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Stantonbury Campus

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Stantonbury Campus is a remarkable school in many ways because of its setting and its size but it is also becoming more unusual in its approaches to education and management.

It is a specialist performing arts college as well as maths and computing and it is awaiting formal confirmation that it has also been granted vocational specialist status, making it one of the very few schools in the UK with three specialisms.

The Milton Keynes institution is in a relatively under-privileged district and might be expected to face many of the difficulties associated with inner-city schools. However, its recent Ofsted inspection was immensely successful and earned it several commendations because of the school's ethos and mission to treat every student as of equal value.

The school's mission statement says: "Stantonbury Campus exists to enable each individual to acquire the personal qualities, attitudes, knowledge, understanding, skills and qualifications necessary for personal fulfilment and active social responsibility in a rapidly changing world. This aim is based upon our fundamental belief in the equal value of all members of our community, and our determined optimism about the potential of each one. This aim is achieved through a whole campus emphasis on effective learning within a climate conducive to that end."

Systems Manager Noel Bell stressed the policy: "Our philosophy is totally inclusive. This has always been a good school and we are oversubscribed. Ofsted praised our relationships with students and our determination to give them equal value."

As part of the philosophy of inclusion many of the potential barriers that exist between staff and students in other schools have been removed at Stantonbury. "It comes out in small but specific ways. For example, we don't have separate toilets for staff and students. We are a first name college; the pupils call us by our first names.

"It imposes on the teachers a need to find ways to approach students that don't involve browbeating. It gives a different sort of discipline. Our routines and expectations are very strict because it cuts both ways. Clear boundaries have to be laid down to make it work but respect springs from the relationship and students have a respect for the learning environment."

A huge pupil roll

The college has around 2,500 students, making it one of the largest in the country, but in order to make students' experience less challenging it is arranged into five sections or 'halls'. Youngsters tend to stay within the same hall for the majority of their lessons, with the same staff. Noel said: "In order to maintain a human size and to make the institution more friendly it's divided into five halls of around 500 each. Four of them are for students up to 16 and the fifth is for post-16.

"Students spend the biggest part of their day in that hall, for their core subjects. For some subjects, such as science and technology, we have two blocks that serve a pair of halls each," Noel added.

Every student has the same tutor from year eight to year 11 and the timetable is arranged in such a way to enable both staff and students to remain in a small area of the massive campus.

"We try to manage continuity and size of groups so that students have a fairly small area to cope with. It also limits movements of both staff and students so reduces any potential logistical problems."



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In spite of its already huge size the school is geared up to expand further in the new academic year as Milton Keynes closes the last of its middle schools and Stantonbury has a year seven intake for the first time. The change will bring the total pupil numbers to over 2,800 but Noel is convinced that the extra influx can be handled and that Facility will help to maintain the smooth running of the school.

SEN and Document Storage

Because of its situation the school has a high proportion of SEN students, a fact acknowledged in the latest inspection. "The intake is such that it creates special circumstances. All the measurements such as free school meals are high. It is not a prosperous area," Noel said. The school's SEN provision came in for particular praise in the Ofsted report.

It said: "Stantonbury Campus enables students to make good progress in a caring, supportive environment. Examination results are in line with national averages and students' achievements are well above those in schools with similar intakes. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with low prior attainment make especially good progress.

"The wide range of students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive outstanding provision and achieve well as a result, as do those for whom English is an additional language."

Stantonbury uses Facility from Serco and has found a novel way of using the document storage option to support SEN work. In addition to all the standard data SEN students have their individual education plan attached to their record as a pdf document so all members of staff have access to the information, not just the SEN teachers.

"It acts as a repository of information available to everyone, whereas before they would have had to find and consult paper records. We're now looking at it across the school for any documents that are sent out to parents.

"It dramatically reduces the workload for our SEN teachers in preparing reports for individual students and I believe that, once documents are routinely stored right across our communications with students, it will be a real benefit."

As part of its success the school has worked with Serco to improve the future development of the SEN section of Facility so that other schools can benefit from Stantonbury's experience.

A new approach to curriculum

It is only to be expected in such an unusual school that the approach to education would also be very different. “The principal feels that the National Curriculum can exclude some students and he’s working towards removing those barriers. He’s introducing a system of ‘rich tasks’ that will make it more exciting and accessible, in keeping with our policy of inclusion,” Noel explained.

Rich tasks are a series of trans-disciplinary projects that students in Key Stage 3 will undertake twice a year while the national curriculum is suspended. The trans-disciplinary studies will allow students to shape their own learning from a range of possibilities. For six weeks previous to each session the relevant National Curriculum topics for the project will be studied in detail to give students the best grounding for their personal work. One of the outcomes for the rich tasks is that students must present their work in a “performance of understanding”. The first rich task will be called Staying Alive and will involve all faculty areas. The development work has been supported by the Innovations Unit of the DfES.

“It will give an opportunity to students to study something they have chosen outside the constraints of the national curriculum. IT will be critical to the scheme’s success, not just for e-learning resources but also for tracking what the students are doing and what they achieve through it,” Noel said.

Facility’s part in running the school

Noel acknowledges that running a school of Stantonbury’s size effectively would be extremely difficult without a proper management system. “Because we’re a very large institution and because we’re committed to equal value we have to know a lot about every student.

“We need a comprehensive system to handle the data and we have to have the confidence that we’ve got the data available. Through ePortal we can gather everything we need in one place and it makes it instantly accessible.

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