

## **IAG Gold Standard assessment – Sydney Smith School**

**External Assessment carried out on 08.05.2009**

**Assessors – Vince Barrett and Maureen Kelham  
In Attendance – Barbara Foyston, IAG Development Adviser**

### **Overview**

Sydney Smith School is a large community comprehensive school located to the north west of the city of Hull. It serves an area of mixed socio-economic family backgrounds and draws learners from both the western area of Hull and from the East Riding of Yorkshire, in which the school is situated although it is designated as a Hull secondary school. There are currently 1260 learners on roll; very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds and an above average proportion have learning difficulties or disabilities.

This school has been through a turbulent period in its history. In 2005, it was deemed by Ofsted to not be providing an acceptable standard of education (*Ofsted inspection report 280242, Oct 2005*) and so required special measures. A new leadership team was appointed and some radical plans were put in place to address the identified issues. To compound matters, major flooding in the Hull area in June 2007 devastated the school. There was extensive damage to the entire ground floor, which required relocation of all learners to ensure that their education suffered as little disruption as possible. Despite this enormous setback, during 2008 the school was removed from special measures and also achieved the Healthy Schools Award.

The large rural school site comprises a range of buildings constructed in the 1960s and 70s, including a large indoor swimming pool and the site has been extended over the years to accommodate additional learners as the school has grown. The Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme has deemed the current site on which the school stands to be inappropriate for new build and so the school is to close in 2015. This has not, however, prevented detailed planning for sustained development; the school continues to improve and strives to serve its community well. Particular IAG features of this school are its facilities that cater for parents (see Element 3.1) and those for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) or who display negative attitudes or behaviour towards learning (see Element 4.2).

### **Assessment**

Prior to the formal assessment, the Connexions IAG Development Manager for Hull, Annabel Brannan, worked closely with key personnel in the school, assisting in the compilation of the self-assessment form in preparation for external assessment. A portfolio of evidence containing documentary representation of the school's IAG practice was provided to the assessors prior to the date of assessment.

The formal assessment procedure took a full day. The assessors were provided with a programme which included interviews with the Headteacher, deputy and assistant headteachers, a range of teachers, key IAG personnel and a group of learners. Young

people were also randomly selected during the course of the assessment to verify IAG procedures. A visual inspection of the available facilities for provision of IAG was undertaken and all interviews and observations were later cross-referenced against the portfolio of paper evidence pre-submitted by the school.

### **Element 1: Accessible and visible information**

**Component 1: There will be one or more information areas, open at clearly displayed times, accessible to all learners and providing a range of appropriate, current and impartial information which meets all needs.**

All learners have access to a centrally-located and well-stocked Learning Resource Centre (LRC) with a dedicated careers area containing up to date careers information. This facility is open from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. and is staffed by Paula Suddards, a qualified librarian who is available to assist learners in research and specific information finding. There are PCs with internet access for additional independent research.

The Connexions Personal Adviser (Careers), Kirsty Milner, has a designated room adjacent to the LRC, containing a comfortable interview area with phone, internet access and space for career-related displays. Personal Adviser (Generic) Carol Burton also has a room where learners can discuss in confidence matters which are of concern to them. Learners are referred, are able to make appointments or drop in for either generic or careers advice and guidance. Labour Market Information can be researched via the local LMI website ([www.lmihumber.co.uk](http://www.lmihumber.co.uk)) and course information via the Area Prospectus ([www.learnhull.co.uk](http://www.learnhull.co.uk)). National publications such as 'Which Way Now?' and EMA packs, the local i4u Planner, and work-related learning materials are all used to support learners. The school's Moodle intranet is seen as a useful means of communication and messages are sent to learners to highlight upcoming events or topics. Notice boards and displays around the school are also used to share information on a range of issues i.e. healthy eating, attendance, school council matters etc.

