

national transition support team

working together to improve transition
for disabled young people

Case Study: Thurrock Council (person centred planning)

Introduction

A whole school approach to personalisation that includes person centred planning, work experience, personalised curriculums and support into mainstream college settings.

Overview

This case study details the steps that Beacon Hill School has taken to implement a whole school personalised approach. It demonstrates how a person centred approach is adopted from the year 9 review and leads to personalised work experience, personalised curriculum and clear and supported transition to college that can take up to 2 years for some students. It focuses on completing this work with young people with severe learning disabilities and profound and multiple learning disabilities and explores how traditional person centred tools have been adapted to meet the needs of these young people. Finally, it highlights the importance of multi agency working and joint commitment and change to secure real outcomes for disabled young people.

Main transferable learning points

Person Centred Reviews are only the starting point in developing whole school personalised approaches and need to extend much further into curriculum, work experience and preparation to adulthood to achieve real outcomes for disabled young people. Given the opportunity and support, disabled young people will continue to push the boundaries of what was thought possible and be their own success stories. School staff and parents need support in coming to terms with the young person's increasing amount of independence and control over their own lives and the different approaches needed to enable this. Schools must work alongside other agencies and develop close working relationships to ensure that real outcomes are achieved.

Introduction to Beacon Hill School and the Post 16 Unit

Beacon Hill School opened in September 2004 and currently operates on two sites. The main site is in South Ockendon and meets the needs of pupils aged 3 to 16 years. The needs of young people aged 16 to 19 are met by the new, purpose built Post 16 Unit situated near Grays. The school and Post 16 Unit cater for students who have profound and complex impairments with many having complex medical needs. The Post 16 Unit environment promotes individual learning of the highest standard. It encourages young adults to take ownership of their education, both at Beacon Hill and in the wider community. The Unit provides stimulating and age appropriate activities which allow students to reach their full potential.

From 2007 Beacon Hill School has been designated "A Special College for Sensory and Physical Needs". In addition the school operates support services for the Local Authority providing risk assessment for pupils with physical needs and services for ICT assessments and an Outreach Service to all schools in Thurrock that require advice on Manual Handling Risks and training issues.

The Post 16 Unit can accommodate up to 25 young people at any one time, all will have a Statement of Special Educational Needs that is reviewed annually. The curriculum for these particular young people focuses on an individual learning programme that will provide the young person with life skills to support them into adulthood. Students are supported to be as independent as possible and to make their own decisions and choices.

Using the Towards Independence ASDAN Award Scheme, and through Foundation Learning all students complete appropriate accredited courses to meet their individual needs. There are individual modules written to accredit aspects of the following areas of learning:

- Independent Living Skills
- Work Related Learning
- Leisure/Recreation/Sport
- Cultural
- Creative studies
- Personal Development, Citizenship, PSHE

This case study outlines the person centred approach that has been applied to all key areas of the transition process for young people in school and the Post 16 Unit.

What were the drivers for change?

Young people had traditionally not been at the centre of transition planning and had little or no choice after full time school education.

Young people had traditionally not been at the centre of the learning and the curriculum. They had to fit in with what was on offer, and curriculum design was not led by their needs.

The only options available to young people were college, day centres, and residential care, at home with little or no support package.

Parents have a very poor opinion of post school provision and school was not taking a lead in promoting a more positive image of this

Information about future options was not being shared appropriately with parents at an early enough stage in the students' transition

Work experience was not an option. Colleges were often seen as the only option for young people and much of the college provision did not meet the needs of young people with a range of needs.

Person centred approaches were being introduced to systems and process that

previously had not put the needs of the young person first and were struggling with the culture of proposed change.

Agencies were not working in partnership to achieve the best possible outcomes for the young person.

There were a rising number of young people with complex needs within the school.

There were rising expectations that all young people were entitled to the same experiences, i.e. education, training, work, own homes etc.

What was the inspiration for change?

