



Belfast Hospital School's experience of using online distance learning to provide accredited learning for students with medical conditions

The context for the use of ICT for Inclusion

At Belfast Hospital School our main aim is to provide education for children who are in hospital or home tuition and for children who are out of school with anxiety-based school refusal (ABSR) and other mental health issues. We work closely with mainstream schools to ensure a successful reintegration to education. We also work closely with multi-agency professionals from both health and education to maximise outcomes for the pupils in our care. We recognise that online learning provides opportunities for children to learn and collaborate in spite of being physically isolated because of their illness.

The policy context

C2k has provided a learning environment for all schools to support the creation and delivery of online learning. Learning NI, which is the current platform, will be replaced by Fronter in 2013.

The use of ICT

Belfast Hospital School uses online learning to deliver units from the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) Employability Skills qualification. This makes learning accessible 24/7 and provides opportunities for children to collaborate with their peers from mainstream school despite being physically isolated because of their illness.

Key outcomes and benefits

This type of learning experience has social and educational benefits for the learners. The project was piloted with children suffering from ABSR and they worked online, collaborating with their peers from mainstream. All of our pupils gained a qualification, while the online contact promoted their self-esteem and confidence and helped them to face the challenge of meeting the group face-to-face. It also encouraged independent learning and developed study, teamwork and ICT skills. We have since delivered an online course on safeguarding to all staff and we are hoping to develop opportunities for online learning by providing an online pastoral care programme.

Main challenges and obstacles

We were hoping to develop this project further, but this has been prevented by the introduction of the Education Network for Northern Ireland. The new learning platform was not made available to schools in September 2012 as originally planned. This changeover has implications for staff training as all stakeholders will have to be re-trained in the new virtual learning environment.

Additional information

www.belfasthospitalschool.org.uk