Further Education Engagement in SEN Reforms

Hackney Community College
Case Study

Working together to improve the progression into employment for young people with severe learning difficulties and autism, in the borough of Hackney

- Hackney Community College is a large general further education college in the centre of Hoxton, within the London Borough of Hackney.
- Hackney Learning Trust is a department within Hackney Council’s Children & Young People’s Service.

In 2009 Hackney Learning Trust requested that the college make provision for five 16-year-old young people with complex learning difficulties for whom no suitable post-16 placement could be found. The first placement was made by the college in September 2012. In September 2014 the college will be enrolling over 86 students into this specialist provision. All the students are young people with a high level of support needs, many with autism and some with profound and complex needs. The college works closely with the Learning Trust to deliver this provision.

Hackney responding to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) reforms

In 2012/13, Hackney Community College was part of a national LSIS project to pilot aspects of the Green Paper, Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability. It worked with other London-based providers, each piloting different aspects and sharing outcomes. This engagement prompted the prioritisation of a curriculum review, leading to a clearer focus on the four strands: work, health, independent living and social life. Development work took place on identifying the relevance of the world of work for each student, and a differentiated work-related curriculum was produced.

Hackney Learning Trust had clear aspirations of employment for its young people with learning difficulties leaving schools and colleges, even before the publication of the green paper. The Head of Additional Learning Needs had worked in Canada and seen effective provision there. With the publication of the new reforms, the Hackney Learning Trust immediately took very seriously its new responsibilities to support school and college leavers in the workplace to train them to be effective employees.

The college and the trust worked together – students on the specialist provisions would experience the world of work as part of their curriculum throughout their sixth form years. Students attend the specialist provision for up to three years. As they approach an agreed ‘leaving’ date, their long-term goals are updated in terms of realistic employment. If a young person has the capability to learn the skills required in the workplace they then move into the Into Work programme. This could be anything from regular voluntary work, through part-time paid employment, to full-time paid employment. An assessment confirms that the
young person is able to learn to carry out their duties independently, without support, in the medium to long term. The initial support is in the form of job coaches.

The college identified some of its own specialist support assistants who were enthusiastic and had appropriate skills to become job coaches. Training courses for job coaches were reviewed, and the College and Learning Trust decided to write their own course, and train job coaches in-house. The course was run throughout the summer term 2014, and trained 15 people. It was delivered by the two college managers and the SEN post-16 project manager from the Trust. It has created a pool of job coaches who will be used as the provision expands in September 2014, ensuring sustainability. The second level of the training will follow in the autumn term 2014.

Currently, in the summer term 2014, there are six job coaches who are coaching 10 young people. Two of them are approaching being job ready, and are likely to be paid during the summer break.

Into Work is a flexible provision. A young person could be supported in work and only come into college for a tutorial once a week. In the future the tutorial could take place in the workplace. For other students just beginning, they may start with half a day, then a day a week in work. On other days job coaches will coach them in college, they will have the opportunity to be part of enterprise projects, and they will spend time each week learning about the world of work by being based on an employer’s premises and engaging with the staff and managers.

The impact of the reforms

The reforms have impacted significantly on the specialist provision, and the employment strand demonstrates this. The Learning Trust has supported the college to move away from focusing on accredited outcomes to concentrating on identifying and providing the skills required for a student to be an effective young adult in the local community. This means looking outside the walls of the college and using the community as part of the learning environment. New priorities and new job roles have been created. New ways of assessing success are being developed.

Emerging best practice in implementing the reforms

- ‘Do-it-yourself’ job coach training – it provides a forum to both train and provide on-going supervision.
- Bringing funding streams together to be able to provide up to 15 hours provision from the college in addition to individual job coaching.
- A second programme, Vocational Explorer, for students with moderate learning difficulties, is being delivered jointly by a local special school, Stormont House, (which has just gained a sixth form), and the college. The Learning Trust has brokered this and added to the mix the Peabody Trust. The Trust is finding employer partners for the programme in which the students ‘explore both the employment sector, and the skills required for employment’.

Avoiding potential pitfalls

- The ability of the young people to travel independently. This should be part of the assessment for suitability and built into the programme. Part of the job coaching training should be travel training, to avoid a potential pitfall.
- Rushing the young person into the role. There is a need for a good fit between the young person and the job role. A lot of detailed work needs to be undertaken on the job role, and on preparing the young person for it.

Some next steps

- Building a network of employers who really understand the vision and recruit fellow employers.
- On-the-job supervision of job coaches and development of the training.
- Working reciprocally with other neighbouring boroughs.