

Most Innovative Special Needs Intervention

TCES Group

TCES is an independent provider of specialist education based in London supporting exceptional neuro diverse children and young people aged 7 to 19 who have special educational needs and disabilities typically associated with autism, social emotional and mental health needs and associated disorders. Most of them will have experienced multiple placement breakdowns and significant trauma, often resulting in behaviour that challenges. On average pupils will have been excluded from other provisions up to three times before reaching us and had significant periods out of education.

TCES pupils learn at one of our four schools or within our Home Learning service; Create Learning and Create Learning Primary support our most complex and vulnerable pupils, with TCES East London and TCES North West London supporting those who are able to access learning within a school environment. When possible, we aim to step children down from Create into one of our main schools. TCES Home Learning offers one-to-one distance or home/community education to children and young people between the ages of 5 to 19 who are out of school currently. This is likely to be due to their refusal to attend school, often linked to mental health and anxiety issues. Since TCES was founded by our CEO Thomas Keaney 21 years ago, we have never permanently excluded a pupil, and since 2018 we have a policy of no fixed term exclusions either.

Independent research (<https://www.tces.org.uk/info/research>) conducted by David Woodger and Caroline Frizell, Goldsmiths University of London in 2019 concluded that TCES' approach, including our refusal to exclude is, 'highly effective in transforming the lives of pupils, educationally, emotionally and socially.' Dame Esther Rantzen, founder of Childline and TCES patron said of the independent research, "We are extremely grateful to the children and young people who took part in this research about whom you will read in the report. Their achievements are conclusive evidence that TCES' approach works, and it works well. I believe that its policy of never permanently excluding, along with other interventions could, and should be used as a template for the educational sector as a whole.

Going above and beyond

Our unique LIFE programme has been developed entirely by TCES to provide a means through which children who often arrive to us disengaged and de-motivated

can achieve, celebrate success and have a timetabled space to think about their dreams, goals and aspirations. Many schools state an ambition to recognise that all children have talents; we go above and beyond by offering tangible opportunities for them to demonstrate those talents including through mentoring others, leading on an Arts or charity project, or gaining specific additional qualifications and skills. We find and support roles, responsibilities and activities that mean we can reflect to each child that they bring value and that they have a place at TCES.

Standing for Leadership, Independence skills, Future options including employment and Empowerment, our LIFE programme delivers authentic inclusion by giving each child a role and responsibility, underpinned by high expectations and support to help them to deliver in those roles. As well as each pupil having two timetabled LIFE lessons each week, the programme is cross-curricular so has an impact right across the school day. For most pupils our LIFE programme provides the very first opportunity they will have had to gain a strengths-based perception of themselves as someone who can lead change, support others and contribute their talents for the benefit of the whole school community.

Our LIFE programme provides pupils with the building blocks of healthy self-esteem. Where possible roles and responsibilities are linked to qualifications so that pupils build up a portfolio of skills and experience to take through their school life and out to college and beyond. At the start of the academic year 2020/21 32 pupils at TCES East London began preparing for English Speaking Board qualifications, including in Debating Skills, Interview Skills and Communicating with others. All have now achieved qualifications; an incredible achievement at any time, but even more so in the midst of a pandemic when many of those pupils were working through feelings of anxiety and upheaval brought about by the global situation.

Our East London school also has five Level 2 trained Peer Mentors, who have timetabled sessions each week with their own mentees. Examples of success in 2020 include Year 10 Mentor 'Barry' who mentors Year 5 'Jolie'. Jolie describes Barry as her 'school brother' and spends most of her school time working in the same classroom as him, which has had led to a marked improvement in her behaviour. Another example of success is Year 14 'Ross' whose mentee in Year 5 is 'Joe'. Having previously been disengaged with Maths, Joe now uses his weekly mentoring session with Ross to complete all his Maths work.

This success is replicated across our TCES North West London school and in our Create services where significant numbers of young people are trained Peer Mentors at Level 2 and provide similar stories of success in the service and support

they offer other pupils. As dedicated Special Schools, TCES has remained open to pupils throughout the pandemic. At the start of the first lockdown in April 2020, seven pupils at TCES East London completed the Anti-Bullying Ambassador Training with The Diana Award. From that point onwards they had specific responsibilities within school for anti-bullying, as well as acting as a point of contact for children who may need to talk about their wellbeing.

