide to the wider SEND community including those that do not benefit from our settings directly. To have helped over 40,000 parents and carers at every stage of their SEN journey in 2023 is remarkable and I am confident that the target of helping one million by 2030 will be achieved.

In the wider world, our future-focussed approach will have an impact on the planet through the ESG (environmental, social and governance) actions we are taking. This has seen us working to reduce carbon emissions and incorporating innovative renewable energy options into our new schools. Helping more young people goes hand in hand with lessening any adverse impact on the environment.

Having now over 2,300 employees, our work on inclusivity and diversity is also an area I am proud of, with our partnering with Inclusive Employers giving us access to expert advice and resources to ensure we have a fair and inclusive culture, a culture which attracts and develops a diverse and talented workforce through clear career pathways. This work, and much more as highlighted throughout this report, is structured around the four pillars of our Group Strategy:

Uncompromising Standards

Great Place to Work

Outcomes for Young People

Financially Secure & Sustainable Business

These four pillars underpin the work we do, in achieving life-changing outcomes for young people and their families through sector leading SEN, while creating meaningful and longstanding value for all of our stakeholder groups.

Tracey Fletcher-Ray
Chief Executive Officer



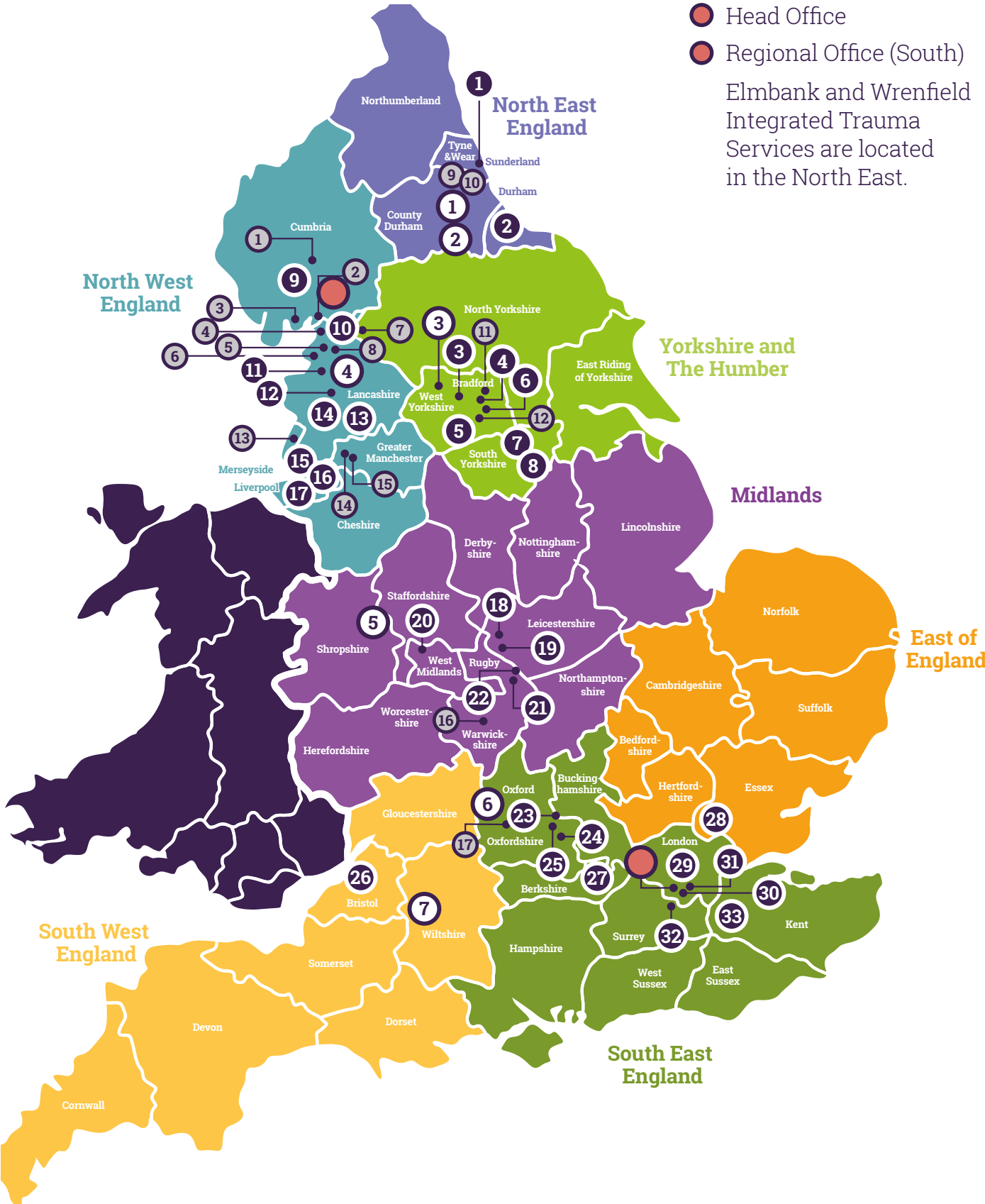


Joining this school has been a major turning point for her and for us as a family - the interventions are amazing. This school offers education but also so many more opportunities for her all-round. We can see astounding improvement in lots of areas already.

Parent

Our Locations

- Key:**
- Schools
 - Learning Centres
 - Homes
 - Head Office
 - Regional Office (South)



Schools

- 1 Ashbrooke School
- 2 Hartwell School
- 3 Millcourt School
- 4 Hall Cliffe Primary School
- 5 Hall Cliffe School
- 6 Hall Cliffe School - Jubilee Campus
- 7 Abbeywood School
- 8 Abbeywood School - Kea Park Campus
- 9 Oversands School
- 10 Cedar House School
- 11 Bridgeway School
- 12 Cumberland School
- 13 Cumberland School - Station Road Campus
- 14 Westmorland School
- 15 Pontville School
- 16 Pontville 16 to 19 Centre
- 17 Lakeside School
- 18 Hinckley House School
- 19 Dovetree School
- 20 Bescot Hall School
- 21 Avon Park School
- 22 Avon Park School - Butlers Leap Campus
- 23 Chilworth House School
- 24 Chilworth House Upper School

- 25 Chilworth Upper Arts & Vocational Centre
- 26 Castlefell School
- 27 Queensmead House School
- 28 Luxborough Court School
- 29 Lavender Lodge School
- 30 Greenholm School
- 31 Greenholm School - Strawberry Lodge Campus
- 32 Bramley Hill School
- 33 Hilden Park School

Integrated Sites

- 1 The Grange Learning Centre
- 2 Oakwood Learning Centre
- 3 Broadbeck Learning Centre
- 4 Meadow View Learning Centre
- 5 The Gables Learning Centre
- 6 Sandwell Learning Centre
- 7 The Eaves Learning Centre

Homes

- 1 Highfield House
- 2 Hollygreen
- 3 Stonycroft
- 4 Cumbria View
- 5 Lakeland House
- 6 Woodlands
- 7 Glebe House
- 8 Mere Fell
- 9 Fernpark
- 10 Hazelcroft
- 11 Heathlands
- 12 Calderbank
- 13 The Birches
- 14 Beech Tree
- 15 Dene Croft
- 16 Fairfield and Vine Grove
- 17 The Spires

At a Glance: 2023

90.3% of our schools are Ofsted-rated Good or Outstanding*

*100% of our schools are Ofsted-rated Good or Outstanding as of June 2024



100% of our students leave directly into further education, employment or training



1,345 qualifications



100% of all Ofsted school inspections rated us as Good or Outstanding this year



97% placement stability



31 schools



1,714 students on roll



+38 employee net promoter score (NPS)



£21.3m invested into our inspiring environments



100% of surplus is reinvested into our young people



2,398 employees



123 placing local authorities



£1.5m invested into our staff development



40,000 parents, carers and professionals provided with free SEN advice & support



Look Ahead: 2024



We will forever keep our children and young people at the heart of everything that we do. Over the next 12 months we strive to continue in our commitment to champion neurodiversity and to empower more children, young people and their families than ever before.

