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ssat the schools, students and teachers network

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Welcome

Sue Williamson,
Chief Executive, SSAT

In a period of political uncertainty with economic and social challenges, it is reassuring to read the articles in this edition of the journal. Their focus is on developing the opportunities for young people, improving pedagogy, and the professional development of staff. Collaboration is at the heart of the articles. Schools are often an oasis for the young people in our care. In my visits to schools, I am frequently amazed at the creativity of staff in removing barriers to learning.

You will have received the latest pamphlets in the deep social justice series: *Deep Experience for Social Justice* and *Deep Support for Social Justice*. In *Deep Support*, I focus on a case study of Manchester Communication Academy – the academy has a wide range of strategies to remove obstacles to children learning in a seriously deprived area. In this journal, Rick Kitson, SEMH and Wellbeing Lead at Catcote Academy in Hartlepool, and one of SSAT's Leadership Legacy Fellows, tells the story of a year in the life of one student. It is not only moving, but highlights the dilemmas that teachers and school leaders face. I visited Catcote and loved the creativity and innovation in creating an employability curriculum in a special school. The vision was created by Alan Chapman, the principal, who had the courage to rent a unit on the industrial estate; open a shop in the main shopping centre; and provide a catering service for the Arts Centre to be able to offer students employment and training opportunities. Sadly Alan died in October, but his vision and work will live on through the brilliant staff team he created.

All the main political parties claim to have social justice as a priority. All the parties receive copies of the pamphlets and we are keeping them aware of the deep social justice campaign. We know that schools cannot cure all the problems of disadvantaged young people, but they do have an important part to play. At this year's SSAT National Conference – *Fighting for deep social justice* – we shared the pamphlet – *Deep Leadership for Social Justice*, where Professor Sir Tim Brighouse articulates his ideas for the changes needed to improve the school system and social justice. Your copy will be sent in the spring term.

The journal is one way that SSAT promotes the work of schools, teachers, students and school leaders. If you would like to share a development that you are working on or an achievement that has made an impact in your school or locality, please email your Relationship Manager on **rmteam@ssatuk.co.uk.**

This is always a very busy term, and everyone at SSAT thanks you for all your hard work. The plays, concerts and other activities taking place bring a lot of joy for children and families. We know that schools are making arrangements for children who may be worried about being hungry over the holidays. Whatever government is in power after the general election, a priority has to be to eradicate child poverty. We look forward to working with you and fighting for deep social justice.

Keeping children in the classroom (or at least in the school building)

Danielle Egonu,
Temple Hill Primary Academy

Over the past two years, Temple Hill has been developing a provision to support the most challenging pupils who face complex social, emotional and behavioural needs. In an effort to shelter these pupils from permanent exclusion, creating a provision that does not at the same time exclude these pupils from their peers has been high priority. Developing positive learning behaviour and social skills, even for those individuals with significant complex behavioural, emotional and mental health needs as well as safeguarding concerns, help this provision take form.

Facing the 'under-performing' stigma

Temple Hill Primary was considered an under-performing school in one of the most deprived areas in the country (Dartford) for over a decade.

Joining the school as a new head two years ago, it quickly became apparent that the school and community had been tarnished with a stigma that they didn't deserve – it was drowning them like a fly in sticky amber. People often lived up to the self-fulfilling prophecy as a result. The first year at Temple Hill was the toughest I have faced.

The surrounding settings and professionals from all sectors viewed our school as an outcast relative. It became very clear that help would be limited in seeking the support needed for some of the most volatile children and families I had ever encountered in my 13-year career.

Local schools would not take our children on managed moves due to the school's reputation. Professionals were reluctant to enter the building, or even the area, and were often able to give us little or no help. As well as this, we never knew who would be attending our school from one day to the next, which made us extremely vulnerable due to our low numbers.

Accepting the challenge and fighting for change
Sometimes when you seem to have nowhere to go you have to look inward and try something different.

We had nothing to lose, we were ostracised by everyone outside of our small trust and no one in a 13-mile radius had faith in what Temple Hill could achieve. We had nothing to lose as far as our reputation, but we were aware that as a team, we needed to create something special and substantive for the children who had no place to go beyond our school.

When starting to change a culture in a school, sometimes you must be blunt! What had been done in the past hadn't worked, so I rewrote the basics.

Implementing new courses of action
Recording incidents on blue paper: Silly as it may seem, this first step began our momentum. Children are visual and tactile little beings, particularly pupils with social and emotional mental health needs. Blue became our colour for behaviour, and we tracked incidents with passion as a leadership team, empowering all staff to be involved in the change of tide.

Children sat alongside an adult when completing a blue form and had to explain the incident when they were ready and calm. These were all logged and summarised and children quickly learned if they had three blue forms in a short term, their parents/carers would be called in and the forms would go onto their report card (yes, a blue one). This was overseen by a member of SLT who would effectively adopt these children for six weeks or longer, coaching and mentoring them.

Blue forms have evolved over the past two years. As a school, we read: "When the adults change, everything changes". Now, children complete the form themselves (annotated by an adult if needed) and decide how to resolve the issue with the support of an adult. Pupils also choose what, if any, repercussions there should be.

Now, children complete the behaviour form themselves (annotated by an adult if needed), and decide how to resolve the issue with the support of an adult

The lifeboat: After the blue form system became a recognisable feature of our behaviour strategy, we realised that we needed to come up with another idea that would free up some SLT time. We were regularly having 20+ children follow us around all day or sit in our offices. While the blue forms were great, we still had children being sent out of class because they were disrupting learning, all while our school size increased towards 900.

The 20+ children previously mentioned were the usual suspects, but it was evident they needed somewhere to go and that they responded best to the relationships they were forming with key adults around the school, like SLT and learning mentors. They wanted and needed to belong to someone and to some place.

This is how the lifeboat was created.

The name was not a coincidence – we needed a place that children could go to which was safe, always open and formed part of developing the skills that helped the self-regulation of their behaviour.

The lifeboat was always manned and although in a worn-down space in the school, it met the needs of our children.

Of course, there were rules:

- Children needed to articulate to their class teacher before they would explode that they needed time out – either verbally or with a token left on the teacher's desk.

- The teacher or lifeboat staff (SLT or learning mentor) needed to communicate to ensure the child arrived at the lifeboat.
- The space had to be respected and could be used for rewards, time out, or just a quiet space, all of which had a time limit to ensure the children stayed part of their class and didn't opt out.
- A register was kept to ensure a monitoring system was in place to track which pupils were using the resource.

Now, I need to mention that before we had the lifeboat, we had several high-profile children who made it their daily mission to try and escape the school grounds. This kept us all rather fit and meant that I quickly spent a hefty amount on walkie-talkie radios. However, now that they had the lifeboat to run to, incidents of their Houdini acts dropped significantly.

Before we had the lifeboat, we had several high-profile children who made it their daily mission to try and escape the school grounds. This kept us all rather fit

I had previously mentioned that no one would take our children. This is still the case, but now it is because our provision is recognised as one of the best in the area and other schools can't match it. We have created an internal manage move protocol as a result.

We became a victim of our success, and that's not something I am sad about. However, it meant that we had to think outside the box again to make provision for pupils who are too 'extreme' to stay in a mainstream classroom for the safety of themselves and other pupils.

This was supported by our CEO and governors, and with their support, we were able to develop a self-funded space called *Beacon*, within our 'lighthouse provision'.

It isn't easy for anyone who works in there. It is a highly demanding room to work in, with pupils who have complex mental health and social needs often overlapping with significant safeguarding concerns.

There is an immense amount of supervision, chocolate and hugs dished out to the staff who choose to work in this space and their level of expertise working with these challenging children is unmatched.

It is, without doubt, a labour of love, as specialist settings are oversubscribed and some of the pupils within our provision are too volatile to be accepted. But this is what good schools do when you have exhausted the local offer.

'Good' Ofsted outcomes and the school's future

So, did all this work? Did the time and money make an impact?

The simple answer is yes.

In June 2019, Temple Hill achieved a G 'good' from Ofsted for the first time in over a decade.

We knew we were good before Ofsted came. We could see the impact of our strategic approach, but we were well aware that the community needed the rubber stamp as validation.

If you think back to your NQT year when hopefully you had a good mentor, they may have given you the same advice that I had when I was a fresh-faced teacher of 30 six-year-olds: you can't teach anything if you don't have a grasp on behaviour first.

It's the same with a school, whether its 1-form entry or 4-form like Temple Hill. When we put the systems in place, staff were able to teach again. They were

able to be colourful in their practice, experiment, enrich and engage instead of trying to keep a lid on a bubbling pot. It meant that because of the support of their colleagues, teachers and teaching assistants were willing to go the extra mile on provision in the classroom and to never give up on an individual. It's the reason why, no matter what provision pupils attend within the school, they still have a home class of other pupils, who they visit and who visit them.

It is still not easy to work at Temple Hill, and it is not a school that everyone would want to work in, as we still have our challenges.

We have higher than national PPG, FSM, SEN and EAL – and yet this year we achieved above national combined in KS2 SATs.

There were and continue to be many barriers and challenges:

- Money, as for all of us in schools, has been a huge barrier and constant juggling act.
- Working with agencies that are stretched and have such high thresholds that significant concerns don't receive support anymore.
- Parental apathy, which can put pupils at significant risks.

Our biggest moral dilemma is that many of our pupils with the highest behavioural needs, who successfully manage at our school and at times achieve expected or higher outcomes, don't complete the first year of secondary school successfully. Before blaming ourselves we need to remember that children spend only 15% of their time with us versus their home environment, which is the key to children's success.

What next, you ask?

We want to continue embedding our practice – we are not looking for perfection, we just want to keep getting better and keep innovating. There is a full commitment to sharing what we have learnt and supporting others in challenging settings, who have challenging children and who may have faced isolation or closed doors to support.

But mostly, we want to engage more in professional dialogue and debate, as it is very clear that childhood poverty and mental health are key subjects which need to be engaged with.

Utilising curriculum models to enhance classroom learning from infant to junior schools

Chris Jukes & Steve Davis,
The Cam Academy Trust

This academy trust shows how bringing school heads together is a vital step in developing leadership and management in their schools, and in the trust

The Cam Academy Trust (CAT), which has seven primary schools, four secondary schools and two sixth forms in South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdon, with one just over the border in central Bedfordshire, sees its role as ensuring excellence in all its academies. This means developing leadership in each school and between schools.

"That's not an easy thing to do," concedes the trust's primary executive leader, Chris Jukes. "At first the only thing bringing them together was they are all part of CAT. They all had, and still have, different visions and viewpoints, particularly those coming from a local authority background, who felt they would lose the support of the LA, and the comfort blanket if things go wrong... We had to help the heads to look at a future without LA constraints – but still to ensure that they have appropriate support."

"Together, we identify the professional development path they are going on. They have started to identify with a lot of that and used it in their development plans on how to move their schools forwards. We've had to work closely together."

A common difficulty in getting a group of disparate headteachers to work together is the relative positions of primary and secondary schools in a partnership. There's an implied sense of "if the secondary and primary phases are going to work together, it'll be the secondary subject expert who will be the person telling the primary about the way things could and should be done," says Jukes. "For example, if we were to team up on science, a science lead from a secondary school may be seen as being the lead. I don't think that's a really big thing – in fact, I've got a really good primary science lead who's undertaken a joint piece of work with local science secondary teachers and shown them some good practice." He agrees that there are some areas, such as empathy and behaviour management, in which primary teachers and school leaders often have more expertise than their secondary colleagues.

With 14 years of headship behind him, "experience which includes going through various minefields and coming out the other side," Jukes' role in the trust is "not to boss people about, but as a facilitator, helping heads to identify what they need, and to support and guide them." Similarly, the heads' role should be providing an overview to their staff, not detailed management. "Staff have to own it. Not the headteachers," he says firmly. "When we started on this project – leading outstanding teaching and learning – with the heads and senior leadership teams led by SSAT's Andy Williams and Colin Logan in September 2018, they helped the heads to understand each other's vision, beliefs, ethos and philosophy of education. It was very powerful: Andy and Colin in collaboration with their colleagues in the SSAT team suggested visits to other schools outside the MAT where this was already in place."

In the case of Hartford Junior School, the opportunity to develop middle leaders and phase leaders has demonstrated "a strong sense of autonomy, empowerment and ownership for their area of work", as its head Steve Davis explains. "My maths leader introduced a whole new maths curriculum throughout the school. And my reading/English lead has led the school's approach to English. It's been a real strength."

By contrast with the traditional rivalry between infant and junior schools, Davis clarifies that unity rather than distance characterises the trust's schools – and indeed, some schools outside the trust. "The collegiate approach to fellow primary school headteachers is really important: we've got each other's backs. We're able to work together on specific projects, on one level, but also to be able to pick up the phone and say, 'We've got this scenario, how are we going to be able to help each other out with it?'"

As Chris Jukes puts it: "I've got to strengthen the heads – indeed, all the decision makers who collaborate – to clearly understand the direction they want to take their school in. How do you identify a talent pool in each school? Identifying staff who could be part of a school improvement model for the trust. We want to internalise that."

Training teachers to become effective leaders makes a significant contribution, as Steve Davis explains: "We have developed an effective pathway where teaching assistants without a degree will study part-time at the University of Bedfordshire for a BA in Child Education Studies. We then offer them the assessment-only module of teacher training qualification. Two of them have been teaching as unqualified teachers for the final two years of their degree, gaining that experience you need in the assessment-only module for qualification. It's been a really good route for the school, and they are solid, strong teachers."

Interim senior leadership roles in other trust schools

At a more senior level, how do you develop colleagues' talents? "A great opportunity arose from being in the trust," says Davis. "My deputy head was able to take an interim headship at another school joining the trust. This which gave me an opportunity, rather than to replace her, to bring on some middle leaders to act as senior leaders in the school for the year she was on the interim post. It was a really good lesson for me."

And for the interim head, it appears. "She had her own existing strengths and development areas – she was very strong on management and on detail. So for me it was a case of enabling her to build on those strengths when she came back. I shared with her some of the things I considered to be her development areas, and we agreed on developing a

strategic vision for our school. It was nice after the meetings we two have had, to share with other primary heads how important it is to build a strategic vision for our school as well as having an eye for the day-to-day detail."

Ultimately, creating leaders effectively nurtures talent within the school, which has been reflected in students' success.

