

# Portland Academy, Sunderland sees increase in attendance thanks to free period products

Since taking part in the scheme, the academy has noted increase in attendance in those students who have taken time off due to period poverty.

According to the leadership team, awareness of access to the products alongside more open conversations with guardians has allowed the parents of the learners, many of whom have learning or physical difficulties, to feel confident their child wouldn't experience any upset during their period at school.

**Karen Hart, 48, assistant head at the school said:** "It's been so important to us to ensure that the scheme has good visibility at the school, so that we can normalise conversations around periods."

Portland Academy uses a number of different tactics to ensure that any learners have access to products whenever they need. A number of freshen-up stations have been set up in the bathrooms for all learners, and in the female bathrooms, alongside perfume, deodorants and hygiene wipes, period products are also placed in baskets for any learner who needs them. The freshen up stations are taken care of by student mentors at the school who ensure that the stock of products is regularly topped off, which contributes to the ethos of caring for one another at the school.

Alongside the products at the freshen-up station, learners are able to access more packs by asking for products. The high visibility of the scheme at the school has also encouraged more open conversations with the boys at the school too, which has further normalised the discussion of periods at the school.

**Graeme Musson, 40, deputy head at the school said:** "We have fewer male staff at the school than female, which is quite typical of SEN settings, but this doesn't mean that we shy away from having these conversations. We ensure that we have males delivering lessons about periods and making the entire male population of the school aware of periods."



The scheme benefits go beyond increasing attendance too, Graham continues: "The scheme has helped us have frank and honest conversations with families that might have been very difficult beforehand. We've started having discussions about periods but it's meant that we have been able to talk about broader issues in relation to poverty, and how we can support those families in a really bespoke and dignified way, which has been really worthwhile."