

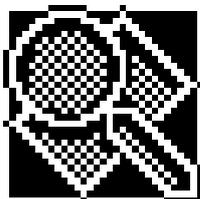
Action on Ethos

Special Educational Needs

This case study describes how Oakbank School developed an ethos strategy which involved the whole school population.

Having agreed their definition of ethos, aspects were constantly reinforced at school assemblies, tutor groups, in the classroom and were written into school policies.

Through consultation and collaboration the pupils and staff have 'ownership' of the school ethos policy and this has encouraged participation and commitment to its continuance.



OAKBANK SCHOOL

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1 Background

Oakbank is a residential and day school catering for sixty adolescent boys and girls with special educational needs. These needs are mainly of a social, emotional and behavioural nature.

Formerly a List 'D' school, Oakbank provides care and education for pupils who have failed within the mainstream education setting (or who have been failed by mainstream education).

The typical Oakbank pupil on admission will be lacking in personal confidence and will demonstrate behaviour relating to low self-esteem. It is common for there to be a history of truancy and exclusion for anti-social behaviour within the classroom setting. They have unhappy memories of their previous, generally unsatisfactory school experiences.

This view of education is the main challenge faced by our multi-disciplinary staff group which comprises social care and teaching staff. Other challenges are:

- how to overcome the pupils' resistance to learning and ensure they achieve success?
- how to create opportunities to allow the teachers to teach?
- how to provide an environment where pupils and staff feel they have ownership of the school's policies and practices?

Some two years ago when we were inspected by HMI questions such as, "Tell us about your ethos indicators?" were not familiar to us. It was clear we had been left behind in some important educational developments. The HMI report subsequently confirmed that we needed to work on this central aspect of our school.

In retrospect, the past two years has been an exciting period where we as a school population (management/staff/pupils) have tackled the recommendations of the report. The commitment of the staff and the involvement of the pupils during this period of hard work saw us become more cohesive, innovative and in the vanguard of current ethos developments.

2 General Aims

These could be summarised as follows:

- reorganising and clarifying the role, function and responsibilities of the senior management team,
- providing the right ethos for effective learning and teaching to take place,
- ensuring there was a balanced curriculum with an appropriate range of core and elective subjects,



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- introduction of curricular choice for pupils and widening of the curriculum,
- development of the "Education for Leisure" programme,
- refurbishment of parts of the school including decorating and carpeting to improve the social areas as requested by pupils,
- introduction of the Educational Tutor role (guidance) to work with the Key Worker (Care Worker) to promote cooperation, collaboration and consultation,
- School Council established comprising staff and pupils and chaired by a pupil,
- introduction of Parents Evenings where the attendance of parents has been very encouraging and has resulted in the setting up of a Parents Association with its own Executive Committee and constitution,
- strengthening the school's external links by establishing a Charities' Committee (staff and pupils) which produced a School Calendar, sponsored by local firms and promoted by our local newspaper (the Evening Express) and with proceeds donated to Voluntary Services, Aberdeen,
- participation in the national schools competition the "Rover Challenge" for which our pupils designed and made a go-cart for use by persons with a physical disability. It was encouraging to be placed third in this competition and the go-cart has now been given to Aberdeen City Council for use by local physical disability organisations.

6 Evaluation

By concentrating on the ethos factors of tone, atmosphere, environment and relationships, the result has been a real cultural change within the management and organisation of Oakbank School.

The benefits have been a more committed staff group and pupils who behave more appropriately and seemed to be generally happier and more content.

By getting the ethos right it provides a setting where more effective learning and teaching can take place. In 1996 the increase in the number of pupils sitting Standard Grade examinations was some 400%. We are on target to enter the same high number of pupils for the examinations in 1997.

7 Summary

In summary, we are not suggesting that we have solved all our difficulties and problems, but as an organisation we are now more effective.

Our task now is to maintain this momentum by constantly ensuring that we nurture the positive ethos which was created through much effort and thought.



Case Study – Number 5
OAKBANK SCHOOL