Evaluation Case Study

Transition to Adult Life Programme

MSSD Output 12: Support for student transitions

Catholic Education Office of Western Australia
Transition to Adult Life Programme

Abstract
The Catholic Education Office (CEO) More Support for Students with Disabilities (MSSD) ‘Transition to Adult Life Project 2012/2013’ caters for students with disability in Years 11 and 12 during 2012 and Year 12 in 2013. The project aims to ensure students with disability are able to identify suitable life and vocational choices from a series of programmes and work placements. It is expected that the programmes will enable students to: identify work rights and responsibilities; demonstrate safe practices in the workplace; collect evidence of vocational skills; produce a log book from each work placement; collect evidence of skill development for post school service providers; demonstrate age appropriate social skills; and experience leisure and recreational options. This case study describes the efforts of one school to broaden support for students with disability as they prepare for life beyond school.

Key elements and actions
The transitions programme is directed at supporting students work placement, developing programmes, and providing professional learning opportunities. It also involves assessment and data collection including logbooks and portfolios, and providing resources to produce information for employers. All CEO schools are required to provide written evidence of student participation across all of these areas.

The transition programme is not new to the College. It has been an ongoing integral aspect of the school’s curriculum programmes and support services in addressing needs for students with disability. As a consequence of its implementation, the MSSD initiative has enabled a revamped suite of strategies and programmes that have been expanded and consolidated in better meeting these needs.

The College has a purpose built Education Support Centre (ESC) catering for over 50 students with disability, each following an individualised curriculum. Students are generally grouped according to age and integrated into specialist mainstream classes and year appropriate classes. This strong partnership with the mainstream classes provides opportunities for students in the Centre to develop wider friendship groups and to be involved in extracurricular College activities. The Centre’s ongoing success is made possible by the College’s caring community atmosphere and the wide support network of staff, parents and students.

Regular training and support discussion days provide teachers with opportunities to meet with the ESC’s Head of Learning Area to discuss student needs, progress and management strategies. Teacher Assistants are also supported to help modify programmes, with teacher direction. All students have a teacher Case Manager as point of contact, support and to prepare an ITP (Individual Transition Programme). Mainstream teachers also have integrated roles in the Transition process.

The mainstream experience for students with disability is balanced with specific programmes organised within the Centre. These include the Community Access Programme, the ‘Inspire Café’ business enterprise experience, Life Skills, Community Service and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses. The aim of the Centre is to equip the students fully for a more independent life, ensuring they have the skills to function in any workplace environment, and to help each student achieve their personal best within their individualised learning plans.
The MSSD initiative enabled the College to reassess budgets and initiatives in order to maximise targeted resourcing and outcomes for both mainstream funded and Education Support Centre (ESC) students with disability. Combined with the Catholic Education Office 'Moving Forward' framework, a curriculum support document, the school has acquired the flexibility and capacity for broader, better and more consistent curriculum delivery and support mechanisms. As a consequence, several adjustments and new initiatives have emerged, including the following elements:

- expanding teacher time for the Workplace Learning Coordinator role, to focus entirely on support provision for students with disability throughout the school
- more proactive skilling and use of teacher assistants in supporting students in the workplace and TAFE courses, such as travelling to and from off-site Work Experience and TAFE programmes, building up student confidence and independence
- creation of a new full time Teacher Assistant position for additional Work Experience and TAFE support, as well as supporting fellow Assistants
- appointment of a part-time assistant to address growing disability needs diversity, ranging from high support needs to competent academic students, mainly within mainstream classes, to assist in areas of differential needs such as organisation, study skills, scribing for students in class and during exams
- full time teacher assistants for high support needs students, such as one in a wheelchair and two others who are non-verbal, for transport training and possible TAFE attendance
- design and construction of a sensory room to meet the needs of students with high sensory issues, giving students a more appropriate space and opportunity for them to better communicate their needs to staff and ultimately to future employers
- Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) courses that engage students in the Transition Challenge, Towards Independence, and Workright Skills programmes enabling professional training to plan and implement the programme in the Senior ESC room.

Collectively, these initiatives have provided broader support and success within the College’s Transition programme. Without the MSSD initiative the College would not be able to provide the extra support, programmes would be disjointed and reduced through the need to spread fewer resources in addressing growing needs.