**Component 2: All staff involved in providing information will be familiar with its content and purpose**

All key school staff and external IAG providers are familiar with the range and content of the information available as described in Element 1.1 above and help learners in gaining information appropriate to their needs. There is in place a strong system for academic and pastoral guidance (see Element 2.1) which has resulted in a co-ordinated team approach to identifying and tackling barriers to attendance and learning. There are fortnightly meetings of the Personal Development and Well-Being (PDWB) Committee which are convened and led by Linda Chapman, Assistant Headteacher, Ethos for Learning and attended by deputy headteachers Jason Blount and Annette Jackson and assistant headteachers. There is also an Ethos for Learning Group; membership comprises staff from most departments within the school and there is an open invitation to all staff to attend these meetings. The PDWB committee's purpose is to discuss and review initiatives such as the Urgent Response System, the RAG system for behaviour management (See Element 2.1), SEAL and the Healthy Schools project. It also monitors and evaluates the 'Ethos for Learning' Policy which embraces all aspects of IAG. These forums draw together a wealth of information from staff and pupils and provide a strategic overview of IAG development, planning and training.

## **Element 2: Accessible advice and guidance**

**Component 1: Internal and external advice and guidance practitioners will collectively possess the necessary skills, knowledge, training and qualifications to identify and respond to each learner's needs.**

The school employs a wide range of practitioners with combined expertise to address all IAG needs. Each learner is allocated to a guidance tutor with whom they start their working day. Any issues, concerns or queries are picked up during this 'meet and greet' session and the vast majority of learners observed during a guidance session reported that they found these sessions useful. Each year group is overseen by an Academic and Pastoral Leader and each Key Stage is overseen by an Assistant Headteacher.

There is also an Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for the school's Ethos for Learning and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). Other defined IAG roles include Co-ordinators of careers education, behaviour for learning, enterprise and work-related activities, special educational needs (SENCO); there is a Parent Services Manager and a school First Aider who is also the Child Protection Officer. There are also teams of academic mentors and student liaison counsellors. Many of these people are trained in use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and work closely with external IAG services such as Education Welfare, Social Services and Connexions. Multi-agency liaison is effective and monitored via the PDWP Committee and through the school's representation on the West Hull Networking Group. All internal and external practitioners are subject to enhanced CRB checks.

There is in place a clear system for the reporting of incidents or concerns in lessons and around school which addresses the management of low-level disruptive behaviour through to more serious offences. This consists of a 5 stage behaviour-checking process ranging from Stage 1 'Beginning to be of Concern' through to 5 'In Danger of Permanent Exclusion'. Stage 1 is deemed to be 'green', stages 2 and 3 to be 'amber' and stage 4 to be 'red'. Stage 5 involves the involvement of external agencies and may require a managed move of the learner to somewhere more appropriate for them. An Urgent Response system is in place to ensure immediate attention and effective intervention to situations which require it. All issues and actions taken are logged and stored centrally. This whole-school approach is taken to ensure patterns of behaviour and recurring issues are identified, action taken and referrals to appropriate agencies made. All staff and learners consulted were clear about these procedures.

Linking with the 'RAG' behaviour system is the sophisticated Bromcom electronic learner tracking system through which teachers record attendance and can 'score' all learners' behaviour and effort, positive or negative, made in the classroom. This information is centrally processed by the administration team, led by Administration Manager Michelle Pinkney and bar charts are produced to give instant visual representation of all learners' day-to-day behaviours, even if they are not in the Red/Amber/Green (RAG) process. This information is monitored by Michelle Cundall, the Behaviour for Learning Co-ordinator, heads of year and guidance and also via the fortnightly KS3 and KS4 PDWB meetings. This allows key IAG practitioners and pastoral staff to see where there may be recurring problems and respond accordingly. It is noted that this system also allows for rewards to be made for positive behaviour, attitude and attendance which the school is keen to foster in its Ethos for Learning policy.

## **Component 2: All advice and guidance practitioners will know about the work of other IAG providers who may be better placed to meet learners' needs**

Communication between external and internal agencies is excellent due to the regular PWDB meetings and the well-structured organisation of the pastoral team described in Element 2.2. These provide a strong basis for partnership working. Notable good practice in this regard is the work of Jenny Belcher, the school's first aider and Child Protection Co-ordinator. She comes into contact with a wide range of IAG practitioners on a day-to-day basis - for instance, she works closely with the NHS nurse who comes into school once a week and on request. The nurse's drop-in clinic is well used.

