

The Cam Academy Trust Cabin Model



Introduction

In its core principles The Cam Academy Trust is committed to providing education of the very highest standards to *all* pupils. This can only happen if pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported appropriately so they can make the same progress in their learning as other pupils with similar starting points.

The large and increasing number of young people in our society with autism presents a considerable challenge to our local, regional and national educational system. The Cam Academy Trust's Autistic Spectrum Disorder centres are known as 'Cabins.' They are designed to provide extra support to young people who have high functioning Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC). These are pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which identifies the need for significant additional support to access educational provision, but who, crucially, are cognitively capable of accessing mainstream lessons.

Since the first 'Cabin' was opened at Comberton Village College in 2007, provision has grown from providing for three pupils on one site to over 100 pupils across multiple sites and is now a key strand in Cambridgeshire County Council's Local Offer, as well as serving pupils from neighbouring counties.

The Cabin Model

Since autism is a spectrum and autistic children, like other children, are individuals, some are able to attend mainstream settings with little or no support. Similarly, some autistic children require the small classes and educational environment provided by a special school setting.

Cabins offer an alternative to special school provision for pupils who have found unsupported mainstream education too challenging. The model, developed and refined for over fifteen years, is to remove the barriers that prevent the young autistic person being able to access and benefit from mainstream lessons like their neuro-typical peers. Cabin pupils are supported to attend lessons and to develop the independence and skills they will need to successfully integrate into adult life. They learn how to understand and work alongside the full range of other pupils. This model allows them to grow into adulthood with the same expectations as everyone else and meet the challenges of 21st century life.

Typically, Cabin pupils are expected to attend at least 80% of a standard mainstream timetable, with many attending 100%. They will be accompanied by a TA to help support them in both accessing the work and regulating their behaviour in what can be, for them, a challenging environment. The rest of the time is spent in small group or individual work, be that educational, with specialist external services or interventions such as social skills and life skills.

Since children are being supported to attend an appropriate mainstream timetable this model is more expensive than a standard enhanced resource base. However, not only is it significantly cheaper than out of county alternatives such as Gretton, the cost has been kept down and has continued to reduce in real terms. More importantly, the model achieves high academic outcomes, thereby enhancing the future prospects of young children and has been shown to give them the skills they need to take their education further.

Cam Academy Trust – Cabin History



Establishing the Cabin – 2006

In 2006, Cambridgeshire Local Authority agreed with Comberton Village College (CVC) to establish an Enhanced Resource Provision (Base) in a portacabin on the CVC site. The ERP was to be managed and run by LA contracted staff.

The CVC ERB was to be one of two specialist centres; the other was at Witchford. One of the main drivers of this proposal from Brian Gale, the then 'Director of Inclusion', was to 'invest to save' by establishing centres in mainstream schools for 'pupils with Asperger's who are at risk of being placed out of county.' At the time the average price of these placements was £80,000 and so a substantial financial drain on resources. In addition, it was also hoped that these new provisions would free up space at other provisions such as the Harbour school or PRUs where pupils with ASD were being placed.

At this time the cost for this new model was set by the LA at £25,000 per student. Whilst this was high compared with certain Special school places, this is a false comparison given the nature of Cabin provision and it actually represented a very significant saving on the alternative, expensive 'out of county' places, as well as freeing up other spaces. It represents the significant time requirement of the TA support which allows Cabin pupils to attend an inclusive mainstream school where in addition to a high-quality education they will learn how to relate and understand their neuro-typical peer group.

The Cabin opened in 2006, housed in a LA-provided portacabin, with three pupils, supported by two TAs and one 'Teacher in Charge'.

The intervening years – growing facilities

Soon after opening the Cabin experienced severe staffing difficulties. Comberton VC agreed to take over the running of the Cabin from the LA and the first SLA between the two came into force on September 1st 2007.

When CVC became an Academy in January 2011, the SLA was replaced by a contract specifying that the school would provide dedicated resourced accommodation, maintain and meet the costs of heating, lighting and all other facilities, and 'Take the opportunity when the school is undertaking new building work to incorporate the cabin into the main school buildings'. Part of that contract specified that, in addition to the place cost, the school would receive additional funding for each pupil (equivalent to 20hrs TA support) to be used to ensure that the pupil has access to full time support.

