

New College Stamford Working with schools



This case study explores:

- How we work with schools to assess learning support needs and
- plan appropriate courses for learners prior to entry

About the college:

New College Stamford is a small general further education college that serves a mainly rural area and is situated at the southernmost point of Lincolnshire.

The college is located within a mile of three other county boundaries and recruits around half of its full-time learners from Peterborough, Rutland, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

The college's core business is vocational education with the majority of its further education provision funded by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). The college now offers provision in all 15 subject areas.

The majority of learners are aged 16 to 18 and study on full-time programmes. Around 5% of all learners study on entry level programmes, around 13% at foundation level, 31% at intermediate level and 26% at advanced level, with the remainder on programmes classified as „other“ level. Some degree level courses are offered.

The college has approximately 1800 learners, with 752 learners declaring a learning difficulty or disability – 42% of all learners.

The college has a discrete provision for 74 learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities. These learners range from Pre Entry, including some non-verbal students, to Entry Level 3 learners. This year we have also run a course for Level 1 learners within the discrete provision.

Learners up to Entry 2 are based in two adapted houses attached to the college. The majority of these learners have Down's syndrome, Autism or Cerebral Palsy.

Students with less severe difficulties on the Entry 3 and Level 1 courses are situated within main college and have a variety of needs including autism, dyslexia, non-specific learning difficulties, school refusal and others. This year we have also run a course for Level 1 learners within the discrete provision.

Area of good practice:

The college has developed close working relationships with feeder schools for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities – initially this was with 3 local special schools but these have now developed to include eight local mainstream schools.

This work has improved the transition process for learners and parents as well as helping to ensure learners are placed onto the appropriate courses from the beginning.

Attending Year 10 and 11 Annual Reviews has enabled us to plan more effectively, further ahead, to be able to meet learners' needs in college.

Some examples of the planning that has been carried out as a direct result of this work are:

- Early identification of staff to work with a specific student
- Staff training on a specific language disorder to be ready for a student
- More thorough planning of transitions
- Early involvement in multi-agency work to identify specific pastoral needs and plan for them earlier.
- Ability to plan flexible programmes for students – i.e. student in the discrete provision who loves animals spends 1 afternoon a week in Animal Care helping the technician.
- Working closely with some parents to challenge expectations and identify the best course for the young person.
- The ability to identify and therefore plan support for students who need it at interview and/or practical aptitude tests for courses – this means that students with learning difficulties and or disabilities are not disadvantaged at all during the interview/selection process.

This work is carried out by the Student Liaison Officer to the Discrete Provision, the specialists for autism and dyslexia and/or the manager of Additional Learning Support. It is funded through the ALS budget.

Process:

The process is described in the 2 flow charts attached. One relates to the work and planning carried out with special schools and the other to the work and planning carried out with mainstream schools.

What schools say:

School A – Mainstream (Assistant Senco)

The Assistant Senco identified the following ways in which facilitators work together to improve transition for the students:

- Support staff from New College Stamford attend Yr. 10 & Yr. 11 student's annual reviews at School to gain information about the student and inform parents of the support and opportunities available to their child

- Staff from New College Stamford, a local mainstream school and Connexions meet to complete the 139A paperwork (a compulsory form detailing students' needs) to aid a smoother transition
- New College Stamford, provide extra taster/ visits if required for students
- There is constant and close liaison between New College Stamford & a local mainstream school regarding students

"This makes transition much easier for our students. Students apply for appropriate courses and get the right support from the beginning. A lot of students progress successfully through the courses."

School B – Special School (Head teacher)

"Over the past few years we have worked closely with the staff from New College Stamford to be able to provide our students with a varied curriculum and thanks to the planning on their part this has been a successful experience for our group.

It has been a productive situation for many of our students who have attended NCS when leaving our School at the age of 19, having had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the college layout and expectations as well as beginning to forge relationships with the staff and other students."

What Parents say

'We are astonished that the college has gone to so much trouble organising a taster day for our son, even though his first choice college is at a land based course at a different college, the staff have been welcoming and fair and we now feel it would not be a complete disaster if he doesn't get funding for his first choice'

'She is always happy to come to college which is a marked improvement from when she was at school. I am sure the gradual introduction helped'

What works well

- The number of students with learning difficulties and or disabilities that have moved courses in the first 6 week assessment period has dropped.
- The retention rate within the discrete provision is 100%.
- There is a high level of parental satisfaction
- Students from out of area are keen to attend – even with transport costs. We now provide a minibus service to a nearby city for students in the discrete provision and demand for places is high.
- Already oversubscribed for 2012/13

Challenges:

- Finding time and staff to attend all the reviews and assessments – approximately 30 hours a year.
- Making sure all assessments are objective and not subjective.
- Making sure that the parents are fully involved in transition – college is a big shock for some of them, especially if their child has been in a small nurturing school.
- Working with Special Schools with whom we offer some dual delivery to identify the right Further Education courses and progression for students
- Helping students with learning difficulties and or disabilities in Mainstream schools identify the correct courses and progression routes in Further Education