Include

Issue 4, Autumn 2020 Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust 'Family' Magazine

What can you gain from a career at Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust?

- Comprehensive training and development from our in-house Training School
- Partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University delivering teacher training qualifications
- Scope for career progression across six college centres, 15 academy schools and Shared Services
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Generous annual leave and flexible working schemes
- Defined benefits pension scheme
- Membership to Perkbox
- Childcare vouchers and enhanced parental leave schemes
- Cycle to Work Scheme

...and many more benefits!

Don't miss your opportunity to enhance your career and make a difference to the lives of young people.

Visit ohcat.org/vacancies to see our current vacancies.

Welcome

It is perhaps obvious to state that this year has been unlike any most of us will have previously experienced.

However, as I set out on pages 6 and 7, it is incumbent on us not just to secure the present, but also to look forward and to continue to build a dynamic, confident environment for our pupils and students to thrive in and for our staff to feel both confident in and proud about. For every challenge, an opportunity; for every difficulty, optimism.

Pupils, students, staff, governors and friends across OHC&AT continue to respond with resilience, and positivity to turn a challenging national landscape into an opportunity for creative development. On pages 8 to 11 you can see a showcase of just some of the achievements across our organisation.

Our core focus on pupil, student and staff mental health and wellbeing has accelerated during Covid, with Executive Principal & Deputy CEO Laurie Cornwell spearheading our team's delivery of training and support; you can find out more on pages 12 to 13.

With four Free Schools still currently in development, we were delighted to open the doors to our first Free School, Addington Valley Academy in Croydon. This is a significant step for OHC&AT and the Croydon community. You can find out more about the school, its aims and ethos, as well as other Free Schools in the pipeline on pages 14 and 15.

At OHC&AT, we meet the government's target for the employment of apprentices, and we proudly have a number of apprentices with SEND succeeding in our workforce. However, there is a huge disparity nationally between the numbers of apprentices with and without SEND, and this is an issue that we look further into on pages 16 to 17.

Orchard Hill College is an outstanding provider and critical to the success of the Trust as its sponsor. Principal Kelly Phillips explains on page 18 why we are a team that can persevere through the most complex of challenges, affect transformative outcomes and constantly adapt to ensure that we work together to liberate the potential of pupils and students across OHC&AT.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Include; we take pride in what we do and of what our children and young people continue to achieve.

John Prior
CEO, OHC&AT

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Follow us on Twitter and Instagram @OHCandAT

The Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust 'family'

Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust (OHC&AT) together form a family of inclusive special education providers for pupils and students from nursery through to further education.

OHC&AT is a 'family' of education providers and services located in four local community hubs in London, Surrey, Sussex and Berkshire with six college centres and 15 academies.

Orchard Hill College is an outstanding independent provider offering specialist education programmes for students with a wide range of needs, aged 16 and over, in six college centres:

Lomond House is situated just off Camberwell Green.

Beaconsfield is located within a quiet residential setting in New Malden.

Vocational Progression Centre is a stand-alone centre sharing a campus with Carshalton College.

Vocational Centre is co-located with Nightingale Community Academy in Wandsworth.

Wyvern House is based near Uxbridge town centre.

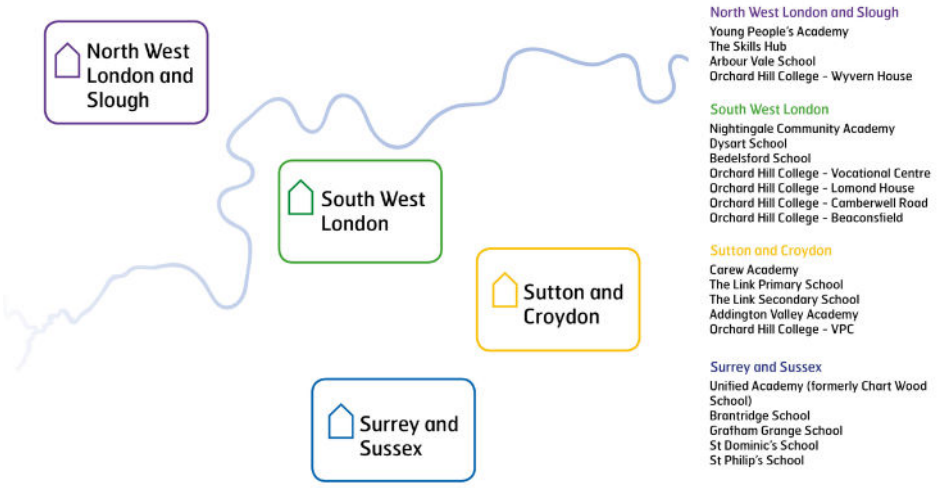
Camberwell Road is our newest centre, located in Camberwell.