"The great example is the peer review – that really gets us to think carefully about the strengths and development areas for each of our schools. To be able to recognise who's doing what well, and who can we pick up the phone and ask about something that may or may not be working in each of our own schools."

Steve Davis greatly values the trust's encouragement to its schools to stay local and take part in clusters and collaborations.

"I'm aware that many trusts will say, 'You're in our trust, this is the way we do things and you need to talk to us about how to do things and how you can develop further'. But our trust leadership has not only enabled but encouraged me and other schools to work in our local partnerships. I work closely with a couple of schools in Huntingdon, particularly along the lines of the knowledge-rich curriculum which we've been building [see below]. There are three schools in the town that are in the trust but another five or six that aren't. In terms of knowledge-led curriculum, at the moment I'm working much more closely with another school in the town than I am with any of our other trust schools."

A curriculum for life

"A year ago, in answer to our static results," says Rae Lee, head of Hartford Infant School, "we felt that we needed to do something quite drastic. We have been developing an Early Excellence model of teaching based on enquiry across the school. It has links to Martin Robinson's ideas re the grammar, dialect and rhetoric but will be underpinned through oracy. This last area is our next part of the journey with Oracy 21."

This vision originated from a visit by Robinson, who worked with each school's SLT for a day. The outcome of this visit was so fulfilling, says Chris Jukes, that staff wanted Robinson to return to work with them further. It also inspired the development of more collaborative opportunities between each of the schools.

Applying Robinson's practice felt like the right choice for creating change, says Steve Davis, one of the champions of this work within the trust: "The idea is that the grammar of a subject, the knowledge of a subject is pretty fundamental. But then knowledge – so what? What are you going to do with that knowledge? It's not a pop quiz scenario where we just want children to become these vessels filled with facts, we want them to be able to play with that knowledge, to work out what they think of it, what that means to them as individuals. There's the dialectic phase when they're playing about with the knowledge that they've accrued. And then the rhetoric phase, when they offer a hand-out to the rest of the world, they share what they've learned with other people, whether it's to inform or to influence."

"I like the idea of enabling children to lead a good life in its fullest sense, and the way to do that is to ensure they understand as much about the world as we are able to deliver in the four years that they're with us."

Davis has applied an approach that integrates each of the aspects touched upon in class and connects them to allow students to better understand the intricacies of our world. Beginning at, for example, ancient Egypt, his class analyses the role of slaves and the divine right of the Pharaoh. It then moves chronologically into the democratic disputes of ancient Greece, the shift of the Roman emperor era and on into Vikings, Saxons and the Danelaw. "By the time we get to beheading Charles I, my children have now got a body of knowledge that looks at moving from the divine rights of a Pharaoh with the power of life and death over slaves in ancient Egypt to cutting off the king's head," he explained.

"I think that tells the children something about the way that individuals can influence a society, and over time and with well-thought-out ideas and a body of knowledge they're able to use to back up those ideas. I'm excited about the way that this curriculum can encourage my children to be thinking about who they are and where they sit in the world and in society, and almost their responsibility to do something with their views about how they think the world should be. I don't mind too much what those views are, but if, for example, somebody comes knocking on their door and asking them what they think about a parliamentary democracy in a country versus a parliamentary democracy in a continent and how they may want to vote, those sort of scenarios, I'd very much rather that they've got a whole history of a civilization to draw upon when making those decisions than just being swayed one way or the other by a particularly vocal or influential newspaper owner or politician. That's where I see a knowledge-led curriculum offering real power to people making up their own minds."

This is one example of the original thinking as well as collaboration that characterises the trust's approach. Chris Jukes sums up: "We have not yet gone on to the next stages, such as SSAT accreditation. That's for later. This is about our initial work over the last year. SSAT has helped us to build confidence, robustness and the ability of heads to be strong leaders engaged with the success of all the schools. For example, new schools that were in difficulties that joined the MAT recently are now fully engaged with this process, taking part in the collegiate meetings and both contributing and receiving advice and support to build a collaborative approach."

Learn more about SSAT's in-school support at **ssatuk.co.uk/cpd**.

Creating a formal mentoring process in a special school

Dianne Propsting,
Perseid School

Dianne Propsting, Perseid School, describes the rationale, ongoing research, implementation and signs of success of mentoring trainee teachers in SEND

'A mentor is a suitably experienced teacher who has formal responsibility to work collaboratively within the ITT partnership to help ensure the trainee receives the highest-quality training.' (Department for Education [DfE], 2016:7).

I was invited to apply for SSAT's Leadership Legacy Project at the same time as I was assigned a second trainee teacher to mentor. I wanted to use the think piece as an opportunity to inform mentoring of trainee teachers within a special school context and the added value that mentors have in developing the teaching profession. This article is based on that work.

However, as I took on a trainee teacher who faced many challenges, I noticed a gap in provision for embedding clear mentoring processes. Perseid School highly values coaching and supervision for all staff. I felt that similar guidelines to those used already would be useful to embed initial teacher

training (ITT) mentoring, and could form part of the school's mentoring-coaching offer. ITT mentors would also benefit from opportunities to develop the skills and qualities while to create a more coherent and collaborative mentoring practice. I subsequently realised that the skills required for mentoring reflect the interpersonal skills required of good leadership (West-Burnham, 2013).

Context and rationale

Schools are facing many challenges in recruiting and retaining new teachers. Recent studies suggest that recruitment of trainee teachers into the profession has been below target since 2012, while teacher vacancies have continued to rise since 2011 (DfE, 2019a). In response to the crisis, the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019a) promotes the early career framework (ECF) as a central reform, providing a package of support to new and beginning teachers. The ECF (DfE, 2019b) is intended to provide clearly structured early professional development for new and beginning teachers, which builds upon their ITT to safeguard their longevity within education. A core component of this package of support is the role of mentoring to support professional development (DfE, 2019b). While the focus of the ECF is on new teachers to the profession, the role of mentors also has enormous impact on the trainee teacher experience and is the biggest influence on their professional development (Elliot & Calderhead, 1994). As a class-based mentor for trainee teachers, I wanted to formalise the mentoring processes within my setting in advance of the ECF.

Perseid offers outstanding education for children and young people with severe and profound learning difficulties, many of whom have an additional diagnosis of autism and/or physical/sensory difficulties. It is the lead school in the Merton Special Teaching Alliance, which is a National Teaching School and works with a number of ITT providers to offer teaching practice placements via School Direct or traditional PGCE routes for students with a particular interest or focus on SEND. While ITT providers offer comprehensive materials and training for class-based mentors, the courses themselves are not structured for SEND settings (Mintz et al, 2015). Rather than replace or duplicate existing materials, it was hoped that further defining and developing mentoring processes in-house would provide the basis for a framework through which both trainee teachers and mentors can feel supported and best prepared to teach within our school setting.

Developing the mentoring guidance

Before implementing any changes, I researched the role of mentors and case studies of schools that have strong mentoring processes in place. I looked at the ECF (DfE, 2019b), the national standards for school-based initial teacher training mentors (DfE, 2016), and a collection of case studies, which showcased best practice in implementing strong mentoring processes within schools. I also reflected on a number of working papers from CollectivED and the mentoring and coaching hub based at Leeds Beckett University; and used Twitter to gain feedback more widely from those involved at the hub on what good mentoring practice in schools looks like.

A core component of mentoring is the role of developing trusting boundaries within relationships where constructive mentoring conversations could take place.

With two other experienced mentors, I formed a mentoring focus group and we agreed that clearer mentoring processes would be useful. While it was important to avoid overlap with ITT guidance, it was felt that guidelines around the school's mentoring processes would provide consistency, especially considering the large number of ITT providers the school works with. Consequently, there was a strong desire to improve the organisational systems in place to provide structure and support for both the mentor and the trainee teacher. It was felt that a short document outlining roles and responsibilities and supporting a mentor-mentee agreement would provide that clarity and formalise the mentoring process.

In order to ensure that improved mentoring processes would be supportive and fit for purpose, I sought further feedback from a variety of colleagues across the school at different career stages, including NQTs and early career teachers who had completed teaching practice placements at the school, experienced teachers, the senior leadership team and the professional lead for supervision, coaching and mentoring. It was clear there was an appetite for

greater clarity to facilitate consistency of mentoring practice, but that any agreement should be supportive in order to enhance the mentoring process. The concept of providing mentoring guidelines and an agreement was welcomed and feedback was included in the project design.

This led me to research, develop and design a document for all new trainee teachers as well as class-based mentors to provide an overview of expectations to ensure that both trainees and mentors meet their responsibilities. The document is intended to support mentors and mentees in establishing boundaries within the mentor-mentee relationship, highlighting roles, responsibilities and allocating sufficient time to adequate mentoring conversations. This was presented to the aforementioned teachers for further input and feedback before submitting to the SLT, where it has been subsequently redrafted and approved.

Impact

While it is not yet possible to assess the impact, anecdotal feedback from all levels suggests that improved processes is a welcome addition and will be essential in better mentoring provision in the school. It is hoped that establishing and embedding formal mentoring processes will enhance impact at a school-wide level in three ways.

1) Providing greater clarity over roles and responsibilities, supporting and enhancing the mentoring relationships and ensuring consistency.

Mentoring can support, influence and improve teaching capacity and good mentoring is about building trusting and honest relationships where others are enabled to achieve and succeed (DfE, 2016). Getting the relationships right is key to building a team that works and requires good communication skills, honesty, integrity and empathy. During my experience of working with a trainee teacher who faced many challenges within their practice, I learnt the importance of holding people to account and establishing clear boundaries. Recognising the need to address obvious problems and handling difficult conversations is a vital leadership skill. It is hoped that the mentor-mentee agreement will support the development of relationships and make clear where the onus of responsibility lies. This will further the teaching school's vision of developing outstanding practice through a shared agreement and clearly articulated purpose.

2) Creating greater emphasis on the development of coaching and mentoring skills within professional practice and the role of mentoring as part of a professional profile.

The formalisation of mentoring processes raises the profile of mentoring and shows a level of commitment to professional development for mentors and longer-term trainee teachers at an individual teaching level and at wider levels. The set of standards published by the DfE (2016) demonstrates that mentoring is an important and critical area of work for schools. Formalised mentoring processes enables the school to raise the status of mentoring and recognises the added value that mentors bring to the profession both in terms of developing teaching practice and in building capacity for the school (DfE, 2015; Lofthouse, 2019).

Furthermore, the wider benefits of mentoring include opportunities to enhance and practise vital leadership skills. Evidence from the OECD (Gomendio, 2017) suggests that mentors are in a good position to empower and inspire others (specifically new and beginning teachers) to improve teaching and learning through collaboration and sharing of expertise.

3) Improving educational outcomes through better teaching practice.

Establishing a formal mentoring process supports the development of high-quality mentoring through clearly defined frameworks. A shared understanding of the support mentors should contribute to the professional development of trainee teachers helps to ensure consistency of practice. Mentors provide added value in raising standards and outcomes for both the trainee and the pupils (DfE, 2016).

In the Carter review of initial teacher training (DfE, 2015), a core benefit of mentoring is described as continuous professional development for the mentors with ongoing opportunities to reflect on and improve practice. Articulating the pedagogy behind my own teaching practice has helped me to develop as a teacher and enhanced the learning in

my classroom. It has been argued that 'learning to be a coach or mentor is one of the most effective ways of enabling teachers or leaders to become good and excellent practitioners' (CUREE, 2005:7). The ultimate aim of a mentor should be to contribute significantly to outcomes for pupils through developing the skills, knowledge and capacity of beginner teachers, in either their own school or other schools during placements.

Next steps

Moving forward with mentoring at Perseid, and taking on a role of greater responsibility as the new mentoring co-ordinator, I will focus on embedding this process with next year's cohort of trainee teachers and mentors. A review of best practice has prompted the aim to further professionalise mentoring across the teaching school by developing a cohort of mentors (DfE, 2016; Lofthouse, 2019). These mentors would undergo an induction period and paired with a more experienced mentor to develop their skills. It is hoped the mentoring focus group would continue to meet termly as a supportive space for mentors to share concerns, develop practice and ensure quality assurance and moderation as and when necessary. Next steps therefore include developing an induction for both mentors and for trainee teachers, which complements the university-based courses but recognises the highly specialised context of the school placement.

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A more methodical approach to helping year 9 students decide on their GCSE options

Rob Swan,
Pate's Grammar School

Rob Swan, head of year, Pate's Grammar School, describes their new approach, which early evidence suggests makes for earlier and better choices

As head of year 9 (Pate's first intake of 150 students) I wanted to improve the help we give to the students in choosing their GCSE options, which they start in year 10. As with previous years, the students will study 10 GCSEs, with six being compulsory subjects (maths, English language, English literature, biology, chemistry and physics), and four being options.

The focus of this project was to enhance the options choice process for the students, with the aim of ensuring that students made the best choices they could and set themselves up for future success. In my view, there were four main factors to be considered to achieve this aim, a student's:

- passion for a course
- awareness of what the course involves
- grades, particularly where this might affect their options at age 16
- suitability for a course (assessed by teachers)

It is important to reflect that this project builds on existing support offered to the students and the established school process, so I detail here what already takes place and the mechanics of the student options process. Students were asked to choose four subjects that they would like to study at GCSE and a fifth subject to act as their reserve. General advice was given around considering what students might want to study after GCSEs, the subjects they most enjoy and those where they are most likely to succeed. It was recommended that students choose a broad range of subjects, including a language and a humanities subject, although this was not mandatory. There were limited constraints for students relating to the statistics option, with this not available to students in the top two maths sets (who will study a further maths GCSE anyway) or those selecting business as one of their options, amid concern that this would become too narrow a subject base.

The options timeline for students was as follows:

- 8th and 15th January: year 9 taster lessons (non-Ebacc subjects)
- 16th January: options assembly for year 9 students
- 17th January: options evening
- 7th February: year 9 parents' evening
- 24th February: deadline for making subject choices on options website.

Historically, once this process has happened, student options have been shared with faculties across the school. Where students have chosen a subject that is potentially inappropriate for them to study, or where they haven't chosen a subject that they would excel at, the individual departments have raised this and had further discussions with the student.

The project

Before starting the project, I spoke with the previous head of year 9 (current head of year 10) to ask what they would have changed from the process the previous year. They identified two key areas for improvement:

1. Forming an early joined-up view from all relevant teachers about which students should or should not take each subject. Last time around there was an extended period of uncertainty for students and delays to the process as changes were made.

