

Building a wider workforce/transdisciplinary practice

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New Bridge School has three key strategic intents that can be listed as follows:

- To develop a campus that places itself at the heart of the community and values the contribution of every individual.
- To offer all pupils and students access to the highest quality facilities and excellent staff.
- To offer all pupils and students an extended school year through the development of holiday clubs and after school activities.

This think piece examines the staffing implications relating to the strategic intents listed above.

New Bridge, as an extended community school, is open 7 days per week, 48 weeks per year, we responded to these new arrangements by promoting flexible working across all areas of our staff teams. We currently have 180 staff members.

Introduction

New Bridge School opened in January 2005 and was the culmination of an extensive SEN secondary review in Oldham that involved a variety of key stakeholders. The outcome was a new build, state-of-the-art 180 place 11-16 school on a mainstream school site and a fully renovated and refurbished 120 place 16-19 Learning Centre (2 miles away) that is driving forward a vocationally based, community centred curriculum.

We are categorised as a generic community special school with all the young people having the support of a statement of SEN. Our mission statement is Learning Together, Learning for All. As the only secondary special school in the town the majority of the population comes from Oldham but we also have young people from Tameside, Manchester, Rochdale, Salford and Bury.

The school has excellent, fully DDA compliant facilities which include a theatre, (with intelligent lighting systems, sound systems, audio visual and interactive white screens), a dance studio with wooden sprung floor, a fully equipped recording studio (to professional standards) and conference facilities. We share all sporting areas with our mainstream partner school that include a (4 badminton court) ball hall and outdoor astro-turf area.

Our 16-19 Learning Centre facilities include a fully operational cafe and meeting place, a hairdressing and beauty salon, a key skills department, a large outdoor and indoor horticultural centre, a print shop, construction and craft departments (indoor and outdoor). There is a designated community base which is used by the general public and partner organisations on a daily basis through the use of the community classroom and the fully operational crèche and child care centre. Gallery New Bridge opened in 2007 as a fully interactional gallery space for school and the community to exhibit 2d and 3d visual and graphic art.

42% of our pupils and students are on the free school meals register. New Bridge School represents the rich cultural diversity within the town and our current ethnicity profile is determined as White 79%, Pakistani Heritage Background 12%, Bangladeshi Heritage Background 5%, Chinese Heritage Background 1%, Other 3%.

At Year 7 our main feeder school is Oldham's primary special, Kingfisher Community School. There has been a significant change in the last few years in that almost 50% of our intake now comes from mainstream primary provision. There has been a recent growth of in-year admissions notably prior to Year 10 and Year 12.

Attainment on entry to Year 7 ranges from young people working at P1 to NC Level 4.

We were awarded specialist school status for performing arts in 2006 and re designated following a very successful Ofsted inspection in 2009. The school has also received Arts Mark Gold, a Basic Skills Charter Mark in 2008, Sports Mark in 2008, Healthy Schools award in 2008 and Inclusion Mark in 2009.

What we offer that makes a difference

- A 48 week extended school offer (open to all who request it) at minimal cost to families,
- A daily before and after school service at no cost to families.
- An holistic and wrap around curriculum that offers residentials, extra-curricular visits and a staff team supporting not just the young people but also their families
- Individual curriculum pathways that include Lumenus (our arts based theatre company) and Hortus (our horticultural service)
- Off-site learning partnerships with many local businesses and organisations.

Developing a Staff team to more appropriately meet the needs of the young people

The need to provide time for staff to plan, prepare, moderate and assess learning has never been higher in profile in education services than they are now. Add to this work/life balance issues, and the preference of UNISON for schools to employ support staff on full hours (36.67 a week) or full year (52 week) contracts wherever possible, the need for schools to look at flexible methods of working are ever more pressing. New Bridge pupils and students benefit immensely from the many different types of contracts on offer for staff. For staff in turn, the new style contracts help to promote healthy work-life balances whilst keeping our young people safe.

New Bridge School embraces

- Flexible working for full time employees
- Time Off In Lieu for term-time only colleagues
- Annualised Hours.

Finding a balance of flexible working that suits both employee and the school is imperative to successful implementation of any flexible working arrangements. It has therefore been necessary to negotiate different types of flexible contracts with different teams of staff. Our flexible working policy enforces the right of all staff to request flexible working including those employees with children under the age of six, or with children who have a disability up to the age of eighteen, who already had that right.

New Bridge fixed flexi-time enables an employee to work more than their contracted weekly hours and then take back the time at a later date, within certain constraints. Flexi-time is worked in accordance with both the individual and school need. This enables, in particular, staff with little annual holiday entitlement to achieve a better work-life balance and time off to spend with families. The school ensured that flexi-time policy did not conflict with the requirements of the Working Time Regulations. The intention of the scheme is to enable staff to combine their work and personal commitments and to manage workflow within their area more effectively. Additional hours can be banked from 1st January to 31st December (the accounting period). Flexibility is allowed around core times (when all staff must be present) and recorded through the school's electronic signing in / out system based at reception, crediting hours daily. During each accounting period a maximum number of hours may be taken as "flexi-leave".

Time off in lieu (TOIL) enables an employee to negotiate a flexible arrangement around their annual hours by working during holiday periods and reclaiming the hours during term time within certain constraints. TOIL is worked with both the individual and school need in mind. The intention of our TOIL scheme is to enable participating staff to claim back hours in school term-time for work managing school holiday clubs in school holiday times. This accrued time can be reclaimed with the exception of the first and last week of a school academic year. This enables teaching staff to negotiate TOIL entitlement and achieve a better work-life balance and time off to spend with families.

