



Wood Green Academy

AND SIXTH FORM CENTRE

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Headteacher: Mr J.Topham B.Sc.(Hons), M.Sc., NPQH

15th February 2023

Dear parent/carer/stakeholder

Thank you for your interest in attending the engagement event on Friday 17th February 2023.

The purpose of the event is to be future focussed and

- talk stakeholders through the review recommendations
- inform you of actions done to date and get feedback
- to engage on future actions and gather new ideas

The meeting will take place at Bescott Stadium, WS1 4SA, in the Mayfair Lounge between 10am – 11am.

Agenda

- Greeting, welcomes and introductions
- Recommendations from the report, actions taken and future actions
- Feedback on actions taken and proposed
- Opportunity for additional ideas for actions relating to the recommendations
- Summary

We look forward to engaging with you on Friday

Many thanks

Mr J Topham
Headteacher

Wood Green Academy

Step Up For Life Lesson 15 November 2022

Review, lessons learned and action

Forward by the Headteacher

Dear Parent, carer, students and members of the whole school community

On 15th November 2022, as part of the school's PSHE/RSHE programme, the school invited an external speaker to present two lessons (one to year 12 and another to year 13 students in the sixth form). Following the lessons, the School received a number of complaints regarding the presentation from parents, from persons within the local community and persons from further afield.

Recognising the division being caused within the school and the wider community, the school commissioned a review by an external and independent team into the events on the day. That team has delivered its report to the school and I am writing to you now to provide you with a copy of the report and a summary of some of the actions which the School has taken in light of issues raised in the report.

The report has been a difficult read for me and the school. The school has decided, nonetheless, to release the report in full (save for appropriate redactions to protect the identity of individuals, including students, which would not be appropriate) in the interests of transparency and to support and promote a meaningful discussion with its students, parents, carers and staff. We recognise that there is much work for us to do, not least in repairing and strengthening relationships across the whole school and the wider community. I firmly believe that we are a great and tolerant school community, with fantastic students and staff who are dedicated and professional. We are wholly committed to working together as a school and to continuous improvement for the benefit of the whole school and the interests of current and future students, parents and carers.

The school values and promotes equality of opportunity and diversity. It aims to prepare students for life in modern Britain and to develop young people's understanding of the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. We accept that errors were made in connection with the lessons on 15th November and how we dealt with the matter immediately afterwards. We recognise that upset has been caused. On behalf of the school, once again I sincerely apologise for this.

What follows is a redacted copy of the external and independent review team's report together with a number of actions that the school has taken in light of the report. Comments and input into our draft action plan will take place on Friday 17th February with all those that can attend the parental engagement event.

I will be in touch regarding how parents that cannot attend this event, can comment and contribute to the action plan

Yours faithfully



Mr J Topham
Headteacher

Progress made to date

In addition to our ongoing communication, review and improvement processes:

1. There have been assemblies for all students and students have been reminded of the existing support structures and processes in place including:
 - a. The On-line “Speak Out” button on the school’s website
 - b. The availability of Student Support Managers
 - c. Provision of CAHMS Counselling support
 - d. Additional in-house counselling services available in school
 - e. Concern boxes have been placed around school
2. There have been student surveys in years 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 & 13. We are taking the next steps to make sure that action plans are finalised, prioritised and implemented. A year 11 student survey is planned.
3. There has been a survey of year 13 parents. Again, we are taking the next steps to make sure that action plans are finalised, prioritised and implemented.
4. There is an ongoing staff survey so that staff can further provide feedback about the school.
5. A Reflection Room has been in operation for students since December 2022.
6. There has been a complete re-structure of student voice:
 - a. Student Voice Listening Ear
 - b. Equality in School Pupils Voice Committee
 - c. Su4L Student Voice Group
7. The Student Voice Group delivered a presentation to SLT on 8th February 2023. Follow-up actions have been agreed.
8. Equality training for SLT and governors is in place, (provided by the National College).
9. All staff have or are in the process of receiving Unconscious Bias training.
10. Cultural diversity days were included as part of our recent PSHE/RSHE Step Up For Life day including team building activities for years 12 and 13.

