

# Removing Barriers

## Cornerstone Employer Case Study



### Background

Through 1-1 school meetings and the Black Country Careers Hub SEND Communities of Practice we identified a lack of SEND-specific employer encounters and work experience projects, especially during Covid-19 restrictions and for those with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

The Careers Hub worked with DPD, a Black Country Cornerstone Employer, to deliver projects to special schools. DPD are an inclusive employer who already offer a supported internship programme for young people who would not typically take Level 2 qualifications. DPD are keen to shout about this hidden talent pool to other employers.

### Aims

Address a gap in online encounters and online work experience projects for SEND pupils.

Support DPD's passion to include SEND young people in the Hub's priority projects, to showcase their abilities and make a positive impact.

Highlight DPD's diversity & inclusion values to schools and young people – in order to support their community objectives and help build the talent pipeline.

Help special schools improve their ratings for Gatsby Benchmarks 5 and 6.

Inspire other Cornerstone Employers and Enterprise Advisers to engage with SEND pupils and engage with schools in new ways.

### Actions

Preparation phase:

- DPD met with the SEND EC to discuss projects to offer to special schools.
- DPD designed and delivered projects which would allow pupils' work to be shared in cornerstone meetings, EA meetings and on LinkedIn to encourage more employers to get involved with SEND pupils.
- DPD set two challenges to ensure inclusivity so all pupils were able to take part, even those who attended PMLD schools.

Challenge 1: Our Planet Needs You - for pupils in special schools or in supported learning in colleges

- Teachers attend a 15-minute information session and encouraged to enter. Being teacher-led ensured it met pupils needs and allowed flexibility to adapt to the educational setting.
- Pupils attend introductory session with DPD to learn about the business, its green initiatives, and to ensure direct contact with an employer (Benchmark 5).
- Pupils pitched ideas to DPD for delivering a greener service.
- Pupils worked individually or in groups to develop ideas, using video, models, or posters. This also met Benchmark 6 as DPD were setting a project, with feedback given at a celebration event.
- DPD sponsored a range of prizes for schools to spend on sustainable projects.

Challenge 2: Christmas is coming! - aimed at pupils with more complex needs

- Pupils could enter a Christmas card competition, with the winning design sent out to all DPD customers and stakeholders.
- A montage of designs was displayed at the Careers Week event in March, along with the winning individual's card.
- Schools could also utilise this as benchmark 6 as DPD are setting a project to meet a brief and feedback was given on the designs.
- There were cash prizes for the winning school and participating schools.



**We were overwhelmed by the entries submitted by the students to both competitions - so much so that their ideas and designs have been shared with the wider business for implementation. The competitions were able to show, once again, the importance of inclusion and DPD recognises the valuable contribution all young people can make to the workplace when given the opportunity.**

Sophie Robins , DPD

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## Outcomes

### Early Wins:

The programme has contributed to raising Compass scores for special schools that took part and helping them achieve Gatsby Benchmarks 3, 4, 5 and 6. The initiative finished with a celebration event recognising participants and providing an opportunity for further engagement between pupils and DPD employees.

- Challenge 1: 5 special schools and 2 foundation learning departments from colleges were involved. Around 120 SEND pupils were involved, with excellent feedback from the schools and pupils.
- Challenge 2: 5 PMLD and complex needs schools were involved. Pupils worked in groups and around 300 SEND pupils with the most complex needs were involved. We received 92 Christmas card entries in total.
- Gatsby scores improvement:
  - Benchmark 5 - special schools average increased from 75% to 85%
  - Benchmark 6 – special schools average increased from 83% to 92%
  - Benchmark 4 – special schools average increased from 84% to 91%
  - Benchmark 3 – special schools average increased from 87% to 92%

### Emerging:

- DPD have agreed to take on 8 pupils from a participating school for a supported internship in September 2022.
- Schools have asked for other similar projects.
- EAs attached to special schools and mainstream schools are working to replicate similar projects between their business and their matched schools.

### Relates to Careers Hub Coordinated Actions



Removing barriers



Employers build long term sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships with schools and colleges

### Relates to Gatsby Benchmarks

3

Addressing the needs of each pupil.

4

Linking curriculum learning to careers.

5

Encounters with employers and employees.

6

Experiences of workplaces.

### How did the work align with the Cornerstone Employer role?



Focus on SEND

## Next Steps

DPD will present the project at the next Cornerstone Employers meeting, to inspire other employers to support SEND students. They are also planning to invite local Cornerstone Employers into DPD for a SEND discovery day. Employers will have the opportunity to meet neurodiverse staff and supported interns, speak to HR and learn more about SEND initiatives. The hub is also planning a SEND and Neurodiversity training session for employers. DPD will be part of this event and showcase how projects like this one support skill development.