



## WELCOME

Spring remains my favourite season by far, representing new growth, new life, and new opportunities for the year ahead. But please forgive me, as I'm going to be a little more political than usual this time, focusing on two subjects that matter greatly to us: Ofsted, and the forthcoming White Paper on SEND reform.

I am genuinely concerned about the potential impact of the forthcoming SEND reforms on SWRAC. There is, quite rightly, significant scrutiny of the costs charged to local authorities by some specialist colleges. I am aware of examples where charges are excessive, particularly among some larger national providers.

In response, a number of local authorities (LAs) have moved toward direct provision, with the entirely understandable aim of controlling costs. However, my concern is that we may be swept up in a simplistic narrative of "independent equals expensive" and "council-run equals affordable".

The reality is we deliver our provision at around 80% less than the larger independent providers, and approximately 55% less than LAs' own declared direct costs - while still meeting all required quality, governance, and financial benchmarks.

Despite this, I worry that nuance will be lost in the policy discussion, and that smaller, efficient, high-quality specialist providers like SWRAC may face unintended consequences. I wrote to the Secretary of State for Education about these concerns back in October, but have yet to receive a response.

You may have also read about our recent Ofsted inspection, and we are rightly proud of the outcome. However, I would caution against believing the narrative that inspections have fundamentally changed, or that the so-called move away from "one-word judgements" represents a meaningful shift.

During our inspection, we were fortunate to have two inspectors who were thoughtful, professional, and genuinely listened. The third, however, felt very much in keeping with previous experiences - focused on catching providers out rather than understanding context. In our view, the process still hinges heavily on the individual attitudes and approaches of inspectors.

The "one-word" grading system hasn't really gone away; it has simply been replaced with different, and arguably more meaningless, language such as "meets expectations" or "strongly meets expectations". The inspection process itself felt no different, and the stress certainly wasn't reduced.

With my brief rant over, I promise normal service will resume next time.

*Adrian Gunner*

ADRIAN GUNNER  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

## TURLIN MOOR YOUTH CLUB

Turlin Moor Youth Club continues to operate as a stand-alone, community-based youth provision, funded by SWRAC with the aim of giving back to the local community.

The club runs two evenings a week, 50 weeks of the year from 6-8pm - Tuesdays (Years 4-6) and Wednesdays (Years 7-10).

The youth club offers a safe, relaxed space that is not SEND-specific, and attendance numbers have been fantastic.

Football is a major draw, with strong outdoor use in the summer and access to the sports hall in winter, and craft sessions are extremely popular, alongside pool, air hockey, PlayStation and group games.

The club hosted a large community Christmas event in partnership with the neighbouring Family Hub, welcoming over 200 people. Activities included Christmas stalls, crafts, face painting, refreshments and Adrian's snow machine.

We are keen to continue growing the club's role within the community, exploring opportunities such as darts nights, chat cafés and potentially adult provision, while maintaining its identity as a welcoming, inclusive space.

Sessions cost £1, with the first session free.



## BOSCOMBE UPDATE

Rachel Taylor

Boscombe has continued to grow this term, in terms of both student numbers, staff numbers and our Supported Internship providers.

The launch of Project Search with Amazon began in September at the Poole warehouse depot. Learners are working across picking and packing operations and are now moving into their second rotation.

Feedback from Amazon has been extremely positive, with one of our Interns, Harry, receiving a Certificate of Appreciation and On the Rise Award from the company.

They said: "Since joining Amazon, Harry has shown great enthusiasm for learning his role. He has made clear progress and continues to take steps towards doing more within the team. Harry has overcome challenges with resilience and determination, always showing a strong drive to do well."

Alongside this, the BCP Supported Internship learners are also beginning their second rotations. Placements are wide-ranging and include roles within cafés, hotels, dog groomers and pet day care settings, giving learners varied experience across customer service and animal care environments.

We have three new LSAs at the centre and are pleased to report another personal milestone within the team, with tutor Demi welcoming a new baby - both are doing great!

Fun activities obviously included Halloween and Christmas celebrations, which are always favourites among the students. And one group visited Q Bar in Boscombe as a reward for their achievements, enjoying pool, snooker and darts.

We've introduced another reward system to encourage good attendance and punctuality. Learners can earn raffle tickets, with weekly draws for £5 Amazon vouchers and a larger prize draw for £10 each month, giving them something tangible to work towards.