These support programmes and structures have evolved over several years, underpinned by the College’s Inclusivity Policy, which has been in place for some two and a half decades. As a consequence, inclusivity is the norm for students with disability.

Organisational arrangements and key actions

The organisational structure of the transition programme enables a broad range of strategies and programmes to add value to the overall curriculum initiatives and lead to the successful achievement of goals and desired outcomes. The three goals of the College’s Transition from School to Adult Life (TSAL) project are to ensure that students:

1. Have the best possible opportunity to access worthwhile experiences within the community that enhance their educational, employment, recreational, social, emotional and life skills development.
2. Become productive members of society, where disability should not become an obstacle when moving into the adult world.
3. Make a smooth transition into the world of work, leisure and independence.

Central to the TSAL project’s success is the need to increase capacity to maximise staff support, organisation and skills in better addressing student needs within both dedicated learning environment (ESC) and mainstream classes, as well as external learning experiences. The actions to date include a number of appointments or additional roles to existing positions:

- **Director of Learning Support** with overall responsibility for the Education Support Centre and Learning Centre, co-ordinating all programmes which includes Individual Education Plans, Individual Transition Plans and Teaching and Learning Adjustment Plans

- **Head of Learning Area** providing coordination of a variety of special programmes and responsible for the day-to-day running of the Education Support Centre

- **Workplace Learning Coordinator (Teacher)** allocating additional (0.2) time to support mainstream students with disability

- **Work Experience Coordinator (Teacher Assistant)** with a full time Education Support Centre role, working with Years 10, 11 and 12 students to support work experience, transport training, and access to external TAFE courses

- **Coordinator of Work Based Learning** responsible for work place visits and support.

Other Support Centre staff are included in the coordination of related programmes ranging from Bush Rangers (a nature conservation cadet programme), IT, numeracy, literacy, Enterprise and Religious Education, ASDAN, Careers Advice and Life Skills.

The organisational structure enables a broad range of strategies and programmes that add value to the overall curriculum initiatives that ultimately impact on the successful achievement of goals and desired outcomes.

**Community Access Programme**

This programme has a themed approach around sport, recreation and transport in the community. It also looks at different aspects of living in the community, such as an excursion to a wildlife park where the students walked as part of their sport in the community. However, the school sees this as more than just an outing. Students with disability need structured experiences within the community to develop their skills and interactions with diverse people and groups, in a variety of environments, to better prepare them for the adult world.

This programme is now linked to the Community Services Programme as part of the accreditation hours to be completed by the end of Year Twelve. New initiatives like the ‘Keep Australia Beautiful Campaign’ Schools Project include opportunities for students to volunteer time in environmental activities such as ‘Adopt a Beach’ and targeting litter within the school.

**Business Enterprise ‘Inspire Café’ Programme**

Business Enterprise enables students to gain experience in business as a total educational experience from the creative side of making flower arrangements, wine bags, Easter baskets and a variety of cards, to learning how to market, advertise, cost and sell their products. This showcases each student’s specific talents while realising their potential for future employment. In more recent attempts to get students out of their immediate social circles, the school explored ways to engage students more with other people. This led to the development of the school ‘Inspire Café’. Students run the Café as an enterprise coordinating: advertising; phone and internet orders; making coffees and delivering them throughout the school. Students undertake various roles, dependent upon their degree of disability.
One significant outcome over the past two years has been the higher skills level development. Previously the process of operating ‘Inspire Café’ entailed a range of individual processes such as advertising, ordering and each aspect of coffee making and delivery. These have generally been carried out by individual students. More recently some students have developed proficiency to manage the whole process, independently. Skills and confidence gained are seen as positive assets for transition and self-esteem. They also represent new skills set which can enhance ‘Inspire Café’ operations. There is now a greater focus to merge Café operations, not just as a marginal event, but broadening it to other activities within the College and special occasions such as Easter, Christmas and Mother’s Day. Ultimately, the aim is future expansion with a programme in food preparation, marketing and catering.

**Life Skills**

The Life Skills Programme incorporates various everyday life topics which include banking, shopping, cooking and housework, facilitating students with skills necessary to live as independent and full a life as they are able to achieve. Part of the Life Skills programme is the People 1st Programme, focusing on protective behaviours delivered over a term by outside providers. It aims to develop student life skills to protect themselves from abusive and potentially unsafe situations. The College incorporates the programme within the local curriculum, throughout the year.

