

with
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Life skills and reading to get pupils back on track

AN ALTERNATIVE provision which takes some of the city's most challenging youngsters after they have been taken out of mainstream school has revealed some of the unique tools it uses to get them back on track.

With some teenagers having the reading age of a six-year-old when they arrive at Southway Youth Hub, the alternative provision in Belle Isle has a task to change cultures and mindsets before it can even start to consider educational outcomes and results.

Under headteacher Andy Percival, who was appointed in October, the school has made two schemes part of its curriculum – one looking to improving access to reading, the other focused on life skills.

The 'Resilience' programme, taught in other Rodillian Academy Trust schools, has been developed and adapted for students at Southway by

teacher Alex Thompson and brought into classrooms two months ago.

A postbox has been set up where students can post messages about what they feel is not right in their school life and, in turn, a success tree will be the place where messages about what went well can be left. The idea is that they can look back at how far they have progressed at the term's end.

A resilience lesson is held every day and can feature cooking, health, camping, playing music or talking about the safe use of social media. Each term has a different theme for projects that teach perseverance, problem-solving and team work.

Mr Thompson said: "We want to challenge the mindset that they have come in with. They think they have failed mainstream and that is why they are here, but that is not the case. I am trying to get across

that failure is part of life and success.

"We have also seen a massive improvement in maths, science and English by being in a good headspace and being able to self-regulate emotions and have self-motivation."

By creating a better attitude to learning, it means that teachers can start addressing other barriers to learning.

Some pupils at Southway struggle with reading. It means they can find it hard to understand exam papers, having a knock-on effect when it comes to grades.

Mr Percival said: "We have got kids that have a seven-year reading delay and kids with a reading age of six being asked to access mainstream school.

"If we don't address this, then we have got a problem. They can't access GCSE papers, think 'what's the point' and misbehave. This is not the fault of mainstream school, but we

have got a chance here to turn that around."

Southway made a case to join the Game Changers reading intervention programme set up by the National Literacy Trust. It uses football-themed activities, challenges, books and role models such as Raheem Sterling to motivate and help students to read.

It is only used in 150 settings across England and Wales and is led at Southway by English teacher Jo Freeman.

She said: "I could read when I started school but we take that for granted. It opens up such a massive world to people if they can read and access reading.

"It is a barrier to learning and we need to address it. We have done a great deal with Game Changers, but we have created an atmosphere for reading and a library in school and an environment where people feel secure and comfortable and want to read."

Southway Youth Hub

Brandon Howey



NEW FOCUS: Brandon Howey is on course to pass his GCSEs and has secured a college place.

Two years ago Brandon Howey had been taken out of mainstream education, was entering into a life of crime and at still only 14-years-old, was considered a safeguarding concern by his school and the police.

Now, having sat his GCSEs, he is about to leave school and is planning to "have a million in the bank".

Brandon is one of the success stories for the Southway Youth Hub, an alternative provision near Belle Isle for young people who have fallen out with mainstream education.

He shared his story with the Yorkshire Evening Post as he looks forward to the next stage of his education,

which is set to begin at Leeds College of Building.

Now 16, he admits that had he not been moved from The Rodillian Academy when he was in Year 9, he "would not be in a school now". Meanwhile, Southway headteacher Andy Percival said the school and police were "seriously worried" about the path he was taking.

Brandon said: "I was being silly for no reason but there was a big crowd. I showed off, I had my mates there, I did not have to prove myself. Outside of school, I was getting into trouble with the police, robbing bikes and anything that I could get my hands on."

When asked why, the teenager, who is dyslexic, is

self-critical and honest. He said: "The amount of people there was an issue. I did not want to do the work in front of 30 people and get it wrong and look like a idiot."

"I used to go to special educational needs groups and used to really struggle with the alphabet and vowels and here they just started teaching me properly. The teachers here can handle it."

"When it is fewer people in a room, it is a lot quieter, I get my head down, everybody is working, it is a nicer environment and you get done what you need to do."

Brandon is on course to get level 4 and 5 GCSE grades (equivalent to C and B) in science, maths and English. He

has been offered a place on a course at the building college with the option to study at a smaller college, but he has opted to go to the main college so he can complete his studies and start work sooner.

He said: "Before I turned 16, I started to realise there was no point coming to school just to mess around because I will not get anywhere, and I need to get somewhere in my life and think smart – it was a reality check."

"Even if I had gone back to Rodillian, I would mess it up again, there would be that many people and I would instantly be back to being the class clown again but that is not what I wanted – who was I doing it for?"



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