2. Holding meaningful conversations with each student to confirm their choices – checking that these are their own, that their parents are supportive, etc, as this would avoid uncertainty and late changes.

I planned to leave a tool and approach that could be used in future years, making changes that would benefit students over a notable period. I considered the project as two clear parts:

1. Gather and process information about students from their grade card and teacher feedback, producing a single informative view that would enable meaningful conversations with the students.

2. Plan a set of meaningful conversations with students to ensure that they had fully considered their choices, and to provide them with information from subjects at an early stage in case there was a reason to reconsider their initial choices.

Stage 1: gathering and processing options data

To enable meaningful conversations to take place, ahead of the students completing their choices I asked all of the faculties involved in the options choices to identify those students that they would strongly advocate taking their subject at GCSE, and those where they would have concerns. This was agreed with the deputy head, academic, and responses were taken in list form.

I also considered the students' grade card data from the autumn term, and used it to identify students who would potentially struggle to make the grades required to return at sixth form, and to highlight where students could choose subjects that might give them a better 'Target'*1 or 'On course for'*2 grade. All of this information was used in the context that those grades are subjective and it is known that some subjects are more generous than others in their grading assessments. It is also worth bearing in mind that some of the option subjects do not have grades at all, as students are not studying them this year.

**1 – The 'Target' grade is the best grade a student is realistically capable of achieving at GCSE.*

**2 – The 'On course for' grade is the grade a student is expected to achieve at GCSE if they continue working at their current rate.*

Finally, the students' initial option choices were incorporated and overlaid with the other data to compare their choices with the academic advice they would be given. The tool was built using Excel in advance of the students selecting their options, so that their choices could be added the day after they were submitted and the tool used for conversations immediately after this. The data was incorporated using background sheets so that the students could see the information on screen during discussions.

Stage 2: holding meaningful conversations with students

Part of the head of year role is to have a five-minute meeting with each student at some point in the year. After conversation with the deputy head, pastoral, I agreed to hold these meetings over a short time period, immediately after the students had submitted their option choices. This enabled the students' option choices to be reviewed as part of the conversation and gave a focus and direction to the conversation. If any conversations required more than five minutes, either because of further conversation on options or for pastoral reasons, a follow-up time would be agreed with the student.

Having agreed an approach, the assistant head of year and I split the year group and scheduled all the conversations to take place within a week of returning after the half-term holiday. This involved pulling the students out of lessons, with teachers made aware in advance and the students notified of their appointments by individual emails (mail merge) and reminded by form tutors in the morning.

The planned meetings, with earlier and meaningful conversations with each of the students, were well received by both students and staff

The key points for the meetings were:

1. Confirmation of the student's choices (to confirm no entry errors).
2. Confirmation that the choices were their own, but that parents were aware and supportive.
3. Review of their choices against the Excel tool, sensitively:
   - *discussing options which they had chosen but where faculties had raised concerns*
   - *highlighting subjects that would support them studying for GCSE*
   - *discussing breadth of subjects being studied*
   - *reviewing their choices against their grade card to see whether they were at risk of not gaining the necessary grades for sixth form and could make a stronger selection in this respect.*
4. Check on the student's understanding of the options they have chosen, covering points such as: do they know their three sports for PE GCSE? Do they understand that art and drama involve coursework? Etc.
5. Explanation of the next steps and timescale for understanding their final option outcomes.
6. Impact.

The individual meetings were well-received by students and they engaged very well in the conversations. The ambition was also well-received by the various faculties and departments, who were helpful in providing clarity on students they had concerns about and why. It is also worth mentioning that there were many wider beneficial conversations with the year group. This did of course include pastoral issues which were followed up, but the conversations also provided an opportunity to explore what students' long-term ambitions were and how they were coping with the academic rigours of the school.

It is difficult to measure the true impact of the project immediately, as this will evolve over the coming couple of years in the run-up to their GCSEs. However there are a few early indications:

1. Three students were identified as trying to 'play the system' by choosing a non-desirable reserve in the hope that they would get their four primary choices. These were amended accordingly.
2. Statistics was undersubscribed as an option and wasn't running, and early conversations with the affected students ensured that they could resubmit their options to reflect this.
3. Twelve students amended their option choices during or following the conversations.

Outcome and next steps

The percentage of amendments above is slightly higher than those that we have seen in previous years, suggesting that issues and concerns may have been identified earlier in the process and hopefully addressed at this stage. This will be monitored over the coming months to review whether further amendments are in line with previous years, or whether these are reduced as a result of this earlier and more joined-up intervention.

Following the continued review of the success of the project so far, the intention is to repeat this process with future years as they undergo the options process. The tool has been built so that future year data can be pasted in and the formulae will update, but the process clearly relies on future heads of year engaging with the process.

The more joined-up intervention appears to have identified – and hopefully addressed – issues and concerns earlier in the process

Language teaching in a primary setting - a different focus

Anneliese Yafai,
President Kennedy School

Anneliese Yafai, Lead Practitioner Designate and Spanish teacher, President Kennedy School, describes her work (part of her Lead Practitioner accreditation project) with feeder primary schools to overcome teachers' lack of confidence in teaching MFL and to better 'bridge the gap' for language learning between KS2 and KS3

As a Spanish teacher, whenever I tell people what my job is, the two things I am always told are: "I wish I focused more in my language lessons at school", or "I would love to know another language". I always respond, "It's never too late." However, the reality is that language learning within the UK really doesn't tap into the most valuable years for a young person to acquire an additional language – ages 6-12.

Working in a secondary school with strong links to its feeder schools, I was asked to support our primary schools to deliver languages. One of the key barriers I found when I went into these schools was that teachers were eager to teach a language but didn't feel confident enough to lead on it. Many teachers expressed the same feelings: they wished they had learnt it better themselves at school. This invisible but significant barrier prevented them from feeling successful in teaching students to acquire an additional language. This endless cycle will continue to be a barrier unless we find a way to break it, allowing our students and future generations to experience languages differently.

Since the change in GCSE exams, we have done a lot of work as a department on what a 'lead language learner' would look like inside and outside our classrooms. This seemed like the perfect starting point. But what would a lead language learner look like at the beginning of their journey? What would be their journey from year 3 rather than year 7?

The languages programme of study for primary schools is very particular in its expectations:

Pupils should be taught to:

Grammar and vocabulary

- identify and use tenses or other structures which convey the present, past, and future as appropriate to the language being studied
- use and manipulate a variety of key grammatical structures and patterns, including voices and moods, as appropriate
- develop and use a wide-ranging and deepening vocabulary that goes beyond their immediate needs and interests, allowing them to give and justify opinions and take part in discussion about wider issues
- use accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Linguistic competence

- listen to a variety of forms of spoken language to obtain information and respond appropriately
- transcribe words and short sentences that they hear with increasing accuracy

- initiate and develop conversations, coping with unfamiliar language and unexpected responses, making use of important social conventions such as formal modes of address
- express and develop ideas clearly and with increasing accuracy, both orally and in writing
- speak coherently and confidently, with increasingly accurate pronunciation and intonation
- read and show comprehension of original and adapted materials from a range of different sources, understanding the purpose, important ideas and details, and provide an accurate English translation of short, suitable material
- read literary texts in the language [such as stories, songs, poems and letters] to stimulate ideas, develop creative expression and expand understanding of the language and culture
- write prose using an increasingly wide range of grammar and vocabulary, write creatively to express their own ideas and opinions, and translate short written text accurately into the foreign language.

In an effort to ensure students could successfully work with the programme of study and, more importantly, teachers felt they could achieve these expectations, language learning needed to change. So, I set about designing a course that offered a structured support system for primary school teachers: a seminar, and support to create a bespoke curriculum and in-lesson provision.

I sought to find ways to empower primary teachers, considering two teaching approaches, pioneered by Rachel Hawkes, and Gianfranco Conti and Steve Smith, along the way. Their approaches involved underpinning language learning through phonics, an aspect in which primary teachers are arguably most knowledgeable – but supported and scaffolded through chunked language learning rather than single-word teaching.

I had already been teaching phonics within my classroom using Rachel Hawkes' approach. I adapted this style of teaching to incorporate more sounds. Its aim? To empower and increase the proficiency of primary teachers.

Conti's and Smith's chunked vocabulary approach focuses on the limitations of the working memory, refocusing language learning to four chunks of information rather than four individual words. This allows greater lexical retrieval and relieves cognitive overload which then allows the working memory to retain a greater amount of language learning.

My next challenge: could I create a student-led classroom environment where non-specialist teachers could embrace the experience rather than see it on their timetable and face it with dread?

Overall, I found primary teachers embraced the changes. Some, inevitably and understandably, were reluctant. The main challenges were that they had used the same resources for many years and didn't have time to recreate them. Or, they simply didn't want to change their practice, maybe for fear of getting it wrong.

Spanish Primary Years 3-6 SOL

S+C= opportunites to stretch and challenge

Topic	Vocabulary	Grammar	Chunks
Greetings/Basics	**Buenos días** – Good morning **Buenas tardes** – Good afternoon **Buenos noches** – Good evening **Hola** – Hello **Adiós** – Goodbye **Hasta luego** – see you soon **Hasta la vista** – Until I next see you **Sí** – Yes **No** – No **Por favor** – Please **Gracias** – Thank you **Mi** – My **Tú**- Your **Su** – His/Her	Accents on the top of letters can only be seen on vowels (á é í ó ú.) Its purpose is to add emphasis/stress onto a letter. They can be added onto a letter by using 'AltGr' and the letter	These topics should be combined and I would suggest to use cognates to make it easy to understand i.e. 1. Hola, me llamo Señorita Laura. Me gusta el chocolate 2. Buenos días, mi hámster se llama Nibbles. Me encanta mi hámster. 3. ¡Adiós elefante! 4. ¿Gracias, cómo te llamas? 5. Hasta luego, odio los gorilas 6. Mi jirafa se llama Alberto 7. ¿Cómo te llamas por favor?
	S+C **El** – the (masc nouns) **La** – the (fem nouns) **Un** – a (masc nouns) **Una** – a (fem nouns) **Con** – with **a** – to	This is a really difficult concept. If a noun doesn't have 'a' before it you should always put el/la in front i.e. me gusta **el** gato – I like **the** cat	

I set about to design an 'idyllic' curriculum model consisting of 11 modules. Each module consisted of pre-populated chunked vocabulary allowing the teacher to 'lift and drop' topics to suit their learners. It required explicit teaching of 6-8 chunks per half term in years 3 and 4 and 10-12 in years 5-6, with implicit teaching underpinning throughout to allow for language learning to occur in as little as five minutes in a lesson. This could be during registration, lining up or even at the end of a maths lesson, for example. Creating depth of language to be acquired with the continual repetition and timely interleaving of topics generates the 'stick' factor.

To support, there are a bank of resources covering listening, reading, speaking and writing opportunities which could be easily adapted for each topic. Each topic builds on the previous, underpinned with online platforms I'd utilised, such as Quizlet, YouTube and Padlet, to reinforce pronunciation and create a supportive working environment, based on schools sharing resources.

As Ofsted recognised recently: "modern foreign languages may not lend themselves as easily as other subjects to workbook scrutiny because a lot of classroom activity could be spoken rather than written." This has led teachers to use online platforms such as Twitter and their school's website and newsletters to evidence progress. Others have created one collective classroom workbook in which students compete to have their work featured.

The impact? Feedback indicates that primary school teachers feel empowered, are able to lead on language learning and are openly willing to make mistakes. One colleague from a primary school emailed me last week to say: "We have tried to launch languages so many times in our school and we have never been able to do it successfully. Staff are finally doing it, and most importantly understand why they are teaching languages and have a shared vision towards an end goal. We have a high proportion of EAL students and they have commented that in language lessons they finally feel that they are good at something – we are excited for the next chapter!"

Together, I believe we have created a 'safe' environment where resources, suggestions and strategies are shared. Where we learn from mistakes and continually improve our practice. An approach where students who may feel left behind day-to-day can excel, lead on their learning and guide those around them. But, most importantly, where all students feel more successful and want to embrace learning another language.

If you would like more information about the course, please visit **www.presidentkennedytsa.co.uk**.

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My non-negotiables

Rick Kitson,
Catcote Academy

Rick Kitson, SEMH and Wellbeing Lead at Catcote Academy, explains his non-negotiables, by following the life of one of his students over his first year in secondary school, and the experience of teaching him, in four parts: December 2018, March 2019, April 2019 and May 2019

December 2018

2018 was my first SSAT National Conference as part of SSAT's Leadership Legacy Project, and I felt very privileged to have had the opportunity to attend. It is rare you have the opportunity to come out of your bubble and see what else is going on in education: my eyes were widened in a number of directions. From alternative ways to look at learning, to robots in the classroom, to seeing the resources other schools have and how they use them. But one question, the theme of the conference this year, really had me stumped.

What are my non-negotiables as a teacher? Seems like an easy question. What are the basics you will always stand by, the self-imposed rules of your classroom and career? As I talk to other teachers and check the National Con-

ference Twitter hashtag, I see answers such as 'combatting the gender performance gap', 'all students to have access to the arts', 'support for the language starved' and 'equal opportunities for all regardless of social background'. All completely admirable non-negotiables and I applaud all the teachers who have this mindset.

Here's my dilemma... Joe.
Joe is 12 years old. He is from one of the most deprived areas of town, in one of the most deprived areas of the country. He has witnessed and experienced extreme domestic abuse, has been surrounded by drug misuse his entire life, has been neglected physically and emotionally all of his life, he is still living in a traumatic environment with a parent who admits she can't cope, he has learning difficulties, he has severe mental health difficulties, he has major issues with attachment and hasn't attended school for 15 weeks.

Joe is not his real name, but he is a real person. He is one of the students in my class of five, all of whom have moderate to severe learning difficulties and social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Three are looked after or adopted and all live in one of the most deprived areas of the country. They are a challenging but incredibly resilient group, and with the support of my brilliant support team, they continue to make strides forwards to achieve things many doubted they ever could. Teachers can make the world of difference when we get students into the classroom.

But what about the ones who can't come into school? Joe is in year 7 and when he arrived to us we saw quite quickly that he had no idea how to form relationships. He would bully, tease, disrupt learning and verbally and physically attack his peers on a regular basis. His attendance was poor and, refusing to do work, he made no academic progress whatsoever. He has refused to come into school for the last 15 weeks.

