



TAKING A
FRESH LOOK
AT QUALIFICATIONS

MORE | **MORE**
CHOICES | **CHANCES**

CASE STUDY: BRAES HIGH SCHOOL: POSITIVE TRANSITIONS COURSE

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Rationale

As a school we were aware that a proportion of young people become disengaged and disaffected by school during S3/S4. We therefore felt it was important to be able to engage these young people to help ensure they had the best possible chance of making a successful transition from school – whether this was to further education, higher education, training, or employment. We recognised the need to give them real-life experience of the world outside school, but also the importance of them gaining qualifications that would be recognised by the outside world. The target audience was S4 pupils who were recommended by their Pastoral Teacher because they were lacking in motivation and becoming disaffected by school.

Our intention was to give pupils an intensive education experience two days each week for the duration of the academic year where topics covered included Maths, English, ICT, PE, Drama and Personal Development. All pupils were presented for Standard Grade English and Intermediate 1 Maths. In addition, pupils were given the opportunity to develop their employability skills during the other three days through a variety of activities including work experience, team-building events, careers input, and positive qualities workshops. Pupils also completed a school project – upgrading the school's garden courtyard area. This was done with support from Falkirk Council's Employment and Training Unit (ETU).

Engagement

We identified young people whom we thought would benefit from this course and invited them and their parents along to an information evening. Parents



and pupils were given the chance to learn more about the course and to ask questions. From there, pupils were asked to complete an application form and to go through a competitive interview for a place on the course. Due to the success of the programme, parents and pupils have now heard of it long before they reach S4 and many now actively seek support for a place before the information evening.

Young people engage in the course because they see the relevance in it for their future. One young learner said:

'It helps you get out there, builds your confidence up and makes you get a job. It gets you on your feet ready for the rest of your life.'

The school educational part is limited to two days each week and pupils enjoy the chances on the other three days to prepare themselves for the world



of work. Pupils are guaranteed a work experience placement and, to date, all the young people who have been on the course have been guaranteed a positive destination at the end of the course. However, full participation in both areas of the course is vital for success.

Throughout the year the pupils participated in various sports and outdoor activities. They attended an outward bounds course through the ETU to develop personal confidence and team working skills and participated in school activities such as football, basketball and skiing.

As a school, we worked in partnership with a number of different organisations to ensure the success of the course. The main contributor was the ETU who worked closely with the young people on the three days that they were not based in school. The ETU engaged with a number of partners in the local authority, local colleges and businesses. The school also worked with partner organisations including the Prison Service, Health Services, Community Education, and Careers Scotland.

The biggest challenge has been securing appropriate work experience placements for young people, especially in a changing economic climate. Also, working in partnership with a number of different organisations requires clear lines of communication and regular contact to ensure the course runs smoothly and delivers what the young people and their parents expect.

Delivery approaches

We appointed a Key Teacher to the group who linked between school and home, and the ETU and school. This was fundamental in ensuring good partnership working and has been a key feature of the success of this programme. The two school days are Monday and Tuesday. These days were chosen as an incentive for pupils to get all their school education completed at the beginning of the week. We also chose to give pupils double periods of subjects so that they only covered the subject once in a week. Subject specialists from each of the relevant departments taught the class and the group's Key Teacher supported in areas of personal development.

For Maths, English, ICT, PE, and Drama, teachers tended to use school and SQA materials to support the youngsters.

While working with the ETU, pupils were again appointed a Key Worker who co-ordinated their programme and liaised with the school. This Key Worker often visited the school on the two days when the pupils were at school in order to show the pupils how the partnership was working.

All young people on the course took SQA qualifications in Maths at Intermediate 1 and Standard Grade English. They also achieved a range of PC Passport Units at Intermediate 1 level.

Assessment approaches and flexible assessment

The key teacher requested feedback from all staff involved on a weekly basis. This then formed the basis of weekly feedback on pupil progress to the school's Senior Management Team and the pupils' parents. Parents were invited to contact the school on a regular basis and encouraged to attend designated parents' evenings. If occasions arose where pupils were not making the progress expected, a meeting was held and all those involved in the young person's life were invited to attend. Strategies to support the youngster were discussed and plans put in place to get things back on track.

Progression

The young people who have taken the course have all progressed to positive destinations on leaving school, whether this is further education, training or employment. Employers have said:

'The skills they are learning at the ETU group are putting them head and shoulders above other school leavers.'

'All other employers should try this scheme because it is so beneficial, a fantastic success for us.'

While on the course the young people also get the opportunity to undertake further qualifications which are recognised by various sectors including CITB (Construction Skills) tests and the John Muir Award.

Future delivery plans

As a school, we have tailored our curriculum from S1 onwards to offer young people with additional support needs a specialist timetable appropriate to their needs. This supports young people who are struggling to cope with the mainstream curriculum due to learning difficulties, behaviour difficulties, family or social issues.

Due to the success of the Positive Transitions course we are currently investigating the possibility of running the course over two years and beginning it in S3.

We are also exploring how we can best use existing SQA qualifications to recognise the activities already being undertaken by the pupils in Personal Development and PE.

On reflection

Good communication and partnership working were key to the success of the course. It is vital to get pupils, parents and partners on board and to develop a holistic view of supporting young people.

