



SSAT Journal 12

Summer 2018

ssat the schools, students
and teachers network

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Welcome

*Sue Williamson,
Chief Executive, SSAT*



Welcome to the last journal of the 2017/18 academic year. This term we have been celebrating the success of member schools at our three Educational Outcomes events in Manchester, Birmingham and London. It is very special to present the awards to the headteachers and senior leaders of primary and secondary schools. I was also able to present certificates for schools that had successfully completed sections of the SSAT Framework for Exceptional Education. It is great to see the celebrations in the media and on Twitter.

For the first time, we used the Educational Outcomes events to present the graduation certificates and lapel badges to our Leadership Legacy Project participants. We had 125 teachers in their first four years of teaching and gave them a variety of leadership experiences: a launch event with Baroness Sue Campbell and with Bill Rankin of Apple; a day at the SSAT National Conference; regional meetings with a leadership expert; and work shadowing with a senior leadership team. The feedback is extremely positive and we were impressed by the energy, vision and creativity of the participants, who completed their year by submitting a think piece. You can read articles by four of the Leadership Legacy Fellows in this edition of the journal.

We will be running the project again in the next academic year and there will be a letter sent to you before the summer break. This opportunity is open to all member schools and we are not restricting numbers. To paraphrase Arsene Wenger, 'We have taken a group of people and acted as a guide. We are showing them the way.' This is SSAT's contribution to the school-led system – supporting and developing the next generation of school leaders.

Also in this edition, you can read about the learning that emerged from the Apple study tour to Texas and California. Apple is one of our partners and has committed to running another tour in 2019, as well as supporting a number of events in England. At their HQ in London, we recently held the Primary Headteachers Conference, which included stimulating sessions on the management of change and reducing workload.

I love my visits to schools, as I am always introduced to innovative work designed to improve the life chances of young people. I had an amazing visit to Catcote Academy in Hartlepool and visited their industrial unit, shop and café. This is captured in Peter Chambers' article. SSAT will be working closely with colleagues in special schools to give their youngsters the opportunity to engage in meaningful work and lead independent lives.

I am sure that you are looking forward to the summer holidays and I hope you have a great break. We look forward to hearing the news about your examination results and the destinations of your students. Thank you to you and all the staff at your school for their hard work. Teachers do make lives; they are hugely important in the futures of the young people they teach. I am a judge of the Teaching Awards' Lifetime Achievement Award, and the best testimony we receive is always from the students, past and present. They truly value all that you do for them.

We look forward to working with you in the new academic year.

**Sue Williamson,
SSAT**

Restructuring lessons for rapid pace and metacognitive practice

*Claire Bishop,
Sir Christopher Hatton Academy*

Claire Bishop, Assistant Principal Humanities and Research at Sir Christopher Hatton Academy, gives a frank account of her new approach to teaching, its challenges and the benefits to teaching and learning.

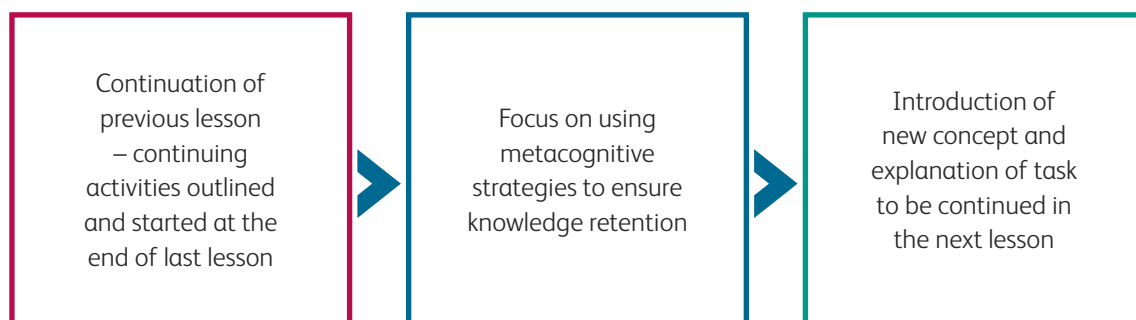
As a trainee teacher I was taught there was a formula to what makes a good lesson:

1. A 'settler': get them in, get them engaged and ready for the topic
2. A 'starter' activity that introduces the topic
3. An activity, e.g. gathering information into a table
4. Mini-plenary
5. An activity
6. Plenary to determine knowledge gained in the lesson.

Later, I began to hear that the special lessons were the ones that ignored this structure and thought 'outside the box'. But this does not deal with the issue of the 'normal lesson'. What does a well-structured lesson plan look like? How can lessons be structured to ensure progress and engage learners? Is there a way to ensure that my pupils feel secure and have a good structure to their learning that also challenges them?

Although I make no claims that the action research project described here will revolutionise the classroom, changing the structure of lessons and applying some metacognitive strategies for knowledge retention have made my classroom a more experimental and productive place.





Aims of restructuring lessons

This restructuring of lessons had three key goals. First, to ensure that as little time is wasted in lessons as possible, as the new GCSE history has so much to cover in such a short space of time. Second, to keep pupils engaged in their history learning through a range of activities. And third, to ensure that knowledge retention is high.

