

Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill

Note of session at Buchanan High School.

Part one – background information regarding how the secondary school works with its young people to prepare them for life after school.

The local authority is looking at developing a transitions strategy, which is out to consultation with parents and pupils at the moment. However, a lot of work already takes place in school.

The approach to transitions in this school is to look at helping its young people on to sustainable positive destinations.

There is a big team involved in transitions – which includes the young person, their parent / carer, Principal teacher or Depute Head (depending on whether the young person is in S4 or S5/6), a transition social worker, Skills Development Scotland, North Lanarkshire Council Supported Enterprise Team, local college, locality support services and school nurses. The main team around the young person is consistent so they really get to know them over a period of time.

The schools start its transitions process / preparations in S4 – even though most children opt to stay to S6.

This is quite a long-term approach which begins with the young people being asked what do they want to do? And then the team works to support the ideas that they have for themselves. They always work with an option A and an option B. They also work to give each pupil leaving school a plan for 2 years...so that all young people have meaningful options, not just for immediately following school but for the two years following school.

It was stressed that, at all points, the young people are supported and are asked what they want / think.

During the discussion, the programme Project Search was highlighted. This is a course offered at many colleges which has placements as part of it, in this case hospital-based placements. There are certain requirements of the young people, for instance, they have to be an independent traveller, however, if they aren't, they can be supported to develop that skill.

Students select three areas across the hospital that they are interested in, for example admin / portering / canteen / blood bank, and have placements in each of the three, then they pick their best, and have a six month placement there. If they are successful and a job is available at the end of the course / placement, they can get a job.

It was noted, that although the transition work begins in S4, there is also pre-S4 prep work done, on a multi-agency basis and involving the young people and their parents.

There is also a lot of work done by the school to build up networks with other agencies and employers. The school looks at what is needed in the local community, to help identify opportunities that could lead to jobs. The school has worked with local partners including MacTaggart and Volvo. This also means that the school is looking at local resources that can possibly be levered into the school. McTaggart offers a CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) Construction course in school half a day each week for a session. The pupils involved undertake an SQA Health & Safety Award and their CSCS card which is essential for working on site. Construction is a growth industry with jobs available and the school has targeted this area because of these facts. A teacher is also being trained – undertaking the CSCS card to enable her to deliver this course from next session.)

The young people are introduced to vocational learning / training / experiences in S1 (through Enterprise activities and Developing the Young Work force classes which are timetabled) and this is developed and expanded during their time at school, to ensure that they can develop skills and qualities over time. S4 pupils have one week's work experience as do S5 pupils. S6 pupils have one day a week work experience with Glenboig Development Trust. While there, they can try 10 different work areas, including horticulture, to see what they like best.

There is a lot of collaboration between everyone involved, which has been built up over time by the team in the school, to deliver this approach which also means that the young people are building up momentum as they move through the school years.

The approach has been successful, as the school's outcomes prove – which are well above the national average.

The school is always working to expand on the experience it can provide for young people. Explaining that it has been difficult to organise placements in a retail environment to give young people interested in that area with relevant experience, the school is developing a shop which will sell surplus food donated from partners. This will allow the school to sell food cheaply to the community, but also provide young people with experience of stocking shelves, using tills and working with customers. This has been made possible by International Beverage as we won their Spirit of the Local Community Award of £10,000.

Asked about the work that they do to support transitions, the Home Link School Worker responded that, although the post is new, they work to encourage parental involvement from as early as possible, to build relationships and trust with parents. They explained that they invited parents to be in the school on the same day that the young people coming up to S1, on transition day.

They also link with other agencies and partners, to help parents and carers build up their social skills and boost their confidence / self-esteem so that they aren't as intimidated by the idea of engaging with the school / services. They are also looking at what is available in the community, to give parents opportunities to have different experiences to again build confidence.

They explained that they were looking to bring / involve parents in, particularly those that are quite isolated, to encourage their views / giving confidence to be involved.

Asked whether there is enough flex / experience in the system to be able to respond to the specific needs of each child, it was explained that the social worker is at every transition meeting. They know the situation and the particular challenges that a family can be facing,

and they aren't just supporting the young people but can be offering support / assistance to their parents too. For instance, there can be a tension if a family in receipt of benefits would lose that, depending on what their child wants to do. The parent wants their child to make the best choice for them but in reality that might mean that the family could be in real difficulty, particularly in the current economic climate. In such cases, the team around the child, including their teachers and social worker, has tried to work out alternative paths and options.

The schools makes a lot of effort to bring people in, including the Tackling Poverty Team, to support their families, particularly in the current economic circumstances.

It was highlighted that the local authority has recently been recruiting family engagement workers, for each cluster, to help support families with these wider issues. Some have been recruited already and the recruitment is still ongoing.

It was noted that, for a lot of young people with Additional Support Needs, a concern for their families is whether to go for guardianship / power of attorney etc. The social workers recognise that transitions, including this question, is a difficult process for the parents, at times, even more than the younger people so a lot of the support is offered to the parents.

