



Abbey School

Charter Summary Report

Initial Gathering Feedback Day – 22nd November 2017

Gathering Feedback Implementation Team

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The report is based on consideration of the following:

Gathering Feedback visit

This involved the following processes:

Parent/carer focus group: this was represented by a small group of 5 parents

Student focus group: this was represented by two groups of 13 students across the full age range, 8 boys and 5 girls, some of whom were on the Student Council. All the students were able to communicate their views verbally

Observations: student arrival at the start of the day, lesson observations and participation, lunch and outdoor play

Guided school tour: this involved 2 boys and 2 girls showing the team around the school; 3 students were Key Stage 3 and 1 was from the sixth form. These students also took part in the student focus group

Informal discussion / initial feedback with school staff: this involved informal discussion with Luci Windle (Head Teacher) and Wayne Askham (Deputy Head Teacher)

Survey Monkey

A questionnaire was posted online which parent/carers are invited to complete. Questions were based around the four Charter principles and followed the same format as those put to the focus groups. There were 3 respondents.

Please refer to the Appendix for the evidence base which informs this summary report. The Appendix includes narrative themes and quotes from parents / carers and students as well as observations made by members of the Gathering Feedback Implementation (Charter) Team. The evidence is a 'snapshot' of a one day visit and provides a base from which the school staff team can reflect and further identify strengths and areas for development.

Overview

Abbey School is a special school for pupils aged 4-18 years with a range of needs, including moderate, specific and severe learning difficulties; autism spectrum disorder; speech, language and communication difficulties; sensory impairments; and





Rotherham Charter

social, emotional and mental health needs. All the students have either a Statement of Special Educational Need or an Education and Health Care (EHC) Plan.

Abbey School is set in beautiful surroundings. The journey through country fields to the building helps bring a sense of calm and quiet expectation as well as a feeling of excitement. Once inside, the elaborate displays and creative way in which the classrooms have been decorated to match the class topic make it feel fun. The Charter Team enjoyed their visit and were struck by the enthusiasm and energy of staff. Students who the Charter Team spoke to presented as confident young people who were keen to talk about their school and did so with a sense of obvious pride. The Charter Team also met a small number of parent/carers who shared their views about Abbey. The following impressions are a result of all the data gathered. They are listed under the four Charter principles.

Page | 2

Charter Strengths to Celebrate

Welcome and Care

A lot of effort is put into Welcome and Care. It is acknowledged that some families have had negative school experiences prior to their child/young person being placed at Abbey School; many have battled. Staff work hard to break down barriers and engage families who, for whatever reason, may previously have been 'hard to reach'. There is a good system in place to support transition which works as parents feel that they are welcome from the start and students seem, on the whole, to settle in quickly. Importance is placed on students enjoying the whole school experience. There is a big emphasis on ensuring a positive start to the day.

- ★ School is a friendly, welcoming place where positive relationships are made and treasured
- ★ 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
- ★ There is recognition of individual need and staff are experienced in nurturing approaches
- ★ 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
- ★ School uses innovative approaches to inspire both staff and students/families to work together towards a common purpose and vision
- ★ There is an air of fun amongst staff and students
- ★ It is obvious staff like working at Abbey and feel passionate about being part of #teamabbey
- ★ Parents and students who may have had previous negative school experiences find comfort in Abbey
- ★ Despite not having a geographical community, families feel that they are part of the Abbey 'family'





Rotherham Charter

- ★ Students on the whole love Abbey; they identify relationships as key to feeling happy
- ★ There is a sense of family loyalty, particularly prevalent amongst the older students
- ★ School go the extra mile to accommodate young people and their families and meet every need

Page | 3

Suggestions for further discussion and development:

- ★ The reception area and office would benefit from the layout being reconfigured to enable staff to be better able and willing to respond to visitors and ensure everybody receives a warm welcome
- ★ Look again at systems for welcoming and involving new parents/carers – transition documents, personal invitation to informal events, buddying up with volunteer parents, etc.
- ★ Identify key workers for families (see also Communication section)
- ★ Lunchtimes – consider the environment, timetabling, organisation, staffing and food. Teaching staff could take it in turns to have lunch with the children. The tables could be presented more attractively. There could be a special table set once a week where students who have received an award can sit and be served. Students could be encouraged to take greater responsibility for clearing away their tables. Alternative seating areas around the outside of the dining hall could be created for older students who want a greater level of independence. Music could be played

Value and Include

Parents strongly believe that school is special in more than name only. Everyone is included without judgement or prejudice. Students are encouraged to be acceptant of difference and demonstrate that they are tolerant and have empathy. There is an ethos that students should not feel held back by their learning difficulties or individual disability. School listens to what makes students happy and, wherever possible, tries to provide opportunities that will please everyone.

- ★ Diversity is accepted and celebrated
- ★ Abbey is a place that students are proud to name and be associated with; students feel that they 'belong'
- ★ School takes great care in providing a broad range of experiences from which the curriculum is then based
- ★ A high quality learning environment has been created by imaginative and immersive displays
- ★ Staff look for ways to make learning fun and offer students lots of practical hands-on experiences





Rotherham Charter

- ★ Students are actively encouraged to pursue their interests and follow their dreams
- ★ Staff notice and reward effort and base this on individual progress so that everyone has the same chance
- ★ School is well resourced and it is a fun place to play out
- ★ School tries to compensate for the lack of after school clubs due to transport issues by cramming lots of activities into lunchtimes
- ★ Students look forward to sixth form and want to stay on
- ★ Abbey is more than just a school; it opens its doors and has a flexible approach to suit families
- ★ Parents are included at every stage of their child's journey so that they don't feel left out

Page | 4

Suggestions for further discussion and development:

- ★ Simple labels and captions would be helpful on photos displayed around school
- ★ Consider expanding the curriculum to include more drama, music and other creative subjects such as dance; specialist teachers or staff with particular skills and experience should guarantee high quality teaching so that students excel
- ★ Ensure that students who may be gifted and talented in certain areas are stretched – include them in decision making; forge links with mainstream providers where possible so that students have a comprehensive range of courses, specialist teaching and exam options available to them
- ★ The Charter Team wondered if students are exposed to a range of alternative options post-16 and are encouraged and supported to look at other providers which may offer courses to suit their individual skill sets
- ★ Encourage links with local businesses who can offer work placements and other supported opportunities
- ★ Think about a behaviour system review – consult with students (see also Partnership)
- ★ Is school able to make use of parents with particular talents or interests so that they can share this knowledge and experience with the students?
- ★ Look at ways in which the library area can be improved (see also Partnership)
- ★ Redevelop, maintain and keep on top of the garden areas (see also Partnership)
- ★ More use could be made of the outside space for outdoor learning and forest school type activities

Communication

Communication, typically an area of weakness for many great schools, stands out as one of Abbey's biggest strengths. Parents like that there are a range of different options available to them and love the fact that they receive frequent positive and uplifting messages and insights into what their children are doing. Students trust that they will get to find out what is going on through some means. Parents in the main





Rotherham Charter

are confident that if they contact school they will receive a response no matter what time of day. This is very reassuring for parents and helps issues from escalating. Parents trust that they can ask school for help on any matter.

Page | 5

- ★ Communication is exemplary
- ★ School keeps families regularly informed and works hard to meet individual need and cover a wide range of preferences
- ★ Senior staff respond to families in need outside normal working hours
- ★ Social media is used well and enables parents to feel a part of their child's learning
- ★ Information sharing is improving in light of feedback

Suggestions for further discussion and development:

- ★ There is too much choice - ask parents/carers to specify their preferred method of communication
- ★ Think about ways of enabling parent/carers to speak to someone after school; offer a time limited telephone surgery for calls up to 5 minutes long, and next day contact those that require follow up or those unable to get through
- ★ Facebook – consult with parents; set up a Facebook page or inform them of the reasons behind not doing so
- ★ Offer parents training on how to access social media as well as internet safety advice so that they can impose safeguards for their children/young people
- ★ Provide space for parents who do not have access to the internet to have time to do so when visiting school
- ★ Students could be more involved in sharing school news through taking responsibility for a newsletter or blog
- ★ School website - assess how much of the information is accessible to Abbey students and their families. The language is complicated in places and quick movement of text off screen does not allow much time to read and digest the written content (Speakup can help)
- ★ Reminders of useful dates would be helpful
- ★ Finish developing the key worker system across school so that families have a first point of contact and someone with whom they and their child can develop a relationship and rely on to share information
- ★ In conjunction with students and families produce pen portraits which are routinely shared and regularly updated
- ★ Have parents been consulted on and contributed to a recent behaviour policy review?

Partnership

Parents/carers are invited in and relationships with school staff and between parents are strengthened through informal events such as coffee mornings. Parents are





signposted to support, where necessary, and there are good links with Rotherham Parent Carer Forum. As a result there is a growing parents' group and, through this, parents are becoming involved with school in a number of different ways, from both attending events hosted by the school to actually taking on roles and partnership working. Students feel that their views are taken seriously. Both parents and students are keen to be even more involved.

- ★ School offers opportunities for parents to meet together which provides both a social network and a forum for voicing their views
- ★ School asks parents to help co-produce policies so that they are more meaningful for families
- ★ Parents are really keen to be involved in the school; there is a desire to help
- ★ There is a school council which actually makes a difference
- ★ Students are encouraged to take an active role which gives them a great sense of pride in themselves and their school
- ★ Governors have a genuine interest and are involved in the life of the school

Suggestions for further discussion and development:

- ★ Consider ways in which parents can be even more involved in decision making - could new ideas be put on the parents' group agenda? How could a virtual suggestion box best be achieved?
- ★ Give parents/carers feedback: 'You said - We did' format
- ★ Ask parents in what ways they would like to offer specific help. Provide a list of possible options, e.g. helping out in the library, listening to readers, supporting vulnerable children; offer training and support where necessary;
- ★ It might help if students are involved in helping jointly negotiate class rules at the start of each year
- ★ Students would also like to contribute to discussions around class and school rewards and the management of behaviour in general
- ★ Ask students to think about how they would like the library to look and work for them; get them to design it and help make any changes, enlist support and appoint library monitors who can share responsibility for the organisation and upkeep
- ★ Review the lunchtime clubs on offer with students
- ★ Utilise parents who have a talent they could share with students, e.g. baking, knitting, sewing, go-cart making, meccano, Lego, origami, gardening, chess, cards, etc.
- ★ Get parents to help sort and maintain the garden beds and outdoor areas
- ★ See what skills, goodwill and resources can be harnessed from both families and the local community to help drive projects forward and keep costs down





Rotherham Charter

- ★ Parent coffee morning can work especially well if they are built around doing something informal to help the children, e.g. wrapping presents, making resources, helping with admin, planning fundraising events, etc.
- ★ Does Abbey run informal family learning days perhaps based around a coffee morning?
- ★ Some schools have run community cafés half termly which are purely a resource for parents and the wider community. See Charter Team for further details
- ★ Students do not appear to have any say in either choosing or help create the amazing classroom display to go with their class topics. Could they have more input?
- ★ It would be nice to see more work on the walls alongside the many decorative features to give students a sense of ownership as well as to reward their efforts
- ★ Introduce governors and consider identifying a key parent contact for each class, a 'Class Charter Champion'

Page | 7

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7th March 2018