This role is an important one in any year but has proved to be particularly vital during the pandemic. Where pupils have had to stay at home for various reasons during lockdown, we have adapted their entitlement to LIFE accordingly. For example, 12-year-old 'George' has continued to develop his independence via cookery and his father sent weekly videos to his tutor at TCES East London so that his progress can continue to be seen and celebrated. An additional skill that we have rehearsed with all pupils during their timetabled LIFE lessons is what to do and who to contact if they are alone in the house with a family member who falls ill with COVID-19.

Evidence of innovation

The Leadership aspect of our LIFE programme in particular has had a meaningful and sustained impact on our TCES schools culture. In 2018 we held our first Leadership week across our group of schools and services. We celebrated the successful transition from our 2017 Student Council team to our new Student Leadership team. We believe that authentic pupil voice and participation is an intervention best utilised with our most disengaged pupils. These are children who have never been considered for roles prior to TCES and at our schools become members of our Student Council, Anti-Bullying Council, Neighbours and Community council and Charity Ambassadors.

The Peer Mentoring programme has developed and grown out of our Group Process, in which pupils and staff alike meet to understand each other's point of view and work to become a cohesive community through supportive dialogue and shared values. Our Peer Mentors are a valued part of the staff team, acting as a bridge between pupils and the wider staff based on their own mentor training and lived experience of how it feels to be a TCES pupil. Our innovation and investment around Peer Mentors mean we have been able to make breakthroughs with children who are all but closed off to adult authority when they join us. The Peer Mentoring programme was introduced in 2020 and as some of those first successful Mentors reached the end of their time with TCES and we could see they had so much more to give to our pupils, we innovated again. In November 2020 we offered our first permanent employee Alumni Learning Mentor role to Nick who is now working at

TCES North West London providing mentoring and using his specialist sports skills to engage mentees.

Our CEO has written about Nick on LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/i-have-promises-keep-thomas-keaney/>) At the start of 2021 we offered our second role to Maison who is a member of our marketing and communications team, alongside his mentoring role at TCES East London. Our CEO wrote about Maison here (<https://www.tces.org.uk/ceo-blog/a-most-gentle-mind>) We are currently exploring apprenticeship opportunities for both Nick and Maison. Our ambition is that Peer Mentoring will continue to provide a pathway to employment with TCES for those pupils who are interested in this route, and our aim is that by 2026 at least a third of suitable roles at TCES will be filled by our alumni. Our HR team has also innovated in response to this development to ensure that we understand and support our neuro diverse pupils, who are now our employees. This has included adapting Maison and Nick's 'All about me' pupil files to a work context so that they continue to receive the supervision and support they need to succeed. Our CEO has written about our vision as a neuro diverse employer here (<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-wont-be-inclusive-until-their-efforts-also-apply-to-staff/>)

Sustainment over two years

LIFE is a firmly embedded programme within TCES, having been launched in 2017 and developed year on year. We continually challenge ourselves to explore and provide additional opportunities based on pupil feedback and our own research based on best practice and meeting new challenges faced by our children. Ofsted inspected TCES East London in July 2018 and reported as follows: "Many pupils lack basic social skills when they join the school. During the time they are at the school, staff successfully teach pupils to become better citizens and make a contribution to wider society. The 'group process' sessions, which all pupils engage in during the week, make a strong contribution to pupils' outstanding personal development." "Pupils speak very highly of the effective support they receive, for instance from the relationship mentoring and leadership and life skills coaching. Many pupils have benefited greatly from a new start.

They learn to manage their feelings and emotions and grow into mature young adults. Some told inspectors they have learned more in this school than in any other they have attended." In 2019 we promoted one of our Inclusion Managers to the company-wide role of Inclusion and Pupil Leadership Manager. One of the responsibilities of this new role is to organise a high-quality Pupil Leadership week in which we celebrate our new cohorts of Level 1 and Level 2 Peer Mentors. We

innovated In November 2019 TCES North West London was one of the first special schools to be inspected under the new Ofsted framework (which focused more closely on how schools develop the whole student).

The school was rated Outstanding and inspectors reported the following in relation to our LIFE programme “Promoting pupils’ social development is a strength of the school. Pupils take on roles of responsibility, such as head girl or boy and membership of the school council. Pupils get involved in fund-raising for charity. Pupils said they like these leadership roles and believe the school listens to their views.” We innovated further in year three of the programme (September 2020) and recruited two LIFE Leads per school and service to oversee the roll out of a wide range of qualifications and leadership opportunities.

These LIFE leads report into their Deputy Head and allocated 1.5 days a week protected time to deliver the programme. This substantial commitment to our LIFE programme ensures that each pupil is supported to become the successful and exceptional leader that we know they can be.