

## **Our school: The Belsteads School, Chelmsford, Essex.**

We are a special school for children with social, emotional, mental health issues (SEMH). All students have an educational health care plan (EHCP). Although we are based in Essex, we work with several different local authorities. Many of our young people are autistic and have ADHD too. It's always lively – never dull there!

Students are aged from ten to sixteen years old and there are currently thirty-five on roll. We are about to expand to almost fifty, once our new buildings are completed.

We have thirty members of staff, who believe in our vision and ethos and who work incredibly hard to make the school a safe and welcoming place to be.

### Student and Staff Wellbeing

This is my third headship and, in each school, my team and I have created a supportive workplace, in which our staff teams have flourished.

We have had no staff turnover now for more than two years. We have a waiting list of people who want to come and work with us.

There are many reasons but the most important one is being human and being able to listen.

We offer:

- A proper staff 'voice'. We use Welbee, an anonymised feedback questionnaire, which enables our team to write freely about the things they find great about our school and things they would like to see improved. In the three years we have used Welbee, we have been found to be in the top 3% of companies (not just schools) across the country, for providing good staff wellbeing and opportunities.
- A staff working party who meet monthly with the DHT to co-create an action plan to continue to provide what is needed.
- Excellent communication – weekly staff briefing with all appointments and events shared via email then in person at 8.30am two mornings per week. Everyone feels involved and informed.
- An open-door policy. I share an office with my deputy. Our room is always busy with students and with adults. No issue is ever too small or too big to be chatted about and hopefully, resolved.
- Two school dogs – very popular – plus chickens, ducks, guinea pigs. Great for taking five minutes and some fresh air.
- All staff are able to take time off (paid), to attend their children's important moments such as performances, medical appointment and sports days.
- We offer three wellbeing days per year, which can be booked and taken either singly or as one block. There is no cost to the school because we cover for each other and help out. This means that staff can take a re-set day when they need it for example, or have a long weekend away.
- We fund training and courses (linked to individual PMRs). Last year, two HLTAs began degree courses. We work with a SCITT so that they can do the 12-week

assessment route to QTS. Other staff are completing Team Teach or Counselling or even Art Therapy qualifications. (Succession planning!)

- We provide breakfast and lunch each day. Nothing grand but it helps staff to save money and that's important, given the cost of living.
- Students leave at 1pm on Wednesday, which means that our staff training can take place immediately after that. No late meetings and no meetings at all unless necessary.
- PPA can be taken at home.
- All staff have access to a psychotherapist.
- We have a staff member of the month (nominated by other staff) – small gift voucher given.
- Those staff members on degree courses are given half a day per week out of class to study. My DHT is their mentor.
- When I joined the school, there was no staffroom! Now there is a fully functioning staffroom and coffee/tea etc., provided free of charge. I provide treats regularly to say 'thank you'!
- As an SEMH school, life can be emotionally very challenging. We will always cover for staff in a class if things have been tough and will send them along the road to have coffee and cake.
- Level 1 healthcare – free dental check/eye test and speedy access to diagnosis privately.
- Whole staff Cluedo game at the end of the summer term. Very mad but fun and much needed. Fosters fabulous team spirit and drives the students mad!

### Students

- Every day is a fresh start.
- Students feel safe and have great relationships with the staff.
- They have outdoor space and are able to take time to breathe.
- Staff know our students really well and know when they are not at that moment in the right place to study.
- We have a very broad and active curriculum, which enables our students to really engage and to be excited about learning.
- YCT counselling available on site (with parental/carer permissions).
- Psychotherapist in school weekly and available to parents to support their wellbeing too.
- Opportunities to embrace interests in addition to the main curriculum.
- An entitlement to an annual residential stay with a wide range of activities.
- Skiing/snowboarding day for all students (and staff!)
- A free holiday club for all students so that they can maintain contact and friendships during the holidays. Students travel in from four different local authorities so they are not necessarily local.
- Community events such as an end of year Prom/Giant Inflatables Day, Bonfire Night and others. Students assist with planning and with supporting a large group of elderly local residents, whom we have 'adopted' and who join us.

- Wider charitable fundraising, voluntary work, with two orphanages – Uganda and Romania – helping to develop confidence, empathy and self-esteem.

We have high expectations and we all try to be and to do the best that we can.

I think we've created something unique but it is a pleasure to see our students thrive and to want to come to school. Many of them have been out of education for several years or have been permanently excluded more than once before.

Our staff thrive because they feel supported but still challenged to learn and qualify further, if they wish.

Our community is brave because we work together and we love what we do.

The Belsteads School, is definitely not perfect and we always try to improve. But it's a great place to work!

Erica Barnett, Headteacher

20<sup>th</sup> September 2023