

The rewards of helping kids with learning issues

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GRADUATING from Cambridge University with a first class History degree, Jake Curtis had the world at his feet.

But disinterested by the lure of London life so attractive to most graduates, Jake decided to turn to teaching at Kings Heath Boys School. It was just a stone's throw away from where he grew up in Balsall Heath.

The two-year Teach First course takes exceptional trainees and places them in schools in low-income areas, in a bid to inspire pupils and tackle inequality.

For Jake, the idea was immediately exciting - and he quickly learned that in teaching there was 'never a dull moment'

"I wouldn't have gone into teaching if it wasn't for Teach First," says Jake, a former pupil at King Edward VI Camp Hill School. "I really bought into the mission of working in areas of disadvantage. It hit home, and it appealed more than the opportunities in London, like going into management consultancy or living the London city life."

Jake admits he had one or two lessons to learn himself, as he tried to strike a balance between delivering great classes and building up a rapport with the kids.

"You can fall into a trap of concentrating on planning great lessons, marking all the work really hard and being really diligent," he



TEACH First's aim is to place top-quality teachers in schools, particular in areas of "education inequality" where pupils are from disadvantaged families.

The charity, which pays its recruits while they do their training, hopes to train teachers who can inspire a generation of children to believe in themselves and stop those who grow up in poverty from becoming trapped in a downward spiral that can lead to scarce job opportunities, poor health and potentially a life of crime.

For more information visit <http://graduates.teachfirst.org.uk/what-can-you-do/changing-career>

adults and to get children to believe in themselves."

Now Jake, 29, who also spent six months teaching in Palestine, is still contributing to the Teach First mission as he works on Jamie's Farm, running a project for children with behavioural difficulties and disengagement at school.

The project has helped hundreds of children from all over Birmingham and the West Midlands.

"We usually take around 12 kids at a time who are struggling with school or home life," he explains.

"They come to Jamie's Farm and we show them love, boundaries and encouragement. We take away their phones and give them a pitchfork. We show them how to deliver lambs, and chop wood.

"This week we have had one boy who hasn't been to school since June last year. God knows what he has been doing with his time.

"But yesterday we were both chopping wood together, and he was contributing to life on the farm, which can have a really profound effect."

admits. "But then you might be too tired to start building up great relationships with the kids. "Because lessons aren't just about passing the exams. They're also about learning to build relationships with



You can fall into a trap of concentrating on planning lessons... but then you might be too tired to start building great relationships

Jake Curtis

At Jamie's Farm more than 70 per cent of children go back to school with behavioural improvements.

And for Jake, the preparation he got with Teach First laid the foundations with all the challenges he faces in his new role.



Jake Curtis is an ambassador for Teach First. He now works on Jamie's Farm, a project that helps troubled school pupils get back on track