

Secondary School Transition (Case Study)

What have we learnt?

The following learning has been collated having reviewed the data, and from conversations and questionnaires with schools, providers, parents, practitioners and children and young people following the initial working groups and the early 'Keeping in touch' meetings.

Generic Learning

Recruitment has been a challenge for many projects, and many have had to be creative in terms of sharing, backfilling, training, and developing existing staff or inducting staff new to education but with relevant skills sets or experience.

Collaborative work needs excellent regular communication to ensure that all parties have similar expectation and a collective belief that the project will meet their needs. This has been an issue for some in terms of 'identifying the bar for referral' for example.

Collaborative working needs staff to be flexible to work effectively across different ethos's etc. Systems such as supervision, Lone Working and Safeguarding need to be clear, consistent, and managed across the partnership.

Projects can support and act as drivers towards whole school initiatives such as developing a sense of Belonging or pupil mental health and wellbeing.

All reporting projects have identified significant improvements in attendance, behaviour and parental confidence for a number of the pupils engaged in the project. Several projects suggested that their projects will reduce the number of EHCP and Special School applications over time. Creating branding for the project e.g. The Bridge can create a stronger community partnership and joint ownership feel rather than a situation where one school is 'doing something' to others.

Strand 5 Supporting transition to secondary school

Early Learning

- The Transition staff can help individual students who would have struggled make a successful transition.
- They can help improve behaviour by helping a school know and understand their pupils and the influences on them.
- The Bridge project with the associated CPD has raised the profile of EBSA across the schools
- The transition programme can have an incredibly positive impact on parental confidence. They feel supported and understood.

Case study

The Beacon project targets ESBA pupils with SEND either side of the point of transition. we knew that they were feeling anxious about coming to school, but also that within families, there was anxiety about the transition to secondary school. We wanted to support them with that working with our primary school colleague. We work with four local primary feeder schools and another secondary school, supporting families and students to make that transition to secondary. The project has 3 components.

- **Component 1:** Whole School Training to ensure all students, including those with SEND, enter a positive, reassuring environment, we will deliver training to all teachers and support staff in both our secondary and primary schools on behaviour so that students will experience similar routines,

dialogue, and expectations. We will establish a behaviour curriculum which is based on the Sussex EBSA toolkit and its therapeutic thinking model.

- **Component 2:** Resources to create welcoming, safe, therapeutic space for our SEND students and support for their integration into mainstream school life.
- **Component 3:** Recruiting 3 EBSA support workers to deliver specialised support programmes across primary and secondary schools.

The project has been called the Bridge, which has strengthened ownership across the partnership of 5 primaries and Uplands Secondary - it is not seen as a Beacon project. The 4 appointments have been made and the project has been based on strong research evidence and applying to the challenge in practice. The referral process has been agreed by all schools and group training is in place to embed capacity to future proof the developments and 39 students have been identified. The project is underway with some very positive impacts on individual pupils around attendance and attitudes to school. Parental confidence has improved as those involved value the additional support offered.

A programme has been designed in partnership with our link Educational Psychologist Lizi Atkinson, and CLASS link advisor Becky Evans, using and developing a range of resources based on the East Sussex EBSA toolkit. We held a PATH meeting and have had regular reviews of this PATH.

Key elements of the programme include:

- Carrying out student voice specifically designed for students with EBSA
 - Interventions in resilience, self-esteem, strategies for managing anxiety
 - Providing a safe space for students to work in while they feel unable to attend a lesson
 - Regular communication with parents and carers
 - Setting small-step targets to slowly reintegrate students into the classroom
 - Enhanced transition for primary students identified as being at risk of EBSA
 - Build capacity across all partner schools to mitigate EBSA effectively and consistently

The enhanced transition programme has had a real impact and this year all the primary EBSA pupils attended the two days including a number of school refusers with zero attendance in primary. There are many individual case studies where pupils have made significant gains in attendance albeit perhaps still below the key targets e.g. one child has gone from 2% to 25%. Here are some other pupil case studies:

- Child 1 - attendance at primary a concern. Has not declined since being at Beacon, despite highly stressful situation at home and bereavement. Has formed very strong relationship with members of the team.
- Child 2 - has not attended school since January 2023. overall attendance now 18.5% and rising. - has been coming in every morning since February half term, despite very unsettled home life, becoming homeless, and high level of mental health struggles.
- Child 3 - Current Year 6. 3% attendance to Primary school. Engaging in weekly 2hr coaching sessions at home and bi- weekly visits to The Bridge. Is excited about starting at Beacon in September, says she can't wait!
- Child 4 - Low attendance to lessons at secondary. Engaging well and attending on a regular basis with one-to-one and group coaching sessions resulting in a reduction of truancy and increase on lesson attendance.

Parent feedback:

- 'The work and effort that you put in to engage, support and really get alongside and understand vulnerable students is what is making the difference here. The fact you don't hurry or push too fast but trust in the process is what is working.'
- 'My child has been doing a little extra with you on a Monday at Rotherfield primary, which they have really enjoyed. Many thanks for all the extra work you are putting on place to make it easier for the children.'

- ‘The team at The Bridge have formed a great relationship with my child. Knowing that they will be there to support them has really helped reduce their, and mine, worries. So much so, that they are very much looking forward to attending Beacon in September.’

Since starting the project Beacon recently had a graded Ofsted inspection.

Zoe James Deputy Head ‘Like all schools, we’ve had issues with attendance which we work very hard at, but the bridge was really part of our strategic program around that. And inspectors were really interested and talk to students and talk to staff about the work that we’ve done there. We were delighted that our grading shifted from good to outstanding.’

From Ofsted Report 50247735 (Ofsted.gov.uk)

Attendance is at the forefront of the school’s priorities. As with schools nationally, pupil absence remains higher than before the pandemic. Leaders here have a firm grasp of this issue. They understand the semi-rural context of their pupils and families. The school is taking a strategic approach to new ways of supporting attendance. They also make thoughtful use of alternative provision both within the school, and externally where appropriate. These approaches are proving to be effective in reducing absence. In lessons, pupils are highly engaged. They are proud of their achievements, and resilient in the face of challenges.

From the feedback meetings with HMIs:

- The Bridge is tackling a sticky problem early on and there are signs of impact from the work with individuals and whole school training. It is an intelligent solution and a pragmatic approach, going beneath the surface of the issue.

Parent comment:

- ‘I have a son who is autistic and has had EBSA for several years brought on by the transition to secondary which was a big trigger going from a small school to a big one, it was quite overwhelming for him. As a working mum it’s very difficult. The battle to get him in to school but also the battle was getting him to stay in school because things would happen, and I would have to come and collect him. As a parent, I found there was limited help with the transition, it was difficult to speak to teachers and everywhere was busy. When an incident happened, I felt like a failure. I feel now there is a place for my son to go to when we were having those difficulties, the Bridge has given him somewhere safe to go and can succeed at being in a mainstream school’.

Pupil case study

One pupil in particular stands out, he recently had a huge loss in his family, and I feel, I honestly feel that he wouldn’t be in school at all if it wasn’t for the Bridge project.

Pupil comment:

- “I like going to the bridge because they help me go to lesson and help me come to school, and they help me with my homework when I struggle. Before the bridge, I didn’t like school, and I struggle coming in more, and I came later”