Academies

North West London and Slough Young People's Academy in Hillingdon is for students aged 11-16 with social, emotional and mental health needs.

The Skills Hub in Hillingdon offers an alternative provision to mainstream education for pupils aged 11-16 to prepare them for adult life and employment.

Arbour Vale School in Slough is for pupils aged 2-19 with a range of educational needs including severe learning difficulties with profound and multiple needs.



South West London

Nightingale Community Academy in Wandsworth is a school for boys aged 5-19 who have social, emotional and mental health needs.

Dysart School in Surbiton is a provision for pupils aged 4-19 who have a range of severe and complex learning needs including autism.

Bedelsford School in Kingston provides for pupils aged 2-19 who have a wide range of physical disabilities, including profound and multiple learning difficulties, multi-sensory impairment and complex health needs.

Sutton and Croydon

Carew Academy in Wallington is for pupils aged 7-19 with a wide range of ability levels and additional learning needs, including complex autism.

The Link Primary School in Beddington provides for pupils aged 4-11 years whose primary need is speech, language and communication. Some children may also have additional learning, sensory or physical needs.

The Link Secondary School in Beddington provides for students aged 11-19 whose primary need is speech, language and communication.

Addington Valley Academy in Croydon is for pupils aged 2-19 with social communication, cognitive, sensory and social, emotional, and behavioural needs.

Surrey and Sussex

Unified Academy (formerly Chart Wood School) in Dorking is for boys aged 9-16 who have social, emotional and mental health needs.

Brantridge School in Haywards Heath is for boys aged 6-11 with social, emotional and mental health needs, autistic spectrum conditions, including those with Asperger's syndrome, and those with a diagnosis of ADHD and associated learning difficulties.

Grafham Grange School in Guildford is for boys aged 10-19 with autistic spectrum conditions, speech, language and communication difficulties, ADHD, opposition defiance, medical conditions and attachment disorders.

St Dominic's School in Godalming is for pupils aged 7- 19 with complex educational, health and care needs typically with a primary diagnosis of speech, language and communication needs and/or autistic spectrum conditions.

St Philip's School in Chessington is for pupils aged 9-19 with a wide range of ability levels and additional learning needs, including complex autism.

Orchard Hill College

Addington Valley Academy

Arbour Vale School

Bedelsford School

Brantridge School

Carew Academy

Dysart School

Grafham Grange School

Nightingale Community Academy

St Dominic's School

St Philip's School

The Link Primary School

The Link Secondary School

The Skills Hub

Unified Academy

Young People's Academy

Back to the future

John Prior, CEO of Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust (OHC&AT), reflects back on the last year with vision for the future.

It's all too easy at times like this to become perpetually stuck in the moment.

After all, during a time of national crisis, what could be more important than the here and now? Why reflect back on previous achievements when the pressure of the present is all-consuming? Why look too far ahead when best-laid plans can be undermined at a stroke by the latest 'event'? It is tempting to fall into ordinarily thinking this way. But it would be a mistake.

OHC&AT exists to support, enable and champion the talents, skills and rights of the most complex and vulnerable people in our society in order that we can release their potential, promote their wellbeing and transform their lives. This is our core purpose. It is essential that we actively embrace our mission statement and use it as our key driver for all of our values and behaviours.

Our Mission

"OHC&AT exists to support, enable and champion the talents, skills and rights of the most complex and vulnerable people in our society in order that we can release their potential, promote their wellbeing and transform their lives."

