

Case Study

Examining relationships in a top performing boarding school

Background

CPS was approached by the Senior Leadership Team of the school to observe and assess the quality of relationships in the whole school community.

Observation

With an open brief to suggest a starting point, CPS proposed an audit. The school facilitated Maria Arpa to have one week's live-in participation in school life partially escorted by students and with unrestricted access to classes, staff and student meetings, events and boarding houses.

During the week, Maria watched lessons, met with students, met with staff members at all levels, attended Boarding House activities and attended SLT meetings whilst living on site and sharing meals with staff and with students.

Conversations

As the week progressed, staff and students began to seek Maria out to talk about issues as they were experiencing them.

One conversation involved a recent incident for which a group of students were to be held accountable. Another involved a longstanding dispute between two staff members. Some older students commented that they had no effective strategies for resolving conflict and a further conversation was about the culture of performance.

On the ground

During the week, Maria facilitated a restorative circle with students regarding the incident. Several students commented positively on the process and subsequently sent emails to express their satisfaction with the dialogue. The attending staff members were taken out of their comfort zone as they were unfamiliar with restorative practices. This was useful feedback in understanding the culture of the school.

Also during the week Maria mediated informally between staff members and made progress in clearing the air between them.

Assessment

The school was definitely a high performing seat of learning which delivered outstanding results and well educated students but the remit was to look beyond the good stuff. What emerged most clearly from the audit process was a need to address the work / life balance for staff and students. The desire for results and maintaining reputation was often prioritised above rest with many people feeling exhausted. In this state people were less able to be mindful and while it was clear that the intention to maintain the values was authentic, in practice the communication often fell short. This presented an ideal opportunity to introduce restorative practices as part of a whole school approach to wellness and conflict resolution.

Outcomes

CPS delivered a comprehensive report to the school which outlined the key issues in depth. CPS has maintained contact with the school and facilitated a team of staff to implement restorative practices using the behaviour policy as starting point for dialogue and change.

Subsequently, CPS has delivered leadership training focussed on managing conflict in leadership roles.

Most noteworthy is that a school with such an outstanding reputation which was actively seeking feedback from an impartial observer demonstrated a significant understanding of learning and development as a continuous holistic process of improvement.