

Sharing Good Practice: The Retreat

Niddriemill Primary School's dedicated 'getaway' room The RETREAT has been receiving a lot of positive attention recently. After it was noted as being an example of good practice in a report by HMI school inspectors last year, it's been featured twice in education publication *The Times Educational Supplement Scotland* and in a local Edinburgh newspaper. Teachers from other schools in Edinburgh have also been to visit to find out more about how and why the RETREAT works.

It's easy to see why it's been getting so much attention. The RETREAT provides a haven within the school for pupils and their families where they can get support and guidance. About ten pupils currently attend, with most spending all their time there while a small number drop in and out. The large, bright space has been thoughtfully designed to offer a calm, safe and welcoming environment for children who have a variety of behavioural support needs. Different resources are used to create a room full of positive energy including soothing music, cushions, a quiet corner, displays and artwork including an up-to-date slideshow of photo's showing positive things that have happened for the children.

Sandra Bonthron, the Behaviour Support Teacher at the school, thinks that at the heart of the RETREAT's success is that it's not simply viewed as a punishment or as a support base where naughty children go. 'There are rules and pupils are expected to stick to them but it's basically a positive space where we try to find what works for each child. We are innovative and try things out, nothing's set in stone, if something isn't working, then we talk about it and find other ways of helping. It's a popular place with all the pupils in the school who are invited to come to the RETREAT as a reward for good behaviour.'

The RETREAT provides pupils with the support they need to stay calm in school. Each desk has an 'emotions ruler' that pupils use to express how they're feeling - 1 shows they're not feeling great and 10 is feeling fantastic. Mrs Bonthron has got one too! For pupils who aren't keen on reading, writing and maths she encourages practical solutions. She explains 'In the past where we've had pupils who are reluctant to write, we've participated in an activity - perhaps something in the garden - then we'll take photographs and the pupils will come back to class and write about this. They're so excited about it they hardly even notice it's work.'

One simple approach that works well is that each pupil has a super-hero picture which climbs up a 'ladder of achievement'. When a pupil behaves well, the super hero climbs a little bit higher up the

ladder. Another popular method of celebrating a pupil's achievements is the 'Worth Noting' books. Pupils, their parents and teachers can write positive comments about things that have happened during the day.

Mrs Bonthrone works with other teaching staff to get the children back into their classes wherever possible often starting with pupils going back for certain lessons or for short periods of time. 'In the past we've put pupils back into class for as little as 10 minutes at a time, I'll pop my head in the door of the classroom and make a thumbs up sign, if I get the thumbs up back from the class teacher then the pupil stays for a bit longer.

A key to the RETREAT's success is the support from Niddriemill's other staff and its Head Teacher Sadie Miller. Mrs Bonthrone explains 'It wouldn't work without her flexibility, creative flair and vision - she's the driving force. The whole school has a really positive ethos.' She goes on to say 'We work really closely with all school staff, we also work with other key figures from the wider community. We've got great links with the local community police officers and other agencies that support families like Place2be.'

Mrs Bonthrone has lots of stories about the positive change in children after they've spent time in the RETREAT and parents are quick to agree with her. Jordon who's now 10, refused to come to school but after a long, slow process of working with him and his mum Jordon is back in school and doing much better. His mum Mary says that Jordon's a different boy now 'I didn't know what to do to get him to get him to school but Sandra came to the house and spoke to me about how things would work in the RETREAT and spoke to Jordon, now he's doing so well'.

It's clear the difference the RETREAT makes for families. Parents and carers are actively involved and are invited to weekly RETREAT 'surgery sessions', individual appointments and parent/child workshops. One parent Billy, whose son is also called Billy and is in P5 and was struggling in school thinks the fact that parents are involved plays a big part in why it works - 'For Billy it's been great and we get to share his success at every stage, you get to see how he is improving'.

Enquire visited the school to chat to some of the pupils who spend time in the RETREAT and they were happy to explain why they attend 'You come here if you are really upset about something and you can calm down for a little while and then go back to class.' They're also very positive about their time in the RETREAT - 'It's calm. It's a happy place.'

To hear more from the pupils from Niddriemill Primary school (and to hear them sing a song about how great they think their school is) listen to our children and young peoples podcast at <http://www.enquire.org.uk/youngpeople/wordpress/?p=826#more-826>