When our Covid-disrupted world begins to return to a semblance of normality - however that may look - we need to be ready to meet it head on. And we need to deliver an OHC&AT offer that is not only as effective as it was before March 2020, but one which has grown in experience, knowledge and stature – one that is even more responsive to the needs of our pupils, students, families and staff.

There are many things required to do this. Resilience, for example, which is seen as our ability to make positive adaptations, adjust to adversity, maintain our stamina and demonstrate that all important 'bouncebackability'.

Robustness, which can be taken to mean our collective capacity to maintain the effectiveness of our functions and processes and withstand more systemic change.

Collaboration, which speaks of our attention to the needs of each other and the wider organisation, drawing on a collective energy and direction of travel. And a compassionate empathy that pulls us towards an instinctive consideration of physical and emotional wellbeing so that we may have the equipment, the tools necessary to advocate for and support our learners as dynamically as we can whilst paying due regard to our own needs.

Our Ethos

"As a community of learners, families and colleagues OHC&AT believes that by working collaboratively, with energy and ambition we can always effect positive change. At the core of our ethos is the conviction that there should be no limit placed on what is possible and that everyone has the ability to be the very best they can be."

Vital as these considerations are, they are best served when supported by a deep understanding of our headline mission, vision, ethos and values, set alongside our key strategic aims for the Trust as a whole.

These are the principles and objectives from which all other things follow; and by 'understanding', I don't just mean something we can read off a display board or recall as a list of bullets from memory. I am referring to a mind-set that intuitively speaks the language of OHC&AT, hears and sees it routinely in all of our interactions and is able to both identify and articulate the impact we have on the lives of the young people we are so privileged to work for.

In short, it is about an instinct, a way of being. And whilst our strapline – 'Working together to transform lives' – captures our ambition very well, it's only via our actions and behaviours that we enable that transformation. Culture is built and perpetuated through doing; and to 'do' effectively, it is imperative that we understand why we do what we do.

OHC&AT has retained a remarkable consistency and continuity since March. Covid has necessitated that we show incredible character and flex but crucially, this period has illustrated with great clarity that our overall strategic direction of travel is the right approach.

Our headline objectives of growing the specialism, nurturing talent, attending to quality and standards, building capacity and being system leaders as a result of our broader advocacy are both precisely relevant and clear signposts to our actions and priorities as we move through this academic year and beyond.

This year, each academy, the College and our business and learning support services has been assigned the specific task of ensuring that our strategic approach is visible, promoted and discussed and that its content not only shapes the way we work but also underpins the key priorities within each and every provision.

We look back at what we have achieved so far, with pride and a sense of accomplishment; we take stock of the present and ensure that we are as responsive as we can be, now, to the precise needs of the moment; and we look ahead with confidence, optimism and clarity to make sure that we remain sharply focused on transformation, on development and on continuously improving the lives of our children and young people.

Over the next few pages we share with you a showcase of some of the achievements over the last year.

Our Values

As an organisation, we adhere to the seven principles of public life to drive our behaviours and provide a framework for our actions. These are: loyalty, openness, objectivity, selflessness, honesty, integrity and accountability. Within this framework, we have defined our own set of core values and behaviours based around the word 'create'.

Confident Respectful Equitable Advocacy Teamworking Enabling

Achievements and successes: Orchard Hill College

Despite the difficulties this year has brought, students at Orchard Hill College have continued to grow, learn and realise their ambitions.

Orchard Hill College remains Outstanding!

Following its Ofsted inspection in November 2019, the college continues to be 'Outstanding'!

The report stated; "Since the previous inspection governors, leaders, managers and staff have maintained their exceptional standards to provide an outstanding experience for their students. They hold extremely high aspirations for students".

The report went on to praise the curriculum, which is carefully designed and bespoke to individual students and ensures they are successful and independent in their lives after college. Students receive excellent support and a "high proportion....gain employment or move into voluntary work".

Kelly Phillips, Principal, stated; "I am so proud of all our students and staff who have worked so hard to maintain an 'Outstanding' judgement. Our students truly deserve this and it represents the continued dedication of the entire college community."