**Community Service**

This programme is available to all senior students. Mainstream students with disability are required to undertake 20 hours Community Service to be completed by the end of Year 12, providing service to organisations such as catering at the St Vincent de Paul centre in Fremantle or assisting residents at local aged care facilities with morning tea and recreational activities. Depending on their degree of disability, Education Support Centre students have two options to meet this requirement. Firstly, they may opt for the mainstream Community Service programme. Secondly, as high-need students, they may complete their Community Service under the banner of the Bush Rangers programme.

However, the challenge of staffing costs associated with supporting student participation in community experiences limits numbers, which in turn limits preferred levels of interactive opportunities. Subsequent linking of hours undertaken in the Community Access Programme has provided greater opportunity for all students to achieve the 20-hour requirement. The programme continues as a combination of both.

Bush Rangers have specialist training modules including: Bush Rangers’ qualities, practical nature conservation projects, working safely in natural environments, the meaning of conservation, environmental management, parks, reserves and landscape management. College students have weekly opportunities to contribute to the wider community by being caretakers of a local reserve as part of the Bush Rangers Programme. They ensure the park is weeded, free of rubbish and kept tidy. This promotes a sense of achievement and pride in their work.

**Technical and Further Education (TAFE)**

Students are offered a variety of TAFE Courses in Years 10 – 12, including: Certificate 1 Work Education, Certificate 1 Retail Operations, Certificate 1 Horticulture, and Certificate 1 of General Construction. These may vary from year to year subject to needs. Student movement to and from, and attendance at these programmes is supported by teacher assistants.

Over the past two years, the College has found it better to employ both teacher and teacher assistant time to get the best out of this programme. There is a need for more intensive educational input and support to develop life skills and student confidence in areas such as access to TAFE
courses. Programmes such as Transport Training have continued to develop independent skills getting to and from venues. These are proving successful.

**Alternatives to Employment**

In establishing alternatives, the College coordinates in-school interviews with a range of relevant parties including Centre Link as part of the Post School Options Programme, parents, students, and staff in assessing needs and the capacity of students to work up to eight hours per week. The outcome determines levels of weekly allocation funding support. This is ultimately paid to any Alternatives to Employment (ATE) providers who take students on board.

**Seamless Transition Programme**

The WA Catholic Education Office provides resources for service providers to assist with transition from school to the workplace while students are attending school. An hourly payment for up to fifty hours per week enables student participation in the ATE programme. The College also provides a Workplace Coordinator in support of the programme and maximising outcomes. This support is partially funded by the MSSD initiative.

One challenge linked to ATE and Individual Transition Plans is the current timeframe for both initiatives. As expressed by one parent:

> ...transition was smooth and he was ready to leave formal school and the College provided the necessary support for transition. The only comment would be that this should perhaps begin earlier in some form for students that are not going to another school based environment, in particular as the PSOP (Post School Options Programme) eligibility interview occurs in advance of 12 months prior to the school end and choosing a provider is necessary. Support needs may have changed over this time, and the PSOP could liaise more closely with schools in this matter. In regards to funding allocation he has settled well into life after school...

Currently the focus is solely on Year 12 and although students are assessed in Year 11, little is done until Year 12. The College sees a desperate need for earlier student assessment and funding allocation processes, commencing in Year 11. This would enable more time to network with other allied services and agencies for a smoother transition. A more graduated approach offers more time to accommodate needs, support and concerns by students and their families. The shift would add value to what already is a successful transition programme, as evidenced from student and parent feedback.

**Individual Transition Plans (ITP)**

Individual Transition Plans are critical in creating a career development culture and are underpinned by a transition planning process, typified by three main elements: Individual Pathway Plans; Career Development and Transition Portfolios; and Exit Plans. These are developed and accompany student transition from Year 10 to Year 12 and into post school workplace, further education or ATE placement.