When asked how the school measures the impact of this investment in the young people and their families, which is both time and resource-intensive. The actual measuring – what data is collected etc - is more of a question for the local authority or Skills Development Scotland, however, from a school perspective, although intensive, it is built into the cycle / calendar of the school year, and part of the school's working practice. It was also noted that schools are always looking at costs. They can't rely on always getting SDS funding, so more reliable funding is important. It was highlighted that almost all of the young people had applied for support from the ILF [Independent Living Fund]. The Deputy Headteacher also holds a 'clinic' on a Wednesday morning to assist parents with applications for ILF.

It was suggested that building in the time / cycle to support vocational training / experiences, to effectively give all young people transitional support, would be positive, to help young people figure out what they want to do next. Recognising the significant numbers in mainstream schools, it was suggested that it could be trialled in mainstream schools, with Christmas Leavers. North Lanarkshire Council already has a Christmas Leaver Programme which some pupils buy into but by connecting this to a comprehensive transition process, the school feel the results would be more productive for young people.

It was highlighted that for young people, post school, support comes from local authority. The purpose of this transitional support from social workers working within schools, is that it helps to bring young people into adult services [or their awareness] at an earlier stage so that there isn't a gap.

It was pointed out that the onus is still on the young people and the family to know about the services. It was also noted that the social worker team dedicated to this school / transitions role is very small and each social worker has a lot of young people to support. However, it was explained that when a need is identified, the social worker would delegate / link to other teams for the specific support, rather than delivering it themselves.

School staff also play a role in sharing a lot of information with parents, notifying them about benefit entitlements and holding events in the school / support families to make applications.

Part two – session with young people

What are you going to do when you leave school in June?

Every young person had a different goal. Some were going to college, one to do an ICT course and another to do a link course – with an interest in sports and teaching.

One young person wanted to do an apprenticeship in plumbing.

Other young people wanted to start working, one in hospitality, one in joinery and another in construction and they had been working to achieve their CSCS card.

Who has helped you to get ready to prepare for leaving school?

All of the young people highlighted that their teachers and school staff had helped them to get ready, and many mentioned their families.

They said that they were helped to plan and supported in what they wanted to do. One young person said that this meant ensuring that they were on the right classes in school. Another was helped by the school, and the company that they had a placement with, to get ready for their next steps.

How have they helped you?

Young Person 1: Teachers have helped to think of a course and find what would suit me. Also in terms of getting ready to leave school.

Young Person 2: Teacher and my job coach helped me to do work experience. It has been good to learn new things that I can use, for example stocking shelves.

Young Person 3: Teachers play a part in preparing us with money handling in maths. Job coaches have also helped. Having different experience of working in gardens and in cafes, and then an experience to learn plumbing has helped me find what I want to do.

Young Person 4: It has been helpful to listen to teachers' advice but they also gave me support to achieve what I wanted.

Young Person 5: All the teachers in the school helped.

Young Person 6: All the teachers and job coaches have helped me to get the right work experience, for instance seeing different aspects of a construction site to see what it is like in a more realistic environment.

Young Person 1: My teacher has helped to build my confidence and develop my independence.

The draft law says you should have a plan before you are 16 years old and that the plan should last until you are 26 years old. Do you think that this is the right amount of time to have a plan? If not, should the plan last for a shorter/longer time?

Young Person 4: It should start earlier, around 14, to give more time before you do the transition. 26 feels too old so maybe 20.

Young Person 1: I think maybe 15 – 21. Start a bit earlier so that you have time in case you want to leave school earlier but end by 21 so you have time for a developed plan but you aren't being restrained later / older in life.

Young Person 6: I agree, 15 – 21. 26 feels too old. You can plan stuff out before then.

Young Person 3: I agree on 15 – 21. It would be good to start earlier as it would help with picking options in 3rd year, would be more involved in the final decision.

All the young people agreed that being able to dip into the support would be more useful than ongoing / overarching the whole time.

Are there things that you are worried about?

All of the young people said that they were looking forward to the future.

How do you feel? Are you supported and knowing what you want to achieve for their future?

Yes, but some people leave it too late to decide, as schools don't have the right opportunities to develop skills and understand what they want to achieve / do in life.

Some people who are at other schools aren't getting the chance to find out what they want to do.

At the end of the day, we want you to feel respected and in control of your own future. Do you?

All of the young people emphatically said "Yes, definitely."

At times when you are feeling uncertain, who do you go to when you feel that way?

All of the young people who responded said that they would go to a teacher.

Who would you go to outside, that you could rely on?

Young Person 3: I'm going on a Life skills course at college, which will give me experience and placements but if I don't like it, I can do something else.

Young Person 1: Could go to mum.

What should be in a transitions plan?

Young Person 3: More opportunities, more courses and jobs.

Young Person 1: A dedicated person who you can talk to / who could help you and advise you.

Young Person 6: Different work experience opportunities to help you know what you want to do. Other schools could offer these experiences to young people.