Residential trip to Exmoor

Students enjoyed their first residential trip of the year to Calvert Trust in Exmoor! Experienced Exmoor staff supported students to reach their full potential no matter what their level of ability. Activities were fun and challenging, building confidence and teamwork skills; this included horse riding, abseiling, zip wires, cycling, crate stacking and more. After a busy day students and staff spent time relaxing in the hydrotherapy pools and sensory room. Evening entertainment was also provided with a visit from Exmoor Zoo and a disco which students especially loved. The trip was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone and the experience was one that will be remembered!

Students support the community during lockdown

Students at Orchard Hill College supported their communities in a number of ways throughout the pandemic.

At Beaconsfield, a group made cards, artwork and bouquets of flowers grown during their horticulture studies. They delivered the gifts to a local care home for residents who were self isolating and unable to see family or friends; a truly kind gesture to support those around them.

Students at VPC were also keen to do something practical to help key workers and show their support to the NHS, so they decided to make protective visors.

The first batch of visors was delivered to a local care home in Sutton, where the team was over the moon that students had thought about them and produced items to protect their workers.

Frances Mckay, Curriculum Lead, said:
'This project has been a win-win for everyone involved, students wanted to help the cause and this project is giving them the chance to make a real and meaningful impact in their community.'

#LoveOurColleges

The Love Our Colleges campaign is an opportunity to highlight the brilliant work that goes on in colleges, and students at Orchard Hill College took part again this year.

As part of the Share The Love competition, which invited students to produce or perform creations around the message "Love Our Colleges', students made a collaborative art piece. Each student filled a cup with paint representing their emotions and let them out by pouring the paint onto the canvas.

The finished piece is truly beautiful and poignant.

'Drive-by' Awards

Sadly, the college was unable to hold its usual awards celebration this year. Instead, they held celebrations in centres for students in college, and for our students at home they took to the road and delivered a package to each of them, with their personalised framed certificate, yearbook, a leavers' hoody and some special gifts.

It was a wonderful way to say goodbye to leavers, congratulate them on their successes, and wish them all the best for the future.

Mental Health Ambassadors

After taking part in Mental Health Awareness Week, students wanted to continue the positive work through the rest of the year.

Five Student Mental Health Ambassadors are being recruited across the college centres to help promote physical activity and mental wellbeing.

The college has also built a new link with AoC Sport, and students have been taking it in turns to share with their peers what activities that they like to do that supports and promotes their individual well-being. With weekly mindfulness, yoga, music and dance sessions, these activites should support students' mental health and stimulate positive conversations about wellbeing and emotional health.

Achievements and successes:
Orchard Hill College Academy Trust

Outstanding results, student reporters and collaborative artwork: pupils and students across Orchard Hill College Academy Trust continue to inspire us.

SMSC Gold Award

The team at Bedelsford School is delighted to have been awarded Gold for the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development quality mark.

The report found; "Although the world outside Bedelsford is disrupted and uncertain, the atmosphere and feeling inside your school was welcoming, calm and inspiring."

The assessor said: "I can clearly see how Bedelsford's motto, 'Better never stops' is lived and breathed. Your pupils are not bound by their physical or mental abilities. They are stretched and extended, and truly grow as young people."

Bedelsford School students with the SMSC award certificate

The Patchwork Project

During the unusual and extraordinary times this year, many of us have never felt so far apart, so Dysart School launched a project to reconnect through the power of creativity.

Pupils, parents and staff members were invited to paint, draw, sew or colour an image of their choice with the theme of 'hope'. All entries were digitally 'sewn' together to create a virtual patchwork quilt combining everyone's take on the theme. All pieces will eventually be connected and put on display in school to symbolise the hope and resilience of the community at Dysart School.

Dysart School's collaborative patchwork

Outstanding for The Link Primary School

The whole school community celebrated another Ofsted Outstanding result for The Link Primary School. Principal, Sandy Turner, said: "I am particularly proud of this rating as it is our fourth consecutive "Outstanding" judgement. As a team, we strive to provide the very best we can for all our pupils with our child centred ethos at the fore, but how wonderful it is to have this acknowledged and confirmed by Her Majesty's inspectors."

