

WA1: Evaluating “Faraday” Community College’s approach to community cohesion.

Community cohesion is defined as a society “in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities”, “where similar life opportunities are available to all” and where “positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community.” (CLG, 2007) In this report, Faraday’s¹ contribution and approach to achieving community cohesion will be evaluated. In fact, as soon as you enter Faraday, you are greeted by a plaque with the school’s vision; exemplifying its commitment to cohesion²: “To be a part of Faraday Community College is to **transform lives**. Our vision is to embed **ambition** into the life of our community where staff and pupils demonstrate an unrelenting **commitment** to achievement in all its forms...We value and **respect** all members of our school community and recognise the contribution we all make to learning. We’re **united** in this endeavour.”

Faraday is situated in the west side of a city whose unemployment rate was 14% (Nomis, 2013). It is in a deprived neighbourhood where up to 45% of people have no qualifications and up to 18% suffer with long term health problems or disabilities where their day-to-day activities are greatly limited (DataShine, 2011). Furthermore, 35-55% of local residents are economically inactive, meaning they are those “without a job who have not actively sought work in the last four weeks and/or are not available to start work in the next two weeks” (UK National Statistics, 2014).

The school itself is rated “good” having improved from being “satisfactory” previously and prior to that being in special measures. In terms of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs (A*-C) or equivalent, Faraday is 13 percentage points above the national average at 95%. It is a smaller than average secondary school with 876 students³, of which just over 60% are from a White British background. The other major ethnicities present in decreasing order are White Eastern European (14.38%), Indian (6.74%) and Black African (4.57%). Furthermore, according to the most recent Ofsted report (2012), the proportion of students speaking EAL⁴ and students with SEND⁵ are above the national average. The proportion of students eligible for PP (FSM)⁶ is also more than double the national average. Two of the major issues that Faraday faces are persistent absences⁷ of nearly thrice the national average at 11% and poor attainment in Mathematics and English (School Guide, 2014).

On the journey to “outstanding”, the school actively engages with the local community in an effort to foster good relationships and a love of lifelong learning by envisaging itself to be at the heart of the local community. One of the major events that take place in the community is the annual local awards that showcase the strengths of the local area and provide an opportunity to get together. Highly community-centric, the categories for the awards include; Services to the Community, Working with Young People, Workers in the Community and Individual Achievement amongst

¹ Faraday is used as a pseudonym to preserve anonymity of the school and will be referred as such hereafter.

² See Appendix 1

³ See Appendix 2

⁴ English as an Additional Language

⁵ Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

⁶ Pupil Premium, including Free School Meals

⁷ Pupils with 38+ days recorded half day sessions of absence over Autumn and Spring terms

others. Faraday is proud to send not only nominees and subsequent winners to these awards, but the awards are also attended by school “journalists” who interview the other attendees and as such become more aware of the various members of the community. Dr Pain (2005) states that this type of intergenerational talk is “central to sustainable communities” and can bring people closer together.

For a couple of years now, Faraday has also played host to the local community carnival by the use of shared space. Since funding to use the local park was cancelled, Faraday stepped in to ensure that the carnival would still carry on. There are numerous activities, primarily aimed towards the youth, including; fairground rides, talent and sports competitions, various cosplay of children’s favourite TV and Disney characters, stage performances by local dance groups, a DJ workshop, FIFA competition and graffiti boards. As can be seen, there is a plethora of engaging activities that take place on the school grounds. By attracting young families and members of the local community to such an event, the school is also able to indirectly advertise its own facilities to those who may not have considered sending their kids to Faraday. Seeing Faraday as this integral institution in the local community and not an insular entity will no doubt help to bolster links within the community and hopefully recover some of the parents or students who are disengaged or disillusioned. Thereby, this could potentially drive up the poor attendance figures.

According to the school prospectus (2013), the principal wants students “to be excited by their learning in the classroom and beyond.” This carnival that now takes place in the school presents an excellent occasion to highlight some of the local opportunities that are available to students outside of Faraday. Many institutions and local charities are present at the carnival, but I have highlighted one called Streetvibe to briefly discuss. In the context of street dance and music, Streetvibe uses “informal education methods to engage with young people” (Streetvibe, 2014) in both group sessions but also providing one-to-one support too. Since Faraday has issues with attendance, an external, after school group like this is used as a means to re-engage with students, listen to their voice and support them to return back to mainstream education during the day-time.

In keeping with this theme of alternative, vocational, detached education and the overarching theme of community cohesion, I would like to focus on a brand new project, directly led by the principal, which Faraday is running from the coming academic year. Faraday is already home to several allotments that are used to grow organic vegetables including potatoes and carrots. From the following academic year, this will be expanded and also enhanced by the addition of chicken and pigs – thereby creating what is essentially a mini-farm. Currently, the students take part in the growing of vegetables on the allotments and provide produce to four local food banks reaching several hundred families. The allotments are also a really useful asset in terms of engaging with students on the verge of being permanently excluded. The responsibility of looking after the crops, the time and effort spent all contribute to building a set of values in the young students that are transferrable in all avenues of life.

