



News Report Activity: Case 9

Case 9: 'Show us that you care': a student's view on what makes a perfect teacher' (theguardian, 2015).

Ofsted has its own ideas about outstanding lessons, but what young people love about teachers is quite different



📷 'The incredible teachers I've had are the ones who never give up on me and have taught me that I should never give up on myself.' Photograph: Allstar/Disney

The perfect teacher. In Ofsted's eyes, that probably means exemplary lesson plans and 30 immaculately marked books with targets for improvement. But, as a 16-year-old, I'm not sure I agree. What students love about the best teachers – the ones whose lessons are discussed at the dinner table, whose names are always remembered and whose impact is never forgotten – is quite different.

Show us that you care

Ofsted says outstanding teachers demonstrate a "deep knowledge and understanding of their subject". Although passion is inspiring, a deep knowledge and understanding of their children is just as important.

I have a teacher who, from the beginning of my two-year course, has offered an after-school session every single week, for however long we need. I am often the only one there but she doesn't mind. She has completely changed my life by believing in me, pushing me and caring about me. Obviously, I don't expect every teacher to be like her, but to know someone values you enough to put time in is amazing.

I have been lucky to have teachers who taught me far more than the syllabus, who showed me how to tackle obstacles head-on and become stronger as a result. Perfectly planned lessons are one thing, but, to an insecure teenager, showing that you care is essential.





Don't shout at us

The teachers who screamed at my class when I was 11 are the ones I still can't form any kind of relationship with. Respect isn't about having 30 silent faces shouted into submission. If you treat us as humans, know what you're talking about and take an interest in what we have to say, you will gain our respect. Thinking of your lessons spontaneously and spending an hour shouting at us for our "disrespect" won't get you anywhere.

There's a teacher who's renowned at my school – she's the one everyone dislikes, mainly because she screams and gives detentions all the time. We have no motivation to work for her, because we just can't talk to her. Shouting us into silence doesn't give you more authority.

Show us your personality (but not too much)

Let's face it, nobody wants to be up at half past eight on a Monday morning. But the best teachers are the ones whose personalities are so bright that the lightbulbs inside 30 heads are switched on anyway.

We genuinely like the teachers who smile, who can do the voices in books without feeling embarrassed and can hear one of those innuendos that we find hysterical and not tell us off for being teenagers. We know you're not here to be our friend, but some sort of relationship is important.

A balance is crucial, however: the teachers who try too hard to "have a laugh" run the risk of student's taking advantage to the point where there's no going back.

Tell us when we've done well

Teachers may be expected to write pages of feedback, but if you want to improve your students' self-esteem and encourage them to further their thinking, but it's the verbal feedback that really sinks in. It can be as simple as "You've got it", "Spot on" or "Absolutely" – it could just be an enthusiastic nod and a proud glint in your eye. It sounds simple, but being told that you've achieved something means the world.

Verbal criticism in front of our peers is not so great, however. Put yourself in my shoes: you're in a food technology class and you have forgotten your tea towel. It is a mistake so great in scale that you will still regret it when writing an article four years later. Being told you're stupid in front of your friends hurts, please don't forget that.

Remember that we do appreciate you

Believe it or not, we know you have it tough. We know that the stress you are under is ridiculous, that you sometimes do more paperwork than teaching, that a one-hour lesson can take more than an hour to prepare and that you hate learning objectives as much as we do. We know that setting us targets and marking our books can feel like a waste of time when you could be kindling a love of your subject.

We might not always show it, but we really do appreciate what you do. Because when it comes down to it, great teachers are like melodies that you can't get out of your head. As children and teenagers, we are constantly changing and you – who see us through that time, pick us up from the wrong paths, failed tests and mistakes – are the truly great ones.

I'm not sure that the perfect teacher exists, but the incredible teachers I've had aren't the ones who never make mistakes, they're the ones who never give up on me and have taught me that I should never give up on myself.

