



**CASHBACK  
2025/26**



# CASE STUDY

**Northfield Academy**

**Relationship-Centred Practice in Action**

# NORTHFIELD ACADEMY

## Relationship-Centred Practice in Action

At Northfield Academy in Aberdeen, the CashBack School of Rugby has become an important part of how some young people reconnect positively with school life — using structure, routine and consistent support to help pupils who were at risk of disengagement.

Delivered in partnership with Aberdeenshire Rugby Club, the programme combines regular coaching, predictable routines and positive adult relationships within environments where young people are encouraged to contribute, communicate and experience success beyond the classroom. Staff reflected that many pupils initially arrived with low confidence, poor attendance or limited belief in their own ability, but gradually responded positively to the consistency and encouragement created through rugby activity.

Across the programme, staff observed improvements in behaviour, emotional regulation and wider engagement with school life. Expectations around teamwork, communication and accountability often felt clearer and more immediate within rugby environments, helping some pupils engage more positively both within sessions and across wider school settings.

### Outcomes

Improved behaviour and engagement – pupils previously excluded from class are now participating more positively within school environments. Staff reported fewer referrals, stronger listening skills and improved emotional regulation.

Enhanced wellbeing and connection – participants increasingly described rugby as an environment where they felt calmer, more included and more confident socially.

Pathways beyond school – several pupils now train and play with local clubs, strengthening wider community ties and positive peer networks.

Role-modelling and peer respect – pupils who once struggled socially are now viewed as dependable teammates and positive influences within younger groups.

### Evidence and Voices

“It calms me down and helps me make new friends and it’s good teamwork.” S1 Pupil

“He’s more focused, with a much better attitude at home. He takes his fitness seriously and surrounds himself with positive friends.” Parent

“We’ve seen significant reductions in classroom incidents and real growth in confidence. Rugby has given them a reason to belong.” Crew Teacher

One pupil, initially quiet and withdrawn, gradually developed confidence through learning tackling technique and participating more fully within team activity. After being left out of a squad one week, he still chose to attend and support his teammates — a significant moment that staff viewed as evidence of growing resilience, maturity and connection to the group.

Another pupil, previously disengaged from school activity, now regularly represents Aberdeenshire Rugby Club and proudly shares match experiences and achievements with staff. Collectively, these examples highlight the impact that structured sport and positive peer environments can have on both individual outlook and wider school culture.

## Learning and Adaptation

Through ongoing reflection between school staff and club coaches, the Northfield team identified several practices that consistently supported positive engagement:

- Consistency and routine – regular training days created predictability and structure.
- Positive role models – pupils responded positively to authenticity, encouragement and consistent support from staff and coaches.
- Small-group environments – quieter pupils were more able to contribute confidently and build relationships gradually over time.
- Strong school-club links – community pathways sustained engagement beyond school hours while strengthening wider support networks.

The approach continues to evolve. Staff now regularly embed “Crew” check-ins before and after sessions, helping pupils reflect on communication, respect and resilience within wider school life. Several aspects of the programme have also influenced broader school practice, with other departments increasingly adopting similar mentoring and relationship-based approaches.

## Reflection and Learning

Northfield Academy’s CashBack School of Rugby demonstrates the impact that consistent routines, positive relationships and structured environments can have on young people who may previously have struggled to engage positively within school life.

While rugby provided the initial opportunity for participation, the strongest impact emerged through the trust, encouragement and sense of connection developed around the programme over time. For several young people, rugby increasingly became a source of structure, confidence and positive identity both within school and beyond it.