

NOTE TO THE BULLYING SCRUTINY PANEL FROM SELF MANAGED LEARNING COLLEGE

BACKGROUND

The College has existed for over 13 years and has a record of success. For instance all Year 11 students have gone on to undertake level 2 or level 3 courses at local colleges. We have never had a NEET. Our current group of six Year 11 students also all have college places for level 2/3 courses. Our record of students gaining GCSEs is very good and we are an approved centre for the Arts Award, which many students take in addition to GCSEs.

We are inspected by East Sussex County Council and are an Approved Alternative Education Provider. This year we were re-inspected and were re-approved. We are also part of an educational charity.

Our students have had issues in their lives and/or their education. For example many are currently being treated by CAMHS; most have been bullied in school; most have been assessed as being dyslexic, dyscalculic, dyspraxic or on the Autistic Spectrum and may also have ADHD, social and communication difficulties or Asperger's Syndrome.

We have supported local schools and the work of the Council. For example we have undertaken development work for Falmer High (as was) and Patcham House; we have provided advice to local schools on handling students such as ours (in this term for Hove Park); we have taken on students sent to us by BACA, Patcham High, Hove Park and Varndean. We are continually asked by local schools to take on students and similar requests have come from educational psychologists, social workers and the Virtual School. However lack of resources has meant that we are often unable to meet these requests.

We believe that any educational organisation should be committed to supporting every child in having a fruitful and rewarding experience. Without exception. We also believe that education is a whole person enterprise that must help each young person to be able to lead a good life – now and in the future. The fact that children who have suffered traumas such as bullying have three times the risk of psychosis in adulthood should orient any educational organisation to the elimination of all bullying. Any measure of the effectiveness of a school should include the ability to provide a safe and secure learning environment for every single child.

RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO US

Processes and structures to eliminate bullying. We are convinced of the evidence of the need for human scale structures (we are active members of Human Scale Education). We also believe that to develop individuals to be full citizens of a democracy we need to implement democratic practices. For instance first thing each day and at the end of each morning we have a community meeting where every

person has a voice and is able to raise any issue. The meeting is chaired in rotation by students and staff. Any instances of rule breaking can also be raised by any student with any staff member at any time. We also have at least one meeting each term with both the student and their parent or guardian to discuss anything of relevance.

Every week on a Friday students meet in their learning group of six students and one staff member. The group is a place where each student has time to talk about anything related to their learning and to their time in the College. Students complete a form and use this to talk to. The form asks four questions – what went well this week; what didn't go so well; how did I help the community; what are my plans for next week. The answers to these questions provide the basis for each student to develop their timetable for the next week

The use of community meetings and learning groups is part of a culture of developing a caring learning community where there is mutual support and tolerance. Also when each student arrives they are given help to discuss their previous experiences in education as a basis for both knowing the problems that they have faced and for helping them to move forward in their lives.

Recording. Minutes are taken at every community meeting and if any bullying issue was to be discussed and resolved it would be recorded.

Examples. We have had no instances of bullying this academic year. Last year the only incident was related to an ex-student bullying another ex-student. And by then it was out of our control. The student who committed the bullying had been excluded from the College. Our view of the individual doing the bullying was that he needed help in recognising the need for specific boundaries. From the meeting we had, to conclude our involvement with him, it was clear that the school who had sent him to us, relevant Council officers in education and the boy's foster parents agreed with us that the social worker involved had allowed inappropriate behaviour and had undermined efforts to assist the boy to recognise the need for changes in his behaviour.

The one incident the year before involved experiences that had occurred before the person joined us. A mixed-race girl was badly bullied in a local school and the attacks on her continued after she joined us. The police had been involved in rescuing her because of the levels of physical violence to which she was subject when attempting to come to College. After having had to bring her in in a police car for her own protection the police were in touch with Education Welfare to make the case that, as with other children in the city who have difficulty getting into school, the Council should pay for a taxi for her. This was refused because she was coming to our College and not to a local authority school, even though the police were clear that she was in real physical danger. Now that we have moved premises the problem has been resolved.

During the time that she was experiencing difficulties we worked closely with her grandmother (her legal guardian), and with the student, to make the best arrangements possible for getting her in. This sometimes had to link to the times at which she was getting a bus (assaults on her mainly occurred at bus stops or on the bus). At other times staff were involved in taking her home.

FURTHER INFORMATION

We would be happy to supply further information and to address the other issues that have been identified by the Panel. We would also be happy for anyone to visit us, if they wished.

Professor Ian Cunningham

Chair of the Management Committee

