

Findings

Provision for learning

At the outset both the Edison and Darwin Centres were provided with a dedicated space and resources to create a welcoming and caring environment. Staff have given careful attention to providing an attractive environment and have enhanced this with displays of the children's work, interesting topics and visual prompts which are appropriate to the students' age and stage of their development.

- *Structured timetable and physical space*

Staff have considered the organisation of the daily timetable to provide a balance between structured activities, reward time and personal development. Whilst this can work effectively and the students generally respond well to the opportunities for rewards or their own choice of activity, it is highly dependent on staffing and adult to child ratios.

At the Edison Centre staff generally find that they interact well with each other, and that their relationships and the two rooms they have access to can be well-utilised so that they are able to offer a flexible approach where they can change the member of staff directly interacting or working with a child, or the space they are working in as and when this is felt necessary:

- *A personalised curriculum approach*

Personalised planning and a flexible approach were the two key determining factors in supporting students to engage in learning "we try to do things in different ways...it's always trying to find an alternative route". The potential drawback to this was that this differed to mainstream approaches and could lead to students moving away from the mind-set of their typical school experience. However, the flexible approach was seen to be beneficial in supporting students to build on their emotional understanding and develop strategies to regulate them:

"it's definitely not always about academic progress...I suppose you could call it therapeutic input...trying to help them access their emotional difficulties and unpicking those"

Staff reported feeling suitably trained and experienced in dealing with challenging behaviours through a personalised approach.

- *Communication and engagement*

Both settings maintain records of work and engagement which are shared with the sending school. Whilst practitioners have put systems in place regarding effective methods of helping children to reintegrate and providing information for the sending schools around strategies that they have found to be beneficial, schools vary widely in their acknowledgement and response to these. There can be some tensions due to the small, specialist set-up of the centres which can lead to mainstream settings viewing that they will not be able to offer similar levels of support. It will be important for all involved to continue to plan activities both in the centres and the mainstream settings



that will support the reintegration of children and young people more fully with their peers on their return to the mainstream setting.

Building a picture – an individualised approach to assessment and planning

Both settings anticipated that the way for them to affect change was through building a picture of what was important to the child or young person and the strategies that worked best for them. This was supported through the use of assessment and information-gathering tools. The amount of time that staff could spend getting to know the student was viewed to have a positive impact on their attitude to learning: *“we have got the time...I think that is our biggest positive really”*. A therapeutic approach through play or discussion were seen as key factors in this and all practitioners thought they could benefit from more resources to assist with this. This would sit in line with the theoretical underpinnings of a nurture group approach, for example supporting interactions with children that are receptive, attentive and scaffolded (principles of attunement). Adults viewed a key aspect of their role was supporting the students to become more aware of themselves:

“skilling them up”

“we can start to unpick it and feedback things that may come to light that they haven’t got time to do in mainstream”

“when they go back they start to regulate their emotions and recognise their emotions...that’s such a big thing because that can solve so many other problems that they are having”

The understanding of the individual allowed for personalised planning and a personalised response that took into account the individual’s personality, strengths and needs:

Relationships between staff and students and within staff teams were viewed to have a significant impact on the likelihood that the student would benefit from their time attending the setting. This is a multi-faceted construct involving inter-staff and staff-student interactions. The children from the Edison Centre all spoke enthusiastically about their experiences and they spoke positively about all members of staff.

The identified themes indicate that what is working well includes:

- Personalised planning and a flexible approach
- An individualised approach where nurturing principles are used to develop self-esteem
- An understanding of the individual needs of each student
- Relationships and communication within the staff team and between staff and students
- The learning environment as a safe space