

Starting School/Moving On Session Observation

Abbey Park Primary School Halifax

Background

Abbey park Primary School is situated in Illingworth North Halifax; the school is geographically located in the heart of a large estate of social housing. The estate has attracted negative publicity over the last few years in relation to drugs and gang culture, this reputation has impacted unfairly on the school who are actively working to develop a positive image.

The area experiences high unemployment many of the parents of children in the school are young and single, staff in the school feel that a sensitive approach is required to engage young parents who lack the confidence to come through the school doors.

A staff member said;

‘Many of our parents are young, they may not have had a good experience of school themselves and that was not so long ago’

Many of the local parents do not enrol their children prior to the school year starting and will make that decision at the beginning of the autumn term, clearly this makes planning and engagement with parents difficult.

Although the school will not have a children centre building attached on site it enjoys a good relationship with a number of partner agencies. The school is a participant of the ‘Greggs’ the baker’s breakfast club schemes, around 80 children come in early for breakfast every school day.

Many children start the reception class with poor language and speech; this is a key priority area for the school staff.

Planning

Planning for Abbey Park has been a learning experience, originally the school offered parents an afternoon session, but the take up for this was very poor, this was followed by the offer of a morning session which a few parents attended.

The staff felt that a different approach was required and developed the idea of the pamper day.

The Event

All parents were approached by letter and telephone to make a free appointment for a pamper session; they were able to choose from a menu of treatments. A classroom was made available for a café and crèche; refreshments were available all day including a fresh fruit platter. Foundation staff were available to chat and answer questions.

Nine parents had attended by mid afternoon, with the promise of more coming later. Given that some parents are not known yet to the school a follow up pamper day is planned for the parents of all reception children in mid September.

Staff commented that some parents do not want to use the crèche and are not use to leaving their children.

Outcome

The staff at Abbey Park School clearly have some complex issues to work with, for the staff the priorities are developing a trusting relationship with parents and restoring the reputation of the school. The pro active approach of the school in looking for approaches that work for their community is starting to make a difference and there are ambitions to develop a parent's room within school to offer more activities and partnership.