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Good Practice Example

Title:	A different way to organise work for students in residential houses
Provider:	Fairfield Farm College
Type of provision:	Independent Specialist College
Region:	South East
Remit area:	Learning and Skills
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Brief description:	A key part of the 24 hour curriculum for students with learning difficulties and disabilities attending independent specialist colleges is the development of independent daily living skills. Fairfield Farm College has developed a different approach to developing these skills. The main focus of the approach is to allocate areas of responsibility to each student and to allow each student to make decisions about how and when they carry out their duties, rather than creating a strict rota to which they must work.

Overview – the provider’s message

“A key part of the 24 hour curriculum for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, particularly those attending independent specialist colleges, is the development of independent daily living skills. At Fairfield Farm College, daily living skills were taught on-site in the student residential houses during the college day. Jobs carried out during the day were often replicated in the evening because students had rotas to follow. Also, if bathrooms, toilets and other areas of the houses were not clean they would remain in that state if it wasn’t on the rota to clean them. Another important factor was that the way in which this part of the curriculum was taught did not emulate real life.”

Advice for others? “It is essential that staff are thoroughly briefed before the system is introduced to students and [training](#) should be comprehensive so that everyone is clear about the objectives and the systems that will be put into place. Consider a small pilot scheme in one area to begin with; either in terms of the number of students participating or the number of tasks included. For example, it might be useful to start by using the system for the student’s bedrooms. Also, the system will need to be regularly reviewed to make sure that it is continuing to meet the needs of the students and the organisation.”

Marion Clayson, Support Manager

The good practice in detail



One of the support workers at the college realised that rotas were not the best way for students to learn about keeping their houses clean and tidy. Her idea was to replace rotas with areas of responsibility and the college

adopted her innovative approach for the delivery of the independent living skills curriculum and the development of daily living skills. The focus for the college was to replicate everyday life; go to work/college during the day, get home, have a shower, have a meal and do whatever cleaning jobs are required.

The support worker identified that students liked responsibility and at the same time realised that when she got home she did jobs around the house because they needed doing not because it was a particular day. She combined both of these thoughts and developed the approach that is now being used successfully by the college as noted in the college's [inspection report](#) in 2010.



The scheme is refreshingly simple! Students choose an area of responsibility in their house each week and instead of doing jobs based on a rota, they decide what needs to be done and when to do it.

An initial pilot involved one house with third year students. These students knew how to do tasks but did not particularly want to do their rotated tasks, even though they had an element of choice. The home was divided into zones such as the bathroom, lounge, kitchen and other communal areas such as hallways, and each student chose an area of responsibility for the week. Over a period of time every student covered every area to ensure that they were developing all the required knowledge and skills.

The staff had to be fully briefed and some found the change difficult. [Guidelines for staff](#) were developed to help them to implement the scheme effectively following the training. The pilot was successful and the scheme was then extended to all the houses. Staff found that in addition to developing independent living skills the students gained in other areas such as:

- developing time management skills
- learning to identify what needs to be done
- developing a realistic approach to housekeeping
- learning to use their initiative
- learning to make appropriate choices
- increased confidence.



The students developed a positive approach to household tasks as they took responsibility for their own area and they took pride in their home and their abilities to keep it clean and tidy whilst practising their daily living skills. Chris, a student at the college says, "It's good because it helps you learn and I can get on without being told what to do." "I've learned everything I need to do and got good skills" adds Theresa, another student. During the meeting with students in the dining room of one of the houses, Theresa had noticed that the floor needed sweeping. She fetched a dustpan and brush and swept the required area. The support manager commented that under the previous scheme of rotas the student wouldn't have noticed that the floor needed sweeping. The scheme has put students' learning into context and because literacy and numeracy are built into the process, learning has become a more

integrated process. Students' progress is monitored carefully and recorded on a [record sheet](#) specifically designed for the scheme.

The impact of the scheme is evident. Students are happier with their responsibilities and they have developed wider transferable skills beyond daily living skills. Theresa has transferred her skills to her home environment and now cooks and cleans for her mother. Staff have got to know their students better as they now work in more meaningful ways with them and more incidental learning takes place. For example, when a student was vacuuming whilst others were watching television, it led to discussions with the student about appropriateness of the timing of his responsibilities and the impact on other students. "There still has to be a bit of direction as sometimes there are jobs that no one wants to do. But the discussions about why these things need doing helps to develop students' understanding" says Marion. "It also helps them to develop their initiative to do these jobs" adds Sandra North, a support worker.



Provider background

Fairfield Farm College (www.fairfieldopportunityfarm.ac.uk) is an independent specialist college for young people with learning disabilities, offering residential and day provision for learners aged 16–25 years. The college, which is based in Wiltshire, consists of a 25 acre farm site, a farm shop and five houses all located within two hundred yards of the farm.