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If civil justice were like education, what would the end-of-year report for summer 2014 say? Francesca Kaye takes an alternative look at civil justice performance in the past year

The head was appointed by the governors in October 2012 to drive through change and to realise their vision as part of the government intervention strategy into failing schools. As part of this strategy, Strand Comprehensive converted to academy status at the beginning of the academic year.



The head introduced substantial and innovative changes in April 2013. These included significant changes to policy, rules and discipline, affecting all departments and subjects, including the introduction of new parts of the syllabus in some subject areas.

The headmaster and governors strongly believe that while a robust approach to discipline by staff can improve the overall running of the school, without reinforcement by parents (who pay the school fees and allowances) the pupils' behaviour will not see the dramatic improvements they are committed to delivering.

Discipline

Ongoing concerns about the failure to deliver improvements in discipline led the head to appoint a new senior management team (SMT) whose focus was on discipline and compliance with the new school rules by pupils, staff and parents.

The SMT and the head reviewed the existing position at the beginning of the Michaelmas term. Evidence suggested many pupils, parents and staff had not fully embraced the new approach to discipline and that the full rigour of the new policies on discipline and compliance had not been widely accepted or fully understood.

The SMT provided further guidance on the application of the new school policies to help staff, parents and pupils. A zero tolerance policy was introduced for all but trivial of breaches of the disciplinary code and school rules.

Unfortunately some departments, particularly those involved with international parents, have taken a more laissez-faire approach to discipline. They sought to argue that the loss of international parents and the funding they provide is a risk to the academy. The head and governors have considered this issue but remain convinced the rules should be applied consistently across the entire academy and that the risk of losing international parents is negligible.

However, it has become apparent in recent months that some staff, pupils and parents may have approached the zero tolerance policy over zealously. The school has seen a significant increase in the level of exclusions in the Hilary and Summer terms. These, and the associated appeals to senior management, have had an adverse impact on the time and resources available for other projects, thus diminishing the academy's limited resources.

The head determined a series of appeals with his SMT allowing pupil representative bodies to make submissions about the operation of the zero tolerance policy. The head is concerned that his previous guidance has been misunderstood and misapplied.

New guidance

Staff and pupils have been provided with new guidance. A new three-stage test is to be applied to any breach with a focus on whether the breach complained of was serious or significant rather than 'not trivial'. Staff must remain vigilant as the old lax culture of non-compliance is no longer tolerated.

The head had been disappointed by the opportunistic approach of both pupils and parents to the mistakes of others. It was as unacceptable for pupils and parents to try to take advantage of inadvertent errors as it was for the breaches to occur in the first place. To stamp this out staff will be encouraged to penalise such opportunism.

It is hoped the new guidance will reduce substantially the number of exclusion hearings and appeals when school reopens for the Michaelmas term and that an improved attitude and approach among parents and pupils will finally see the academy achieving its potential.

Maths

The new curriculum introduced in April 2013 has taken time to settle down. Parents, staff and pupils have struggled with some aspects. Pupils have resisted the new focus on openness and cooperation not just with staff but with fellow pupils. This must stop if the curriculum is to reach full potential.

The head believes that in time, as the staff approach to teaching becomes more consistent, and as parents and pupils take a more proportionate and co-operative approach to the new maths syllabus, the academy will see significant improvement in results.

In light of concerns about timetabling, members of staff in the different departments are looking at revised (but consistent) procedures to encourage cooperation and proportionality between pupils in preparing their work. Pupils are encouraged to discuss their work with others in their study group at an earlier stage so that they can submit combined maths papers in time for the seminars. This will result in more effective and shorter seminars. This benefits both staff and pupils.

PHSE

As part of the drive to prepare pupils for the world, the head refocused personal, social and health education (PSHE) on skills necessary to survive in a recession. The focus on budgeting has not yet been wholly successful. While parents continue to supplement pupils, they will not learn to manage on a budget.

Over the summer the head had hoped to announce a cap on pupil allowances to apply to all new pupils joining the school. Although the report he received encouraged a significant reduction in allowances the head had been disappointed by the lack of evidence supporting this conclusion. He believes the allowances need to reflect reliable market evidence. Reluctantly he concluded he could not adopt the proposed new allowance cap at this stage. However, he intends to revisit this issue early in the new term with a view to gathering further evidence so that a new cap on allowances can be implemented as soon as possible.

The current allowances are out of date and have not been rigidly enforced for some time. This has led allowances to increase to unrealistic levels. The head wants to work with parents to ensure pupils are prepared for life outside school, so they can budget their allowances better without parental top-ups if they overspend.

Junior

Over the next 12 months the head will be looking at closer links with junior schools and in particular whether further efficiencies can be achieved. The head is considering whether some topics currently within the academy syllabus can be taught in the junior schools. This would free up academy resources and provide more challenges for pupils, parents and staff in the junior schools. The recently created Strand Junior Academy is already trialling some of these changes.

The head is committed to delivering an Academy that remains respected worldwide, not only for the achievements of its pupils and staff but for being well-disciplined and efficient.



Francesca Kaye is the immediate past president of the [LSLA](#) and partner at Russell-Cooke

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