Wood Green Academy Review December 2022

Report from the Independent Review Team

The Independent Review Team attended Wood Green Academy on Friday 9th December to gather information on the lesson that took place on 15th November 2022. The Review Team considered evidence from a range of sources and interviews with the following:

- The Chair of Governors
- Pupils [REDACTED]
- Teachers [REDACTED]

The purpose of the review was explained at the beginning of each interview and participants were given assurances that the report would be anonymised. Participants were asked if they were happy to proceed and notes were taken. A further meeting took place on Sunday 11th December with representatives of the WGA Parent Group at a local mosque. This was at the request of the group and was attended by two members of the Review Team. Verbal feedback on the Review was delivered to the Head Teacher and Chair of Governors by the Review Team on Microsoft Teams on 14th December, 2022.

Aim of the Review

The aim of the Review was to ensure that a fair and independent assessment of the established facts was undertaken, in respect of the complaints received by stakeholders, and:

- 1.0 to understand the events that led up to the delivery of the lesson and subsequent actions taken by the school in respect of any breach of the school's internal policies and procedures
- 1.1 to consider the effectiveness [REDACTED] of curriculum planning
- 1.2 to identify and explore the impact of the planning and delivery of the PSHE lesson and the issues affecting students that were identified during and after the lesson.
- 1.3 to determine if the lesson was age appropriate, suitable, and politically impartial; and whether or not the need to promote respect and tolerance between people of different faiths and beliefs was applied in practice.

Summary

1. There is clear evidence that there is insufficient awareness and experience to be able to deliver the teaching of controversial issues in a way that is safe for everyone.
2. There has not been close enough oversight of this area of the curriculum to ensure safety and, as a result, the way in which the lesson was planned and delivered has been extremely damaging to relationships within and beyond the school.
3. Although the focus of the Review was on one event, it was clear that it is entangled with other failings in this area over time, leaving some students feeling victimised and/or under-valued.
4. The lack of adequate dialogue and acknowledgement of the harm caused because of this, and earlier sessions, needs to be addressed urgently. The

effectiveness of student voice procedures needs urgent review.

5. There is a need to restore and repair relationships across the school with a strategic approach to addressing the tensions that are still there.
6. The response to the concerns raised before, during and after the session was to deal with them as behavioural issues. In relation to this issue, the school has misunderstood its duties to its pupils and there is a need for an urgent review of the delivery of this area of PSHE/RSHE.
7. Relationships amongst peers is fractured, as a direct result of the way in which this session was planned and delivered. This needs to be addressed with urgency and reassurance given.
8. Children and their families have lost faith in the school's ability to keep their children safe, and many told the Review Team that they had not had a response to concerns raised.

Recommendations:

There is an urgent need to:

1. Repair the relationships that have been damaged as a result of the session, for students, staff, and the wider school community.
2. Review student voice/participation processes and ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to consult effectively, whilst considering the needs of different groups within the school; PHSE co-construction with students should be considered.
3. Review the [REDACTED] delivery of PSHE/RSHE across the school to ensure that there is appropriate oversight and attention paid to the planning and delivery of schemes of work.
4. Seek advice on a response to the WGA Action Group to share the headlines of the Review and to re-establish trust and confidence in the school.
5. Ensure effective coaching/training is put in place for governors and staff to understand the complexities of working equitably in diverse contexts.

Observations from the Review

- The incident on November 15th has led to a great deal of concern, anxiety and upset for young people and staff of all backgrounds and characteristics, and the wider school community.
- There appears to be a view amongst some staff and some students that this was caused by rude and aggressive behaviour by some students, who lacked compassion [REDACTED]
- Senior leaders were clearly concerned about potential behaviour issues, as reflected in the number of staff present during the lesson and in statements given to the Review Team. There is a lack of ownership of the delivery and planning, constructed by the Academy, despite concerns raised by staff and pupils prior to the lesson taking place.
- Concerns raised [REDACTED] as to the nature of the event some days before it took place led to reassurances being given which were then not met.
- A lack of appropriate due diligence being carried out, further consolidated by concerns raised [REDACTED], particularly highlighting the risks suggested by [REDACTED] social media posts [REDACTED]
- Lack of preparation for the session including unclear aims and objectives contributed to a lack of safety. Young people studied topics related to

diversity earlier in the day, but these did not prepare them for the exact nature of the session to come. No ground rules were agreed at the beginning and there was no agreed structure to address any concerns. The goals of the session were not appropriate and there appears to be an apparent asymmetry between the treatment of some [REDACTED] students and others.

