

Innovative blended learning approach helps to re-engage vulnerable pupils

Avon Valley Specialist Sports College – Salisbury

Staff and pupils at Avon Valley College have tried a radical new approach to re-engage some of their most challenging learners. The school used a blend of intensive cross-curricular activities and classroom study supported by an online learning course in Nutrition and Health from vision2learn for **schools**, to help learners who were at risk of low achievement at Key Stage 4.

Juliette Baldwin, Director of Teaching and Learning at the school, was inspired to try the approach when she reviewed the content of the **NCFE Level 2 Award in Nutrition and Health (QCF)** course online. In the course learners are asked to find out about how diet affects people's health and about healthy food planning and preparation.

"We realised that the course content is not easy and would be challenging for this group of learners," explains Juliette. "We decided to mix and match classroom sessions reviewing the online course content with experiments in our science lab (e.g. testing for starch, checking the sodium content of salt), with visits to the local supermarket and with sessions in our food technology rooms. The pupils also had to plan a menu and invite a friend and senior members of staff to a meal."

"Our catering manager was a great support. We started each day providing a different type of breakfast and quickly realised that many of these children never eat breakfast, in fact they don't eat anything during the day until they go home. Trying out a full English breakfast, cereal and toast and continental style breakfasts and porridge was a revelation to them."



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Life-changing learning

For one pupil in particular, the experience proved life-changing. Jordan, who is on the Autistic spectrum, had developed a number of food phobias to the point that he was eating such a limited range of food and he was anxious to try anything new. The course helped him to understand the nutritional impact of food on his body. *"His mother was amazed and delighted that he suddenly asked to try pork crackling, carrots and pasta and that he said 'it's not going to kill me if I try things, is it', following the sessions,"* says Juliette. *"He used to hate food but now he is aware of all the nutrients that he isn't getting and became more aware of the consequences of not getting the right nutrients."*

"Learning in a supportive environment with access to Apple Mac computers helped the learners to feel special too," says Juliette. *"For some of these learners this will be the only Level 2 qualification that they will achieve but they have picked up so many life skills that they can use for the rest of their lives it's very relevant. For other learners this course will support their Key Stage 4 achievement by providing a fifth GCSE-equivalent qualification."*

Staying focused

Studying Nutrition and Health has helped learners to focus on achieving – which completely changed their attitudes and outlook to coming to school. Principal Mark Avoth reported *"two hours solid working,"* which he had rarely seen from the lowest attaining students in the year group. And

Adrian Hart, Assistant Director for Cross College Programmes, said attendance for the course was 100% – up from the low 80s mark previously. One pupil, Sam, pushed himself to attend school even when he'd missed the school bus. *“I didn't want to miss out. I was learning new things! I missed the bus one day, so I ran to school so I could still do the course. I felt like the teachers had made an investment in me and I didn't want to let them down.”*

Encouraging interaction

The course also helped students brush up on their interaction skills – the school adopted an innovative approach to the course by running a breakfast club alongside it. Says Juliette: *“The students were all very nervous and untrusting towards the group breakfast in the beginning; only a few students ate breakfast on the first day. But by the last day of the course the whole group was sitting down – together – which was a real achievement because it had been a constant fight to get some of them to sit down and eat.”*

The school has a specialism in Applied Learning – which means it uses creative approaches to the curriculum. Staff member Jo Bhaya, Cover Supervisor, sees the benefits of this blended approach. Jo explains: *“By completing this course the pupils have learned methods that they will continue to use in the future – research methods, for example, and being more open-minded about food.”*

How else can vision2learn for schools help?

The School is planning to roll out further vision2learn for **schools** programmes over the coming months.

*“We are exploring using vision2learn for **schools** further by introducing the Equality and Diversity course as an option, and we have plans to incorporate the Sports Coaching course as we are a specialist Sports College,”* says Juliette.

Networking with other vision2learn centres through The PiXL Club – a collaboration of school leaders – has also proved very effective, she says: *“We were introduced to vision2learn for **schools** through the PiXL Club, which has been a very useful source of new ideas to help us re-engage challenging learners and help them to achieve.”*



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The PiXL Club

The PiXL Club (www.pixl.org.uk) is a collaboration of school leaders, headed by Sir John Rowling. The PiXL Club is about sharing new ideas with school leaders; it is a partnership of focused, determined and dedicated professional practitioners. It is a not-for-profit organisation that focuses on supporting and developing the GCSE results of thousands of students in many schools across London, the South East, West and the North.

Avon Valley Specialist Sports College

Avon Valley is an 11-18 Specialist Sports College with 714 pupils on roll. Its latest Ofsted report [January 2011] commented: “The college’s impressive on-site vocational provision has become an important learning hub for other local providers. It is particularly effective in promoting students’ future economic well-being through a range of practical qualification routes. Students were unanimous in their praise for this provision.”

Contact us

For more information about vision2learn please contact:

Jonathan Ovenden
Business Development Director

0191 215 4120
07730 402 653

jonathan.ovenden@creatingcareers.com