Some may instinctively think his behaviour is terrible, he should be punished or excluded, his parents should be brought into school because they are to blame. But that's not how we do it at this school. If we did it like that, I wouldn't have any students left to teach. We believe that behaviour is a symptom – as I write this, I realise, there is one of my non-negotiables – there is an underlying cause to all behaviour. It is my job to find the root cause of the behaviour and then to help the student to overcome that. The barriers to learning need to be knocked down before learning can take place. A student will not learn until they feel safe, regulated, encouraged, and believe they can manage the challenge and achieve.

There is an underlying cause to all behaviour. It is my job to find the root cause of the behaviour and then to help the student to overcome that

It was clear we would need to adapt the way we approach Joe's education. I reduced his timetable, redesigned his curriculum, took him out of the classroom, gave him 1:1 support (without the funding, I might add) and focused on building trusting relationships with adults.

This went really well. His attendance rocketed, he successfully completed work tasks, he began to form relationships with us – and crucially he began to feel safe and happy in school. Everybody involved with Joe agreed he was doing brilliantly.

Then one day, he didn't show up. We haven't seen him since.

Call home, no answer. Doesn't show up the next day, call home, Joe doesn't want to come in. Joe says he'll hit mum if she tries to make him come in. No Joe the next day, call home, same response. This goes on for two weeks.

Time to call in the other professionals working with Joe: social worker, CAMHS, SENCo, DSO, Youth Justice, family support worker, as well as mum. CAMHS say they've tried to engage the family but mum doesn't want their help. Youth Justice have seen it all before. Mum and family support worker blame school. School say we've done everything we can, but the problem isn't school. Social worker says she'll 'do some work' with the family. School says we'll do some home visits.

A month passes, four attempts at school home visits met with no answer to the door and twitching curtains. Social worker has done one session with the family. Joe is still not in school although he has been spotted smoking cannabis on the street – at least we know he's alive.

March 2019

Months of meetings, phone calls, missed appointments and sadly still no Joe. He hasn't been seen by school since a colleague saw him smoking cannabis on the street months ago.

Another meeting is held. My school has decided that we are not the right place for Joe. We believe he needs intensive therapy and wraparound care in a residential setting. Somebody suggests trying him in a mainstream school to learn more discipline. I stop myself laughing in disbelief. Joe has never learnt to trust adults to keep him safe, to meet his needs and to make him feel special. Basic needs we all learn when we are first born. Joe's horrendous upbringing has deprived him of the absolute basics of being human. He can't manage his emotions. He has no self-esteem. He can't feel safe. And yet some expect him to be able to sit in a maths lesson four times a week and call him the problem when he can't handle that.

Despite everybody working around Joe agreeing, even mum at this point, that Joe needs to move to a residential school with intensive therapy, we have to 'go through the process'. Social worker offers him to the mainstream schools in the local area. None feel they can provide for him. Social worker offers him to schools in the wider area. None feel they can provide for him. Finally, two months later, the search for a therapeutic, residential setting can begin. Two more months later and nothing has been found. All the suitable settings are full. The search will continue and social worker will 'do some more work with the family'. Everybody discusses that things are hard for mum and she is doing her best, but I am dumbfounded to find out Joe is not even under child protection. The 12-year-old who hasn't attended school for six months, is smoking cannabis, living in a traumatic, abusive environment, emotionally neglected, the boy who first came to the attention of social services aged two when he was found alone in a bush with a bottle of vodka.... What more has to happen to a child for the system to recognise them?

What do you do when your non-negotiables are for children to have their basic needs met, but you can't even do anything to help?

A few more meetings are held, CAMHS discharge him, Youth Justice have finished their work with him, school have still not managed to do a successful home visit. Meanwhile this child is still living in a traumatic environment, still being exposed to drugs, anything could be happening to him. He is being neglected on a national scale. This country is neglecting him, as they neglected his parents and his parents' parents.

This is not a scathing attack on the people working in social care – I have huge respect for them. Could social care have done things differently in this one particular case? Possibly. Is social care chronically underfunded and over-capacity? Definitely. Are they short of viable options? Certainly. Do these excuses help Joe? No. The education and social care systems are being starved of funding and it is our most vulnerable who suffer the most.

So, as a classroom teacher, what can I do? Call mum every day? Visit home every day after school? Send work home? Harass the social worker who is out of options? Call the police?

I don't write this as a therapeutic exercise to reassure myself, although it feels like one. Nor do I write this to lessen the hard work and achievements of other educational professionals or anybody else. I write this because JOE can't. JOE doesn't have a voice. This is a cry for help from all the Joes around the country that are being systematically neglected, who we as teachers are helpless to help.

What can I do? I will not stop fighting and pushing and knocking on doors for JOE to have his basic human needs met until somebody with the power to change things, does so. That is our reality. That is Joe's life.

That is my non-negotiable, what's yours?

April 2019

I am very happy and relieved to have had the news that a residential school place has been found for Joe and he started two weeks ago. I was beginning to lose hope. But after eight months of fighting, pushing and knocking on doors we've finally been heard,

Joe has finally been heard.

While there is relief and happiness, and of course grief that my work with Joe has finished, I can't help feeling sad. How have we as a society allowed it to get to this point? Why did we let those things keep happening to him? How did it go on for so long? Why did it take us to exhaustively fight Joe's corner, hold endless meetings and borderline pester social care for this to happen? How long will it take for Joe to get over his trauma? Will he ever?

The next theme for this year's SSAT National Conference is aptly, 'Deep Social Justice.' Is this social justice?

Our children deserve better.

May 2019

The dust has settled, Joe is now in a safer environment and can hopefully get the support he needs. Now my time with Joe is over, it is a chance to reflect on what I have learned and what the future will hold for Joe.

The first thing I did was to find out more about looked after children. Surely Joe's case had to be a one-off? How can a case this severe be deemed not an absolute emergency? Why wasn't he taken into care years ago? My research began.

DfE's *Children Looked After in England* report (March 2018) states there were 75,420 looked after children in England, with a further 51,080 children at risk and 389,430 in need. As shocking as these statistics are, this one is worse: the number of looked after children has increased every year for the last nine years. No wonder social services can't cope!

What is the future like for Joe and other CLA children? Only 14% achieve 5 A*-C GCSEs, they are five times more likely to face exclusion, four times more likely to be involved in the youth justice system; 40% of care leavers between 19-21 are NEET and four times more likely to have a mental health condition. (*Looked After Children: The Silent Crisis,* M. Oakley et al, August 2018.)

What have I learned? We as an education system need to find a way to meet the needs of the continuous rise in looked-after children. We must address the statistics and do everything we can to reduce those numbers.

What about closer to home? As a leader limited to one school, what can I do? Ensure that LAC students are a priority, make sure staff know who they are, make sure they are well supported and that school has high aspirations so they are provided with an education that gives them better life chances. We don't want any of our students to become another statistic.

What I have learned from this experience, and what I will take forward as a future leader, is that I now understand more than ever, that teaching them is not just about learning facts about the Battle of Hastings or the area of a triangle. Perhaps the most important thing for me to teach them is how to be resilient, how to function in society, how to have high aspirations and, possibly most importantly, how to be happy.

Perhaps the most important thing for me to teach them is how to be resilient, how to function in society, how to have high aspirations and, possibly most importantly, how to be happy

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Improving learning by focusing on teaching, lesson by lesson

Michael McCluskie & Chris Robertson, Scalby School

Michael McCluskie and Chris Robertson, headteacher and deputy headteacher of Scalby School, reflect on their journey towards improving the school's teaching and learning

When Michael McCluskie joined Scalby School, Scarborough, as a senior leader in 2007, he noticed that the school had been undergoing a transitional phase that left room for change. Having already spent a few years teaching in the coast of North Yorkshire, he recognised that the school needed a revamped leadership capacity, a boost in efforts to increase exam performance and fresh classroom practice to improve teaching and learning.

Upon joining Scalby, McCluskie realised it had been declining over many years. Having traditionally been the highest performing school on the Yorkshire coast, it was now one of the lowest performing, with under 30% of students achieving grades A*-C in English and maths. One of the principal reasons for the decline was the poor quality of leadership at every level of the school. There was no system of accountability or effective strategic planning to improve the outcomes for students. So when the school was inspected by Ofsted in November 2008, unsurprisingly it was put into special measures.

Although special measures is Ofsted's worst rating (and no school would choose it), this provided a

platform for rigorous school improvement. Departures from the leadership team meant that there was now a greater impetus and sense of urgency in the new team. The focus became establishing a system of accountability, especially for middle leaders, to secure improvement in the classroom.

Although special measures is Ofsted's worst rating (and no school would choose it), this provided a platform for rigorous school improvement

McCluskie successfully led and managed teaching and learning in order to take Scalby out of special measures. Using Ofsted targets for improvement, he wrote a strategic development plan which identified barriers to improvement, key actions needed, how these actions would be evaluated, the budget required for CPD and how each element of strategy would be led. His initial evaluation indicated that: Scalby lacked consistency across the school and within departments; teachers needed crucial CPD on assessment for learning (AfL) strategies; improvement required to be framed in a rigorous teaching and learning policy; and performance data needed to inform lesson planning.

Taking advice from colleagues in other schools, McCluskie introduced a written feedback policy, stipulating that students should have their work marked according to progress towards their target levels or grades. He worked with an LA consultant to develop a whole-school learning plan in which teachers were expected to evidence progression, not just write a series of activities. He also asked for teachers' support in creating a 'sharing good practice' group, which delivered two half-termly sessions on all assessment for learning strategies. A subsequent LA review noted that students had developed confidence in assessing their own and others' work and could describe their targets for improvement.

In order to sustain this improvement, McCluskie created a teaching and learning database which he used to co-ordinate the work of a team of coaches. He identified six teachers whose performance was not improving, and he designed and managed a developing performance plan for each of them. Five of these teachers could not rise to the challenge of these plans and resigned. In Ofsted's Section 5 inspection, which removed the school from special measures, 15% of lessons were outstanding, 60% were at least good and there was no inadequate teaching. The school's performance confirmed this improving trend – in the year the school was placed into special measures, 48% of students achieved A*-C. In the year the school came out of special measures, this had risen to 99% A*-C, 26% above the FFTD target; and 68% with English and maths, 10% above the FFTD target. This model brought about sustained improvement, and the school is now in the top 5% of schools nationally.

Scalby School not only came out of special measures, but was graded as good. Ofsted noted: "Teaching had significantly improved and is now good overall." These improvements, McCluskie believes, stemmed from holding others to account for their performance in difficult circumstances; and developing and leading effective teams who themselves help lead school improvement.

Sharing good practice

Rigorous and accurate self-evaluation played a crucial role in driving teaching and learning improvements. McCluskie had felt the school lacked a mechanism to share good practice, which also blocked leadership opportunities for the school's most talented staff. Using his own CPD as a model, he delivered performance management training for middle leaders to understand how to set targets that were rooted in improving classroom practice. Further CPD helped them develop effective monitoring systems and better understand their own accountability in leading improvement.

To embed AfL strategies, a coaching programme focused on individual needs aimed at moving the performance of more teachers to good, and in a few cases outstanding. The impact of this strategy was recognised by Ofsted, who said: "Middle leaders, through self-evaluation and improvement planning, are emerging as key drivers of improvement". They also recognised that "self-evaluation is accurate, as is the school's view on the quality of teaching", which led to an overall judgement of grade 2 for the leadership of teaching and learning. McCluskie acknowledges that this experience taught him how to develop others for succession planning and sustained improvement.

McCluskie's colleague, Chris Robertson, joined in 2004 as an NQT, and has worked his way up the school's ladder over the past 15 years to become deputy headteacher in 2018. Together, they have been reshaping academic possibilities for the school.

The school is now the lead school of a MAT called Scalby Learning Trust. As a school in a socio-economically challenging area, as McCluskie and Robertson put it, they have faced significant challenges and even bigger initiatives have been put in place in an effort to increase success among their younger population.

"On the Yorkshire coast, the biggest challenge is raising the ambition of our young people. It isn't as if we haven't got a lot of young people with intellectual capacity, we certainly have. But Scarborough is a place that is geographically disadvantaged. The nearest big cities are 40 miles away... York, Middlesbrough and Hull," McCluskie explained. "It means that over the years, our young people are not exposed to employment opportunities or advancement opportunities that you may think typical for young people who are in bigger [areas]. So, our biggest challenge has been to provide young people with the qualifications they need to be successful and understand what they can do with those qualifications."

In order to bring these aspirations forward, the pair set up a series of seven strategic objectives with a three-year timeframe.

Strategic objectives 2018-2021:

Objective 1:
Achievement at Grade 5 + in English, maths and science to be greater than the national average in 2019/20. Increase this number in 2019/20 and 2020/21. Achievement at Grade 5 + across the Ebacc subjects to be greater than the national average (notional range of 45-50%). All students to make at least the progress expected of them in all subjects.

Objective 2:
No achievement gap in English, maths and science by 2021.

Objective 3:
All disadvantaged or special needs students to make the same progress as their peers nationally or exceed progress expected of them by 2021.

Objective 4:
Vast majority of students to have secured college placement on a Level 3 course or an apprenticeship before they leave year 11 by 2019.

Objective 5:
Student attendance to be better than national average with a pattern of reduced persistent absenteeism by 2021.

Objective 6:
Prepare students to be responsible citizens in 21st century Britain by steadily increasing their participation in artistic, sporting, cultural and musical activities, as well as ensuring curriculum provided opportunities for social development.

Objective 7:
Embed an effective pastoral intervention strategy to reduce fixed-term exclusions, particularly among the disadvantaged cohort, so that behaviour data shows a declining trend from 2018-2021 which is also better than the national average.

"One of the biggest things is to make sure that our students have got the proper qualifications and the correct grades so they can take the next step in order to ensure the continuation of education, employment or training," McCluskie said. Navigating through these changes over the years, the success of the strategic objectives has earned the school its title as highest performing school locally and in North Yorkshire. SSAT has also recognised Scalby for being in the top 20% of schools.

