

High-quality alternative provision through creating a company: Hawkley Hall High School

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Brief description

Like many secondary schools, Hawkley Hall High School used to send a number of Year 10 and 11 students to alternative providers for part of each week. However, senior leaders were not satisfied with the quality of provision. They brought the delivery of a number of courses in-house and worked in partnership with four local high schools to set up a limited private company to deliver high-quality construction skills, off-site. The successful Western Skills Centre is the result.

Overview – the school’s message

The Western Skills Centre aims for high-quality delivery which stimulates student engagement and meets their individual needs. The Centre endeavours to ensure that all students leave with a nationally recognised qualification in construction crafts. Generally, this is a level 2 BTEC certificate or diploma, depending on students’ abilities. A key aim is to raise students’ motivation and aspirations so that they also achieve well in English, mathematics and the other GCSE subjects they have chosen. The five high schools which make up the company, each, use their own procedures for selecting students to attend the Centre.

The Centre’s facilities include three practical working areas, one each for painting and decorating, joinery, and brickwork. There is also a classroom for the delivery of the theoretical aspects of the course, as well as social areas for breaks.

The Centre has close contacts with local construction companies, many of which are actively involved in the delivery of the programmes of study.

In 2012 and 2013, all exceeded their targets by the equivalent of at least one GCSE grade and, in most cases, by the equivalent of two or more grades.

The good practice in detail



In 2011, Ofsted carried out a [survey](#) to find out how well schools were using alternative provision. Some schools were using alternative provision well; however, others were not. In September 2012, Ofsted started a follow-up survey, which is due to last for three years. One of the findings of the current survey is that some schools are now drawing away from using off-site providers, instead organising innovative provision 'in-house'. This case study is about one of

the schools visited for the survey that has done this successfully to improve achievement and engagement.

Getting the best for students

High aspirations are at the heart of the successful hard work put in by Hawkey Hall High School and its partners to set up the Western Skills Centre. Hawkey Hall's mantra of 'best chance of best grade' spurred their desire to secure the best quality for all courses offered, whether academic or vocational, on- or off-site.

Unwilling to accept less than the best for students on alternative provision, the school and its partners provide training in construction skills - joinery, bricklaying, painting and decorating - at the Western Skills Centre, a unit converted for this purpose, located on a small estate for light industry. To ensure that the Centre is financed appropriately, each school agrees to fund 24 one-day places each year, divided evenly between students in Years 10 and 11. If partner schools do not require all of these places for their own students, spare capacity is made available to other local schools and the local pupil referral unit.

The Centre uses industry-standard tools and materials. Its strong links with manufacturers in the region help staff to keep abreast of upcoming training and employment opportunities and result in some donations of materials. This, and visits to a wide range of construction projects, broaden students' experience of the industry.

What difference has it made?

Standards are rising across the school and for students on the construction course. When the Centre first opened, in the main students were gaining qualifications at level 1. More recently, Hawkey Hall students



who attend the Centre have all gained qualifications at level 2. In 2012 and 2013, all exceeded their targets by the equivalent of at least one GCSE grade and, in most cases, by



the equivalent of two or more grades. All moved on to post-16 courses or apprenticeships that are linked to the qualifications gained at the Western Skills Centre. The Centre's retention rate is very high: only one student has ever dropped out!

Hawkley Hall and its partner schools are clear that the benefits of following the construction course at the Western Skills Centre go beyond better academic

outcomes and permeate school life more widely. Students' behaviour improves because they are much more engaged in their learning. This increased motivation is evident in improvements to students' attendance and their ability to collaborate with others.

How are the high standards maintained?

The Western Skills Centre employs an experienced teacher as Strategic Manager to oversee the Centre's direction, assure the quality of the provision and liaise with schools. The company has procedures and training in place to ensure that safeguarding requirements and health and safety regulations are met. The quality of teaching is reviewed regularly and professional development for staff has played an important part in improving provision. Students' progress is tracked at regular intervals and the Centre's staff tailor reporting to meet each school's own system. Staff from all the schools, using the Centre, visit regularly to check on how well students are doing.

Hawkley Hall does not rely solely on the Centre's own quality assurance procedures. Senior leaders are keen to evaluate the quality of the Centre's provision in the wider context of the school's curriculum. The quality-assurance system of regular faculty reviews includes the work of the Western Skills Centre as an aspect of the Technologies Faculty. Senior leaders and the governing body provide challenge to the faculty to ensure that high standards are reached and sustained.

Involving families

Parents and carers have opportunities to find out about the Centre and the course it offers. Visits before students start the course, an open door policy and an annual parents' evening at the Centre are all part of supporting students to succeed. The Centre provides regular feedback to schools which is incorporated into their usual systems for reporting to parents and carers.



What do students think?

Students are very positive about the course. They like watching skills demonstrated and having the opportunity to practise these for themselves. They appreciate learning in an environment where the rules of the workplace apply – although, sometimes, these are uncomfortably demanding! The Centre's learning mentor provides support as students adjust to the new demands made on them.

The school's background

[Hawkey Hall High School](#) serves an area in the west of Wigan. With 920 students on roll, it is slightly smaller than average. Almost all students are White British. The school became an academy in May 2012 and is a National Support School. The Western Skills Centre is run in partnership with Cansfield High Specialist Language College, The Byrchall High School, Saint Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic High School and Standish Community High School. The model for the Western Skills Centre has worked so well that some of the schools involved have replicated it and established a similar venture for teaching skills in motor vehicle maintenance.

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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