

Alternative provision academy changes attitudes to learning

By converting to an alternative provision academy the Bridge AP Academy in Hammersmith and Fulham has transformed its reputation.

The secondary AP academy provides full-time education and support for up to 180 students who are not in mainstream schools. They converted on 1 April 2013 and are part of a multi-academy trust.

Headteacher Seamus Oates said:

We were one of the first pupil referral units to convert, and one of the first alternative provision academies to go through an Ofsted inspection in May 2013. We were thrilled to achieve 'outstanding in all areas' along with some highly positive comments.

Changing attitudes

Anyone working in PRUs and AP understands that these establishments often have a poor reputation in the community. They are seen as the final destination for someone who has not succeeded, so learners are often angry when they arrive and parents are disappointed that their children have ended up in alternative provision.

At the Bridge AP Academy we have turned these attitudes around and created a place that learners are proud to be a part of. Parents are proud that they are a part of it too, and they will say so to visitors – and this has improved our reputation in the areas that we serve.

One of the first things we did as an academy was introduce a new uniform, chosen by the students themselves. This also went some way towards changing attitudes.

Rewarding good practice

Students who have failed, or been failed by education, need top quality teachers, instructors, therapists and support staff. I can now recruit and retain such staff by rewarding good practice and offering extra staff benefits, such as a health and wellbeing package, which would have been difficult to do under a local authority.

We're also looking at developing our own pay scales in the future, so that we can recognise outstanding performance.

Improving services

We're now able to do things a lot faster than we could previously. For example, we've brought in a new governance clerking service, and we're also looking at building maintenance, HR, finance support and legal services. Procuring our own services in this way means we can plan for the future.

We would like to be in a position to offer sponsorship to other PRUs and mainstream schools that are looking to develop their systems around behaviour management and therapeutic support for learners.