



much more than just a school



01 June 2021

To whom this may be useful to

Park Community School is based in a ward that is in the top 10% deprivation areas and has been for a very long time. Our students are 98% white British and parent's majority working class. The ethos of our school is 'Much More Than Just a School' which means that whilst we will do everything we can for students to achieve the right number of GCSEs we also offer wide ranging opportunities many of them off site. We will shortly be returning, after Covid restrictions are lifted, to being open till 10pm at night and a minimum of 9-6pm at weekends throughout the year, we even open on Christmas Day.

What I want to write about is how partners can aid community cohesion, parental and student buy in to what you are trying to achieve as an educational establishment. One initiative that made significant difference to us and everyone they linked with was called PO9 Pioneers.

The Churches in the area combined to create two posts and they were called PO9 Pioneers. The background of these two individuals was that they were Baptist Ministers. When I was introduced during our first conversation I was concerned that this was going to be about introducing those they were helping to religion. But I couldn't have been more wrong. They brought care, compassion, empathy, counselling, support in many guises, signposting, new ideas and links to those in our community we found as a school hard to engage with.

What has been achieved?

- Were able to provide an invaluable service to both students and staff called Solace. This was individual counselling sessions provided by trained, safeguarded group of volunteers who provided their time regularly to meet, predominantly with our young people.
- Through the PO9 Pioneers we started providing free hot meals (called Munch Meals) to our students and parents during every holiday. This increased to Thursday tea times and Sunday lunches and then Christmas Day Lunch. It was initially to assist with food insecurity, but it was so much more than that. It reduced social isolation, loneliness, helped those with mental health problems, boundary setting for children, signposting information and activities. This programme has raised through donations and funding £250k in the last 4years, and we have secured National Lottery funding to continue this for another 3 years.
- We provided food and activity hampers to those in need, identified by the PO9 Pioneers.

Success for All through Attainment, Resilience and Autonomy

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- Provided Summer Schools and Transition sessions using again a great band of volunteers. This was invaluable to parents who struggled to provide any meaningful activities for their children. The only cost to the school was arts and crafts materials, and even those we managed to get some donated.
- Provided arts and craft sessions for parents. Teaching and pastoral staff would take part as well and this encouraged good dialogue to take place in an informal setting.
- Were able to support parents when they embarked on what for them was very scary, literacy and maths courses.
- Were present at parents' evenings which for many of our parents was a terrifying experience. Nervousness about their own lack of education.
- Supported school trips locally but the most epic trips were to Tanzania. The students that all went came back with fantastic knowledge, empathy, experiences and were able to present to students in school about what it is to value education and to be poor and hungry. Our students had gone thinking their lives were bad and how they hated school and soon realised the importance when the children they met walked miles each day to receive education on a diet of rice.
- They were able to give parenting tips at informal coffee mornings.
- They engaged with some of our most troubled students and it is not an exaggeration to say that they prevented activities that would have been life changing.

What are the benefits of opening your facilities to the community:

- Provide facilities that are safe for your community to pay and use, increasing cohesion, fitness, providing a programme of activities for all ages
- Reduces vandalism to the site as it is always operational
- Brings income into the school
- Gives you opportunities to apply for different sources of funding because you are providing to your community
- Provide paid employment for Students – they are your community assistants looking after your customers giving them valuable life skills
- You become the hub of your community not just a school
- Gives you the opportunity to build a group of volunteers to assist you
- Provides lots of opportunities for students

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