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Title	Enhancing Inclusion and SEND Provision: A Case Study of New College Swindon
Publisher	nasen and Education Training Foundation
Publication date	2026
Download date	2026-03-05 11:00:33
Item License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/1140



Enhancing inclusion and SEND provision: A Case Study of New College Swindon

(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 – New College Swindon. The peer review is a fully subsidised, confidential and non-judgemental review for colleges. The 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 take time to be seen as in some cases; the provider is looking at large changes across its setting which can be across different geographical locations and with different leadership teams in place. This case study highlights how a college receiving a Requires Improvement grade reach out to the CFE SEND for support and the ongoing relationship and support provided by the CFE SEND on this College's journey to improvement for its learners.

Introduction

New College Swindon is a further education institution serving learners across various campuses, including those with SEND and EHCPs (Education, Health, and Care Plans). The college has 223 high-needs learners and 215 with EHCPs. Staff include middle management roles and specialised personnel, such as Special Learning Needs tutors and Learning Mentors.

Implementation

Weston College were approached by the College to review and support the improvement of the College's inclusive practices and SEND support following an Ofsted inspection (January 2023) that rated the institution as "Requires Improvement."

Weston College conducted a two-day review involving observations, learning walks, and discussions with staff and students. They engaged in virtual pre-review meetings to establish the process and focus. They also reviewed Additional Learning Support at the North Star Campus and Foundation Learning at the Queens Drive Campus.

Implementation (continued)

The aim of the review was to focus on the following areas:

- Enhance college-wide structures and systems to better support SEND learners.
 - Develop a more ambitious curriculum with efficient delivery.
 - Address barriers to inclusivity and improve sustainable outcomes for learners with SEND.
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Outcomes

- Positive learner feedback on specific programmes (e.g., Evolve).
- Notable gaps in inclusive practices, resource consistency, and personalised learning.
- Challenges in staff accountability and effective use of Learning Support Plans.

Some of the barriers identified below:

- Limited staff with advanced SEND qualifications (above Level 3).
 - Dependence on external subcontracting for specialist services.
 - Variation in resources across campuses.
 - Resistance to shifting from dependency models to fostering learner independence.
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Impact

The Peer Review increased awareness of inclusivity gaps among staff and management. It also identified areas for immediate improvement, such as CPD for inclusive practice. This enabled the College to have a clear picture in the short term of what improvements can be made.

The College has identified a number of next steps on its journey to improvement.

- Introduce a Director of SEND to centralise leadership and accountability.
- Enhance CPD for staff on inclusive practice and personalisation.
- Develop infrastructure and resources, including social enterprise opportunities and assistive technology.
- Strengthen partnerships with external stakeholders, including local authorities and employers.
- Expansion of current assistive technology and specialist staff to reduce reliance on human interventions.
- Alignment of pathways for smoother learner transitions.



Key Learning

Insights:

- Leadership commitment is essential for fostering an inclusive culture.
- Consistency in SEND provisions across campuses ensures equitable learner experiences.
- Personalised learning pathways significantly impact learner independence and outcomes.

Recommendations:

- Prioritise upskilling staff to enhance inclusive practices.
- Adopt a sustainable staffing model with clear career progression for SEND specialists.
- Leverage technology to empower learners and reduce dependency.
- Integrate external partnerships to enhance transitional pathways for learners with SEND.

Weston College has a further visit scheduled for end of February 2025.

From initial conversations with the Principal and Chief Executive progress has been made on NCS improvement journey which includes the overall college outcomes improving by 3.2%. 16-18 outcomes have improved by 6.2% during 2023-24 (a 10% increase since 2022-23) and most importantly the gap between high needs learners and learners who do not declare a high need has been reduced significantly from 17.2% to 3.9 %.

New College Swindon also received a monitoring visit by Ofsted in January 2024 which confirmed the college is making reasonable progress against the key themes.

