

**Abbey School
Gathering Feedback Day
22nd November 2017**

APPENDIX		
<p><u>Charter Principles</u></p> <p>KEY THEMES: Positive narratives</p>	<p>Black type – commentary and details observed by the team (focus groups, tour of school, incidental conversations, lesson observations and lunch)</p> <p><i>Green italics – quotes; what parents/carers “said” and wrote (focus group and Survey Monkey)</i></p> <p><i>Blue italics – quotes; what students said (focus group, tour guides, and incidental comments from around school and in the dining hall)</i></p>	
Welcome and Care	Strengths	Areas for development
<p>School is a friendly, welcoming place where positive relationships are made and treasured</p> <p>Students are welcomed into school in the morning by a team of friendly staff whose smiles and warm comments say they are pleased to see them</p> <p>There is recognition of individual need and staff are experienced in nurturing approaches</p>	<p>The Charter Team noted that every student is guaranteed a warm welcome. Staff stand at the door and greet students as they arrive with a smile and a personal comment; they seem to know all the students by name. Students like this and enter the building calmly. They speak to staff with ease and appear relaxed in and by their presence.</p> <p>Despite the number of taxis and minibuses involved, the start and end to the school day appears to operate smoothly and be well managed by all involved, which is helpful for students. Escorts play a valuable part in this and are appreciated. A small number of students are met personally but this appears very flexible and staff only intervene where required. On the whole, students seem happy upon arrival and are very independent considering how young some of them are.</p> <p>Staff know the children well and anticipate potential worries and anxieties. There is a very well-resourced sensory room for those children who may be struggling emotionally and, at the start of the day, time is set aside to allow children who may need some additional settling to access a sensory circuit in the hall before lessons. Later in the day the Charter Team observed a mindfulness session in the sensory room which a small group of students seems to be engaging well with.</p> <p>Many of the children who travel long or</p>	<p>Staff working in the reception area are separated from visitors by a glass screen and at times are some distance away. It can be hard to attract their attention at times and the electronic sign-in system adds to this depersonalised greeting.</p> <p><i>Sometimes the office staff seem really pre occupied and it can feel unwelcoming as a parent visiting school or collecting a child.</i></p>

<p>Parents trust school to not only teach their child but to keep them safe and look after their emotional wellbeing; there is a personal touch that goes beyond</p>	<p>distances or have convoluted journeys have an early start. There is a breakfast club that children can access. Students appeared able to access the breakfast hatch independently and knew where to go afterwards and what to do.</p> <p>Parents told the Charter Team that they were made to feel welcome from their very first contact with the school. They feel comfortable coming into school. There is an open door policy.</p> <p><i>“They wanted to know about my child before they got him.”</i></p> <p><i>“When [name] joined the school we were asked to fill in a form which gave lots of information about us as a family, her likes and dislikes.”</i></p> <p><i>“Can’t fault it, made welcome from day one.”</i></p> <p><i>“Couldn’t be better.”</i></p> <p><i>“You can come into the lessons with the kids.”</i></p> <p><i>“...enjoy coming in.”</i></p>	<p>The Charter Team wondered what systems are in place to welcome new parents and support them to meet other parents and get involved in school. It is acknowledged that families are spread further afield than just Rotherham.</p> <p><i>“I’m new and I don’t know any of the other parents.”</i></p>
<p>School uses innovative approaches to inspire both staff and students/families to work together towards a common purpose and vision</p>	<p><i>“The first time I walked through the door here, it was so warm and welcoming. It’s like coming home.”</i></p> <p><i>The teaching and support staff have friendly faces. My child was greeted on the first day with: “I have been waiting to meet you.”</i></p> <p><i>The school always makes you feel welcome. The staff are polite, always smiling and say you are welcome at any time to come in or contact them by e mail or phone.</i></p> <p><i>Really welcome - we are encouraged to come in as much as we like.</i></p> <p><i>Keeps them safe, looks after my child and their mental health.</i></p> <p><i>Boosts self esteem. Aware of how they are feeling and communicates it with you.</i></p>	

