



Rotherham Charter

Brinsworth Whitehill Primary School

Charter Summary Report

Initial Gathering Feedback Day - 30th November 2015

Guided tour of school – 18th February 2016

Page | 1

Gathering Feedback Implementation Team

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Background

Brinsworth Whitehill is a large two form entry primary school comprising a Foundation Stage Unit and ten classes. When last inspected by Ofsted in March 2015 it was judged to be 'a school that requires improvement' in every category except for the 'behaviour and safety of pupils' which was rated as 'good'. This appreciative enquiry led by the Rotherham Charter Implementation Team was designed to uncover and highlight areas of excellence to help recognise many of the wonderful practices, some old and some new, taking place on a daily basis in school. In total, twenty seven positive themes have been teased out of the narratives, spread across the four Charter principles.

Please refer to the detail in the Appendix for the evidence upon which this report is based. The Appendix includes narrative themes and actual quotes from parents and children as well as observations made by members of the Implementation Team on the initial Gathering Feedback Day and subsequent guided tour of school. This evidence provides a 'snapshot' of our experience and offers a foundation from which the school Charter team can reflect and build. The Implementation Team sense a desire and urgency for self-improvement. This report can be used as part of a broader data gathering exercise whereby school can work together with parents/carers and children to identify further strengths and areas for development and go on to formulate an action plan which can be jointly realised.

Overview

There was some initial confusion, even amongst those parents who attended the focus group about the Rotherham Charter and what it means for school. Despite a display board in the inner entrance hall it is clear that the message about school's endeavour to work together to create an even better future needs to be communicated more widely and more explicitly. Parents are keen to engage, and willing to help teachers, so that the workload is shared. There is a strong belief that the teachers have the children's best interests at heart and want for them the same as they would want for their own children.





Charter Strengths to Celebrate

Welcome and Care

What comes across most vividly is how many of the children used the word 'happy' to describe their school experience. All the children who the team spoke to were overwhelmingly positive, smiley, and spoke enthusiastically about their school. They are excited by the opportunities provided for them and talk eagerly about their learning. The tour guides were a credit to their families and fantastic advocates for Brinsworth Whitehill.

Page | 2

Parents appreciate that the Head Teacher knows the names of every child and feel that this implies real knowledge of, and involvement with, their child as well as a caring attitude. They like the fact that both Mrs Lee (Head Teacher) and Mrs Oxborough (Assistant Head, SENDCo and Foundation Leader) have shared some personal reflections and feel that their experience as parents of primary aged children helps them have a greater empathy and makes them better at carrying out their role. Parents consider Mrs Lee to be genuine and believe that she understands them and wants to do whatever she can to help them and their child. Children perceive Mrs Lee as fair.

Parents who have had children at the school for a while and have seen a change in senior leadership are delighted by the rapid changes which have taken place since Mrs Lee's arrival and report feeling so much more 'comfortable' with things now. They have seen proof that Mrs Lee means business and, in general, have developed trust so that they are willing to accept almost all of her decisions. Within a short space of time parents can already sense a legacy and are hopeful that the school will now enjoy a more settled period where the improvements made can come to full fruition.

Positive themes and areas of excellent practice:

- ✓ The school is full of happy and energetic children
- ✓ Polite and well-mannered children interact well with each other and are proud of their school
- ✓ A true sense of community spirit
- ✓ The school promotes personal relationships which makes children and parents feel at ease
- ✓ Parents have mutual respect for the Head Teacher and she is held in high regard
- ✓ The Head Teacher is amazing and is quickly turning the school around





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- ✓ Positive change is taking place
- ✓ The children love learning new things and enjoy working on creative projects at home to extend their knowledge
- ✓ Playing is nurtured; school is a place where friends are made
- ✓ The PE teaching is of exceptional quality making it a favourite subject area for lots of children
- ✓ The children enjoy being and have a sense of belonging together
- ✓ Children speak with enthusiasm about the wide variety of activities on offer that take into account their skills and interests

Page | 3

Suggestions for further discussion and development:

- The main entrance from the road up to the school door is well concealed. Better signposting would make visitors feel welcome and give them a more positive experience as well as a flavour of the school's ethos. Fresh signs here, at the entrance to the car park, and at other key external points on the building would help create a better impression and serve to give a true indication of the real warmth inside.
- For some parents it seems a massive jump from Foundation to Year 1. It is possible that transition between these two year groups needs to be looked at in more detail. Parents' comments should help formulate practical solutions. [Welcome and Care & Communication]
- Parents would welcome alternative arrangements for those children who find it hard to sit throughout a whole assembly. Parents also appreciate low maintenance personalised intervention strategies such as the provision of fiddle toys for use at these and other times.
- Parents would like staff to look at the less structured times of the school day, such as playtimes and lunch, and see if any improvements can be made so that all children feel cared for and happy.
- Children would like each classroom to have a worry box.
- Children have a wealth of good ideas about what would make school better, many suggestions which have already been followed up or passed on to the school council. Some of the more achievable ideas include a cooking club and the provision of optional indoor play.

