

## Raising aspirations for disabled students post 16: New Bridge School

**URN:** 138697

**Area:** Oldham

**Date published:** 8 November 2012

**Reference:** 120343

### Brief description

New Bridge School Learning Centre successfully raises the aspirations of disabled students and their families by offering an excellent range of Key Stage 4 and sixth form pathways that caters for a variety of special educational needs. Highly effective routes to employment and apprenticeships as well as opportunities which enable students to make outstanding progress in becoming more independent, mean that post-16 students are extremely well prepared and motivated to move on to the next step in their education or training.

### Overview – the school’s message

‘Is the aspiration we have for disabled students nationally as they move into a world outside of school high enough? I would argue not. There is a real tension, for me, between the number of our young people that make “good” or “outstanding” progress in their academic and social development and how that transfers into society, communities and particularly the workplace.

Presently fewer than 5% of young people who attended special schools (and have severe learning difficulties) are in paid employment of 16 hours per week or more. I don't believe this is isolated to our part of the country but is prevalent throughout the system. As a school, we are not suggesting that we know the answers but we are beginning to understand the challenge. The placements, the provision, the funding, flexible appropriate courses – all continue to test us! However, we believe we do not deserve the Ofsted accolade of outstanding until we make real inroads into the issues. Our governors believe: “Establishing high aspirations and making choice a reality can only happen through constantly challenging our practice so that we can improve provision and therefore increase the chances and opportunities for our students.” Having a clear vision executed with flair and underpinned by clear lines of accountability has helped New Bridge not only raise the aspirations of the students and their families but has opened up more and more learning opportunities for students. I hope that



this example goes some way to inspiring you to also ask the questions. Collectively we need to find the answers.'

*Graham Quinn, headteacher*

## The good practice in detail



Opportunities for disabled students and those who have special educational needs are often limited but New Bridge School ensures that its sixth form students have the chance to choose a course that, while meeting their needs, motivates them to achieve beyond many people's expectations. The ['Moving on' document](#) is a guide for parents and carers explaining the range of options available. Within each of the pathways there is intensive work to develop skills for independent travel for many of the students. The success of this training empowers students to take

greater control of their lives and gives access to a wider range of opportunities for employment, training and leisure.

### Course design and content

The school looked at the research and practice in work-based-learning programmes for young people with learning disabilities. Two large local employers where some links were already established were identified. The programme was explained and the requirements were agreed. The school was clear about the intentions and requirements of the programme and deployed staff accordingly. This reassured the employers that the necessary support and 'job coaching' would be available on site.



The programme offers three work-based learning placements, each lasting between 12 and 14 weeks. The students gain experience on three placements from a range of jobs at The Royal Oldham Hospital or a [variety of placements at Manchester Metropolitan University](#). The success of the programme is partly due to the strong support given by the teacher and job coach provided by the school in each of the providers. These staff ensure that students are given the support they require to learn new skills and job routines as well as continuing to develop core academic skills. The employers are absolutely committed to ensuring students become less reliant and more independent so carefully withdraw the job coaching as students become more proficient.



The careful individual guidance provided by the school helps students and their families choose the right course that matches their own interests and levels of need for sixth form provision. As a result, students'

motivation is sustained and often they attend much more frequently than in previous placements, as well as achieving very high levels of success. A well-established transition

team including social care, health and education professionals works closely with students and their families to help prepare for the next stage. This helps students to feel well prepared but also excited about their move into more adult provision.

Staff involved from the hospital and university are fully committed to the programme. A member of the hospital team says: 'We don't carry them; once they have learned the job they work hard like the rest of us.' The programme has been of mutual benefit to the university and hospital teams as well as to the students involved. The benefits to the employers go beyond having additional workers and they have found the programme helps to improve staff morale, enables staff to develop their own coaching skills and increases their understanding of disability. By providing a teacher and job coach the school ensures direct access to the necessary support so that the employers can discuss any issues that may arise. Regular discussions also focus on identifying where more opportunities and improvements to the programme can be made.



‘I would never have believed my daughter could get a job but because I trust the staff, they gave me the confidence to back off. She has learnt more than I dreamed she could – how to be independent and work as part of a team... She now has an apprenticeship!’

