

Planning for the implementation of Foundation Learning

Development project

Creating personalised and holistic learning programmes using a purpose-built learning environment

Introduction

In 2006 the mainstream King Edward VII School had unacceptable levels of exclusions, poor behaviour and poor attendance. In the academic year 2005/06 there were 87 fixed-term and two permanent exclusions, 12,958 unauthorised absences and 20 learners who left with no recognised qualifications. Learners in these categories were provided with a School Plus agenda which included Key Skills, Skills for Life and Work qualifications, but these were largely unsuccessful.

In response, the Melton Learning Hub was built as a purpose-designed satellite centre, located half a mile away from the main school campus. The Hub has a range of workshops designed to represent a real working environment, built around a central shared learning area. It was set up with the aim of increasing the success of all learners at the school and creating opportunities for them to learn in new and flexible ways, in keeping with the principles of Foundation Learning.

Provider profile

Name of organisation	King Edward VII School, a 14-19 mainstream upper school
Location	Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire
Contact	Lesley Wiseman (Head of Inclusion) Project Manager David Cowell (Head of Centre) Project Officer 01664 851010
Type of organisation involved in the development project	Specialist training school and technology college with a current learner base of 897.
Approximate number of staff involved in the development project	4 full-time members of staff, 4 part-time staff members and a team of volunteers.
Approximate number of learners involved in the development project	In the academic year 2008/09 the Hub had 106 learners, of which 32 of the 56 Year 10 learners were selected for the Foundation Learning pilot.

Aims and intended outcomes

This development project focuses on the strategic approaches that led to the successful delivery of personalised programmes for learners at the Melton Learning Hub. The aim of the project was to create effective personalised and holistic learning programmes, in line with Foundation Learning aims, using a purpose-built learning environment.

The expected outcome was to address unacceptable levels of exclusions, poor behaviour, unauthorised absences and the high number of learners leaving with few or no qualifications or recognition of progress. The project included the development of an assessment tool called the Assessment Matrix (see Resource 1), based on the principles of Every Child Matters and covering areas such as attainment, behaviour, social issues, identity, community factors, health and future aspirations.

