Transforming Engagement and Literacy Outcomes at Lionheart School (Pupil Referral Unit) for SEND pupils

How use of the R.E.S.TT™* process, implemented by a school SENCO led to measurable progress, increased confidence, and whole-school impact.

*R.E.S.TT™ - The process taught in Unlock Learning Foundations online programme.

The Challenge

In this pupil referral unit (PRU), students had a history of struggling in mainstream education.

Pupils in this study had literacy issues and additional SEND including ADHD and ASD. Pupils were disengaged, lacked confidence, and believed they were incapable of learning.

Repeated exposure to interventions that hadn't worked had reinforced a damaging belief: **"Nothing works for me."**

For staff, engagement was a huge barrier. Without it, meaningful progress simply wasn't possible.

A Different Approach

Instead of introducing another traditional intervention, the school's SENCO, Alison, completed Unlock Learning Foundations, a specialist online training programme teaching the R.E.S.TT™ process.

This approach focuses on something often overlooked:
Preparing the brain to learn before attempting to teach

Rather than delivering more content, the process:

- Identifies how each student processes information
- Uncovers hidden barriers to literacy
- Develops internal tools that make learning accessible

This enabled Alison to apply the approach immediately with her students, while also building long-term capacity within the school.

Engagement: From Resistance to Willingness

The shift in engagement was immediate and significant.

> “We have three students who wouldn’t have engaged before, who are now all engaging.” - Alison, SENCO Lionheart School

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One student’s story illustrates this transformation clearly.

A teenage girl had reached a point where she believed there was no point in trying. Every previous intervention had failed her. As a result, her confidence was extremely low, and her frustration was entirely understandable.

This approach was different.

Instead of continuing to work on phonics, spelling and decoding, Alison focused on understanding **how the student’s brain was processing text** and worked with her to create a new, more helpful way forward.

For the first time, the student experienced an approach that was genuinely centred on her.

Recognising this, she agreed to try:

> “At least it looks interesting.”

This moment marked a turning point, from resistance to openness.

Confidence and Mindset Shift

As engagement increased, confidence followed.

One student who had previously refused to read aloud:

- Took a text voluntarily
- Read aloud to a small group
- Reflected afterwards:

> “I normally hate hearing myself read, but today it felt okay.”

Across the group, Alison observed a clear shift:
From *"I can't do this"*
To *"Maybe I can"*

Understanding Themselves as Learners

A key outcome was increased self-awareness.

Students began to understand:

- How their brains work
- Why they had previously struggled
- That their difficulties were **not their fault**

This reduced self-blame and significantly improved confidence.

One student discovered she had **aphantasia** (an inability to form mental images), saying:

"I can't picture anything in my head. I didn't know other people could do this."

This insight was transformational, explaining years of difficulty and unlocking new ways to learn.

Tools for Life, Not Just Literacy

This approach goes beyond reading and writing.

Alison explains:

"These are tools for life, not just for passing an exam."

Students quickly began applying what they had learned across subjects. One asked:

"Can I use this in other classes?"

He went on to independently apply the strategies in maths and science, with noticeable improvements in both.

Measurable Results

Alongside these mindset shifts, academic progress was clear and rapid.

For one student:

- **Comprehension:** 1/5 → 4/5
- **Information retrieval:** 1/4 → 3/4

Progress was achieved in a relatively short time and continues to improve.

A Scalable, Sustainable Solution

This case study highlights something powerful:
Training one teacher can impact many students

By equipping Alison with the tools and understanding:

- Multiple students were supported simultaneously
- The approach can now be used with future pupils
- Knowledge can be shared across the staff team

Alison plans to:

- Continue using the approach regularly
- Train other staff
- Implement simple school-wide changes

She says:

"I understand so much more about the brain now."
"It works. It definitely works. There is no doubt about it."

Why This Matters for Schools

This model offers a practical, cost-effective alternative to traditional interventions.

It can:

- Re-engage the hardest-to-reach students
- Improve confidence and independence
- Deliver measurable academic progress

- Reduce reliance on intensive one-to-one support
- Create long-term, whole-school impact

In light of the SEND White Paper (SEND reform: putting children and young people first) this approach addressed many of the key points. When put into practice at Lionheart School it:

- Broke down barriers to learning
- Promoted inclusion
- Delivered targeted support
- Was needs led
- Addressed multiple needs

Alison is now equipped to:

- Become a leader in collaborative working
- Share resources within her school
- Possibly fulfil the role 'Expert at Hand' in the future

Final Thought

When students understand how they learn and are given the tools to succeed, everything changes.

This isn't just about improving literacy.

It's about unlocking potential.

If you're a school looking to improve outcomes for students with dyslexia or literacy challenges:

Email: louise@unlock-learning.co.uk to find out how this approach could work in your setting.