Five years ago the new Beacon Hill School and Post 16 Unit were formed.

The new school had derived through amalgamation and it gave the opportunity to create a new provision with a new and very different vision. There was a need to re-write curriculum and re-define the ethos of the school

There was a new management team with new ideas, an understanding of the barriers and issues preventing a new approach to young people with complex needs.

There was a new focus on children and young people with severe learning disabilities and profound and multiple learning disabilities and that traditional curriculum needed to change in order to meet these students' needs.

The management team were able to have a major role in the development of a vision that the new Unit would provide an environment that young 16+ year olds would expect, i.e. appropriate furniture that did not have a "school feel" to it, facilities that would enable and empower young people to prepare for adulthood.

The opportunity to provide a curriculum that was personalised to each student.

The opportunity to work with partners to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people with complex needs.

A vision that was prepared to push boundaries and do things differently.

What was your organisation trying to achieve?

The school mission statement is “Achievement has no boundaries” and this statement was at the core of what we were trying to achieve. We wanted to make sure that every student had access to a full range of opportunities, which were differentiated and structured appropriately for their needs. We also wanted to empower the students to be at the centre of the decision making process about their learning.

We were trying to create a provision that bridged the gap between the slightly more formal learning at school, where we are to a certain extent still bound by the National Curriculum, to the more independent adult world which exists for young people with complex needs.

We also recognized that during this phase there is a huge amount of work to be done to support parents coming to terms with the young person’s increasing amount of independence and control over their own lives

There is a need to develop strong multi disciplinary working at this stage in the young person’s life and we wanted to develop very close effective working relationships with the other agencies involved, particularly Connexions and the LA Transition team.

Our long term goal was to make sure that the students and their families were equipped, prepared and excited about facing their future opportunities. We wanted to try and change the perception that the future was just a bleak dark hole and show that there were exciting opportunities ahead.

The success of this was measured by how well the transitions went, how early decisions were made and how smoothly these changes were made. For some students this process actually lasted nearly 2 years in order to make sure the student would succeed in a new environment.

The Beginning – Year 9 Review

Disabled young people are fully prepared for the Year 9 review

In preparation for the Year 9 transition review, all young people transferring to KS 4 are encouraged and supported to make a DVD that tells their story. The DVD shows who the young person is, what they like/dislike, what their hopes and aspirations are. The DVD is shown at the start of the Year 9 review and gives the professionals (Connexions PAs, Adult Services etc), often unknown to the young person and their family, valuable information about the young person.

Range of person centred tools used in the review based on needs of disabled young person

Year 9 reviews focus entirely on the young person and a number of person centred techniques are used/or are being piloted to ensure that the wishes and aspirations of all young people, especially those who do not have verbal communication, are captured. Young people who are able also complete simple pictorial forms about themselves and take home simple question versions for family members to contribute to. Interestingly, some parents were unhappy with some of the original person centred techniques used, especially the “map around the wall” technique – they found this confusing and not very helpful.

We have begun piloting and adapting some of the excellent materials produced by Surrey to support this process. Students can choose what they want the paperwork to look like.

Most of our students are unable to read, but for some students, if an adult supports them by reading the simple questions, they were able to identify what they wanted to say.

For those students who are not able to express their wishes either verbally, through symbols or using objects, it is really important to seek information from everyone who supports them.

The resources in the Surrey pack were very helpful with this. The forms are designed not to take much time to complete but address the most important questions. We share these with everyone who works with the young person.

Parental feedback so far has been that they like the more direct simplified approach and feel that the questions and issues they raise were much more relevant to the young person's future.

What we have learned so far

From our pilot work on person centred reviews, we have learnt that it is really important to be flexible with the approach for each review and to plan it in the most appropriate way to meet the needs of each individual student.

We also need to make sure that the students and families understand the process and can see how it will benefit them.

There needs to be clear outcomes and targets which will then be re-visited in the future.

We have also found that this approach enables us to look at a wider range of issues and it is less likely that we will miss out on something that is really important to the student and their family.