<p>There is an air of fun amongst staff and students</p> <p>It is obvious staff like working at Abbey and feel passionate about being part of #teamabbey</p> <p>Parents and students who may have had previous negative school experiences find comfort in Abbey</p>	<p><i>Trying to cope with her attachment issues...</i></p> <p>Abbey is a good place to work. Staff look after each other as well as students and staff wellbeing is taken seriously. There is great comradery amongst smaller teams which together form #teamabbey. Staff have fun and this is transmitted to the pupils by the way they greet each other, show affection to, and care for the children. Students sense this optimism. Senior managers value every member of the team and their contributions are noticed, valued and publicly celebrated in creative and fun ways (e.g. superhero capes). Team bonding is an intrinsic part of working at Abbey. Recognising and rewarding staff for a job well done is built into systems.</p> <p>There's a flexible approach to try and suit every need.</p> <p><i>"Transition went out of the window. She came in for an hour and that was it, she didn't want to go home!"</i></p> <p>Parents feel that Abbey is a 'special' school which is different and more than its status as a 'special school'. The school's ethos and unique approach and staff approachability is especially appreciated by those families who have had previous poor experience with the education system.</p> <p><i>"It's amazing, unreal and very different."</i></p> <p><i>"Can't praise it enough."</i></p> <p><i>"It gave us our life back."</i></p> <p><i>"She's not looked back since."</i></p> <p><i>For me personally the school are doing brilliant now. They will try and do whatever they can to help and you can see them at any time.</i></p> <p><i>It's a wonderful school I wish I had known about it sooner.</i></p>	<p>When problems do arise: <i>It would be good to have one go to person.</i></p>
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<p>Despite not having a geographical community, families feel that they are part of the Abbey 'family'</p>	<p><i>"I think the good thing about this school is everything."</i></p> <p><i>"I do love Abbey. It's pretty much the best school I've ever been in to in my life... I love every lesson and I think they couldn't even improve it."</i></p> <p>All the parents in the focus group commented on how the school valued them as a family unit, the care extending beyond just their child or young person. Parents, as well as students, feel looked after.</p> <p><i>"On the very first day she [Luci, Head Teacher] said, "Your fight's over now, you're part of our family.""</i></p> <p><i>"Feel part of the community."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm made to feel that it's my school."</i></p> <p><i>"You are part of the family."</i></p> <p><i>"They look after you as a family, not just the child."</i></p> <p><i>"They look after me as well."</i></p>	
<p>Students on the whole love Abbey; they identify relationships as key to feeling happy</p>	<p>As the Charter Team toured around school it was noted that many of the children were very friendly and keen to talk, doing their best to make visitors feel welcome. They are a credit to Abbey and their families. Those students the Team spoke to had positive things to say about their school and identified staff personality as playing an important role in making them feel welcome. Like parents, students find staff to be approachable and, on the whole, students feel that their status is taken seriously and believe that staff care about their welfare.</p> <p><i>"The Head Teacher Mrs Windle is kind."</i></p> <p><i>"...the teachers are really great...I think it's a great school."</i></p> <p><i>"She can be funny" [science teacher]</i></p>	<p>Lunchtimes pose a challenge. The timings of break and lunch are very late in comparison to other settings. Children seemed hungry in the run up to lunchtime, and the children we spoke to told us that the food was not great, in terms of portion sizes and choice. The older students in particular seem to feel strongly that they are not getting the same deal as their mainstream counterparts. The quality of food on offer was poor. Desserts were plentiful, but not collected at the same time as main courses. Popular choices ran out, causing upset to those at the back of the queue.</p> <p><i>"...we don't get enough...just like a little bit more than the little ones. I have more than that at home."</i></p>

