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## Sandy Davies

### Principal Education Links

“We’ve come a long way with our school, but we are part of a bigger picture. I want alternative provision to be recognised and give validation to where young people have come from. People will then assume without question that the young people have had success and overcome difficulty, and have the potential to continue to succeed in future.

I was part of the Playbus circle, from which Community Links was envisioned. Later, one day, Community Links invited me to teach IT in a new group they were starting, for young people on the streets at risk because they had been excluded from school.

Three months into this pilot it hit me. In my teaching career so far exam results had been the focus, now the focus was the young person. Community Links gave me the space to do what was right for these young people, with no constraints. Success then followed. Education Links was born. Steadily we proved its worth and it grew. In 2014 we became an Alternative Provision Free School, chaired by a Community Links Trustee but constitutionally separate. In time we might even become an academies trust; there are other locations needing our standard of alternative provision.

Demand is huge. Today our young people are challenged by being bullied or being a bully, by how to speak, medical conditions like epilepsy, family break-up, drugs, gangs, child protection; violence, weapons and sexual harassment; some are looked after children. Many will tick seven boxes, have seven other agencies involved, and their social workers move on very quickly. Here at Education Links we are the one constant feature in their lives.

Twenty years on from the pilot I am very pleased to be where we are: an Alternative Provision Free School rated Good with Outstanding features. The first, Personal Development and Welfare of young people. That is why we exist. For 230 students through the door last year and our best year for GCSE’s. The second Outstanding feature, Leadership and Management. This gives us the basis to maintain our standard and get better and better.

I see many good stories come through and students revisit us, time and again. They might not always be in top flight jobs but they can be good parents. That has to be the greatest of impacts because, from poor or no parenting for themselves, this breaks the cycle.

Problem solving and idea generation go off the scale here. Responding to needs, managing adversity and steadily proving the case; I want our young people to be proud to be able to say they went to Education Links. I aspire for us to have a place in the education landscape where we stand shoulder to shoulder with other schools. Our journey of Education Links exemplifies the Community Links approach.”

COMMUNITY  
LINKS