A recent example of this was where a student attended an after school club and was worried as the member of staff who supported him was leaving and he wanted to still go to the club. This led to opening up a whole discussion around support services on offer outside of school, buddying systems, learning to travel train etc.

This approach gives us the ideal forum to discuss opportunities for the future in a positive way and to give families information in an appropriate way.

We plan to continue using this approach, build on it across KS4 and P16 and hopefully link it in more closely with multi agency working.

In house person centred approach training provided to all school staff

All school staff participating in the Year 9 review receives in house training. This transition process continues to be built upon during the student's time in KS4. Linked activities begin in KS4 with students from the P16 Unit. We also have a 14 – 19 manager who oversees both groups. To ensure continuity and cause the least disruption to the young people as they move from the school to the Post 16 Unit, some familiar Teaching Assistants (TAs) from KS4 transfer with the young people. TAs work on a rotating, flexible contract that includes working at both sites.

Year 9 transition reviews inform each individual's personal curriculum and learning targets

At the end of the Year 9 review the family and professionals begin to have an understanding of what the personalised curriculum needs to look like for each young person as they move into Year 10. Targets and learning are identified and mapped onto Foundation Learning to insure appropriate accreditation for each pupil. There are also opportunities built into the KS3 and KS4 curriculum for students to make choices through activities such as weekly carousel option groups.

Changing systems across the Local Authority

The School is now working with the local education authority to consider ways of changing the statutory paperwork to reflect the more person centred approach used during the Year 9 review.

Personalised Curriculum and integration into the Post 16 Unit

Gradual, supported transitions

KS4 students have a number of regular links to P16 Unit including weekly college visits and social events such as the Christmas party. This is to introduce them to the Unit and staff, and starts to prepare the young person for a very

different environment so that the transfer at the beginning of the Year 12 academic year is as smooth as possible. An individual transition programme is planned for each student in the summer term before they move on. The Teaching Assistants (TAs) who will move with the students into Year 12 are crucial to this gradual integration into the Unit. TAs are not attached to any one student in the unit but work with all, so that each TA gets to know and understand each student. This also eases the separation when the student leaves the Unit. This same principle is applied in the college setting.

Trying out a range of subjects and developing personalised curriculums

When students start at the P16 Unit they all take part in an induction programme where they experience a huge variety of different activities that are on offer. All students are then involved in choosing their areas of learning by contributing their ideas to an Individual Learning Programme (I.L.P). This is done by an individual tutorial, using pictures, photos, videos and objects of reference to help the student make decisions.

Within their areas of choice they are encouraged to be as independent as possible and achieve as much as they can.

Achievable targets are set to show progress is being made. Students are assisted by staff skilled in understanding their needs, who are knowledgeable of current learning strategies and technologies. The timetable is then completely re-written to reflect these choices and it is usual after this to have a different curriculum and timetable for each student. If the student and families want this can include flexible start and end times.

At the P16 Unit all young people have a fully personalised curriculum. During their second and third year at the Unit, the curriculum offers are re-visited and new choices made.

Regular multi agency transition focussed meetings for each student

From Year 9 onwards the School and Unit will work with key partners to ensure that planning for the future is at the forefront of the next 5 years. Regular meetings with the social care Transition Team, Health (Nursing team, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy), Connexions PAs, College staff and families are used to ensure that the Year 9 Transition Plan is being reviewed and adapted where necessary and that crucially, all students have identified provision once they leave the Unit. The specialist Connexions worker works at the school and Unit for one day a week and through this builds up good relationships with the students and their families. The Unit, in partnership with social care, support students to spend one day a week at a social care house to practice life skills. In this setting they will plan meals, shop for the food, cook, clean, use money and travel to the shops.