Value and Include	Strengths	Areas for development
<p>Diversity is accepted and celebrated</p> <p>Abbey is a place that students are proud to name and be associated with; students feel that they 'belong'</p>	<p>Students understand they may be different and are not ashamed to acknowledge they have difficulties. Staff work hard to motivate and encourage a strong sense of self-belief. As a result, the students we met were keen to tell us that they in no way feel sorry for themselves and firmly believe that they can achieve their goals.</p> <p>Students told the Charter Team, that Abbey School is... <i>“Good and fun...perfect for people with learning difficulties...because you get help with your work when you’re struggling.”</i> <i>“You get more support here.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is indeed a decent [school] for pupils with learning disabilities and other such problems.”</i></p> <p><i>“...don’t let your disabilities stop you...that’s how it makes me feel personally at this school”</i></p> <p><i>“...you know the people are really similar as you...when you come to this school, you’re not the only one.”</i></p> <p><i>“This school makes me feel better...I just feel so special here because, you know, because it’s supposed to make you feel like you belong and I like that; that’s cool.”</i></p>	
<p>School takes great care in providing a broad range of experiences from which the curriculum is then based</p>	<p>It is recognised that writing can be a trigger for many students and provision has been made in every classroom for students to have a choice of preferred position by providing a variety of less formal seating arrangements in addition to desks. Students on the whole were polite and engaged in their lessons and learning; most were working independently. ICT was used to support some young people.</p> <p><i>“You can work freely. You can just work anywhere. In a normal school you’d be strapped at a desk.”</i></p>	<p>Not everyone is a fan of lessons: <i>“I don’t like work.”</i></p> <p>The library was very messy on the day that the Charter Team visited and did not feel like a place where you would want to spend time.</p>

<p>A high quality learning environment has been created by imaginative and immersive displays</p> <p>Staff look for ways to make learning fun and offer students lots of practical hands-on experiences</p>	<p><i>“You know in sixth form, we don’t have to work in one class, we can go in living room, in kitchen, in classroom, or...and also we don’t have to stay in [room]....we can lay out on floor, how you feel comfortable to work.”</i></p> <p>Children in L1 make choices about their learning and access a range of independent tasks as well as teacher-led activities. They can choose whether to be indoors or outdoors.</p> <p>Abbey students are active within their local community and take on enterprise tasks such as selling goods to raise money. They like the responsibility that this brings and enjoy rising to the challenge.</p> <p>The topics seemed popular and the students, were able, described what they were doing with enthusiasm. Each class’ topic was evident from the elaborate classroom displays and decoration which are creative and of very high quality. They help bring the topics to life and make the environment feel fun. Every space is used to provide inspiration and promote positive messages and role models. The Charter Team particularly liked the Dream noticeboard.</p> <p>The students placed a lot of emphasis on how much they value the practical subjects. Cooking and science are particularly popular. The students love baking. Those we saw were all engaged and keen to tell us all about it. They knew what they were doing and were eager to get on! Sport is promoted and one student spoke with enthusiasm about the prospect of going roller skating.</p> <p><i>“Lessons are fun...science is extremely fun. You get to like use Bunsen burners and all that. You don’t just stick to like...er...writing and frame something together, you get to like actually use something what’s a little bit dangerous.”</i></p> <p><i>“Last year we did Coca Cola challenge</i></p>	<p>There were lots of small photographs of important people without explanation on display around school. Our tour guides could not tell us who they were or what the significance was.</p> <p>Parents are keen to see more drama and music within school. When asked the question, is this something you’d like to see more of, the response was unanimous: <i>“Yes, definitely. I’m keeping my fingers crossed that they introduce drama and music back.”</i></p> <p>One student told us the work was too easy and that he wasn’t challenged enough: <i>“I feel out of place, I feel that I shouldn’t be here, the work isn’t challenging enough.”</i></p> <p>Some more able students wonder if they are being stretched enough and want to be more involved in planning their learning</p>
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<p>Students are actively encouraged to pursue their interests and follow their dreams</p>	<p><i>with Mentos. It was proper mint!"</i></p> <p><i>"I liked the other day. You know the other day we had ponies and I really liked that day. Ponies came to our school; they came into our classroom. Real Shetland ones."</i></p> <p><i>"This school has opened up a lot of opportunities for me personally...I know here that if I want to do something the teachers will be fine with it as long as it's within boundaries and the school has the resources to do it."</i></p> <p>School is working with parents to ensure that aspirations are addressed in the most effective way.</p> <p><i>"I had a phone call and [unclear] asked me what did I think school needed to put into place to help [name] achieve her ambition of being an actress."</i></p>	<p><i>"All I know right now is that it's possibly going to become a specialised schedule for me, but I haven't been told any more. The only time I get told anything is when I directly talk to the teachers and bring the subject up itself...I prefer to be informed about anything going on about myself. I trust the school's decisions but I prefer to have a little information at least."</i></p>
<p>Staff notice and reward effort and base this on individual progress so that everyone has the same chance</p>	<p>Students receive frequent rewards in class for good behaviour and work. Student's work is celebrated through frequent use of the school iPads which both staff and students use to record and share what they are doing.</p> <p><i>"Points mean prizes."</i></p> <p><i>"I like playing games and iPad."</i></p> <p><i>"The school has mountain bikes...if you've got a reward...We go on them every Friday afternoon."</i></p> <p><i>"There's always a trip each term."</i></p> <p>Students also understand and like the more formal reward system: <i>"There's a points makes prizes as well. You get so many points, you'll go down and see points room. You get 5 points for your uniform."</i></p>	<p>The behaviour of some students can be extremely hard to manage and this can be distressing for others, particularly if students are seen being positively handled. Not all students understand the rationale behind school's behaviour policy and systems.</p> <p><i>"...the punishment system isn't good enough. It's too soft... Students just walk out of class willy nilly; some just swear and break out... So, I believe, the punishments should be changed so that people accept that if they were to do that on the outside world the repercussions would be great."</i></p>
<p>School is well resourced and it is a fun place to play out</p>	<p>School is well resourced with iPads: <i>"...when you want do some research on a project or work at school and they just let you go on iPads whereas at me old</i></p>	

