

Practical lessons bring BTEC Health and Social Care to life for Valley Park School

School:  Valley Park School

OFSTED  Outstanding

Location:  Maidstone, Kent

BTEC Cohort:  100

Background

Valley Park School is a mixed 11-18 academy in Maidstone, with 1570 students on roll. BTEC qualifications are at the heart of Valley Park's curriculum, with the school offering Level 1/2 Firsts, Level 1/2 Tech Awards and Level 3 Nationals. Kathy Prebble, Head of Health and Social Care at Valley Park School, says the progression from Level 2 to Level 3 allows students to continue in areas that they enjoy and would like a future in. Kathy has been teaching BTEC qualifications since 2002 and explains how the flexible nature of the Health and Social Care qualification continues to engage students and teachers alike.

Practical experience helps equip students for later life

We find that the flexibility of teaching a BTEC subject allows for **different teaching styles** so that it never becomes mundane. This is especially true for Health and Social Care as there is so much extra scope that you can add into the course. As part of the more practical side of the course, we do a number of different activities. First aid is important for any Health and Social Care student, so we train our students to do CPR on Resusci Annies and then put them in the recovery position. We use cyber babies and a 'Baby Egg Challenge' where students have to look after an egg for a week, allowing them to fully understand the challenges of caring for infants in a very hands on way.

We find that the practical elements of the teaching really help students' development and allow them to produce evidence in a different way.

“It's really important for us that once students have got the knowledge, they can put that into practice and have an application of that knowledge.”

It also encourages some of the more introverted learners to work in team situations, where some then show their natural **leadership skills**. Level 3 Health and Social Care student, Chloe, says that the practical experience she has gained from Health and Social Care has made the qualification “much more relatable to life” as “all the skills you learn are applicable to any situation”.



Kathy Prebble, Head of Health and Social Care at Valley Park School
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Kathy teaching CPR on a Resusci Annie

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Students gain confidence from real-life placements and community engagement

At Valley Park School we incorporate work placements and visitors coming in from outside to demonstrate to the students that what they are learning in the classroom can be applied to the workplace.

“This engagement helps students to understand the world around them and encourages them to understand the bigger picture in life.”

We also run lots of projects for our Health and Social Care students, such as Dementia Cafes with the help of local charities, where the students have all been trained as 'Dementia Friends'. We run Christmas OAP parties for local homes and our Sixth Form students have volunteered in local disability groups. From this, the students gain such good skills that they can use within any career they choose to. Skills such as **communication, confidence and independence** are all so transferable to any job they'd like to do.

The outcome – students are more engaged and teachers can exercise their creative freedom

I've been teaching BTEC since 2002 and I don't think I will ever change now because I believe it offers so much to the students and as a teacher, I love the **flexibility** it offers. I find it so interesting to teach because there is so much you can do within each topic area and the students love the **interactivity**, as it isn't all theory led. You can do lots of different practical lessons with the students, which as a teacher, you want to be able to do.

Recently, one of my former students came back to work at the school as a clinical and educational psychologist, which was a really proud moment for me. If I was speaking to someone that was considering offering Health and Social Care, I would definitely advocate that they do it.

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