

# Centre to help pupils with mental health

BISHOP Jonathan has opened a new centre that aims to help students with their social, emotional and mental health – and it will bear his name.

He formally opened ‘The Jonathan Centre’ at Charter C of E Academy in Portsmouth. It’s a therapeutic learning centre to help students overcome barriers to learning. It fits in with one of the priorities that he identified when he was first appointed our bishop – the need to tackle the growing mental health epidemic among our young people.

He cut a ribbon with the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth, Cllr Tom Coles, after which visitors were given a chance to tour the new centre. It has been created in the Aldwell building, which was the original St Luke’s School back in the 1860s. It has been given a complete revamp, with rooms designed for creative art therapy, pastoral mentoring, cooking and sport.

Students who might otherwise refuse to attend or who struggle in the classroom can be referred for a range of targeted support to help them access the curriculum. The centre is only a few steps away from the school gates, meaning students and their families can come and go without needing to walk through the school grounds.

Principal Christian Down said the cumulative effect of Covid lockdowns, teachers’ strikes and pupils’ increased anxiety had resulted in increased absence rates and a spike in referrals to mental health services. This centre would



**Christine Frost with Oil Thusi, aged 15 in the Jonathan Centre**

help Charter Academy to provide earlier intervention to combat issues such as school phobia and challenging behaviour.

This centre continues the tradition of the school naming its buildings after Bishops of Portsmouth. Bishop Christopher Foster opened the Christopher Building in 2021, just before he retired. The centre also has a family connection, as Bishop Jonathan’s wife Christine works there as a creative art therapist.

Bishop Jonathan said: “I can’t think of anything better to bear my name – I expressed when I first came here that my number one priority was the mental health of children and young people. It’s a joy to be associated with this work.”

Vice principal Juliet Read-Birks said: “We currently have a generation of children who are not as resilient, for various reasons. They’ve had to deal with a lot of chaos and they lack stability, even at school.

“The Jonathan Centre will provide a space for students to actively address the challenges they face. There will be a menu of intervention that will help them to tackle the issues that are preventing them from learning effectively.”

The centre has been launched for students. In September it will be opened up to their families, and by summer 2025 it aims to reach into the local community. It includes a sensory room, an intervention room, a kitchen and dining area, and a classroom to replicate the rest of the school. Among the interventions offered are art therapy, speech and language therapy, pastoral mentoring, reconnecting through sport, Lego therapy and support in emotional literacy.

Daniel Holmes, 15, said: “The idea is amazing, and I’m glad students are getting the support they need. It’s a really good foundation to help bring those who are struggling back into the main school.”