The report praises staff highly, stating, "Pupils thrive at Link Primary School. Staff are expert in communicating with pupils. They work tirelessly to develop pupils' confidence and their ability to interact positively. Pupils feel safe and happy."

The Link Primary School is Outstanding

Carew Academy is Outstanding!

In February, students, staff and parents at Carew Academy were celebrating the result of their Ofsted inspection, in which the school was rated 'Outstanding' in all categories.

Principal, Rob Watkins, said: 'I am delighted with the outcome of the inspection. Students thrive at Carew Academy because they know we have high expectations and we want them to do well. I have an amazing team and we all share the same vision, we want our students to be well educated, happy, confident and independent.'

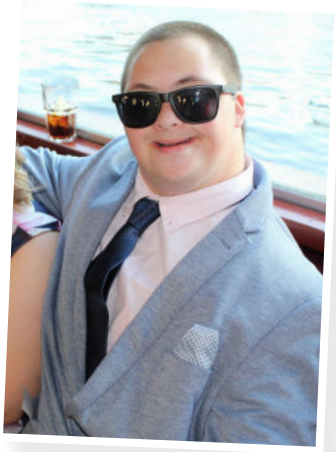
Carew Academy judged Outstanding

Student features in BBC documentary

Staff and students at St Philip's School were delighted to see one of their post-16 students, Jamie, feature in a BBC video: "Lockdown life: What's going on behind every door?"

In the film, BBC News Diplomatic Correspondent, Paul Adams, delves into the truth of the impact of lockdown in his insightful report.

In the video Jamie and his family explain how the lockdown has affected him. His mother explains "what he lives for is school."



Unified Academy is open

Unified Academy, with its name and logo decided by students, proudly opened the doors to its new school building in September. There was a lot of excitement as students explored their new surroundings and had a chance to try out some of the new facilities available to them.

Acting Principal, David Thomas, said: "Students are what make a school, so I am delighted to welcome our students back into the school community. Our team are ready to get them started on their learning adventure and here to support them to reach their full potential."

Unified Academy

Student reporters

Pupils and students across OHCAT have been invited to join in with a Student Reporter initiative. We have 'passed the mic' to our pupils and students, to give them a platform to write about their interests, any lessons or topics they're learning that have truly struck a chord, or anything they're particularly passionate about. Stories are being uploaded to each school's website, and in December they will be uploaded to the OHCAT website. Visit ohcat.org to read them all!

If you're happy and you know it...

Laurie Cornwell, Executive Principal and Deputy CEO of Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust, provides insight into OHC&AT's mental health strategy, and the importance of a whole-school approach to positive mental health and wellbeing.

If you're happy and you know it...

Why do we need such a physical sign that we are happy; is clapping hands or stamping feet the best way to 'really show' it? Why the emphasis on a physical movement, and a song, for happiness? After all, clapping hands, stamping feet and indeed a smile can easily hide mental ill health.

At OHC&AT we are constantly developing our knowledge and understanding of mental health and how we 'really show it'. The range of needs of our learners means that it can manifest itself, and be communicated or hidden, in many different ways.

OHC&AT has worked hard over the past academic year to develop, establish and promote our safeguarding and well-being offers. These offers define a universal entitlement for students and families, promote wellbeing and enable students to 'be safe and feel safe'. Essentially, they are at the heart of our very existence and key to OHC&AT's mission.

At OHC&AT we use Edupod, a digital platform for planning, managing and evaluating our journey to creating a mentally healthy environment.

Laurie Cornwell with a pupil at Unified Academy

Fundamentally, it focuses on five key principles: readiness and motivation; leadership and strategy; working together; staff support and development; and student support.

Edupod captures the voice of learners, staff, parents and governors via surveys to strategically assess current progress and identify areas for development. By surveying a range of stakeholders, we are ensuring that whole college and school communities 'know it' and we 'really want to show it' quantitively as well as qualitatively.

