

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: Dawn House School in Nottinghamshire

Introduction

This case study discusses Dawn House School and its link with an FE college to provide a supported pathway for young people post 16.

Overview

Students at Dawn House School can hold dual placements with the local FE college and the school. Placements in mainstream classes in the FE college are supported by Dawn House staff in line with the young people's statements of SEN. Many young people then move successfully on to their local mainstream FE provision, to apprenticeships or to employment.

Key points

- Partnerships work best where each partner is forward thinking and innovative so that the partnership amounts to more than ticking the inclusion box.
- Structures need to be in place to ensure good communication between partners.
- Expert support continues post 16 so young people are more likely to maintain their FE placements and achieve their aspirations.
- The support may be varied as they become more independent.

Introduction

Dawn House School in Nottinghamshire is an ICAN school which provides intensive and specialist support for children and young people aged 5 -19 years who have severe speech, language and communication needs. Pupils come from across the UK, their placements mostly funded by their local authority, and receive integrated therapy and education. Ofsted describes the school as outstanding in relation to its curriculum, personal development and well-being, and care, guidance and support.

Students at the school can access the FE department at the school for one to three years following one of three pathways or a combination. Among the pathways offered include dual placement with the local FE college and the school. Placements in the FE college are supported by Dawn House staff in line with the young people's statements of SEN. The aim is to move them towards independence. Many young people then move successfully on to their local mainstream FE provision, to apprenticeships or to employment.

Background

For five years, Dawn House School has been running a Further Education Department (FE) which provides education and therapy for 25 young people in a separate centre on the school site. Before Dawn House developed its FE provision pupils left at 16, often returning to their home town and attending local colleges. There were fears, however, that without the

expert support they had been getting at the school, many would drop out as these were young people who, in many cases, had failed in mainstream earlier in their school lives.

When Dawn House School began to extend its work to young people post 16, it sought local partners to help make the full range of provision available for its 14 to 19-year-olds. West Nottinghamshire College was the obvious choice. Only a few miles away from the school and graded as outstanding by Ofsted, the college was enthusiastic about the collaboration from the outset.

FE students at Dawn House choose from three pathways. On pathway 1 students are supported by Dawn House staff to access an academic or vocational course at the mainstream West Nottinghamshire College following induction at the end of Key Stage 4. Other learning providers are also offering a limited number of places. On pathway 2, students access vocational qualifications through a work placement, which is supported by staff from Dawn House. Pathway 3 offers a small number of vocational courses on the Dawn House site. These are interchangeable pathways with some students progressing from pathway 3 to pathway 1, some combining different pathways and others sticking with a single pathway throughout. In addition, all students, whichever pathway they are following, work on literacy, numeracy and life skills at the school.

Interchangeable pathways mean that young people can mix and match. Some students have followed up attendance at college with NVQs achieved in retail placements in big supermarkets, for example. Individualised programmes for each student means some aim for qualifications such as NCQs and BTECs or the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE); some enrol on a foundation learning programme, perhaps alongside an SEN horticulture course, spending between one or three days at college.

Aims and objectives

The school aims for a seamless progression through 14 – 19 and lifelong learning, involving a fusion of skills from education, speech and language therapy and residential support. The

whole provision has a focus on communication, and provides a platform from which young people can progress to further college courses or employment. By Year 14 the aim is for young people to be equipped with skills for independent travel, some independent study and independent living skills.

Approach

Programmes are tailored to individual young people and those following Pathway 1 are offered courses which in the main have been successfully tried and tested by past students. The Dawn House bespoke prospectus given to pupils in Year 11 lists courses where there is already a good understanding with the college.

The Pathway 1 model requires extensive liaison between school and college at all levels:

1. A senior partnership group meets termly to discuss strategic direction of partnership. These meetings are minuted with decisions and information cascaded within departments.
2. Continual liaison – at least on a half termly basis – with the FE co-ordinator and the speech and language therapists within the Dawn House FE department.
3. Daily liaison between LSAs from Dawn House and tutors from the college.

Support provided by Dawn House for its students attending college is a crucial element in their successful transition to further education and towards greater independence. Selecting courses and supporting learning require greater help than is routinely available for young people with SEN transferring from special school to FE college.

The support begins with a strong focus on transition at the end of Year 11. Team building takes place as part of a post exam project, running alongside off timetable activities such as sports. As well as explaining what further education will be like, the students understand that alongside their FE courses they will continue with the core curriculum at the school's study centre with enrichment opportunities, work on citizenship and key skills. SLT support continues, either one to one or in small groups. Speech and language therapists

(SLTs) are an integral part of the team that enables Dawn House students to access mainstream college, whether they work directly with the young person preparing them for classes, in the classroom or following up learning; or whether working with tutors to provide them with the strategies for helping students get the most from their courses.

FE students may also receive other therapies including occupational therapy and art therapy, help with anger management and support from learning mentors.

Because they are registered at a school, Dawn House students are in the unusual position for young people in further education of retaining their statements of SEN until they're nineteen. Dawn House uses the information from the statement to help the college understand the specific needs of students and why support has to be tailored. Although the college has its own learning support department, Dawn House can demonstrate that its young people need very specific support which the school has the expertise to provide.

Challenges

Staffing issues

Formulating support across departments can be problematic, especially if staff are ill. An agreement for the coming year with the college means that for short term absences affecting a young person with one to one support, the school will either get the college to send work to school so the student can work in school with support, or the school will provide a speech and language therapist or tutor if they are available.