Jenny and her colleague Natalie are responsible for the organisation of facilities such as counselling or treatment clinics which allow practitioners to carry out their work efficiently. Information is shared as appropriate with other IAG providers but the nurse's and counsellors' one-to-one conversations with young people are deemed to be confidential within the boundaries of Child Protection legislation. In addition, Jenny works closely with many parents and carers, especially those whose children have a medical condition. The school operates a medical pass for use by these learners, which allows them to leave lessons for any necessary consultations or treatment.

There is an open door policy to this facility and learners are able to self-refer. School staff are also able to make learner referrals to Jenny using a 'Cause For Concern' form rather than e-mail. All forms, phone calls, letters and contacts are recorded. The work of Heads of Year and guidance tutors complements these co-ordinated IAG processes in the school and the system works well. Jenny commented that pastoral support has a high profile in the school and that staff work together to maximise the benefits for young people.

## **Element 3: Linked IAG provision**

### **Component 1: The provision of linked information, advice and guidance will be a part of the remit and role of a senior manager within the organisation or service.**

Information, Advice and Guidance provision is well represented at Leadership level. In addition to the PWDB arrangements detailed in Element 1.2, deputy headteacher Jason Blount has overall responsibility for IAG provision within his role as PDWB Strategic Lead.

Jason has oversight of the dedicated Parent Services area of the school where parents may access any information, advice or guidance to support them in their role as parents. Ian Lamb, Parent Services Manager, has worked very hard to develop the school's liaison with parents and has introduced the Family Learning Signature project which is an interactive process designed to engage families in judging their own attitudes towards learning. It builds a picture of the views and behaviours of the family and the conditions and resources they provide to support learning. Many parents have benefited from participation in this project and virtually all parents of Year 7 learners have been actively involved. This background information gives the school an excellent starting point for providing targeted help and support and has resulted in much closer parental involvement in the school and improved attendance and behaviour of the learners themselves. It was noted that average attendance figures over the last eighteen months have risen from around 81% to over 92%. The Family Learning Signature links very closely with the Social Mediation and Self Help (SMASH) programme designed to help and support those learners who are identified as likely to benefit from confidence-building activities or who require support in overcoming any barriers to their learning. There are many enhanced learning opportunities provided through this programme which include home visits and residential visits to the 'High Adventure' Centre in North Yorkshire.

Jason also works closely with Linda Chapman, Assistant Headteacher and Sue Warren, PSHE, Citizenship and RE Co-ordinator in drawing up and delivering an engaging and relevant Personal Development Education programme (see Element 5.1) and he co-ordinates the work of all internal and external IAG providers working in the school. He agrees with IAG providers the parameters of their responsibilities and wherever appropriate draws up and agrees service level agreements. As an example of this, there is a detailed Partnership Agreement with Connexions Humber, where developmental issues are discussed and appropriate allocations of PA time agreed. During this assessment, several practitioners talked about the open-door management approach adopted by the school with regard to IAG provision and said they felt able to comment on policies and practice whenever the need arose.

**Component 2: All IAG practitioners will make clear to learners the links between IAG services and support learners in their transition between these services.**

As stated in Element 2.2, day-to-day communication between IAG practitioners is very good and there is in place an effective and supportive network that is able to respond quickly and appropriately to learners' needs. All school-based pastoral staff are familiar with internal and external agencies supporting young people and members of the Senior Leadership Team all share some responsibility for the co-ordination of personal, educational and vocational IAG complemented by the team of learning support staff. The clear communication strategies and the close cohesion of staff working arrangements ensure this works well and learners know to whom they can turn for help. This was borne out in conversations with a wide range of learners during the assessment.

**Component 3: All IAG practitioners will recognise professional boundaries and know which alternative provision is appropriate for signposting or referral to meet each learner's guidance needs.**

Sydney Smith School invests heavily in its support systems which, as detailed throughout this report, are provided via a range of services and practitioners. All interviewed during this assessment have a good understanding of internal and external support networks; all are aware of the remit of others and referrals are made easily between IAG personnel in order to ensure that specific questions on topics such as finance, health, accommodation or transition are addressed by the most appropriate practitioner.

