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Grant Thornton

Local businesses help Leeds pupils ‘Make the Grade’



An initiative headed by social enterprise Ahead Partnership which connects Leeds employers with local schools has been given top marks by pupils.

The three year ‘Make the Grade’ scheme which recently completed its second year and is now embarking on a third year, involves eight high schools* and 19 primary schools and over 107 local businesses. During the last academic year, over 3,000 pupils from primary and secondary schools worked with 704 volunteers from the partner businesses and feedback from schools, pupils and employers was extremely positive.

Sophie Nesworthy, programme leader at Leeds Ahead, said: “Having worked with schools and employers for the last eight years, this initiative is proving to be one of our most successful. It provides each participating school with a bespoke programme of employability and skills development activities and rigorous monitoring allows us to report achievements and progress to both schools and employers.

“For example, business advisory firm Grant Thornton, together with partners Logistik and Premier Farnell, has been working to mentor a girls Year 9 group at Swallow Hill Community College. The aim



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has been not only to help the pupils to improve their grades, but to bring about a more fundamental change in their attitude to learning by increasing their confidence and motivation.

“Throughout the year, the partner businesses have not only held mentoring sessions, they have also organised a careers event, staged a maths workshop at school and hosted visits to their offices to give pupils an insight into the world of work. We have another exciting schedule planned for the year ahead with the aim of inspiring and engaging young people about the world of work.”

Sandra O’Neill, a volunteer mentor from Grant Thornton, added: “A fresh perspective is always welcome. Working with one of the students over a 12 month period, I found her perception eye opening and refreshing ; she really made me look at things in a different way. In addition, knowing that I was helping her in making decisions about her future was very rewarding. She had to go through an interview process to receive the mentoring and it was clear to me from the outset that she was keen to gain experience and get herself ahead of the game. She worked hard and applied herself and the feedback from everyone here was very positive.”

Bryan Pearce, assistant principal at Swallow Hill Community College, said: “Any scheme which strengthens contact between students and businesses is invaluable. During the last academic year, the Make the Grade initiative has been fantastic in terms of enabling young people to talk direct to real businesses, outside the world of education, and our students have really appreciated the opportunity.

“We are particularly aware of the need to engage and inspire our female students. Too often there is a lack of confidence and self-belief – the companies which have been working with our Year 9 girls mentoring group have done a great job of delivering a convincing message about the opportunities available for these bright young people and raising their aspirations. It has been a real pleasure to watch the relationships develop between students and their mentors.”

Feedback from the girls mentoring group stated that their favourite activity was visiting the different businesses and taking part in the various tasks. The element they enjoyed most was getting to know the business mentors, who made working life and business more real and gave them a better understanding of different businesses and how they actually work.

Grant Thornton’s involvement is part of its Educate to Innovate programme which aims to foster entrepreneurialism by working with primary and secondary schools as well as colleges in the region to encourage and develop pupils’ innovation and business skills. The firm has also supported Leeds Ahead by helping with environmental team days, careers events, the scholarship programme and its ‘world of work’ activities in primary schools.

Grant Thornton has also supported Cockburn School and Carr Manor Community School with mentors, working with partner businesses ICB, RS Steeper and Burgess Diagnostics.

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Photography:

Photo shows: Swallow Hill girls mentoring group

Notes to editors

Additional comments from the Swallow Hill girls mentoring group:

"It's made us become more interested to study Business Studies at GCSE"

"We've been offered work experience"

"We've got to meet new people."

"It's given us more confidence and self-belief."

"We loved getting to know new people; this was outside of our comfort zone."

"Getting to go to new places - the businesses."

"Being told we can do what we want to do."

Additional teacher's quotes:

"It's possibly been one of the most successful programmes we've been involved with. In terms of contact time with employers it's given us far more than anything else we have been involved with. The mentees have already said they feel a huge difference in themselves, in relation to their self-confidence and self-esteem, but more importantly they feel more grown up."

"Having business volunteers get involved with our students means everything to the students involved. They live in a sheltered world and employers giving their time adds reality to activities."

"By meeting people in the world of industry the students' eyes are opened to different industries, the skills required and the different job choices available to them."

Bryan Pearce, assistant principal at Swallow Hill Community College



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***Make the Grade schools & partner businesses:**

Carr Manor Community School

Partners: MAMG, Capsticks, Leeds Community NHS Trust, Cintas

Cockburn School

Partners: Asda, Balfour Beatty, Pinsent Masons, UK General Insurance

The Co-operative Academy of Leeds

Partners: MAMG, Arup, The Co-operative, Eversheds, OHS

Crawshaw School

Partners: Asda, Baker Tilly, Pudsey Legal, Zenith

John Smeaton Community College

Partners: MAMG, Communisis, DWF, Tesco

Ralph Thoresby High School

Partners: MAMG, Asda, Aecom, Bond Dickinson, Tenet Group

Roundhay School

Partners: First Group, Tesco, The Big Word

Swallow Hill Community College

Partners: Grant Thornton, Logistik, Premier Farnell

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