400 additional student placements will be made available



Minimum of **5** new schools will be opened



Our engaged alumni will be supported by our Futures team until **100%** are in suitable employment or further education



We hope to reach a **2,274** student capacity



We will create over **350** new jobs



100% of surplus will be reinvested into our young people



We will open **2** new Futures Centres

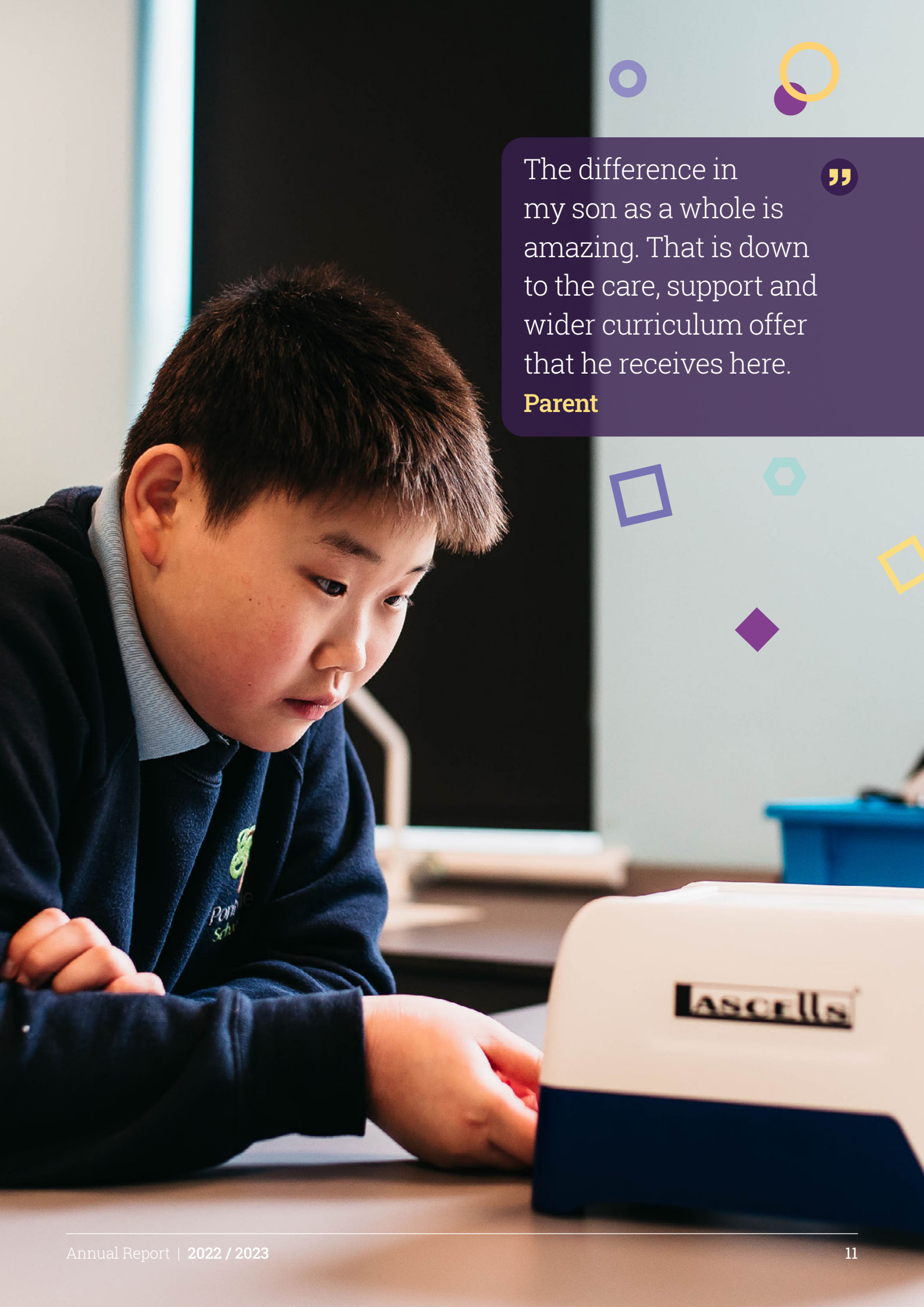


The **Witherslack Academy** will launch



Outstanding Outcomes for Young People





”
The difference in my son as a whole is amazing. That is down to the care, support and wider curriculum offer that he receives here.

Parent

Education

We provide unique and inspiring learning environments in which young people thrive both in and outside of the classroom.

Our highly dedicated, skilled and experienced team of professionals work with parents and carers to deliver outstanding outcomes and inspire a future that every child and family deserves. Our students are supported by qualified, caring and experienced staff who don't give up. We provide a place where children and young people enjoy learning and are fully supported and as a result we have **sector leading attendance levels at 91% and placement stability 97%**.


We are very proud of our young people and the barriers they overcome to achieve, both academically and socially. This year, **our Year 11s achieved 1,345 qualifications** with **53% of them achieving Maths, English and Science GCSE's**.



Each student is supported and encouraged to achieve nationally recognised outcomes at a level that is right for them. Qualifications this year ranged from entry-level certificates to functional skills awards, BTECs, GCSEs and A-Levels. This approach resulted in **88% of our Year 11s achieving at least one form of Maths qualification** and **89% achieving at least one English qualification**.

We invested £21.3m into our inspiring environments to ensure we continue to offer state-of-the-art learning resources in sector leading educational spaces that our children and young people deserve. We are proud to have sector leading regulatory judgements. As of June 2024 100% of our schools are rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

Next year, we look forward to the opening of 5, new schools across the country, enabling us to support up to 2,274 children and young people, more than ever before.

