



Mind Matters

This year has been tough. As children returned to school, there were lots of changes to adjust to, as well as new challenges to face. We asked schools across the North East how they have helped support their pupils' mental health in a year like no other

At Aysgarth School, Deputy Head and Head of Boarding, Paul Barlow, also puts the children's mental health first. 'If a child is happy, having fun and feels safe, then the rest of the learning just happens,' he says. That's why the pastoral

care at the school focuses on developing a relationship with each child so that they have somebody they can trust while in their learning environment. 'If they feel safe, then that makes them feel like they can be different – they can join the choir, for example, and not feel like they're going to be teased,' Paul continues. 'They can be who they want to be.'

Combining both old-fashioned and modern techniques, Aysgarth offer support in a variety of ways. 'We're old fashioned in the sense that it's about getting more adults looking after less children; as a member of staff, if I've got less pupils to pastorally look after, I can do a better job,' he explains. 'But we're modern in that we recognise that there are new and modern ways – not to replace you – but to help you identify those pupils that need that little bit of extra pastoral care.'

Above all, the most important thing in Paul's eyes is spending time with the pupils. 'The biggest change we have implemented into the pastoral care structure is a much closer working relationship with the school counsellor,' he says. The school is now able to easily initiate introductions for pupils and covers a percentage of the cost so that pupils can have easy access to the professional help of a trained counsellor from outside the school. 'This has been vital during these difficult times, and it is clear that the pupils and the school have all benefited from strong professional pastoral advice and management on the more sensitive and demanding emotional concerns. We often tell the boys at Aysgarth that asking for help is a strength.'

