

IAG Gold Standard assessment – Cambridge Park Specialist Maths and Computing College

External Assessment carried out on 10.10.08

**Assessor – Vince Barrett
In Attendance – Paula Shaw, Curriculum Adviser**

Overview

Cambridge Park Specialist Maths and Computing College is a non-residential area special school currently catering for 184 learners, aged between three and sixteen and all with statements of special educational need. There are an additional 6 post-16 learners accommodated in the new on-site facility and plans are well in hand, in partnership with Grimsby Institute, to extend this facility to other post-16 learners in the Borough who would benefit from the specialist programmes and facilities offered (see Element 6.2 for further detail). This special school is unique in having secured specialist status for maths and computing and now enjoys the additional benefits this status brings.

All learners have emotional, behavioural and/or learning difficulties ranging from moderate to severe and a significant number also have a physical disability. The school has a separate but integrally located facility for learners with autistic spectrum disorder. Due to this wide range of needs, the information, advice and guidance provided for learners and their parents is given a very high priority and is tailored to each individual's needs. This is to ensure that, as far as possible, all learners progress successfully through the school and on to appropriate and fulfilling next destinations. As is to be expected, official GCSE academic attainment is well below the nominal national benchmark but the school does cater very well for those learners who are capable of achieving GCSE success – some having achieved as many as eight good grade passes - and no learner leaves the school without achieving at least one nationally recognised qualification. The school has recently started to run the Foundation Level Diploma in IT.

Assessment

Prior to the formal assessment, Connexions Education Development Co-ordinator, Brenda Hardy and Curriculum Adviser for North East Lincolnshire, Lisa Hanson-Dows (now Paula Shaw), 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 evidence of IAG policy and practice - was provided to the assessor prior to the date of assessment and a planned programme for assessment prepared. During the course of the assessment, I interviewed Roly Ward, Director of Specialism, Gillian Kendall, Headteacher, Graham Scott, Careers Co-ordinator and Carol Howard, PSHE Co-ordinator, Lead Child Protection Officer, Home/School Liaison Lead and French Language Manager. I also interviewed two learners representing the school council and, over lunch, young people who happened to be sitting at the same table. I also interviewed Paula Shaw, previously one of the Connexions PA working in the school and observing on this assessment.

The assessment procedure took five hours. During that time, in addition to interviews, a visual inspection of the available facilities for learners to access information, advice and guidance confirmed that these were in place and accessible. The relevant collected evidence demonstrating each Element and Component of the North East Lincolnshire Gold Standard for Information, Advice and Guidance is described in summary below:

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, credible and impartial information which meets all needs

Free individual access to information is not appropriate for learners in a special school environment in the manner expected in mainstream schools. There is excellent guided and supported access to any information required to assist individual learners with any issue, difficulty or need they may experience. State-of-the-art computer terminals with controlled internet access are located strategically throughout the school and staff access to electronic information is well used. The school has a small stock of hard copy careers information, centrally located and available at all times during the school day.

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

All teaching and learning support staff are aware of the access to information as described above and support learners in gaining information appropriate to their needs.

Element 2 – Accessible Advice and Guidance

Component 1: Advice and Guidance practitioners will possess the necessary skills, knowledge, training and qualifications to identify and respond to each learner's needs.

The school has a staff complement in excess of 120; all are working directly with learners and are recognised as providers of information, advice and guidance. There is a programme of continuing professional development for all, enabling members of staff to develop their skills in meeting aspects of particular needs required by learners. Teaching staff in all curriculum areas have what is known in school as a 'right hand person' or Personal Assistant and all these practitioners are all qualified to Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) level. In order to complement the school's response to the wide and varied needs of learners, the school has built a huge network of highly qualified external practitioners. These include health, education and guidance professionals. Day-to-day communication between school and external agencies and services is excellent and provides a strong basis for sound partnership working.

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

Although this is a relatively small organisation in terms of learner numbers, the staff/learner ratio is just over 1:1. There are many external practitioners working with learners in the school and so the need for liaison and sharing of the work of all IAG practitioners is greater than in large mainstream schools. High priority is given to child protection and the health, safety and well-being of all learners and regular meetings take place to ensure that all practitioners are aware of precisely what interventions are being made and procedures are in place. All practitioners, internal and external, are able to raise any matters of concern and share views on who is best-placed to meet each learner's needs. See also 3.1 below.

