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Preparation for Adulthood (PfA)

Professional Development Group

School/Background Context

This project was set within a medium/large, multi-academy trust spread across a wide geographical area, spanning the northwest and the midlands, and incorporating 31 schools and one independent specialist college. The schools encompass nine secondaries, eight primaries and 13 special schools. There are approximately 2500 staff and 11,864 students in the MAT. Whilst not all of the schools participated in the Professional Development Group (19 at the outset), the findings from the project are being disseminated across the Trust. This is particularly important because there are nearly 3500 students with SEND. Impacting positively upon the progress and achievement of this 29% of students within the MAT is the ultimate aim.

The Challenge

As a Trust, we have been working very hard to enable the success of students with SEND and for the interpretation of success to be widened to incorporate students' personal development as well as academic success. The Preparation for Adulthood's (PFA) Group's vision was to explore how we could develop a rigorous approach to Preparation for Adulthood because our initial idea was that if we could engage students (and their parents) with ideas about life beyond school, it might impact upon students' self-esteem, their motivation and behaviours and their parents' aspirations. In order to do this, we wanted to take a structured approach to small scale school improvement projects co-ordinated as a Professional Development Group (PD). There were already pockets of excellence particularly in our special schools but across the whole Trust, we knew that we would have to build staff knowledge and confidence. We are not complacent and so even in schools where there is outstanding PFA practice, they knew that they wanted to look at the systems and processes that they did have in place for PFA and improve these and for some schools where there was PFA knowledge but there were no systems and processes, they wanted to learn from each other's practice as well as from organisations that promote PFA in order to develop provision in our schools. Finally, in such a varied trust where 'one size fits none' we wanted to explore whether there were any key principles that could be shared across all of the schools and the college in the Trust.

What They Did

The PD Group participants (mostly SENCOs) all met with the Deputy Regional Lead (DRSL) for Whole School SEND (WSS) for 5 on-line sessions. In the initial session the scope of the project was outlined and in addition, staff were introduced to the WSS PFA audit tool 'Preparing for Adulthood from the Earliest Years' and the 2017 PFA Outcomes across the Age Ranges for children and young people with SEND' as well as the latest data demonstrating the poor outcomes for young people with SEND as they move into adulthood. All of the participants then had 1:1s with the DRSL to focus in upon their particular aspect of the wider PFA project. In these meetings, the participants fed back on the findings of the audit tool to help to define their small-scale research project. Baselines were discussed - surveys etc as well as what actions would need to be taken to ensure the rigour of the project.

The project was kept on track with regular on-line sessions with the DRSL who delivered the next 4 meetings which carefully guided the staff through each stage of the project as well as supporting discussions around wider questions that were raised.

In session 4, we were able to invite a Senior Leader from the Trust with inspection experience to talk about not only visits into our own schools but also from further afield - the good practice that she has seen and to answer questions from the group. The SENCOs found this particularly helpful because her comments underlined what we had talked about in previous sessions about the primacy of student need, communication with parents and carers and the rigour of a curriculum that may have been adapted.

In the 5th and final session, the teachers were all encouraged to think about the impact of the project in the widest sense, sharing the highs and lows of working in a Professional Development group. This session was attended by the senior SEND Lead in the Trust giving the project greater gravitas as well as providing an opportunity for the participants to hear how much their work has been valued.

Outcomes and Anticipated Impact

What conclusions can be drawn, were your findings expected or unexpected?

- The baseline activities have been enormously helpful in highlighting where provision is strong and where there are gaps (Each school was asked to use the WSS PFA audit tool to help to define their school improvement project) Staff questionnaires in particular helped SENCOs to appreciate the level of staff knowledge and expertise.
- The Trust has prioritised the EEF's 5 a day approach to teaching pupils with SEND in mainstream schools - this work, particularly in equipping staff to teach explicitly, has resonated throughout the PFA discussions and projects.
- At the outset, PD Group members knew that they had an entitlement to take time out from their own school to visit another school within the Trust and that this could be facilitated and supported by the senior SEND Leaders in the PD Group. This was enormously beneficial for the staff who undertook the visits.
- WSS PD Group sessions emphasised the importance of the EEF Implementation cycle. All of the schools were familiar with this because of the wider SEND strategy started in the Summer of 2024, but the way in which each session broke down a part of the Implementation cycle enabled staff to talk about the successes and barriers that they had not only in terms of their PFA project but also in terms of leading a school improvement project. Because the sessions were restricted to membership of the Trust, staff felt that they could speak very openly about the challenges faced as well as to share some fabulous success stories.



Outcomes and Anticipated Impact (continued)

- The senior leaders in the Trust will take the key findings from the project as a whole as well as the individual schools' case studies to develop a key principles document about PFA to share across all of the schools and the college in order to strengthen provision. This document will be presented initially at a Headteacher Forum and then at the SENCO Hub to raise its' profile. One of the areas that SEND leaders will enquire about when they undertake Trust SEND reviews is PFA.

Workload, particularly for SENCOs in mainstream schools is overwhelming. Despite knowing that the PD Group was a Trust priority, 4 members of the group had to very regrettably withdraw. Attendance at times was also variable because of very busy meeting schedules. The Trust will consider the workload of SENCOs in their planning for the next academic year.