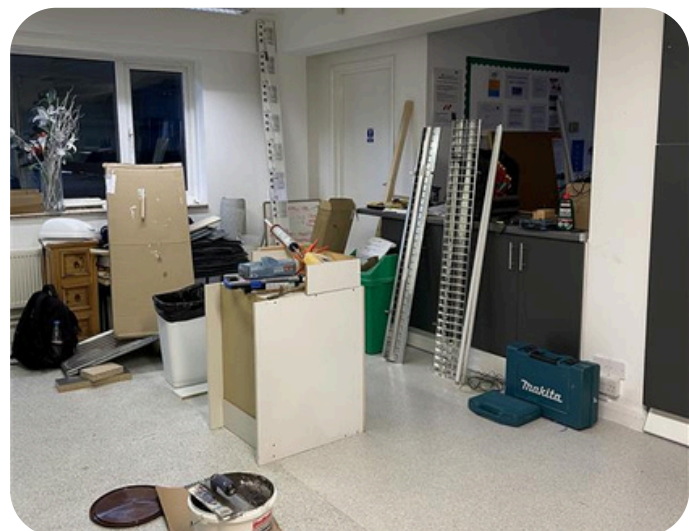
Employability skills were further developed through participation in the Bournemouth Christmas Market, where learners made items to sell, including wreaths and knitted donkeys. A lot of our students worked at the market, gaining valuable real-world experience, in all kinds of weather too! Funds raised were reinvested back into the centre.

Learners also took part in sessions delivered by STARS, focusing on supporting victims of sexual harm, which were well received.

As exam season approaches, Functional Skills learners are being well supported with readers, scribes and regular breaks, helping manage anxiety and ensure they feel prepared.

Meanwhile, work is almost complete on the top floor life-skills space, which includes a new kitchen, lounge and bedroom-style area. This will support learners to develop independence skills such as cooking, making hot drinks and managing personal space.

A successful Open Day in November will be followed by another one in February, and our learners will again be supporting us at The Careers and Apprenticeship Show at the BIC in March.





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Specialist Independent College



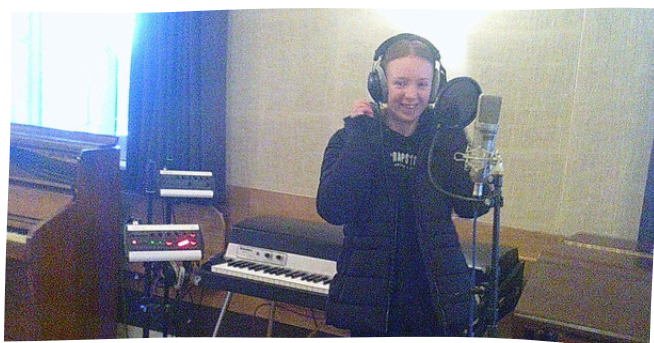
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## DORCHESTER UPDATE

Lauren Morris-Bourne

Kicking off with our annual attendance at the Dorset County Show in September, and an influx of new learners, it's been a busy autumn and winter.

We've now got almost 70 students at the centre across all courses, and thanks to our successful summer transition days, everyone has settled really well.

We're pleased to report that the outdoor gym equipment is used every day, come rain or shine, and students weren't put off by the weather for our camp out either. Everyone was in high spirits while putting up their tents and cooking their marshmallows for the film night, and bacon for their sandwiches in the morning over the fire pit.

Inside, we've revamped the library which the students helped to stock. They were asked to write a review about their favourite book and were then given a budget to go out and find them at local charity shops.

One student has started a monthly book club too. Around 13 students will meet each month to chat about what they have just read - currently this is *The Boy Who Grew Dragons*.

We also started a Youth Club in November on a Wednesday evening. So far, one of the highlights has been an 'I'm a Celebrity' themed challenge, where students had to complete challenges to earn stars.

Trips have included a visit to Echotown Music Studio in Dorchester, where learners were able to try a variety of instruments. Some even had a go at recording a cover song - something which took a lot of courage for many as it was well outside of their comfort zone.

As part of their travel training, our Supported Interns went out to Weymouth, Poole, and Dorchester, finding appropriate routes and timetables themselves and visiting several workplaces along the way. These included Weyfish, Lush, the RNLI lifeboat station and Ratty's trail Dorchester where they participated in a scavenger hunt using What3Words to access different locations.

At Christmas, students organised a festive get-together where some of them volunteered to sing songs and we all wore Christmas jumpers and made hot chocolate!

On the internship and work experience side, we currently have students at Radipole Lake Cafe and The Potting Shed in Weymouth, Pets at Home, Asda, and Freshwater Holiday Park.

As we look ahead to Spring, we're doing lots of tidying, organising and prepping the land ready for planting.

## THRIVE UPDATE

Rachel Rainsbury

With around 40 students in the THRIVE programme at Winton now, there have been a lot of new initiatives launched to keep learners engaged over the last few months, as well as two new Activity Assistants joining the team - welcome Chloe and Kirsty!