Many schools set up farms initially during the World War II Dig for Victory campaign, and after being on the decline, there has been a recent re-emergence of the school farm. It is estimated that around 60% of schools grow something on their grounds (FCFCG, 2014). Recently, more emphasis has been made on well-rounded education with an appreciation of the outdoors and life after school. Considering the fact that a significant minority of students at Faraday do not excel in the traditional

classroom setting and that out of 164 leavers this year, nearly 50% applied to vocational further education as their first choice (Internal data, 2014), vocational education and real-life experience is highly valued by Faraday students. For this reason, it was decided that the farm project and all the aspects it comprises would be used as an educational resource for vocational qualifications. For example, in constructing the farm, students on the Construction and the Built Environment BTEC course would benefit and in looking after the crops and animals, students of the Hospitality course would benefit. In this manner, the school envisages a project that meets the needs of its students and allows them to achieve the best possible grades they can in the learning environment that most suits them.

Furthermore, as with the allotments themselves, the produce of the farm and the expanded crop gardens will further assist the food banks in the local community and promote cohesion. Parents and members of the community will be able to nurture the crops and in return the school is able to nurture the relationships it has within the community.

Another means through which Faraday promotes community cohesion is with direct links to primary schools in the local area. The relationships are cultivated through various means, of which the foremost is via inter-phase lessons. The language departments hold French days where primary school students come into Faraday to not only experience taster lessons in KS3 French, but also get an insight into secondary school life. In a similar vein to this, the Science department has a Year 5 Science Club to which primary school students attend on a more regular basis to conduct fun experiments. This has the effect of fostering a love of learning, curiosity and the Sciences, but once again allows a link to be made and sustained within the community. These primary schools can then act as feeder schools for Faraday.

To ensure that students with EAL are still able to integrate into the school community, a similar sort of primary engagement project is run by the EAL coordinator at Faraday. The coordinator holds language sessions for the community to allow them to learn English outside of the school and prior to the students starting at Faraday. In this manner, the 25% of current Faraday pupils whose first language is not English may not suffer in mainstream classroom education.

Another innovative manner in which Faraday engages with the local community is the Christmas project. One side to this project is the engagement with local primary schools. Each year, a Year 10 pupil from Faraday attends local primaries dressed as Santa and gives out presents to students. This fun festive activity also engages with the parents as they are aware of Santa's link to Faraday and as such look upon the school more favourably and would be more likely to engage with the school and even send their students to Faraday in the future. The other side to the Christmas project is the charitable aspect. Students from Faraday make small gift parcels with donated items and then arrange and present them to highly deprived members of the local community. This is a great way of fostering cohesion. The intergenerational talk that was mentioned previously could also be tied into this idea to promote greater links with the elderly members of the community too, along with the primary school aged youngsters.

Although, a lot is done by Faraday in terms of community cohesion, more could be done to further improve the relationships it has within the community. For example, the school has four houses in its structure based on the four major roads encompassing the school grounds. The only time the houses seem to be of any relevance is during sports days. However, houses could be constantly

competing with each other, not only on sports, but on their efficacy of community engagements too. Each house could also be potentially be given a particular responsibility on a rota system, including; primary school projects, intergenerational talk, event organisation and/or local journalism. At the end of a four month rotation, each house will have experienced the four responsibilities and they could be ranked on their performance. The school also has fantastic new facilities from a recent £12m renovation and rebuild from the Building Schools for the Future scheme that could be further exploited. The old projectors are already being donated to local primary schools, but the additional ICT facilities could be made available to members of the public since 20% of locals do not have internet access at home (Personal communication, 2014). Furthermore, the kitchen facilities and open meeting/dining area⁸ could be made use of to host public forums where pertinent local issues involving the school could be discussed over light refreshments.

Faraday's commitment to "transform lives" and promote cohesion within the community is strongly displayed in this evaluative report and the strong foundation presented by its vision and mission statement. As a teacher starting at Faraday from the upcoming academic year, I am reassured by the methods of the principal, the Senior Leadership Team, the teachers and the students in what is a united effort in engaging with all members of the local community. There is obviously room for improvement on the road to "outstanding" and beyond, but Faraday Community College is well positioned to address any current and upcoming challenges it may face regarding community cohesion.

References

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⁸ See Appendix 3

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Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Ethnicity breakdown (2013/14)	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Total	Percentage
African Asian	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.11%
Any other Black background	0	2	0	0	0	2	0.23%
Any other ethnic group	6	2	0	1	0	9	1.03%
Any other mixed background	1	3	0	3	2	9	1.03%
Bangladeshi	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.11%
Black - Somali	0	1	2	2	3	8	0.91%
Black Caribbean	0	1	0	2	2	5	0.57%
Chinese	0	1	0	0	2	3	0.34%
Gypsy/Roma	1	2	0	0	0	3	0.34%
Indian	14	7	16	13	9	59	6.74%
Information Not Yet Obtained	0	0	0	0	2	2	0.23%
Other Asian	5	4	1	4	4	18	2.05%
Other Black African	6	11	8	9	6	40	4.57%
Pakistani	0	0	2	1	1	4	0.46%
Refused	0	1	0	2	0	3	0.34%
Traveller of Irish heritage	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.11%
White - British	110	103	110	107	97	527	60.16%
White - Irish	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.11%
White European	19	30	25	28	24	126	14.38%
White Other	2	1	5	4	1	13	1.48%
White and Asian	2	0	3	2	5	12	1.37%
White and Black African	3	2	2	1	4	12	1.37%
White and Black Caribbean	1	6	2	0	8	17	1.94%
Total	171	178	176	180	171	876	

Appendix 3