Implementation

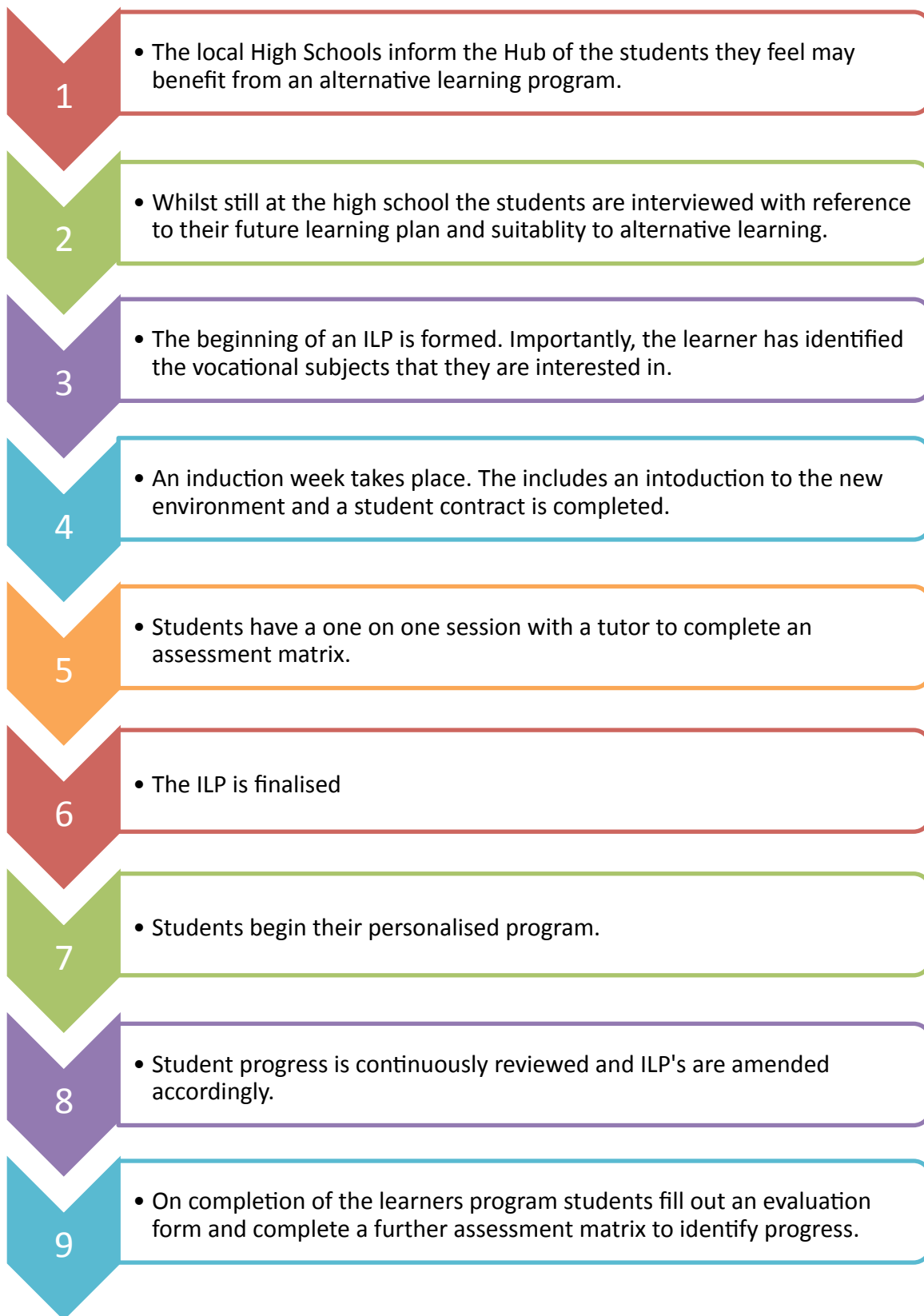
Classes at the Hub are kept small, with between four and six learners in a workshop at any one time, and tutors tailor their lessons to the individual needs of the learners. Approaches to learning incorporate the philosophy of personalised Foundation Learning programmes.

Programmes at the Hub complement the core curriculum which is delivered at school. The proportion of time spent between the Hub and school is based on individual need. While some learners take mathematics, English and science at school, others will be on an alternative route based on need. For example, some learners take additional vocational options rather than science.

The Assessment Matrix helps inform a learner's programme. Target setting that arises from the individual learning plan (ILP) plays a vital part in learners being able to see the purpose of their learning and work towards their targets. All learners are assigned a learning coach and have regular one-to-one reviews. A weekly meeting is held between the head of inclusion, the learner coaches, the SEN coordinator (SENCO) and the head of centre to discuss the progress of each learner.

The table below illustrates how the school created and structured personalised programmes.

Table 1. A step-by-step guide to a personalised programme



Thirty-two Year 10 learners are taking part in the Foundation Learning pilot. At the time of writing, six of them are studying one Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE) vocational qualification, eg mechanics (mainly at Entry Level 3 and Level 1), for three hours a week. Twenty learners are taking two vocational qualifications for a total of six hours a week in, for example, hairdressing and beauty, and childcare. Four learners are taking three vocational qualifications and two are studying more.

The school plans to offer personal and social development (PSD) elements of Foundation Learning from September 2009. Thirteen PSD units will be delivered across one day a week with learners moving around the Hub, working with different tutors and covering a range of PSD skills, many of which will be embedded in the vocational areas they are studying. The school hopes to integrate them further with the vocational elements as tutors become more familiar with providing supporting evidence of PSD skills.

Functional skills which are accredited by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) are delivered at the main school site and are not yet formally embedded in the vocational or PSD elements. The school is working towards embedding functional skills across the two sites.