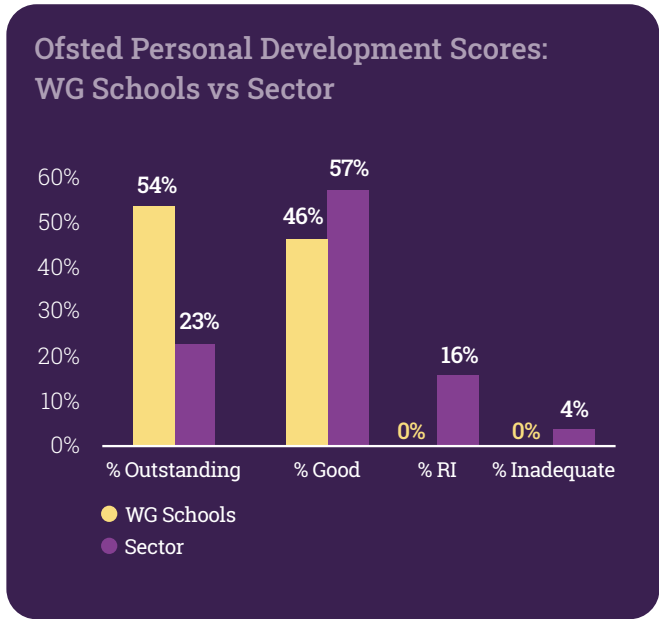
Pupils get a second chance at Hall Cliffe Primary School. 

Many have had difficult previous school experiences.

This changes when they start school here. **Ofsted Report 2023**

Residential placements provide young people, whose special educational needs have impacted on both their school and home life, with the environment and support that enables them to find stability and make sustained improvement.

For some young people living with us can be the best option in helping them to access the education they need to achieve and develop. Our team of experts work to prepare our young people for adulthood, raising aspirations and motivations as we aim to educate into employment, as evidenced by sector leading Ofsted Personal Development scores.



What has been achieved

1,345 qualifications

62% pupils achieved their GCSE in English

62% pupils achieved GCSE Maths

91% attendance

90.3%* schools are Ofsted-rated Good or Outstanding

97% placement stability

*100% of our schools are Ofsted-rated Good or Outstanding as of June 2024





This is more than education ”
as the staff and school have taught our child to self-regulate, be a good friend, study, take instruction, reflect and be able to accept themselves (behaviour and all).

Parent

Therapy

Bespoke therapy and clinical intervention is key to our Integrated Team Around the Child approach.

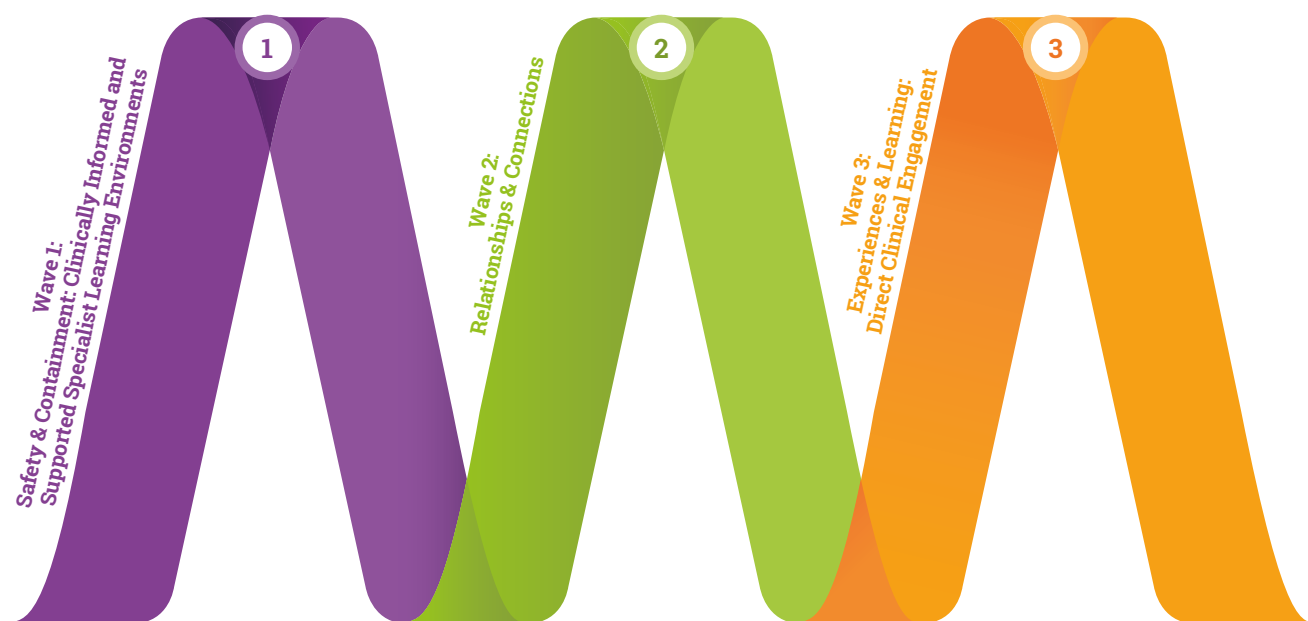
Each of our provisions has employed, clinical experts in-house; each one of our young people have the support of our on-site expert Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and other specialists as required. This enables us to put purposeful and appropriate interventions in place and assess our effectiveness through the tracking of outcomes and impact.

Our Clinical Teams provide young people with unrivalled levels of therapeutic support, in terms of the level of expertise, the ratio of qualified therapists and clinicians to young people, and the range of therapies offered. The team invested 300,000 hours of clinical support this year, with over 11,000 hours of direct engagement between children and clinicians.

In September 2019 the ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity launched the ADHD Advanced Practitioner Award, which we have now rolled out across 29 of our settings. We have now trained up a total team of 71 staff, all of which have achieved full ADHD Advanced Status. We had a 100% pass rate for this year's cohort and have 20 newly qualified ADHD Advanced Practitioners who will progress into a Coaching role supporting a new member of the staff team within their settings.

We believe that unless a young person is able to feel emotionally secure they are less likely to fulfil their personal, social and educational potential. Our unique approach to supporting young people through our Wave Model enables them to go on to realise a future filled with aspiration and achievement.

Witherslack Group Wave Model



1 Safety & Containment



Our first therapeutic focus with all of our children and young people is to re-establish or indeed establish for the first time, a feeling of physical and emotional safety & containment in order to access education.

Critical to achieving this is our provision of clinically informed and specialist living & learning environments. These provide a safe, secure base and child-centred nurture. They offer clear, reliable and predictable provision, routines, boundaries and physical environments which are adapted to meet the assessed needs of our children and young people.

Here we undertake an initial clinical assessment and screening which will help identify individual needs and areas for further assessment, and shape our initial goals to inform our Integrated Team Around The Child meetings. This may also include curriculum adaptations and class initiatives, staff training and general parental advice and guidance.

2 Relationships & Connections



As our children and young people begin to have a felt sense of safety & containment, and their environments become familiar and predictable, our therapeutic focus moves to support the development of relationships, connections and therapeutic engagement with others. This could be through clinically supervised keywork sessions, targeted small-group work, targeted parental engagement and bespoke training for staff to support specific children's needs.

This focus means our children and young people begin to develop an increased ability to be co-regulated with the support of staff and to eventually communicate and regulate their emotions independently, reducing unhelpful behaviours.

3 Experiences & Learning



Having a renewed sense that others can be relied upon to have their safety & wellbeing at the heart of their actions, our children and young people will now be able to begin to engage in new therapeutic experiences and learning opportunities.

Our focus at this time is to identify and support the removal of barriers to thriving and learning. We do this through bespoke one-to-one therapy as they engage further with education, group therapy and targeted family work.

