

Case study: What one school can achieve - Newman Catholic College

Introduction

Newman Catholic College (NCC) in North West London is a UNICEF Rights Respecting secondary school and sixth form that takes a broad approach to both welcoming refugee and asylum seeking students, and providing them with a relevant, appropriate and quality education.

The school has circa 70 refugee and asylum seeking students at present, of which just under a third are unaccompanied minors in the care of a Local Authority [it would be interesting to know what percentage this is of the whole pupil population at the school]. The school's approach encompasses a specially developed flexible curriculum, pastoral and whole-family support, and partnership working with a range of external providers.

The key problem this case study addresses

Large numbers of refugee and asylum seeking children, particularly unaccompanied minors, join the UK school system part way through Key Stage 4 (KS4), with little or interrupted previous education. Many struggle through a GCSE curriculum with limited EAL support; fail their exams or obtain low grades; then enrol in an FE college after leaving school and start back in Entry-level ESOL, quickly becoming frustrated at their lack of progress. The years spent in school for those who arrive part way through KS4 can become, in too many cases, a missed opportunity for relevant and quality learning.

What they do

Curriculum

NCC has developed specialist provision for EAL students who arrive in the UK having missed the start of their KS4 studies. Whilst those students who are able to study in mainstream classes do so, with the help of language support from EAL assistants, the school has designed a set of 'project' streams for learners not ready for mainstream classes at this level. These project streams enable learners to undertake meaningful study at the level appropriate to them. These streamed classes are based not on age, but on English language competency and level of previous education. All students are thoroughly tested on arrival, and, if they do not have the language and previous education needed to go straight into the school's mainstream KS4 classes, they are placed in the relevant 'project' stream.

Classes in 'project' streams are designed to improve students' English and Maths skills, but also offer them a variety of other subjects at various levels. Students can work towards qualifications

ranging from ESOL and Asdan, to full GCSEs. Those studying on the 'project' GCSE programme are taught a set programme of GCSEs, with integrated English language support. Circa 25 students are studying on this bespoke GCSE programme in 2016-17, and the course is viewed as prestigious by both staff and students. Learners' progress is assessed every half term, and students have the opportunity, with each assessment, to move up to the next level of 'project' class, or into mainstream if appropriate.

If necessary, and in cases where students have little or no previous education, places are offered for a brief period of time in a 'pre-project' class, where the focus is on basic numeracy, reading and writing skills. This programme allows the students to observe school life, make friends, learn basic skills and then join a 'project' group feeling more confident and prepared.

The school supports the curriculum activities and learning with an EAL specialist Reading and Homework Club, which all refugee and asylum-seeking students are invited to attend after school daily.

Pastoral and family support

In addition to their innovative approach to curriculum, NCC engages as fully as possible with entire families, running English classes for parents and organising regular 'Arabic tea' sessions (the majority of families linked to the school are from Syria) where parents can meet other parents, bring along younger children, share food and socialise informally within the school setting. The parents gradually become a part of the school community, and are encouraged to partner in their child's learning. Activities including role-playing parents' evenings, reporting child-sickness and studying school planners build the confidence newly-arrived parents need to engage.

Within the school, a dedicated Refugee Project Lead role ensures a 'warm and generous welcome' for all students and their families, and provides dedicated pastoral care throughout the school year.

Partnership working

The school has partnered with a range of external organisations to facilitate additional services and support for their refugee and asylum-seeking students, including the Tricycle Theatre, who run drama workshops designed to enhance confidence, self-esteem and communication abilities; Paiwand, who run boys' and girls' groups, Refugee Support Network, who take referrals for educational mentoring and specialist education advice and guidance; Targeted Action for Mental Health in Schools, who provide an art therapist two days per week; and Queens Park Rangers Football Club, who have linked with the school to provide various football-related opportunities for refugee and asylum-seeking students, including being team mascots at Wembley.

The difference this makes/why this is an example of good practice

NCC has adopted a comprehensive, whole-school approach to improving learning and support for refugee and asylum seeking children. Their approach to curriculum, in particular the bespoke GCSE course with integrated EAL support, is a model that could be trialled in other institutions - it provides a model whereby newly arrived KS4 students with severely interrupted education can benefit from the supportive environment of a school whilst engaging with learning that effectively equips them for the future. Students see that achieving GCSEs is possible - aspirations are raised, and pathways to university begin to emerge for ambitious new arrivals.

For more information:

www.ncc.brent.sch.uk