All employees understand that the scheme must not cause a major drain on time and that TOIL working necessitates teamwork and consideration from all members of staff for it to work effectively. The effective running of the school and entitlement to pupils/students always takes priority whilst we are conscious that the scheme has to be fairly and consistently implemented.

It is primarily the employee's responsibility to ensure that on average the employee attends for 36 hours 40 minutes per week (or equivalent part time hours) and that excessive variations from the standard working week on a regular basis are avoided. In any case the employee should avoid working in excess of 48 hours per week.

New Bridge annualised hours enables contractual hours to be calculated over a year, rather than a week and the total hours are negotiated in January of each year. The actual hours worked each day, week and month can then vary in accordance with business needs, as long as the contractual hours are met by the end of the year. This has great benefits for roles where there are peaks and troughs in the workload.

An employee may request to work from home on occasion. This is at the discretion of the Headteacher. All employees understand that participation in any flexible working scheme is a privilege, not a contractual right.

All the above schemes are available to every employee regardless of job role or status.

New Bridge also recognises that effective staff development is not only vital to meeting future goals and ambitions but also makes an essential contribution to the development of a responsive, staff supportive and well managed institution and so the school has implemented the TRIP system (Training Routes Information Planner).

High quality training also provides an opportunity for staff to improve their skills and knowledge on an individual level and move into areas they have particular affinity for. It is a more flexible and fitting approach to meet the requirements of the school, the student and the member of staff on an individual basis. TRIP is organised through:

- 3 fixed training days which cover all compulsory training elements for all staff
- 10/15 hours of flexible individualised training (TRIP) whereby staff have the opportunity to personalise their own development and training needs.

TRIP is committed to:

- Staff induction and initial training.
- Compulsory staff training
- Recurring staff development
- Individual development
- Assignment of personal mentors.
- Team development needs
- School-wide development needs
- Management development
- The allocation of time for training.

Impact for the young people

Our progress and achievement analysis (that compares young people who attend holiday clubs and those that do not) suggests very positive trends. As holiday clubs have become more suited to individual needs many indicators have shown a positive trend in progress and achievement. There is objective evidence to underpin these assumptions in our uncapped point's scores at the end of Key Stage 4, the numbers of pupils and students gaining externally accredited awards, our Contextual Value Added scores and within the school's progress measures (linked to the recently published progression guidance).

Holiday clubs run every week throughout the year other than the last two weeks in August and the Christmas vacation. Approximately 70/80 pupils and students attend each week supported by staff

who understand their individual needs. This has had a significant impact on both our staying safe and being healthy agendas. Families also report the benefits it offers them.

Our attendance figures have increased year on year to their present 91.6%. We are assuming that the young people enjoy coming to school as a result of this measure and formal feedback through the families' responses in our school self review.

Our "individual pathways" curriculum model has already attracted considerable local, sub regional and National interest. Lumenus and Hotus have only been in existence for a year but early evaluations appear to be incredibly positive. Both are offering community based activities and the links developed with external organizations should begin to make inroads into our employment, contribution and participation agenda.

Impact for the staff team

Recruitment to the school team is a very positive experience. The school attracts many graduates into the workforce who are attracted by the schools' professional development agenda. This has supported colleagues into qualified teacher status from the initial positions of classroom support assistants, higher level teaching assistants, teachers without QTS through the use of our TRIP system. The "grow your own" model not only offers colleagues the opportunities to develop their skills but makes economic sense and is less risky than going down more traditional routes.

Attendance and punctuality. It is widely reported that many schools struggle with staff attendance and punctuality. The systems New Bridge operates allow for a great deal of flexibility and trust that in turn leads to a greater commitment from the staff team.

Promoted positions. The school has been very successful through our School based training programmes in offering colleagues who wish to further their career the opportunity to do so. Every year, for the past 4 years, members of our team have been appointed to senior positions in other schools including Headships, Deputy Headships and Assistant Headteacher roles.

With ever increasing pressures on school budgets it is becoming more and more necessary to implement innovative ways of working that can meet the needs of our 21st century school whilst achieving best value with the funding that we do receive. Our TRIP and flexible working systems provide exactly that with the benefit of electronic systems to monitor and communicate across 300 families and 180 staff.

Staff benefit from autonomous training and development opportunities, time off-in-lieu, flexible working and equal opportunities, in addition to their substantive terms and conditions.

Impact for families

Results from our school self review show that parents/carers value the opportunities on offer to them and their children. B&A clubs and holiday schemes in particular are a vital asset providing routine for the young people, keeping them safe and providing social opportunities with peers. For parents themselves the clubs offer respite care, the comfort of knowing their child is supported by people that know them well and affordability through the use of flexible working arrangements.

In summary

In delivering our school's strategic intents it has been necessary for us build an extremely diverse and wide workforce that can meet the needs of the young people and their families throughout the year. The questions we asked ourselves were:

- How can we ensure that our strategic intents continue to be addressed and, more importantly, have the capacity to be sustained in the future?
- How do we provide a fair work/life balance for full year and holiday club workers?
- How do we achieve best value financially, for the young people and the staff who work with them?