As the Cabin pupil numbers increased, the accommodation became less and less appropriate. CVC and the Cabin therefore researched and submitted an EFA grant request and, in 2016, a £1m purpose-built centre with a capacity of 40+ students and staff was opened on the CVC site. As with other Cabin facilities, these have been provided at no cost to the Local Authority.

Demand for Cabin places has continued to grow. Not only does the Cabin at CVC now have over 50 pupils (significantly more than it was designed for) but satellite secondary Cabins have opened at Melbourn VC and St Peter's (currently with around forty pupils between them). In 2020 a primary Cabin 'Cabin Nest' opened at Gamlingay in a purpose-built facility. Within a year it was supporting ten pupils with demand for more. The Cabin at CVC also has a sixth form extension, supporting eighteen additional pupils. Plans are in place to relocate the Cabin satellite at MVC from it's current location (designed for twelve pupils) to one which will accommodate twenty five. In total, the Cabins are supporting over one hundred and twenty young pupils with potential to expand still further.

Funding Changes

In 2007 when CVC took over the running of the Cabin the agreed per unit cost of £18,500 (around £26,000 at today's prices) didn't include TA hours on the pupil statements (these were paid separately). In addition, the LA would continue to provide Education Psychology 3 times per year, CAMHS and a Specialist Teacher for six days per year, as well as being responsible for some other costs later passed to Academies. By 2009 the Cabin funding had increased in line with average increases in per pupil funding to £19,665.

The SLA contract of 2011 reaffirmed that admissions to the Cabin(s) would be separate from main school admissions and that in addition to education Cabins are responsible for providing a range of therapies (including SaLT, OT, Lego Therapy, Music Therapy and Family Support) as appropriate or required in an EHCP.

A significant funding change came in 2014 when, nationally, SEN Statements were replaced by EHCPs. One result of the change was that the E(S)FA decided that Enhanced Resource Bases should be outside the school funding systems and that Central Government would provide the first £10,000 per place, to be 'topped up' by the Local Authority. As far as the Cabin at CVC was concerned it was agreed that the LA 'top up' would cover the 20 hrs TA support, etc at £20,171.20 – the difference being approximately equal to the £10,000 that would be received by the ESFA grant. These arrangements made in 2014 remain the basis from which the Cabin operates, the only subsequent changes being

- In 2020 the ESFA reduced the contribution from £10,000 to £6,000 since pupils are on roll in the associated mainstream school.
- The number of base-funded places has increased from twenty up to fifty places.

Cabin Satellites

As the original Cabin grew in size and attracted pupils from a wider geographical area, the Trust was asked by the Local Authority if it could open additional Cabins in different locations. Cabin Satellites were established at Melbourn VC in September 2017 and St Peter's school in September 2018. The Melbourn site began with four pupils and now has more than 20, whilst St Peter's has grown from two pupils to 19.

As well as providing additional capacity, the two new Cabins centres reduced travel time for pupils and transport costs for the Local Authority. In turn, this supported them in making the case for 'efficient use of public funds' when offering Cabin placements as alternatives to out of county placements. Having three different secondary sites has also opened up a choice of Cabin for some pupils where this is helpful. For example, Melbourn Cabin has gained a reputation for supporting autistic girls.

The most recent Cabin developments have been outside the 11-16 age range. With the opening of Sixth Form and the existing expertise with the Cabin, establishing Cabin provision for 16-18 yr olds was an obvious move and is now supporting 14 students. It is worth noting that whilst some of these have transferred from other Trust Cabins, some are actually accessing Cabin provision for the first time at age 16, having attended other schools

The Cabin had been asked repeatedly if it could do something in Primary Schools by both parents and Case Workers over the years. In 2020 the Cabin Nest provision at Gamlingay Village Primary was established and is now in new purpose-built accommodation (again funded by the Trust at no cost to the Local Authority). In the space of one year, this provision grew to 10 pupils with a number of additional requests for places.

The persistent growth in numbers has led to the Cabin introducing criteria for being 'full' to keep numbers at a manageable level – and it shows no sign of easing. We think it is imperative that we maintain a limit of 3.3% of school population for our Cabins as the number of ASD students in our schools is a challenge for all teachers and other students. Thus, we feel that 3.3% is a tipping point from when the Cabin starts to have a detrimental effect on the learning of others.