The team continuously assess and review the developmental stage and presenting behaviours of each child and young person to ensure the therapeutic focus is in line with the child or young person's developing and changing needs. This is achieved through multi-agency and multi-disciplinary consultation and decision making across both teaching and clinical staff.

Safe and Sound Protocol

We are committed to sector leading clinical practice and we continue to explore the integration of cutting-edge modalities. One example of this is a pilot programme of Safe and Sound Protocol (SSP). This year we carried out a pilot of the Safe and Sound Protocol (SSP), an evidenced-based listening therapy and practical application of Polyvagal Theory.

The SSP is an accessible, non-intrusive model designed to reduce sound sensitivities and improve auditory processing, behavioural state regulation, and social engagement behaviours through specially filtered music.

The protocol wholly aligns with Witherslack Group's core practice model, and the growing international evidence base and our internal pilot strongly indicate the model is effective with the children and young people that live and learn with us.

The range of positive responses across the pilot group reported were:

- ✓ Improved positive emotional expression e.g. talking about how they were feeling
- ✓ Better class engagement
- ✓ Better sleep and settling
- ✓ Better engagement with other therapies
- ✓ Reduction in anxiety and reporting feeling 'relaxed'

In 2024 there will be an additional 20 clinicians who will become certified SSP practitioners so that this new intervention can enable an additional 100 more children and young people to access living and learning opportunities.



What has been achieved

300,000 hours dedicated to the therapeutic support of children and young people.



11,000 hours of direct engagement between children and clinicians.



20 newly qualified ADHD Advanced Practitioners.



Futures



Futures is about delivering unlimited aspiration and endless employment opportunity for every child. As a result we are proud that 100% of our students leave directly into further education, employment or training.

Whether our young people want to be an astronaut or an artist or anything in between, we are completely committed to helping them realise truly aspirational futures. The Futures programme aims to connect young people with their next steps beyond education, via a network of employer and recruitment partners.

This year the Futures programme was rolled out across each one of our secondary schools, alongside dedicated Regional Futures Leads to embed the programme's delivery. True pathways into employment are established and the students from the first cohort are now utilising these to pursue their chosen career paths with some of the UK's leading employers.

The engagement of our young people, our alumni, parents, carers and employer partners have enabled us to deliver over 75 Futures sessions and 230 work placements, and to set up 32 work experience programmes for our young people this year.

We are now working with 80 employer partners, including Microsoft, John Lewis, RoadChef and Liverpool FC, to provide outstanding career experiences and opportunities that broaden the horizons of our young people and allows them to find their own pathway forward.

2024 promises to be an equally successful year for our Futures programme as the rapid progress made since launch begins to return even greater impact for our young people and their families.

One of the main focusses for 2024 will be around fully establishing our WG Futures Alumni and developing real engagement and connection with them to ensure that they can benefit from all aspects of Future support, as and when they need it.

We will also be establishing our Parent & Carer Alumni to extend the reach and impact of the programme even further, while also launching additional support via our WG Futures Alumni App, as well as a bespoke programme for care leavers.



Pilot Summary

80 employer partners



75 sessions delivered



Over 800 hours delivered



32 work experience programmes



230 work placements



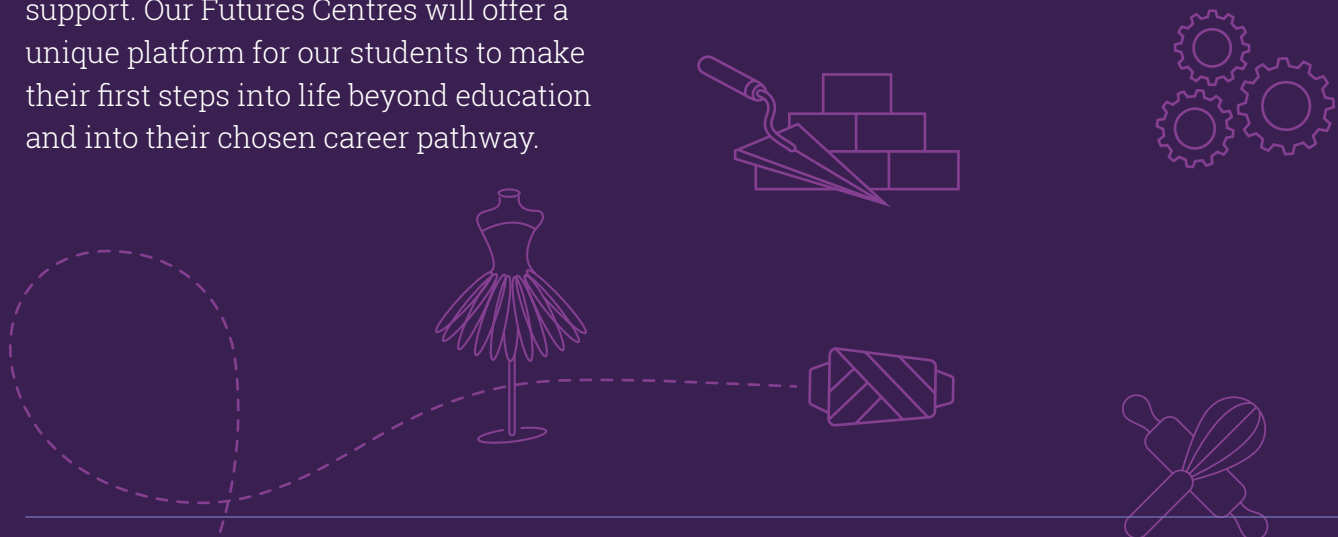
43 ambassador sessions



We will launch the first two of our Futures Centres, which follows on from the full launch of our WG Futures programme in 2023.

The centres will blend the principles of both state-of-the-art learning settings and leading contemporary work spaces to provide our Key Stage 4 students with a unique environment to access education, employer-led programmes and WG Futures support. Our Futures Centres will offer a unique platform for our students to make their first steps into life beyond education and into their chosen career pathway.

Alongside this, we will launch our WG Futures Employer Award, to recognise our employer partners who have celebrated and embraced neurodiversity and shown real commitment to creating aspirational pathways into employment.



Futures Journeys: Matthew's Story



Matthew, a former pupil of Lakeside and Pontville schools, recently graduated from Salford University with a commendable 2:1 degree in Geography. Denise, Matthew's mother, reached out to us following his graduation, filled with pride. Getting to this point hasn't been easy, but with the support of professionals and his mum's unwavering support, reaching this milestone has been momentous. Little did they know that there would be even more to celebrate.

The Beginning

Matthew, aged 8, struggled in mainstream school. His disruptive behaviour led to a fixed-term exclusion, which led Denise to explore SEN provisions. During a visit to Lakeside School, she witnessed a calm, nurturing environment where children with SEN were actively learning. Not long after, Matthew joined and, here, he wasn't disruptive anymore; he was engaging in sessions and, for the first time, flourishing academically.

Lakeside's support extended to the family, with effective communication and strategies for behaviour management. Soon after, the time to transition to secondary school came, and Pontville School was Matthew's next destination. He continued to achieve success with support from the team, who praised him continually. During this time personal challenges arose, notably his mum's cancer diagnosis, but with school supporting him and his family, the care ensured his emotional wellbeing.