Areas for development are formulated into action plans which can be shared with communities and we have access to resources which are prepared, written, recorded and produced by clinical psychologists and complementary professionals, as well as examples from other schools. Edupod also offers accreditation, which will support us to excel in creating sustainable mentally healthy environments and to celebrate our achievements.

There has and will be for a significant time to come, an increase in the risks and pressures that young people are exposed to. Of particular concern is the prominently evidenced rise in domestic abuse where reports have doubled; the key word here is 'reported' i.e. only the ones we actually know about.

OHC&AT, in partnership with Innovating Minds, has been successful in securing a Youth Endowment Fund grant to train 18 members of staff to deliver the Healing Together programme to our young people.

The aim of the Healing Together programme is to equip students with skills and strategies so they learn to emotionally regulate themselves and understand how their brain and body are responding to heightened feelings such as anger and sadness - the feelings heightened by experiencing trauma i.e. from witnessing domestic abuse. This programme increases young people's capacity to safeguard themselves against involvement in youth violence and have a positive experience of help-seeking.

Key to all of the above is our own mental health and that of our teams. We cannot deliver on our whole college/academy approaches or indeed, transform lives if we ourselves are not mentally healthy. I believe it takes the whole of OHC&AT to transform the lives of our pupils and students. This includes looking after our own and each other's mental health.

Now let's go back to our song, make a few adaptions, and change the statement to a question. 'If you're happy, how do you know it?' Let's go one step further. 'If they seem happy, how do I know it?'. How many times do we greet colleagues and respond throughout the day? This is a habituative part of our every day, but what is its actual value? I would describe it as programmed politeness but does it actually serve any function. How many of us take the time to really look?

If we are unhappy and perhaps mentally unwell we may not want to 'really show it'. We may not even recognise it within ourselves.

Let's change our song to something better. Something far more superior on so many levels: ELO's *Telephone Line*.

"Hello, how are you?

Have you been alright..."

More importantly, let's mean it!

Healing Together

COVID-19 has increased the anxieties of some students, so we are proud that members of staff across OHC&AT have completed their 'Healing Together' training.

Healing Together is a programme designed to support young people who are vulnerable as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

18 staff members have been trained to deliver a therapeutic programme for students who have increased anxiety regarding attending school, the future, and the health and wellbeing of family and friends. The opportunity was funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, who awarded a grant to Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust and Innovating Minds, who deliver the training programme. The initiative will benefit 180 young people across the Trust.

Jon Yates, Executive Director at Youth Endowment Fund, said: "It has been too easy to forget vulnerable young people during this crisis. The pandemic has removed much of the critical support that many of them rely upon – from teachers to youth workers. This funding will help us find the best way to reach and support these young people when they most need it."

Free Schools: Spotlight on Addington Valley Academy

Addington Valley Academy is a new special Free School providing specialist education for children and young people with autism and complex needs.

Addington Valley Academy, OHCAT's first Free School in partnership with the London Borough of Croydon, opened its doors to its first cohort of students in September 2020.

Our brand new, purpose-designed school is currently being built and will open in September 2021. It will be located at Field Way, New Addington and will welcome 150 children and young people aged 2-19. It has been specifically designed to meet the needs of students with autism and social communication, cognitive, sensory and social, emotional, and behavioural needs in the Croydon region.

Vision and Values

Our vision for Addington Valley Academy is to provide a positive environment where children and young people access specialist support so that they can learn and achieve.

This is underpinned by our values which are to:

- provide a service which offers equality of opportunity and respect to all children, young people and staff;
- build quality relationships and interactions which respect an individual's potential to learn;
- provide real life learning opportunities within a framework that is flexible, safe and responsive to individual needs;
- enable and empower children and young people to identify and work towards their personal aspirations.

Follow our progress

Visit addingtonvalley.org for the latest new school developments. You can also watch live footage of the new school construction. Email enquiries@addingtonvalley.org if you have any queries.

Architect images of Addington Valley Academy

Free schools in the pipeline

The Futures Academy

The Futures Academy will be a co-educational special school located in Sutton. The school will have capacity for 246 children aged 5-19. The opening date is currently scheduled for September 2022.

