

Spotlight On: SEND partnerships at King's High School, Warwick

Stephen Burley, headteacher of King's High School, Warwick, explains how the school's partnership work provides vital opportunities for local children with disabilities.



Surely, the most pressing (and depressing) educational crisis of our time is the plight of children with disabilities. Many are trapped in educational provision that doesn't meet their needs; others are at home (sometimes for up to three years, depending on where they live) waiting for local councils to find and fund suitable specialist provision.

Even for those fortunate enough to be placed in specialist settings, the long school holidays pose incredible challenges for families of children with complex educational and care needs. Last year, the disability charity Contact published the findings of a survey of over 1,800 families caring for over 2,000 disabled children nationally.

The survey found that nine out of 10 families had been unable to find a suitable holiday club or activity for their disabled child, with families desperate for opportunities through the long summer holiday. Almost 80 per cent of parents felt stressed and anxious due to lack of holiday clubs, with over a third giving up work because of a lack of suitable childcare.

As the father of a child with complex disabilities and care needs, I am all too familiar with these issues. For a variety of reasons, special schools are not able to offer what so many families desperately need: extended terms or 52-week provision for day students (this is reserved only for those children in need of residential placements). This means that charities are left to fill the gap where they can and, inevitably, holiday provision is extremely hard to access.

King's High School and Evergreen School, a broad-spectrum special school with around 300 pupils, have worked together, as part of a much broader partnership project at Warwick Schools Foundation, to provide life-enhancing experiences during school holidays. Firstly, our foundation's well-established Holiday Action Programme, which runs through every school holiday for local children, was enhanced to offer 15 weekly places to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Evergreen staff and King's High students came together to support swimming classes, go-karting, craft and other activities.

However, children with more profound disabilities were not able to access this provision and we wanted to address this urgently. We therefore partnered with Let's Play, a disability playgroup in Oxfordshire, to launch a new and fully inclusive holiday playgroup based at Evergreen School, staffed by students from King's High and Warwick School, alongside experts from Let's Play and Evergreen.

Due to the staff ratios required to support children with complex needs, the costs are inevitably high, but we are very fortunate in being able to draw on the tremendous support of The King Henry VIII Trust, one of our ancient Warwick charities. Before joining the programme, our students undergo thorough training via our bespoke in-house course which covers modules on autism, safeguarding, first aid and activity planning.

The impact of the project is very powerful. Nick Evans, executive head at Evergreen School, writes:

"The partnership to enable holiday provision for our children and young people has been nothing short of life changing. Suitable, affordable and sustainable holiday provision for children and young people with SEND has been limited for many years, so to be in a position where we can now offer accessible activities, in familiar settings and during the school holidays, is transformational. Not only do our families now have some much-needed respite, but pupils are able to have some brilliant experiences with their friends in the holidays, with the right level of support."

The parent perspectives were very clear. As one Evergreen parent wrote: "There are no clubs for our children in the holidays and this has a massive impact on us and our children. Keep being amazing and trying the best for our kids!"

We are excited for the future of this project and aspire, in time, to offer provision through every school holiday so that children with additional needs can have the same opportunities as their peers.

We would also love to work with other independent schools to create a national network of schools working closely in partnership with their local special school to provide life-changing experiences through the school holidays. By working together as a sector, we can have a tremendously positive



impact on the lives of families in our communities who are in desperate need of support and provision for their children. Independent school partnership work takes many forms and its strength is its diversity; but, by partnering successfully with your local special school the impact is incredibly high and the benefits for the children at both schools is palpably clear.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me directly on s.burley@kingshighwarwick.co.uk if you would like to know more about our work.

Further Reading:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-66188156>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37177967>

<https://contact.org.uk/about-contact/news-and-views/9-10-families-unable-to-find-suitable-holiday-club-for-their-disabled-child-this-summer-2/>