After completing his GCSEs in Maths and English, Matthew secured a spot at a local college. There, he earned a Level 2 diploma in Art and Design, followed by a Level 3 award in Graphic Design. His affinity for the outdoors guided his decision to pursue a degree in Geography, beginning at the Foundation level.



Graduation Day

Fast forward to graduation day, Denise captured the photo of Matthew in his cap and gown, proud as can be as he completed his degree. Quickly, while standing tall, she got back in contact with our teams to thank them for laying down the foundations of his success. The dialogue and support between us started again, with Denise elated, but also expressing concerns about Matthew's job prospects due to his autism and ADHD.

Denise connected with our Futures Team, who introduced Matthew to the comprehensive support offered by our Futures programme and highlighted that employers actively seek out people like Matthew for their unique talents, skills and abilities. The team's Talent Manager, David, worked closely with Matthew and Denise to find out Matthew's true aspirations. They then began meticulously exploring job opportunities within the rail industry, Matthew's dream industry.



Despite facing initial setbacks, Matthew displayed unwavering dedication and commitment. With the Futures Team's steady guidance in the background, he diligently honed his interview skills and maintained transparent communication with potential employers. David's unwavering support boosted Matthew's determination, leading to his persistence and eventual success.

More Milestones

Matthew then achieved another significant milestone: securing a coveted job offer from Network Rail. Denise was overjoyed and immensely proud of her son's swift achievement, which was accomplished within a mere three months of engagement with our Futures programme. Additionally, Matthew continued to receive invaluable guidance from Futures to support him to disclose his condition to HR, ensuring a smooth transition into employment.

Looking ahead, Futures committed to assisting Matthew with an Access to Work application, alleviating the financial burdens associated with starting a new job.

So what does Matthew's future look like now?

This remarkable journey from school to college, graduation and now employment is a testament to Matthew and the transformative impact of tailored support and advocacy from our expert teams. The unwavering support from teachers, therapists, our Futures programme and working in partnership with Matthew and his mum, has enabled him to navigate obstacles and secure a fulfilling job aligned with his aspirations. His success brings immense joy to his family and to us and inspires hope for other neurodivergent individuals seeking meaningful employment opportunities too.

Joel's Story



Joel's journey exemplifies resilience and personal development underpinned by the support of Pontville School's staff team, the Futures Team and the unwavering encouragement of his family.

Exceeding expectations is in our DNA, and this story demonstrates that we stand by our children, young people and families from start to finish. Every step of their journey is met with relentless support and dedication, ensuring no one is left behind.

The Beginning Of Something New

Joel faced uncertainty about his future upon completing Year 11. Concerns lingered about transitioning into adulthood, prompting an agreement for him to attend the school's 16-19 Centre for an additional year. His mum recognised the significance of this opportunity in supporting Joel in preparing for the next phase of his life. However, as the end of the academic year approached, he and his family grappled with the apprehension of the unknown again, intensified by his brothers' past experiences in similar situations.

Amid these uncertainties, the Futures Team began working with the school, organising workshops to explore career opportunities with young people. During a session, Joel voiced his enthusiasm for the motor vehicle lessons he was accessing and expressed a growing interest in pursuing a career as a mechanic, signalling a potential direction for his future aspirations.



Moving In A New Direction

This breakthrough moment focused the Futures Team's efforts, getting to work by establishing a rapport with Joel and facilitating multiple meetings over the summer holidays. With guidance from the Futures Team, Joel tailored his application for an apprenticeship at a local KwikFit branch. Although the initial interview resulted in an offer, Joel's performance left a lasting impression, resulting in an alternate job offer at a different branch in a few months.

Unbeknown to everyone, this was where the real test would commence as the two-week training course before the start date was away from home. Joel's autism diagnosis and social communication difficulties would heighten the stress of adapting to a new environment. The prospect of the course, coupled with last-minute changes and unfamiliar settings, tested his resilience. Despite initial struggles with loneliness and uncertainty, he gradually adapted to the training experience, forming connections with fellow trainees and embracing the opportunity for personal growth.

Behind the scenes, the Futures Team maintained regular contact with Joel, extending guidance and assurance that he had their unwavering backing. This ongoing support gave Joel confidence and reassurance as he navigated his path.

Stepping Into Adulthood

Today, Joel is relishing the hands-on experience in the workshop. Despite the ongoing challenges posed by changing train schedules, he remains committed to his job. His successful transition to employment reflects the transformative impact of dedicated support and guidance on young people navigating the path to adulthood.



Joining this school has been a **major turning point for her and for us as a family** - the interventions are amazing. This school offers education but also so many more opportunities for her all-round. We can see astounding improvement in lots of areas already.

Parent

Uncompromising Standards





He never had a sense of belonging prior to moving to the school and this had such a negative experience on his self-esteem. **He now feels like he is wanted at school, accepted for his whole self**, has a high level of sense of belonging and this has led to a huge increase in his self-esteem. Thank you! **Parent** ”

Our Approach

Our highly dedicated, skilled and experienced in-house teams work collaboratively with parents, carers and local authorities to deliver outstanding outcomes, enabling children to thrive and inspiring a future that every young person and family deserves.

Our range of specialist settings offer unrivalled opportunities, experiences and support for every child both in and outside of the classroom.

Our unique approach ensures that our young people have access to an integrated team of experts across Education, Therapy and Futures.

Every team member works together with each other, keeping the young person at the heart of everything that they do.

We call this approach our Integrated Team Around the Child (ITAC) model. This approach enables us to deliver our services in a bespoke, integrated and coherent way to get the best possible outcomes for each young person.



Our son has very complex needs but school have been able to meet all of them. Three years later he is thriving. He is in every lesson, he is doing really well academically and he is starting to work through and understand his own needs. We are thankful for a Pontville place every day.

Parent

The ITAC process has five core elements. Our model ensures that each young person realises their own story of success. From making new friends to leaving with qualifications galore, we love to celebrate every moment of success.

1. Effective sharing of information about the child, young person or family to underpin ongoing work.



2. Consistency and coordination in the services delivered.



3. A multi-disciplinary approach to supporting a child, young person and family.



4. Development and delivery of a package of solution-focussed support, with each ITAC member being responsible and accountable for their actions and the services they provide.

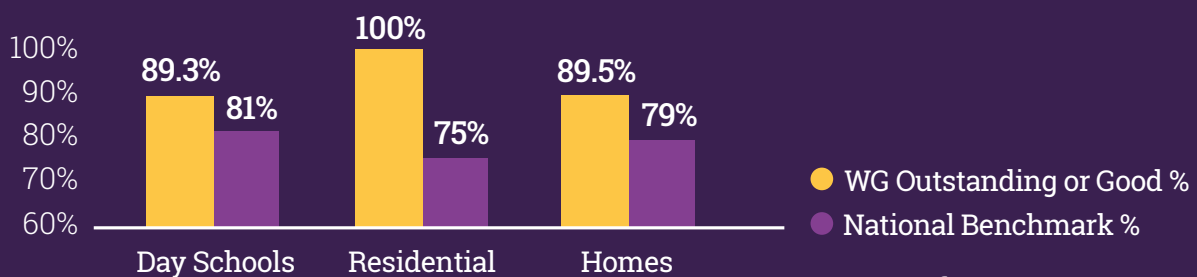


5. The review of progress and outcomes, identifying further action and support that may be needed.



This approach has consistently resulted in outstanding outcomes that set us apart from the sector with 90.3% of our schools (both day and residential) rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and as of June 2024, 100% of our schools are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

Witherslack Group Ofsted Judgements vs National Benchmarks 2023/24



Advice & Support

We are proud to have supported over 40,000 parents and carers at every stage of their SEN journey.

