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Securing high-quality alternative provision in a rural area: John Masefield High School

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Brief description

John Masefield High School and Sixth Form Centre is in Herefordshire, a rural and sparsely populated county. The school, therefore, faces particular challenges in enabling students who would benefit from alternative provision to gain vocational skills in a range of specialist settings. Yet, with the strong support of the local authority and the European Social Fund, its students have access to a broad range of high-quality provision which is having a positive impact on their motivation, attendance and qualifications.

Overview – the school's message



'A team-focused approach has been central to our achievements with the alternative curriculum provision. Our specialist careers consultant has been the catalyst. She interviews students and liaises with parents and carers to ensure that students are provided with bespoke advice before making the significant decision to opt out of the standard curriculum model. She then monitors attendance and assesses achievement, supported by a higher-level teaching assistant who draws up action plans for students to ensure that they continue to meet the requirements of their core curriculum, and acts as a link between the students and their core subject teachers at school.

We are fortunate that the local authority sourced European Social Fund money to establish a *Live and Learn* initiative.

This provides economies of scale that individual schools could not hope to achieve and much-needed subsidies for transport. The local authority also provides excellent quality-assurance and safeguarding support.

* School was previously registered under URN: 116955

And the results speak for themselves. Last year, 100% of our students achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to G for the first time in our history, and behaviour sanctions and exclusions for the target group were significantly lower than in previous years. We are proud of our achievements and believe that it demonstrates that students who take part in alternative pathways can achieve success when they are given accurate guidance, high-quality training and appropriate support.'

Andy Williams, Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for Key Stage 4 Curriculum

The good practice in detail

Background

In 2011, Ofsted carried out a [survey](#) to find out how well schools were using alternative provision. Some schools were using alternative provision well, but others were not. In September 2012, Ofsted began a follow-up survey on this topic, which is due to last for three years. This case study is about one of the schools visited for the survey that has used alternative provision effectively to improve achievement and engagement.

Arranging high-quality experiences which take students out into the working world beyond the school gates takes time, effort and resources. Yet, many students value the opportunity to spend time developing their knowledge and skills in activities linked to possible future careers. The benefits of such provision are widely acknowledged, especially in motivating and engaging those students who are not well-motivated by traditional classroom learning; or those who have a passionate interest in, say, catering, sport, cars, and working with animals.

To ensure that such benefits are achieved, a school has to:

- secure provision of a high quality
- match the provision closely to each student's interests and aspirations
- monitor and evaluate carefully the success of the placements
- ensure that students are able to make good progress in other aspects of their curriculum, particularly in English and mathematics.

The programmes

The school's offer in Key Stage 4 is structured around three programmes:

1. **The Young Apprentice Scheme** offers vocational training opportunities up to Level 2 for two days per week to students in Year 11. One student takes hairdressing, and another two follow motor vehicle studies. Managed through a local partnership coordinated by a lead school, the scheme is in its last year as government funding has been withdrawn.

2. **The Live and Learn Project** offers a wide range of vocational opportunities at a number of levels to students who are vulnerable to underachievement. This is a county-wide scheme managed by Herefordshire County Council's 14–19 curriculum team, with significant resources provided by the European Social Fund.
3. **Off-site vocational links** draw upon the contacts and expertise generated through the school's wide involvement with training providers and programmes. It will, in exceptional cases, arrange bespoke training packages for students with specific interests and aspirations.

Across all programmes, students are learning skills in the following occupational areas:

- construction (level 1)
- hair and beauty (level 1)
- motor vehicle engineering (level 1)
- motor vehicle Young Apprentice (level 2)
- hairdressing Young Apprentice (level 2)
- foundation learning skills programme
- equine studies (levels 1 and 2)
- outdoor education
- agricultural engineering (levels 1 and 2).



Selecting and commissioning providers

Central to the success of the programme has been a rigorous system for [commissioning training places](#) from providers. The local authority team invites tenders from training providers to offer places to students from schools on the programme. This process means that providers must meet exacting standards and are subject to regular review. [Service level agreements](#) reinforce these high expectations. Information about the providers then informs the selection for the other programmes; including the Young Apprentice scheme and the school's independent agreements with providers.

Getting the right students on the right courses

Comprehensive information, advice and guidance are provided to ensure that courses are well-suited to the students' needs and aspirations. Careers interviews guide students towards vocational programmes where appropriate. Representatives from the local authority attend Year 9 guidance and options evenings and other careers events to explain aspects of the *Live and Learn* programme. Students and their parents and carers are invited to visit each provider before starting the courses to see the learning environment. Students, their parents and carers, and the school sign an [agreement](#) setting out their respective roles and responsibilities in the alternative provision.

Referral forms supplied to training providers include details of students' personal characteristics, and any behavioural, social, emotional or learning difficulties. Students supported through European Social Fund resources on the *Live and Learn* programme have specific barriers to their learning, such as disability, special educational needs, or social disadvantage. This information is shared with training providers to ensure that they fully understand each student's needs and backgrounds.

Funding

European Social Fund money has been central to developing effective links between schools and training providers. The school uses its own funds to support training provision for some students, including Pupil Premium funding where students are eligible.

Getting the student to the placement

Transport is a challenge in a rural area where some training providers are nearly 20 miles away! However, most students say that this has not been an issue for them, and they are able to make the start times agreed with their providers. The local authority provides free bus passes for students on the courses to offset costs, and also offers independent travel training for those who need it.

Monitoring and evaluating provision

Monitoring of provision on the *Live and Learn* programme is rigorous and thorough. The local authority team conducts health and safety checks of providers. They visit students on placement each half-term and conduct detailed face-to-face reviews of progress; attitudes and disposition; behaviour and attendance; and drop in on lessons and activities. They record outcomes on a detailed [proforma](#) which enables them to track progress over time and set students effective short-term targets.



The school's careers consultant monitors the quality and success of all placements using a similar degree of rigour to that on the *Live and Learn* programme. These evaluations are based on a range of indicators, including students' progress and attitudes in school as well as on their placements. Student questionnaires are used systematically to help in the evaluation of the success of this provision. As a result of this evaluation, the team which supports alternative provision has been strengthened, through the careers consultant and the appointment of a higher-level teaching assistant to coordinate support for students in school.

Keeping students on track across all their courses

Students who go off-site for their provision do so for one and, in a few cases, two days. At this school, these students miss lessons in other subjects, including in English and mathematics. Thorough arrangements to help students stay on track are in place. Students in Year 11 are given catch-up time in their programmes to support their progress in these subjects. The higher-level teaching assistant works with the students' teachers to arrange programmes of work to help the students keep up and cover the work that they have missed. Students comment favourably on this support.

Success!

Success rates are high across level 1 and level 2 courses in vocational areas including



construction, equine, hair and beauty, motor vehicle, catering and sport. Nearly all students progress into further education, training or apprenticeships, often in related vocational areas. High success rates for students on these courses make a significant contribution to the school's high GCSE pass rates and consequently high overall score for 'value added'. Overall, school attendance has improved markedly over time, and this is reflected in the good attendance records of many students on the off-site programmes.

The school's background

John Masefield High School and Sixth Form Centre serves the market town of Ledbury and the surrounding area. With just over 900 students on roll, it is broadly average in size. Pupils are mainly White British. The school is an academy with a specialism in the performing arts. It was judged good overall in its [Ofsted inspection](#) of February 2011.



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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