ITP’s incorporate a collaborative approach to set and achieve outcomes. Several stakeholders are involved in the process with students as one of the main consultations. They include: parents/carers; Local Area Coordinators (LAC’s) from the Disabilities Services Commission WA; Allied Services; Teachers; and Teacher Assistants. Again, the process is endorsed by positive feedback from stakeholders. As shared by one parent:
...the staff at the College did a wonderful job in transition. Life after school is busy...she is doing very well and matured a lot since the end of school. She has become very independent and I basically don’t do much at all for her anymore...

**Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN)**

In further developing education pathways for students with disability and high support needs, the College offers an endorsed programme as part of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN), a UK based charitable social enterprise with awarding body status. Modules included are:

- **Workright Skills Programme** – a framework to develop a range of basic transferable employability skills
- **Towards Independence** – a programme which is designed to develop life skills
- **Transition Challenge** – a course designed to assist the children with the transition to adult life and the world of work.

The programme is ongoing and has also been developed with a greater focus on requirements of higher support needs students.

**Professional learning**

With the increased focus and programme development enabled by the MSSD initiative in 2012, there has also been a substantial growth in staff professional learning. This has been accompanied by changing clientele with increasing numbers of high needs students. The professional learning initiatives include:

- Certificate IV training for all teacher assistants, developing their skills, knowledge and capacity to cater for a diverse group of students
- teacher assistant and ESC teacher modules presented by the Director of Learning Support throughout the year, covering specific disability information, programme ideas, assessment and reporting
- staff training in understanding and better addressing education plans and needs of students with disability whether they be in the Education Support Centre or mainstream classes
- provision of awareness and knowledge on the role of and better use of Teacher Assistants in the classroom
- whole school orientation focusing on awareness and understanding of students with disability.

College funding supporting the MSSD initiative enables professional learning. This commences at the beginning of the year, providing individual awareness of student disabilities prior to them commencing in Term One. It also includes staff involvement in the development, implementation and assessment of Individual Education and Transition Plans. Most ESC Teacher Assistants are now Certificate IV trained. New staff are encouraged and supported to undertake similar accreditation.

Over the past two years professional learning initiatives have included:

- ongoing PART (Predict, Assess, Respond to Aggressive and Challenging Behaviours) Training – helping staff to deal with difficult situations whilst in the work place, such as physical restraint and responding to escalating situations
- Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) training for ESC staff
• interschool visits, exploring other needs initiatives and how staff deliver programs for students with disability
• Output 6 training for all school staff to improve understanding of their obligations under the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and how to meet those obligations, delivered by CEO and also as an ongoing process for new staff.

There has been a significant increase in the focus and delivery of professional learning targeting the College students with disability, as a whole school community. The outcome has been a more inclusive environment and better outcomes for all.

**Outputs and outcomes**

The CEO Moving Forward support document has four essential components. This provides an overarching framework for curriculum implementation in addressing needs and post school options for students with disability in senior school. The document also offers a framework of accountability expectations as a systemic initiative with expectations of all secondary schools, including the case study College.

The systemic obligation and clear guides ensures school commitment in developing effective transition for students through school and on to further education, training and employment, as well as Alternatives to Employment (ATE). Combined with requirements such as Individual Education Plans, Individual Transition Plans, evidence of student participation, local and systemic reporting, the CEO has incorporated uniformity and accountability as part of the transition programme. There seems to be some evidence that this structure has assisted in the school’s focus and successful implementation of Output 12 reflected in a range of positive outcomes:

• There has been a successful transition rate for all students leaving the College in 2012 who will all be gainfully occupied in either Alternatives to Employment, employment or further education. In previous years around 80 per cent completed successful transitions.
• Attendance rates are high (over 95 percent). This is due largely to successful programmes but also what the school has to offer in terms of its culture and ethos.
• The WACE graduation rate for students with disability who were enrolled in courses in mainstream classes is 100 per cent.
• Student portfolios reflecting student development from Year 10 to Year 12 include Workplace Learning Employability Skills, Certificates for Workplace Learning, and graduation from the College.

More recently, the successful transition rate increased to 100 percent. All these College students are either currently gainfully employed, in Alternatives to Employment programmes, Supported Work Placement; and TAFE Courses. The programme’s success is evident in parent feedback extracts:

...he receives Post School Option funding and is at TAFE three days per week as well as working a day at Fremantle Hospital for the Red Cross. He has adjusted well to life on the outside. I still miss you guys and am forever in your debt for all your hard work making him the beautiful young man he is today...