With these aims in mind, I critically analysed my lesson structures. My classes and I have a good relationship so while I liked to ‘hook them’ as soon as they got in, this was not an essential behaviour management tool at the moment. I decided to have three basic sections in each lesson – see diagram above.

The second phase of the lesson, focusing on metacognitive processes, includes:

- Quick-fire subject knowledge quizzes to determine the level of knowledge pupils have about the topic we are learning.
- Modelling answers, demonstrating my thought process as I go.
- Self-evaluation conversations about *how* we are revising the topics at home, dispelling some myths about the ‘best’ ways to revise.
- Peer and self-assessment.
- The ‘big’ questions. For example, rather than just focusing on whether Oliver Cromwell was a hero or a villain, we discussed whether it was the role of a historian to judge the past or merely relay it to their audience.
- Updating our personal learning checklists (PLCs – a red, amber, green system that pupils use to judge their knowledge against the scheme of work or exam board specification).

I decided to undertake this new structure with both year 7 and year 11 classes. The reason for the year 11

choice was sheer necessity: I had inherited a class of lovely, hard-working pupils who had not completed two key topics of the course, so we simply had an enormous amount to get through. As for the year 7 class, I chose to compare the impact with this class as they were so different. The year 11 class is a ‘top set’ whereas the year 7s are mixed ability. Also, the year 11 class is very small, only 17 pupils, compared to the class of 31 lower down the school. The final reason was the different foci for the two years; the aim with year 11 is clearly to prepare them for their upcoming exams, whereas with year 7 I have the joy of instilling a love of history in the young people I teach. It would be interesting to see whether the proposed structure would have differing levels of impact on these very different classes.

Impact on learning

In both classes, the pace at which we worked through the scheme of work was slightly faster, finishing on average three lessons earlier than the original scheme of work had allowed. Although this did not really affect my year 7 class, the comfort of knowing that we could now spend more time revising content was a relief to both me and my year 11s.

I cannot say how this could affect the pace at which we could complete the GCSE course based on this small-scale research; that is something I’m planning to explore in the future.

The key change, however, was the level of depth pupils were prepared to dive into, shown through their questioning and their written answers. I have been a history teacher for five years and have an arsenal of resources passed on by veteran teachers covering the classic topics such as the Magna Carta and the English Civil War – but my resources were now not challenging enough, and I have had to remedy that! I also felt that we had covered



the topics at GCSE in the same depth as with the previous specification, which had less content.

The key change was the level of depth pupils (both Y7 and Y11) were prepared to dive into, shown through their questioning and written answers; I have had to find more challenging resources!

When asked about how they viewed their experiences, year 7 felt more comfortable with the changes than the year 11s. One pupil from Y11 commented that they saw what I was trying to do, but they were ‘used to the old structure and [didn’t] like change’ whereas a year 7 pupil commented that they ‘enjoyed working on [their] own at the start of the lesson as it gave [them] the space to remember last lesson.’

I found this particularly interesting, as it links to the importance of reviving learned information before teaching new aspects of the topic, as outlined by the EEF’s guidance on metacognition.

Impact on my teaching

I love moving around the classroom and found that now this was more purposeful than just ensuring that my presence was felt. As pupils were straight in and working, I had more time to spend with pupils who have been away and missed key parts of the topic. Although my school’s attendance figures are consistently at or above the national expectations, I have issues of persistent absence with a couple of pupils in both classes. This time at the beginning of the lesson allowed me to focus on pupils who had missed key concepts and make sure that they ‘get it’.



On a more practical level, starting the lesson half-way through a task meant that I had the sheets ready to go for these pupils. With the more traditional lesson structure, I had the bad habit of forgetting resources we had used previously, meaning that the pupils didn’t get them until I had a chance to email them later in the day – this also meant I couldn’t support them with the trickier aspects of the work while they looked through things at home. Now, I had everything ready to go.

My planning was more focused. Rather than thinking ‘how can I create a hook that allows my pupils to engage with the topic?’ it was now ‘how can I link this to the real world, and what can I do to explain the fundamental historical concepts?’ This makes my lessons feel more focused on the bigger principles in history and I have broached ideas with my year 7s that I would previously have saved until A-level. The process has opened my eyes to the younger pupils’ potential, and has removed the barriers that I had subconsciously been creating.

Overall, I feel this simple restructuring of lessons has enabled me to utilise metacognitive strategies and rethink how I want time to be used in the classroom. It has also broken the barriers I was unconsciously creating as a teacher, and enabled my pupils to take charge of their learning.

References

These actions were based on the original *Education Endowment Foundation* information available on their website: bit.ly/2yKNTRS

The EEF have since published a really useful guidance booklet and poster to explain how metacognition can be applied to the classroom: bit.ly/2HDv4Ak

Why we haven't all got a growth mindset... yet

Chris Hildrew,
Churchill Academy & Sixth Form

And how we can help develop it in our students, and ourselves. By Chris Hildrew, headteacher, Churchill Academy & Sixth Form .