Participation workshops

Students at Key Stage 4 and those in the Post 16 Unit are given the opportunity to take part in the joint project of Impact Drama week held each year. This event consists of workshops based around a number of themes such as communication, relationships, independent living, decision making, aspirations, choices and respect for themselves and others. In 2009 the event focussed on equipping students with the skills they need to cope with any transition in their lives, i.e. for Key Stage 4 students to cope with their move to Post 16 and Post 16 students to prepare them for their future life after schools.

Learning from this curriculum approach

We have found that although this is a quite complex curriculum model it has been extremely beneficial for the students.

The students have begun in KS3 and KS4 to make choices about their curriculum options. They also make choices about college option groups.

The Post 16 curriculum has been designed to extend and build on this by giving students a wider range of choice of learning opportunities.

They have begun to take more responsibility for their learning and take ownership of their choices.

It has also been noticeable that some students have developed very good negotiating skills through this approach. They will come and talk to staff if they are not happy about the choices that they have made or if they feel that they want to make changes to their programmes.

This flexible approach has also enabled us to bring new ideas on board to reflect students' interests, for example, one student whose mother was about to have another child, wanted to learn about looking after a baby so she could help her mum, so we were able to build this into her programme.

Logistically this approach can be complicated so it needs careful planning and it also needs staff who are prepared to work in a very flexible way to facilitate it. The majority of our timetable at P16 is in very small groups or individuals and TAs are given programmes and trained to facilitate these activities. Very little work is now carried out within big groups with our P16 students.

Transitioning to College

Year 10 – 1 day a week at mainstream local college

In Year 10 all students start to attend the local college, South Essex College (formally called Thurrock College) one day a week. Prior to this, the Unit and College will have met to consider and design the courses that the students have said that they want through their ILPs. College staff will have also met each student as part of their interaction with the Unit and school.

The Unit have a unique partnership with South Essex College and both work together to design courses that the students have said they want. By sending such a large number of students and linking in with other schools, the college is able to offer a wide range of courses for the students to choose from.

School staff supporting college staff to develop skills

One of the biggest challenges has been making sure that the more complex needs students also have meaningful access and we have done this by working with the college to provide a Therapeutic Day for this group.

Each student is supported at the College by the Unit TAs and school teaching staff to ensure continuity between the Unit and College. The TAs will also not only support the student but also the College staff. Both the Unit and College staff are encouraged to learn from each other and between them build up a range of skills, experience and knowledge that benefits the students. The school is able to lend the College necessary equipment to ensure that they can provide for the students. A recent Ofsted inspection rated the partnership as Outstanding.

College staff attend school annual reviews from Year 10

College staff visit the Unit regularly and will attend school annual reviews from Year 10 onwards so that they get to know the students and the students can familiarise themselves with College staff. This has the effect of reducing a student's anxiety when they start to attend College on a weekly basis (and in some cases eventually go on to College full time after age 19).

The College have also worked with the School and Unit to extend personalised approaches. Where a student expresses a particular interest, the College will look for opportunities to develop this. For example, one student was very interested in clothes and worked with a student on a fashion course to design her own outfit which she then modelled in the College fashion show!

Investing for the long term

The College are very much aware that some of these students will be with them up to age 25 and want to ensure that they are comfortable and familiar with the college environment and with staff. In addition to the interaction with the Unit and students, the College arrange a trip abroad to put into practice the life skills learnt at both the Unit and College, i.e. money, travel, different cultures, food etc. This helps young people put into practice their individual learning and starts to reduce reliance on the school.

Both South Essex College and the Post 16 Unit are committed to this personalised approach for each student but do not underestimate the challenges in continuing this approach.

Learning from the partnership with the College

The inclusive link at the College has been a very gradual process to develop. Initially courses were only available for out more able students and it has taken considerable work from School, Unit and College to make these accessible for all.

It has been particularly exciting to see the responses of the students with more complex needs from being in the inclusive College environment.

They have enjoyed the opportunity to choose and wear their own clothes on College days rather than uniform and it has been great to see how confident they are in the College setting.

