



Meeting the challenge of COVID-19

Learning and practice



How East Park used their relationship based practice to help pupils to continue to learn and grow

What was the challenge faced?

When the COVID-19 lockdown came into force in Scotland in March 2020 and school buildings were closed to most children, teachers, care workers and parents at East Park - a Glasgow-based charity that provides education and supported accommodation to children and young people with additional support needs, including autism - were concerned that a lack of structure and routine would have an adverse effect on their young people. About two thirds of the pupils attending school at East Park live on-site, who learn alongside day pupils who live at home with their families and travel to the campus for classes.

It was feared that children who live in East Park's houses and day pupils who usually attend the onsite school could feel isolated under the lockdown.

What change in practice took place?

East Park's educational support staff were redeployed to support the staff in the residential houses to help young people with the non-classroom based learning packages created by East Park teachers. This was the first time education and residential staff had worked so closely together, and created a new, unique partnership and collaboration.

The teachers worked online and also visited families of day pupils to make sure they didn't feel isolated. The school began holding online assemblies and music sessions; residential houses were able to tune in together, and day pupils could take part and interact in a safe space from their own home with a support worker alongside them at home. This was important to help the young people join in and integrate in their own terms as support staff could adjust surroundings to suit the young person's needs, for example changing the audio volume on computers, and environmental conditions such as temperature and lighting.

After careful planning, East Park was able to provide some face-to-face teaching to its day pupils too who came into school two at a time, two days per week. This was a lifeline to many families, as digital learning does not suit every child and had been a change to their established learning environment and routine.

Returning to a school routine after school holidays can usually be quite challenging for the young people at East Park, and there's a need to re-engage pupils and settle them again. After the disruption of lockdown, staff were concerned about the impact of the summer break. It was decided that the school should stay open over the summer to offer some structure to the young people. This was achieved by a staggered holiday rota for teachers instead of the usual long summer break, so that teachers were always available, and without incurring extra staffing costs for local authorities. Continuing classes during the summer made the return to full-time schooling much smoother and less disruptive, and improved relationships between everyone.

Who was involved in making the change?

Staff across the charity were involved in responding to the challenge. East Park set out clear intentions so everyone understood and felt empowered to adapt to what needed to be done to achieve what was needed and the families were able to input into the changes and adaptations throughout.

What difference did this change make?

Using a relationship based approach, the charity was able to support staff to feel safe and empowered to make decisions and this helped sustain their relationships with the children they care for and teach.

Having seen the improvement in behaviour and relationships by keeping the school open over the summer break, the school is now considering providing a holiday club.

It became obvious quite quickly that some aspects of digital interaction work well for some young people but not for others. For example, for young people with sensory challenges, this can be overwhelming. East Park is currently considering how to use the learning from this experience and is working with another school for pupils with additional support needs to run music sessions together.

More information:

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