

Beechen Cliff School

A Seven Year Solution Focus Case Study

Opening & Background

The story of Beechen Cliff's solution-focused journey began in 2018 with concerns about students who were struggling but not receiving adequate support. Susie, then pastoral manager for the sixth form, recognised that many young people were falling below the threshold for NHS services.

Determined to act, she trained in the Solution Focused approach, supported by the leadership team, and brought Tara on board to work alongside her. What started as counselling provision soon grew organically into a whole-school approach.

Introductions & Roles

Today, Beechen Cliff's SF practice is supported by a wide team. Tim, now headteacher, oversaw its introduction as assistant head. Marina continues Susie's pastoral work in the sixth form, while Annabelle and Polly lead PSHE and integrate SF into lessons. Ella, a new teaching assistant, has embraced SF in her daily work, and Mike, the deputy head, ensures SF informs behaviour and pastoral strategy.

Alongside them, students such as Annabelle (Year 12), Henry (Year 10), Caden, and Rafferty shared their experiences of SF in practice.

Culture Shift & Student Perspectives

Over time, the use of SF has shifted the culture of the school. Staff across all subjects, not only pastoral roles, now use SF language, and students are deeply familiar with it. What began as a tool for those in crisis has become part of everyday conversation, in lessons, tutor time, and informal interactions.

The stigma once felt about counselling, especially among boys, has faded. Students describe sessions as short, supportive, and focused on what is going well. They speak of teachers who notice strengths, peers who celebrate each other's successes, and a general openness that makes well-being support normal rather than stigmatised.

Challenges & Overcoming Them

The journey was not without challenges. Some staff were initially concerned, fearing they were expected to become counsellors. Others wondered how SF would fit into their daily teaching. Over time, resources such as prompt cards, toolkits, and posters helped staff apply SF in simple ways, even during busy lessons. The approach also proved valuable for staff personally, helping them reflect on their own strengths. For students, especially athletes facing injury, SF provided a crucial way to manage emotions when their outlet of sport was no longer available.

Parents, Data & Evidence of Impact

Parents have also been drawn into the SF approach, through newsletters, coffee mornings, and training sessions. Data collected by Susie and Tara demonstrates its

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reach; where once only 10 boys in sixth form sought help, in 2024, 149 students across the school were supported. In one year alone, over 1,000 sessions were delivered, with two-thirds of sixth formers seeking support coming from outside schools; evidence that Beechen students had already benefited earlier. Feedback from students has been equally powerful, showing how much difference SF makes to their confidence and resilience.

Student Feedback & Unanticipated Outcomes

Students highlight that SF is calm, supportive, and goal-focused, helping with both well-being and academic pressures. Staff note unanticipated outcomes, everyday classroom interactions have become more positive, with strengths highlighted more often. SF has also supported staff well-being, reframing challenges and encouraging reflection on what is going well. New staff, such as Ella, found the training transformative, reshaping how they approached both their work and their own confidence.

Future Hopes: 2028 Vision

Looking ahead, the team envision SF being embedded in every lesson and tutor session, starting and ending with reflection. They hope to see peer-to-peer SF conversations between older and younger students, extending into informal settings such as the refectory. For students, the aspiration is that SF will become part of assessment and feedback, balancing areas for improvement with recognition of strengths. The hope is that SF becomes second nature across all aspects of school life.

External Recognition & Wider Impact

External observers have also noticed the difference. Ofsted inspectors repeatedly highlighted the strength of Beechen Cliff's mental health provision in both school and boarding reports. SF has now spread into at least five other local schools, some within the same trust, others outside, and word of its success continues to travel. Attendance at Beechen Cliff has risen over the past three years, now the strongest in the local area, a sign of the wider impact of SF in reducing barriers to learning.

Advice for Others & Closing Reflections

When asked what advice they would give to other schools, staff were clear: SF is simple, effective, and offers exceptional value. With minimal training, anyone can use it to make a meaningful difference, whether in a 30-minute session or a brief corridor conversation. Students echoed this sentiment, describing SF as approachable, non-threatening, and a way to build on strengths rather than dwell on problems. The conversation ended with gratitude and pride in what has been achieved: a thriving case study of SF in action, deeply embedded in Beechen Cliff's culture.