Element 3 – Linked IAG Provision

Component 1: The provision of linked IAG will be part of the remit and role of a senior manager within the organisation or service

As briefly described in 2.2 above, this school has in place outstanding procedures and protocols for the co-ordination of the work of a large range of services and agencies, overseen by the headteacher and her team of senior leaders. All parents are required to sign a statement to agree that information may be shared between practitioners and so multi-agency meetings are arranged on a six-weekly basis to hold case reviews to share information in order to meet identified needs. This approach has resulted in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) drawing up personalised plans to address the specific mental and physical health needs of individual young people.

Component 2: Practitioners will make clear to learners the links between IAG services and, where necessary, support learners in their transition between these services

There is a constant and ongoing necessity to ensure that learners successfully make their transitions. Many support services are required to meet their needs as identified via the procedures described in 2.2 and 3.1 above. Self-referral by learners to everyday health or support agencies, such as doctor, dentist or Connexions personal adviser is rightly not viewed as an option here and so help and support is provided to learners and their families as appropriate and at point of need. Parents may approach the school for assistance in understanding what is required of them and this is willingly given.

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

Well-structured and co-ordinated systems for the delivery of advice and guidance to individual learners are in place with the extremely effective referral mechanisms outlined in 3.2 above. An excellent relationship exists between the school and advice and guidance practitioners with a high degree of integration into the school systems enabling effective and accurate referrals to be made.

Element 4 Quality and Delivery of IAG

Component 1: IAG will be targeted at the needs of learners and informed by social and economic priorities at local regional and national levels

This is a school serving a largely socially and economically disadvantaged area with a learner population requiring tailored information, advice, guidance and general support. This, together with the school's close attention to the physical and emotional well-being of all learners increases the need for the involvement of a wide range and diversity of guidance practitioners in order to meet all IAG needs. The school is well aware of its geographic and demographic location and works hard to ensure that all local and national IAG demands made of it are addressed and met.

Component 2: IAG will be underpinned by a planned personal development programme based upon national recommendations

There is a planned PSHE programme, co-ordinated by Carol Howard who has responsibility for ensuring delivery of a range of topics and activities designed to enhance learners' personal development. The school provides many opportunities for learners to participate in activities designed to extend and enrich their curriculum. Visits are arranged to places quite far afield and I found evidence of learners enjoying residential trips to Buxton and engaging in sporting events in Leeds. Rather than a single programme for all, the PSHCE experience and content is tailored to the needs of each learner.

Element 5 - Diversity of IAG Provision

Component 1: IAG provision will recognise and reflect the diversity of learners' needs and promote equality of opportunity and access

This element lies at the heart of everything this school does. Learners often arrive with low levels of self-esteem and confidence and so clear structures and procedures are in place to ensure absolute equality of access to IAG provision. Activities are designed so that individuals may continually build a positive view of themselves in my conversation with a Year 8 learner and a Year 11 learner over lunch it is quite clear that the experiences of learners as they move through the school are nurturing the development of self-image and awareness, not only of themselves but also of others and the environment.

Component 2: IAG will be available in other more neutral premises whenever appropriate

The range of IAG agencies working in the school arrange interventions with learners and parents in places other than school as appropriate to need.

Element 6 - Impartiality of IAG Provision

Component 1: IAG will promote equally all options available and open to learners based on the defined needs and circumstances of each individual to ensure as far as possible, accurate matching of stated need to help and support

Information on all options post-16 is made available to all learners via a biannual careers fair to which a range of post-16 learning providers and others such as the DofE Award are invited. All learners have access to the Connexions PA and promotional information from local providers is available.

