

GREATER MANCHESTER MENTALLY HEALTHY COLLEGES

School to college transition

LORETO COLLEGE
NOVEMBER 2020



Loreto College is situated between Hulme and Moss Side in Manchester. Two thirds of its 1,900 students come from Catholic partner high schools and from other Catholic schools in the wider Manchester area. 2. The college's student population is drawn from Manchester and surrounding local authorities including Salford, Trafford, Tameside and Derbyshire. In 2007, Manchester was ranked as the 4th most deprived out of 354 local authorities.

In Manchester in 2008, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C (including English and mathematics) was 36.7% compared to a national figure of 47.2%. Over half of all students at the college receive educational maintenance allowances.

Almost all students are aged 16 to 18 and are enrolled on full-time advanced level courses. The college's student population is a diverse multi-ethnic and multicultural community.

School to college transition

This is part of the Greater Manchester Mentally Healthy Schools and Colleges programme. Due to the concentration of student numbers in a relatively small number of education settings and the short timeframes involved we recognised that a more bespoke approach to further Education colleges would be needed.

The aim of this project was to:

- Develop the capacity of further education and sixth form colleges in Greater Manchester to collaborate in support of the mental health and wellbeing of their staff and students
- Identify good practice that can be shared across the system.

There are 21 colleges in Greater Manchester (9 general further education colleges and 12 sixth form Colleges) and approximately 90% of 16 to 18yr olds in Greater Manchester are in colleges. During an academic year approximately 51,000 out of 56,000 16-18-year olds will study at these further education and sixth-form colleges.

The Association of Colleges (North) was awarded funding for 12 months in March 2019 to deliver a project to raise awareness and support development of the mental health agenda within individual colleges.

This project aimed to support the mental health of all our high achieving students (based on prior attainment at GCSE) and in particular those who are at greatest disadvantage, so that these students have the best opportunity of balancing high academic achievement and strong mental health whilst at college and beyond. We also wanted to work with them to develop their skills in managing their mental health.

Our students



All students were in our 'High Achievers Cohort'. These students had achieved highly at GCSE – typically 6 or more grade 8/9s. Students are given bespoke tutorial and Religious Education programmes to challenge and engage, with a view to making an application at the most competitive universities.

We have the highest number of disadvantaged students of any sixth form college in the North West., 60% of our students are defined as disadvantaged by widening participation post code. A large number of our high achieving students are also from disadvantaged families. We recognise that the families of our high achieving disadvantage students are not necessarily equipped with the skills and insights needed to fully support their gifted children and so the levels of anxiety and stress around these students, pressure of achievement, expectations and feeling out of their familial comfort zones will be greatest.

Challenges

Many students join the college from small feeder schools where their attainment will have placed them in the top handful of students. The increased challenge at Level 3 study can be a novel experience for students who have previously found studying relatively easy. Students find themselves surrounded by an increased number of high achieving students and may no longer be 'top of the class'. In addition, some of these students have extremely high expectations, aiming for 100% and places at only the top universities.

These factors can lead to students suffering mental health problems such as anxiety. We've seen an increase in such students accessing support at the college. We have also noticed, anecdotally, an increase in students in this cohort accessing counselling due to anxiety and self-harm issues. This cohort typically have a positive view of college and learning and are willing to engage in activities put on by the college. They are open to advice from staff.

What we offered

We organised a mental health conference. This was in the style of a workshop where the guest speaker discussed approaches to looking after mental health, a 'toolkit' for students and parents. Both students and their parents were invited to this. The guest speaker was a qualified psychotherapist who has a wealth of experience in working with young people and wellbeing issues. 17 students attended this meeting with additional parents in attendance. In addition, tutorial resources were created and delivered in two tutorial sessions – 200 students accessed these.

What we found

Feedback from the mental health conference was overwhelmingly positive. Parents and students commented on the impact, feeling that they had developed their skills in looking after their wellbeing and also feeling confident in doing so.

We're now awaiting results of a survey given to students to assess the medium-term impact on their mental health.



Due to COVID-19 which necessitated the move to remote teaching in March it's difficult to assess the full impact of this project on the long-term mental health of students at the moment.

Next steps

The conference/workshop was well received and certainly provided an important opportunity to allow students and parents to discuss mental health and explore strategies to manage mental health and know when to reach out for support.

The tutorial resources were well received and will be used in subsequent years. We're looking at ways we can further develop tutorial resources and teach students about their mental health.



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