The school's Parent Services Manager, Ian Lamb and First Aider Jenny Belcher attend external multi-agency meetings and the Connexions service has contact with a variety of support agencies outside school. All staff have access to the school's management information recording systems to inform their work with learners and Connexions has its own Trakrekord system. Information is shared by mutual consent where appropriate and referral procedures are rigorous and clear.

Much emphasis is placed on peer support and peer mentoring. Learners in Key Stage 4 apply to be prefects and in that role they are trained to be peer mentors. As part of the attendance and re-integration process at Key Stage 3, learners are offered a 'back to school chat' with peer mentors. It is felt by staff and mentors that learners respond to their peers in some cases better than to teachers. Prefects interviewed as a part of this assessment value the role and say that they felt supported and respected for the work they do.

#### **Element 4: IAG responsiveness to the needs of clients**

##### **Component 1: IAG provision will promote equality of opportunity and access**

The IAG protocols and procedures described throughout this report result in quick and sensitive identification of all learners requiring additional support and ensure that their academic, social or personal guidance needs are met. The school has developed strong links with a wide range of external agencies such as health professionals, educational psychologists, educational welfare officers, Special Educational Needs Support Service (SENS) and Children's services in order to help meet those needs. There are excellent and exemplary links with home and parents/carers are very appreciative of the support offered by the school to them and their children.

##### **Component 2: IAG will be accessible to all, with specific resources directed to learners identified as having additional needs**

All year 11 learners have the opportunity to have a one-to-one interview with a Connexions Personal Adviser in response to their individual needs and to support them in transition. Information on learners, both personal and academic, is recorded and shared through the school's sophisticated and co-ordinated School Information Management System (SIMS) and informs the advice and guidance processes. Learners are supported in accessing information in school and followed up by Connexions, as appropriate, once they progress into learning and training post-16. The school's Connexions PA for Careers, Kirsty Milner is seen as an extremely valued member of the guidance team. She reports that she feels this is a friendly school where "everybody knows exactly what everybody does". Most pre-appointment learners arrive punctually for interviews and the few that don't are followed up by an immediate e-mail to tutors. E-mail is one of the most important forms of communication in the school.

The school has a wealth of resources for learners who have additional needs. The off-site WEB Academy caters for learners who are disruptive or find difficulty in coping with the mainstream school curriculum. The aim of the Academy is to provide permanent alternative off-site learning provision through Key Stage 4 together with whatever additional help and support is required to make positive progress in learning. This is a significant facility to ensure that learners remain on the school's roll, are engaged and have equal access to appropriate curriculum, external examinations and IAG as provided to all. Learners study GCSE English, Maths and ICT and in addition take OCN qualifications in work-related learning and drug awareness. Other courses such as performing arts are also offered. The WEB Academy links with external agencies to give additional advice and guidance on lifestyle choices and learners are well supported by Connexions personal advisers.

The on-site Child Learning Intervention Centre (CLIC) is a dedicated classroom base for Key Stage 3 learners who have been identified as displaying negative behavioural or disruptive traits. The classroom is bright but formally arranged, with separate desks for morning sessions while afternoons are spent on less formal and more social learning activities such as quizzes, board games and jigsaws. Learners attend for a minimum of 8 weeks, the first week being spent entirely in the centre, including breaks and lunchtimes. A gradual re-integration programme is established with pupils initially attending lessons in core subjects. This re-integration programme is designed to correspond to each learner's pace and if some feel reticent to go back into mainstream, they receive further support. Learners are closely monitored while in the centre. They achieve 'merits' awarded for good behaviour, attitude, work and attendance; these attract rewards and running totals are displayed.

There is also the Total Communication Unit (TCU) for learners with hearing impairments from across the East Riding, the City of Hull and North Lincolnshire. This is a very specialist facility and Joanne Kelsey, TCU Manager, ensures that these learners have access to a full and broad curriculum. The TCU team works hard to integrate learners into the mainstream curriculum and are there to support communication via British Sign Language in assemblies and lessons.

