

Select and support staff and volunteers

Mount Zion Supplementary School

Background

Mount Zion Supplementary School has been running for 3 years. It was set up by a faith organisation called Mount Zion and became one of its major programmes. It is open to children from age 8-18 from any faith. The majority of the pupils are African-Caribbean. There are some young Tamil and refugee students. The school operates on Saturdays between 9.30-12.30 with the main subjects being curriculum support, English, maths and science. There is also an element of humanities teaching, as well as arts and drama for personal development.

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The school is run by a pool of 10 staff and volunteers. None of them are qualified teachers though 2 are progressing through teacher training. The majority of the staff and volunteers are qualified to degree level in the subject they teach. Volunteers are paid £10 per hour to cover travel expenses, while the teachers are paid a small fee for their time.

Where Mount Zion truly excels in is its clear induction of all staff and volunteers. They provide full training on the organisation's vision and history, as well as its significant past achievements. Staff and volunteers are encouraged to contribute to that vision and feel as important to it as anyone else. Mount Zion has an organic vision. It is willing to evolve as an organisation and as a school, people can add to it, be they staff, volunteers or parents. This school has definitely placed a great deal of importance on feedback, nurture and development.

The organisation provides internal and external training for all staff, to help them develop as people and as educators. This training is beneficial for the school and the trainee as it adds a personal capacity and onus to their responsibilities and duties, as they feel like a part of the organisation as a whole. The staff has been sent on training provided by the NRC and local authority. So far 9 out of the pool of 10 people have been trained as first aiders.

An important part of Mount Zion's commitment to its staff is the internal training it provides. This innovative initiative, facilitated by the school's lively coordinator, Rosemarie Ramsey, focuses largely on building a strong team for the school. The team meets regularly to discuss issues and to use a variety of arts and crafts activities to solder their bonds. They discuss what is needed in a team, what they would want from colleagues and how to address issues such as maintaining a healthy work-life balance. As a team, they recognise the importance of what they do with the young people, and nurture what they get out of it as well. The team even meets up socially. You can see a real sense of togetherness in their relationships with each other.

The team is clear on its strengths and maintains a thorough management file containing policies like child protection, health and safety, recruitment and a confidential complaints procedure, as well as evidence of all CRB checks. They feel this is an important part in maintaining transparency between management and staff and volunteers. Everyone is aware of all procedures and it is laid out clearly what their duties are and what rights they have.

Challenges and solutions

Mount Zion's core strength has been its ability to retain its staff group. People don't come and go so much. Rosemarie puts this down to 'group ownership' of the school. A lot of time is spent building the team and making it feel valued. They meet regularly and find that staffing is one of their key strengths.

Rosemarie feels that they would like to do more training on mainstream school procedures and how they go about things, so they can see how best to implement these into a supplementary school.

Top tips

- Really engage people right from beginning. Market the vision of the school and what you want to achieve. Get your staff and volunteers to contribute to that vision.
- Put a system in place where people are supported in terms of their progress, with regular one-to-one supervision meetings.
- Think about the development of your staff and ensure training opportunities are available to them. Allow them to feel confident enough to identify any training gaps.
- Place all your social capital in your team. Maintain clear job and role descriptions.
- Spend equal time on all members of staff. Make sure what they're offered is quality. Taking time out to discuss how the project is going, acknowledging individual achievements and good practice. Identify where gaps are and come up with solutions as a team.
- Implement a thorough induction and good staff development policy.