From Red to Blue: Teaching the Mindset Skills Students Need to Thrive Under Pressure

17 November 2025



Stephen Ferguson interviews Martin Fairn, co-founder of the mindset development company Gazing Red2Blue.

In an age where schools face rising levels of stress, anxiety, and absenteeism among students and staff alike, *mindset* may be the missing subject on the timetable.



Martin Fairn

Former rugby player and performance coach **Martin Fairn**, co-founder of **Gazing Red2Blue**, believes that young people need not more diagnosis but better skills to manage pressure. The Gazing **Red2Blue** model—used by world-class athletes, military teams, and now an increasing number of schools—teaches a deceptively simple yet powerful mental discipline: moving from reactive "red-head" thinking to calm, focused "blue-head" control.

The Challenge: Stress in Schools

Post-pandemic classrooms are awash with stress. Teachers report growing emotional volatility in students, and nearly a million young people aged 16–24 are now outside employment or education. Yet much of our response remains rooted in a *clinical* rather than *developmental* mindset. *"We've moved from teaching skills to labelling problems,"* Fairn warns.

He argues that while mental-health awareness is essential, young people are rarely taught *mental skills*—how to recognise when their minds are in overdrive and how to regain focus. **Red2Blue** offers a common language and framework for doing just that, turning abstract wellbeing lessons into practical tools for daily life.

> *"We need to provide young people with some mindset coaching—skills that enable them to deal with pressure and setbacks." – Martin Fairn*

The Red2Blue Model: Simple, Visible, and Teachable

At its core, **Red2Blue** is a model of *attention control*. The "red head" describes the reactive state familiar to anyone facing pressure: attention scattered, emotions rising, focus hijacked by worry or frustration. The "blue head" is calm, composed, and centred on what can be controlled.

Transitioning from red to blue is not about denying emotion but redirecting attention—a process that can be learned through simple techniques such as controlled breathing, reframing, or briefly pausing to "take a broader view of the situation."

Fairn explains, *"The control of attention is at the heart of the skill. Red2Blue*

gives students a language to recognise when they've gone red and tools to bring themselves back to blue." Whether on a sports pitch or in an exam hall, that self-awareness becomes the difference between panic and performance.

Why It Belongs in Education

Fairn believes mindset training should be as fundamental as literacy or numeracy, which has led to the development of the "Become a Red2Blue School" programme, In schools already using **Red2Blue**, the model is introduced through short workshops for staff and pupils, helping teachers frame performance and mindset in everyday terms:

- **Performance:** What are we trying to achieve?
- **Pressure:** Where does it come from, and how does it affect us?
- **Mindset:** How do we respond?

This shared language opens conversations about resilience without pathologising normal emotions. As Fairn says, *"Start where they are, not where someone thinks they should be."* The result is a culture that sees challenge not as threat but as opportunity to learn control—an antidote to the current epidemic of anxiety in classrooms.

> *"The beauty of Red2Blue is that it normalises those unhelpful or emotionally distracted responses we all experience—but does so without judgement. That's what makes it empowering. It enables teachers and students to own their mindset and develop the mental skills for the moments that matter." – Martin Fairn*

Fairn adds that the framework has also shown strong results in **SEN settings**, where students often struggle with self-regulation and emotional control. *"We've seen some great examples of engagement within SEN schools and with students stuck in dysregulated behaviour patterns,"* he explains. *"It helps staff and pupils alike move from reaction to reflection in a way that feels natural, not clinical."*

Evidence and Effectiveness

When asked for proof that **Red2Blue** works, Fairn laughs gently. *"The All Blacks won two World Cups with it,"* he notes. *"That's not bad evidence."* The New

Zealand All Blacks are one of their most famous clients and have made no secret of the importance of the Red2Blue concept in helping them to win the 2011 and 2015 World Cups.

The method has been applied from elite sport to the British Army, and now to education trusts across the UK. And internal school data shows improvements in engagement and reductions in behavioural incidents after Red2Blue sessions.

For Fairn, the measure of success is pragmatic: Effectiveness is the best measure of truth. If pupils and teachers find it helps them think clearly and perform better, that's evidence enough. Ultimately, **Red2Blue's** value lies in *transferability*—from classroom to workplace, exam stress to life stress. It equips young people with skills that outlast any curriculum reform.

The Deeper Message: Responsibility and Humanity

Fairn's philosophy aligns with a growing movement to restore *personal responsibility* and *human connection* to education. *"We start human first, student second,"* he says.

By teaching mindset as a skill rather than a symptom, **Red2Blue** encourages agency. Students learn they can influence their emotional state; they are not simply victims of circumstance or diagnosis. That subtle shift—from externalising problems to owning solutions—builds confidence, resilience, and self-belief. As Fairn puts it, *"It transfers ownership of their mentality to themselves."*

For teachers, it offers a shared framework to discuss performance without judgement, and for schools, a sustainable way to support wellbeing without overburdening pastoral systems already at breaking point.

Conclusion

In a world where every distraction pulls students toward the red zone—constant notifications, academic pressure, social comparison—**Red2Blue** offers a way back to focus. It doesn't promise instant calm or clinical cure, but it provides something more valuable: *a teachable mental skill for real life.*

Perhaps the first step is simple—teach them how to pause, breathe, and shift from

red to blue.

I finish the interview with the question, "*How would you sum up what you're trying to achieve with Red2Blue?"* And quick as a flash, Fairn replies : *"There's 8 billion people that could benefit from understanding what it is and how to use it."* Given Fairn's obvious passion about his mission, I wouldn't be too surprised to see him achieve that.

About the Author

Stephen Ferguson has worked for over 40 years as a counsellor, coach, psychiatric social worker, personal development trainer, and wellness mentor. He is the creator of the Ferguson Solutions Method, which blends Solution-Focused Therapy, EMDR, EFT, and mindset training to accelerate emotional change and resilience.