In SSAT Journal 1 (Winter 2014/15), I wrote an article entitled *Becoming a growth mindset school* about my work as a deputy headteacher at Chew Valley School as we tried to scale up Professor Carol Dweck's work on mindset into a whole-school culture. Now, three and a half years later, I'm headteacher at Churchill Academy & Sixth Form, still just as committed to using mindset as a vehicle for school improvement, and the journal article has expanded into a book with the same title.

A growth mindset culture seeks to tackle motivation by instilling a school-wide ethos that we can all improve through the careful, consistent and deliberate application of appropriate strategies. We have sought to provide all our learners with strategies to overcome difficulty by celebrating behaviours such



as persistence, struggle and taking on difficult challenges.

Getting growth mindset back to front

While the ideas behind growth mindset have become more widespread and popular, they have also become more widely critiqued. In our work, we have come to the conclusion that many people understand mindset effects back to front. The way that many of Dweck's initial experiments have been presented led us initially to believe that developing a growth mindset in our students would lead them to increased motivation and greater academic

success. This meant that our first attempts at developing a growth mindset culture saw us working on mindsets in isolation, through assemblies, displays, and specialised lessons designed to introduce the concepts and approaches. While these approaches did no harm, and perhaps helped students to understand what a growth mindset was and what we expected, they were not habit-forming and did not, in many cases, change student attitudes.

What we now understand is that, in fact, it is the other way around: greater academic success and progress, when it



is the result of determined and consistent effort, develops a growth mindset in our students. When students apply effort and carefully chosen learning strategies in school, and then see the progress they make as a result, they begin to equate effort and strategy with academic success and achievement, and they are then more likely to apply that approach in future. To be effective, those effort-leading-to-achievement experiences need to be happening multiple times every day the child is in school, to reinforce that connection and develop the learning behaviour. At Churchill, we try to engineer those experiences through our curriculum and our extracurricular offer.

Greater academic success and progress, when it is the result of determined and consistent effort, develops a growth mindset in our students (it's not the other way round)

If the level of challenge is too low, students will achieve easily without too much effort and without encountering difficulty or struggle. Then, they will start to equate 'achievement' with 'easy,' which is the beginning of a fixed mindset. Alternatively, if the level of challenge is too high and students are not appropriately supported to reach that high expectation, they will start to see effort as fruitless and be inclined to give up – again, the seeds of a fixed mindset.



The key is to find that Goldilocks pitch where the level of challenge is such that students have to struggle, try different strategies, and really apply themselves – but then they achieve. This needs skilful teachers who know their students really well and can plan their curriculum and pitch their lessons so they are 'just right'.

Working on student motivation

In order to focus students on their approach to learning and the strategies they are using, rather than just the outcomes, we rethought our whole school culture. This started with us considering the academy's core values, to align them to our approach to character education and developing a growth mindset. This process included teaching and support staff, and a wide-ranging group of students, researching the attributes and characteristics that would lead to effective learning.

In the end, we settled on the research of Angela Duckworth and colleagues at CharacterLab, which found that character strengths fell into three broad categories: strengths of the

heart, strengths of the mind, and strengths of the will. From this framework, we settled on our three academy values: kindness (heart), curiosity (mind), and determination (will).

Within this framework, we then laid out the approaches and attitudes we value in learning, based in the research of Dweck and Duckworth, and also Walter Mischel, whose Marshmallow Test experiments showed the power of self-regulation. The framework we have established is that at Churchill, we believe in the value of:

- determined and consistent effort
- a hunger to learn new things
- challenging ourselves to go beyond our comfort zone
- viewing setbacks and mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow
- seeking and responding to feedback
- encouraging others to succeed.

This set of value statements informs our attitude to learning reports for families. And they are used as the basis for conversations between teachers,



tutors and students in order to coach learners to ever more effective study habits and approaches to their lessons.

Developing metacognition and leadership of learning

The missing piece of the jigsaw was getting the students themselves to understand that self-regulation and adopting specific approaches and strategies were the keys to unlocking learning and progress. To do this, our director of English, Dave Grimmett, ran a project with students who had been identified by staff as having made exceptional progress over the course of the academic year. Dave gathered them together to get them to reflect self-consciously on what they had done to make this progress, culminating in an 'exhibition of progress' where the approaches and their outcomes were celebrated by the students and with their families. In completing this research, we hoped to make explicit what was otherwise implicit, so that the students could reuse the same strategies in future.

In the next year, we hope to use these students' experiences as the basis for a learning ambassadors programme, where the approaches can be shared across the student body by their peers as methods for achieving greater success.

The students themselves identified the following as having the highest impact:

- effort in classwork
- personal determination to get better
- positive relationship with teacher
- effort in homework
- personal understanding of the work and how to improve
- enjoying the subject.

Working closely with the students, Dave Grimmett was then able to identify three key approaches:

- 1. Break out of your comfort zone:** pushing yourself to do something difficult, or different, is the best

way of making progress. Often this was prompted by something – feedback from a teacher, a good or bad result in an assessment, or a personal realisation and decision to change.

