

## **Social Skills Training Programme: St Francis School, London SE15**

The above programme is now entering its fourth year of operation, having benefited, and continuing to benefit a significant number of children and their families.

The programme was adapted from the nationally proven "Circle of Friends" Social Support Programme, by St Michael Associates with an experienced educational psychologist.

At its inception, the programme employed two Teaching Assistants from the school who had in-depth knowledge and experience of the social and cultural factors which impacted on the behaviour and academic performance of the pupils selected for the programme.

An initial cohort of 15 children, from Year Two attended sessions, which were skillfully and reflectively led by the Educational Psychologist and the Assistants, who had received training from St Michael's Associates. This pilot group was selected from a class of pupils who had been significantly underachieving socially with consequent impact upon their self-esteem and motivation to learn. From the beginning, it was deemed to be necessary to maintain close contact with the pupils parents who unanimously supported the programme.

Such was the programmes's degree of success, it became visibly obvious that the pupils participating in the programme, developed a high degree of self-esteem and understanding of others. The overall result was an improvement in pupil work attitudes and social behaviour. Significantly, an OFSTED inspection rated pupil behaviour as Good.

In subsequent years the programme was gradually extended to other pupils from the Year 2 cohort, whilst maintaining the participation of pupils from the initial cohort, when deemed necessary. As numbers increased it was deemed necessary, to increase the number of Teaching Assistants, who led the programme. We were fortunate at this stage to obtain the services of another experienced member of staff who was able to benefit from the training and experience of her colleagues and the St Michael Associates' educational psychologist.

An important feature of the programme, has been the way that St Michael Associates has developed and refined its interface with key members of school staff; the Headteacher and Leadership Team, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and Ethnic Minority Achievement Co-ordinator.

At the threshold of another academic year, I am unable to stress too strongly how important this programme has become to the school, particularly during a period when budgetary cuts necessitated the loss of other valuable social and academic, support services.

I am particularly happy with the high quality of day-to-day management of the programme by Ben and Lola Omotayo, whose skilled and sensitive oversight of both pastoral and administrative aspects of the programme have been a key to its success.

Having worked with St Michael Associates for a period of seven Years, during which time a valuable partnership has emerged, (previously St Michael Associates organized valuable Homework Classes at St Francis), I am able to, unreservedly, recommend them for consideration for further funding for their projects at St Francis and elsewhere.

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