

NEVER Gonna Give You Up...

As far as Educating Essex's Vic Goddard is concerned, failure is not an option for the man in the mirror. So what happens when it becomes an inevitability?

I have been fortunate to work in many educational settings, influenced by all kinds of socio-economic factors – but nowhere has ever given me the kind of buzz that working at Passmores has, because of the nature of the young people we serve.

A phrase that we use a great deal is, 'we don't choose our students, they choose us'; our student society mirrors that of our community – both the good and the challenging! Publicly stating that we strive to be a 'no fail' organisation for every young person therefore puts us, and me personally, under pressure. Staff, quite rightly, are desperate to help those who want to succeed; getting the balance right of ensuring the school superstars reach their potential whilst not letting others commit educational suicide.

I continually ask staff to look in the mirror first to see what we can do to help, before looking out of the window to apportion blame on others, which can be really tough to do. I am a very lucky head, though, in that I have colleagues at every level that accept this and keep getting up when they have been knocked down by a lack of engagement or sometimes, downright rudeness (although, it should be said, the vast majority of our students behave wonderfully day in and day out).

The key to our success with students that nationally underachieve, like those on free school meals for instance, is the awareness all staff have of who these young people are and the amazing work of our non-teaching staff in

supporting them. We call our in-class support team members 'co-educators', because we encourage them to be the leader in the classroom with specific children and for the responsibility to be shared across the adults.

The whole Inclusion Faculty works incredibly hard to close gaps and we have invested heavily in training and other staff development. We have a team of mentors, A,G & T, CLA, behaviour and subject specific, and alongside them, a number of academic coaches that have developed an excellent, whole-school coaching model that empowers students and staff to self-solve their challenges (we're very proud to be the first school to have achieved the Coaching Quality Mark).

It's this resource of talented, trained staff that allows us to 'hold on' to students that otherwise we would have to remove due to their impact on others' learning. This issue was one of those most raised in the aftermath of 'Educating Essex' – and so it should have been. The now frowned upon (by the DfE it seems) Every Child Matters agenda is still alive and well in schools up and down the country, and ensuring that continuing to battle with and for one young person isn't to the detriment of the others is a real challenge. Without our non-teaching staff input we would fail, and with budget cuts likely over the next few years this will be even harder to maintain.

VIC GODDARD IS
HEAD TEACHER AT
PASSMORES
ACADEMY – AS
SEEN ON CHANNEL
4'S 'EDUCATING
ESSEX' SERIES



As a few million people have seen, I take the failure to succeed with any young person personally, and feel it is right that I should – but I also have to find a nice little compartment in my head to lock away that disappointment when I know that we have done all that we can. We are now approaching our year 11 Celebration Day, when our students come to school in their smart clothing and we get to tell them the things we will remember them for and why we are proud of what we have achieved together. Not all of them will be present and I will once again be gutted about absenteeism due to our failure to get certain individuals to the end of their school life as active and valuable contributors to our community. I think I will be able to look myself in the eye when I am doing my tie up in front of the mirror knowing that I did my very best for them... but even so – failure hurts.

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