In 2016, Scalby School's P8 score was 0.16. In 2017, it rose to 0.56, which included the ECDL qualification. Analysing the data without the ECDL scores, their P8 was 0.35. In 2018, their P8 was 0.45 and in 2019 it is 0.5. Their A* score this year is 50.13. This is impressive, considering research showing that children in coastal schools underperform by 2 grades at GCSE compared to their peers (although using the IDACI measure – Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index – Scalby has a deprivation factor of 0.18, very similar to the national average of 0.20).

Any school in North Yorkshire with a higher P8 score than Scalby School is located in an extremely affluent, middle-class area of the county.

Incremental coaching

McCluskie and Robertson credit Scalby School's ability to be one of the highest performing schools in any England coastal area to "having a focus on improving quality of teaching in the classroom, primarily starting with maths and English and moving on to science."

They recognised that the traditional model of performance management would not produce the performance needed to meet their objectives. They therefore developed a programme of 'incremental coaching', where middle and senior leaders drop-in to lessons with a specific focus on improving pedagogy. They then feed back to teachers in short 10-minute weekly coaching sessions to discuss improvements or barriers to improvement.

The incremental coaching programme has been well received by staff, who have unanimously said that, as well as improving classroom practice, it has reduced stress caused by the three formal observations each year.

The school's science results had always been below national averages, but science teaching has transformed over the last two years. Science results in 2018 and 2019, as well as being above regional and national averages, are the best they have ever been at the school. Scalby entered around 30% of their cohort for separate sciences and their scores were well above 90% at grade 5 for all three sciences. The confidence in the science team is growing and they are now producing some of the best lessons in the school.

McCluskie was especially pleased with the results for more able students in two other key subjects – 36% achieved grade 7 or higher in English and 28% achieved this in maths.

But while, as McCluskie said, they've made a big commitment to curriculum by investing heavily in Ebacc subjects, Scalby has also maintained flexibility in curriculum, "which means that students have access to creative performing arts, technology and sports." This commitment to all subject areas emphasises the importance of having ambition, which Robertson believes is crucial to students' ability to overcome local stereotypes: "In terms of the area, there's a lot of unemployment, families that have been in cycles of unemployment for generations.... For us, it's about setting ambition and setting the standards we expect of our students in terms of learning, and making sure that they understand that learning and being able to achieve is really important to them."

Having teachers on board in this process has been paramount in continuously reshaping educational possibilities, as Robertson explained: "I think we're lucky that we have a staff that have bought into that and that talk about the importance of education and the doors that can open for students. That's created a culture among our students where they value education. They can see what they can get out of it and they value what we're giving them. The vast majority of our students have bought into what we're trying to do as a school."

The way they've gone about this has been by looking at who they were as school leaders. McCluskie and Robertson acknowledged that some of the school's past strategic priorities have not always put the development of teaching and learning as top focus. Thus, they decided to change it by reclaiming the entirety of the CPD focus to make sure improvement was continuously seen. According to McCluskie: "It's involved a restructuring of how we do performance management, of how we do CPD and on our senior team development."

"It's really driven the sophistication of school leadership – that focus on teachers day by day, lesson by lesson, getting better."

McCluskie and Robertson take pride in how far Scalby School has come and that it continues to improve. "Regardless of what's gone on in the past, Scalby has shaped its own curriculum and we weren't dependent on anyone else," they concluded. "We've got confidence in our school improvement model that we can share with others."

Leading meaningful change in PSHE

Louise Ramsay,
Debenham High School

Louise Ramsay, assistant headteacher of Debenham High School, reflects on how their new PSHE programme of study has enhanced students' academic success

Academic attainment and progress have been consistently outstanding at Debenham High School, an 11-16 Church of England Academy of 675 students. However, the whole school ethos is focused on the holistic development of its young people, of which one key facet is PSHE.

As part of a wider curriculum review in 2017-18, change was made to the provision of PSHE, which has been positive for the school academically and pastorally. The PSHE programme of study was re-written and implemented between spring 2017 and the start of term in September 2017.

The rationale was twofold: first, an urgent need to free timetable space for core subjects with the new GCSEs. Second, the recognition that PSHE would better nurture our students in terms of their personal and social development if it was delivered by

tutors and/or year teams. While initially viewed with scepticism by staff and external visitors, PSHE provision has been enhanced. Students value the subject and staff have delivered the curriculum extremely well. In fact, our SIAMs report (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) in October 2018 praised the PSHE : "Pupils value PSHE and say they prefer the new system, where it is delivered by members of staff who know them well."

Previous model

PSHE has always been valued – it has been reviewed as a separate subject, reports were written, there was an appointed coordinator of PSHE and a programme of study for each year group. The staff delivering PSHE curriculum were selected partly based on subject expertise, but mainly those with spare teaching time. To accommodate staff knowledge and understanding, a carousel model was used to deliver the programme of study. Unfortunately, there was little consistency between teachers, and a weakness in working with a student on their personal development. This then became a key driving factor for the SLT to change the way PSHE was taught.

Leading the change

There have been six main stages in the new approach: consultation with the staff; preparation; implementation; monitoring and review; ongoing training opportunities; and continual review.

1. Consultation and transparency

SLT, determined that transparency was of vital importance, discussed the curriculum review with staff. Curriculum models were clearly presented in a whole-staff meeting and colleagues were encouraged to respond in writing.

All staff could appreciate the need for additional lessons for core subjects, given the increased subject content in English, maths and science. However, the loss of the timetabled period of PSHE was an issue both in terms of the impact on curriculum teaching time and the need for all staff to teach PSHE. Staff felt they were overwhelmed by the expectation of the new GCSEs – the schemes of work, new assessments and varied subject content – and so did not have the headspace to write anything new for PSHE. Of even greater concern were staff fears of inexperience in teaching PSHE and/or feeling uncomfortable teaching sensitive topics. There was a lack of self-confidence from most of the staff, which they expressed openly.

2. Responding to staff fears: preparing for change

Distilling the main concerns, the PSHE coordinator, supported by members of the senior leadership team, planned to remove possible barriers to delivering an effective PSHE curriculum.

a) Planning a meaningful overview of a programme of study for KS3 and KS4

Using guidelines from the PSHE Association, the programme of study was planned under three main themes: health and wellbeing; relationships; and living in the wider world. Key themes linking to aspiration and effective study skills were added as appropriate to the year groups. To ensure the main subject areas were covered, learning outcomes were written for each key topic area so that what we wanted students to learn formed the main basis of the planning. Based on research on how to plan effective learning in PSHE, the programme was planned to be cyclical so that subject areas and skills are covered more than once allowing for our students' differentiated emotional needs. The new PSHE curriculum was planned to be more rooted in the year team, meeting the specific needs of that cohort, with strategic oversight from the head of year as well as the PSHE coordinator to approach course content from a pastoral and curriculum perspective. Due to the fact that these schemes were linked to a specific year group and not a fixed model of a carousel, there was flexibility in the number of weeks each unit needed to be taught to allow certain themes to be highlighted in a given year group.

b) Ensuring coverage of content and skills, along with safeguarding the current curriculum

Crucially, the decision was made to limit the programme of study to 30 weeks, so as to ensure that each period on the timetable was affected only once. This meant that lessons missed were in proportion to the amount of time allocated on the timetable. This went some way to reassuring staff they would not lose too much time.

c) Writing coherent and fully resourced schemes of work for each unit

To overcome fears of inexperience and workload, a team of staff wrote schemes of work for each unit. The senior leadership team had been instrumental in the preparation of these schemes, so took the lead. The involvement of other key staff such as the head of maths and second in English also helped to ensure staff ownership. Staff with specific expertise focused on the development of each key theme, eg, assistant headteacher with responsibility for pastoral care looked at health and wellbeing; the coordinator of PSHE, relationships; and the deputy headteacher with responsibility for careers education, living in the wider world. Short-term plans were written, resources collated and prepared for staff. They essentially had a lesson they could use or, ideally, adapt.

d) Allowing autonomy in style of delivery

While lessons and schemes were fully prepared, heads of year were given autonomy over how their year team delivered the material. It was made clear that students' personal development was a key consideration, and the ability to work as a year team made it likely that students' needs were better understood. The senior leadership team favoured tutors delivering most of the units, but staff preferred the idea of a carousel within the team, so each member could become an expert on one unit. Given staff nervousness, it was agreed to allow freedom to decide. This approach was successful, and there was a hybrid of approaches, which resulted in ownership from year teams.

While heads of year and tutors played a pivotal role, teams were widened to ensure all staff were invested in the new approach. Having the whole school involved in teaching PSHE was successful in two key ways: it gave PSHE a higher status as a subject; and there was equity in terms of staff teaching. Additional staff were able to teach units so providing relief to tutors – effectively each member of staff had a whole unit (five or six weeks) off their timetable to offset demands on their workload.

e) Training – Inset for all staff

The PSHE coordinator introduced the new PSHE programme of study on the September PD Days. A member of SLT then delivered some basic training in how best to teach PSHE – highlighting throughout that these were skills our staff already had, so aiming to build in confidence and optimism.

3. Implementing the change

Ready to go: as promised, all schemes of work were ready to go on 17 September 2017. Delivering what was promised was vital to success. Likewise, small reminders such as the PSHE dates being in log books and on notice boards in form rooms allowed for smooth running of the new system.

Underpinned by whole-school ethos: crucially, the leadership of change in PSHE was made possible by the school's ethos and vision to nurture confident and healthy young people. PSHE is built on the school's strong pastoral foundations, which include a personal tutoring system run by year teams; myriad student leadership opportunities; a well-developed information, advice and guidance offer; and a commitment to key whole-school initiatives such as PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement) to promote mental and emotional wellbeing.

4. Monitoring and reviewing

In February 2018, the senior leadership team reviewed the provision of PSHE in the annual faculty review. Structuring the review to analyse, showcase excellent practice and capture student and staff opinion was a rigorous process. Learning walks and student voice were largely positive and

there was an agreement that curriculum included appropriate topic areas. Staff concurred with this and appreciated the quality of lesson plans. However, their worries about losing lessons and their lack of experience in teaching PSHE remained concerns. Finally, the staff survey asked for areas for future training.

Continuing to work on raising the status of PSHE and working to build staff confidence, the SLT made sure that all staff were given access to the review findings. These were also made into a display in the main corridor, showcasing excellent practice.

5. Ongoing training opportunities

Responding to staff concerns in the review, a twilight CPD session in June 2018 was led by an external speaker on the importance of developing students holistically, promoting the importance of PSHE. The speaker also delivered basic drug education training. Given staff expertise within the school, the head of RE led a case study on how he teaches sensitive issues such as death, showing approaches that would work in PSHE.

In response to further demands for drug education training, Dave Hannah from The Mix delivered an optional training session after school in a pastoral team meeting slot, which 20 members of staff attended.

6. Review and improvement

In summer term 2018, staff were asked to return feedback on each unit to the PSHE coordinator. Using this feedback and the comments from the faculty review, all schemes of work were reviewed, and adapted where needed.

The review is ongoing, especially with the latest legislation and guidance on teaching PSHE. However, our external verification by the SIAMs inspector in October 2018 and the annual faculty review findings of 2019 suggested that the revised approach to teaching PSHE has been successful. Curriculum time has been freed up to teach core subjects, so in 2018, GCSE achievement was exceptionally high. Likewise, PSHE is well-respected by staff and students; and the whole school is invested in the personal, social and spiritual development of our students.

In a nutshell: our five key pieces of advice for colleagues:

1) Have a clear vision for change: share the rationale and methodology with staff clearly.
2) Listen to staff concerns and address them: being prepared to listen to staff fears and acknowledge their anger was crucial, even if uncomfortable. This would not necessarily signify a change of strategy, but that their fears around capability and workload would be addressed.
3) Lead by example: writing fully resourced programmes of study with short-term lesson plans made this successful in terms of staff workload, quality and equality of provision for students.
4) Instil a sense of ownership for staff: working as year teams led by the head of year meant a team took ownership over curriculum and adapted where necessary to suit students and staff on that team.
5) Take time to review: reviewing the effects of the change on staff and students informed adaptations.

Using Twitter and other online technologies to get out of 'the cycle'

Nathan Francis,
Haydon School

Twitter is an absolute goldmine of discussion when it comes to teaching and learning concepts and new pedagogical discussion. It is a place where no matter how far you are into your teaching journey, there is guaranteed to be something that may pique your interest.

I came across a tweet in which a science teacher I follow complained that the scientific method is not applied rigorously enough to what happens in our classrooms. The tweet stated that all too often overworked teachers rely on 'what works', and nowhere near enough time is devoted to education research.

As somebody who has only ever worked in one school, I somewhat agreed with this post. I had spent many hours in my first few years of teaching carefully designing PowerPoints for almost everything I would ever teach. Every time I taught the lesson again, I would go over the lesson, make some simple changes depending on the prior attainment of the class, and adjust the lesson challenge accordingly. I was in a cycle of delivering similar lessons again and again. These lessons worked, but I knew there was scope for change.

At the end of the tweet was a link to an article which would have a profound impact on effective pedagogy in my lessons.

Seeing the light – stopping the overload

Its subject was cognitive load theory (CLT), which has its roots in the beginnings of cognitive science back in the 1950s. When linked to teaching this can be a high impact, low effort strategy to improve instructional design. Changing one's approach to how a lesson is delivered in line with the principles of CLT can lead to more effective learning in lessons. That it took 60 years to get this to the forefront of education research is perhaps a worrying indication on how little educational psychology is considered in day-to-day learning.

The theory can be explained in very simple terms. The student's brain can be imagined as a computer with a finite amount of processing power. To maximise effective learning, as much processing power as possible needs to be designated to the task at hand. Strip away anything extraneous. If less processing power is used finding and deciphering information, more processing power can be used to complete the required task.

If less (brain) processing power is used finding and deciphering information, more processing power can be used to complete the required task

The theory

There are three types of load on working memory to be considered in instructional design:

- **Intrinsic cognitive load (ICL):** this is the inherent difficulty of the task. In simplistic terms: ICL cannot be controlled by the person delivering the learning (we know that reading Dostoyevsky is more challenging than reading JK Rowling). ICL can however be moderated through effective instructional design. As a science teacher I have always found chemical bonding a challenging topic to teach: it has many abstract ideas that need to be brought together into one coherent model. But bonding can be clearly broken down into subtopics, then by considering subtopics in isolation, with appropriate scaffolding, they can later be linked together to more effectively manage ICL.
- **Extraneous cognitive load (ECL):** this refers to the unnecessary thinking that learners may do when completing a task. Linking back to the computer metaphor, it is the processing power being used, but not for the specific task being completed. This is where as teachers we can have the most impact: by considering how the material is delivered, we can aim to reduce as much ECL as possible to give students the best chance of successful learning.
- **Germane cognitive load (GCL):** this is forming and storing long-term of new understanding – exactly what as educators we are hoping for our students to achieve. When considering instructional design, if we manage intrinsic load and reduce extraneous load, we can ensure students spend as much as their energy as possible on the construction of new understanding through meaningful GCL.