- 2. Be self-disciplined:** avoiding distractions, staying focused, concentrating so that the job gets done well – these are keys that unlock progress.
- 3. Reflect and think about learning:** the power of metacognition – knowing how to improve, responding positively to feedback, and developing a bank of strategies and approaches which work – allowed these students to apply themselves more purposefully to learning.

These findings provide a road map and a template for any student who wants to thrive and make exceptional progress. Our message now is simple: if these students did it – you can too.

Chris Hildrew's book, *Becoming a growth mindset school* (Routledge) is out now.

How we embedded formative assessment

*Annabelle Taylor,
Ricards Lodge High School*

One outcome of the EFA programme at Ricards Lodge High School: ten staff members aspired to become leaders of learning, as assistant head Annabelle Taylor reports.

As the lead for CPD at Ricards Lodge, I wanted to generate a wider discussion between colleagues around teaching and learning. Lesson observations by many were seen as something done to them to meet the requirements of our teaching and learning and appraisal policies. I felt lesson observations had become more about a showcase lesson than developing and sharing good practice to further

improve the learning experience. We were also on a journey to secure outstanding and to enable us to do this we needed to improve progress for all our students. So I was delighted when Ricards Lodge secured a place on the two-year EFA programme authored by Dylan Wiliam and supported by SSAT under the leadership of Corinne Settle.

To ensure that teaching staff could see the value of the EFA programme, I asked staff to volunteer to be part of the EFA programme and lead a pilot teaching and learning community (TLC). The volunteer group worked through the programme in advance and became not only advocates for the



programme but leaders of teaching and learning in the school. After trialling the strategies in their classrooms, they could see the benefits of working with a colleague outside their subject area. The TLC leads came from different curriculum areas, so conversations developed in curriculum area meetings, learning walks, line management and staffroom bases.

Over the period of training we collected a variety of different evidence not only for quality assurance purposes but to ensure staff and students were engaged in the programme. Findings from the student questionnaire showed that 84% of all pupils agreed or strongly agreed that the EFA strategies had helped them to become more engaged and helped them with their learning. Findings from staff questionnaire suggested that the EFA strategies had a very positive impact on students. They observed the following:

- more independent students
- more engaged students
- more confident students
- increased collaboration among students
- improved outcomes
- students enjoying their learning more
- fewer teacher-led lessons.

Staff were keen to share their ideas and student work through our EFA Twitter feed, and a sense of competition developed between the different TLC groups.

Our achievement data supported our quality assurance findings. In 2017, we achieved our best ever results with a Progress 8 score of +0.71 which ranks us sixth nationally for progress. Our Attainment 8 score is 54.4, which ranks us second out of 55 similar schools nationally.

In October 2017, Ofsted rated the school outstanding, highlighting the quality of professional development in their report:

‘Leaders ensure that teachers receive the high quality training that they need to improve their teaching. As a result, teachers are highly skilled in meeting pupils’ different needs. Teachers challenge pupils to think deeply about their learning.’



And:

‘Teachers pose questions and organise activities that encourage pupils to think deeply about their learning. Teachers check on the accuracy of pupils’ understanding and quickly correct any misconceptions. The most able pupils also feel that teachers extend their knowledge, skills and understanding. One pupil’s comment, which echoed the views of others, was, ‘Teachers challenge us and prepare us for what is coming.’

Taking it further

Once the formal part of the EFA programme came to an end, staff spoke about the value of visiting other subject areas and discussing strategies that they had adopted and developed in their own practice. The creation of TLCs and the EFA programme presented us as a school with two very strong opportunities:

- Ten teaching staff now aspired to be leaders of learning, and were keen to continue and support the school’s CPD programme.
- Teaching staff recognised the value of peer-to-peer observation to support the attainment and progress of all students. Staff were more open to be observed working with more challenging groups.

A working party reviewed the teaching and learning and appraisal policies. After consultation with the working party and the governing body, I saw an opportunity to extend peer-to-peer observation and move away from the model where lessons were graded against Ofsted criteria. The success of the EFA TLC model and support of school leaders made this possible. The open door culture and peer-to-peer support had become embedded; conversations about student learning become more research based.



The processes of reporting to governors and assessing the quality of teaching were changing. After the first round of lesson observations in the autumn term, we still had a training need for observers for coaching and teaching and learning conversations. Leading on from the success of the TLC leads and after consultation with Corinne at SSAT, we advertised SSAT Lead Practitioner training posts, supported through the CPD budget. The LP worked with Corinne on a module for all teaching staff, to explore:

- What makes outstanding teaching and learning and how this is evidenced.
- How to make connections between teacher action and the impact on the student.
- The importance of continuously reflecting on practice and taking appropriate action to improve the quality of teaching and lead to better student outcomes.
- Developing a coaching culture.

New TLC groups

This was then delivered in new TLC groups. Setting the scene was considered to be the most important element, so we met as a teaching body before moving into the groups. The feedback from the session was very positive:

‘Really nice tasks, lots of discussion exploring outstanding teaching and learning. Very enjoyable and reinforces what I am doing. Inspires me to do more.’

‘It was nice to be given time to reflect on our own teaching practice and also to be given tangible questions when coaching a lesson.’