Component 2: IAG will support learners in making informed decisions and will not favour any particular learner or groups of learners in order to address institutional targets or goals

The progression route for the majority of learners is to Grimsby Institute which provides a wide range of entry level and Life Skills courses designed to build upon each learner's achievements during their time at the school. The Year 11 learners I spoke to during this assessment were all clear about the options open to them and discussion had clearly taken place with each one to ensure understanding of their next steps. During Years 10 and 11, many attend taster or introductory courses at the Institute in order to familiarise them with the new environment. For many, this is absolutely essential to ensure smooth transition. However, Cambridge Park has learners who achieve good grade GCSEs and for them, an apprenticeship or employment may be more appropriate. Each learner's individual circumstances are taken into account and all are supported into the most appropriate destination for them.

There is, however, a recognition that for some learners, moving on to a new place of learning is not appropriate at the age of 16. As a result, senior managers in the school have worked very hard, in partnership with Grimsby Institute and the LSC, to provide an on-site post-16 facility which offer accredited learning in a wide range of basic skills. There is a purpose-built car-washing and valeting bay and learners are able to practise essential skills such as clothes laundering, home maintenance and food preparation. It is envisaged that this facility will grow in order to offer places to young people completing their compulsory education elsewhere but would benefit from the post-16 courses on offer here.

Element 7 – IAG for Learning and Work

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

The school has a number of opportunities that encourage learning about work. There is a strong work experience programme for all those who can benefit from undertaking a period of real work and this is integrated into the overall career s education programme.

Component 2: IAG practitioners with a careers focus will work closely with local employers to ascertain up-to-date LMI

Local labour market information (LMI) is gained via the local Education Business Partnership (EBP) and also through the school's links with employers offering work experience placements. As a part of this assessment, I witnessed a group of learners discussing the importance of labour market information; which jobs were available nearby and which would involve moving away.

Component 3: IAG provision will ensure that all learners have access to a common 14-19 prospectus from the end of key stage 3 in order that they are made aware of opportunities and qualification requirements for study and training from the age of 14 and for further study, training or employment from the age of 16.

The 14-19 Area Prospectus is relatively new to North East Lincolnshire but a training session for all careers co-ordinators in the Borough had recently taken place at the school, taking advantage of it's exceptional IT facilities. This has ensured that the Prospectus (www.lincs2.co.uk) includes the interests of special schools and the facility will be used appropriately with learners as it develops in the coming months.

Element 8 – IAG responsiveness to the needs of clients

Component 1: IAG practitioners will liaise with each other and all external agencies and services that provide support for learners

As reported under Elements 2 and 3 above, this school operates a true partnership approach to everything it does. As an example, the Connexions PA interviewed as a part of this assessment considered that she felt her work to be an integral part of the 'big picture' of support and guidance offered to all learners in the school.

Component 2: IAG provision will ensure that outcomes of learners' reviews are acknowledged and incorporated into advice and guidance sessions.

The Connexions PA and the school feel that communication regarding learners is good. Information from guidance interventions is held securely by Connexions on the CCIS Trakrekord system and from reviews by the school within its SIMS system. Information held is shared as appropriate in line with current data-sharing statute.

Element 9 – Evaluation of IAG

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

There is a school council where learners are able to feed back formally on anything of concern to them. School council members interviewed reported that they are able to raise issues and concern, be listened to and have their views acted upon.

The school's IAG provision is constantly monitored, reviewed and modified via the range of multi-agency and internal mechanisms described in this report. Due to the ever-changing demands of its clientele, IAG and curriculum provision is constantly adapting to meet learners' needs. Staff and management meetings promote discussion between staff regarding the help and support available to learners and adjustments are then made as necessary. All staff I interviewed said that they were happy with the way in which the school operated on a teamwork basis to provide the best experience for all learners.

Recommendation

Cambridge Park Maths and Computing College provides outstanding examples of good practice in the provision of information, advice and guidance. Indeed, many elements of the delivery of IAG at the school, especially underpinned by the importance placed on IAG by all staff, could be used as exemplary practice across the Humber sub-region.

There is very strong commitment from all staff to continually review, maintain and improve the support and guidance provided for learners and their parents, with a strong emphasis on the development of self-awareness and growth. The Senior Leadership Team recognises the importance of IAG in its broadest sense being a foundation for this individual development, with the overall aim being to prepare learners, starting out in life with many disadvantages, for a fulfilling future.

Vince Barrett

Connexions External IAG Assessor. 13.10.08

Date of Award: 14th November 2008

Date for re-assessment: October 2011