

## Blog 2 – Transition course Corelli College

The second transition course I assisted with was a lot larger than the first. 41 students had registered to take part, but unfortunately only 25 turned up. This was a great shame as a lot of effort had gone into planning and organising the week, with more qualified Speech and Language Therapists (SALTs) and volunteers in attendance. Initially, the pupils had been split into groups based on ability; however these had to be rearranged to accommodate the smaller numbers.

The format involved the groups of children taking lessons in different classrooms in a large secondary school. This gave them the opportunity to learn how to navigate a school building without being surrounded by all of the pupils. The first activity involved the students playing an introductory game, where they had to find out information about each other, e.g. who has the same number of siblings as me? Initially, they needed to be coaxed into action, but that may just have been because it was a Monday morning! It was a good team building exercise, as the more confident students asked questions of their peers, who in turn understood the activity more clearly and asked more questions themselves.

Other classes involved learning how to plan and organise homework, which is a new skill for the students. It is important that they learn to write down what work needs to be done, so they don't forget it and parents and carers can help keep track of everything. Reinforcing and revising what has been accomplished during the school day is vital to assess long term comprehension and independent learning skills. However, everyone does need free time to relax, play and spend time with friends and family, so the students were asked to plan an evening slot for their work which still gave them time to do all the other things 11 year olds do.

Listening is a key skill for the classroom, so the students were tasked with performing roleplays to demonstrate "good" and "bad" listening. Some students thrived with this type of activity, whereas inevitably, others felt intimidated. The roleplays are useful as they can highlight the listening skills being discussed and also provide valuable experience for presentations in high school, even if the students do not always enjoy taking part.

At break time, the students played outside. It was heartening to see that some groups did not require any adult assistance and set up their own games, while others sat around and chatted. The volunteers set up a game of Uno, which helped the quieter students to feel more involved and make friends, which is a vitally important part of school life.

The next day the students started working on wordsearches in small groups. From my perspective, this was an interesting activity to observe as it gave an insight into the student's cognitive processes. Some students found it difficult to locate the words on the grid, possibly because they could not work out a logical systematic approach or because they did not have enough time. Others did not recognise words which one would expect them to know, e.g. "registration" and "attendance". So even though they could appear chatty and confident, there could be a lack of deeper understanding, which needs to be addressed.

Then we learnt about the hierarchy of a secondary school, as some job titles would be new to the students, e.g. deputy head. This was a practical skill as the students found out to whom they should speak about a particular problem. We discussed strangers and people you can trust for help, with

the students offering a variety of options. One student's alarming examples of strangers were "paedophiles" and "stalkers". These terms are unhelpful when offering practical advice to young people, but it is a reminder that you cannot completely shield young people from wider discussions in the outside world. Although we need to be aware of safeguarding issues and provide necessary support when required.

In order to help combat fatigue and anxiety we did an exercise called "How does my engine run?". The students had to recognise emotions in various photos and whether the person in question was running "too fast", "too slow" or "just right". Once this was identified, they were given strategies on how to cope, relax or energise themselves. They responded well to this task and gained practical skills such as keeping hydrated, eating crunchy food to wake them up and using fidget spinners or other toys to help them concentrate.

In order to help the students feel confident about travelling to their new school, we did map work tasks. We walked down the street near the school and had to find what was missing from the maps provided to the students, e.g. street names or a post box. The students located the missing items, but were somewhat distracted by their surroundings, which was to be expected. In all, they found this task useful and it was stimulating to be out of the classroom – thankfully it was not raining!

The next day I got to work with a different group of students and it was fun to get to know them. To start we looked at friends and talked about where we would position people in our circle of friends, e.g. if a student did not know who lived next door to them, their neighbour would be a stranger and not close to the centre, but if they were friends, their neighbour would be nearer the middle. The students responded well to this and answered appropriately. Another activity revolved around strengths and weaknesses, with the students being required to compile a list of theirs. They seemed to have a good grasp of their capabilities, which is a positive as it shows insight, and understood ways in which an adult could help them.

At lunch, one group set up their own game of Uno without any assistance. This was good to see, as it demonstrated how their peer-relationships and confidence had developed over the week. However, it also meant that they did not need me! So I went to see another group who I thought were in pain, but they were just singing! So for the sake of my hearing, I left them to it. I continued my tour of the playground and another group called me "Sir" which was a new experience for me.

The final class was music therapy, which always goes down well with the children – as long as they can get the instrument that they want. The specialist teachers were excellent at getting everyone involved, working both individually and as a band even if one or two were students put on an over exuberant performance. Hopefully, they can carry this enthusiasm into their new school and pick up an instrument again.

Personally, this was a fun and enlightening week. I got to meet a lot of people who are in the sector and got to pick their brains about their day to day workloads, experiences studying to become SALTs and levels of job satisfaction. As with my previous volunteering, the students are what make the process special and rewarding, it is just a shame that I only got to work with them for a week, as you could see tangible growth and development even in that short space of time. I wish them all the best for the future and hope they feel positive about the opportunities that lie ahead, because with the right targeted support they can go on to achieve great things.