Further Education Engagement in SEN Reforms

Oaklands College
Case Study

Hertfordshire Local Authority and Oaklands College working collaboratively to implement the SEN reforms

Hertfordshire colleges have a history of working collaboratively with the local authority since their involvement in the East of England Improving Choices Pathfinder 13 years ago. The focus of this work was for colleges to make provision for young people with high levels of need so they could stay and learn in their local areas. Oaklands College now makes provision for 200 high need students, who travel daily from across Hertfordshire and North London.

Planning for the reforms

Hertfordshire Local Authority was identified as a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Pathfinder champion, and set out to involve colleges in preparing for the new legislation. It sought to promote the spirit of the Green Paper, Support and Aspiration and work with providers to ensure parity, understanding and transparency.

The local authority (LA) worked with all its colleges to ‘map’ the curriculum provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and working with the lead professionals in each college, agreed the developments required to better meet local need. At the same time the LA worked with the College on a range of wider developments in preparation for the implementation of the reforms.

1. Student funding.

Last year the two organisations agreed that funding changes should not disrupt the student experience or cause doubt and uncertainty about future provision among future students and their families. The LA and the College agreed interim funding arrangements that mirrored the previous funding model. They agreed to work towards funding ‘bands’ in the longer term which could provide a standardised approach across all the colleges in Hertfordshire for the majority of students.

2. Transition from school to college.

One transition support worker was appointed to each college, jointly funded by the colleges, special schools and the local authority. (The staff are line managed by the colleges, with a project director managed by the LA.) The transition workers have a case load of young people in their last year at school. They work with them and their parents to prepare them for college. An interim evaluation of the work so far indicates a more robust transition package; also those identified as being at risk of becoming a student Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) have maintained 100% attendance while on individualised transition packages. Parent feedback has been extremely positive, noting an improved focus on personalised learning for their children.

3. Improved dialogue with special schools.

One outcome of this for Oaklands has been the creation of a five day programme for a
group of young people who face challenges that could inhibit their successful integration into the college. Students spend three days in the college and two days back at the school.

4. Focus on employment as an outcome for students.

On the basis that employment is key to social inclusion; the curriculum now includes realistic work placements, with students supported in the workplace by job coaches. The targeted students are those with moderate learning difficulties, and social and emotional difficulties. Last year the target was 15 to gain permanent employment – which was met. Alongside this has been the development of a supported internship which is due for a September 2014 launch.

5. Staff training.

The LA has provided tailor-made staff training for college staff on Education, Health and Care plans. They also arranged and part funded a course in systematic instruction for potential job coaches. Oaklands College now has six job coaches training with students in the workplace. In addition the college has taken on employment advisers who negotiate placements with employers.

The impact of the reforms

The biggest impact has been that the continuity of funding has allowed time for sound planning. This has enabled good transition for students, and reassurance for all concerned that they have input into future planning.

Emerging best practice in implementing the reforms

• Close planning relationships between special schools and colleges with the transition workers ensuring the quality of the student transition.

• Students, parents and carers are now working with the college in shaping the future.

Avoiding potential pitfalls

• Hertfordshire started planning early and talking to all interested parties in order to avoid pitfalls.

Some next steps

• To involve students, parents and carers more in the planning. Plans are underway to extend the student forum, and to engage parents to join a forum and become involved in planning for the future.

• To work with other colleges more closely to share practice, to define the college offer and promote the local offer across the county of Hertfordshire. Cross college co-operation has continued and is key in working towards a coherent and transparent Hertfordshire offer together with consistent co-operation, mutual support and sharing of best practice.