Oakwood High School: Creating a sense of belonging for everyone

Aim:

- Work with whole school community to identify areas for improvement.
- Challenge bias and stereotypes through a diverse curriculum.
- Increase staff awareness and confidence around inclusion, inclusive language and challenging non-inclusive language.
- Give students a safe space to discuss issues that are important to them, listen and respond.
- Audit how inclusive the school environment and lessons are by inviting a colleague from within the Trust to do a DEI walk.

Background

Oakwood High School is a diverse secondary school in Rotherham, with over 40 different home languages. It was an industrial area, that is creeping out of the industrial phase, but there is a lot of associated deprivation in the area.

As will be the case in many schools, the school leadership team does not reflect the student community, although the wider staff body is far more representative. Although this is an area that cannot be immediately addressed, Oakwood has recognised this means they need to

> *"work to see through a different lens to create a sense of belonging for everyone, to make sure everyone feels welcome and part of the community, with the same chances moving forward."*

Oakwood started its journey into Diversity, Equity and Inclusion by investing in staff training, sending a member of staff on a training course. They then carried out a whole school staff DEI survey to identify where their gaps were; and then made addressing these an ongoing priority.

> *"We're not going to solve it in a year, it's a long-term process, a culture shift, not just a series of activities"*

Action:
What are students learning…

Diversifying the curriculum is a big task for departments and can appear overwhelming to teachers. To support with this, Oakwood offered training and time to start this process. All departments audited their resources, with a focus on diversity of images. English and History have also assessed their texts for diversity, stereotypes and bias in perspectives.

Raising awareness…

The tutor time and assembly programme provides a structure to recognising, learning about and supporting celebrations of different religious festivals.

Let's talk (and listen)…

Oakwood has started regular 'Let's talk' student sessions, where they give a safe space for students to discuss, learn about and share their opinions about issues around DEI. The first of these sessions was around the influence of Andrew Tate: the session was so popular there wasn't space for all the students to attend. This powerfully demonstrated shutting down the conversation isn't the answer, but instead that students need to be part of the conversation.

Impact

- Stereotypes and bias in students learning is reduced as the school have ensured the curriculum represents people from different backgrounds and presents different viewpoints. This means students are better able to understand peoples diverse backgrounds, and also to see themselves represented in subjects. This can improve their relationships with people throughout their lives, but also broadens their horizons for their future opportunities.
- The school has a clear vision for inclusion, which they have shared with staff and students, making them part of the change. This helps to make everyone in the school community feel valued and welcomed, which can lead to better staff retention and engagement from students.
- Teachers are more confident in inclusive language and in identifying and challenging language that is unacceptable following whole staff training.
- Leadership are embedding a culture of inclusion across the school by allocating staff training time, and also by engaging with ongoing reflection. Although teachers describe the school as inclusive, they have invited external people to view the school through the eyes of different protected characteristics to identify areas for improvement.

    "There is always room for improvement and there's always more we can do."
- Students recognise the power of the individual and of contributing to group and collective actions by having a voice that is listened to and acted on by the school.