

Collaborative working to increase social inclusion

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Summary

This case study outlines how the Post 16 department at National Autistic Society (NAS) Radlett Lodge School worked with a local college to increase opportunities for social inclusion whilst widening the learning experiences of the young people. As well as learning new vocational skills and transferring existing skills to a new environment, the young people got the opportunity to work and socialise amongst other typically developing teenagers.

Key lessons learned

If the aim of your organisation is to provide a curriculum that is tailored and individualised for each young person you work with then this case study may help you to think about how to work with other FE providers in your area in order to provide a greater range of options for learners.

This project allowed us to identify and work on a range of individual targets for each young person relating to vocational skills, daily living skills, functional maths and English, and personal and social development.

About NAS Radlett Lodge School

- The Post 16 provision at Radlett Lodge opened in September 2011 and currently consists of 9 young people.
- We provide a curriculum by devising personalised programmes based on Foundation Learning.
- Personalised learning programmes are built around aims identified through each student's Personalised Centre Plan (PCP) created prior to entry to post 16 (in year 9-11).
- Through PCPs we aim to establish the future destination of each student in terms of living arrangements, further education and employment (after leaving the post 16 department).
- After establishing the destination of each student we map the skills they need to develop in order to achieve long term goals.
- After identifying the skills each student needs to develop and taking into consideration their strengths and interests we then select suitable modules and qualifications for their study.
- Weekly timetables are then tailored to each student's needs. We take into account any opportunities for partnerships outside of the school which can provide support with delivering programmes.

- We build a 3 year Individual Learning Programme for each student, which states what skills they need to develop and through what kind of programmes or qualifications over their time in the department. This plan is reviewed yearly and can be modified.
- We believe that working with local partners is important for our students for a number of reasons including:
 - It gives our students an opportunity to be part of a wider community.
 - It helps our students experience what life in college may be like.
 - It helps our students make new friends and learn new and exciting things that we may not be able to offer.
 - It helps us build coherent learning programmes so that students can gain expertise in certain curriculum areas that they already show talent in.
 - It helps us increase the range of learning opportunities we can offer our students.
 - It helps the local community learn and understand how to live, work and support people with autism so they can lead the life they choose.

What we wanted to achieve

Like many specialist providers of further education (FE) funding is difficult when providing for small numbers of students. Radlett Lodge Post 16 department currently has 9 students over 3 year groups. Widening the opportunities and experiences we are able to offer our young people is highly important to us and fits with our ethos of tailoring timetables in accordance with student's PCPs. Our long term aim was to develop links with other FE providers and share the cost of funding new and exciting courses that we can not provide on site for our young people and other young people in Hertfordshire. This case study outlines how we have started to create these links and set up future ways of working. In summary the aims for this project were:

- To extend learning beyond the school for the purpose of transition post 19.
- To provide a range of learning opportunities outside of the school in order to increase curriculum opportunities.
- To develop links with other providers in Hertfordshire in order to make long term post 16 provision more cost effective.

What we did

Phase 1: Preparation for college

Students participated in a horticulture programme at Radlett Lodge. We worked with Earthworks to create an allotment in our Post 16 Department.

Students learnt:

- New rules for the allotment to help them learn and keep them safe
- What clothing to wear and the importance of protecting themselves from harm
- What tools to use and how to use them safely
- How to work with new people and make new friends
- How to plant seeds and grow produce that they could cook with and eat. Students used the produce they grew to create a new and exciting lunch menu that they prepared for the group each day
- How to work together as a team
- How to look after plants and animals in the garden
- That garden maintenance is an all year round occupation

They were able to accredit their learning through ASDAN Towards Independence Horticulture module

Phase 2: Working with Oaklands College

Students participated in a Horticulture and Agriculture programme at Oaklands College and at Radlett Lodge. They attended Oaklands one day a week where they were supported by staff from Radlett Lodge Post 16 department and Oakland's college Landmark Programme staff. Sessions included some classroom work but largely consisted of practical work on the farm working with plants and animals. They were able to accredit their learning through an AQA module.

Students learnt:

- How to work and learn in new environments
- How to listen and respond to unfamiliar people
- How to talk to other students and make new friends
- New and unfamiliar rules and how to respond appropriately to these
- How to communicate outside of the safe school environment and let the public know about their thoughts and ideas
- Where our food comes from
- How to prepare farm produce for sale
- What 'sell by' and 'use by' dates mean and stock rotation
- How to work together on larger scale projects
- How to look after and care for chickens, ducks, pigs, sheep and horses
- How to operate and drive a tractor!

In addition to the work on horticulture and agriculture our students were given use of other mainstream student facilities including the cafeteria area and the gym. They were given the opportunity to be more independent in making choices, navigating their way round the college, taking responsibility for time and organising their own work. Students met with a number of mainstream college students, made friendships, played basketball and relaxed over a hot chocolate with peers. Unexpected opportunities arose through a range of situations where students were pushed to consider the wider social implications of their choices. For example, when a young lady in our group was asked on a date it provided the perfect opportunity to discuss relationships and when you know you are ready for one.

- Students learnt that it makes you feel good to have friends

What we learned

In order for the project to work we needed to make sure that students and staff were fully prepared. The preparation and organisation was essential to ensure good collaborative working. Students needed to feel welcome and accepted in both settings and needed to feel proud of what they were doing. Our students invited Oaklands College staff to Radlett Lodge to share some of the work they do at school. Oaklands staff joined our students for lunch in the Post 16 café that the students run each week and had a chance to see and meet with their friends and school staff. Good communication was vital in this project. Staff in both settings needed to have a joint understanding of where each young person was coming from and the challenges they face. Behaviour support plans and strategies were shared and risk

assessments were carefully considered in the partnership. Adaptations were made sensitively and carefully to ensure our young people were happy and safe at all times.

As a relatively new post 16 provision this was the first time Radlett Lodge had been involved in such a project. The project has allowed us to address individual needs of students in relation to their life outcomes and what they want as young adults. Staff in the Post 16 department at Radlett Lodge feel proud of our students. They are proud of every single tiny step that individuals made during the project and proud of themselves for helping to make our young people successful.

What we are taking forward

Phase 3: Continuing the social journey

Radlett Lodge and Oaklands College plan to continue their joint working. Oaklands College very kindly offered our students an allotment plot and area inside their polytunnel to continue their agricultural work. Students continue to develop skills in agriculture at the college and by maintaining the Post 16 allotment at Radlett Lodge. One student (our first 19 year old leaver) has decided to pursue her education with Oaklands College and will be joining the Landmark Programme for 2 days a week next academic year.

However, the most important thing for phase 3 is the continuation of social inclusion. Our young people have experienced that life outside of school can be safe, fun and full of excitement. They have met new people and want to continue to build those relationships. Students are planning to continue to use the leisure facilities that the college provides so they can develop new friendships. Our young people want to be just like everyone else. They want to learn. They want to go to work. They want to be able to travel on their own and meet up with friends to have fun. They want boyfriends and girlfriends and they want the possibility of marriage and children. They want to earn money, to be independent and to contribute to their local community.

Our overall aim for phase 3 of our project is that our young people have an opportunity to continue on their social journey and that their community has an opportunity to see just how great they really are.

Date published: June 2013

Provider name: NAS Radlett Lodge School

Sector coverage: ASD specific FE provision focusing on life skills, vocational skills and Personal and Social Development.

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