

ALL TOGETHER NOW

From groovy grans to tentative tots, everyone is welcome at Passmores – Vic Goddard explains why...

Today is a Thursday – I love Thursdays. As I do my morning climate walk I get to visit one of our ICT suites and always start the conversation with a cheery, ‘hello, to the naughtiest class in school!’ This is always very kindly met with a suitably encouraging titter that means I will be using the same joke next week. Because what is unusual about this cohort is their average age: about 75. These are our ‘Silver Surfers’ – members of the ICT club we operate for the more mature members of our community. We have been running it for many years now and just this week the member of staff in charge, Jane, came to me to ask whether we can add a second morning because the numbers are growing too big for one computer suite. I couldn’t say yes quickly enough. The fact that our students get to see their nan/granddad in a computer suite learning how to mail merge their address labels for Christmas cards or use the internet to stay in touch with their friends and relatives around the world is just about the best message about lifelong learning that I could possibly wish for.

I think seeing our Silver Surfers is even more important to me because of an experience that I had when I first became head teacher, when not one parent turned up to the restaurant evening that was organised by the students. Even though this happened some six years or so ago I still repeat the story to our prospective parents at open evening to highlight our expectations for their involvement.

Someone once said ‘there’s no such thing as society’ and I have since heard it altered to ‘community’, which is simply untrue; you will find schools of all age ranges and types at the heart of a vibrant community.

We chose to become a

Co-operative Academy because of the very fact that co-operatives are based on ‘community’ and self-improvement is at the forefront of much of what they do. What has our ‘co-op-ness’ meant, then, apart from helping me sleep better when the governors decided that academy status was the way to go? We have developed a ‘co-op directory’, which lists the trades and services that are offered by the parents/carers of our students in order that we can look to maximise the support we give each other in these very difficult financial times. We have a Co-operative Community Day when we close the school for a day and organise community-based projects for students to be involved in. The activities range from helping out at the amazing Harlow Food Bank to digging the gardens at Harlow Museum and students doing some literacy work at the local homeless shelter.

As community facilities and resources become increasingly stretched I think it is vital that schools open their doors and invite as many different community groups to make their homes within our buildings, and with access to our facilities. The benefits to my school are numerous but the two most important ones for many reasons are first, to give as much opportunity as possible to the young

VIC GODDARD IS HEAD TEACHER AT PASSMORES ACADEMY – AS SEEN ON CHANNEL 4’S ‘EDUCATING ESSEX’ SERIES



people at Passmores to be involved in the community through attending the activities that are right on their doorstep. This had never been more obvious to me than one evening when walking out of my office at about 6.30 I saw a family of five sitting in the heartspace of the school having their dinner. I realised that one of them was a Passmores student, and when I asked what was going on the parents replied with, ‘well he had an extra-curricular activity here and then he’s going to Rock School – so we thought rather than him rushing home, and getting indigestion, we’d come here’. I was so pleased that the family felt that our school was a place where they could make this choice, that I think I did a little fist pump when I made it back to my office! I know that’s a little bit sad of me #easilypleased.

The second benefit is a little more cynical I think, but so important to our school and all of yours – the positive word of mouth about what we are trying to achieve here only spreads if you let the community in. And the biggest lesson that I have learnt is that no one spreads the word quite like a Silver Surfer!

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