

Phase 2 Green Paper Project: Support and aspiration

New Pathways into Training and Work: Medway cluster development



What has been developed and by whom?

A cluster of providers in Medway and the surrounding area are working to develop better pathways into training and work for young people with autism, including through production of a film to raise awareness and engage employers which can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5Wo0yIpaMM>.

Partners include Helen Allison School (National Autistic Society), Grange Park School, MidKent College, North West Kent College, Bexley College, Medway Education Business Partnership (EBP) and White Rocks Farm. Each has a different role to play in supporting young people with autism in their journeys to training, employment and independence.

Why was it developed?

Partners identified two key issues to be tackled:

- a lack of effective transition routes and arrangements between partners, and
- movement into employment which is particularly challenging for autistic young people.

Two cluster partners, Grange Park School and MidKent College had begun to explore 'transition partnership' at the outset of the project. Other partners were not working together in this way, resulting in a lack of clear progression pathways into training, employment and independence for young people across the range of the autistic spectrum. The cluster wanted to develop and extend the example of developing good practice to create a coherent range of transition pathways for young people in the area.

The movement into work was identified as a particularly difficult challenge, not least because of the lack of understanding that businesses may have about autism. The cluster felt that by producing a film that demonstrated successful examples of young people with autism in working life, they could help to persuade businesses of the benefits of employing these young people, as well as raising aspirations, increasing understanding and quelling fears for young people, parents/carers and teachers.

How was it developed?

Transition pathways

Cluster partners were supported to work together on some case studies to identify pathways for students with different levels and types of need within the autistic spectrum. This helped to highlight particular challenges for transition and progression, as well as enabling partners to understand their specific roles in pathways to training and work. This was particularly important in identifying the roles of 'non education/training institutions', for example, Medway Education Business Partnership (EBP), which provides key links to businesses as well as work experience. Examples of new partnership arrangements developed through the cluster work include:

The partnership between **Grange Park School and MidKent College**, developed because school students needed:

- an academic progression route
- a wider social and age appropriate environment
- a wide vocational choice
- specialist support from school staff in the college setting
- full time rather than 3 day per week provision without loss of statement

Students are accommodated at MidKent college whilst still being Grange Park students. Transfer takes place at end of Year 11, 12 or 13 dependent on appropriateness, or sometimes at Year 14 when they leave Grange Park. All courses and social periods plus two days additional provision (work experience/travel training etc) is supported by Grange Park Specialist Teaching Assistants.

To date, the outcomes have included **all** students progressing into training, pursuing a range of courses from Entry level, Level 1, 2 and 3 courses (100% pass rate) and a first ever Level 3 for a Grange Park student. Grange Park students' aspirations and expectations have been realized and the work is now being taken forward by involving other satellite colleges nearer students' homes in rolling out the model.

The partnership between White Rocks Farm, Grange Park School and Helen Allison School, developed because school students needed:

- opportunities to develop work skills and study in a real life setting
- support tailored to their individual needs
- vocational routes into employment

The approach works because there is a very good working relationship between White Rocks Farm and the schools, whereby the schools understand the supportive yet realistic environment in which students need to work and White Rocks Farm understands and can provide the types of support required by the students.

The students carry out daily tasks including feeding animals, cleaning animal accommodation, grooming, health checks and animal handling, working towards a Level 1 qualification in Land Based Studies. Other vocational units offered include estate maintenance and horticulture.

Key learning points from this work has been to 'listen to what the students want to do and support them in that, even if it is challenging', and changing expectations by realising that students with autism can adapt to situations that they previously may have struggled in.

All twelve students that have attended White Rocks Farm have achieved their respective qualifications and some are now keen to progress to courses at agricultural college. Provision for further cohorts of school students is now planned.

Film for employers

The film produced by the cluster involved all partners in:

- agreeing the **purpose and audience** for the film – the main intention is to raise awareness and interest amongst employers, however, partners realised that young people, their parents/carers and teachers would also benefit from seeing successful examples of young people with autism in work
- identifying **successful examples of young people with autism in employment** - this was an illuminating exercise, highlighting how few had successfully made this transition
- identifying **how interested employers would be helped to access support** - the need for 'back wiring' to ensure that where employer interest is stimulated, there is support and a range of services that can be easily accessed by them to capitalise on this interest

To reach a good audience of employers, the film was launched at a Business Breakfast organised by Medway EBP, which had previously conducted an e-survey of employers as part of the preparation for producing the film. This event not only enabled the film to be shown to a good selection of employers, but also provided an opportunity to discuss and explore employing young people, enabling delegates to understand the benefits and support requirements, and how the latter can be provided.

How is it being taken forward?

The partners are committed to sustaining the momentum of the work, including through:

- continuing to develop between them a network of contacts and cross referral so that employers have easy points of contact and coherent information about how they can recruit and train these young people;
- jointly organising networking events for employers, for example, a planned autism awareness session for employers, following on from the Business Breakfast and hosted at North West Kent College, to develop employer knowledge and engagement, and
- developing a working relationship with Kent Supported Employment Service across all partners to ensure signposting to employers who are actively supporting young people with autism and disabilities.

Other specific partner legacy actions include:

- White Rocks Farm will liaise with the Medway Youth Trust to explore enterprise opportunities.
- MidKent College will continue to work with Grange Park School to engage the job shop in actively supporting students with autism to find employment. College staff completing training to support young people with learning difficulties or disabilities will visit partners to experience support in a variety of locations.
- North West Kent College and Helen Allison School will work together on developing a pilot employment programme within the College.
- White Rocks Farm will explore the potential for establishing Job Clubs for 18-25 year olds. Activities will include job search techniques, Curriculum Vitae writing, getting in touch with local employers in the field about job vacancies and providing some outreach support into employment.

Links with the Medway Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) Pathfinder and Teaching School Alliance (TSA)

The cluster developments are highly pertinent to the Medway SEND Pathfinder work, particularly in relation to the Employment Strategy. The Medway Youth Trust who are leading on the SEND pathfinder work with 14-25 year olds have appointed Job coaches to bridge the gap with employers along with a Partnership Broker to support new relationships, partnerships and multi-stakeholder collaborative thinking and working. The cluster is now working with the Medway Youth Trust so that there is mutual benefit between the SEND and cluster developments. To take this work forward, the Trust will be sharing information on current and planned initiatives, including two new posts that will have a focus on volunteering and employment.

Cluster partners are also working with Medway TSA which includes 45 special schools and has been involved in a linked project. A particular area of joint working is the development and delivery of a programme of staff/organisational development covering areas such as transition from school to college/work and developing employability strategies and understanding in pre and post 16 settings. Cluster partners will continue their involvement with Medway TSA, including a forthcoming meeting to share the film clips and encourage the development of work experience opportunities across the TSA schools.

What are the intended impacts and how are they being assessed?

- **For young people:** clearer and more effective pathways into working life and adulthood. It is expected that a greater number of young people will make a successful transition into post 16 training **and** into employment.
- **For employers:** a better understanding of the benefits of employing autistic young people and more effective access to services and support for recruitment and training.
- **For parents:** confidence in pathways that can help their child move into work and become independent
- **For partners:** improved partnerships that make best use of resources and share expertise
- **At strategic level:** contribution to strategic planning, improved co-ordination, reduction in duplication

Impact will be assessed through a variety of means including student progress and destination tracking and analysis (further education, employment, volunteering etc.), employer feedback, parent/carer feedback, partnership development plans, SEND Pathfinder feedback and involvement.

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