

Pens Meadow School

Shared delivery for family outreach



What we've done

Pens Meadow Special School is working with Halesbury School to employ a Family Outreach Coordinator, using available pupil premium funding along with additional funding sources. The post was initially for a fixed term so we could evaluate impact during the initial year. A key aspect of the role is to identify fundraising possibilities to make the initiative sustainable.

Our advertisement for the post attracted applications from a wide range of people. We were able to recruit an experienced family support worker who had previously worked in support of Dudley schools. This meant she was able to start immediately working with families with only a short induction.

Both schools identified vulnerable families for the coordinator to work with. In the context of 16-19 provision and securing successful outcomes for Pens Meadow, our criteria included: pupils in receipt of free school meals (FSM), looked after children (LAC), pupils with attendance issues and pupils whose families were not engaging with the transition process, which starts at Year 9.

In our shared delivery model, the coordinator is working flexibly across the two schools to support identified vulnerable pupils and families through:

- home visits,
- meetings with relevant agencies,
- support for families at meetings,
- identification of available social opportunities for pupils out of school time and in holidays
- support with direct payments or other funding streams,
- liaison between home and school, Connexions, social care and other agencies.

Why we're doing it

Our starting point was that seven special schools in Dudley had previously worked together on family outreach, drawing on government funding for extended services. One coordinator and two parental support advisers worked across the schools supporting families in accessing services. This was particularly helpful at Pens Meadow as the funding was used to support enrichment activities for pupils, both in and out of school. The funding ceased in August 2011 so the posts were not sustainable.

Pens Meadow and Halesbury wanted to build on this earlier initiative. Key objectives were to:

- Provide a link worker that families would feel comfortable approaching, and who would also effectively liaise with the wider professional services including social care, speech and language, youth services.
- Widen our schools' skills base beyond teachers and teaching assistants.

The issues for some of our parents include transport difficulties if we are not local to their home address; isolation as the family of a disabled child; language barriers; previous negative experiences of support services; and lack of knowledge of opportunities after school along with fear of the future.

How our pupils and their families benefit

In the six months so far the impact has been clear. We are now engaging effectively with identified families. The coordinator is supporting our pupils and families in planning for successful transitions. She is working proactively to identify any difficulties and to help overcome them. She is helping address the concern of parents who are dealing with many outside agencies about frequent changes of personnel and much time having to be spent repeating information. The family outreach coordinator provides consistency for these families as they only have to talk to one person who can then, if necessary, represent them in discussions with a variety of agencies.

One of our pupils who was previously not able to access out of school activities has been supported by the family outreach coordinator to attend a weekly evening local youth club for pupils with autism. Liaison between school staff, autism outreach and youth club staff ensured behaviour management information was given before he started; the family outreach coordinator arranged transport and funding for this and has secured additional direct payments so that the pupil can have support at the club. This gives the pupil valuable social experiences in a different environment and enables his mother to have a much needed break every week.

Class based staff feel supported by the outreach coordinator as identified concerns get followed up and resolutions reached which previously they felt unable to do effectively. Parents are also very appreciative.

'I feel like we can really help now; before we could just report the problem, now we can be part of the solution' - member of staff

'I feel like you care, and more than that, you make a difference.' - parent

The proof of the pudding is that, after a three month report to governors, both schools have been happy to make the coordinator's contract permanent. We plan to fund this by the increase in pupil premium; funding which must be used to support pupils in receipt of free school meals and other identified vulnerable pupils. In addition to this, successful fundraising projects by the family outreach coordinator have enable funding to be released from other areas.

What to think about if you plan to do this

- Identify need and be clear about the role helps recruit a suitable person. Every setting will have different requirements but, for us, being able to make decisions and follow through with actions was key. We needed a pro-active person who would have the authority and ability to do this so it is not a low cost option.

- Having a clear line responsibility is essential, especially if the coordinator is shared between establishments.
- Decide on roles and responsibilities at the outset.
- Hold regular meetings to review progress and identify next steps.
- Establish clear reporting systems and accountability. Our post is part of the school structure and the member of staff needs to undertake the same training and adopt all school policies and practices.
- Bear in mind that this is a different way of working for schools that traditionally employ teachers and teaching assistants. It does require staff to be flexible in their thinking

Want to know more?

To learn more about what we do click on our website www.pens-meadow.dudley.sch.uk . For more information about our Family Outreach Coordinator, contact Marie Bissell, Headteacher, on 01384 818945 or at mbissell@pens-meadow.dudley.sch.uk .