- Clear aims and learning outcomes along with appropriate teaching and learning strategies to achieve these were absent. The targets were generalised and a solid understanding of how these might be seen to manifest in a diverse school context was not demonstrated, with no appreciation of the tensions that can exist between protected characteristics or how to manage that.
- Construction of an unsafe environment, which led to many young people being upset, mainly caused by the lack of sufficient planning, lack of clarity of aims, lack of preparation for the young people in relation to the topics being explored, which was delivered to a very large group with no opportunity to reflect on the session afterwards. There was no indication that any follow-up, de-brief or similar post-talk sessions had been considered. The importance of careful and well-structured and scaffolded preparatory discussions in smaller tutor groups in advance of the [REDACTED] session was overlooked.
- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- Relationships for learning are the foundations for creating safe learning environments. They are difficult to maintain in short periods in large groups, where students may encounter and engage with ideas that may be discomforting, particularly when appropriate careful pre- and post- work with trusted tutors who will ensure that the learner is held safely, are missing.
- We heard from [REDACTED] after the event. Parents report not being informed of these events by the school.
- The session was intended by the school to present a life journey outside of a religious context, yet the nature of this means that the religious context would be hard to avoid, and was, indeed, explicitly raised [REDACTED].
- Despite all these concerns, it seems that a reassurance about not mentioning religion [REDACTED] and a previous visit [REDACTED] meant that the session should go ahead. It appears that the only mitigation was the addition of more [REDACTED] staff to the event, which suggests that students with differing views were seen as a behaviour problem: this shows a fundamental flaw in the Academy's approach to addressing sensitive but important issues. It is noted that some colleagues were enabled to have PPA time by [REDACTED] staff being present: however, it is also clear that the additional support of [REDACTED] staff was due to concerns about what might happen during the session.
- [REDACTED] accounts of the session [REDACTED] delivered two years ago directly contradict the information given by [REDACTED] [REDACTED] told the Review Team that the same issues arose in that session too. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] This relates to the wider issues described in more detail below.

- A conflation between promoting respect and tolerance and demanding acceptance [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] students were able to articulate clearly to us [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] This should be reflected moving forward in the role of student voice in the school's response to this Review.
- Students reported that, prior to the event, they all got on well in the sixth form and that all understood the importance of respecting diversity and they felt respected by one another.
- We are alarmed that [REDACTED] it appropriate to address issues [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] in a large group presentation and debate format. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] during the session and it is extremely concerning that this issue was raised with absolutely no opportunity for any pre- or post- discussion.

Wider issues relating to trust and confidence in the school

Although not the subject of this Review, there is a view widely held by many staff and students that the on-going reluctance to provide prayer facilities has led to a sense of students not being valued or listened to, which contributed to the frustration expressed at this event. It should be noted that last year [REDACTED] [REDACTED] – had also caused upset and a concern at a lack of balance in the Academy's provision.

This reflects:

- A lack of clarity as to how the aims set out in documentation lead to detailed lesson plans for PHSE.
- A confusion between preparing young people to interact successfully with a range of people in their future lives with making them feel that their beliefs need to change: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] It is not suggested by this Review that this was the aim, although this cannot be ruled out. However, it is the view of this Review that the lack of clarity over the aim left a vacuum for different interpretations to fill. It is the role of curriculum planning to ensure such vacuums do not exist, that there is clarity and transparency of intentions and proper preparatory activities and planning to ensure that topics can be discussed in a safe way by and for all.
- Ineffective student voice procedures: time invested in student voice, including co-construction of the curriculum, would have contributed to enabling a diversity programme to run successfully; there has been an apparent lack of student voice activities since the event to understand views.

Policy and Practice

There is a lack of clarity over how policy is reflected in applied practice, and both policy and practice appear to be at odds in the context of the incident under review.

The Personal Development Policy states that the 'Step Up4 Life' programme is a way for the Academy to '*actively encourage the following skills; high order questioning skills, understanding another point of view, discussion and debate*'. It is very unclear how this session would have enabled any of these to be developed, especially given the size of audience for the speaker and the absence of any effective preparation or post-session review.

The Policy states that '*all teachers are encouraged to develop a repertoire of flexible, active learning methods*'. This and other aspects of the policy suggest that teachers select from a range of resources. This needs to be reviewed to ensure staff are equipped to provide a safe environment to support students' personal development and that there is a consistency of approach.

Within the RHSE Policy, the 'attitudes and values' which the RHSE provision 'considers' include: '*respect for self and others, same-sex relationships, exploration of moral dilemmas, development of critical thinking, self-confidence, self-esteem and empathy for others*'. There was no clear plan available to the Reviewers as to how this session could possibly have developed these 'attributes and values', despite the topic being linked to an area of relationship education. This again reflects that lack of planning to enable these areas to be explored in a safe environment. The result is that the session has had the direct opposite impact on many young people: the seriousness of that failure cannot be understated.