Successes

The following have been key to the success of the project:

- choice and flexibility in how, where and what learners learn
- having staff with the expertise to support learners in a number of contexts and environments as tutors, learning coaches and role models during and outside of the school day (see Resource 2)
- robust initial assessment, including the use of the purpose-designed Assessment Matrix to identify personal successes and barriers to learning, and target-driven ILPs
- devising a programme from each ILP which is holistic in nature, taking account of all aspects of learner needs and current personal and social situations
- combining different Foundation Learning elements, making programmes personalised by using the special interests and attributes of learners
- delivering the components of Foundation Learning in different ways for different learners
- the ability to rapidly adjust the programme and offer new and varied routes if things are not working, and

- continually involving learners in the choices and decisions about their programme and in evaluating and reflecting on their own progress.

Tutors at the Hub use a range of approaches to learning, many of which are related to building skills and increasing self-esteem. These include developing vocational skills and competence, ownership of and choices within learning, and being involved in work-related activities, work experience and real projects with employers.

These combinations of learning experiences using different environments: learning coaching, role modelling tutorial support and access to unit-based accreditation via Foundation Learning have all contributed to learners' success. Learners work towards final productions within their subjects and this gives them direction and excitement. For example, hairdressing and beauty learners give a public exhibition of the techniques they have learnt.

The elements of Foundation Learning are improving the motivation of learners because a much wider range of skills, abilities and attributes is now being recognised. The approaches to learning combine choice and flexibility. Learners are fully involved in choosing which vocational options to take before the programme starts in Year 9, and this continues as an ongoing dialogue throughout the programme, with the flexibility to add or remove options as necessary.

Work-related learning and work placements

The Hub has a range of workshops designed to represent real working environments where learners gain meaningful, practical experience. For example, the mechanics workshop operates in partnership with a local motorbike garage, allowing learners to carry out mechanical diagnosis on faulty motorbikes and interact with customers.

Individual needs are also met through work experience and work-related projects. Learners who require a lengthier, alternative learning timetable are encouraged to participate in a one-day-a-week work placement related to their subject interest. For example, learners following vocational qualifications in animal care may have a work placement at the local kennels. Learners are also offered opportunities to be involved in work-related projects that complement their qualifications.

The high levels of applied learning are very motivating. Being able to link theory to real work practice has helped learners to appreciate the purpose of their learning. This has been linked directly to reductions in poor behaviour and improved attitudes to learning. As skill levels have risen, so learning has been more highly valued by learners. Self-esteem and the readiness to learn have improved dramatically.

Extended learning

The Hub offers learners an extended day with after-school, weekend, evening and holiday sessions. Learners have reported a sense of belonging, improved self-esteem and a feeling of personal contribution to their progress, which has helped them to achieve their targets. The extended day allows learners to be directed into more positive ways of living and reduces the risk of slipping into negative behaviour and choices during holidays, at weekends and after school.

An extended service provides continuity and consistency in terms of the formal and informal targets that learners are working towards. This has greatly contributed to self-esteem and a sense of belonging because these high-risk groups of learners spend more time in positive active learning environments, both at the Hub and outside. For example, learners can take structured sport and recreation activities which help keep them out of trouble and stay on track with their learning. Some of these activities have the added advantage that they are related to their Foundation Learning programme, so they can use these opportunities to gain evidence for qualifications.

Learners select from structured activities after school, at weekends and during holidays. They may or may not involve the same interests as the learners follow during the school day. Sports and other physical activities are the most popular, and choices include weekend fishing sessions. Learners can also get involved in work-related projects out of school hours that contribute to evidence for their Foundation Learning programme. For example, a recent Easter holiday activity saw 12 learners trained by professional chefs to deliver a three-course meal for 70 key individuals in the Melton community.

Challenges

During the first few months after the Hub opened it was perceived as a 'dumping ground' by staff, parents, partners and some learners. There was also a lack of understanding that many aspects of poor attendance and bad behaviour were symptomatic of the nature of the school curriculum and teaching approaches

which led to insecurity, low self-esteem and little opportunity to accredit learning. The Hub now has a different status, as a positive, high-quality place to learn. Opportunities for step-by-step recognition afforded by Foundation Learning continue to be vital to that success.

