

Visit to Myatt Garden Primary School - 17 January 2019

Present: Councillors Luke Sorba, Octavia Holland, Jacq Paschoud, Monsignor Nicholas Rothon, Emma Aye-Kumi - Scrutiny Manager, Oraine MacDonald – Pastoral Care and Learning Support Manager (PCLSM), Elaine Dempsey – SENCo and Designated Safeguarding Lead, Sally Williams – Head Teacher

About the school

1. Myatt Garden Primary school is a 2-form entry community primary school in Brockley. The school reports that the demographic of the school is changing, with up to 40% of pupils towards the top of the school eligible for Pupil Premium, and significantly lower levels in the infant school. 2018/19 is the first year that the school has not been oversubscribed. Suggested reasons for the drop in applications include the general drop in demand for primary places, other nearby schools increasing their intake, Brexit causing families to return to their home countries. The school continues to enjoy a good reputation in the local community and, following a recent Ofsted inspection, retained its 'Good' rating.
2. The school building is unusual. It was built as a community school with no internal partitions or corridors. Partitions have been installed to create classrooms. The lack of corridors has the upside of making all learning open and visible.
3. Class teachers have a good relationship with the Pastoral care/ SENCo team, and meet regularly to discuss progress and challenges.

Relationship building

4. The school focuses on building relationships with families. The ethos of the school is to commit to the child as an individual. School uniform is not compulsory. The school aims to provide consistency, love and care to all children. Learning is individualized according to the needs of each student.
5. Home visits are made to all Nursery and Reception children. Families starting Reception are offered an individual 30 minute meeting with the head teacher to start building the home-school relationship. The head sees the relationship between school and parents as critical – she described it as a 7-8 year relationship and which benefits from early investment of time.
6. Key points made about relationship building with families:
 1. Having a strong relationship before a crisis happens is “money in the bank”.
 2. The parent and child always need to have a voice.
 3. Keep focus on the child and not what the parents have or have not done. This helps focus on the shared goal of nurturing the child.
 4. The school has only ever experienced 1 or 2 families that would not engage at all with the school. Families, regardless of their challenges, generally want to engage with the school to benefit their child’s journey.
 5. Where things go wrong, the school’s approach is to “repair, restore and go again”.

SEN/ SEMH

7. There are 8 children with EHCPs currently on the roll at Myatt Garden, and another 2-3 being monitored and /or waiting to be assessed. The profile of children receiving SEN support is varied, with approximately 3-4 children in each class. None of the EHCPs relate to physical disability. The multi-level school site is not suitable for children with mobility needs.
8. The school reported experiencing a backlog with the Educational Psychology element of EHC Needs assessments, with a couple of children having to wait more than the 20 weeks for initial assessment. There have been a couple of cases where school have had to request an increase in the banding level. One parent sought mediation to resolve this issue. Children with SEMH needs are often the most complex, especially when Children's Social Care are involved.

Transition

9. The SENCo and PCLSM attend transition day at Kaleidoscope, and arrange extra visits to schools for the children that will need additional support around secondary transition.
10. The head was confident that the school gives good quality information around transition, but reported that some secondary schools do not always act on that information until much further down the line, once problems have arisen. The head sees relationships as critical to a successful transition as the environment at secondary school is quite different to primary. Children have a 'safe' person at primary but without this familiar support can struggle at secondary.
11. When asked what could be put in place at secondary school to aid transition, the following suggestions were put to the committee:
 - All secondary children having house classroom/ tutor base with multi age registration
 - Keeping form teacher for more subjects
 - Primary school retaining links with struggling children do they have a go-to person with an established relationship, who knows their challenges
 - Secondary transfer day in April/ May is too long before September. Could do a Team Around the Family (TAF) in early September with the primary and secondary school, so both are accountable for any actions arising and jointly responsible for helping the child to settle
 - Parental involvement is key, but there is naturally less contact with parents at secondary school as children usually take themselves to and from school.
 - Secondary schools benefit where joint working with the family is established early.

Children's Social Care

12. The school currently has no Looked After Children. The school has a relatively large number of adoptive parents – 11 families at one point. The head believes this is due in part to the inclusive nature of the school and a larger than average proportion of same sex couples. Families are often signposted to the school because of its reputation as understanding attachment needs, and offering support in this area. The school has an adoptive parents' group who meet regularly.
13. There are a number of children with Child Protection/ Child in Need plans in the school, and the school works closely with Children's Social Care.

Outreach/ support services/ other agencies

14. Funding is a big challenge for all schools. The support services bought in are very good. These include a link Educational Psychologist, specialist teachers from the Specific Learning Difficulties Team, sensory team and ASD outreach team. There is an increasing demand for provision for children with SEMH, with this demand having to be met out of borough.
15. The threshold for CAMHS is high. Staff reported witnessing self-harm, aggression, refusal to comply with instructions, damage to property, risk-taking behaviour – but due to other factors, noticeably domestic abuse where the child still has contact with the perpetrator of the abuse, CAMHS is not able to be involved. This includes some children who have been talking about death or suicide.

Behaviour management

16. Committee members were provided with a copy of the school's behaviour policy and a quick-refer sheet of interventions and positive strategies to try (Appendix A3).
17. The school does its best to avoid excluding children, and the consistent and positive reinforcement of rules and behaviour expectations enable children to make positive choices. When mistakes are made, children are supported to reflect and consider what harm may have been caused, what needs to be done to make amends and how to make better choice moving forward. Occasionally, when children are presenting with challenging behaviours, a fixed term exclusion will be considered as the most appropriate response. These are rare. Ultimately, the most effective tool in helping children manage their behaviour is the certainty that any misbehaviour will be followed through by an adult. It is this certainty that keeps children safe.