

## WESTFIELD ARTS COLLEGE

### PUPIL and STUDENT VOICE POLICY

#### **Rationale:**

Listening to children – and really hearing what it is they are telling us – has always been central to the work that we do at Westfield and to the relationship we want to have with our pupils and students. Staff spend hours every week talking with children and supporting them in all aspects of their school life: their current concerns, their daily successes and their hopes for the future.

The ‘Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 Years’ (January 2015) now makes explicit in law the requirement upon schools to fully and meaningfully include all young people and their parents/carers in important decisions about a young person’s provision, both now and in the future. Young people and their parents/carers must be provided with the information and support necessary to enable full and informed participation in these decisions.

This policy sets out how this is achieved at Westfield Arts College.

#### **Aims:**

- To ensure that the ‘authentic voice’ of each child and young person at Westfield is heard.
- To ensure that the statutory requirements of the ‘Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 Years’ (January 2015) are met in full and that children and young people at Westfield take a full part in the decisions made about their provision and their future.

#### **Background:**

- Up to the age of 16, parents/carers are the key decision-makers in a child’s life. In making decisions they take account of the views of their child and the guidance of the multi-professional team supporting them: school, health, social care, etc.
- When a young person reaches 16 they become the person making the decisions. This notion is an underlying principle of the ‘Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 Years’ (January 2015) and staff at Westfield are careful to ensure that it is observed, both in spirit and in practice.
- Children and young people at Westfield are supported to consider questions such as the following:
  - What support do you need? In school? At home?
  - Which school do you want to attend?
  - What school or college would you like to go on to when you leave Westfield?
  - What do you want to do when you have finished school and college? What support will you need to make this happen?
- If the young person is aged over 16 they are also supported to consider the following:
  - What sort of decisions do you feel comfortable making?
  - Are there some decisions you do not feel you can make?
  - Would you like your parents/carers to continue to help you make decisions?
  - What involvement in decision making do you want from your parents/carers?
  - Do you want anyone else involved in helping you to make decisions about your provision and your future?

## Implementation:

- The principle, formal opportunity for children, young people and their parents/carers to make decisions about provision and plan for the future is during the annual review of Statement or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). All children and young people prepare a presentation for the review about themselves and the plans and hopes they have for their future. Although resourcing at times makes it difficult, we work very hard to ensure that all reviews follow Person Centred Review (PCR) best practice and that they are led by a trained facilitator. Where this is the case, the voice of the child and their parents/carers (in the case of pre-16 PCRs) is genuinely heard and acted upon.
- Westfield has two School Councils – one for primary aged pupils and one for secondary. Representatives to the Councils are elected by their peers and join with staff to take part in a range of discussions about how their lives at school are constructed and how they could be improved further. The Councils, for instance, had significant input to the design of the new playground and the play equipment that went into it. School Council representatives are involved in all teaching appointments to the school – and almost always identify the candidate who goes on to be successful! A full account of the work of the School Councils is given in policy no. 87 ‘School Councils Policy’.
- School Council members represent Westfield in a range of Dorset County Council (DCC) and Chesil Education Partnership (CEP) forums: e.g. CEP Schools Council, DCC interview panels, etc.
- Pupils and students from across the school act as Rights Respecting School representatives. They are chosen by their peers and spend time discussing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implementation throughout the school.
- Pupils and students throughout Years R-11 are consulted and included in all elements of their curriculum planning where there are options and choices to be made: in planning for residential experiences or off-site learning, in choosing Key Stage 4 options and in Year 10/11 diagnostic interviews, for example. By the time they are planning for life in the Sixth Form and becoming the key decision maker, students are very much in the driving seat with regard to the shape their personalised curriculum will take. Sixth Form staff meet with all students and parents/carers prior to entry and ask some of those key questions listed above. ‘What do you want to get from your time in our Sixth Form and what do we need to put in place in order to support you to achieve it?’ The outcomes of such discussions are recorded in Sixth Form documentation such as ‘My Sixth Form Year’. This process of discussion and decision making is repeated each year as students move through the Sixth Form.
- All staff talk to our pupils and students all of the time: we get to know them really well. They are genuinely treated as individuals and the quality of the relationships that exist between pupils and staff is such that we feel we have a clear view of their current happiness and their hopes and questions for the future. In addition to the class staff teams (average 3 pupils to 1 staff member), our Pupil and Parent Support Workers (PAPS) and School Counsellor work intensively with individual pupils who need time to talk.
- The views of pupils and students are collected through our Pupil Suggestion Box and our annual Pupil/Student Questionnaire. All comments and suggestions are carefully considered by senior staff and, where appropriate, actions are taken and feedback is given.
- School staff work hard to provide parents and carers with the information they need in order to make (or support their son or daughter to make) the necessary decisions. Our Working With Parents/Carers Policy (no. 80) sets out the many ways in which the two parties work together and how information is shared. PAPS workers, for example, are in daily communication with parents/carers, passing on information on a wide range of

subjects and hosting coffee mornings at which advice and news is freely shared between parents/carers. Our newsletters and occasional parent/carer information evenings perform a similar function.

- External support for decision making is provided by such agencies as Ansbury/Connexions, providers of independent advice and guidance, the Dorset Parent Carers Council and local community groups like the Rotary Club of Weymouth and Portland, who provide valuable interview experience for Sixth Form students.

### **Resources, Policies and Documents**

- Ansbury/Connexions
- Dorset Parent Carers Council
- ‘Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice’ (Departments for Health/ Education, January 2015)
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- SEND Policy (no. 02)
- Inclusion Policy (no. 05)
- Single Equality Policy (no. 72)
- Working With Parents/Carers Policy (no. 80)
- School Councils Policy (no. 87)

**Written September 2016**