Effective implementation of Education, Health and Care plans in partnership with the local authority

Bromley Local Authority used their effective working relationship with Bromley College to test elements of the SEND reforms before they became law. A key part of this was the development and implementation of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. Working in partnership, the local authority (LA) and the college implemented the changes required by the draft Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice in the 2013-14 academic year. This provided clear evidence of the strengths of working together to achieve the best outcomes for learners as well as highlighting the implications for staff, the college, potential learners and their families and carers, which will inform planning for September 2014.

Key points from the new legislation

Colleges must co-operate with local authorities on needs assessments for students and in the development and review of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. The college also has a duty to admit a young person if it is named in the young person’s EHC plan, and to provide the educational support specified in the plan.

Local authorities have a duty to review EHC plans at least once a year and colleges must co-operate in these reviews. The local authority can also request that the college convenes and holds the review on their behalf, and the college may be asked to attend a review meeting for the young person before they start college if named in the young person’s EHC plan. The review focuses on:

- The young person’s progress towards achieving the outcomes specified in the EHC plan.
- Whether the outcomes remain relevant.
- Whether preparing for adulthood and transition planning have been built into the EHC plan.
- Good exit planning if the young person is nearing the end of their time in formal education and the plan has less than twelve months to run.

More information about EHC plans can be found in Chapter 9 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 – 25 Years.

Planning for the reforms

Whilst planning for the reforms, the college focused on three key areas in order to develop effective EHC plans with their LA: partnership working, transition planning for an effective curriculum and communication.

1. A shared vision with effective partnership working is the key critical success factor

- Preparation work started early. With visioning workshops with young people, families, schools, LA and Health colleagues and other local providers. The workshops were supported by the Preparing for Adulthood team who reported on the main findings and these became a template for further planning activity.
- The Post-16 Commissioning Group comprised of LA Commissioners, Heads of Service and representatives from colleges, special schools and others worked together to develop provision that meet the needs of young people.
- Where the college universal offer could not meet all the assessed needs, the gaps were identified and work with partners
across education, health and care ensured that a holistic package was in place.

• A LA representative attended college team meetings to support staff development and to increase understanding of the reforms and their requirements.
• To ensure consistency, a template format for EHC plans was agreed with all partners as well as practical documents for assessment and review. The agreed timeline was shared with other practitioners and commissioners locally and nationally.
• External communications focused on the partnership rather than the individual institution. For example, when attending schools and other events, staff from the college, schools and the LA represented and spoke about the whole partnership rather than promoting their individual role within it.

2. Transition planning with a focus on review and redesign of the curriculum has supported person-centred learning

• Each young person was individually allocated to a Preparing for Adulthood Adviser, employed by the LA and forging strong relationships with college staff.
• Link courses have been redesigned from a more traditional course format to allow for more individualised programmes. These programmes are also being extended to include link arrangements for students with more complex needs. The assessment of needs in a college environment is carried out in time for support arrangements to be agreed and tested 7 months ahead of the start date, thus allowing the LA to meet its statutory requirement.
• The college provides a room for special schools to use one day a week for a year before the learner comes to college.
• The college is employing a Transition Coordinator to support the transition and assessment process between school and college and towards independent life and work.
• New study programmes no longer rely solely on external accreditation and include college certification, thus allowing for more appropriate individualised outcomes and raising personal achievement.
• Person-Centred Planning (PCP) is embedded throughout the curriculum as part of tutorials and target-setting. This allows the student contribution to be embedded into the curriculum, helping to address a recognised issue in the resourcing of PCP.

• Good annual assessment timelines are put in place, which are shared with parents and carers. Documentation is aligned to the EHC plan template so there is a strategic and standardised approach and no unnecessary repetition.
• Early involvement at LA planning meetings with colleagues from other services has facilitated access to identified needs that are not always easy to source in a local FE college; for example, speech and language support, support for behaviour that challenges and staff training and capacity building. The college has, in partnership with the LA, two speech and language therapists from the NHS who visit two days a week, which has been invaluable to staff and learners.
• The college, special schools and Nash College (an independent specialist college for learners with moderate to profound learning disabilities) have worked together to create a programme taking learners with complex needs who would normally be unable to come to the college.
• A job coach will be needed to support learners to find employment. There are good employability pathways for learners with moderate learning difficulties and the college wants to extend this to learners with more complex needs.

“Personalising the Personal Progression Pathway programme was a huge logistical challenge! We had to ensure that the aspirations and needs of the young people were taken into account when planning their individual timetables but it has proved to be a great success with all students enjoying being on their programmes and thriving at Bromley College.”

Rhona Sapsford – Curriculum Co-ordinator, Learning for Living and Work

3. Good communications and an open and transparent way of working has created the right environment for planning and implementation

• The use of a common language by all staff in reviews, with parents, stakeholders and
visitors, became an important tool in effecting cultural change. For example, ‘curriculum’ became ‘life pathways’. There is more talk about life outcomes and the concept of ‘just enough’ support to enable the development of independence.

- A transparent, ‘no blame’, solution-focused culture has been developed across the partnership and with parents. Each service understands the context in which the planning and implementation of EHC plans takes place. Any resourcing issues are openly acknowledged and solutions discussed and the implications of new timescales for the different organisations are shared.
- The views of young people and their families and cares were sought and recorded and have actively influenced the development of the plan and the way it has been introduced.
- The need for capacity building within the college was acknowledged and actively supported by all partners. All staff are supported by an effective professional development programme – some of which is funded by Bromley LA.

Avoiding potential pitfalls

- Build in time for on-going improvement of EHC plans. For example, set aside meeting and feedback time to deal with any inconsistencies and standardisation issues that may arise when providers work in partnership as this will save time in the long run.
- Review the curriculum in the light of the EHC plan and ensure it allows for individualised, one-to-one provision.
- Carry out detailed transition planning.
- Set up learner pathways that are clear to college staff, partner organisations, learners, their parents and carers.
- Invest in regular reviews.
- Nurture the goodwill of the team as it is crucial to any success.
- Be positive about the changes.

Some next steps

To ensure they are fully prepared for implementation, Bromley College will be:

- Refining existing EHC plans following on-going regular evaluation which will form part of their quality control system.
- Transferring non-statutory plans into the new format as it has been so successful.
- Investigating internships.
- Providing an enrichment programme that uses the Student Experience Team and college pastors.

The impact of the programme

- The college has more detailed and relevant information about the young people which allows them to individualise the assessment process, which in turn leads to on-going person-centred reviews.
- EHC plans have helped to develop a different culture where learner review is constant and uses the EHC plan as its anchor.
- EHC plans have enabled the college to create individualised study programmes for learners based on the four ‘Preparing for Adulthood’ pathways.