Although some of the courses are only for pupils with special educational needs, the inclusive aspect of moving around the College and using the common room, refectory, library etc is a huge benefit.

There are significant challenges to setting up and maintaining this provision. The School pays a large amount in College fees every year. School and Unit transport has to be re-routed to avoid additional journeys. The transfer of LSC funding to Local Authorities may also have an effect on this post April 2011.

Thurrock College has recently merged to become South Essex College and this will lead to additional challenges. New staff are coming in to post and it is important that they realise the benefit and outstanding features of this provision. Unfortunately it is not easy to provide data to show this success although we are working with the College to map future courses across to Foundation Learning for accreditation. However meetings have already been set up with new staff and we are hoping to build on and extend this provision.

Work Experience

Statutory work experience entitlement

In Year 10, each student has a 2 week “tailored” work experience. Before students decide what to do, each is encouraged and supported to visit a number of different places before making a final choice. Again this is open to all students and PMLD students carry out roles with support where they can gain sensory responses from being in a work environment.

Building work opportunities into the school curriculum

This is then extended as appropriate in Year 11 for pupils to follow personalised work experience programmes, usually for a day or a half day a week. Once students move on to the Post 16 Unit they are given the opportunity to select what type of work placement they want. The Unit finds the placement which could be in a number of areas including animals, catering, retail etc.

TAs provide high levels of support to the student prior to, during and after the work experience to ensure that they are fully prepared.

Even though it is known that not all the students will move on to full or part time employment as a young adult, all have the opportunity to take part in the experience including those with the most complex needs.

One of our biggest successes was a young man with autism who was able to work independently doing specific and clear tasks at a local supermarket. There were very few opportunities at the Unit for him to work without support and this was a very significant achievement for him.

Learning from the work experience

The inclusive approach to work experience was started to ensure equality of opportunity and we were not at all sure what kind of response we would get from pupils, parents or work placements.

All placements were visited in advance and met the student to make sure that expectations were clearly set out and understood. Initially parents were also sceptical about the value of the opportunity.

However, we quickly found out how beneficial it was for this group of students. Meeting new people and being in a different environment gave them the chance to demonstrate responses that we might not have expected e.g. a 16 year old male student with profound and multiple learning disabilities who showed great delight at being asked to put out the new display of ladies lingerie!

Many of the staff that we worked with at the placements had no previous experience of people with special educational needs and it was fantastic to see how well the students responded to and interacted with them.

For some of our more able students who were able to work with less support, they showed that they could follow instructions and work with members of staff at the placements. We have also shared this success with Connexions and the Transition Team and looked at how these opportunities could be continued into supported employment.

Finding placements was not easy. Most were negotiated through visits with the group and realistic discussions with staff about what opportunities were on offer.

It was clear with several potential placements that the staff there had reservations and when we felt uncomfortable with this, we sought an

alternative. Now having built up a bank of placements it is easier to make selections.

Deploying staff to support students was a difficult task logistically but needed a whole school overview to look at how to achieve this. We were not prepared to let students go without the support they would need to succeed. One thing we did learn was the value of having placements near to each other geographically and a mobile phone contact system set up for emergency support.

Challenges in developing a whole school personalised approach

- Time needed to make sure changes were properly planned, developed and owned by school staff
- Resistance from some parents and staff to change
- Embedding new ethos within the school
- Developing staff skills to work in a very different and more flexible way

How did you overcome/deal with them?

- Deputy Heads created time to work off site in order to formulate structures and ideas. This was then brought back to the whole staff to discuss, add to and re-shape.
- Key staff were able to take the lead in demonstrating the benefits of this particular way of working to others who were less willing to take it on board.
- Time was created within the school day for teachers and assistants to meet together to look at the individual needs of particular pupils and work out ways to meet them. This helped to create the ethos of personalisation. All staff were involved in providing information for person centred reviews.

What would you do differently next time?

Maybe look at ways of involving pupils more in the curriculum design. For example, we created option groups for two afternoons a week but perhaps pupils might have come up with different ideas about what those option groups should be.

