

For immediate release: With five images.

Young autistic actor is aiming for the West End

A young student at Autism Unlimited's specialist Sixth Form in Christchurch has advanced a step closer to his ambition of becoming an actor, by securing a full-time college drama place.

Fenton Loader, 17, from Bournemouth, learned he has been accepted to college in the same month that he appeared as Macbeth on stage at The Lighthouse Theatre in Poole.

He said: "It's all been very exciting. I just can't wait to get started in September and show everyone what I can do."

Fenton first started performing whilst at mainstream primary school.

He said: "My first ever role was as Pumba in the Lion King when I was about 10. I had a blind audition, and I was very nervous, but I couldn't wait to do it at the same time.

"I loved being on the stage acting as it gave me more confidence. I felt I could really express myself.

"But being at mainstream school was very difficult for me because my autism means I respond to some situations differently and this meant I struggled with managing my emotions sometimes. Once I started at Portfield School I was flying, because the teachers there understand me and have been able to help me learn and also discover my acting talent. They are amazing."

Portfield School is operated by Autism Unlimited, a leading charity which provides education, support and training to autistic people and their families.

Students attend Sixth Form between the ages of 15 and 19 and start to look beyond school life and onwards to accreditations and preparation for life post-education.

Fenton continued: "When people find out I am autistic they are often surprised because they expect autistic people to be shy and quiet, which I am not!

"All autistic people are different. We still have the same ambitions and dreams and we love fun. But mostly, people think about what we *can't* do. My autism actually helps my acting because I am an expert at learning lines and the organised way in which I think means I can go over and over them in my head, wherever I am.

"I'm proof of what autistic people *can* do!"

Fenton is also a member of Stagewise School for Performing Arts at The Lighthouse.

"Stagewise is like a family to me," he said.

"Four years ago, I was chosen to be part of the choir for the sell-out Brendan Cole Show at the Lighthouse.

"I was shaking so much before I went on, but I just told myself to be myself. I had done all the rehearsals and I had this! It was an incredible experience."

Fenton has just made his Shakespearean debut - playing Macbeth on stage at The Lighthouse.

He said: "I hadn't actually read Macbeth before I was given the part, but I knew he was a very complex character and I was going to have to try to get into the way he thought and felt as much as possible. It was amazing to play him and it's only made me more determined to become a stage actor full time."

Fenton has also recently completed a week's work experience at the Lighthouse Poole.

He said: "I wanted to know more about the workings of the theatre, so I sent in my CV and requested work experience. I went for an interview and got a placement for a week. I loved it. I got to see all different parts of theatre life, from the ticket office to HR, the Stage Door, marketing, stewarding etc."

Fenton has a place at Brockenhurst College from September on the BTEC Theatre Studies course.

He said: "This will give me so much more experience and qualifications which I can then take on to a higher level."

Patricia Vaughan, Fenton's teacher at Sixth Form said: "I have had the privilege of being Fenny's teacher for the past academic year, and have witnessed first-hand his ceaseless enthusiasm, passion and motivation for acting, singing and musicals.

"I have been educated by his phenomenal knowledge of musicals and films and entertained by his eclectic choice of music, which he plays on our minibus journeys, making tedious journeys uplifting ones as we all follow Fenny's lead and sing along."

Fenton added: "I want to be an actor one day and of course my ambition would be to star in the West End. So, watch this space!"

Ends.

Picture captions:

[Bard role 1 and 2] Fenton recently made his Shakespearean debut as Macbeth on stage at the Lighthouse Poole in a Shakespeare Festival.

[Fenton 1-3] Fenton recently enjoyed work experience at the Lighthouse Poole

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