Our dedicated support teams are always on hand to help and assist, knowing that we are all working together to create real futures for each and every young person.

Whether families want to find out more about how to get an EHCP, establish a better bedtime routine or discover new sensory activities for their child, we are here to share our expert advice and support. Our range of podcasts, webinars, face-to-face events and resource packs are readily available.

Last year 40,000 parents, carers and professionals across the SEN sector accessed our advice and support via our website, alongside 21,000 event sign-ups and 13,000 podcast listens.



Support, advice, guidance - I only discovered the Witherslack Group a couple of months ago, but in those couple of months the extensive information provided together with guidance and advice on their online webinars has been amazing. **It's given me hope and the strength** to continue battling to receive help for my child. **Parent**



This school has **changed his life (and our lives) in an amazing and positive way.** ”

Our relationship with the teachers and staff is outstanding and we have been able to work together to get the best out of him.

Parent

Our Stakeholders

We are driven by a commitment to improving the experience and outcomes for all of our stakeholders, based on our in-depth understanding of their needs, which is gained through ongoing and meaningful engagement.

Due to the nature of our work, our stakeholders have a unique passion for and connection with what we do and the outcomes we achieve for each and every young person. They are invaluable supporters and critical friends as we strive to deliver more and more for our young people and their families.

Our Young People

We don't believe that one-size-fits-all. Every child's journey is different but our unique approach ensures that the outcomes remain the same - inspirational achievements and stunning stories of success for each one of our children and young people.



Our Families

We understand that parents and carers want their child to receive the very best education and support, with access to world-class facilities, and staff that constantly go the extra mile. To us there is nothing more rewarding than seeing breakthroughs for young people; everything we do is built around getting the best outcome for our young people and their families.



Our Local Authorities

We work in partnership with 123 local authorities to offer the best provision for young people; 65 of these local authorities have been placing with us for over 10 years. We understand the needs and challenges on an individual basis and are able to adapt and offer our services to ensure that local authorities see us as their provider of choice.

We can be very proud of an overall **customer satisfaction score of 95%**, with **85%** stating they would recommend our provision.



95% satisfied



Cruyff Court Opening 2023

Our Employer Partners



We now work with 80 employer partners, including Microsoft, John Lewis, RoadChef and Liverpool FC, to provide outstanding career experiences and opportunities for our children and young people that broaden their horizons and allows them to find their own pathway forward.

Our Wider World



We want to further extend our impact, beyond the students and families that directly access our services across our educational settings. As we look to further develop our environmental, social and governance strategies, we aspire to not only impact the lives of our communities, but also to make long-standing contributions to and impacts on society as a whole as we work to continue to reduce carbon emissions and work towards B-Corp status in 2024.

Johan Cruyff Foundation

We are proud to be an official partner of the Johan Cruyff Foundation, which was set up to support and develop sports activities for children and young people all over the world. Our state-of-the-art Cruyff Courts are all-weather pitches which support small-group sports, including football, basketball, volleyball and netball.

We opened up four new Cruyff Courts at Cedar House School, Oversands School, Ashbrooke School and Hartwell School this year offering more of our pupils a place to grow, make friends and improve their mental health.

CREATING SPACE



Our Wider SEN Community



Our wide variety of events, podcasts, helpline and resource packs offer thousands of parents and professionals a unique opportunity to access a range of SEN-specific advice, support and training each week. We are committed to sharing expertise and advice to support both the SEN community and also the wider agenda around neurodiversity and inclusion.

Our Charitable Partners



Our relationships with both our partner organisations and, importantly, our suppliers are critical to us maintaining the highest of standards and support for our students. We work with world-leading charities to ensure we are equipping our teams with the very best understanding and creating inspirational environments.

ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity

We have worked in partnership with the ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity for several years now. They provide invaluable training and support for parents and carers, teachers, social care providers, healthcare workers and employers to enhance knowledge, promote inclusivity, and empower neurodivergent children and young people.

We worked in collaboration to develop the ADHD Advanced Practitioner Award and a further 28 advanced practitioners were awarded this meaning, even more highly specialist and individualised ADHD portfolios have been created for our children and young people.



A Great Place to Work



People

We are committed to attracting, developing and retaining a diverse and talented workforce to get the best possible outcomes for our children and young people.

Our 2,398 employees are the public face of Witherslack Group. We are proud that we have jointly created a culture where everybody can fulfil their potential and be their best, whether in one of our schools or based at our Head Office supporting our front-line teams. We have a fair and inclusive culture, underpinned by our Witherslack Group Behaviours, which are embedded into everything that we do.



As part of our strategy in relation to EDI we started a partnership with Inclusive Employers. Partnering with Inclusive Employers not only means we can access a considerable range of resources to support our focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, but also – through the accreditation process – helps us identify areas where we can continually improve. We have a fair and inclusive culture where people feel comfortable being themselves at work. This year we worked with Inclusive Employers, which culminated in a successful award submission in December 2023 of Bronze status.




We have engaged people who are really involved and enthused about their work & workplace.


This was evidenced during our annual staff engagement survey which we run in conjunction with The Happiness Index. In our annual survey in March 2023, we saw 89% of employees complete the survey with an eNPS of +38. The question 'To what extent do you think people of all backgrounds can join and thrive in your establishment?' scored 8.7, indicating a real strength in this area.




Key facts:

 Response rate: **89%**

 Average question score: **8.2**

 **Highest scoring question**
Improving outcomes for young people is a top priority at my place of work?
8.9

 **Lowest scoring question**
How much do the systems and processes effectively support you in your role? **7.6**



Employee Net Promoter Score



EDI question

To what extent do you think people of all backgrounds can join and thrive in your establishment? **8.7**



As the employer brand of choice across the sector we are able to attract and retain talent.

This year we attracted a record number of applications to work with the Group, with over 13,000 people who applied to join us this year alone. We have also campaigned to encourage more Women into STEM classrooms, and attract more males into children's residential care, currently a female-dominated sector.

We are pleased to have welcomed a record number of new colleagues to the Group as we saw our workforce number 23.6%. Our new colleagues have helped us open schools, expand our residential homes and grow our clinical team, so that we can support more young people than ever before.

The areas of focus for us over the next 12 months will include a renewed emphasis on early careers. We are in partnership with a number of universities to offer placements and job opportunities for Early Careers Teachers with a Special Education specialism.

We will welcome our first cohort of Speech & Language Therapy degree apprentices, also offering a range of apprenticeships and graduate opportunities across the Group as we look to bring more talent into the sector.

