

# Dudley Council

## 'Localism' in Dudley



### Background

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council gives high priority to young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Evidence from our pupil cohorts from Year 8 clearly showed that numbers of young people with learning difficulties and /or disabilities were increasing. With the local authority duty to ensure sufficient and adequate Post-16 provision, we saw it as important to ensure that we are equipped to meet the needs of this cohort as part of our wider goal of achieving local solutions to meeting service needs.

In particular, we saw a need to improve transition and to develop new provision and support arrangements across the borough.

### What we'd previously achieved

Our Heads of Service from 16-19, Connexions and SEN teams worked together to:

- Better understand the cohort and transition arrangements for young people with learning difficulties and /or disabilities post-16.
- Improve the offer and support for our young people.

We developed an Project Plan for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities which set out the following priorities:

- Manage expectations of young people, parents and Special School Headteachers
- Ensure there are sufficient, adequate places for all learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities at Post-16
- Develop new mainstream provision for learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities where this is required
- Work with Special Schools and colleges to improve transition at Post-16
- Develop the role as 'host' local authority for the Glasshouse College.

The Project Plan was reviewed regularly and updated as activity escalated and we received significant support from the special schools, independent specialist college and further education colleges based in Dudley to implement the plan.

We also gained commitment from all six providers to share information and work together more closely. This took us to the point that most young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities now attend their likely Post-16 destination in advance of starting their course.

### How the Support and Aspiration Project helped

The LSIS Support and Aspiration Project has given a real boost to progress with this strategy. When we heard about the opportunity to apply to take part, we felt this would be a great opportunity to strengthen the work we had already begun and increase the level of interaction and sharing of practice. We therefore encouraged the six providers to put in expressions of interest to take part in the project as the 'Dudley Cluster'. The six providers were:

- Two post-16 special schools: Old Park and Pens Meadow
- One independent specialist college: The Glasshouse
- One tertiary college: Halesowen
- Two general further education colleges: Dudley and Stourbridge

LSIS must have seen the potential benefits of this 'localism' initiative and the Dudley Cluster were chosen to be part of the national project.

"We felt the project would be a really good opportunity to strengthen the work we had already commenced and increase the level of interaction and sharing of practice between the six providers."  
- John Cunningham, 16-19 Funding and Commissioning Manager

When we heard that the cluster had been successful, we convened a pre-project planning meeting with the providers to help ensure that maximum benefit was obtained from the project. We also participated in parts of the two workshops which were organised by LSIS as part of the project, with representatives from Children's Services, Connexions and, for the second workshop, Adult Services.

During the pre-project meeting and first workshop, the partners identified a set of local aims and desired outcomes in addition to the national project aims. We all recognised that some of these aims would require considerably longer to achieve than the project time-frame and there was a commitment from the initial pre-project meeting to sustain the momentum created by the project following its completion. The group agreed a list of local Support and Aspiration aims, to achieve by the time the LSIS project ended. (Annex 1)

Two key decisions were made at the second workshop:

- To continue the work of the cluster, focusing initially on future cohort planning, led by our Connexions service and on developing a number of small-scale shared delivery ideas generated by the project.
- To add transition into adulthood to the remit of the group, with future representation in the cluster from Adult Services.

A particular aspect of teaching and learning which we identified for possible future consideration was preparation for managing personal assistants and personal budgets.

The project has been very effective in sharing knowledge and in turning the words (in our Project Plan and local project aims) into a range of potentially very productive actions. From our perspective, key benefits have been the commitments to:

- Plan jointly and earlier for post-16 transitions.

- Develop shared delivery models.
- Aim for a seamless progression from Children's to Adult Services.
- Align the employer engagement activities of the Dudley College/Remploy shared delivery partnership and Adult Services employment support.

Particular examples of effective practice are described in other pages in the Excellence Gateway.

"The project has given a real boost to learning and relationships and to generating practical steps forward. It has been followed with interest by my colleagues on our Black Country local authority learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities group as a way of promoting collaboration and joining up action." *- John Cunningham, 16-19 Funding and Commissioning Manager*

## Key messages from the project

### (a) Effective teaching and learning

1. Much scope for cross-organisational staff training and development
2. Benefit of substantial investment in pre-enrolment assessment and diagnostic testing
3. Potential to draw upon centres of expertise e.g. management of challenging behaviour; specialist communications expertise
4. Value of embedding work experience opportunities as a core part of the curriculum
5. Effectiveness of project-based approaches to learning e.g. glass lung and cyber-bullying projects
6. Benefits of students with learning difficulties and or disabilities doing part of their learning with mainstream students
7. Value of ASDAN awards in achieving flexible progression towards entry level
8. Benefits of early planning (involving Connexions) for personalised learning after transition to college

### (b) Planning for young people's futures

1. Importance of involving parents and carers, where necessary through a family outreach coordinator
2. Significance of independent travel training in raising the expectations of students and their parents and carers
3. Need to develop expertise on students' capacity to make decisions within the Mental Capacity Act framework
4. Value of involving college students with learning difficulties and or disabilities in showcasing further education to students at their former schools
5. Potential to provide 'work placements in the real world'

6. Benefits of shared delivery partnerships between special schools, independent specialist colleges and mainstream further education colleges
7. Benefits of shared delivery partnerships between colleges and supported employment organisations
8. Value of a locally driven approach to planning, transition and progression into adult life, embracing schools, colleges, Connexions, Children's Services, Adult Services and supported employment organisations.

### **Want to know more?**

Read more information about [Dudley Council's](#) approach to supporting learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For more information contact John Cunningham, 16-19 Funding and Commissioning Manager, on 01384 817755 or by email at [john.cunningham@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:john.cunningham@dudley.gov.uk).

**Dudley Cluster: local Support and Aspiration aims**

- **Sharing existing effective practice in the interests of young people (achieved)**
- **Extending focus to all students with learning difficulties and or disabilities including those in mainstream provision (partly achieved)**
- **Continuing to resolve issues about transition from special schools to colleges, particularly by working with colleges earlier in the planning process (partly achieved)**
- **Improving pathways to employment and independent living (partly achieved)**
- **Sharing information about learning offers across all cluster partners (achieved)**
- **Extending special school knowledge of what's available at nearest colleges (achieved)**
- **Sharing effective approaches for students with challenging behaviour (achieved)**
- **Developing curriculums which are bespoke, personalised and fundable (partly achieved)**
- **Working towards effective person centred planning at different stages (partly achieved)**
- **Specialist/FE collaboration to enable students to stay in education and address the issue of students who go to college and then drop out (partly achieved)**
- **Joint working to widen curriculum offers through shared delivery (partly achieved)**
- **Addressing progression where FE is not a realistic option (future agenda item)**
- **Achieving seamless transitions to Adult Services (partly achieved)**
- **Progression for those who fall below the adult social care threshold (future agenda item)**
- **Increasing range of post-education options (future agenda item)**
- **Understanding what support is available from other services e.g. Connexions, Next Step (adult IAG), Jobcentre Plus, Work Choice (partly achieved)**
- **Working with cluster partners, supported employment organisations and employers to increase opportunities for progression into work (partly achieved)**