The intrinsic cognitive load associated with a task cannot be altered; but it can be managed to ensure students have the best chance to synthesise new understanding

Changing the method of delivery

Every lesson I have seen in an observation and every lesson I have delivered myself has, at some time, had the following:

- A teacher in front of an interactive whiteboard speaking to a class on a topic
- A PowerPoint (or equivalent) slide behind them containing text
- A PowerPoint (or equivalent) slide behind them containing a photo/ cartoon (which is often irrelevant).
- A PowerPoint (or equivalent) slide behind them containing a question/task.

These can contain a large extraneous cognitive load. Are students to copy the text off the board, draw the picture in their books, listen to the teacher, try to write down what the teacher is saying, or try to answer the question on the board? This is where I feel we as a body of professionals have fundamentally got it wrong. The method of delivery of information is muddled and incoherent. By considering the minutiae when delivering a lesson, we can begin to ask ourselves what we are hoping our stu-

dents will be doing and what they are getting out of this part of the lesson.

One of the simplest ways to do this is to move away from using pre-prepared slides and using the whiteboard more: this way, students can better see the thought process behind what is happening. Through teaching chemistry and physics, I have had to get students to carry out a number of complex calculations. As a new teacher I would often use my slides as a crutch: if I made a mistake, I had a perfectly laid out correct working and answer. But showing students a computer-generated perfect answer robs them of working through the steps logically. I am failing to manage the intrinsic cognitive load.

By investing in a visualiser, I now work through all calculations on lined paper, showing students a step-by-step approach to working through the problem. At any point I can stop to ask students what is the reason for this step, or they can stop me if they're unsure why a step has been carried out. This effective scaffolding far increases the likelihood of maximising germane cognitive load.

The simplest way to start incorporating the principles of CLT into lessons is to go through the slides you use when delivering a lesson to the students. What are you hoping for the students to get out of the slide? If you are hoping for the students to learn a new technical word, have the word and its definition alone on the slide: this way students will know they need to write it down. From there, once everyone has it written down, a discussion can be had about the new word, then examples can be given where the new word is applied. All you have done is ordered your delivery of information: if this is a clear logical order, then hopefully the students' thinking will be too. The extraneous has been stripped away and meaningful work can be carried out.

Cut out the extraneous

As a first step in applying the principles of CLT, before every lesson I now go through my slides and cut out all the extraneous pictures and text. This practice has led to many students asking why my PowerPoints don't look as much fun as they used to, now they are not filled with pictures. I explain that these unnecessary pictures were merely a distraction and I want the students to be thinking clearly on what will help the most with generating new understanding. I believe this has helped some of them reflect on their own learning, and what they are actually doing when receiving instruction.

As mentioned previously, the intrinsic cognitive load associated with a task cannot be altered; however, it can be managed to ensure students have the best chance to synthesise new understanding. Cognitive load theory encompasses effective strategies for the development of technical language and the contextualisation of information across internal topics and different subject areas. This includes considering students' zone of proximal development (ZPD), (managing what they can achieve on their own), and what they still need help with from a competent source. To effectively manage ICL when students are undertaking challenging work, appropriate scaffolding needs to be used. The CLT principles on this are:

1. Do a worked example.
2. Give the students a question that is as close to the worked example as possible.
3. Check understanding, then build up the challenge.

This ensures students are not pushed beyond their ZPD too soon, so far more challenging work can be undertaken in the lesson. The foundations on which students learn are more robust.

Lighting a fire

I liaised with teachers from the SEND department on the principles behind CLT. I felt it was working well in my lessons and wished to share my experiences on the positive effect it was having on students' synthesis of new understanding. It was something my colleagues were also using in their SEND lessons and we agreed it could be rolled out to greater effect across the school. Articles were shared with the whole staff on the principles of CLT and how it could be incorporated into lessons.

The more I tried to teach to the principles of CLT, the more I believed it was having a positive effect on generating new understanding in students. With agreement from the head of science, I delivered a training session to staff on the principles of CLT in lessons. This session was generally very well received, staff appreciating the clear principles and the benefits when they are used effectively.

The common aim

The science department I work in has a strong culture of sharing lessons culture; many of the teachers will teach the same scheme of lessons. This is particularly prevalent at KS3, where most classes are delivered the same lessons, though by different teachers. In liaison with the head of KS3 science, it was decided that I would redesign the sequence of lessons in a single chapter of year 7 chemistry, Biodiversity, using the CLT principles. The effectiveness could then be judged afterwards by assessing students' understanding. Early data comparisons have been extremely positive, but this is a small sample.

Effecting change in a mainstream school is always a challenge. Teaching styles can be very personal, and for varying reasons it can be difficult to expect people to change their teaching style and incorporate new ideas into their classrooms. My school is in Greater London, which has a severe shortage of teachers, particularly in science. This makes the department a mix of experienced teachers (who often have an ingrained teaching style), ITTs and NQTs, and short-term supply staff.

Despite these constraints, I believe there have been some successes in the school in using CLT to maximise effective learning. The SEND department in particular have embedded these principles in the lessons they deliver when working with students with additional learning needs, to ensure the students are making meaningful progress.

Next steps

I plan to liaise with the school's NQT coordinator, to ensure all new teachers entering the school are introduced to the CLT principles. The pedagogy used by new teachers tends to be based on their own philosophies on what learning should look like, affected by their individual experiences in the classroom, with impacts from the various mentors they have had in their fledgling careers. I believe when effecting whole-school change in teaching and learning, working with new teachers, whose teaching and learning principles are often at their most malleable, will yield the largest long-term impact. So for the rest of the school year I have arranged for NQT teachers to observe this style of teaching in the hope that they become as inspired by these principles as I have.

The references below incorporate more strategies to use in task planning and assessment.

More information on CLT and strategies to use

1) Allison, S (2017). *Making every science lesson count – Six principles to support great science teaching.* Crown House Publishing, Carmarthen.

2) https://impact.chartered.college/article/using-cognitive-load-theory-improve-slideshow-presentations/

3) https://researchschool.org.uk/durrington/blog/cognitive-load-theory-and-what-it-means-for-classroom-teachers

4) https://teacherhead.com/2017/05/28/teaching-to-the-top-attitudes-and-strategies-for-delivering-real-challenge/

5) http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/blog/taking-the-lid-off-stretch-and-challenge-in-the-classroom/

6) https://www.edutopia.org/blog/scaffolding-lessons-six-strategies-rebecca-alber

7) https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/five-standards-of-effective-pedagogy

This is an edited version of a blog first published on https://doreviewimprove.home.blog/

Promoting and improving self-esteem of KS3 female students

Lucy Wolstenholme,
The Fernwood School

Having had experience working with young women and their mental health before starting my teaching career, it was always something that I felt passionate about. I knew also of the pressures of dealing with young people.

Mental Health Foundation (2019) states that nearly 70% of females and 60% of males in the UK claim that they have suffered with poor mental health; over 70% of them being between the ages of 18-35. It is not hard to find many similar statistics and media coverage of such saddening prominence of mental health difficulties in the UK.

I really wanted to make an impact on the young people I interacted with on a day-to-day basis and improve their educational experiences by starting with one of the things sometimes beyond our control and intervention ability as 'just' a classroom teacher – their wellbeing. There are many ways in which we were doing the best we could at supporting our students at The Fernwood School, but the services within the school were stretched to capacity.

Priorities have to reflect emergency safeguarding issues, so students may not always be supported as swiftly as they would like or need. While support staff could conduct 'check-ins' and use form tutors to help, some students still needed more.

As a second-year teacher I was eager to be involved in a project that would benefit the whole school and sup-

port this aspect of education. In my previous teaching year at Fernwood, I had been involved in supporting our secondary students' wellbeing ambassadors, students who support their peers, and in 'music Mondays', a song played each Monday morning during form-time to start the week in an upbeat way.

Building on this, I felt it was extremely important to raise the aspirations of girls who were affected by low self-esteem and low aspirations, which are often linked to educational success, through self-doubt, time missed from school, academic disengagement or a combination of these.

I researched the need for student mental health support in the school, and found that the number of students receiving regular structured support by safeguarding and wellbeing teams and school counsellors was:

- **Year 7:** 7 students
- **Year 8:** 13 students
- **Year 9:** 8 students
- **Year 10:** 8 students
- **Year 11:** 10 students

This equates to around only 4.6% of the school student population receiving support, yet there was a growing waiting list and all staff at capacity. Including those receiving external support from services such as CAHMs, Kooth and Women's Aid, this proportion increases to c10%.

Caroline Henshaw (2019) makes explicit links between students' access to social media and a decline in positive self-attitude, with girls being twice as likely as boys to develop mental health issues as a result. NHS statistics show that over 20% of 14-year-old girls have self-harmed or continue to do so. One of the main reasons is the way they feel about themselves and their appearance. CAMHs referrals have been rising by nearly 100% a year in some areas across the UK (Ford, 2019). These findings provide stark and shocking realisation of how society and the media can affect our students' self-perception and mental health. This research is echoed in individual schools' research, student voice and expressed parental concerns.

Acting on the research

I created a six-session self-esteem group that would look at many of the issues our young women face, targeting girls in year 9 for several reasons. They would be able to self-consent through Guillick Competency (NHS, 2019); this is the year where support was generally low; and it gave an opportunity to access students before the pressures of GCSEs started.

The Dove self-esteem project informed the layout and design of the course, which we called *Empower.*

Session one would be an introduction, getting the group of girls to know each other more and find out where they are 'now' with their understanding of themselves.

Session 1: Getting to know you

» Setting the group's terms: getting the girls to make a 'contract' about what ground rules they expect. Must include confidentiality and when this may need to be broken. In order for the sessions to work, the girls must take ownership of their own rules.

» Task: something you feel proud of, something you want to achieve, something that makes you scared. To discuss what they wish to get from the group and how they will be able to use the information they gain in their futures.

Session two would build and reflect on the previous week and what they had learnt about each other, and explore the feelings of fear and anger.

Session 2: Fear and anger

» Tasks: discuss reaction to things that make us worried or scared. What are our natural reactions and what is fight/flight/freeze?

» Why do we act in certain ways and what do we think are the right responses?

» Where do we feel anger? How does it present itself, both physically and internally?

» Why do we feel fear? What can this make us feel like? Reactions to fear.

» Things to consider: this session might provoke many disclosures from students. Be prepared to write down any reflections that might be discussed.

Session three would allow exploration of the relationships within the girls' lives, whether they perceive them to be positive or negative and why this might be.

Session 3: Relationships

- Discuss: what types of relationships do participants have in their lives? (Mind map) The impact of positive or negative relationships on their lives.
- Tasks: Get two different colours and highlight positive and negative relationships. Discuss main relationships in their lives. What do these make us feel like?
- Things to consider: which types of relationships might make us feel vulnerable and put us in an emotional/mentally poor place; why might this make us feel bad. Potential disclosures of arranged marriages/ forced marriages within families. Support for this should be fed down to DSL and recorded via child protection software.

Session four would consider romantic relationships, expectations, consent and the legalities surrounding an intimate relationship. It would also be able to challenge the understandings of arranged/forced marriages and other potential safeguarding concerns.

Session 4: What do I expect from a romantic relationship?

- Discuss what a romantic relationship might be, as some students might not know.
- Tasks: Diamond 9 –characteristics girls might want from a partner. Which of these might not be healthy, and why?
- Some girls may choose to pick characteristics that might not be desirable (Eg, possessive/wants always to be in contact with me/buys me gifts/ tells me what to wear.). Discuss why a parent/ carer might worry. Link with age of consent.
- Consent, and expectations of how as a woman we should expect to be treated. How to give consent positively, and how to know when someone else gives consent. Explicitly highlight law relating to sexual relationships.
- Different types of romantic relationships eg, heterosexual, homosexual. How do the girls feel about these?
- Things to consider: disclosures of sexuality/ abuse may arise. Contact/report as above.

Session five would challenge the impact of social media on the way it would make students feel and act, including the pressures it puts on females regardless of age.

Session 5: Self-esteem and the media

- Discuss: how do others perceive me and how do I perceive myself?
- Task: using Lammily doll, think about what the media wants us to expect our bodies to be like, and what this leads to.
- Worksheet: fill in how the media affects the way we feel about our bodies and what we feel is 'normal'. Alongside, write down the 'influencers' they see on social media that might affect the way we perceive our lives.
- Discuss pornography and self-esteem. What do they expect from themselves and their partners? What pressures does pornography cause?
- Things to consider: disclosures centred on body image/self-harm. Contact/report as above.

Session six, the final session, would involve the students again taking a baseline data test and comparing this against the first. They would have time to reflect and think about the growth they had accomplished from the first session.

The final session, 6, draws together all of the topics discussed and rounds off the course.

After creating the sessions, links were made with the safeguarding and wellbeing team to have critical overview of the aims and outcomes of each of the sessions. Considering the new Ofsted 2020 criteria and relationship and sex education updates to policy (2019), the sessions should enhance the school's support and guidance for pupils.

Action plans for safeguarding and disclosures were also created, so the girls taking part would gain better and quicker support.

Findings

Head of year for Y9 put forward the first group of students: eight vibrant and bubbly young girls who seemingly would have no issues with their self-esteem, but this could not be further from the truth.

As the sessions went on, we saw tears and celebrations of enlightenment; it was a truly remarkable journey to have taken with them. By the end of the sessions, the girls were sad that it was over.

The second group of girls taking part had a strongly contrasting demeanour: quiet and introverted, with little to say at the start of the course. But by the end, their growth was clear to see in both confidence and ability to be articulate with their opinions.

The largest improvements were shown in responses to these three questions:

- Do I know how to recognise when I am starting to feel negative emotions?
- Do I know where I can access help if I need it?
- Do I always know how to say how I am feeling?