To help organise us more effectively, we've set up an 'Extra Responsibilities' board which gives students different allocated tasks for a month at a time. These might be Gardener, Risk Assessor, or Mentor, for example, with a certificate given at the end of each month.

Our 'Around the World in 12 Months' is a new session where students can pick countries they would like to visit, and we dedicate a whole day to learning about its history and culture. We get in flags and themed decorations as well as food and snacks from those countries for them to try something new.

For Germany, the learners made their own Bratwurst sausages. Up next is Australia!

Students have also started 'Skillset Days'. Once a month, a student will choose a particular interest and skill of theirs and present it to those who are interested in finding out more. Last month, Connor identified his skill in Minecraft and showed others how to play the game. He did an amazing job delivering his session, and it was a great confidence builder. Connor received a 'Gold Card' for his great achievement!

Community Action Network made a visit to film interviews with some students on their experience of transitioning from Education into Adult Social Care, with our Thrive + programme being a place where they can develop new skills for learning how to live in Supported Living. The material will be used to help raise awareness of SWRAC and give people an insight into what it's like to be on our Thrive + programme under Adult Social Care.

Also, some students will be attending quarterly Working Together meetings to advocate for the young people's voice, which is a joint initiative between BCP Council and Community Action Network.

A particular highlight since the last newsletter was our Winter Fayre fundraiser for Children in Need with a visit from Pudsey.

Students helped to make and prepare things to sell on stalls and win via raffles and the tombola, including soap bars, reindeer corks, cakes and chocolates, which they also packaged themselves. We raised an incredible £820.51.

Over Christmas, we had lots of festive activities going on, from a big Christmas quiz, Christmas jumper day, Mince Pie and Movie Monday and a centre-wide trip to see Cinderella at The Pavilion. We also did our first Secret Santa involving the learners! .

For our quarterly project week in February, Thrive Skills and Independence will be preparing and delivering an Art Exhibition mixed in with a bakery. Whilst Thrive + will use a mix of tiles, finger prints and hands prints to create a mural to go up outside our centre, facing the high street.

Finally, we'd like to congratulate Becky, who is currently training to become our dedicated ELSA. Well done!



## WIDNES UPDATE

Jen Orr

We now have our Prepare for Life and META courses in full swing at Widnes, and have welcomed Heather Greally and Neil Craig as LSAs to support our growth.

META supports learners who may not have been in education for some time or who have struggled in other settings. They are supported through bespoke timetables, 1:1 mentoring, personal development, health and wellbeing, and working towards Functional Skills, with the aim of getting them back into education or other SWRAC courses.

Following a fantastic open day in December, we also hope to have a Prepare for Work course starting later this year too.

The students themselves have been out and about, with trips to the Widnes Markets, looking at the various stalls and linking them to careers and employability opportunities. We also visited the Liverpool Museum and Christmas market, and had a few games of badminton at Halton Leisure Centre!

One student, Oliver, won a £25 voucher for winning our Christmas card competition - something he was very proud of.

Other sessions have included fresh pasta making and personal development, looking at attitudes and values and setting goals for the future, with an enterprise project coming up which will have students making recycled bracelets from drink can loops and wool.



## RESIDENTIAL TRIP TO THE LAKE DISTRICT

Merseyside students from Bootle and Southport headed to the Lake District in October for an activity-packed couple of days.

Around 15 students enjoyed long walks, orienteering and team building challenges as well as archery, crate stacking, and the high ropes. By night, we watched films and told stories and jokes over a delicious BBQ. The weather was absolutely brilliant and everyone had an amazing time.



## BOOTLE UPDATE

Claire Kennedy

We've had a particularly active term at Bootle and are now delivering the META course as well as Prep for Life, Prep for Work and Supported Internships, with around 40 learners in total following intakes in September, November and upcoming starts in February.

Since August, learners have been running their own enterprise stall in a local shopping centre through the Big Onion community hub, selling items they design and make themselves.

Products have included bird feeders and Christmas decorations, and now the students are creating Valentine's and Easter items. Funds raised are reinvested into the centre, supporting learner activities and days out.

Our weekly youth club continues every Tuesday evening, offering themed activities such as pumpkin carving, cooking, arts and crafts and local walks when weather allows.

Learners also enjoyed a Halloween party, and the centre has hosted two charity galas, raising around £350 in total for Action for Homeless Liverpool and South Park Allotments, where some learners attend work experience.

It was a chance to get together in a relaxed environment and play some fun games while also holding raffles and a tombola, with items donated from staff, parents and local businesses including The Very Group.

In November, HITS Radio Liverpool interviewed learners about their experiences at SWRAC - the clips have recently gone live and really captured powerful comments. Some of them even brought tears to my eyes!

