

A pioneering approach to SEND provision



The Cam Academy Trust has successfully expanded its provision for SEND students in schools across the Trust.

This expansion model works within a pioneering programme called the Cabin and was launched at Comberton Village College as a direct response to the lack of places in the secondary school system within Cambridgeshire for students with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC).

Considering the national picture, the funding crisis concerning the provisions for students with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) is widely reported. In early 2019, The National Education Union estimated that over 8,500 students are 'awaiting provision' for a school place, which is more than double that in 2017. The Cam Academy Trust's Cabin programme plays a key role in alleviating this pressure.

A new SEND provision

The Cabin was created 15 years ago to bring students with ASC into mainstream school so they too can navigate the social intricacies of school life, instead of being home-schooled or attending out of county placements. When the Cabin was established at Comberton Village College it catered for three students and since then it has grown to support 70 students from as far away as Ramsey, St Ives, Suffolk and Hereford across the Trust.

Through the Cabin, the colleges provide varying degrees of support for students, from assistance in mainstream lessons to small group learning or individual support. This helps students to develop their independence and life skills whilst remaining in mainstream education. It offers a safe space that allows them to engage in their interests in a positive and stress-free environment.

Overcoming challenges

Challenges have evolved from simply supporting students to access mainstream lessons to encompassing a variety of pastoral and academic concerns. This is because there is an increasing

number of students with ASC who are not accessing a primary education and subsequently arriving at secondary school not having sufficient support and not practiced in learning. Many of them also suffer from associated mental health issues including low self-esteem and ability to interact with their peers. The Trust is now looking to reflect and support these issues by providing bespoke tutorials in Personal Social Health Education (PSHE) to ensure these students can manage their worries and keep themselves safe in the real and virtual worlds.

Peter Allcock, Director of Cabin Provisions, said: “We strive to provide a broad and balanced education for all our students as well as a supportive environment to fully develop their academic and social potential.

“However, students with complex needs can often find the classroom overstimulating and confusing and may find the curriculum challenging. This can result in them becoming increasingly demoralised, anxious and isolated from their school community.

“To support our students with Autism effectively, we launched the Cabin in 2005. It has made a huge difference to their lives as the unique space and academic opportunity has given them the confidence, support and skills needed to progress, whilst remaining in the wider school community, helping to prepare them for life after education.

“We have a team of brilliant staff who run the Cabin and help each student to reach their individual goals by challenging them in a way that is suited to their needs. The results have been amazing with many of our last Year 11 students managing to complete work experiences and go on to local colleges where we can envisage them getting work and contributing to society in the future.”



National endorsement

Lord Agnew, the Education Minister, visited and toured Comberton’s Cabin in 2019. He stated it was an excellent example of inclusive education and considered it to be a very positive example of an effective Trust of schools in action.

Further growth in the future

The Trust is now looking at viable options to add a primary school provision that can run alongside mainstream primary teaching but support students so that they are ready academically and socially for the challenges of secondary school. It is hoped that building their resilience at an earlier age will ensure their time in secondary school is more successful, and in the long term will enable a greater chance to reach their full academic potential.

Peter Allcock added: "I currently know of about 50 students in the county who are not in school due to lack of places. By extending and adapting the Cabin provision to primary schools, we will be able to reach and support even more students with ASC, growing our supportive and inclusive community."

"We are currently investigating how this could look at Gamlingay Village Primary and the types of offerings we can provide such as social skills development and occupational therapy. We believe that helping students from a younger age will not only keep them in mainstream education and reduce the risk of isolation but help them to settle into learning and develop skills ready for secondary school."

