

Working in partnership to create extended work placements

The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre (ALC) and Robert Ogden School

Summary

This case study is based around an extended work placement which was set up between Robert Ogden and The Dearne ALC. The Placement was organised to accommodate the needs of a stated student with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) at The Dearne ALC.

Key lessons learned

- Evidence of good communication between state provision and an independent school
- Sharing of good practice and developing working relationships

Introduction

About organisations involved:

The Dearne ALC

The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre is a larger than average secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. A higher than average proportion of students receive support via School action. One in six students is supported by school action plus or with a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

Robert Ogden School is a National Autistic Society School which supports children from primary School age up to nineteen years of age. The school offers a flexible and personalised education support package to meaningfully prepare young people for their future life. The school offers day and residential provision for young people with autism.

What we wanted to achieve:

The Dearne ALC encourages all Year 10 students to take part in a week long work placement in March. It was felt that this may not be appropriate for one young man because of his particular needs. Both school and parents were however, keen that he should gain some work experience although it was agreed that it needed to be in a more 'protected' environment where the impact of his autism would be fully understood and his needs could be supported.

Implementation

What we did

During an initial meeting between all the providers involved in the cohort, it was mentioned that Robert Ogden had a place available to work in their café on Wednesday mornings. The SENCO from The Dearne ALC suggested a date for an initial visit. It was clear from this visit that this would be an ideal situation and the student appeared very comfortable in the setting. The student very quickly took to the routine: his mum takes him to the café every Wednesday morning where he carries out the various responsibilities expected of him. These include:

- Food preparation
- Welcoming customers
- Serving customers
- Taking money
- Washing up

He stays for lunch with the rest of the team and then is collected by mum and taken to The Dearne for his afternoon lessons. It became quite clear almost immediately that this situation suited the student and he is now also attending a life skills course with the group on Thursday mornings.



Outcomes and impacts

What we achieved:

Thoughts from:

- **The student's mum** - has said that she is very pleased with how the project has developed. She recognises that when he goes to school normally he is a little on edge and when he arrives at the Robert Ogden he is more relaxed. She has said that the young man will talk to her about the staff and pupils at the Robert Ogden and is happy to work alongside her in the kitchen now at home. He is now more willing to help when asked and is even offering to do things. This new interest has given them something they can do together. He has commented that he knows that the pupils at the Robert Ogden school like him '*because they talk to me, they are my friends*'

'The experience has had a big impact on his life. He is excited about the work and his confidence has improved. He has blossomed'

- **The participating student** - has made progress in all areas of work in the café. He is now able to prepare vegetables and fruit salad, and he can make cookies. He is able to sort and put away items delivered into the café in the appropriate places. After a verbal explanation and the task being modelled, the young man is now able to undertake tasks such as washing up and clearing away with increasing independence and ultimately on his own. He takes orders from customers and has been taught to use the till by the other pupils working in the café. This young man is happy and calm when working in the café and is quite chatty with staff and comfortable with the other pupils. He has said that he really enjoys being at the Robert Ogden School and would like to continue his extended work experience placement next year.
- **NAS Robert Ogden School** - have provided the venue of the 'Storm in a Coffee Cup' café where the student has been able to develop work based skills. This has been led by the Robert Ogden staff. The student has been very comfortable in the environment and has not required additional support from The Dearne. The student has fitted in well socially with the pupils from the Robert Ogden School and has a relaxed and happy demeanour during his time at the school. A member of staff from The Dearne commented that he is much more talkative and sociable in the café than when he is in his regular school. He follows instructions well and understands the health and safety and hygiene rules and protocols which have to be followed. He is adaptable in the environment, understanding that he has to leave the job he is doing when a customer arrives to be served. This is an area that some of the other pupils find more difficult.
- **The Dearne ALC** - feel that the project has been very successful. The student has thoroughly enjoyed the experience and family members have commented that it has had a big impact on his confidence and self esteem. The student's mum has been very supportive and has transported him to the Robert Ogden school in the morning and picked him up and taken him back to The Dearne at the end of the session. Originally he was intended to be at the school for one morning working in the café, but he soon began to access a second morning following the Life Skills programme.

What we learned:

The project has worked well from day one. This was to do with the student's attitude and motivation and the commitment from staff at both organisations. The project was fully supported by the senior leaders at both establishments which meant that any possible hurdles such as funding or transport were avoided. The two schools are very close geographically which made things much easier. It is hoped that in future years the NAS Robert Ogden School will benefit from individual pupils being able to access specific qualifications or curriculum areas, either physically at the Dearne or by using materials provided by their specialist teachers.

What we are taking forward:

The project has been very successful and The NAS Robert Ogden School are inviting the student to continue working with us in the new academic year. Relationships between the two schools are developing and it is hoped that in the new academic year pupils from the Robert Ogden will attend ASD friendly showings of different films in the Dearne's lecture room.

The schools are both involved in enterprise projects and the Dearne and other cluster members will be invited to attend the Robert Ogden Autumn Fair to sell their produce. .

How we are sharing it:

Details of the project have been shared by word of mouth by the student's family as they are very pleased with the changes they have seen in the young man and his increased confidence. The cluster group also organised a conference for parents and professionals and the project was publicised there too with photographs and an outline of what had taken place.

What advice we would give to others:

It is important to have the support of the senior teams within the organisation and to have clarified the objectives before the start of the project. In this instance it was clear that the student would receive practical work experience and be able to develop some portable employment skills in an environment where his ASD would be understood and supported. We were fortunate in that the staff team were more than happy to incorporate the student from the Dearne into the group and the other students were accepting and welcoming too. The project was undertaken in the spirit of collaborative partnership working and there has been no need to request funding at this point and this has obviously avoided many potential barriers.

Further reading

<http://www.autism.org.uk/>

<https://www.ourlearning.barnsley.org/schools/Dearne/Pages/default.aspx>

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