

Case study: The “Open Ear” Policy (The McKee Centre, Fleetwood)

The McKee Centre is a short stay secondary school which works with students that are at risk of permanent exclusion, or who are excluded from their mainstream provision. The centre takes students from ten mainstream secondary schools across the Fylde and Wyre districts.

Why an “open ear” policy?

The wide catchment area and the diverse needs of the families we serve mean that we had to think outside the box regarding our interactions with home.

Many students have had negative experiences of the schools they have attended and their parents have often become disengaged from education.

When a child is referred to us the Pupil Support Officer (PSO) makes the first contact in the family home, providing a simple parent handbook.

All information is discussed on a personal basis, highlighting any support needed by the family, in particular relating to literacy. This process helps to inform school about



the type of home contact that is appropriate to meet the family's needs.

The PSO then arranges a visit to the school to meet the headteacher. Transport is provided for the student and parent or carer if required.

The school's approach is to work in partnership with families, carers and supporters. We work together to overcome any barriers to learning.

Always listening

We seek to make as much personal contact with home as possible throughout the child's time at The McKee Centre because we feel that whole family engagement is crucial to the development of a positive approach to learning.

Every week at least one positive phone call is made home by the student's key worker. This enables families to talk about any issues that may be worrying them. Letters that are sent home are also followed up by a phone call to make sure the message is clear.



Display work on the drama group which parents are invited to join.

Hear me

Parents and carers are encouraged to ring school to inform staff of changes in the child's life. This contact is very important to parents who live many miles away and cannot just pop in for a chat.

Over the last year the school has held three after-school training sessions: an introduction to ICT, plus literacy and numeracy activities.

We have also supported parents with reading documents, form filling and at inter-agency meetings.



Parents and learners beating time together at the African music event

Sound bytes

Parents and carers have been invited into school to share in creative learning experiences. This was a huge step forward for many, as they had previously rarely attended school functions.

Parents were invited to an African music afternoon and an after school drama club. The music event went down very well. Parents enjoyed using percussion instruments alongside their children.



The Headteacher introducing the end of year play to families at a local theatre.

What has happened as a result?

- Parent involvement in school activities increased over two years
- All phone calls home receive responses, when they had previously been ignored
- Inter-agency support has grown because parents see school as supportive
- Parents have taken part in, or been signposted to, adult education



TOP TIPS

- ✓ Make all documentation easy to read and clear to understand
- ✓ Lend them your ears. Sometimes all you need to do is listen