



Woodlands Meed on students careers support

Woodlands Meed, a generic special needs school and college in Burgess Hill for students aged between two and nineteen, achieved [The Quality in Careers Standard](#) in April 2023. Following the assessment, Woodlands Meed School and College (KS3-KS5) has been accredited as "fully meeting all the accreditation criteria, incorporating the Gatsby Benchmarks."

To celebrate this achievement, we interviewed Nola Bennett, Deputy Head Careers and Curriculum Collaboration, regarding the career programme at Woodlands Meed.

Can you start by telling us about your background in careers?

The Gatsby Benchmarks are a framework of eight guidelines that define the best careers provision in secondary schools and colleges and came into effect in 2015 and are part of the government's Careers Strategy. The Careers and Enterprise Company also offer Level 6 training for education staff to achieve an award in Careers Leadership. I was part of the very first cohort to complete this qualification, and this spring boarded work here at Woodlands Meed and the development of the [Meed's Job Club](#)! Woodlands Meed's Career programme is delivered by the Meed's Job Club.

What motivated your decision to work towards The Quality in Careers Standard?

Woodlands Meed has met and maintained all eight Gatsby Benchmarks since autumn 2019. The Meed's Job Club team use Compass + to track our performance against each benchmark and complete an evaluation on a termly basis. We wanted verification to confirm our evaluation was correct. So, we registered to achieve The Quality in Careers Award. We started to compile a portfolio of evidence to be assessed as part of the standard.

In total, it took two years to complete the award. However, the improvement journey doesn't stop once you have achieved the standard. Post-assessment, the assessors recommend further areas for future progression. This adds an extra level of accountability and challenge to continue to develop above and beyond the national benchmarks!

It is worth noting here that, at Woodlands Meed, we receive Jobs Club funding from West Sussex County Council, which makes it possible to commit resources and dedicate staff time to careers education.

How did you celebrate your achievement of the standard?

Mims Davies, MP for Mid Sussex, joined the [Meed's Job Club \(MJC\)](#) team, Careers Governors, students and our headteacher to unveil a plaque celebrating the achievement of the standard (please see adjacent).





In January, only 558 English secondary schools and colleges hold the award, so it makes it particularly special that the work, enthusiasm, and commitment the Meeds Job Club have put into this has been acknowledged.

Why is careers such an important focus at Woodlands Meed?

Approximately only 5% of people with SEND and autistic spectrum conditions are in employment who want to be. This is evidence of a huge disability employment gap, as significant as the gaps linked to gender and age. We believe that, to start addressing this issue, we need to work with pupils from Year 7 onwards to raise their aspirations.

It is also hugely important that we work with employers to break down misconceptions about people with special needs in the workforce. With this intention, the Meeds Job Club is part of several business associations to put pupil's skills and abilities on show. Time is essential to nurturing great relationships and overcoming barriers with local employers. For this reason, we follow a process of gradual involvement when approaching new partner organisations and businesses, starting with first contact talks, and culminating in student meetings, careers fair attendance and work experience placements.

What types of employers do you work with?

We work with employers from a wide variety of sectors – horticulture, catering, computing etc. To this end, we draw on expertise from local support agencies like the Coast to Capitol's SEND Careers Hub.

Ultimately, our careers programme offer has to reflect the diversity of our student's interests and abilities. Our team start exploring the interests of our pupils early using vocational profiles to determine ideal sector pathways to help give us this intel. These vocational profiles are reviewed on an annual basis and can be take forward into life after Woodlands Meet to use with future employers.