Students showed a 64% increase in ability to articulate their feelings; 57% felt more supported at Fernwood; and 50% showed improvements in understanding how to handle relationships and feeling confident in all aspects of their lives.

It is important to note that some girls' scores actually deteriorated. But speaking to them revealed that at the start of the sessions the girls felt: they knew themselves well; their self-esteem was not something to worry about – they did not know how to recognise feelings of worry, or understand the consequences of saying how they really felt. As discussions explored their feelings, they become more self-aware – which led to them scoring themselves more negatively than before. Despite this, they felt that the whole experience had been positive for themselves and their relationships with those around them.

Student voice was important in informing my planning for the future. Having collected both qualitative and quantitative data, it was easy to spot links, discuss anomalies and explain what would otherwise just be statistics. It helped me to understand the journey that each individual girl had been on. Some, who had been less vocal throughout, seemed to demonstrate the most growth.

Further actions

Since both groups have finished the six sessions, further actions have included:

- Delivering intent, implementation and impact of the group to the senior leadership team. Three girls joined me for this and expressed

their thoughts on the course. This linked to the school's PSHE curriculum, as it helps improve secondary students' wellbeing.

- As a reward to the girls taking part, I have linked with a local businesswoman who runs her own restaurant, Annie's Burger Shack. We will be taking the girls to dine at her restaurant – and she will deliver key messages of inspiration to enhance academic and future aspirations.
- Working alongside the SEN team, we will develop tailored sessions for more vulnerable students.

Future steps

For the academic year 2019/20, the sessions will continue and reach a wider cohort of pupils. The school's senior leadership team has agreed the following aims:

- To create resources and tailor sessions to fit the need for more vulnerable pupils to make a 'nurture' Empower group. With discussion and support from the SEN team, we decided that it would be best to keep students who may be more sensitive in their approach to the topics in a separate group.
- To continue reviewing and creating resources using feedback from pupils who have taken part in the sessions.
- To extend the Empower group to males and work with a male member of staff who will deliver the sessions. Since the sessions have started, male students in the school who feel this would be beneficial to them too have approached me, and student voice has shown that Y9 male students would like this.
- To embed a 1-hour timetabled lesson into my teaching capacity to enable the sessions to be delivered next year.
- To further strengthen a streamlined safeguarding procedure for pupils referred from the groups. I plan to make a register, with key notes information on each group, which can be reviewed by the school's designated safeguarding leads to establish priorities and interventions.

Overall, I feel that the course has enabled a greater understanding of our pupils and a good rapport to be built between pupils and staff. Not only has secondary students' wellbeing improved, it has been a pleasure for me to see the impact that can be made in just six sessions for students who may not always show the support they truly need. I feel that the outcomes show a real strength that Fernwood has in supporting our pupils throughout their school experience.

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Literacy across the curriculum: A small-scale study

April Heath,
Chelsea Academy

I undertook this small-scale literacy project as it would allow me to develop my leadership skills as a middle line manager (literacy coordinator) and prepare me for the role of mentor to a school direct trainee in the next academic year. Working with two teachers, one from the history department and another from science, I aimed to assess how our staff support literacy in their subject areas, and to see whether my research and practice could suggest ways in which they could improve their teaching of literacy.

Research

The following literacy and leadership books can help understanding of teaching – and leading – literacy across a school or academy:

1. *Reading Reconsidered,* Doug Lemov and Erica Woolway
2. *Closing the Vocabulary Gap,* Alex Quigley
3. *Don't Call it Literacy,* Geoff Barton
4. *The Literacy Leader's Toolkit,* Graham Tyrer and Patrick Taylor.

Such reading gave insights into the ways staff could support students' literacy (reading, writing, spoken and listening) throughout the academy. The most effective books, I found, were *Don't Call it Literacy* and *The Literacy Leader's Toolkit* – thanks to the simple steps which could easily be implemented to tackle literacy in all subject areas (Barton), and the practical strategies to being an effective middle line manager (Tyrer/Taylor).

Learning walks

'Observing lessons from a literacy point of view by conducting a literacy walk will begin the process of envisaging the potential of cross-curricular strategy' (The Literacy Leader's Toolkit, p13)

To assess the current teaching of literacy in the academy, my line manager and I went on a literacy walk and observed a science teacher and two history teachers. Using the observation framework provided by the National Literacy Trust Online, I collated the following findings (opposite).

From this, I could tell that the staff are confident in rewording students' answers to develop their spoken language; yet, other scaffolding strategies might be needed to help support and stretch the students further. I was particularly interested in how improving the strategies for spoken or listening may, in turn, affect the students' written literacy.

Setting up meetings

Next, a meeting with the heads of science and history clarified the goals and direction I wish to move in and therefore why I am doing my project *(The Literacy Leader's Toolkit, p7).* With science, I attended one of their weekly briefings and outlined my project to all the staff. With history, the department head suggested that I contact a specific teacher to collaborate with.

WWW (what went well)	Areas for development
History (male, trainee): Clear use of strategies to help students learn key words or ensure that they are accessing the mark scheme. For example, using acronyms in history 'D, D, D'.	Putting answers on the board or using more visual stimulus to help further prompt the student's memory or consolidate information. Additionally, the teacher could 'Increase [the] use of no hands up' *(Don't Call it Literacy, p23)* after a think, pair and share exercise. This could raise the level of engagement and allow the teacher to assess the spoken literacy of other students.
History (male, experienced teacher): Re-wording students' answers so that they have a clearer understanding of the topic and can hear the key vocabulary in context.	When getting students to write down the answers discussed in class, the teacher could write it on the board so that 'the students can see their teacher modelling how to write' *(ibid).* Or, key words could be placed on the board to remind the students of the type of vocabulary they should be including when constructing their answers verbally/ when writing. This helps further ensure that 'teachers explicitly teach key words in their subject' *(ibid, p24)*
Science (male, experienced teacher): Again, good modelling and rewording of students' answers with probing questions to develop their response.	Give students time for 'oral rehearsal' *(ibid, p23).* They could do this with some type of written guidance: a checklist, word bank or a series of questions etc. This could then reduce the amount of teacher-talk and instead provide more time for the teacher to ask probing questions.

Questionnaires

Following the National Literacy Trust observation form found on their membership website I compiled a questionnaire to be used for science and history, with 13 quantitative and 2 qualitative questions in total. The questions were split into all areas of literacy: speaking, reading, writing, listening, vocabulary and assessment/feedback.

Seven science teachers completed the literacy questionnaire out of a possible nine. They revealed that writing is the most important aspect of literacy in science, and an area they would all like to improve on. Interestingly, listening activities are 'only sometimes used' and reading tasks were 'not as varied as they could be'. From this, along with the previous research and the lesson observations, it would be beneficial to find strategies of increasing or supporting the students' listening, speaking or reading to improve their written work.

Although only one history teacher completed the questionnaire out of a possible six, it was interesting to hear that they too felt that reading and listening were areas of neglect. They stated how 'reading and writing are what [the students] need to do best, but [it] would be interesting to find ways where listening/speaking might enhance these.' This, therefore, was something I wanted to focus on when doing my observations with the history teacher.

Science observations

In science, I observed a mixed year 7 class of 27 students, 19 of which were male and 8 were female. The class included one SEN student who received 1-2-1 support, five SEN students and 15 qualified for PP. The teacher is female, mid-twenties and in her third year of teaching. I observed 40 minutes of her lesson, after lunch, and noted the following three pieces of advice for how to improve literacy in the classroom.

Observation	Areas for improvement
For the starter activity, the students copied down a paragraph on the board and filled in the gaps with the missing words found on the same slide, demonstrating their knowledge of the previous lesson. This activity lasted 20 minutes, by which time quite a few students had already finished and were waiting for the next task.	**Vocabulary to help written:** the teacher could have ensured that the gap fill consisted of words that the students needed to use later in the lesson (key vocabulary). In order to stretch and challenge the students who finish early, the teacher could print the sheet off for students to fill in. This then leaves more room on the board for the challenge questions and feedback could be done more quickly. It would be interesting to see whether this would have improved the students' written work as it would allow them more time to move onto the challenge and hopefully, they could then use the key words in their answers.
The students watched a video on YouTube about chemical and physical reactions to review and consolidate information previously taught. Students were told to 'write down anything interesting in their books.' They then fed this back as a class afterwards, with varying degrees of detail and relevance to the subject or learning objective.	**Listening:** when watching the YouTube video on chemical and physical reactions, the students could have been given a handout with a series of short questions in chronological order, or true and false questions. When watching the video, the students could then be listening out for the key questions and writing down the specific answers. Like the first suggestion, this might guide the students to have more focused responses around the lesson objective. It would be interesting to see what effect this has on their written work also.
Students were given images on the board which were either examples of a chemical or a physical reaction. Students were asked to point to the right wall if the image was a physical change, and the left wall if it was a chemical change. This allowed the students to demonstrate their ability to spot chemical or physical reactions.	**Reading and spoken:** when getting the students to decide whether a reaction is chemical or physical, the teacher could provide them with a flow chart which they could use to help guide their discussion and discovery in pairs. This could ensure that they understand why it is a chemical or physical reaction as it allows them to explore the reasoning or process behind it. It would be interesting to see what effect this potentially has on their spoken language and consequently their writing in their assessment at the end of the half term.

History observation

In history I observed a year 10 options class of 25 students, 14 of whom were male and 11 female. The class included one SEN student and 13 qualified for PP. The teacher was also female, mid-twenties and was in her second year of teaching. I observed 35 minutes of her lesson, also after lunch, and noted the following three pieces of advice for how to improve literacy in the classroom.

Observation	Areas for improvement
For the starter, the teacher had three questions on the board about how Hitler used propaganda. Some students were engaged, if they knew the answers. Following this, the teacher then put a list of interests on the board and asked the students to discuss what things from the list had the most amount of influence on them (family, media, music etc).	**Comprehension:** having the second activity as a starter might work better as it engages the students on a more personal level and means that all students can access the learning. Then, the teacher could use the starter slide to narrow the focus and teach them about the main subject/topic. It might then help to recall their previous learning. This could also make the lesson objective clearer for the students and the reason as to why they are looking at it in relation to today. (Similar ideas are explored in *Reading Reconsidered*)
The teacher had lots of questions on the board all presented in different colours, presumably to indicate the increasing levels of difficulty. However, they all began with the word 'what'.	**Questioning:** 'less use of 'what?' questions and more use of 'why?' and 'how?' *(Don't Call it Literacy, p23).* It would be interesting to see whether this affects the students' written work and/or their spoken literacy.
Lastly, given what the students have learnt in the lesson, the teacher asked them to define the word 'propaganda' in their own words to consolidate their learning.	**Speaking and writing:** perhaps this could be scaffolded further by having the key word on the board surrounded by other words that could be used to describe it. The students could use the words on the board to create their own supported definition. This could work for words they already know as well as new vocabulary. It could also be used as a spoken activity at first before writing. This idea could work in most lessons and, from previous observations and the questionnaire, I could see how it has the potential to benefit other teachers too.

Last observation of science

After meeting with both teachers and feeding back my findings, I did a final observation to see whether these suggestions affected the students' learning. Given the timescale and exams, I was only able to do this with the science teacher, but will do the same with the history teacher next half term. My findings for science are as follows:

Observations

Vocabulary to help written

The teacher chose words which were specific to science such as 'chemical' and 'reversible' in the gap fill. The board included more challenges for the students to do once they completed their work. The EAL student who receives 1-2-1 support seemed more engaged with the work and was able to get through the whole activity like the rest of the class. This activity, however, was still very long, lasting again 20 minutes. There were also a lot of challenge questions on the board, which were hard to see from the back of the room and rather overwhelming due to the way they were worded. The student who finished the task very quickly in the last observation did not attempt the challenge in this lesson. Although the answers were fed back from the gap fill task, the challenge was not. Perhaps I could have been clearer about the way in which this task could have been set up to ensure the development of literacy.

Reading and speaking

For a different topic (conduction, convection and radiation) the teacher made a flow diagram which the students had to use to figure out what type of energy was being used in the pictures on the board. I noticed, without teacher modelling and perhaps having never seen a flow chart before, a lot of the students just stared at it then talked about something else. I worked with an EAL student, as his 1-2-1 support had left the room, and another student. Once I explained the task, they both began debating the type of heat transfer being used, using the language on the flow chart. I then circulated the room and helped groups that were also confused about how to use the flow chart.

When the teacher asked for feedback, I observed how one student used the wording from the flow chart to describe how the image was using conduction rather than convection. This then led another student to agree that 'like student A, I think that image B on the board is also convection because....'

So this task, if modelled and set up effectively, could be a valuable way of explaining the process behind the science. This also reminded me that 'putting pupils in groups is not a guarantee that they will learn more effectively' *(Don't Call it Literacy, p39).* Perhaps I could have provided the teacher with more support in this activity by explaining how a routine or set of success criteria put in place before doing a group activity might be needed to encourage the development of spoken literacy.

Listening

Unfortunately, given the amount of time spent on the previous activities, this was not completed. It would be nice to come back and observe this task to see if there were any developments.

Follow-up questionnaire

In order to check the effect this has had upon the students' work as well as the impact of my suggestions, the science teacher and I conducted a final questionnaire which consisted of four open-ended questions and two closed. From this, I learnt that the teacher could see that the 'students used key words from the flow chart to help their verbal responses, before I [the science teacher] asked them to do a written task on the content.' It was also good to hear that the teacher felt 'it was useful' because it 'gave [her] some specific feedback on how to use more literacy tasks to help support [her] class' and 'when [she] used these with them [she] could see that it helped them to progress.' Understandably, this is only from one teacher and so it would be interesting to see whether my input was useful for the history teacher and any other teachers who might be involved in the project in the future.

It would also be beneficial to check the students' recent assessment, being marked over half term, to see if the activities suggested have had an effect on their written work.

How it has helped already

Such research has helped educate me about the literacy demands in other subjects. It has also given opportunities to develop my skills as a mentor, and has provided literacy ideas for the school's new online platform for literacy.

Moving forward

I would like to extend this to next year's whole-school CPD session, TEEP meets, and future lead practitioner bulletins. I would like to extend the project to other departments to find out the literacy needs of other subject areas and come up with further developments.

How does reducing response marking affect pupil progress and teacher wellbeing?