We developed a close working relationship between KS3 and KS4 at the start of the process. But with hindsight, we should have looked at closer links between KS4 and P16 at the same time. This issue became more complicated due to the split site provision.

Specific challenges to the work/project that you overcame

The biggest challenge was to change peoples thinking and perceptions and to encourage staff to allow pupils to be more independent.

By modelling higher expectations of pupils and making sure that we set challenging opportunities for all students, staff gradually began to realise what the students could achieve.

What were the biggest contributors to these successes?

The students themselves were the biggest contributors to success. As they got more ownership of their own learning and were given the opportunity to make choices, it quickly became clear how much more mature they were becoming. They began to expect to be given the chance to make their own choices.

Benefits of the project

Students have become much more independent and autonomous in their learning. They also have more of a voice and feel empowered to make themselves heard. The outcomes for students in terms of further education and employment are also beginning to demonstrate the effectiveness of a holistic personalised approach. The success of this was measured by how well transitions went, how early decisions were made and how

smoothly these changes were made. For some students this process actually lasted nearly 2 years in order to make sure the student would succeed in a new environment.

Feedback from young people and their families

Feedback from young people and their families has been very positive. The young people show and tell us what they enjoy the opportunity to make and learn from their own decisions. Families are beginning to see the students in a more positive way and focus on what they can do and what they want to extend rather than what they cannot do.

Families are also beginning to see their young people as individuals who have the right to make their own choices and this approach is making them better prepared for the exciting opportunities ahead.

Conclusion

Our long term goal is to make sure that the students and their families are equipped, prepared and excited about facing their future opportunities. We want to try and change the perception that the future is just a bleak dark hole and show that there are exciting opportunities ahead.

Here in Beacon Hill we knew that if we were to support our students fully with this new approach, it was not only the students who had to adapt to change. Thus the learning from all that we have done was not only for the benefit of our students but also that of the staff in the School, College and for those who took part in providing or supporting the work experience.

Future plans

We do not underestimate the challenges we face in the changing times ahead but we do believe that the processes and partnerships that we have established will help us to continue to develop our person centred approaches in the future, not only in Beacon Hill but also with other schools in Thurrock.

Our plans for the next twelve months are to:

- Participate in the roll out programme for person centred approaches to mainstream schools, with funding from the Transition Support Programme.
- Continue using the person centred approach used at the Year 9 review, build on it across KS4 and P16 and hopefully link it in more closely with multi agency working.
- Work with the LA to make person centred plans more meaningful and accessible to our students.
- To set up a KS4 and P16 advocacy day facilitated by Speaking Up and funded through the Transition Support Programme. At the end of the day, students will choose people to train as peer champions to represent their views within LA groups.
- To embed foundation learning across the School, beginning to identify key areas and destination routes at Year 9 and developing this through KS4 and P16.
- Revisit the opportunities for choice within KS3 and Ks4 and consult with students about how this could be changed and improved.



Young people taking part in person centred planning

How the personalised agenda develops through KS3 – P16

Year 9

Person centred plan
Destination routes start to be identified
Transition Team and Connexions involvement starts

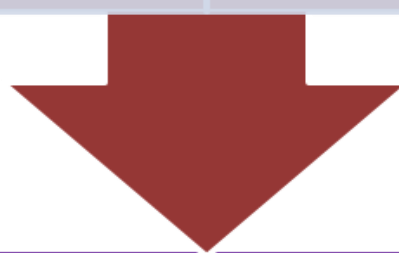
Foundation learning routes identified
Student choice promoted through option groups



Year 10/11

College links
2 week block work experience
Impact Drama project

Individual tailored work experience placements
Joint linked activities with Post 16 group
Transition visits to Post 16



Year 12-14 (Post 16)

Induction or refresher course
Personalised learning and accreditation routes identified through ILP

Supported final transition from school to college or work

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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.

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