

Enhancing Engagement of Academically Able Students

Ashley Park School
Daily therapeutic check-ins to strengthen connection in a specialist secondary setting
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THE BIG QUESTION

What were we trying to understand?

When attendance looks strong but learning stalls, what unlocks engagement?

THE LEADERSHIP ISSUE

Attendance was not the problem. Passive participation was.

Students were present and communicating, but progress was limited by emotional readiness, low resilience and passive participation.

THE STRATEGIC RESPONSE

A targeted, low-cost relational routine.

- 5–10 minute daily check-ins during morning transition.
- Delivered consistently by the clinical team.
- Designed with students, not simply for them.
- Used a simple wellbeing scale to move pupils from feeling unsettled towards learning readiness.

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Context: **Specialist secondary specialist provision**

Cohort: **Two Year 9 academically able autistic students**

Attendance: **Over 90%, in some cases over 95%**

Intervention: **Four weeks of daily therapeutic check-ins**

Evidence: **Student voice, parent views, classroom observation, Engagement Scale and check-in records**

WHAT CHANGED? — KEY FINDINGS

Small routine, visible shift, clear leadership implications.

THE IMPACT

Readiness to learn increased.

Students moved from being present in lessons to showing stronger signs of active engagement: more persistence, more communication and greater participation.



EVIDENCE OF CHANGE

35 / 38

check-ins attended

Student voice: increased readiness to learn and stronger motivation to engage.

Observation: more questions, sustained focus and participation.

School data: one student was in class more frequently after the intervention.

WHY LEADERS SHOULD NOTICE

- Engagement can look deceptively positive when attendance and behaviour data are strong.
- A short, protected relational routine can reduce hidden barriers to learning.
- Student-led support increased ownership, buy-in and willingness to continue.
- This is scalable practice: simple to trial, easy to adapt and meaningful to evaluate.

VOICES FROM THE PROJECT — WHAT WE HEARD

PUPIL INSIGHT

“Knowing there was someone to talk to helped me feel ready to go into class.”

The scale gave pupils language for feelings — and a clearer route back into learning.

PRACTICE INSIGHT

Predictable connection reduced the need for students to seek adult interaction outside learning.

The routine turned an existing need into a planned route for regulation and readiness.

FAMILY INSIGHT

Parent views helped identify barriers, interests and what engagement looked like beyond school data.

The project modelled ethical, collaborative and personalised practice.

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAYS

Ask these questions in your school:

1. Who is attending but not truly engaging?
2. Where are pupils seeking regulation outside learning?
3. What protected routine could make readiness visible?
4. How are pupils shaping the support designed for them?

FROM INQUIRY TO IMPACT

Immediate school-wide shift:

- Check-ins extended beyond the initial cohort.
- Visual supports added for accessibility.
- Pupils given choice: scale, conversation or no check-in.
- Relational practice embedded as a learning strategy, not an add-on.

SCALING NEXT

For leaders considering adoption:

- Trial with a clearly identified group.
- Protect the timing and consistency.
- Measure readiness, persistence and participation.
- Keep student choice central as the model grows.

KEY TAKEAWAY — ONE MESSAGE TO REMEMBER

Attendance shows who is present. Engagement shows who is learning. A simple, student-led relational routine can unlock both.