Lauren Walters,
South Rise Primary School

Lauren Walters, year 6 lead, teacher and English coordinator, South Rise Primary School, describes changes to the school's marking policy that can improve teacher wellbeing with no negative effect on teaching and learning

For this SSAT Leadership Legacy Project (LLP) aimed at improving wellbeing across the school while ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning was not negatively affected, I was working alongside my headteacher and acted on the opinions and feedback of staff. To do this, I changed our approach to marking through four steps:

- Running a survey across the school to analyse teaching staff's outlook and views on marking
- Revising and adapting our marking policy
- Trialling the new marking policy with my team
- Introducing it to the school as a whole.

Currently, it is only my team who are running the new marking policy across all areas of the curriculum. During the last half-term, the rest of the school began implementing the new policy to their English marking. Therefore, moving forward, I will gather feedback from all members of staff on how they found the new system in their year group. I will then work alongside subject leaders within the school to introduce the new marking policy to all staff across all areas of the curriculum.

As we enter the new academic year, our new system will be in place across the school. During the year I will continue to monitor staff opinions and the impact of our marking on the children's attainment and progress. I would like to assess the impact the change has on teacher and child dialogue in the classroom. Ultimately, I also see, in the future, the opportunity to develop support staff to better respond to teachers' marking and so achieve better impact in their time with individuals and groups.

The big question I was seeking to answer was: how would reducing response marking affect both progress within school and teacher wellbeing?

The phrase 'teacher wellbeing' has lately been bandied about by educators, the press and politicians. But what do we really mean by wellbeing?

In January this year, *TES* published an article which included: "Wellbeing is about achieving balance. It's about an individual's ability to balance the psychological, social and physical resources they possess against the challenges they come up against". Interestingly, in the same month the Department for Education published their Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, with their top priority being 'more supportive cultures and reduced workload'. The department, alongside Ofsted, are aiming to simplify the accountability system and reduce any unnecessary pressures it places on teachers. Lastly, and most recently, (May 2019) the Labour party has announced their plans to eradicate the key stage 1 and key stage 2 SATs.

It goes without saying that everyone in education

is thinking about retention and workload – so naturally, I too began reflecting on my own practice.

My experience

Once I sat down and thought about my own professional practice, I became increasingly aware of the hours which I spent marking. In comparison to other aspects of teaching such as planning, classroom displays and assessment, I spent the majority of time on my marking. As a year 6 teacher, teaching mathematics, reading, grammar, English and a unit lesson daily to 28 children, I faced 140 pieces of learning per day to mark. Although I had been doing this for a while, when I put it down in numbers like this, it shocked me!

At our initial LLP SSAT meeting, one speaker recommended that we read *Start With Why* by Simon Sinek. This really resonated with me. As a leader, and someone who is always looking forward, I did exactly that – I asked why.

The proposal

In order to make change, and to explore the idea of changing marking within my workplace, I first had to approach our headteacher and propose my project. To begin with, I highlighted – in numerical form – the length of time I spend leaving written feedback on each piece of learning in my books. This totalled over seven hours a week.

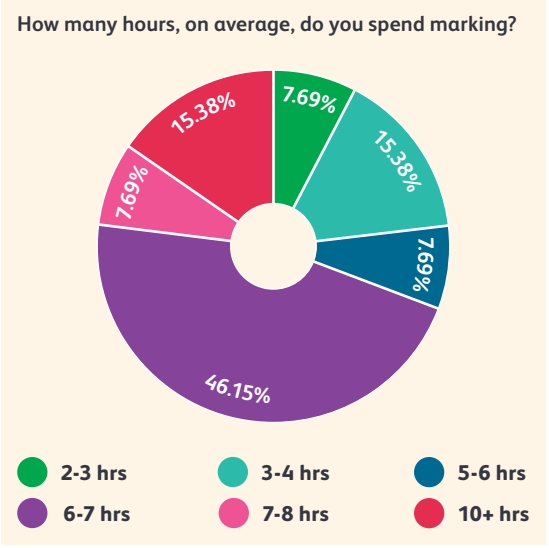
I then explained to the head some of the research supporting my project. This included papers which argued that there is 'no strong logical argument' for why acknowledgement marking aids pupil progress. Indeed, researchers appear to be unanimous in their belief that such marking (also known as tick and flick) could be 'reduced without any negative effect'.

Thoroughly supportive, my headteacher encouraged me to follow my line of enquiry and to put into practice a change in our marking policy.

Therefore, I started my project by doing two things: creating a survey for staff members and making changes to our English marking policy, putting into place what I had discussed with the head.

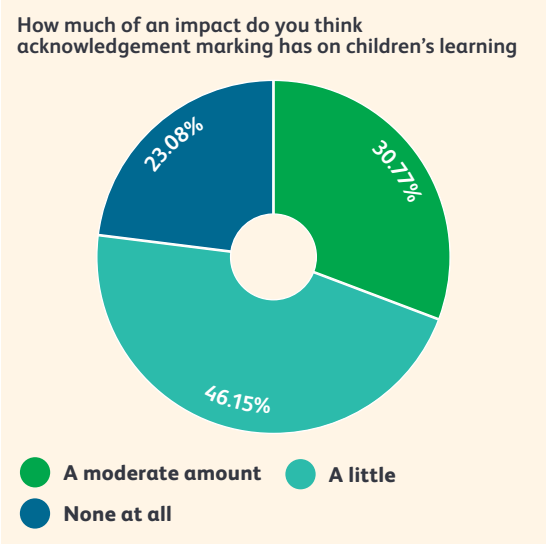
Feedback from staff

I have included below a summary from my staff survey.



As you can see from the figure, just under half of the teachers in my school spend 6-7 hours marking a week. Shockingly, over 15% spend more than 10 hours marking weekly!

Furthermore, when asked whether teaching staff think acknowledgement marking has an impact, the most common response was 'a little'. After reading these responses, it was no surprise when staff, when asked what they would change about marking, gave answers such as "one to one feedback for individual children once a week. Lose acknowledgement marking" and "I think fewer daily comments as I am not sure how much the children interact with these."



Changes to the marking policy

Below is a section of the revised marking policy, the red being the key changes made.

Changes to the quantity of written feedback from daily comments to a minimum of one positive personal comment a week

Written Feedback (Marking)

- Children are given feedback using a green pen. Children will recieve a short positive comment, a minimum of once per week, which is personal to them; denoting **the exceptional effort or disposition shown e.g. 'you have tried really hard today...'; 'Great effort!'; Fantastic teamwork!'; 'Great use of language!'; 'Great vocabulary'.**
- It is important that learning shows evidence of being 'marked through the piece'; this means words are ticked etc.
- All learning, once read, will be acknowledged with a tick at the bottom of the piece.
- Teachers will assess children's learning next to the Learning Intention with the marking code denoting 'achieved' or 'partly achieved'. If the lesson's intention was not achieved. Then there will be no annotation.
- If the teacher deems that the child 'didn't achieve' the learning intention, then a development point will be needed.
- When marking an extended piece. The teacher will 'deep-mark' a section of the writing which has been identified to deepen or move the child on in their learning.

Replaced daily written acknowledgement marking with a tick at the bottom of the page

New marking code giving children immediate feedback and cutting down written expectations for teaching staff

This was incredibly important, as the new marking policy is to be focused on the positive

Rather than deep-marking a longer piece (which can become multiple pages in upper KS2) teachers will focus on a section of a child's writing and therefore give more detailed feedback and model editing which the writer can then use in their feedback

English
The following symbols are used to assess each lesson based on formative assessment **A** Achieved **PA** Partly achived.
D Development point
OF indicates oral feedback has been given
Punctuation and errors related to grammar will be indicated where appropriate
Sp should be used to indicate incorrect spellings where appropriate
The following symbols are to be used where appropriate / new line // new paragraph **^** missing word **?** meaning is unclear

I saw, and still see, the new marking code as an important change to our policy.

The coding system gives children instant feedback when they look back at their work. It also is incredibly helpful for the teacher as they can easily and quickly assess the impact of a lesson and through using AFL can ensure that their lessons are effective and revisited if necessary.

This survey was incredibly insightful and gave me (and my headteacher) lots to think about and consider when changing the marking policy.

Feedback from the trial

After we, as a year group, trialled the new marking policy in our English books we fed back our opinions to the headteacher. These included points such as "I'm now hardly taking any books home" and "the children are asking for more oral feedback, questioning their codes, and this is creating a more open dialogue in the room."

Importantly, when asked, the children in year six also gave positive feedback. They commented on the fact that they felt there was no negative impact on their learning, that they enjoyed seeing easily whether their teacher felt they achieved the learning and had more opportunity to talk with and discuss their learning.

This feedback was better than I could have expected and led to change being implemented across the school.

Implementing change

Before introducing the new policy to the rest of the staff, I first met with SLT and explained the changes and feedback from the trial. Then, during the Summer 1 half-term, we rolled out the English marking scheme across the entire school (KS1 and KS2).

Moving forward

So far, we have received positive feedback from all year groups. There was initial concern, before trialling the marking scheme, that the changes may not be entirely suitable in KS1: however, early feedback suggests that the children are enjoying the new coding system and are finding it easier to understand then the previous marking policy.

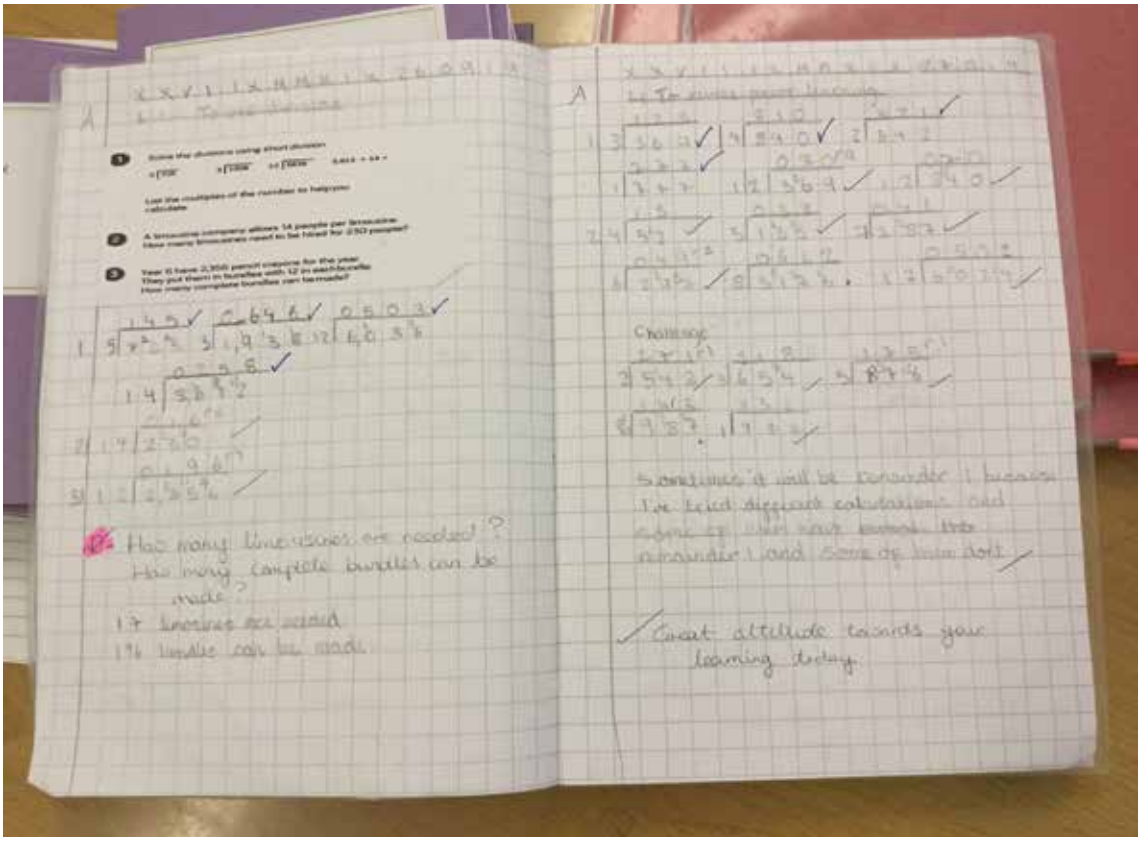
In my year group, we are now trialling the new marking policy across all areas of the curriculum. Through working alongside the maths subject leaders and SLT, we intend to implement a change to all marking, across the curriculum, before the end of the academic year.

The impact

I have learnt many things from this project. On reflection, I feel that the changes made will not only have a lasting positive effect on staff wellbeing but will also continue to support our children's learning in a positive and meaningful way.

Without the opportunity to partake in the SSAT Leadership Legacy Project, I am unsure whether I would have approached my headteacher to discuss marking and the potential changes which we could make. However, this project has shown me that as a leader, we need to constantly reflect and evaluate our approaches to both teaching and learning within and outside of the classroom. Importantly, we must also listen to staff and children and react appropriately to shared opinions.

In this changing climate, where staff wellbeing is under greater scrutiny and more and more educators are leaving the profession, we must ensure that both teaching and support staff have a healthy work-life balance to retain professionals and ensure that children have the best education and opportunities possible.



How SSAT can support your school improvement journey

We can help you identify focus areas and access the right tools, advice, resources and programmes for improvement. Our education team has expertise in primary, secondary, post-16 and special education, and we offer school improvement consultancy and support that can be delivered flexibly to suit your requirements.

Examples of our professional development and school improvement support include:

- **Curriculum intent and quality assurance seminars**
  Using the *Four Pillars of Principled Curriculum Design*, review your current curriculum provision and identify areas for development

NEW DATES ADDED

- **Embedding Formative Assessment programme**
  Change your teachers' habits and behaviours, improve feedback across your school and positively impact on learner outcomes
- **Coaching**
  Tailored one-to-one support and bespoke group training
- **Improving whole school attendance and punctuality**
  Identify new approaches to improve attendance and punctuality rates
- **School perception surveys**
  Analyse how staff, learners and parents feel about your school
- **Leaders for the Future**
  Develop the leadership skills, knowledge and mindsets of teachers showing leadership potential
- **Peer Review**
  Work with other school leaders to self-evaluate and plan for further improvement
- **Department for Education's National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML) Modules**
  Become an accredited delivery partner and offer this middle leadership training across your school and networks
- **Lead Practitioner Accreditation**
  Empower and recognise your staff to improve whole-school teaching and learning

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