

A Day in the Life of a Special School

If you could bottle the spirit of our children, there would be few problems with the world. This is not because they are saints or high flyers but because they value what they have rather than envy what they have not. They make the most of today, enjoy learning for its own sake and approach life with good-natured tolerance and optimism. They reject self pity and legitimise gentleness.

Our day and residential school is for children and young people aged 4-19 with physical disabilities and one or more additional needs of a communication, learning, sensory or medical nature. A fifth of our children have progressive conditions and short life spans. We have young people of whom we are proud they can count to three and others that we wish had gained higher grades in their clutch of GCSEs. We are a microcosm of the educational world, multi-cultural and varied in talents. We celebrate achievement and how far forward people move rather than judge attainment and how they jump.

Our job is to create the conditions for optimum progress for now and to integrate the children into society both today and for the future. Liberating this learning and improving wellbeing are increasingly demanding due to the greater complexity of needs. This arises from the improved survival rates of the most vulnerable babies. We seek to improve as a school whilst our standards decline.

We also reach out to the educational community, 600 pupils accessing curriculum in mainstream as a result of support and offering professional development to more than 150 establishments each year.

Although our multi-disciplinary team enjoys an outstanding reputation, we are restless for improvement, knowing that whatever we do is not enough. The work is rewarding but challenging. There are huge and sometimes competing management, pedagogic, care, training and resource demands in both our inward and outward-facing roles. Harnessing these demands requires wise, compassionate and resilient leadership now and for the future. This cannot be in isolation and nor can it be temporary. Collectively we are much more than the sum of our parts and we must maintain this.

We need sustainable leadership and this is where the FLSE can be of great benefit. The FLSE is not only mutually supportive but highly connected with other organisations which are also determined to improve the quality of experience and outcomes for children. The FLSE enables principled and evidence-based practice and mature systems for identifying and developing the leaders of tomorrow.

We want children to thrive: to experience, to learn, to feel good, to contribute and to be socially included. It is the job of leadership to guarantee these outcomes.