Flexibility of support

Matching the practice in Dawn House with a large institution like the West Nottinghamshire College can be a challenge. For example, the school is able to respond to changing needs by varying support throughout the academic year, whereas college tutors assume that once the support has been put in place in September, this will be the model for the rest of the year. An agreement to review support half termly means that tutors are getting used to the more continual process of assessment and the likelihood that as young people become more

established, they will need less support and will be aiming to be as independent as possible by the end of year 14. It is a relatively simple development which is going to have an impact on the young people and the approach taken by the college.

Training staff

There are differences too in the way the college and school organises training. Although training for college staff or any other provider is a crucial element in the success of placements in further education, take up of training is not always as high as the school would like. The school is prescriptive about training for its own staff but the college is more flexible and open, merely inviting tutors and other staff to sign up. Dawn House believes it is important that staff have a minimum of introductory training but the college says it is up to them to choose it. A change in the way training is offered may provide the breakthrough. Dawn House has invited tutors to come into the school where they can shadow a teacher at school and spend time with a speech and language therapist. This may be seen as more of a professional development day at Dawn House and as such could be more attractive than trying to tap into their inset day. If individuals feel they are contributing to their own CPD and their line managers support this, it is hoped that take up will improve.

Successes

Take up of further education is high and drop out rates low for Dawn House FE students, with the majority finishing with some sort of accreditation. Take up of further education from pupils in year 11 is 100%. Out of a maximum of 25 students in each year, the school saw only two students drop out of further education in 2008/9 and only one the following year.

As well as employment, including supported working and apprenticeships, Dawn House students move on to a variety of destinations. A new route includes those who move on to their home town colleges to finish national diploma courses begun at West Nottinghamshire College once they have developed enough independence as learners.

Among the many individual success stories

include those who move into employment. A high level of robust support is often required to help students achieve their aspirations. In one case, a young woman in year 14 who loves horse riding did horse care at college and found a work placement looking after horses, eventually securing a job at some stables. Although her experience with horses meant she was competent at practical tasks, her low literacy levels meant she needed a good deal of help to acquire qualifications. She also needed a lot of social support to understand working structures and how to interact with her boss and other employees.

Conclusion

Ensuring students feel part of both school and college is seen as an important precondition of young people getting the most out of dual placements. Both college and school are committed to young people genuinely succeeding at their chosen pathway, rather than merely being concerned about ticking the inclusion box. At professional level, good liaison between departments and professionals is at the key to making the partnership work smoothly.

How to use

Key issues and principles

- Continuing personalised support planned and delivered by professionals with recognised expertise.
- Inclusive provision where young people are ready to access college placements etc.
- An holistic approach involving integration of education, therapy and care.

Barriers

The partners had to find an effective way of communicating and over time a structured system of liaison has evolved. Differences of size and practice between the school and college can make communication a challenge. On a day to day level email and phone calls are used to alert the school of any incidents or serious concerns involving a Dawn House student, for example if a health and safety issue

or behaviour problem occurs. Regular meetings between departments and professionals have been put in place to deal with strategic issues and to keep young people's progress under review.

How to turn partnership working between schools and colleges into good practice

Much good practice takes place in the work carried out before young people enter college, for example through the transition review planning process, preparation at the end of Year 11 and induction in Year 12. When FE in college is agreed, the following Dawn House's experience suggests the following tips for successful placement:

Top tips

- Put structures in place to ensure communication between professionals is smooth.
- Offer young people expert support to help them get the most out of their courses within FE college.
- Plan for their increasing independence as learners with an extended curriculum at school to support them in developing life skills.

Key legislation

Section 325 (5) Education Act 1996	Requires LAs to review a statement at least every 12 months.
The Education and Skills Act 2008	Made LAs responsible for Connexions' duties in April 2008.
The Learning and Skills Act 2000 Section 139A (amended by section 80 of the Education and Skills Act 2008)	Local authorities now responsible for ensuring learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are assessed in their final year of compulsory schooling.
The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learners Act 2009	Funding responsibility for the funding and organisation of 16-19 education and training transferred to local authorities from the LSC. Includes the responsibility for LLDD up to the age of 25 and is supported by the Young People's Learning Agency for England (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA)

Key policy

- **Through Inclusion to Excellence**, the LSC's report on funding and provision for learners with LDD, made recommendations for taking forward the inclusion agenda.
- Alongside this, has been an increasing focus on person centred planning set out in **Valuing People**, the Governments strategy for learning disability which highlighted the need to plan holistically to meet individual needs across the whole spectrum of a person's life.
- **Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC): better support for families**, launched in May 2007, is the transformation programme for disabled children's services. As part of the AHDC programme the **National Transition Support Programme (TSP)** was set up. This is a national programme to improve support for disabled young people in their transition to adulthood. TSP is running over three years with £19m of funding committed between 2008 and 2011.

Organisations and websites

- **National Transition Support programme** www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk
- **Children's Workforce Development Council** www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/
- Covers Integrated Working including setting up and developing multi-agency teams. www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/multiagencyworking
- **Transition guide** CDC, 2007, a transition guide for all services: key information for professionals about the transition process for disabled young people
- **Putting People First**: personalisation toolkit, 2008, Department for Health

Acknowledgements

The National Transition Support Team would like to thank the staff at Nottinghamshire County Council for their assistance with this case study.

National Transition Support Team (NTST)

NTST is working alongside the National Strategies and the Child Health and Maternity Partnership to coordinate the delivery of the Transition Support Programme.

NTST is based at the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England. CDC is hosted by NCB. www.ncb.org.uk/cdc

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