

Issue 7  
March 2015

DUDLEY **insight**

## THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES CHALLENGE



This is one of a series of papers aimed at providing our stakeholders, both internal and external, with up-to-the-minute information on how we are strategically responding to local and national challenges. The papers may be of interest to many relevant stakeholders including parents, employers and the Local Enterprise Partnership.

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## I INTRODUCTION

With the Children and Families Act in place since September 2014, there is a new legislative framework for children and young people (aged 0-25) with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The purpose of this paper is to provide stakeholders with information on how the college supports students with SEND to reach their full potential and how we are working to continually improve our services to provide an outstanding experience for our students.

## 2 CONTEXT

The college has for many years offered educational opportunities for young people and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. Initially, this provision took the form of discrete provision. Students with mild and moderate learning difficulties were based at our Mons Hill campus and those with severe learning difficulties were based at Castle View campus.

Over time, views changed and integration rather than separation became the norm. In 2010, all of this

provision moved onto the Broadway Campus, into the heart of the student community. By then the curriculum offered a whole range of vocational options within Step Up. These included Construction, Health & Social Care, Hair & Beauty and Animal Care. Students were encouraged to access the college-wide enrichment programme and many took up activities they had never considered before, alongside students from across the college. One of our students led the establishment of a youth club We Socialise Too, which continues to run very successfully.

In 2012, we were successful in securing funding to develop one of the houses within the Learning Quarter to create Aspire Living, which opened in Autumn 2013 as an independent living unit where students could develop their home skills such as keeping their bedroom tidy, washing up, laundry, ironing, cooking and gardening. The house also includes a sensory room, an art/craft room, a general classroom and a lounge where students can relax and play video or board games. It is also a base for students across college who are on the autistic spectrum, who use it to have their lunch and relax in a quiet, calming environment.

At about the same time, we developed a partnership with Sutton School, a specialist secondary school in the borough. This led to the creation of Six Plus in September 2013, an innovative year-long transition programme which eases students into college life while giving them opportunities to try out new vocational activities. The programme is delivered by staff from both the school and the college. Almost all of the students have gone on to other courses in college this year.

In 2013, we secured funding to develop the house next door to Aspire Living and in September 2014 we opened Aspire Works for young people with SEND. This facility is primarily focused on employability. Our students run an enterprise company and produce and sell items such as high quality customised mugs, T-shirts, photos on canvas and mouse mats, which they produce in the state-of-the-art digital printshop. Students make their designs using the latest software packages and develop their retail skills through the on-site shop, which also sells produce grown by students in the Aspire garden. The house also includes a café area and several classrooms where students develop their English, maths and employability skills.

We firmly believe in an inclusive approach and students with a Learning Disabilities Assessment (LDA) are enrolled on courses right across college at all levels.

Learners with a Learning Disabilities Assessment	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015
Entry Level	26	67	89
Level 1	35	38	47
Level 2	30	44	28
Level 3	16	32	33
TOTAL	107	181	197



Our entry level students are mainly taught in small discrete groups while higher level students attend vocational and academic study programmes with support. Students can access a range of support options such as in-class support with an Education Support Assistant (ESA), assistance with personal care needs, specialist support for dyslexia and sign language support. A full-time transition officer and 3 support supervisors work closely to make sure that the needs of students are fully met.



### 3 THE CURRENT CHALLENGE

With new legislation in place, many parents/carers and young people are concerned about how the changes will affect them, in particular the move to EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans) which replace all other types of LDAs (Learning Disability Assessments).

For parents/carers of young people with SEND who are about to leave school, it is a very anxious time as their children move from the relative security and certainty of school into the post-16 environment. Many describe it as 'like jumping off a cliff'.

For young people themselves, while some will relish the move from school to a more independent learning environment, many are anxious about how they will

cope in a much larger, busy setting. Many are used to being taught in small groups with high levels of support and while this is still available to those within our discrete provision, others who go straight on to mainstream courses may still need to develop the necessary personal and social skills to cope with such a changed environment.

