

Visit to Abbey Manor College - 14 January 2019

Present: Councillors Luke Sorba, Liz Johnston-Franklin, John Paschoud, Caroline Kalu, Coral Howard, Monsignor Rotheron, Emma Aye-Kumi

Meeting with Heather Johnston (head teacher)

About Abbey Manor College

1. Abbey Manor College (AMC) is the borough's Pupil Referral Unit, where the majority of permanently excluded pupils spend part of their secondary education. The College is split across two sites: KS3 (Y7-9) is housed in the former dining rooms of a Victorian workhouse in Ladywell, while KS4 (Y10&11) occupies a former retirement home in Lee. Despite being modified, neither building is well-suited to use as a school, and they each present challenges.
2. The KS4 site in Lee is very small, with tiny classrooms that can only take up to 6-8 pupils, which makes timetabling challenging. It has no sports hall. Corridors are narrow and movement around the school needs close supervision to avoid bumping and tensions arising over encroachment of personal space.
3. The KS3 building in Ladywell has a vaulted roof which creates an echo chamber. Every sound reverberates around the school building, giving the impression that it is a lot rowdier than it actually is. It has no outside space. Students make occasional use of a nearby sports hall, and of the Youth First provided portacabins at the Ladywell Fields Adventure Playground. Under the floor there is asbestos which means the entire building flooring will need to be replaced. The head teacher advised that this work will most certainly be carried out during term time due to the extensive amount of time it will take.
4. Both buildings have high maintenance costs as they have been heavily modified to provide the facilities needed to operate as a school.
5. When the current head teacher took up post approximately 18 months ago, she made a number of changes. Previously, AMC used a college model, with pupils of all ages split across both sites. Now the two key stages are on different sites, wear uniform, have a wider curriculum offer that now puts them on a level with their peers in mainstream. An assessment hub has been created and intervention room to accommodate the wider needs of those with SEN.

Students

6. Black boys are the highest represented group at AMC, and the school reports that the number of girls on the roll is increasing. Currently around 50% of AMC students are female.
7. AMC receives Pupil Premium for all of its students, and child hunger and poor nutrition are prevalent. The school provides free breakfast - cereal, toast, fruit – as well as bagels and fruit at break time, and a hot lunch. School uniform is free and

trainers are not allowed. The school has a bank for hygiene products. A significant number of students have Child Protection or Child in Need plans, and the College currently has 9 Looked After Children on the roll.

8. Students join the school at different times throughout the year. The school operates an assessment hub where students' individual needs are assessed including Speech and Language, dyslexia, Ed Psych, past progress. The school also does a family genogram. Pupils have access to the school nurse, dentist, and PHSE support particularly around staying safe. There is the equivalent of a full time school counsellor at the school.
9. In some cases the screening indicates that a student should go straight back into mainstream education. In most cases the screening highlights a number of complex needs that AMC needs to address.
10. On the whole, the school reports a positive relationship with children's social care. Students at AMC tend to be at the top of the hierarchy of needs, and therefore they find that children's social care is responsive. However, turnover of social workers can present challenges.

Working with families

11. AMC has done a lot of work to improve its relationships with parents, including the introduction of parent evenings which have been well attended. Generally, parents do care about their child's education but often have high levels of dysfunction which make it difficult to be able to support appropriately due to domestic violence, mental illness etc.
12. The school has a strict behaviour policy and parents are called in where behaviour falls far below the required standard, for example in the event of a fight. AMC uses a whole school approach to behaviour management ("Ready, Respectful, Safe") with layers of consequence.

Curriculum

13. The curriculum at KS3 mirrors mainstream school. Subjects offered include English, Maths, Science, Humanities, Sport, and Hospitality. At KS4 students complete 2x vocational qualifications in Y10. In Year 11 they undertake GCSE English, Maths, 2 x vocational subjects e.g. catering, IT, health and social care, sport, construction, and one High Project Qualification (HPQ) this is a GCSE equivalent that can be done on any subject.
14. KS4 students work towards 5- 7 GCSEs or equivalent, which - if they are successful - is sufficient to gain access to mainstream 6th Form or Further Education College.
15. Last year, 100% of students achieved level 1-9. Some 26% achieved level 4 and above, compared with 4% nationally (PRUs), and 59% (mainstream).
16. In addition to teaching the curriculum, the school teaches social and emotional skills.

Attendance

17. Attendance is above average for a PRU, at 85% including authorised absences. The College currently employs 2 attendance officers. This figure is unlikely to improve as it includes some non-attendees. Punctuality is important to the school and the sanction for lateness is detention.

Reintegration

18. KS3 operates as a revolving door, aiming to support students back into mainstream as soon as possible. For many students, this approach is successful, but some – around 26 students last year - do transition to the school's KS4 campus.
19. Students that are excluded in KS4 are harder to get back into mainstream. Often they have been excluded for involvements in gangs, knives etc. Secondary schools follow different curricula and use different exam boards and therefore most KS4 students stay at Abbey Manor until the end of Y11, sitting their GCSEs at AMC.

Budget

20. Budget cuts continue to threaten current staffing levels. The school receives ~~per~~ place funding of £10,000 per place from the High Needs Block, which is top sliced from the Dedicated Schools Grant, plus an additional £14,000 top up per place from the local authority. The budget is based on funding for 160 children – last year pupil numbers ranged from 120 in September to 212 by the end of the academic year.

Ambassadors

21. Members of the committee shared lunch with some KS4 students who had been appointed ambassadors of the school. All spoke positively about AMC and their futures, and had clear plans of what they wanted to do post-16.