**Students** and their families are proud of their achievements and recognise the opportunities this programme has brought them. Elizabeth has recently been employed at the Sterilisation Unit at Royal Oldham Hospital: 'You work hard and see if you like it... they help you so you can learn. You meet new people and then you can get a job and get paid like me.'

## Vocational learning

In addition to the usual option-based curriculum for post-16 students, more focused programmes are offered, including 'Bridging the Gap' – a work-based learning programme, and a choice of three excellent dedicated vocational pathways known as 'Lumenus', 'Hortus' and 'Sports Pathway'. Each has a strong core curriculum so that students can improve their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. This is accompanied by a strong focus on developing independent skills alongside intensive work in each student's chosen vocation.





'Lumenus' is a full-time, performing-arts-based course offering creative opportunities and a unique arts curriculum pathway for students. The students study influences on creativity, how to think and work creatively to develop their own ideas, the skills required to turn ideas into reality and how to operate within a creative enterprise or business. Various accredited qualifications can be studied from entry level to level 2. Students take part in a number of theatre projects and performances

within the wider community, including those based in local community venues and [local primary schools](#). They also study further afield in Finland and in London, filming for the Olympics with Danny Boyle.

'Hortus', a work-based horticulture pathway is open to students from Year 11 upwards. The course extends students' skills in horticulture and construction and offers a range of qualifications from entry level to level 2. Hortus operates as an enterprise and maintains the grounds of five sites across Oldham, including local schools and sports facilities. Students on this programme also support community projects by teaching practical horticulture skills to local primary pupils and other community groups. This pathway is successful in preparing students for employment. Students are often supported to gain employment by staff helping to arrange work-based interviews rather than the more traditional spoken interviews.



'Sports Pathway' is a relatively new programme aimed at students who have difficulties engaging with education. As with the other programmes, there is well-planned time to ensure that students continue to make progress in core subjects. Students are working towards gaining sports leader awards and all have work experience in local primary schools. Aspects of the programme also include learning a range of new sports and improving the students' personal fitness. They also work towards becoming safe independent travellers and being able to work effectively in a team.

## Bridging the Gap

Through the effective partnerships with the Royal Oldham Hospital and Manchester Metropolitan University, 'Bridging the Gap' provides students with excellent preparation for future employment. Both have produced tailored resources to support transition which can be viewed [here](#) for the Royal Oldham Hospital and [here](#) for Manchester Metropolitan University. Half of the students who have completed this programme now have paid employment.

## Pathways beyond 19

Many students move on from New Bridge Learning Centre to be successful in employment, training and/or education. However for some students there are very limited choices after the age of 19. In direct response to parental concerns that there are too few choices for pathways after the age of 19, New Bridge Horizons was established.

'New Bridge Horizons' offers a range of personalised packages planned and developed to meet individual needs on a part-time or daily basis. The centre provides for young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties and offers part-time places to young people with moderate or severe learning difficulties who may have an interest in increasing their independence or working towards employment. For the latter group, the provision complements college courses. It is a separate provision from the school and is located on a different site. It operates as a non-profit limited company funded by charitable donations and students' 'individualised budgets'. The provision facilitates on-site vocational activities and various forms of holistic and movement therapy. Where appropriate, users also have access to specialist facilities at New Bridge School and New Bridge Learning Centre. In addition, service-users can access the unique social enterprise and employability training packages. New Bridge Horizons is governed and managed by selected trustees from New Bridge School's board of governors. It shares a leadership model with the school which ensures that the outstanding leadership of New Bridge informs and dictates excellent provision and practice for young people aged between 19 and 25 years old.

## The school's background

New Bridge School is a 300-place secondary special school in Oldham that caters for students with statements of special educational need between the ages of 11 and 19 across two sites. It is a co-educational school which meets a variety of individual needs including moderate and severe learning difficulties as well as the needs of students with profound and multiple learning difficulties. There is specialised provision for those who have autistic spectrum disorders. The school and sixth form were judged to be **outstanding** by Ofsted in November 2011. It is a specialist arts college and has Arts Mark Gold status.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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