

GROWTH MINDSET CASE STUDY

ST JOHN'S RC HIGH SCHOOL DUNDEE



ST JOHN'S PUPILS WIDEN THE GOALPOSTS



When it comes to mindset, evolution, rather than revolution, is the approach of choice. Implementing a growth mindset culture takes time and there is always a new challenge around the corner.



This has certainly been the case at St John's RC High School in Dundee.

Depute Head Teacher, Wendy Sinclair, was one of the early adopters of growth mindset in Dundee. She participated in Winning Scotland's immersive professional learning programme, [Mindset Teams](#), in 2019 to integrate growth mindset principles and practice into school life.

After a Covid-enforced delay, the impact is starting to show with one particular group of pupils in 2022 - young footballers who are members of the Scottish FA and Dundee FC Performance Schools at St John's.

"I was aware that these young people had experienced a growth mindset approach through the performance schools," says Wendy.

"They're always saying things like, 'I may not be as good as some of the other players but if I keep practising, I will be'."

However, according to a pupil survey the footballers were not applying the same logic in some of their academic subjects.

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FROM THE PITCH TO THE CLASSROOM

Wendy and her team challenged the boys to transfer their growth mindset attitude from the pitch to the classroom.

At the heart of this idea was Scott Snee, Principal Teacher of Modern Languages. Wendy and Scott started meeting regularly to discuss how they could help the pupils apply their football mindsets in their learning.

“Scott embraced the opportunity to introduce growth mindset in Modern Languages to support the young people,” explained Wendy.

“We started to see a difference very quickly. There was a visible change in attitude and use of positive language. They were beginning to understand that just because they found a subject difficult initially, that they could improve with practice and using different strategies.

“They were talking about how their brains can grow and adapt to help them in the classroom – very similar to what they do to learn and progress in football.”

One of the pupils explains it perfectly: “If you’re doing badly in a maths test or getting stuck on a question, you always think, ‘I can do it’. Even if you don’t get it right, at least you have tried your hardest.

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THE IMPACT

Scott backs this up – explaining how the young people have enjoyed more difficult work because of their mindsets:

“We’ve been instilling the idea that the pupils actually enjoy the work more because it’s hard. They’ll say ‘This is hard so I’m going to give it my best effort’.

“One of the other small changes I’ve made is allowing pupils who are struggling, to ‘sit’ in their struggle to find the answer. For me, it’s about helping them find the answer, rather than simply giving them the answer.”

The impact?

“I wasn’t the best at French before, but now I’m right up there,” says one pupil.

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ENGAGING WITH STAFF

Dundee City Council's growth mindset manager and also a Dundee FC youth coach, Jamie McBrearty, supported the project by engaging with teaching staff in the school. This was crucial because the survey also showed that pupils responded much better to teachers who practiced growth mindset in the classroom.

Wendy explains: "Jamie delivered some sessions with our staff team to discuss the way mindset is used in football and how it could be applied in the classroom. He also shared mindset case studies from Dundee and Ayrshire to let everyone see what could be achieved. Staff enjoyed and engaged in these sessions."



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THE EVOLUTION CONTINUES

Wendy now wants to roll this approach out across the school into other departments.

“Mindset is in the School Improvement Plan for 2022/2023. If this works in Modern Languages, it can work in other subjects.”

“We formed a school inquiry group which included Scott, myself and several staff who had also taken part in growth mindset professional learning. Our Newly Qualified Teachers had been involved with the Limitless Learning growth mindset programme which has proved invaluable.”

Due to the impact, more staff are joining the inquiry group, we will be supporting departments throughout the school. The plan is for each department to have a ‘growth mindset champion’,” explains Wendy. Scott is clear about the potential of mindset at St John’s:

“Moving forward, it’s about making sure we share the message of how we’ve seen the benefits of mindset in our classes. It has made a difference – we’ve got the data and have seen the results.”

The evolution at St John’s continues.