The Collective Worship and SMSC Policy states that within Step Up4 Life: '*The programme will actively promote the challenging of any student, staff or parent who expresses opinions contrary fundamental British values.*' The Policy does not go on to describe how such 'challenging' should be undertaken. There is an urgent need to review this line of the policy to make clear the nature of what should be challenged and how. This is an opportunity for the Academy to reflect on the way the curriculum can enable students to navigate these issues in a safe and effective way.

Review Team

Professor Deborah Youdell, University of Birmingham
Peter Weir, Washwood Heath Multi-Academy Trust
Razia Butt MBE, Independent Education Adviser

Links to policy documents:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

127. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure that, as part of the requirement for staff to undergo regular updated safeguarding training, including in relation to online safety (paragraph 124) and for children to be taught about safeguarding, including in relation to online safety (paragraph 129), that safeguarding training for staff, including online safety training, is integrated, aligned and considered as part of the whole school or college safeguarding approach and wider staff training and curriculum planning.

128. Whilst considering the above training requirements, governing bodies and proprietors should have regard to the Teachers' Standards which set out the expectation that all teachers manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe educational environment and requires teachers to have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1090195/Relationships_Education_RSE_and_Health_Education.pdf

Religion and belief, including teaching in schools with a religious character

19. A good understanding of pupils' faith backgrounds and positive relationships between the school and local faith communities help to create a constructive context for the teaching of these subjects.

20. In all schools, when teaching these subjects, the religious background of all pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching, so that the topics that are included in the core content in this guidance are appropriately handled. Schools must ensure they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, under which religion or belief are amongst the protected characteristics.

21. All schools may teach about faith perspectives. In particular, schools with a religious character may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships, and balanced debate may take place about issues that are seen as contentious. For example, the school may wish to reflect on faith teachings about certain topics as well as how their faith institutions may support people in matters of relationships and sex.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)

36. In teaching Relationships Education and RSE, schools should ensure that the needs of all pupils are appropriately met, and that all pupils understand the importance of equality and respect. Schools must ensure that they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, (please see *The Equality Act 2010 and schools: Departmental advice*), under which sexual orientation and gender reassignment are amongst the protected characteristics.

37. Schools should ensure that all of their teaching is sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content. At the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach their pupils about LGBT, they should ensure that this content is fully integrated into their programmes of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a stand-alone unit or lesson. Schools are free to determine how they do this, and we expect all pupils to have been taught LGBT content at a timely point as part of this area of the curriculum.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315587/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf

2.9 Excluding the content of the curriculum ensures that schools are free to include a full range of issues, ideas and materials in their syllabus, and to expose pupils to thoughts and ideas of all kinds, however challenging or controversial, without fear of legal challenge based on a protected characteristic. But schools will need to ensure that the way in which issues are taught does not subject individual pupils to discrimination.

2.21 This guidance sets out the position on the extent of the Equality Act only. However, as pointed out already, it must be remembered that schools also have many other duties, including their duty of care to their pupils, and their duty to deliver key areas of the curriculum such as religious education or sex and relationship education.

3.16 The definition of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief does not address discrimination on any other ground (such as race, sex or sexual orientation). The Act does not allow a teacher to discriminate against a pupil because of his own personal religious views about homosexuality or the role of women for example. This is explained more thoroughly later in this chapter, in the section entitled *Sexual Orientation and Religion or Belief* (paragraphs 3.26-3.30)

3.30 Schools with a religious character, like all schools, have a responsibility for the welfare of the children in their care and to adhere to curriculum guidance. It is not the intention of the Equality Act to undermine their position as long as they continue to uphold their responsibilities in these areas. If their beliefs are explained in an appropriate way in an educational context that takes into account existing guidance on the delivery of Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) and Religious Education (RE), then schools should not be acting unlawfully.

3.31 However, if a school conveyed its belief in a way that involved haranguing, harassing or berating a particular pupil or group of pupils then this would be unacceptable in any circumstances and is likely to constitute unlawful discrimination.

3.32 Where individual teachers are concerned, having a view about something does not amount to discrimination. So it should not be unlawful for a teacher in any school to express personal views on sexual orientation provided that it is done in an appropriate manner and context (for example when responding to questions from pupils, or in an RE or Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) lesson). However, it should be remembered that school teachers are in a very influential position and their actions and responsibilities are bound by much wider duties than this legislation. A teacher's ability to express his or her views should not extend to allowing them to discriminate against others.