

Notes from EdPOC visit to Brookfield Adult Education Centre

On 06 March 2013 Members of the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee visited the Brookfield Adult Education Centre to gather evidence for its Major Review into Access to Education for Hillingdon's Vulnerable Children.

Brookfield had been used for just over 1 year to provide pupils, who are nearing 20 school days without a school place, with interim education. On the visit Members were informed that the principles at the Centre were to keep vulnerable children safeguarded, sustain a work ethic and keep up morale.

The classroom

The maximum capacity for Brookfield is 17 pupils but it was noted that, should the facility be at full capacity, the classroom would be extremely full and difficult to manage for the teaching staff. However, on the day of the site visit there were 8 pupils in the classroom, although there were 15 pupils currently on-roll. With this number of pupils the classroom was of a sufficient size. Members were informed that there was currently a one-in-one-out system in place and that there was a waiting list for future places. As of March 2013 there are 10 pupils on the waiting list

Pupils were all provided with laptops on which to work and on the day of the visit were undertaking a project to create a Powerpoint timeline of the life and career of Hugo Chavez. There were also 2 non English speaking pupils working on developing their language skills. Following discussions with staff, it was highlighted that work was limited to projects like this as it proved very difficult to do appropriate group work with the diverse range of students and due to the space constraints in the room.

Members noted that the classroom provided a welcoming and stable environment for vulnerable children.

Staff highlighted that there were some potential safeguarding issues at the site; students were able to leave the facility without consent very easily and there were problems with sharing the space with adult learners. This meant that staff supervision had to be constant but could still lead to students leaving at any time. Problems with children smoking on site were also noted.

The students

Members were informed that the oldest students in the class were Year 10 and were made up of those awaiting a school place, those with exceptional Special Educational Needs and those with English as a foreign language. With regard to the make-up of the students, it was noted that the intake was partly subject to world events and consequent migration to the UK which could be hard to plan for and accommodate.

It was noted that there were a number of students at Brookfield who had been attending for longer than had been hoped for. This was for a variety of reasons. Some of the students had very specific needs which meant that it was not currently possible to place them in a traditional school environment. Others had simply been awaiting a school place for longer than was expected. The average time spent at Brookfield is 6-7 weeks although a small minority of pupils have been there for 3-4 months and 1 pupil has been there for 6 months. Everything is done to keep the turn around short and to prevent places being 'blocked' by pupils straying for too long

It was noted that the illegal off-rolling of students by schools contributed significantly to the number of students at the Centre. In one instance, a child had been without education for a year prior to the Council becoming aware that he/she needed to be found a new school place. Officers emphasised that this could have been due to Academy schools not informing the Council that he/she had been off-rolled. However, in this instance it was not known whether this was the case.

Due to Brookfield taking pupils from all over the Borough, there were some issues with the time that many students had to travel to the site although the site is central with good transport links.

Despite some of the problems that were mentioned, it was emphasised that, if these students were not at Brookfield, they would not be receiving any education at all. Due to this provision, they were being provided with the statutory five days a week of full time education.

The staff

As set out above, the classroom environment was noted to be very welcoming and staff added to this. The staff-student ratio on this day was 1:4 which was noted to be very generous. Staff did not report any issues with being under staffed.

Staff noted that one of the major problems that the students faced was the lack of social interaction that would be found in a more traditional school environment. It was noted that those students who were at Brookfield for longer than expected often lost morale due to this lack of socialising and the feeling of being rejected by the schools they had applied to.