Applied to join us

13,000



Our workforce increased by

23.6%



We have effective career pathways providing development & progression.

Our staff teams are supported by accredited, skilled and experienced trainers both in their subjects of expertise and in the sector who deliver bespoke training to multi-disciplinary teams. This year our workforce completed over 86,600 hours of training. This included new cohorts of our Elevate and Aspire programmes, which have supported people to progress and develop into a variety of roles, including those that are business critical. Fifty per cent of those on our Elevate programme have been promoted to Head Teacher or Registered Manager.

We will be utilising feedback we received from our December 2023 Inclusive Employers submission to inform our EDI strategy. EDI will be a strong part of our Talent and Succession work, ensuring our processes that identify talent and encourage career development are fair and consistent across our business.



2,398 employees across our schools, integrated education provisions and Head Office. **This is a 23.6% increase from last year.**



62.8% of our colleagues are female and **37.2%** are male.



Our leadership team is made up of **53.3%** females and **46.7%** males.



Our training team provided over **10,390** training days and over **13,924** e-learning module completions.



Case Studies

Ben Stamper started his Occupational Therapy apprenticeship in 2023 after working as a Teaching Assistant at Pontville School:

The OT degree has been a great opportunity for me to develop. It has taken some time to get used to the demands and balancing university work, learning a new job, and home life but with support from my workplace mentors and team I have been able to find that balance.

Doing the degree apprenticeship has been an amazing opportunity to be able to learn on the job and put the skills I am learning at university into practice.



Clare Read graduated from our Elevate programme in 2023, and has progressed from Assistant Head Teacher, to Deputy Head and then Head Teacher at Ashbrooke School. She is now an Executive Head Teacher.

Elevate has been one of the best experiences of my career. It provided me with the tools to reflect on my own practice, gave me confidence in my own ability and an invaluable understanding of the Witherslack Group. Through the programme I have worked with and learned from inspirational leaders who listen, challenge and work collaboratively. To have learning and development so valued is something special that benefits me and the pupils I work with.





They changed our son's whole life. He had lost faith and trust in everything and everyone but **the teachers here turned his whole world around** and supported us all when we needed it most.

Parent

Financially Secure & Sustainable Business



Sustainable Business

Sustainability shapes our plans and activities at all levels here at Witherslack Group.

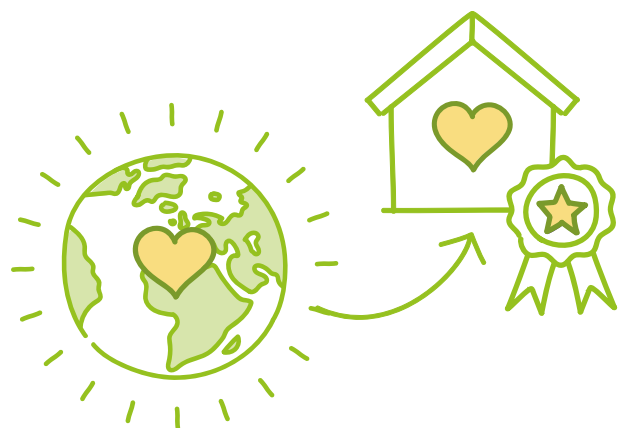
We remain committed to leading our sector, caring for the communities we serve and taking action to drive sustainability. We want to play our part in reducing waste and the carbon emissions created by our operations. We also want to incentivise and accelerate new behaviours that will help to deliver lasting, sustainable change across our sector. As an educational provider we are uniquely placed to educate our young people to lead by example in how we embed more sustainable practices, and to drive change among our partners and suppliers.

2023 saw us make great strides forward as we focus on ESG (environmental, social and governance) initiatives, affirming our commitment to sustainable practices. We have begun developing our ESG strategy, reflecting our dedication to meeting rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency.

We recognise that we have a responsibility to the environment beyond legal and regulatory requirements and therefore we must have strong principles with respect to our impact on the environment and our intentions on how we will control and manage that impact.

As a result of our proactive approach to mitigating environmental impact we have successfully reduced carbon emissions by 30%. We now take a forward-thinking approach to our infrastructure development, with new schools incorporating renewable energy options like solar panels and ground-source heat pumps. We have also been working with our existing sites to make developments such as fitting low-flow plumbing fittings and replacing older boilers and lighting with new, more energy efficient systems.

Six of our schools achieved the Eco-School Green Flag accreditation this year showcasing our dedication to fostering environmental stewardship among students and staff, demonstrating the collective commitment to how much we care about environmental issues and our shared desire to actively protect our planet.



*since 2019

Future Vision

We are committed to integrating sustainable practices into every aspect of our operations to ensure that the work we do now helps our young people today and positively impacts society in the future.

In 2025 all of our schools will achieve the Eco-School Green Flag Award, emphasising environmental stewardship and fostering a culture of sustainability within their educational institutions. We want to increase the prominence of ESG (environmental, social and governance) considerations throughout our education portfolio. To support these initiatives, we plan to increase staff training around ESG topics, enhancing staff awareness and equipping educators with the knowledge and tools to effectively incorporate sustainability practices into their daily activities.

We are dedicated to further reducing our environmental footprint by working towards paperless workflows, reducing waste levels and minimising plastic usage across the organisation. We have undertaken an ESOS survey across all sites to identify opportunities for further energy savings and set longer-term carbon reduction targets. We also plan to increase our visibility over waste and water usage levels to set more long-term reduction targets.

We have plans to increase our social impact on our local communities through increased support to our young people's parents and carers, and community engagement initiatives. We recognise that we have a responsibility to the environment beyond legal and regulatory requirements and therefore we must have strong principles with respect to our impact on the environment and our intentions on how we will control and manage that impact. These principles form the foundation of our commitment to effective environmental management and our overall contribution to a better planet.



Financially Secure Business

2022/2023



Revenue

Witherslack Group

£172.8m

(FY22: £143.7m)

Operating Cashflow

(before Taxation)