Young People's Academy and Young People's Hub

Young People's Academy (YPA) and Young People's Hub (YPH) will be co-located in Hillingdon. YPA will have capacity for 110 students aged 11-19, and YPH will have capacity for 120 students aged 5-19.

Wings Academy

Wings Academy will be a special school with 90 places, located in Hounslow. The school will be for children and young people aged 11-19 with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school is due to open September 2023.

What is a Free School?

Free Schools are independent state-funded schools. They provide a way for groups of parents/carers, teachers, charities, existing schools or other organisations to respond to a need for a new school in their community – whether for extra places, to raise standards or offer choice. They can be primary, secondary, all-through or 16-19, and can open specifically for children with special educational needs or those who struggle in mainstream schools (alternative provision). Once established, Free Schools are legally academies so are funded by central government.

More information on Free Schools can be found at newschoolsnetwork.org/what-are-free-schools

Mind the gap: SEND and apprenticeships

Young people with SEND are less likely to become apprentices than their peers; Orchard Hill College & Academy Trust (OHC&AT) is behind a drive for change.

Young people who have special educational needs, learning difficulties or disabilities are less likely to become apprentices than their peers. OHC&AT is pushing forward with its vision to bring change, both internally for students across the organisation, and also to demonstrate to employers that a young person with SEND is a valuable addition to any workforce.

Apprenticeships are an attractive route for students and employers and OHC&AT is pursuing an active drive to showcase the positive impact of increasing the numbers of young people with SEND in apprenticeships, whilst at the same time removing the barriers that hamper progress.

OHC&AT's apprentice journey began in 2016 when the first apprentices were welcomed to the team. In 2018, following a successful pilot delivering customer service to SEND apprentices, Orchard Hill College became an approved provider to deliver apprenticeships in healthcare, teaching and learning, customer service. As Head of Apprenticeships, Susan Barnes says;

"We are very much raising the bar at OHC&AT by improving access to apprenticeships for people with learning difficulties and disabilities, and transforming the lives of some of the most vulnerable young people in society."

With equally ambitious plans moving forward, OHC&AT is on track to achieve its target of ensuring that every college centre and academy employs at least one apprentice in the next three years.

A greater understanding of the true value that young people with SEND bring to the apprenticeship talent pool is essential to help overcome the barriers they currently face. For instance, employers may cite concerns over issues such as the assumed increase in resources (time and cost related), which they believe are required to support apprentices with SEND in the workplace. In reality, if changes are needed, these are typically low cost. "Our task is to dispel the myths around why companies aren't taking SEND apprentices on, and to encourage an understanding of the mutual benefits through engaging and educating employers to reduce their concerns. We invite businesses to see the students' skills; not what they can't do, but what they can do," continues Susan.

Businesses across industries benefit greatly by opening their doors to people with learning difficulties or disabilities; it is an incredibly rewarding experience with long-term value. As an effective way to introduce fresh talent to a company, there are economic and social advantages as research by Needles K. and Schmitz R. (2006) identifies. From a recruitment standpoint, people with SEND remain in their assigned roles longer and record less absenteeism; for employers this means greater reliability, loyalty and commitment.

Benefits of employing SEND apprentices:

- Improves workforce morale
- Promotes diversity in the workplace
- Helps foster better public image
- Widens recruitment talent pool
- Reduces operational costs
- Lower absenteeism
- Higher retention
- Improves loyalty

Indeed, once students are introduced to employers, and businesses understand the positive impact of working alongside people with learning disabilities, the barriers begin to diminish, bringing change to businesses for the better as Peter O'Keefe, Site Manager at Carew Academy agrees. "From an employer's perspective, and from experience of hiring SEND apprentices, tapping into young talent adds a whole new dimension to the workforce. It is a cost-effective, efficient recruitment option, and one that has helped enormously with our continued success."

To help the process run as efficiently as possible, OHC&AT provides employers with extensive support, including a college mentor who is the link between the employer line manager and the apprentice tutor. "Our college mentors are an additional layer of support who are available to offer assistance as and when needed, which has been invaluable, particularly in recent months," says Susan.