### **Element 5: Quality and delivery of IAG**

#### **Component 1: IAG will be underpinned by a development programme of planned personal learning based upon national recommendations**

Linda Chapman, Assistant Headteacher and Sue Warren, PSHE, Citizenship and RE Co-ordinator work together to provide a very detailed programme of Personal Development Education. It is built around the five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes, the SEAL domains and is linked very closely to IAG systems within the school. There are detailed schemes of work for Careers, Social, Health and Citizenship components which run from Year 7 to Year 11. The whole programme is delivered by a designated team of teachers and learning support staff on a weekly basis, 50 minutes timetabled per week on a 'carousel' basis. The detailed content of this programme was submitted as part of the evidence for this assessment and it meets national recommendations for breadth and balance of content. Sue is committed to continuously developing the content and delivery of the Citizenship programme and learners are able to gain either a half GCSE equivalent short course or a full GCSE in Citizenship. The personal well-being curriculum is enhanced by the provision of 4 'super learning' days per year, each of which has a particular theme such as health or careers.

#### **Component 2: IAG will be targeted at the needs of learners and informed by social and economic priorities at local regional and national levels.**

As mentioned in the overview to this report, this school serves the full spectrum of social and economic backgrounds, but a concern raised by Ofsted was that many young people attending the school at that time had low aspirations resulting in underachievement and poor attendance. These issues have been rigorously addressed and pupil tracking systems have dramatically improved (see Element 2.1) In addition, the Home Learning Team works within Parent Services and primarily targets those families where low attendance and poor behaviour are potential issues. The team then looks for "tailored solutions to disaffection, evident in school as poor behaviour and attendance." This includes anger management training, self esteem development, family support work and family learning. The school focuses squarely on prevention of underachievement rather than attempt a retrospective cure. This approach is to be recommended.

The learner population now has access to individually-tailored information, advice, guidance and general support. There are in place rigorous procedures to quickly identify learners requiring additional support and to ensure that all their social and academic guidance needs are met. (See Element 2.1)

The school is well aware of its geographic and demographic location and the fact that it is due to close in 2015. All members of staff are working very hard to ensure that all local and national IAG demands made of it are addressed and fully met right up until that time.

## **Element 6: Impartiality of IAG provision**

### **Component 1: IAG will provide all available options based on the needs and circumstances of each individual**

As the school is situated close to the villages of Anlaby and Willerby, there are bus routes both into the city and to Beverley. The perceived travel to work and study area tends to be into the city and, although all options are impartially presented to learners, the most popular option post-16 is into full-time college provision at either Wyke Sixth Form College or vocational provision at Hull College. A smaller number choose to go on to apprenticeships.

Sydney Smith School offers learners a wealth of opportunities to gather information without bias. This is done through the curriculum, with the support of the staff and the Connexions service and by additional activities such as the super learning days, use of the 'i4u' Student Planner, open access to the Area Wide Prospectus [www.learnhull.co.uk](http://www.learnhull.co.uk) and supported use of the inbuilt Common Application Process (CAP) which is more widely used in this school than any other in the city. 99% of all Year 11 learners have made applications through the system to post 16 opportunities.

### **Component 2: IAG will support learners in making informed decisions not led by institutional targets or goals**

Learners report that they feel comfortable about asking for help in the school, they are aware of the Connexions service and feel confident that they know who to ask for help if they need it. A recent survey of all Year 9 Learners showed that overwhelmingly, they know to whom they may turn for help in various situations. The entire school ethos is one of helping young people to achieve within the context of their family and social setting and this is done regardless of their academic ability. The Parent Support Services Unit forges excellent trusting relationships with parents and ensures that they are fully informed about anything happening at school which affects their child. The Connexions service maintains the impartial information, advice and guidance on progression pathways.