In recent years, local authorities have been keen to keep more of their young people with SEND in-borough rather than funding them to go to residential schools often very far away from their support networks. This new approach means that we are now supporting many more students in college with complex needs.

## 4 OUR RESPONSE

The new legislation in place has enabled us to raise the profile of SEND right across college. The Director of Aspire is our nominated lead and training on the implications of the new SEND code of practice has already been delivered to the whole of our Directorate and the wider management team. It has then been cascaded to all staff.

We have revised our website to provide the latest information on how we can support students with SEND and are currently working on a new transition booklet which will be available electronically as well as in print.

In the last 3 years in particular, we have invested in additional staffing to ensure that we are fully able to meet the support needs of all learners with SEND who choose to come to Dudley College. Our team now includes:

- 2 Curriculum Managers for our discrete foundation studies and cross-college learning support
- An Academic Support Co-ordinator for dyslexia support
- 9 Lecturers
- 4 Instructors
- 3 Cross College Support Supervisors
- 40+ Education Support Assistants (ESAs)
- A Transition Officer
- 2 Signers
- 3 Care Assistants

Students can also access our mentor and counselling services which are available to all our students.

We work very closely with local special schools, special education needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) in secondary schools and Connexions in order to ensure a smooth transition into college. College staff attend year 11 review meetings for individual students and have a direct input into EHCPs. Our Transition Officer meets parents/carers and organises visits to college for them and the young people. We set up taster days for year 11 pupils so that by the time they enrol at college, they are very familiar with the college environment.

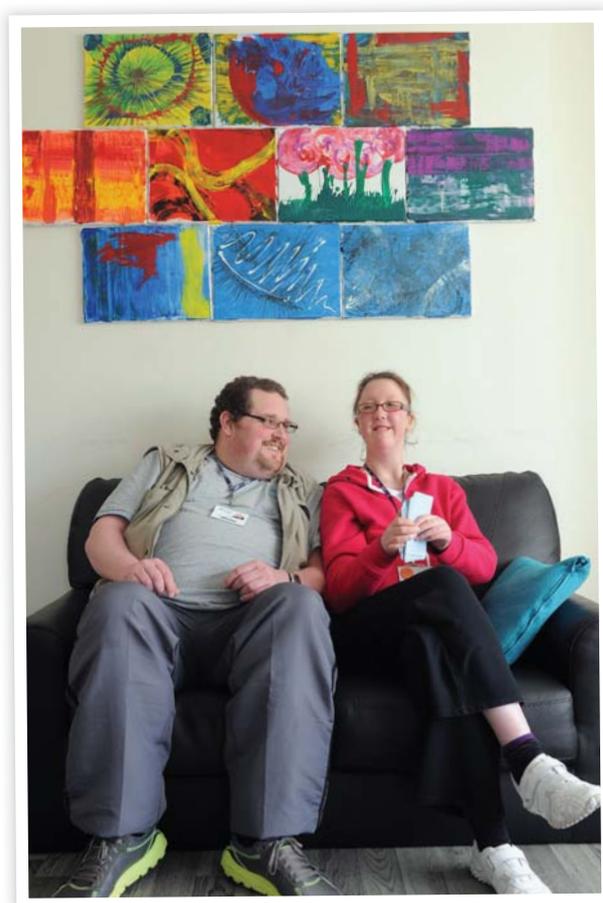
We actively engage with the Dudley Parents Transition Forum and are always keen to improve our service to young people. Following feedback from this group we are now piloting interviews to assess support needs prior to attendance at interviews for courses so that

young people already have an outline support plan in place when they meet course tutors. Feedback on this new approach is so far extremely positive.

With new funding arrangements in place for high needs students, we liaise very closely with local authorities who allocate the funding, in particular Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Staffordshire. 95% of our high needs students come from Dudley borough and we have worked with the local authority throughout the past 12 months to ensure that the new processes in place, particularly around EHCPs and transition, are effective.

Once young people make a firm decision to come to this college, we can use the flexibility the funding allows us to tailor study programmes to meet individual needs, depending on recommendations within the Learning Disability Assessment (LDA) and in discussion with the young person.

We hold a termly review with each student to ensure that their support needs are being met. As our goal is to develop their independence, we discuss the changing needs of the student and modify the support package as appropriate.



## 5 PROGRESS TO DATE

In 2012, as part of a whole college inspection, our work with young people with SEND was judged as good. In 2014, an Ofsted team was in college and was particularly impressed by the facilities available to students with SEND (Aspire Living and Aspire Works), which they described as outstanding. Ofsted were also delighted with the very high standards of teaching and learning they saw in action with our entry level students.

We have increased significantly our use of assistive technology to help our students access the curriculum effectively and many use laptops and ipads with specialist software such as SuperNova and JAWS (for visually impaired students) and ReadWrite Gold for students with dyslexia. Our IT team supports staff to get the most out of the new technology being developed.

This year for the first time we have held focus groups with high needs students from across college and a



separate meeting with parents/carers. These were well attended and the feedback we had, as well as being extremely positive, gave us some good ideas as to how we could improve even further.

In order to keep our staff abreast of the changes around SEND, our Directorate and wider management team have received regular updates. Governor training is scheduled for next term and staff across college will have the opportunity to attend a SEND workshop at our next college conference.

Managers regularly attend borough-wide meetings and training with the Dudley SEN team, Connexions and the Local Authority. Our collaborative approach is essential to ensure that the needs of young people are met. We are also active in a regional network of post-16 providers which focuses on the SEND agenda.

It is important to us that our staff are fully supported in the work they do and are given opportunities to develop their skills and expertise. Within the last year, 2 staff attended Warwick University where they gained specialist qualifications in teaching young people with SEND. We have delivered in-house training on dealing with students with autism and Dudley's Autism Outreach team runs a regular session in college for both students and staff, offering individual support.

6 staff have attended challenging behaviour training delivered by Sandwell Behaviour Support team in order to better understand reasons for behavioural issues and to learn new strategies to promote non-challenging behaviour in students with SEND.

Our reputation continues to grow and we are increasingly seen as the first choice provider for young people with SEND, with a year-on-year growth in numbers of students with Learning Disability Assessments (LDAs), including a significant growth in the number of students with complex needs.

**“Ofsted were also delighted with the very high standards of teaching and learning they saw in action with our entry level students.”**



## 6 NEXT STEPS

For the coming year, our focus continues to be embedding of the new reforms and ensuring that our young people and their parents/carers are fully aware of the changes and how they impact on them.

We want to maximise the impact of the good practice already in place and plan to deliver OPT (Outstanding Practice in Teaching) sessions to staff across college, in particular on how to work effectively with students with a range of disabilities.

March 2015 sees the official opening of Aspire Living and Aspire Works by our local MP, Ian Austin. It will be an opportunity for invited guests to see first-hand the fantastic work our students and staff are doing.

A group of our Six Plus students has very recently put together a presentation to promote their digital print enterprise business and has already delivered it to a large group of professionals attending a borough-wide 19+ skills strategy group. As they grow in confidence, they are very keen to do more presentations to promote their business and we are keen that more students get involved. They also plan to run pop-up

shops around the college campuses and further afield.

We will continue to work closely in partnership with surrounding local authorities to ensure that the new Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are effective in identifying the learning and support needs of young people with SEND.

We continue to develop an innovative curriculum offer and are in the process of developing a level 1 transition course for young people with SEND who are not yet ready to join a mainstream course. This will include a range of core activities as well as one day per week in a vocational area of their choice, with a view to fully transitioning into that area the following year.

We will be hosting a regional event in June 2015 as part of the Inclusive Skills competition. This will involve students from across the region coming to Dudley to take part in a range of activities in Aspire Works.

We are very excited by the progress we have made and are very proud of all our students.



**If you are interested in learning more about  
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities at  
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- Issue 6: Skills Competitions Success - January 2015**
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