



# Gecko Community

*Empower, Inspire, Educate*

Through our work in alternative provision we identified a need for alternative provision that can offer innovative teaching and engagement in therapeutic projects for young people at risk of exclusion or self-exclusion. We support students aged from 11 to 20 who are struggling with mainstream education due to bullying, trauma, mental ill health or other challenges. Our aim is for students to return to full time education, employment or training via a process of collaborative planning, communication and strong relationships with schools, parents and students. Our long term goal is to have a centre in Frome and this is something we hope to achieve in the next few years.

## **How we will achieve this:**

Students are offered a variety of bespoke packages focusing on Community, Wellbeing and Education. Students are empowered by offering a holistic approach that places student wellbeing central to all we do.

**Community.** We believe that a sense of community is vital for the wellbeing of young people and the wider society. Research shows that a positive sense of community enhances educational attainment, improves mental health and builds stronger relationships with family and peer groups. Gecko will achieve this by developing a sense of belonging for students, placing high value on pupil voice and building our community together from the start. We will then expand this and support students to engage with their school community, thereby encouraging a sense of investment, ownership and belonging at school.

**Wellbeing.** Wellbeing goes beyond positive emotional experiences. Gecko will embed wellbeing within the learning environment, placing an emphasis on meaning, sense of purpose and self-realization. The discovery of talents, strengths and capabilities can open up a new world of possibilities for students and research shows that students with high levels of wellbeing have better academic and life outcomes both within school and beyond. It is for this reason that we believe that learning is about far more than academic outcomes.

**Education.** Gecko will use a tried and tested approach utilising a combination of project based learning, negotiated curriculum and online learning with therapeutic strands running throughout this. These allow students to follow a wide field of interests in their learning while mapping to the national curriculum. Students will produce projects and products that contribute toward qualification or certification and radically adapt their learning practice while they learn to re-engage within a classroom environment.

## **Our cohort:**

We work with students aged between 11-20 who:

- Have ADHD
- Are autistic
- Are experiencing anxiety or mental ill health
- Are experiencing or had past experience of bullying and trauma
- Are at risk from exclusion or have self-excluded from mainstream education
- Are diagnosed with medical needs

## **Our offers**

This depends on the student's age, ability and path. Each student will have a different timetable as we fit to their needs and plans. Each offer weaves together wellbeing, community and education. Students are with us for a minimum of a term up to two years.

### **Core provision**

- Students start with Lift Off or a Project for at least half a term.
- Lift Off involves individual online sessions with a teacher, with a twist. The sessions involve the student being immersed in a fictional narrative set in a 14th century castle where they explore the context and interact with a variety of characters. As they do so, they become involved in learning activities that stretch right across the curriculum - from writing diary entries, to designing shields, to researching gender inequality.
- A Project involves a discussion of ideas resulting in the student choosing a project. This could be a coding project and developing a simple game (ICT focus), experimental work (Science), working on a business plan for future self-employment (Maths), or creative writing and finishing with the creation of a story or play (Literature) for example.
- This start allows a gentle re-engagement with learning which follows the student's interests. Activities are negotiated at every stage and learners have agency to follow their interests whilst at the same time core subjects are addressed. These methods adapt to the needs and abilities of each learner and help overcome emotional barriers to learning.
- Students will develop crucial 'soft skills' such as independent working, asking for help, expressing opinions and recovering from setbacks.
- Alongside these weekly online sessions, students have a morning or afternoon of face-to-face wellbeing. These are student led and start very gently with the team member and student getting to know each other. As the student feels able to share, there can then be an exploration of strategies and ideas for managing anxiety and concerns. This includes discussions on mindfulness, growth mindset and neurodiversity.

When a student is ready they progress onto the next phase

- Now that the student has re-engaged with learning and we know their ability level, we look at a suitable level of study. This could be KS3 or KS4 and GCSEs, all subjects are 1:1. GCSE subjects are: Maths, English, Science (this could be combined science or separate sciences) or Computer Science. Other sessions are: cross-curricular projects focused on students' interests to include humanities, PSHEE and creative writing.
- Alongside these subjects, all students continue to be engaged with face-to-face wellbeing for a morning or afternoon a week.
- At this stage, we can start discussing peer led group sessions (max of four students). These are face-to-face sessions in an appropriate location (a park, or cafe) with a familiar member of the team.
- We also offer 1:1 Animal Assisted Activities. This can aid the development of relationships and social interaction whilst relieving anxiety and stress. Young people also get the opportunity to learn new skills and build confidence whilst exploring their own behaviours and emotional wellbeing through observation, discussion and experiential learning.

### **Transition package**

- This involves helping students successfully integrate into new college placements.
- Our team works with all involved parties to help students transition successfully into college, giving them a strong start and reducing the likelihood of absences or leaving.
- This includes regular communication between all involved to boost the student's attendance and engagement. We would attend review meetings/Annual Review meetings where we can promote student voice in meetings.
- Our Wellbeing lead would deliver targeted sessions building the student's resilience and confidence and discuss ideas for supporting any anxiety.

### **Covid-recovery package / Re-engagement package**

- We know some students have become highly anxious and fearful of leaving their homes and attending school. This could be because of Covid or due to other pre-existing factors (e.g. disengagement with school).
- We offer short and long term therapeutic and academic support. A student's timetable fits to their needs and can encompass the most suited sessions for them. This ensures the student doesn't fall further behind their peers and their mental and emotional wellbeing is supported.
- A timetable could be a weekly online wellbeing session and GCSE sessions. This would grow to home visits, then trips into the community and then supported trips to school.

### **Wellbeing package**

- This is for students who are **at risk** of exclusion or self-exclusion. We work alongside the school to support students within their school environment.
- A student would have weekly online or face-to-face sessions with our Wellbeing lead. This would look at key areas where the student needs support.
- This includes regular liaison with a designated point of contact at the school. Our team would work alongside the school to design effective strategies for supporting the student and would phase out our involvement at agreed stages based on the student's progress.
- This can include aspects of other packages which would benefit the student, e.g. two coding sessions a week, Animal Assisted Activities or outdoor activities based on the Forest School philosophy.