<p>Abbey is more than just a school; it opens its doors and has a flexible approach to suit families</p>	<p>[Sixth form] <i>"...is good. We're always doing something. We do lesson and... we've got time to do whatever we want. This afternoon we're going to a museum. Also, this morning we've been to the gym."</i></p> <p><i>"You have to do it all independently, like a college."</i></p> <p><i>"I did struggle with me anger for a little bit, but...I don't fit in now at all, but I'm not bothered. I'm happy to stay. I'm going to the sixth form for definite."</i></p> <p>The sixth form annexe has hosted a party, in recognition that the students not only come from all over the local area making it hard to socialise out of school, but also because they may not feel comfortable in traditional public party venues.</p> <p>Parents feel involved and are welcomed and encouraged to join in with their child's learning; it is acknowledged that they know their child best and they are consulted about decisions.</p>	
<p>Parents are included at every stage of their child's journey so that they don't feel left out</p>	<p><i>"You've got a voice...they saw positives in me as a mum."</i></p> <p>There are lots of different events throughout the year that parents are invited to: <i>Classroom days, shows, parents evening, when the students are selling things.</i></p> <p><i>The school has lots of events and parents meeting to share how students are learning and progressing.</i></p> <p><i>My daughter's teacher e mails if there has been any problems with her, i.e. her behaviour, refusing to work. I will be asked for any help for ways of how to cope with her. Also the school arrange days where parents/carers can come into school and see what their child/students are learning and you can help with them.</i></p> <p><i>I think we are included.</i></p>	

