

Publication: Nasen Connect
Date: May 2024, Summer edition
Circulation: 30,000
Periodicity: Bi- Monthly

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→ TEACHING & LEARNING

Dysart School's approach to careers education

Leigh Edser, principal, and Steph Cruse, vice principal of Dysart School in Surbiton, explain how they creatively shape the careers provision for young people with complex needs to help them be 'future ready'.

High-quality careers guidance makes a difference to young people. It opens their eyes to the options available once they leave education and equips them to make aspirational choices for their futures.

At Dysart School we ensure that our 163 students, who are aged 4-19 with a range of severe and complex learning difficulties, have a voice. There is no defined limit to their potential and, as a popular school with numbers rising every year, ensuring high-impact careers provision for students is essential.

CREATIVE ABOUT CAREERS

Dysart School is part of Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust. Our Outstanding Ofsted rating has been maintained for the past 10 years and we are very proud of this. We also have two satellite schools under our wing, which helps to keep pace with the rising demand for places in Surbiton and the surrounding areas.

Our school thinks creatively to help students thrive. This begins with the creation of our own definition of careers. 'Career' at Dysart does not necessarily mean paid employment. Instead, it's a purposeful destination on leaving school. Our overall aim is to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for the next stage in their life.

In the UK however, the careers provision accessible to young people with severe and complex learning disabilities rarely meets their needs. This remains an issue into adulthood, with only 4.8 per cent of adults with a learning disability in paid

employment in 2021/22, according to the **Department for Education**. Part of our vision is to address these shortcomings and drive improvements in our school, along with providing examples of effective practice to others with similar provision.

A NEW TAKE ON THE GATSBY FRAMEWORK

Based on international best practice, the eight Gatsby benchmarks define what world-class careers provision looks like. What's important to remember though is that the Gatsby framework isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. We have adopted the benchmarks in a different way, using internal knowledge and experience to shape a careers programme that meets the complex needs of our students.



BIO

LEIGH EDSER

Leigh Edser is principal of Dysart School in Surbiton. Leigh has worked as a SEN teacher for around 20 years and began her career as a SEN teaching assistant in a special school environment.



EXPANDING EXTERNAL ENCOUNTERS

One of the main aims is to strengthen the pathway intents that relate to community inclusion, and to meet benchmark 5, 'encounters with employers and employees,' and benchmark 6, 'experiences of workplaces.' This requires high-quality relationships with local businesses, which can be a challenge but we work with some great companies in the community. One of these is Langley's Restaurant in Surbiton, which recently hosted a charity evening to raise funds for our school. This provided a hands-on opportunity, helping our students to develop confidence and social communication skills in a workplace environment. Working with professionals and contributing to meetings during the planning stages also created meaningful encounters for students, enabling them to have a voice.

Students took on various roles, from marketing the event and designing menus to meeting diners, even setting up a stall selling hand-decorated biscuits, with profits donated towards a class trip.

THE GATSBY BENCHMARKS

- 1 A stable careers programme
- 2 Learning from career and labour market information
- 3 Addressing the needs of each pupil
- 4 Linking curriculum learning to careers
- 5 Encounters with employers and employees
- 6 Experiences of workplaces
- 7 Encounters with further and higher education
- 8 Personal guidance

BIO



STEPH CRUSE

Steph Cruse is vice principal of Dysart School. Steph has worked as an SEN teacher for more than 10 years. She developed her passion for SEN teaching during her teacher training placements where she experienced working with children with SEND in environments that were not suited to meeting their needs.



REVIEWING OUR PROVISION

To help us understand the progress achieved and opportunities for development, it seemed logical to audit activity. The Careers and Enterprise Company, the national body for careers education in England, completed an independent careers impact review to help us understand the impact of the initiatives. The report given to the school following the review, praised the creativity of the school's provision, stating that: 'Through a tenacious vision to enable meaningful lifelong social inclusion, the school is creating student careers learning journeys that include relevant encounters and experience that meets students' needs'.

Ultimately, an independent audit has helped us focus on the quality and impact of careers leadership and provision, and we will continue to support students and families to understand pathways beyond Dysart. The overall intent of the curriculum of Dysart School is to enable meaningful lifelong social inclusion for students, and our careers approach is synonymous with this intent; helping young people to be 'future ready'.

IN-SCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES

Careers opportunities fall closer to home too, with the school presenting a valuable resource to tap into. An internal jobs fair invited students to apply for on-site roles, with students submitting CVs in a selection of formats including written, images or video. Staff interviewed those shortlisted, and jobs were offered in hospitality and catering, administration, and site maintenance.

Another new venture is 'Dysart Delights,' a pop-up café opened recently by a group of students and supported by Christ Church in Surbiton. This provides first-hand experience of operating a small business including displaying products, taking payment, ordering stock, and marketing. Run by our post-14 students, it's a welcoming environment for people to enjoy a drink and freshly baked cakes and cookies.

In addition to students gaining valuable work experience, it's an opportunity for the local community to see for themselves what our young people can achieve. There are even the murmurs of exploring an external delivery service, a Dysart Deliverool!

