

# Behind the Scenes at Ark Putney Academy: a parent's view

Behind the Scenes at Ark Putney Academy' is a series of blog posts written by Sarah Sterne, a parent and governor at our school. Sarah writes from a parent's perspective about the challenges in selecting a Secondary School, getting past the jargon of new progress measures and finding the right learning community environment to suit a child's individual needs.

Sarah Sterne has a professional background in Education and Teacher Training. She is a parent of two children currently in Years 5 and 7 in the state education system. Since she has recently been through the process of selecting a secondary school and is about to embark on the process again; she is interested in sharing her experiences with others. Sarah has recently been appointed as a Governor of Ark Putney Academy.

## **Post 2: How to Choose a Secondary School Part 2: Pastoral Care**

### **What is Pastoral Care?**

Since becoming part of the Ark Putney Academy Community, I have become increasingly aware of the very high level of care that is put into place to meet the wider needs of all the students. All Ark Academy Schools emphasise the importance of knowing every child and this has influenced APA's approach to Pastoral Care.

The National Association of Pastoral Care (1) explains that Pastoral includes teaching individuals to grow in their self-esteem, confidence and independent thinking. It aims to enable students to develop their personal, social and emotional intelligence. The quality of pastoral care in any educational setting impacts upon the whole ethos and tone of a school and is therefore of paramount importance when creating an atmosphere in which young people can feel secure and achieve. In my view, Pastoral Care concerns itself with what the students experience on a daily basis and is formed by student relationships with peers and staff.

Pastoral Care impacts upon the learning, behaviour and welfare of each student. I am certain that Pastoral Care is of one the most important

contributing factors to the progress of the students in any school. Many academic studies provide evidence to support the relationship between students' self-esteem and their academic attainment.

Last time, I looked at the high level of progress that the pupils at Ark Putney Academy had made as measured by 'Value-Added'. Because high quality Pastoral Care is arguably a major contributing factor to progress in learning; in this post I will detail some of the Pastoral Care strategies used by APA to support its students.

### **Where can they go for help?**

Secondary schools are larger and seem busier than primary schools. It is natural to feel concerned that a new and bigger school may seem overwhelming for your son or daughter. At APA, all students have an adult that they can turn to if they have any concerns whatsoever. Each pupil is allocated to a Learning Mentor, who is a non-teaching member of staff. The Learning Mentor's contact details are also given to the parents/guardians. Families can contact their son or daughter's Learning Mentor to ask questions, explain absences, explain medical needs and for countless other reasons. This level of care helps to provide an atmosphere similar to the Primary Schools with which families are sometimes more comfortable.

The students themselves have many other adults they can turn to. They have a form tutor, who greets them every morning and provides them with constructive experiences such as learning about 'Growth Mindset'.

## **What Kind of Mindset Do You Have?**



I can learn anything I want to.  
When I'm frustrated, I persevere.  
I want to challenge myself.  
When I fail, I learn.  
Tell me I try hard.  
If you succeed, I'm inspired.  
My effort and attitude determine everything.



I'm either good at it, or I'm not.  
When I'm frustrated, I give up.  
I don't like to be challenged.  
When I fail, I'm no good.  
Tell me I'm smart.  
If you succeed, I feel threatened.  
My abilities determine everything.

The pupils also get to know their Head of Year and students with additional learning needs are also overseen by the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, who can be contacted by the student and their families. APA aims for the students to be *willing to talk*, and this aim comes across through good staff-student communication.

### **House System**

The students at APA have recently been involved in selecting figureheads to name their 'houses' after. The House System is a great motivator because it brings groups together but also allows for some friendly competition! Each house has a member of staff who is the Head of House, giving the students another adult available to them if they have any concerns.

### **Transition from Primary School**

All schools have strategies to ease the move from Primary to Secondary School. At APA, pupils may come alone from their Primary School, so the transition arrangements are very carefully managed.

During the summer term before they start at APA, the new students are invited to spend a short day with only their own year group. They take part in practical activities which help them to make friends and form groups. On the first actual day at APA in September, only the new Year 7 pupils are in school. This gives them the chance to get to know the school further (including the key members of staff mentioned above), before they meet the whole school community.

### **Rewards and Sanctions**

APA has a system of Rewards and Sanctions, based on its Six Pillars:

- Community
- Effort
- Teamwork
- Commitment
- Independence
- Enthusiasm

The boundaries within each of the pillars above are made clear to students through the use of positive and negative points. A report is sent to families every half-term, detailing how their son or daughter is faring regarding the points system. Rewards motivate and the Sanctions help to provide the security that the students need to succeed.

In addition, students and their families are asked to sign a Home-Academy Agreement based on the six pillars to ensure a consistent approach.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is directly linked to the progress of students. After all, it can be hard to catch up if you miss too many lessons. APA aims for the students to enjoy their 'whole school experience' so that they *want to come to school*. Lessons are challenging and exciting. Attendance is closely monitored so that every individual student can maximise on their opportunities for learning.

### **Enrichment Activities**

The atmosphere of a school can be influenced by the enrichment activities it offers. APA offers a multitude of activities, such as:

- Every student in Year 7 learns a musical instrument free of charge;
- numerous sports based clubs such as table tennis;
- charity and community work such as Sport Relief;
- clubs for academic subjects such as Science;
- Trips such as going to a theatre production.

### **Wellbeing and Support Services**

In addition to what I have described above, APA also offers clinical Wellbeing and Support Services. These are run by a fully qualified and experienced Psychotherapist who offers confidential counselling in a safe space. These services can provide a lifeline for students in many different circumstances. I have not yet come across another secondary school in the local area that offers a comparable clinical counselling service.

All parents and guardians want their children to be settled and thriving. So when choosing a secondary school, it is undoubtedly important to look at what different schools offer in terms of Pastoral Care.

**Key Questions to ask Prospective Schools about Pastoral Care:**

1. Which adults can students approach if they have concerns about their learning?
2. Which adults can students approach with concerns about other aspects of school life such as friendship issues?
3. Are the contact details of staff attending to Pastoral Care given to families?
4. How are expectations of conduct made clear to the students?
5. How is attendance monitored?
6. What enrichment activities are offered?

**References:**

1. [www.napce.org.uk](http://www.napce.org.uk)