‘Opportunities to reflect and consider good practice for observations and feedback.’

‘Really thought-provoking questions which allowed me to be reflective on my own approach to teaching and as a mentor (to NQT student) – great session!’

The challenge for us as a teaching and learning community continues as we look to review the quality of peer-to-peer mentoring, lesson observations and of course the impact on student outcomes.

Teaching and learning: it's about knowing the young people

*Daniella McManamon,
Elthorne Park High School*

Daniella McManamon, SSAT Leadership Legacy Fellow and English teacher, Elthorne Park High School, describes how much she learned with her most challenging class.

In my first years of teaching I tended to see my learners in basically two categories: quiet, anonymous 'good behaviour', or a seething mass of 'bad behaviour'. As my teaching practice has developed, I have sought to see the individuals in the classes – who they are and what they know.

There are some classes where this endeavour to know is especially pertinent; such as the year 9 'nurture' class (or bottom set) I have been teaching this year. Our department teaches predominantly in mixed-ability groupings, with the exception of the lowest attaining pupils in the year, who are collected into one group. Of the 18 learners, about 80% have identified learning difficulties or SLCN (speech, language and communication needs) while almost all struggle



with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. They are, without doubt, the most challenging class of my teaching practice so far.

With them I have experienced genuine doubt in my capacity to teach, but they have also shaped my philosophy of what good teaching and learning can be. Getting to know the individuals in this group has led me to adjust the mantra from 'who are the learners?' to 'who are the young people?'

Because learning is sometimes only possible through knowing them as people: their strengths, interests, and fears.

Learning is sometimes only possible through knowing them as people: their strengths, interests, and fears

In the first weeks of teaching them, I would spend most of my





time preparing for our lessons and then feeling powerless as I watched those lessons 'fail' – we struggled to get through the most basic of activities. The group constantly exchanged offensive remarks across the classroom, shouting, walking out, and refusing to come in. Here again was the seething mass. As I spent time reflecting on the disruptive behaviours, and watching the exchanges rather than fire-fighting in response, I gradually moved from viewing the class as a whole to perceiving the individual experiences and focusing on their successes.

Success depends on who you are

Success is not something this class is used to. Acutely aware of their position as the lowest attaining, they flail at any mention of the word 'exam'. I wanted our classroom to be a place where success (or failure) wasn't a grand finale, but where successes were acknowledged and praised regularly. It is difficult to describe in general terms what 'success' looks like, because it is highly specific to the individual, to who they are and what they know. The

following vignette captures a turning point that has come to underpin my philosophy of teaching, where success develops out of something that was categorically not a success.

During one of our early lessons I asked Max whether he would mind reading some instructions aloud to the class.

'No.'

'If you could just read that one line Max?' Reading the refusal as rudeness, I pressed him to do as asked.

'Come on Max, it's just that little bit'. The other students waited for his response.

'NO!' He shouted and then, looking down all the time, got up and left the room.

I didn't understand what had happened. The situation had become unwieldy so quickly. It was so out of character. I knew Max was dyslexic, but he had read out in class before. Now, his anxiety had reached a peak and triggered the dismissive behaviour. In the aftermath of the lesson, I wondered what I could do to bring Max back to reading aloud.

In our next lesson, I printed off some short extracts from the novel we were working on, and everyone was given rehearsal time before reading to the rest of the class. Max rehearsed carefully, asking me how to say some of the more challenging words. When it was his turn to read, he did so fluently and was clearly proud of what he had achieved. For Max, it was a considerable success.

This seems like a small moment, but for me it was one where I learnt to recognise a need beneath the learner's 'bad' behaviour, and where I could begin to meet that need. I saw that what I was doing each day as a teacher was far more complex than sharing 'my passion for English'. Good teaching is responsive to the classroom's complexity. It requires continuous reflection, and a commitment to discovering who these young people are, in order to keep building on what they know, and keep seeing their individual successes.

I want to share two more vignettes, written to explore critical incidents which

increased understanding, both in the young people and in myself.

In lessons early in the year, Harry regularly used his 'time out' card when he felt his anxiety building: he would go and sit on the floor outside the classroom, with his head in his hands. After a few minutes, I would go out and crouch down beside him. 'Hey Harry, we're missing you in there, come back and join us.'

I could understand some of the triggers that sent Harry out of the classroom in those early lessons. It could be a difficult place. There was an unpleasant atmosphere between some of the individuals in the class, and they would take every opportunity to criticise each other.

'Are you dumb?'

'Special needs.'

Mistakes were quickly attacked so that taking a risk with new ideas was out of the question, and discussions were hard because you only answered something if you knew for certain you were right. Even if they claimed that they were just messing around, the reality was that the environment for learning didn't feel safe.

Focus on talk

I decided to focus on the talk in our classroom. In those early lessons I introduced some conditions of 'good' talk. We would often begin our thinking with brainstorms, which removed the element of risk in sharing ideas and encouraged turn-taking. These would then develop into group or class conversations as we developed



and elaborated on the initial ideas. In those dialogues, we worked on taking turns, on listening so we could respond to each other's ideas, on being respectful even if we didn't agree or we thought the other person was wrong.