In hindsight, the school should have spent time prior to setting up the Hub working with staff and partners to ensure that the aims of the Hub were understood. More time should have been spent involving them in the criteria by which learners would be selected, and the key processes such as the Assessment Matrix should have been in place earlier. The philosophy behind the approaches at the Hub and the curriculum should have been in place, with appropriate staffing, from the outset.

Impact and outcomes

The school has not only achieved the desired outcomes of the project but has seen its expectations exceeded. It has created the best conditions for learning, a factor as important as, if not more than, just selecting qualification combinations for their programmes. There is clear evidence from the project that there is a strong causal relationship between personalised and holistic learning, and learners' success and progress.

Although average attendance rates across the school have improved, the contribution that the Hub environment has made to learning has led to learners' attendance at the Hub being significantly better than that for the school-based elements. Levels of unauthorised absence have been virtually eradicated.

There has also been a significant impact on exclusion rates. The number of fixed-term exclusions fell from 87 in 2005/06 to 35 in 2006/07 and continues to fall. A large proportion of learners at risk of exclusion attended the Hub during this time. Of these, 52% obtained one qualification, 25% obtained two, 16% got three and 7% achieved four or more. The number of learners leaving the school with no qualifications fell from 20 in 2005/06 to 12 in 2006/07 and 4 in 2007/08.

The 32 learners currently in Year 10 all had success in vocational qualifications under the Foundation Learning pilot, with 19% taking one NCFE-accredited unit, 62% taking two units, 13% taking three units, 3% taking four units and 3% taking five units.

From the 2007/08 cohort, 44 learners in Year 11 attended courses with a recognised vocational qualification from Entry Level 3 to Level 1 with a 100% success rate. Of these, 59% have gone into post-16 courses and further education, 16% into employment, 9% into training, and 14% were not in employment, education or training (NEET). Learners who were NEET, and whom the centre supported outside the pilot, were offered a ten-week course to give them new skills and a new direction.

Another significant outcome of the project has been that the Assessment Matrix tool has helped identify which PSD units are most likely to meet the needs of individual learners, supporting their targets and contributing to their personalised programmes. Furthermore, the school has used the evaluation of the outcomes of the assessment tool to identify the wider needs of learners, eg health issues which showed up as a decline in scores. See Resource 1, Appendices C and D.

Conclusions and next steps

The school needs to do more work on making the statements in the Assessment Matrix much more objective. Some of the statements are vague or describe symptoms of behaviour, not underlying causes. The school believes that as it improves the assessment tool, it will be able to set targets more accurately with learners within the realm of PSD, selecting the most appropriate routes and strategies for them as they work through their programme. This will allow the school to more closely embed the key priorities in learners' ILPs across all of the elements of their Foundation Learning programmes.

The school will be developing further options within their Foundation Learning offer to introduce PSD. It is also seeking to extend its capacity to offer longer placements at the Hub during the school year and the option for learners to remain full time at the Hub. With the foundations in place and a good reputation secured, it is now important to ensure that the principles of Foundation Learning continue to be implemented.

One learner who currently studies four alternative learning qualifications within their Foundation Learning programme said:

'If I hadn't come to the Hub I would probably have got kicked out of school. I feel I am treated more like an adult. The lessons are more practical because I get to do other things than just sitting down and writing and I have passed lots of courses.'

Another learner, studying two vocational learning qualifications, had a similar opinion:

'I think it is better than school because I can be myself, whereas at school it's different.'

The school now has enthusiastic and happy learners who are engaged and achieving.

Resources produced

Resource 1: The Assessment Matrix

- Appendix A: Learner self-assessment form
- Appendix B: Assessment Matrix form
- Appendix C: Assessment wheel
- Appendix D: Showing progress for 2007/08 learners by using Assessment Matrix scores

Resource 2: Staff job descriptions, person specifications and targets