

Case study

Abbot's Lea School

Abbot's Lea is a SEND school for students aged 3 -19 with a primary diagnosis of ASD or Asperger's. We identified that our students in Post 16 often had special interests linked to information and communications technology (ICT) and digital media. With the support of Amanda from a digital media company, we established links to digital industries and we collaborated to set up a careers day in school for students to experience different potential employers in this industry. We wanted students to see a greater range of potential options available to them when they left school, and to also make parents aware that there are several other options for careers that could possibly be related to their child's special interests in digital media e.g. game design, digital art, website design.

Amanda introduced us to the BIMA Digital Day competition. The Digital Day Competition has 3 challenges set by companies that require a potential digital solution and on the day of the competition, employees from a digital media company, came in to lead activities and to also provide students with knowledge of what a career in digital media could offer. It was a real eye opener to the students and employees from the digital media company were impressed by the way that the students looked at problems in different ways. Following this event, we had a lot more interest from students in potential digital careers.

We decided to enter the competition, again with the challenges being set by Vodafone, who asked students to think of ways to make shopping a better experience for those with disabilities; the Football Association who wanted a way to get more girls involved in grassroots football and the BBC who wanted a digital way of promoting a new TV programme.

After presenting their project designs at the end of the day, two were selected by Amanda and they were offered the chance to come into her company to put together a more professional competition entry. The students who went to THINK Live found the trip enjoyable as they not only got the chance to work with industry professionals but to also to see what working in a digital media company would be like.

Entering the competition again the following year, we had 3 entries make it to the final, with two entries being selected by Vodafone and one selected by the Football Association. Whilst it was amazing to get our entries through to the finals, we were then excited to learn that one team had won the Vodafone challenge, beating off mainstream schools in the final. Furthermore, the judging panel had no idea that the entry was from a SEND school, it was judged entirely upon its merits.



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Student quote

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The students in the winning team subsequently met the local MP and were invited to tour the Houses of Parliament as a result. Vodaphone invited the winning group to London as they would like to make the App they designed and would like them involved in the process.

Since linking with Amanda and working with the digital media company, we have seen students take more interest in digital careers, with one student going on to take media at college and another study digital art.

Student quote: "It has made me feel a more confident person from speaking in a group and improving my teamwork skills."

Teacher quote: "Our students solved the problems with their different way of thinking. It showed that the traditional 'neuro typical' problem solving approaches are not always the best. Students with Autism have an important part to play in the work place with their ability to think outside the box in a unique way."



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