The process of this work was sometimes arduous and our discussions could quickly break down into a cacophony of disputing and off-topic voices. But I could see that talk was becoming an important part of the learning in our classroom. Neil Mercer explains that dialogic talk enables children to become more adept at using language to express their thoughts and to engage with others in joint intellectual activity. It also advances children's individual capacity for productive, rational and reflective thinking.

Space for respectful and productive dialogue

There was no overnight transformation, but over time I could see some progress. With frequent reminders, we made space for more respectful and productive class dialogues. This talk was not perceived as 'work' in the same way as writing (which is frequently an isolating

and gruelling experience for pupils in this class). In the talk, they were learning 'ways to think' (Mercer, 2003) and there was a willingness and even eagerness to contribute. Listening was more challenging, but it was encouraged as I asked pupils to explain or build on the ideas of others. If they perceived 'mistakes' in understanding, it didn't result in personal attacks, but (sometimes heated) discussion. I saw that Harry began to contribute more often to the talk, and he stopped using his time-out card.

To illustrate something of the progress we have made as a class, I want to turn to another lesson and the interaction between Harry and Jack.

Deciding on the main themes of *A Christmas Carol* has triggered Jack's thinking about the purpose of our reading. 'Why do we have to study this? How is it going to help with what we do when we leave? It's so pointless!'

'Well, first of all, I think it's a really good story which we can enjoy' (I hold up my hand to stop Jack from interjecting). 'Plus the reading skills that we have been working on will be useful, like how we look for the deeper



meaning of the writing, and we also learn something about the past, about the world Dickens was living in.'

'Yes but what's the point of knowing all that?' Jack asks.

Harry has been listening carefully, 'I can't stop thinking about the deeper meaning of things now. Every time I see something, I think: I wonder why they're doing that, or I wonder where he's going, or like what do they actually mean when they're saying something to me?' Harry is performing the questions he's posing, by resting his chin on one hand, then the other. His animation fascinates Jack who now listens in.

'That's really interesting Harry, so the reading makes you think about what you see around you in real life?' I ask.

Jack responds, 'Like CSI, when they have to look at everything

closely to find out what happened.'

'Sort of. No, but in real life, when someone says something and I'm like: I wonder what they actually mean? Are they being serious, or hiding something?'

In this dialogue, Harry connects his learning in English with his lived experience. The conclusions he draws are unexpected, unplanned, perhaps arising from his confidence in the explanatory nature of our classroom dialogues.

Jack absorbs Harry's ideas into his own understanding: in the next lesson, he brings the discussion up again and we talk some more about the purpose of our reading. I see here Vygotsky's theory of social learning in action; Harry is confident in his thinking and can see that it is valued by Jack, who listens, grasps, and builds on his idea. Harry and Jack both 'gain from

their "intermental" experience (communication between minds through social interaction) [and this] shapes their "intramental" activity (the ways they think as individuals)' (Mercer, 2003).

It is difficult to notice the small changes in the way the class interact when you teach them almost every day. Through writing this, I have been encouraged to notice their progress since the beginning of the year. The group has not transformed miraculously, and there remains a cacophony of voices, but there is also space for confident, positive, productive dialogic talk.

There remains a cacophony of voices, but there is also space for confident, positive, productive dialogic talk

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Desirable difficulties: creating the conditions to stretch and challenge the most able learners

*Lucy Greenwood and Jodie Goulding
Skipton Girls' High School*

Maximising opportunities for challenge encourages long-term learning, and can also reduce teacher workload, report Lucy Greenwood, assistant headteacher (teaching, assessment & learning) and Jodie Goulding, associate assistant headteacher, Skipton Girls' High School.

The nature of our intake at Skipton Girls' High School (SGHS) results in a student body of primarily high prior ability or exceptionally able learners. This means that we must continually search for ways to significantly stretch and challenge our learners, as well as support them to achieve in all areas of their lives. This support has to be both academic and pastoral, particularly as some of our students have often found learning 'easy' in the past, so can feel uncomfortable or insecure when challenged.

As a result, last year our whole-school community focus was about resilience and 'being brave'. This year it has extended to encompass social and emotional wellbeing. Both themes have permeated school life (particularly through CPD – see below) and students are learning to use a range of cognitive and emotional strategies to meet learning challenge. Our CPD priorities have this year been organised into four 'pillars' of professional learning, underpinned by a continuing focus on resilience: positive and formative assessment, thinking and learning, motivation, and social emotional wellbeing.

Our main vehicle for professional learning is a lesson study-based, collaborative, teacher-led model.



Teachers have this year chosen to work in one 'pillar' area, supported in their research by 'koshis' (expert teachers). Thus, whole-school priorities are addressed, but in a context-driven way, with groups choosing a specific issue/question to address rooted in their own cohorts of students and their learning. Research is key to the process, as are co-planning, trial and observation. Strategies trialled with students are evidence-based and successes disseminated among staff in various ways, to subsequently discuss and implement in faculties.