£7.69m

Carbon Reduction

30%



4 New School
Developments



Capital Expenditure

£26.5m

Net Assets

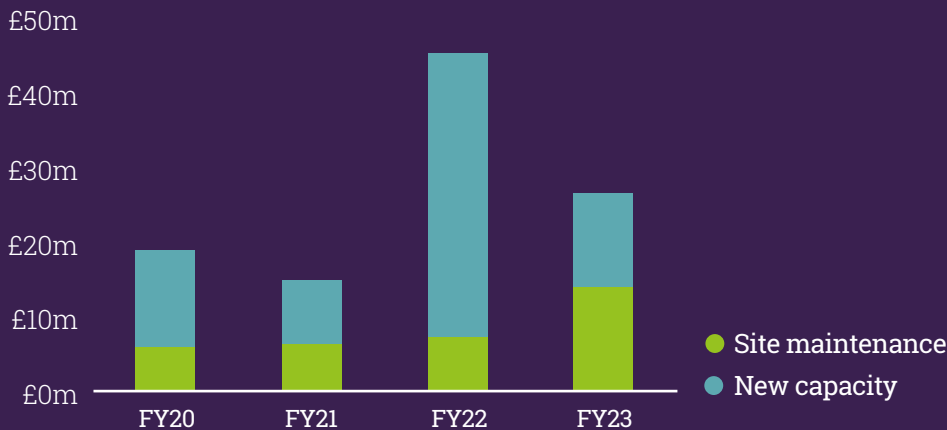
£160m

All profits are **reinvested** as **capital expenditure**

Key Performance Indicators

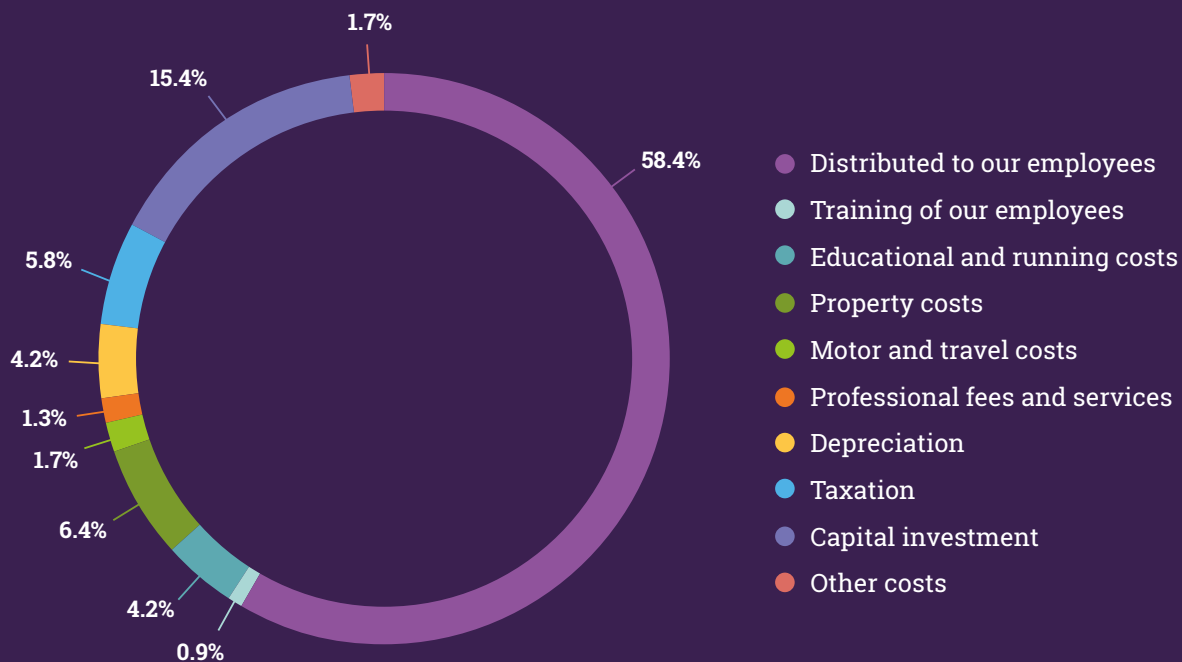
There is a significant shortfall in SEN places in the UK and Witherslack Group prides itself on investing all EBITDA generated into new provisions to help young people with SEN needs. Since 2016, we have invested over £130m in capital projects to help meet the shortfall of provision by adding over 1,100 new student places in education provisions.

Capital Investment



During this period capital expenditure has been greater than the profit made by the Company, which reinforces our commitment to meeting the shortfall of provision.

Expenditure FY23



Witherslack Group's employment costs account for 58.4% of all expenditure, with a further 15.4% spent on capital investment projects. This is a significant investment in our growing workforce of over 2,300 colleagues who provide education and support to all young people across our educational establishments.

Director's Report

for the financial year ended 31 August 2023

Principal Activities

Witherslack Group aspires to be an exemplar of best practice for the education of children and young people with special educational needs, locally, regionally and nationally. This is achieved through the provision of education and care for children with special needs, their families and local authorities across the UK. We lead with our education offer, and provide residential accommodation to school pupils where necessary. All young people in our homes attend our schools.

We have a clear view of our purpose and practice, and this is articulated in the theoretical and philosophical aspects of our work. Outcomes for children and young people are closely monitored across a variety of internal metrics.

From a Head Office in Cumbria, combined with dedicated regional managers, the business places children and young people into our schools, integrated education provisions and learning centres across the UK, which is the lifeblood of the business. These places are funded by local authorities, our primary revenue stream.

To ensure Witherslack Group remains competitive we strive to obtain the highest level of quality by consistently investing in people, training and infrastructure to create a leading platform in the specialist education sector.

Company Strategy

The core business strategy is to continue to drive organic growth in revenue through the acquisition and development of new sites. We also plan to expand and further develop existing sites to create more available spaces for children and young people who require special education and care.

Organic growth is complemented by strategic targeted acquisitions. The business continuously looks to expand its reach, actively researching opportunities for expansion into markets where we can leverage the use of our expertise.

Continuous reinvestment in our sites, staff and young people ensures that we remain competitive in our market by offering the highest quality service. Our track record of success and sector-leading Ofsted judgements has been achieved through an ethos of high aspiration, placement stability through our 'team around the child' approach, unique in-school therapy solutions and our inspiring environments. These all combine to optimise life opportunities for children and young people, give confidence to parents and carers, and deliver unmatched value for local authorities.

The Company position is particularly strengthened by its expansion into new geographical areas, in Essex and the Midlands, much of which has taken place in response to requests by local authorities to open in their regions.

Developments During the Year

The Group has made significant advancements in its ESG initiatives this year. We have worked with experienced consultants to focus on reducing CO² emissions throughout the business. These developments encompass a range of efforts aimed at enhancing sustainability, promoting social responsibility and strengthening governance practices across the Group.

Walker Guidelines

Witherslack Group (the “Group”) is committed to complying with the Walker Guidelines (the “Guidelines”) for increased disclosure and transparency in private equity and has included the additional disclosures as set out in the Guidelines in the 2021/22 Annual Report.

The Board has decided not to upload the audited annual report for the Group and has instead provided the above explanation under the “comply or explain” principle as set out in the Guidelines.

The Board believes that certain information included in the audited annual report is commercially sensitive, and, due to being the only company included in the scope of the Guidelines in our sector, has decided not to include the audited annual report within the scope of this report. The audited annual report for the Group can be found on Companies House.



Steve Bacon

Chief Financial Officer

Board Members

T Fletcher-Ray	Chief Executive Officer
S Bacon	Chief Financial Officer
R J Wilkins	Chief Operating Officer
J Carter	Chief People Officer
M Bowes	Commercial Director
A Ghanem	Chairman
A Holloway	Non-Executive Director
J C Huxtable	Non-Executive Director
T Andrews	Non-Executive Director
T Halford	Non-Executive Director
P Jones	Non-Executive Director
J Jones	Non-Executive Director



My son has bloomed since he started school here. Teachers and classroom assistants have worked closely with him and helped him to **grow in confidence and use his skills to the best of his advantage**. Staff are in regular contact with me and keep me updated regularly on his progress. My son feels comfortable and settled and has learned to socialise and make friends. He is very happy at school.


Parent



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