...the College accommodated the service provider to observe our son in school. They assigned a staff member from the ESC to attend Getabout, a learning and leisure programme, with our son. This helped to smoothly transition the change and facilitated understanding of the strengths or limitations of our son to cope or adapt. Through the years we have been wholly appreciative and full of praise for the
uncompromising efforts of staff at the ESC. The College truly integrates mainstream students with special needs students and has played a tremendous role in moulding our son and provided a solid platform for him to be who he is now and will be in the future in the real world...

...I am thankful of the support to convince me to put her name on the Activ waiting list (a community service providing support to people with disabilities) ...it would be great if a teacher could be given the role to work with parents to make a plan for post school year...

Lessons Learned

Key observations and findings

The MSSD initiative is acknowledged as an essential element in the College’s successful transition activities. Additional resourcing provided by MSSD has enabled increased personnel support and hence greater consistency of programmes, across the year. There is also greater flexibility in being able to target programmes to the many diverse disability needs. Mainstream students with disability now also access the support they require for successful graduation.

There have also been improvements in both mainstream and Education Support Centre outcomes in relation to Alternatives to Employment, WACE graduation, employment, and further education. The positive outcome is also a result of a highly professional and committed approach by the school staff and community in committing to effective programmes, experiences and learning opportunities that promote student transitions through the College and beyond.

The key strengths to the success of Output 12 identified by the College include:

- Programme ownership by the whole school, which is now part and process of College life. The ESC and students with disability are now integral to the overall school process and student cohort. “...the school owns the programme...not just a centre! This has evolved over many years...”.
- The CEO Framework ‘Moving Forward’ requires schools to commit, evaluate and report on outcomes in Output 12. Having a degree of compliance and structure is also a positive impetus to deliver programmes with positive outcomes.
- The culture of local ongoing review of processes, programs and outcomes inform decisions that ultimately motivate staff to get the best out of students, which in turn has improved relationship building.
- Maintaining a high level of mainstream teacher professional learning has enabled improved understanding and skills to better manage students with disability in their classrooms. This has been critical to the programme’s success.

Sustainability

The transition programme has taken some years to develop at the College. Its strengths come from the support systems throughout the school and a whole school approach to students with disability. The MSSD initiative has allowed the College to expand programmes so all staff develop confidence, capacity and understanding to cater for students with disability in both the mainstream and Education Support Centre. However, at the time of the initial site visit in 2012, the College believed that the expanded level of activity would not be sustainable without ongoing additional external...
funds. The challenge of sustaining the changes was reiterated in the second visit, and remains problematic and will require reconsideration of options for the future.

**Potential for adoption in other contexts**

This case study is a positive story that could be replicated in other schools. Given that success has come from activities evolving over many years, replication will probably require a longer implementation period for other schools.

Others have visited the College, recognising it as a positive model with expertise and success in addressing needs of students with disability, including programmes such as its Transition to Adult Life Programme. Groups include: other schools; Catholic Education Office; parents and families; and government agencies. One family recently arrived from abroad visited the College on the basis of its reputation and decided to relocate to Perth so their child could be enrolled. Other colleges have formed a network with the case study College over the course of time, seeking its assistance and expertise, as a desirable model for its own school community.

**Background**

**MSSD Output**

Output 12: Providing additional support for students with disabilities to transition effectively between stages of schooling and/or from school into further education, training or employment.

**Case study methodology**

The case study involved a site visit and interview with the Head of Learning Area in the Education Support Centre (ESC) at the College in December 2012.

A follow up visit was undertaken in March 2014. Discussions focused on progress and outcomes since 2012, with the Head of Learning Area (ESC), as well as sharing feedback from parent experience with the Transition process.

**School Background**

The case study school is a Catholic College that caters for over 1150 students from Years 7 to 12 and is located in Perth. To meet requirements for CEO programmes, students with disability are expected to participate and be registered with the School Curriculum and Standards Office. This enables them to be accredited with a certificate upon leaving school. This may be the regular Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) or Certificate of Participation. To cater for differences in student interest, rates of learning and motivation, schools can consider a mixture of courses, vocational education and training (VET) and endorsed programmes when planning student pathways. All courses, VET and endorsed programmes can contribute to the WACE and all students receive a statement of results at the end of Year 12.