Successful strategies feature desirable difficulties

A wide range of strategies to stimulate and support the most able have stemmed from this model of professional learning, as well as from the established culture of teacher development (we are a teaching school), pedagogy, research and innovation. Many of the more successful strategies in supporting the most able link to creating 'desirable difficulties' to promote deep thinking and learning.



Last year, two central leaders delivered an 'expert input' session to teachers on engineering such difficulties in the classroom. Several lesson study groups then went on to explore and trial different desirable difficulties in their classrooms. This training applied Bjork's original ideas about long-term learning and retention: 'Introducing certain difficulties into the learning process can greatly improve long-term retention of the learned material' (Robert Bjork, 1994). Also highlighted was the work of David Didau in this area ('struggle is a sign not of failure but of progress' – Didau, 2015) and James Nottingham, who, in his book *The Learning Challenge*, describes the idea of a 'learning pit':

'At the heart of the learning challenge is the pit. A person could be said to be in the pit when they are in a state of cognitive conflict....Deliberately and strategically creating a state of cognitive conflict in the minds of learners is at the heart of the learning challenge....eg: "I believe that stealing is wrong, but I also believe that Robin Hood did the right thing".' (Nottingham, 2017, p.5)

In one English lesson, the conditions of the learning pit were deliberately created by challenging year 7 students to articulate the similarities and differences between Shakespeare's comedies, histories and tragedies, based solely on three extracts of text (one from each genre). In groups, the students had to consider key questions, with no help from the teacher. Inevitably, students had many ideas, but some of these were conflicting and contradictory (eg: when considering which genre is most critical of humankind). Although students were initially a little uncomfortable, they began to make connections between their ideas and this subsequently resulted in a rich learning experience. (Nottingham's 'learning pit' directly links to the principles of SOLO taxonomy, which has also been an area of research and training in school.)

Y7 students were challenged to articulate the similarities and differences between Shakespeare's comedies, histories and tragedies, based solely on three extracts of text

Much work has recently been done on spaced practice, engineering desirable difficulties through structuring programmes of learning to allow students the optimum amount of time on the 'forgetting curve' between teaching and revisiting ideas. This is used to promote retention and effective long-term learning and memorisation. In mathematics, for example, students are tested on topics/ideas taught three weeks before using hegartymaths.com. This system has had a hugely positive impact on learning and retention in maths, and the maths team's expressed expectation of completion to a high standard has fostered a culture of fast responses to any areas of concern highlighted.

Whole-class feedback

Another strategy developed through one of our professional learning projects saw two teachers (music and geography) explore the idea of replacing traditional written feedback for each individual student with quality whole-class feedback (as adopted by the Michaela school). The aims were to increase the impact of feedback on learning, maximise opportunities for challenge (thus encouraging long-term learning) and reduce teacher workload. Whole-class feedback was targeted to address the errors, areas for development and misconceptions seen in student work across the class. Students were then tasked with re-reading their work to identify any of these, using a 'find and fix' approach, and finally redraft their work. This method of feeding back challenged students to look at their work from the teacher's perspective and reflect on it very closely, ultimately engaging them in the feedback more actively. Students initially found this difficult but were very positive about having to think about the quality of their work much more deeply, and were more confident when they had practised the technique a couple of times.

Other staff are now trialling the technique, and initial attempts have not only indicated a positive impact on learning, but a considerable reduction in teacher workload.

In a similar vein, a cross-faculty triad consisting of colleagues from MFL, maths and art elected to explore the impact of traditional written feedback. The research underpinning this group's enquiry stemmed from an article produced by Gianfranco Conti, who proposed that, despite copious amounts

of consistent and detailed feedback from teachers, common mistakes continue to recur in students' work, due to lack of understanding, interest in the mark only, or lack of time given to engage with the feedback in a meaningful/sustained way.

In response to this, the triad elected to trial the learner initiated feedback technique (LIFT) strategy as a way of promoting metacognition among more able learners. LIFT requires students to 'self-strategise', in the jargon, and initiate teacher feedback when required. When completing subject specific tasks, students were encouraged to reflect on their responses and annotate their work around what they found most challenging or where there was uncertainty and they needed additional support from the teacher. Students posed questions within this annotation where possible, to initiate feedback from the teacher to promote cognitive processing skills. This clearly discourages passivity in relation to areas for development and promotes resilience.

The students appreciated the strategy, feeling that it challenged them, engaging them in how they could improve aspects of their work. This is also a powerful tool for teachers, as misconceptions are highlighted early, which can feed into subsequent lessons. In some cases, teachers would answer questions with questions to promote higher order thinking and again, this could be tailored to stretch the more able students at an appropriate level. One student commented: 'It helps me think harder and will benefit my learning more than just being told the answer.'

Further work included using personalised editing checklists (as recommended by Conti). Students were prompted to make a list of several mistakes that they continue to make in their work and hope to eliminate. This could be a misconception identified in maths, or inclusion of key vocabulary and case study examples in geography. Again, this strategy promotes self-regulated learning among the more able students and promotes brave, resilient, independent learners who have a greater awareness of barriers to their own learning.

