

# A LESSON IN *character*

HELPING LEARNERS TO DEVELOP  
CONFIDENCE AND SELF-BELIEF

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To pinpoint exactly where our personal values and character come from isn't easy. In fact, it's impossible. These attributes are developed over time and can't simply be taught. So what can "character education" achieve in practice? We learn from two teachers.

## THE TEACHERS

Joseph Casey has been teaching at the Good Shepherd Centre, Bishopston, for nine years. As a secure unit the majority of his pupils live there 24/7, having arrived through either the Children's Panel or the Court system. Joseph explained that the young people he works with can be severely lacking in self-confidence. "Many of them have suffered from abuse or neglect and have gone through life without people telling them how amazing they are or about any skills and talents they have."

The vast majority of Joseph's pupils have also missed out on a lot of schooling, so much so that some of his third and fourth years have barely attended secondary school at all. It can be a difficult task to get the young people to come and be in a class, let alone actively engage in lessons.

On the other side of Scotland, teaching at The Waid Academy, Anstruther, Scott Duncan faces a different set of challenges as Acting PTC for Social

Subjects and RME. Scott, who has been teaching at The Waid Academy for 12 years, feels that good RME teaching needs to be active, engaging, challenging and a very relevant subject for today. Scott has been using a programme called inspire > aspire with his third-year pupils for the past few years. "It fits in really well with our core RME provision because it gets children to reflect fundamentally on themselves and on their own values," Scott said.

Key for Scott is asking the right questions of pupils to get them thinking deeply about their learning. "I think the inspire > aspire programme gives quite a structured way of doing that" Scott said. "You also need to engage in that discussion with students about, 'What do these values actually mean?' And sharing my own experiences with them can help them to engage too."

For Joseph, inspire > aspire creates the ideal forum for him to be able to talk to pupils about themselves openly in a calm and relaxed manner. "For our kids to be able identify the skills and values that they have, to have the courage to say, 'I've got that quality,' and then say why and put it down on a piece of paper, is a massive thing."

## THE IMPACT

Scott finds that the programme allows every child to engage at some level

and can even enable more disengaged children to produce good work because of its personal nature. "Often when you engage at that level you get really good pieces of writing," he said.

This is something that Joseph also finds with his youngsters, so much so that the programme is an integral part of his teaching and something that he uses all year round. However, it can be difficult, Joseph said. "If I've got 26 kids, I would introduce all of them to this piece of work, and not all of them would buy into it. I might have 14, say, that would actually give it a go and from that I might only have eight that would complete the piece of work, because it is difficult for them to do it. But the eight who do finish it feel fantastic and when I read the work I feel fantastic too."

For Joseph, one pupil stands out as having benefited hugely from the programme. "The pupil was really struggling and his behaviour was terrible in class. Then all of a sudden he produced this brilliant piece of work, which everyone was really proud of. It had the effect of bringing everybody else's quality of work up too." Following this, Joseph's student began producing work every time he came into class, started attaining qualifications and even made it to the finals of the inspire > aspire national competition.

Joseph took the pupil to the annual awards ceremony in Glasgow. "It was a brilliant experience," Joseph recalled. "When we walked into the hall where all the work was displayed, his really stood out because it had a big, dark picture of Tupac in the middle, and there was someone standing in front of it, reading it intently. His face just lit up."

Scott, too, notes that "when you celebrate what pupils do and what they write it's a real confidence booster". He has seen many pupils gain confidence in themselves through taking part in the programme.

For Scott's pupil Morgan Morris, now in fifth year, the programme led to a series of successes – positive for



## TEACHERS' NOTES

*inspire > aspire aims to support young people, aged 10–18, to explore their character, values and ideals.*

*A template guides pupils through a series of tasks that requires them to think about their values, what they need to work on, and who and what inspires them. This concludes with the "arc of destiny" – a statement about the type of person they want to become, their vision for a better world and what they will personally do to bring this vision to life. The final manifestation of this work is a completed poster.*

*Teachers can choose five posters to send to Character Scotland and these are judged as part of a national competition.*

**BELOW:** Waid Academy pupil Morgan Morris, far right, has become a social media intern and represented his school in India since coming second in the national competition



both him and the school. After coming second in the national awards in June 2014, Morgan joined Character Scotland as a social media intern, became one of Scotland's few #iwill ambassadors, and went on a trip to India representing the school.

Morgan said: "It definitely taught me a whole load of things about myself that I didn't know before and impacted how I went on to do things in future. It actually made me feel like I want to be a teacher myself!" <sup>15</sup>



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