We also hosted an Open Day, which was supported with stalls from Liverpool Council's travel team, Lumiere Soft Play and Very. Another Open Day is planned for February.

In December, we had our first parents' evening, which was extremely well attended and gave families the opportunity to see learners' progress and achievements. We've decided to do this again in the summer.

Festive celebrations included a Christmas jumper day, complete with a roast dinner and karaoke, followed by a Christmas party on the final day. We certainly have a lot of singers at the centre, that's for sure.

Work experience placements are expanding as well, with a florist now on board and one student at Bradbury Fields, which is a day centre supporting people with visual impairments. As our student is visually impaired herself, she's helping their service users to read braille.

Looking ahead, we're in the middle of planning a Valentine's party, which should be great fun!



*"They're so supportive, they just believe in you."*

*"It is a college family and I feel the togetherness and I feel the love that I feel."*

*"It's just absolutely boss!"*

*"No matter what type of help you need, they've always got it and they always want to help you."*

*"It's my favourite place to go to and college makes us feel safe and they always encourage us to voice our opinions."*



## SOUTHPORT UPDATE

Emma Lynch

Southport has welcomed two new staff members since our last update, Rachel Rimmer (LSA) and Paul Smith (LSA / Job Coach), who have been a valuable addition to the growing team.

The centre continues to deliver Prep for Life, Prep for Work, Supported Internships and META courses, supporting a mix of new starters and returning learners.

Supported Internship learners have begun new placements with the Air Ambulance and work with The Very Group is stronger than ever.

Prep for Work students are also engaging in work placements at The British Heart Foundation, the Atkinson, and Happy Dog Haven.

Project Search is also about to begin with Whiston Hospital, which is a fantastic opportunity for our students.

Interns will get the chance to rotate around a number of roles, including admin assistant, accommodation support, car park attendant, receptionist and ward host.

We were delighted to win a Buddy Bench through participation in Young Minds' Hello Yellow campaign for World Mental Health Day, delivered in partnership with Marks & Spencer and Plastecowood.

This provides learners with a dedicated outdoor space for conversation and peer support.

At Christmas, we all enjoyed a fantastic festive day where all students sat together with staff to pull crackers, listen to Christmas songs and eat a delicious meal with all the trimmings.

Students also took part in a range of activities including crackers and cards crafts, a Christmas quiz with tasty prizes, Christmas films, a hot chocolate station and a Christmas present exchange.

In addition to Bootle, Southport students also busied themselves making Christmas trees from the pages of old books to sell at the Big Onion stalls.

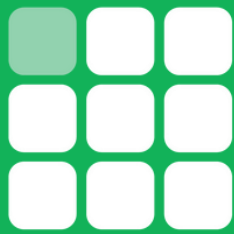
They are now working on items for Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Easter which includes melts and soaps.

In January, learners visited Train 200 in Southport, part of the nationwide Railway 200 celebrations marking 200 years of the modern passenger railway. The interactive exhibition explored innovation, sustainability and careers within the rail industry and students seemed to be very interested.

A mix of students from all courses enjoyed an inspiring day at The National Apprenticeship and Education Event at Aintree Racecourse too, meeting employers, asking questions and discovering exciting future pathway possibilities.

We're now preparing for our second Open Day, which promises to be very busy.





## **SAFEGUARDING UPDATE**

Emma Lynch

Below is a quick update on your DDSL's before moving on to a general update:

- Adrian Gunner, Maria Fincham - all centres
- Bev Kennedy, Steph Logan - Bootle, Southport, Widnes
- Claire Kennedy - Bootle
- Jen Orr - Widnes
- Natalie Newman, Lauren Morris-Bourne - Dorchester
- Rachel Rainsbury - Winton
- Rachel Taylor - Boscombe

Safeguarding continues to be a key focus across all SWRAC centres, with an increased emphasis this term on online safety and supporting parents and carers alongside learners.

SWRAC is now providing a monthly online safety newsletter, in addition to the general safeguarding newsletter. These are shared with parents, carers and learners via email, social media and the website.

One newsletter focuses on safeguarding more broadly, while the other specifically addresses online safety, including social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok and Instagram.

Alongside this, SWRAC is offering online safety support and training sessions for parents and carers, with four sessions planned across the year. Invitations and resources are emailed directly, including links to further support and guidance.

In March, Ali Barfield from Deflect and Protect will be delivering online safety sessions for learners, parents/carers and staff. These will take place across centres, with separate sessions tailored for parents and learners, ensuring the content is accessible and relevant.

All centres will also be taking part in Children's Mental Health Week (9th – 11th February) and Safer Internet Day (10th February), with activities and resources shared to support learner wellbeing and awareness.

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