Value and Include

Children feel involved. Immediately upon entering school the Implementation Team was struck by the subtle uniform differences which denote special roles and





responsibilities. Alongside the more academic subjects, PE is a large feature of the school curriculum and children enjoy a wide range of sports taught by a specialist teacher sourced from Wickersley School & Sports College which they have chosen to fund. Mr Green who heads up this provision is clearly very popular and the children speak about him with fondness. Sport is fun at Brinsworth Whitehill and children see this as one of the main advantages that makes their school stand apart from others. They like the opportunity to try out new sports as well as, for some, being selected to represent their school in inter-school tournaments. Girls feel inspired, supported and confident enough to try a range of different sports, including football. The practice appears to be inclusive, allowing everyone to feel good about their ability.

Children with a variety of different special educational needs (SEN) attend and are successfully integrated into Brinsworth Whitehill, ranging from a child in a wheelchair to a child with a hearing impairment as well as children with learning difficulties and social and emotional and mental health difficulties. Parents are developing greater confidence in the SEN systems. Many however have had poor experiences in the past; some with external agencies, therefore not directly within school's control, and recognise that they need support to help build up renewed trust.

Recently and increasingly the school is making a great effort to meaningfully engage with its Asian community and celebrate the diversity this brings through both formally educating all students about the religion and culture and encouraging Asian parents to share their skills through more informal means such as cooking and craft activities. The school benefits from a rich ethnic mix and families from all backgrounds are made to feel special. School display boards are used to inform and remind children and visitors about this, maps of the world being used to highlight Brinsworth Whitehill's global family roots. Our tour guides represented a wide range of origins and each either knew where the others were from or showed a genuine interest as per school's global learning curriculum.

Positive themes and areas of excellent practice:

- ✓ There is a massive emphasis on celebrating achievement
- ✓ There is an abundance of ways school recognises and rewards children's efforts
- ✓ Parents appreciate the opportunity to regularly join together to celebrate everybody's talents
- ✓ Sport is of central importance and is used to promote emotional wellbeing and team work as well as a healthy lifestyle





Rotherham Charter

- ✓ Behaviour is generally good; the children are respectful and this helps create an atmosphere conducive to learning
- ✓ Support for children with special or additional needs is getting better
- ✓ School actively embraces its diverse community and recognises its rich ethnic mix as a strength

Page | 5

Suggestions for further discussion and development:

- Some parents feel that the Platinum award scheme is flawed and that it doesn't allow for enough recognition of the middle band of students who are always conscientious and good. However, all the children who took part in the focus group reported to like the scheme. All had received at least one platinum award and seemed to agree that the award was really special and gave them something to aspire to. They understood sanctions in place and thought that the loss of golden time was fair.
- Children love it when their parents come to celebration assemblies and take great delight when they are witness to them showcasing their work or receiving an award. Perhaps at less frequent intervals an assembly can be planned to help celebrate a particular year group's successes so that parents have knowledge of this date well in advance and more can make alternative arrangements which will allow them to attend.
- Parents and children like the raffle ticket system and think it might have benefit if introduced as standard across all the classes.
- The school needs to explore with families different ways in which they can involve working parents, in particular dads, outside of school hours.
- The SEN process needs to be more explicit in particular with regard to timescales and responsibilities as some parents still find the pace of movement [in terms of providing a higher level of support] slow and frustrating.
- There is more scope to explore what the British Asian community and families of different nationalities can offer/bring to school to help celebrate and promote cultural harmony and understanding.

Communication

Staff, including the Head Teacher, make themselves readily available to parents. In addition to sending letters home via the children which may or not reach families, parents greatly appreciate the time teachers make for face-to-face dialogue as this gives them the opportunity to check out anything they are uncertain or unhappy about. Parents and teachers are on first name terms which is unusual and impressed the Implementation Team. This helps break down barriers and create productive working relationships where parents describe feeling closer to being on equal terms.





Rotherham Charter

This in turn creates mutual trust which is the founding premise of the Rotherham Charter upon which the principles are all based.

Parents of children who find it hard to express their feelings, or choose not to approach an adult for support, know that they can advocate for their child and that their voice will be heard. They are not worried about raising concerns and feel that they will be taken seriously. It is taken for granted that the school has an open door policy. No parent indicated that they felt as if they needed an appointment to speak to a member of staff or that they would have to wait for a length of time before this could happen. In this way, issues can be dealt with promptly before the problem escalates.

