

CASE STUDY: Carmel College

Reducing repeat exclusions

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Martin* is in Year 9. We know that school presents a challenge to Martin. In Year 7 he came to us from an Alternative Provision, after he was permanently excluded from his Primary school. He also has an EHCP** for SLCN and SEMH. In his first 2 years at Carmel College Martin had 3 suspensions and 13 student isolations. Martin's own view of school at the end of Year 8 was, perhaps unsurprisingly, negative. He told us that he didn't have an adult he could trust, he didn't have a supportive friendship group, and that he often felt like a failure in his lessons.

Carmel College is an 11-18 Catholic school, in Darlington County Durham. Our levels of suspension are well below National, but we want them to be lower. When we looked at suspension and internal exclusion data for 2023/24, there was a distinct cohort of students who were repeatedly missing learning. These students were disproportionately SEND and FSM. They were students like Martin. Improving outcomes for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, and reducing their experience of lost learning, is a key school priority and central to our mission.

I am currently on The Difference [Inclusive Leadership Course](#), funded by the North East Combined Authority. The course is providing me with a great opportunity to focus on this challenge, and develop a proactive response to engage with students who are getting repeat internal exclusions. Very often these exclusions result from escalating incidents of dysregulation and low level disruption. It is really important that we have a clear and consistent approach to disruptive and harmful behaviours, but we should also recognise that the sanction isn't a solution. That's especially true when we are thinking about students who are getting repeat exclusions.

One key idea I've taken from the Inclusive Leadership Course is the critical importance of a 'whole-school' approach to inclusion. Essentially, recognising how universal, everyday interactions and experiences support the needs of all students, but especially students like Martin.

At the start of this term I delivered Trauma Informed training for all staff using resources from the course. The training focused on using this relational practice in everyday positive and negative interactions to improve the experience of, not only our focus cohort but the community as a whole.

This included

- Ensuring there was a **focus on compassion and regulation** when responding to challenging behaviour
- **Positive engagement** with students before and especially after their planned regulation breaks
- **Reward and Sanction tracking:** Visible reporting on the reward:sanction ratio of our SEN and FSM students

Staff engagement in these interactions has led to some really positive outcomes for students across the last term.

- Numbers of Suspension and Internal Exclusions are at their lowest level for 3 years
 - Suspension and Repeat Suspension reduced by over 50%
- Repeat Internal Exclusion is 50% lower than the same time last year
 - With the proportion of FSM students at 4% and SEND at 5% [compared to school populations of FSM 23% and SEND 15%]
- Decreases in other forms of exclusion: Detention (33%), Lesson Removal (36%) and SLT On-call (24%)
- During this time we've also seen reward recognition for PP and SEND students rise by 40%

Whole College attendance is 2.7% above the national average. The picture for vulnerable pupils is similarly positive with PP students 4% above national and SEND students 6.5% above. All of these figures represent an improvement on the previous years statistics and there is a significant move towards standards of attendance achieved pre-COVID 19. In the coming term I am excited to build on these promising impacts, and think about next steps that will help to sustain them.

1. Develop a whole-school approach for Zones of Regulation with all students, to improve their emotional literacy and build on the new understanding of staff
2. Develop scaffolds and social scripts for staff to use with students who are presenting with frequent challenges
3. Develop consistency in our Connect - Correct - Connect practice to support regulation and sustain secure relationships

The positive results from this work is not just evident at the level of whole-school data. It is actually reducing Lost Learning for individual children. So far in Year 9, Martin has not been suspended, he has only had 1 internal exclusion, and his attendance is 98%. He has benefited from targeted support to strengthen friendships and develop his emotional literacy. But above all, Martin feels seen by staff and more confident of support when he's struggling and dysregulated. At his last review he told his key worker.

"Staff notice me now for good things and I feel like they know me better cos of my profile thingy. This makes me more relaxed and I can learn more. Year 8 Carmel was a 2/10, now it's a solid 8"