Communication	Strengths	Areas for development
<p>Communication is exemplary</p> <p>School keeps families regularly informed and works hard to meet individual need and cover a wide range of preferences</p>	<p>School acknowledges the fact that its families are from all different catchments both within Rotherham and beyond. Staff strive hard to both keep parents who can't come in informed as well as to welcome in those that can so they can find out first hand more about what is going on.</p> <p>All the parents that spoke to the Charter Team told us that communication was exemplary. Parents value how proactive school is in communicating with them. They appreciate that communication takes place by a variety of means: <i>Text / email straight through to the Headteacher whatever time of the day or weekend. Letters, Website, School app, Phone calls.</i></p> <p><i>Text messages informing parent/carers if the school's phone lines are playing up, we are given an alternative way to contact the school e.g. e mail.</i></p> <p><i>Through receiving e mails from my daughter's Teacher.</i></p> <p><i>"There is Twitter and the website. It is reassuring to see stuff all day and the updates."</i></p> <p><i>"You get texts to remind you of coffee mornings or trips."</i></p> <p><i>"There's the school app, newsletters, Twitter."</i></p>	<p>Some parents feel overwhelmed by the range of communication channels: <i>I think sometimes there are too many choices.</i></p>
<p>Senior staff respond to families in need outside normal working hours</p>	<p>Parents were impressed by the speed of response from staff to e-mails and find this reassuring if they have a problem. Those parents who contact either member of the senior leadership team are confident of a response outside school hours.</p> <p><i>"There's always someone on the phone to get back to you."</i></p> <p><i>"They emailed me in the school holidays [to confirm the place] it's very reassuring."</i></p>	<p>Parents expressed concern that there is no one to answer the phone after four o'clock which can be problematic as many of the children do not arrive home till later than this when issues often first become apparent.</p> <p><i>"It is frustrating that there's no one to answer the phone after four."</i></p>

<p>Social media is used well and enables parents to feel a part of their child's learning</p>	<p><i>“School helped me sort out the issue with the buses, they were brilliant.”</i></p> <p><i>They do get back to you as quickly as they can. I have known my daughters Teacher ring me late in the evening.</i></p> <p>The school has a very active Twitter account which helps inform parents of everything including what their child is learning in class. This is particular helpful given that the majority of parents neither live close nor drop off or pick up. One young person was their class Twitter monitor and said their parents found things out via Twitter.</p> <p><i>“There’s always stuff coming through on Twitter. It’s nice because when you ask them what they’ve done at school they say ‘Nowt’.”</i></p> <p><i>“When I first looked at it, it was that reassurance to see that smiley face on Twitter.”</i></p> <p><i>...by putting pictures of the activities the students have done. Praising all the students who have done brilliant and achieved their goals.</i></p> <p>Escorts often help ensure that letters get home safely and are good at knowing what is going on and giving reminders.</p>	<p>There was a concern that not all parents would be able to access every form of social media and one parent asked if Facebook could be used too.</p> <p>The Charter Team loved the website and found it to be very engaging.</p>
<p>Information sharing is improving in light of feedback</p>	<p>There is greater clarity now about important diary dates through posts: <i>Also school term dates and up and coming Parent/Carers meetings.</i></p> <p>There is an acceptance amongst students that you will get to find things out from one source or another and they are confident that they know enough about what is going on.</p> <p><i>“Well my teachers kind of tell me sometimes...but most of the time it’s my friends who tell me and sometimes it’s my parents who tell me.”</i></p> <p>Parents told us that school is moving towards a system whereby each pupil will</p>	<p>Some parents think more reminders would be helpful.</p> <p><i>“They send the diary dates out at the beginning of term but it would help if they sent a reminder and some clarity about what’s happening. We know we’re welcome but sometimes you forget what you’ve said you’ll do.”</i></p> <p>Again, parents would like a key</p>

have a key worker and this is welcomed. Staff value the importance of historic knowledge of families and are particularly aware of the need to pass this knowledge on, as in the case of one member of staff nearing retirement age.

point of contact who they can develop a relationship and liaise with: *Have a Key Worker who knows my daughter and they could be the one who we deal with all the time to have the continuity.*

A concern was expressed that staff who don't have such a close relationship with individual students sometimes do things in a way that can cause anxiety. It was recognised by parents that there are a number of new students but also that an individual's needs and preferences can change very frequently. It is hoped that a way of conveying these preferences and personal idiosyncrasies can be developed to keep staff informed.

