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Enhancing inclusive practice: Strengthening Support for Learners with SEND

(FE) Peer Reviews

This case study highlights the role of a peer review and the impact that these have had in improving inclusion at an FE College.

Weston College undertook a comprehensive peer review of another provider – The Sheffield College. The peer review is a fully subsidised, confidential and non-judgemental review for colleges. The peer review is a supportive tool to determine areas of strength in supporting young learners with SEND and suggested areas for improvement, with a summary, recommendations and support in the follow-up provided after the peer review.

The impact of the peer review can be immediate with some quick solutions embedded such as team name changes to signify change as well as longer term such as the development of trusted networks within regions and with other providers.

This case study highlights some of the short-, medium- and long-term impacts below.

Introduction

The Sheffield College serves a diverse student body, including 1,400 learners with declared learning needs, 340 high-needs learners, and over 412 with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs). With a growing demand for SEND services, the college operates from multiple campuses, employing skilled staff in Learning Support and Foundation Learning.

Weston College conducted a Peer Review as requested by The Sheffield College. The review was targeted on the following areas:

- Developing a whole-college inclusive approach.
- Professionalising staff to better support SEND learners.
- Enhancing pathways for sustainable outcomes, including employment, further education, and independent living. The need stemmed from a high dependency on in-class support, gaps in consistent inclusive practices, and a desire to embed a Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) ethos across the curriculum.

Implementation

Weston College undertook a two-day review with observations, learning walks, and strategic discussions across campuses. Outcomes were measured through qualitative data (observations, discussions) and review of student support plans, progression, and curriculum impact.

Barriers considered:

- Limited alignment between Learning Support and curriculum staff.
- High dependency on in-class support for learners, impacting staff accountability and learner independence.
- Inconsistencies in curriculum personalisation across departments
- Inconsistencies in High Needs Funding allocations

Outcomes

Strengths:

- Commitment to inclusivity, introduction of innovative SEND roles, and effective transition support systems.

Areas for Development:

- Enhance cross-department collaboration and accountability for inclusive practices.
- Reassess resource allocation to reduce over-reliance on support staff.
- Expand use of assistive technology and innovative teaching tools.
- Strengthen employer partnerships and supported internships to improve vocational outcomes.
- Develop targeted strategies for SEND learners without EHCPs or those aged 19+.
- Increase HN allocation to demonstrate future growth

The College renewed their investment in specialist roles (e.g., SEND advisors, High-Needs Advocates) and staff training in areas like mental health and trauma-informed practice as a result of the Peer Review.

The Peer Review gave them further confidence and support with the introduction of new facilities, such as the Peaks campus for complex needs learners, opening in September 2024

Impact

The review prompted a closer connection between the College and the local authority. The College is now attending and influencing at a local authority level around sufficiency – growing provision for very complex students and associated HN funding.



Development of 'Bloom' – Specialist Provision

- Improved engagement with families via the Parent & Carers forum to support longer term developments of specialist provision in Bloom.
- Baseline CPD for the specialist Bloom team has been delivered – Preparation for Adulthood by the Sheffield LA PFA team and a 1-day training session by NATSPEC on RARPA
- A fully personalised curriculum offer is in development – refined and simple to understand curriculum pathways are in place underpinned by a range of core competencies
- A 3-year expansion plan has been developed and presented to Executive Team and LA with HN funding attributed

Cross College SEND & ALS

- Changing 'Team' name to Inclusion and Learning Support to begin the culture change within the College.
- All roles to be renamed in light of the social model of disability being adopted.
- A 'change maker' team developed to lead the changes using the lived experiences of staff.
- Inclusion and Learning Support will now be planned last after all other curriculum planning is complete and the team know what they need to develop and respond to.
- The team "took over" the cross-college training day in July and delivered 30+ sessions on inclusion and support. Ranging into to the social model, to technology for dyslexia etc.

Next Steps

- The college journey is far more complex and detailed than initially shared by college leaders. The change needed in more niche areas is a challenge.
- The LA is supporting development and expansion of high needs learners – focusing on Bloom– however new students are accessing provision in their most suitable academic/ aspiration areas so are cross college. Meeting needs is inevitably more expensive as the college can't always share support.
- Staff team expansion and specialist training are at the forefront of the project.

Recommendations for further development of good practice would be that leaders and managers might be able to access ongoing support / formal coaching with CFE leads to scope out challenges and share some time to think and plan actions in a confidential and supportive relationship.

