Oasis

JS visited Oasis and spoke to Julie Pitkin (JP) who oversees the centre. Many of our most vulnerable students access Oasis. Students can come to Oasis before school, at break time and lunchtime or whenever they feel they need support.

The school has provided students with a chill room which provides a very useful quiet space for vulnerable students, particularly those who suffer from panic attacks and anxiety issues. The students have chosen the furniture. The room benefits from a light show and water feature which are designed to distract the mind and aid reflection. Students can talk to staff if they want to or just take time in a quiet environment to reflect.

Students who suffer from anxiety and panic attacks know what to do if they have an attack in public. There are designated safe spaces they can go to such as the chill room or the medical room. The medical room staff liaise closely with Oasis. Safe spaces for such children are extremely important. Students are issued with a time out card for Oasis. If they feel they cannot cope in a particular lesson the classroom teacher will email staff in Oasis and the student will be met by an Oasis staff member.

Students are referred to Oasis. Any member of staff can refer via the pastoral team. There is a discussion with both parent and the student. JP then carries out an assessment which is considered by the Intervention team. The assessment is very much child centred. Child assessment tools are used looking at health, feelings, behaviour. The assessment includes the student choosing three emotions which represent how they feel at school and then three emotions representing how they feel at home. These are then plotted visually on a blob tree. The student chooses different colours to represent home and school. A family tree is created to ascertain what relationships are like at home. A timeline can be useful in establishing if there has been a trigger point for example, if the parents have separated or the family have moved home. The student also completes a series of questions which will provide their self-esteem score and locus score. JP will then feedback to parents and obtain their comments. All the information is collated into an interventions referral form. A decision is then made whether a referral to Oasis would be helpful.

JP stressed the importance of talking through the assessment. JP gave the example of a young carer with a disabled brother who decided to self-harm so she could feel the pain of her brother. Through the assessment process and through talking through the assessment with the student the school was able to uncover the self-harm.

It is important to work with parents. Some parents are closed to the idea of mental health issues. However, with time it is possible to discover common ground and a way forward to help the student. However common ground must be found.

Following assessment, the aim is to put strategies in place that will make the individual students day better. A class mentor could be suggested or extra support provided in English and Maths. Oasis also has professional contacts that they work with such as family solutions, extended schools, Social Care and CAMS. Mary Thomas who assists in Oasis runs a healthy relationships group.

Waves has also been established. It was felt there was a need for those students who chose to stay in the school into sixth form to continue to have access to support. We did not want students getting to sixth form and then not coping. Students can spend their free time here and have the opportunity to talk with JP or a member of her team. They are able to work here in a quiet relaxed environment and they have access to computers. The room has been designed by the students.

JP explained that the work and support provide by Oasis is all about building resilience. This can be measured in a number of ways. There is soft evidence. A student for example deciding not to attend Oasis at break time or paying more attention to their personal appearance and hygiene. A student’s demeanour is often an indicator of improving resilience for example if they are smiling and laughing more. However, impact is also measured by hard data, for example in improved attendance and educational progress and attainment. JS saw data which clearly showed improvements in attendance for those students attending Oasis over a period of time. There was also evidence of improving educational progress and attainment. One student who had been predicted D grades at GCSE progressed so well that she secured 4 B grades and 2 C grades at GCSE and progressed to 6th Form. Some students have very complex needs. One student was sectioned from the school such was the extent of her mental health issues. There was a background of domestic violence and her father had been in prison. She was a selective mute at primary school and self-harmer. Her target Grades were Ds and Es at GCSE. Such was her progress she secured Bs and Cs at GCSE and is now on work experience at a primary school. She attends all her classes. This is evidence of her resilience having been built up through the work of Oasis.

All students have an individual file which details their needs. Their progress in key areas is tracked and recorded such as attendance and educational progress. Grades are tracked every three months. There is a self-esteem score out of 26 and JP would be looking for an improvement in that score over time. JP would also look at a student’s locus control – to what extent they are internalising. If a student’s needs are being met the section would be highlighted in green. Cases are reviewed at the regular safeguarding meetings.

JS then met with three students who attend Oasis. One student explained that if it were not for Oasis she would not be attending school regularly. They all agreed that the help and support provide by the staff had improved their self-confidence. They spoke of the Oasis as being a comfortable safe place for them and how it felt like a family. They explained how the Oasis time out cards meant that if they felt unable to stay in a lesson they could go to Oasis and work there. They felt they worked well in Oasis. One student came to Oasis instead of attending PE. They often came to Oasis first thing in the morning to speak to JP and how if they had had a bad night or had negative thoughts JP made them feel everything was ok. JP always had the time to talk to them and support them. They feel included. One student who was relatively new to the school explained that she had been scared and anxious and unwilling to go to school. However, since having the support of Oasis her attendance and grades had improved and she had a positive attitude to her work. All agreed that Oasis had been a real difference to them.