Benefits for apprentices with SEND:

- Improves mental health
- Encourages financial independence
- Increases organisational skills
- Develops digital skills
- Boosts competence in English and maths
- Opportunity to showcase skill

There are strong advantages to entering the world of work as an apprentice for young people with SEND, and through hands-on experience and training, it is an opportunity to hone individual skills.

Francesca is an apprentice working in the office at Dysart School. When describing her job, she said: "I am really proud to have progressed to a paid job at a school that I love. It is great to learn new skills and be part of a team, I have some really nice colleagues." Penny Jelbert, Business Manager at Dysart School said: "Francesca is very hard working, she is our first apprentice and we would have to go a long way to find a better candidate. She is making great progress and fits in very well."

Francesca is one of many success stories illustrating how young people with SEND are thriving in apprenticeship roles, and at OHC&AT there are other young people who are eager to secure their own apprenticeship opportunities.

If you are an employer and would like to be part of the solution to transform the lives of young people, contact Susan Barnes, Head of Apprenticeships on 0345 402 0453.

Changes for good

Kelly Phillips, Orchard Hill College Principal, has taken the positive from the unforeseen challenges this year has brought.

This has been a difficult year, in which the word 'unprecedented' has been used more than ever before. However, the team at Orchard Hill College has turned this time of uncertainty into an opportunity for positive change.

Such uncertainty can be unsettling (at the least) for our students, parents and carers, so we were quick to implement a number of solutions to offer support, and further improve our offer; we've turned a negative into a positive, and it has catapulted us into our next phase.

Learning

We have devised courses that are wholly studied online, covering digital studies, getting back to work, CV writing and more.

Running these courses online makes them more accessible to a wider audience. Hurdles such as travel, being in an unknown environment or socialising with new people, which are often barriers too great to overcome, are taken down; these courses are truly open to all.

PMLD students had lessons tailored to include live therapy sessions. Therapists trained parents and carers to show how they can deliver and support the therapy programmes.

Student advocacy

Student Safeguarding and Mental Health Ambassadors continued their great work face to face and virtually. Holding meetings via Zoom, students discussed wellbeing and set up a wellbeing calendar to take place across the year.

Kelly delivering gifts for this year's alternative awards ceremony

The groups have also been planning common room designs to make them more effective and enjoyable for students to use.

Our students also continued being active members of their communities and were keen to support local key workers in any way they could.

Events

We run a number of events throughout the year, so we created online alternatives. Virtual open events have allowed prospective students to find out about the college from the comfort of their own home. These events saw an 80% turnout for students, proving it to be a more accessible option that was also enjoyable and informative. These events received positive feedback, as this attendee said: "The overview of the college was very insightful and the video tour was very useful. Overall, excellent event considering the circumstances - very smooth".

We also redesigned our Transition Event into an online forum. Welcoming 20 guest speakers, students, parents and carers were able to speak to professionals from supported housing and employment, specialist disability organisations and local community schemes providing opportunities for extending life and learning skills.

Staff wellbeing

Staff wellbeing has always been a priority for us, and this year even more so. Alongside our staff wellbeing calendar with monthly perks, we held fun events such as virtual quizzes and a raffle, using technology to create a link between our college centres.

We have been delivering a training programme to benefit all members of staff. These sessions are delivered with guest speakers to build up staff members' specialisms within the workplace.

The steps we implemented ensured that students were still able to move on to meaningful destinations, including employment, supported living, further education and apprenticeships.

Although this year has been a true challenge, it has demonstrated the grit and perseverance of our students and staff members. We have taken what could be a huge negative and turned it into an opportunity for development, creating something everyone can benefit from.

Orchard Hill College

Support our students!

Orchard Hill College is an Ofsted Outstanding specialist college and independent charity for young people with SEND.

Each year we need to raise additional funds to provide our students with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) with the specialist equipment and opportunities to realise their aspirations.

You can support us through:

- Making a donation
- Running your own fundraising event
- Corporate sponsorship

We would love to hear from you, please contact us on marketing@ohcat.org or 0345 402 0453.

Thank you for your support

Charity number 1144922

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