## **Element 7: IAG for learning, work and progression**

### **Component 1: IAG for learning, work and progression will support learners in exploring the implications of possible career choices when planning their futures**

There is a coherent and sequential careers education programme in place from year 7 overseen by Careers Co-ordinator Claire Daddy, which builds knowledge and understanding through each key stage and culminates in helping learners select their next learning, training or employment destination. During Year 11, learners are given opportunities to practise making applications, learn about adult roles and responsibilities and think about possible career choices. Representatives of local colleges and the Consortium for Learning are given free access to talk about the opportunities they offer and to answer any questions. The Y10 careers lesson on interview techniques delivered by teacher Kimberley Lawrence and observed as a part of this assessment procedure, demonstrated a range of activities designed to engage all learners.

In November 2008, an ambitious 'Industry week' was run for all Year 10 learners, bringing them into contact with a very wide range of employers, agencies and services from across the city. All underwent mock interviews, could explore possible career routes and the feedback was very positive. As mentioned in Element 6.1, virtually all learners made their applications via the Area Wide Common Application Process.

## **Component 2: The work of IAG practitioners will be informed by up-to-date and accurate labour market information**

Learners are encouraged to make decisions that are informed by local labour market information and progression pathways. The local LMI website [www.lmihumber.co.uk](http://www.lmihumber.co.uk) the EBP's LMI newsletter and the 'i4u' Student Planner are used to inform staff, Connexions PAs and learners while the careers education programme and the input from Personal Advisers ensures that learners have many opportunities to match LMI with their considered progression options.

## **Component 3: IAG provision will ensure that all learners have access to the information they need to make informed choices**

The exemplary use of the Area Prospectus and CAP, i4u Student Planner, other local and national publications all help give each learner every chance to consider all options available post-16. The personal development programme and the opportunity to discuss ideas with a specialist practitioner ensures that all year 11 learners have information, advice and guidance to help in making their decisions and understand the consequences of those decisions.

The school is also heavily involved in providing experiences and information via Enterprise Education. English teacher Patrick Pinnock is the Enterprise Education Co-ordinator and the Gold Standard assessor was the observer of a very enthusiastic presentation by a company called 'Go Games' which introduced their healthy eating board game 'Off Your Trolley'. The managing director, web designer, finance manager and sales executive spoke about the employability and personal skills they had developed and how much they valued the input given by their teacher and business advisers. On the day of this assessment, Patrick learned that this group was one of 6 to make it into the regional finals of the Young Enterprise competition.

## **Element 8: Evaluation of IAG**

### **Component 1: All IAG practitioners and learners are able to feed back their views on the provision within the organisation**

Learners interviewed all stated that they felt Sydney Smith School offered a supportive environment where they were able to work, to learn and enjoy good relationships. Older learners remarked on the dramatic improvements they had seen in the way the school operates during the time they had been there. All Year 11 learners said they felt they had been well-supported when making decisions about their futures and will be sorry to leave.

Learners were asked about bullying and all said that it was dealt with and was not a significant problem. Many commented on the recent improved reputation of their school and were supportive of their head teacher. All felt that they had people to talk to and pointed to guidance tutors, teachers and learning support staff as all being good points of contact. The school submitted evidence of frequent learner questionnaires seeking views on aspects of school life and learner responses are very positive.

The assessors were impressed by the teamwork approach taken by the school in all aspects of its work and the open approach taken with regard to feeding back to management any concern or issue regarding any aspects of the school's work.

## **Recommendation**

This school is a prime example of an organisation that places good information advice and guidance at the centre of all that it does. There is a distinct atmosphere of 'pulling together' to present a school that cares for its learners and to a very significant extent, the parents of its learners. There is no perceived hierarchical structure and all practitioners are equally valued for the part they play in providing a very positive learning atmosphere. The school is constantly looking to improve and develop the service it provides and an example of this are the plans to introduce individual EPCs (mini laptop computers) issued to learners to further enhance and individualise learning.

There is no doubt in the minds of the two assessors that Sydney Smith School has in place the IAG strategies and requirements that fulfil the Kingston upon Hull 14-19 Strategy for Learning Gold Standard for Information Advice and Guidance.

The assessors recommend that this school is awarded the Standard.

Vince Barrett and Maureen Kelham, Gold Standard Award Assessors

Date of report: 14.05.09

Date of recommendation: 01.06.09

Date of Award:

Date for re-assessment: