

Celebrity chef bowls over students at launch of new autism sixth form.

Dorset-based chef Lesley Waters joined students in getting creative in the kitchen at the official unveiling of Autism Unlimited's Portfield School Sixth Form in Christchurch.

Leading charity [Autism Unlimited](#) officially opened its new Portfield School Sixth Form (on March 22) and celebrity chef Lesley Waters was there to give her seal of approval to its new professional training kitchen.

Autism Unlimited took over the former Airfield Road warehouse in 2022 and has undertaken an ambitious redevelopment programme.

Visitors at the official opening included Councillor Vivienne Charrett, Mayor of Christchurch.

Everyone had the chance to take a guided tour of the new building, meet teachers and enjoy entertainment from the talented musicians of the Portfield School Sixth Form Band.

Chef Lesley Waters joined in the fun, staging healthy food masterclasses with students in the kitchen.

Lesley, who is a regular on ITV's James Martin's Saturday Morning and Ready Steady Cook, previously supported Autism Unlimited's Big Brekkie campaign and has hosted parents and carers of students at her Dorset cookery school.

She said: "It was wonderful to spend time with Portfield School Sixth Form students and tutors at their amazing new building, and to share some tips on ways they can cook simply and healthily in their fabulous new kitchen.

"Autism Unlimited has been supporting autistic children, young people and their families across the region for over 50 years and I am proud to be able to show my appreciation for that work. It's deeply satisfying for me to see how the new sixth form is helping young autistic people to transition so successfully into adulthood."

Amongst the students cooking with Lesley was Luke, who said: "Lesley is really nice and a brilliant cook. I have learned some very important tips from her today."

Student Jack agreed: "I'm really enjoying coming to the new sixth form building because it is so modern and has lots of great facilities. I especially like the gym because I want to get fitter and the recording studio where we can play, write and record our own music."

Portfield School Sixth Form was designed in consultation with students and built with the support of BCP Council. Leader of the Council Vikki Slade joined the guests in touring the building and meeting staff and students.

In addition to the impressive training kitchen, the building has modern tutor rooms, workshop areas, social areas and outdoor space.

The kitchen, outdoor trampoline and sensory garden, together with the recording studio have all been possible thanks to *a number of grants and individual donors, including a £10,000 donation from the Talbot Village Trust.

Siún Cranny, CEO of Autism Unlimited said: “Portfield School Sixth Form aims to nurture talent, and foster success and fulfilment in adulthood.

“Our new building is an environment in which young people thrive and it’s been wonderful to open its doors to the public and show people what we do.

“We are immensely grateful to Lesley Waters for attending the launch. Her knowledge of food, cooking and nutrition is incredibly beneficial to us all, and I know her visit will prompt many of our students to become even more creative in the kitchen.”

Additional entertainment at the launch was provided The Dhol Foundation Drummers and a Ceilidh Band.

The Sixth Form’s ‘Brew Crew’ of trained student baristas also served hot drinks.

For more information on Portfield School Sixth Form contact: Carol.Borwick@autism-unlimited.org

Ends

Picture captions (from left to right):

Pic 01 – Portfield School Sixth Form student Luke, with Lesley Waters, student Jack and Autism Unlimited CEO Siún Cranny.

Pic 03 - Autism Unlimited CEO Siún Cranny, Lesley Waters, Councillor Vivienne Charrett (Mayor of Christchurch) and Vikki Slade Leader of BCP Council

Pic 06 – Student Jack, Steve James, Home Economist and Chef, student Luke, Lesley Waters and Jan Banks of Christchurch Rotary Club which has donated to the building’s facilities.

Leading charity Autism Unlimited provides specialist education, care and support to autistic children, young people and adults from the age of four into adulthood.

Autism Unlimited also manages Portfield School for primary and secondary school students aged 4-15 in Parley.

*£5k from The Clingan’s Trust, £500 from Christchurch Rotary, £3160 from Nationwide in Bournemouth and £500 from Little Lives UK via the Christchurch Living Advent calendar.

If you are interested in getting involved or wish to donate to the work of Autism Unlimited, please email Carol Borwick at: Carol.Borwick@autism-unlimited.org

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