

# Online learning – a school success story

## York High School

New ways to raise achievement for 14-19 year-olds



Teacher and students at York High School

**York High School believes that online learning makes a ‘significant contribution to school improvement’.** Deputy Head Gavin Cowley says online learning is a ‘key motivator’ for many students at the school.

The city’s newest secondary school – opened just 18 months ago – currently offers programmes from vision2learn for **schools** in Nutrition and Health and Equality and Diversity. They’re proving their worth by promoting independent learning and contributing to results at GCSE, raising achievement across the range of abilities. Says **Gavin Cowley**, *“We’ve seen clear evidence these programmes are raising aspirations, often among hard-to-reach students. We’ve tracked a marked impact on other areas of the Key Stage 4 curriculum.”*

Benefits noted by the school include ease of use and flexibility. *“Students have a 10 minute induction, and then they’re away”* he says. *“The materials are enjoyable to use, and the techniques needed are of course very familiar to this age group, anyway.”* The self-directed aspect of the materials is a plus point.

*“The fact pupils can make progress at their own pace, in their own time gives the courses a real flexibility,”* says Gavin Cowley. *“Maybe a third to a*

*half have regular internet access at home, but it’s not essential – obviously they can use the computers here, or in local libraries or in the youth centres many of them visit after school.”*

The materials encourage self-assessment, and make getting a quick response from tutors easier, too. *“Pupils like the quick feedback they get,”* says **Siobhan Moore**, KS4 Inclusion Manager. *“It all helps them take ownership of their work and progress. The skills they develop completing the courses are very good for the post-16 work they’ll be doing when they leave here, whether they go to college or straight into employment.”*

Gavin Cowley adds that vision2learn for **schools** materials can enhance career development for teaching assistant staff, who can gain experience in assessment and support; it means that non-teaching staff, like Siobhan Moore, can contribute in measurable ways to whole school achievement.

*“I know we’ve gained a lot as a school from offering these options,”* he says. *“They make a real contribution to the school’s improvement in the percentage of pupils with 5 A-Cs – they’re a crucial part of the interventions we’re using to maximise achievement.”*

### E-learning for the whole community

Currently, York High School is planning enhanced links with the community, says Gavin Cowley. *“We serve an area where many people haven’t got great memories of being at school, but we want to share what we have with them. We’re talking with the local authority about funding for vocational online courses*

*“Nutrition and Health and Equality and Diversity from vision2learn for **schools** have made a significant contribution to our GCSE cohort’s performance this year. This has been achieved by both courses’ contribution to the fifth GCSE, plus the additions the courses have made to students’ individual point scores.”*

**Gavin Cowley**, Deputy Head, summer 2010

# vision2learn for **schools**

*to adults – there's great potential in this, and with the same benefits of increased motivation and visible, worthwhile achievement as apply to our Year 10s and 11s."*

So, which pupils get the most from the materials?  
*"As well as reaching students who are at risk of not getting 5 A-Cs, we've found they have a positive effect on students with long-term absence, or whose link with the school is difficult or tenuous"* says Gavin Cowley. *"For some students, it might be the one school activity where they can demonstrate success – it's a real confidence-booster."*



Deputy Head Gavin Cowley and students, York High School

## What do learners think?

Year 11 student **Alex Standing** has recently completed the Nutrition and Health programme. *"For me, it was good to do on my own, as it's easy to get help if you're stuck. The way it works means you can see yourself making progress very easily."*

His classmate **Steve Ridley**, who plans to follow a course in public service at college, sees the relevance of his work on the programme to possible career options. *"You can see the link to different jobs where they'd need you to know something about this topic, and it was good at giving us practice at finding out information for ourselves."*

**Sarah Needham** recalls writing a food diary as part of the work. *"It changes how you think about food,"* she says. *"People our age may not eat very well, but it got us thinking about what we could do to make our diets a bit better... and I liked the way it was all easy to understand, with good explanations."*

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## York High School

- 11-16 comprehensive school, with about 900 students
- Specialist sports college with a strong emphasis on linked values including teamwork, leadership, fair play and healthy lifestyle
- Used by the communities formerly served by Lowfield and Oaklands schools
- Now in new, single re-furnished site at Cornlands Road, opened at the beginning of 2009
- Member of PiXL, the network of 170+ collaborating secondary schools focusing on online resources, training opportunities and development programmes in order to enhance performance at GCSE

## Vision2learn for **schools**: the vision

Vision2learn courses for schools have the potential to break down barriers. They offer accessible learning opportunities, connecting especially effectively with hard-to-reach groups.

A recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, authored by Alissa Goodman and Paul Gregg, showed how attitudes and behaviours of children growing up in poorer families impact on school performance. Young people's own belief in their ability is one of the factors that make a difference at GCSE; the flexible pace, and the speedy feedback from tutors – key characteristics of vision2learn for **schools** courses – support a personal sense of achievement, and change the outlook of students who might otherwise find it hard to follow normal school routines.

York High School's proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. One quarter of the student population has learning difficulties/disabilities, and an above-average proportion has a statement of special educational need.[...] The level of social and economic disadvantage in the area served by the school is above average. (Ofsted, June 2009).

## Contact us

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