In November 2018 my Headteacher approached me regarding an opportunity for secondment to Park Community Academy for two terms following my performance management. We agreed that it would perfectly fit my targets and long term aspirations in education.

Taking the secondment to work at Park Community has been one of the best career and personal development opportunities I have ever taken. It has given me the chance to see a totally different world of teaching and allowed me to develop strategies that will support me on my return to mainstream education for years to come. I was always confident with SEND pupils but now feel that I have developed the skills and know how to validate that confidence.

Having worked in mainstream for 18 years, I was skilled at differentiation and assessment, but PCA has helped me enhance this and to look at the small details and steps that make up the SEND child’s journey. I learnt to focus on what the child truly needed and how to include EHCP targets into my day to day teaching more effectively.

Something that I cannot understate is the joy of working with the children at Park. In no time they welcome you into their school, and after a lot of scrutiny and questioning from them you will feel like you have known them for years. Working in a 12 pupil KS3 class meant I got to know every child by name. Walking down the corridor without a cheerful hello and a chat with a pupil was nearly impossible. I felt a part of their school family within weeks.

Park is a very welcoming school. From day one staff went out of their way to help me acclimatise to life as a KS3 SEND teacher. They were supportive when I got things wrong and congratulatory when things worked. I never felt unable to ask for advice and take great pride in the things I have learnt. The day that I first had an EHCP review accepted with no amendments needed sticks out as a great moment in my time here. PCA trusted me to do what I could do and were there when I needed them. I was also very welcome in the staffroom and was invited to join out of school activities, groups and social activities.

The challenge of taking on the secondment, of coming out of my comfort zone into a totally new environment, has really revitalised me personally and professionally. Upon leaving PCA I will be returning to my base school to run a nurture class for children with additional learning leads as well as being given the chance to shadow the SENCo to develop my understanding of that role. I have no doubt that it has been my newly enhanced skills that made this possible.

The Headteacher at Park often told me the point of the secondment was for me to take something from PCA and for PCA to take something from me. I agree that the benefits of the secondment have been two way. I brought with me a very up to date understanding of the current curriculum and the drives towards mastery. I have very high expectations for the children and used these to challenge the higher ability children. My own specific subject knowledge helped me to contribute to the curriculum. I have also been very ICT driven and have been able to share different approaches with my new colleagues. It was a great feeling to be able to share ideas with other teachers that they may not have considered and then to have them suggest approaches I had not considered. It has very much been an exchange of ideas, practice and support.

I cannot express how grateful I am to Park for creating this opportunity and Thames for allowing me to follow this path. My advice to others would be to grasp this opportunity if it ever comes your way. I loved it.

Mr. C.J. Warhurst.