Page | 6

Formal communication with families and the different systems at play are, however, a key concern for some parents who seem to be a little confused and find it helpful to rely on/check with each other to make sure that they don't miss anything. Information sharing can seem a bit 'hit and miss' at times and there appears to be a lack of consistency throughout the school, with some class teachers being better than others at communicating news and feeding back on progress. There seems to be agreement amongst parents that the quality of the communication depends on the personal relationship a parent develops with the teacher.

The new vibrant school website, a recent school priority which has been thoughtfully and professionally put together, will no doubt help alleviate some of these issues. It is a fantastic resource which contains a comprehensive overview of the school as well as access to recent letters and links to some superb learning resources that families can access at home to help further promote their children's learning.

Positive themes and areas of excellent practice:

- ✓ Communication with children and families takes a variety of forms to try and suit everyone's needs
- ✓ Parents feel able to approach staff at all levels and give their views
- ✓ Parents and children feel listened to
- ✓ The older children in particular are keen to know what's going on and be kept informed of developments

Suggestions for further discussion and development:

- Some teachers are better than others at communicating with parents both verbally in writing through homework sheets and reading records, etc. Parents appreciate that staff are busy but would like some brief acknowledgement in the form of a smiley face or a signature to indicate their interest/approval.





Rotherham Charter

- Feedback books or home-school diaries are found helpful by those families who appreciate frequent progress updates or need more guidance.
- Parents would welcome some preparation before attending SEN assessments or review meetings in terms of a brief outline of what to expect on the day: agenda, who will be attending, possible outcomes, etc.
- Parents of children in Year 6 with SEN would appreciate greater clarity around transition to secondary school and the support systems available at an earlier stage to alleviate concerns and help them with decision-making.

Page | 7

Partnership

There are plenty of ways in which children can influence decision-making and children of all ages can apply for a place on the school council. The school council is more than just tokenistic, children citing real examples of changes that have taken place and improvements made following suggestions brought to council meetings. As children progress through Brinsworth Whitehill they develop a real sense of pride for their school and many take the opportunity to fill out an application form to be considered for other roles, such as sports leader. Children appreciate the responsibility they are given and treat the role, if selected, or those in the role with great respect. The trust that the school puts in the children serves to create a fantastic working relationship and gives the children controlled practical experience of the real world in a safe and supported environment.

It is acknowledged that change is gradual and in terms of collaborative partnerships with parents/carers it feels as if Brinsworth Whitehill is at the start of something much bigger. Innovative ideas for how to engage hard to reach families and groups were suggested at the initial Rotherham Charter training session by staff who are willing to give up their time to try new things such as curry and quiz nights. All ideas are welcomed and the Head Teacher seems happy to take risks and explore a range of strategies in the hope of finding different formulae that work.

The 'Friends of Whitehill' is a charitable organisation for parents run by parents who are responsible for arranging a whole range of activities and events. They help alleviate some of staff's workload on top of their core hours by volunteering themselves and working to provide the children with richer extra-curricular experiences, in particular at key points in the school/religious calendars, such as Christmas and Eid. They endeavour to capture interest, involve more families, celebrate diversity, have fun and host social functions for the community as well as raising money for the school and offering informal respite through the creation of a friendship network. The key to growing this group and keeping it alive and fresh is numbers. The school is trying hard to promote this group to a wider audience.





Rotherham Charter

Home learning with extended family members is actively encouraged to support topic work. Grandparents and great grandparents loved this year's World War II topic and some got involved in helping build model air raid shelters which were later put on display in the Year 6 classrooms.

Page | 8

Positive themes and areas of excellent practice:

- ✓ The school encourages pupil voice and grows confident young people
- ✓ The children love to be trusted to undertake real responsibilities and be helpful
- ✓ Parents feel that they are on equal terms with staff and that their needs are understood
- ✓ New ideas and initiatives are welcomed and regularly explored

Suggestions for further discussion and development:

- Parents have concerns as well as improvement suggestions that they would like to share, however they would prefer to do this anonymously rather than having to identify themselves which has been a perceived requirement of previous questionnaires.
- The Parents Forum is an ideal medium through which ideas can be passed. Less confident parents feel more comfortable talking to and being supported by other parents. There would be benefits in formalising arrangements and making it explicit who each class's representative is.
- If parents can be encouraged to organise events, fundraising or other, then families, including those hard to reach ones, are more likely to engage.
- The community room can be accessed via a separate entrance and is an excellent venue and local resource for families which, if used to good effect, can help break down barriers that some parents may have about school.
- Parents are keen to learn how to better support their children at home and a few would be interested in attending a range of classes if school were to host them at a convenient time with specific themes. Guest speakers from local support agencies could help attract greater interest.

Lisa Morris
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Charter Implementation Team

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