"I've suggested a pen portrait which can be regularly updated by ourselves."

"There is a lot of that information on the EHC Plan. Members of the senior management seem to know it. I'm not sure about the TAs."

Partnership	Strengths	Areas for development
<p>School offers opportunities for parents to meet together which provides both a social network and a forum for voicing their views</p>	<p>Parents believe that their contributions are actively welcomed and like that they are not only involved in matters concerning their child but in the life of the school as a whole. Parents are encouraged to visit the school and there is a growing parents group. Coffee mornings are being held and offer a forum for this.</p> <p><i>There is a parents group and a school council.</i></p> <p><i>“You are always welcome to come in.”</i></p> <p><i>“We’ve had some coffee mornings that people can come to.”</i></p> <p><i>“The school’s ethos is that all parents are welcome in school so we don’t really need a parents’ forum.”</i></p> <p><i>“The last one we had was in here and it was packed, there were so many people here.”</i></p>	
<p>School asks parents to help co-produce policies so that they are more meaningful for families</p>	<p>Parents are consulted on matters of school policy: <i>We have regular meetings to discuss how the school is and if they can change anything.</i></p>	<p>Parents told the Charter Team that they have never been asked to help with decision making.</p> <p><i>“We’ve never been asked, have we?”</i></p> <p><i>“We want proper involvement, not just to sell cakes and buns”.</i></p>
<p>Parents are really keen to be involved in the school; there is a desire to help</p> <p>There is a school council which actually makes a difference</p>	<p>Parents have a thirst to help out in a variety of different ways.</p> <p><i>“I help at the Charity Shop, decorating the classes and in the library.”</i></p> <p><i>“They had a Day of the Dead day, a gardening club”</i></p> <p>There is a school council which is active in helping direct and implement change.</p> <p><i>“They ask the kids for club ideas.”</i></p>	<p>One parent is keen to offer school support for some of their more vulnerable students: <i>I would like to help with being able to come to the events which they have at school and be there to watch and have hands on for some of the students who are in care or looked after students who never have anyone to come into school and see what work they have been doing, be at their events.</i></p>

<p>Students are encouraged to take an active role which gives them a great sense of pride in themselves and their school</p>	<p>Students can see evidence that they have been listened to: <i>“I’ve got two of mine [suggestions]. One of them were more bikes.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s our job to help change stuff within the school itself.”</i></p> <p><i>“I came with two proposals...a tally system which is used in like most primary schools...which our classroom has put into effect.”</i></p> <p>Older students are encouraged to take an active role in the running and upkeep of the school by being given positions of responsibility. One sixth former helps out with caretaker duties; others have jobs overseeing things at lunchtime. They have to apply for these jobs and be interviewed. Students in post take their roles very seriously and feel that this gives them a stake in their school.</p> <p><i>“I’m like a TSW.” [Teacher Support Worker?]</i></p> <p><i>“I work as a leader; I work in the hall. I know what I’m doing...I manage the leading team.”</i></p>	<p>Students are keen to have more say in what goes on. For example, they would like to be consulted more about lunchtime clubs.</p> <p><i>“[Student] Involvement is OK, but like not all the time...some of the time it’s just teachers that are getting involved and I think like more students could have their own opinions...some of the pupils get to have their own opinions, but I think most of the time it’s just the teachers.”</i></p>
<p>Governors have a genuine interest and are involved in the life of the school</p>	<p>Governors are encouraged to be linked to classes. Each class has a named governor with their photo displayed outside the classroom.</p>	<p>Neither the students nor the parents who spoke to the Charter Team were sure who the governors were or what they did, although one parent did suggest that having a key parent allocated to each class would be helpful.</p>

Evidence based on:

- Parent/carer focus group with 5 parent/carers
- Two student focus groups with 13 students in total
- Tour of school with 4 student guides (all of whom also attended a focus group)
- Observations of student arrival at the start of the day, lessons, lunch and outdoor play
- Parent/carer comments via Survey Monkey (3 respondents)

Lisa Morris
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7th March 2018