In the geography department, teachers aim in every lesson to create challenging conditions that remove students from their comfort zone. In doing so, it was key for them to step back and consider what they

wanted students to learn and what skills were vital for them to succeed within the subject area. Each lesson at KS3 offers a range of learning pathways for students to access, with 'Challenge Plus' activities promoting deeper level thinking. The pathways are constructed around Bloom's and SOLO taxonomies and encourage learners to draw synoptic links and deep connections between aspects of their learning, focusing on the relational and extended abstract elements of the taxonomies.

Student-led learning and co-construction (teacher and student designing learning experiences together) are both used extensively across the curriculum. One tool that facilitates this is the current VLE, whereby all students have access to bespoke learning resources to accelerate their learning independently. This blended learning approach enables more content that would traditionally be taught by the teacher to be completed both in and out of the classroom and therefore allows greater flexibility to engage with advanced concepts within class time. Students have, in some cases, created resources to go on the VLE in particular subject areas.

The power of positive expectation is most definitely a driving force for the high standards at SGHS; but it must be acknowledged that the ever-shifting landscape of educational research and development is continually pushing us to seek out innovative ways to stretch and challenge all students.

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Progress based on collaborative learning, innovative engagement – and challenge

*Senior Team,
Pendle Vale College*

Pendle Vale College uses a wide variety of approaches in its aim to ensure that all learners become well-rounded, resilient young adults, well-qualified and equipped for the modern world. The Senior Team at Pendle Vale explain.

All great architecture is built on strong foundations. This was our starting point for developments at Pendle Vale College and after much hard work we are now consistently achieving some of the highest progress measures

in the North West, in an area of deprivation and traditionally low aspiration and achievement. Sustained improvement in student outcomes is of course due to a combination of factors, including: consistently good teaching and learning, a well-planned curriculum and excellent 'wrap around care' of students. These factors are all underpinned by a clear, consistent approach to student assessment, gathering and analysis of data and the rigorous monitoring of student and curriculum area performance.

We are delighted to have recently achieved four of the SSAT 'transforming' marks on the SSAT Framework for Exceptional Education (FfEE).

Setting the vision for learning was the first stage of our improvement journey. This was achieved by having clear learning expectations and a passion for learning from all stakeholders in our college. Our learning policy 'outstanding everyday' has provided a language for learning that underpins day-in day-out practice.

How teachers share techniques and strategies

Teachers use a variety of strategies to engage, extend and challenge all students. These include collaborative learning techniques, innovative engagement strategies and ways to challenge students which staff then regularly share with one another through CPD opportunities, learning bulletins and showcasing events. A weekly learning focus is reinforced through staff briefing, with ideas and strategies shared. Termly learning challenges and competitions keep the momentum going. Teachers are imaginative in developing and reshaping strategies to maximum effect, and ideas are shared both within and across subject areas.

One way in which these ideas are shared is through half-termly focused, 30-minute learning surgeries – like mini TeachMeets – where staff showcase three or four ideas in an informal way. This has enabled excellent practice to be spread across school and has given many members of staff the opportunity to share as it is open to everyone. As a result, we believe teaching and learning has gone from strength to strength with enthusiastic teachers becoming passionate about delivering well-structured and very effective lessons.

Lessons mostly show very positive relationships with students; they are asked about their experiences of learning, which helps to reshape future planning, as part of our lesson study process.



All leaders in school know their role as leaders of learning and contribute to the continued everyday development of learning. This is reinforced through well-established quality assurance procedures, which we call the Pendle Vale health check.

Start by identifying barriers to progress

Professional learning is supported in a wide variety of ways, which staff value. First and foremost, it is prioritised by identifying barriers to students' progress and planning CPD that appropriately addresses them. CPD needs are also identified through the developmental areas in the appraisal process. A sustained professional development programme is then planned for the year.

For professional development to have lasting impact, it has to be sustained over time and our CPD structure supports this. By disaggregating our Inset days we have a two-hour, weekly opportunity for professional development. This could be through whole school input, departmental sessions

or opportunities for cross-curricular groups.

We positively encourage collaboration, mindful of the new CPD standard and the opportunities for sustained development. To facilitate this, in the last couple of years we have adopted a lesson study model. Linked closely to department priorities established through the Pendle Vale health check, lesson study allows colleagues to work on an area of focus and a cohort of students, planning lessons together and supporting this through research enquiries. A considerable amount of time is allocated to this each half term in order to ensure that staff have regular opportunities to get together and plan their lesson study and evaluate its impact.

Complementing these CPD opportunities, 60 colleagues over the last four years have completed an outstanding teacher programme which has had impact in the classroom and built the whole-school language for discussing teaching and learning.



Following the abandonment of levels at key stage 3 we built a simplified approach to assessment. This tracks final outcomes expected at the end of key stage 4, with standardisation and moderation taking place within curriculum areas for quality assurance and developmental purposes.

Underpinning student achievement is a culture of high expectations. Students have ambitious target grades set for them which are fixed on KS4 expectations from year 7 and are set based on key stage 2 performance. This in turn is linked directly to Progress 8 estimated outcomes and allows us to monitor student performance accurately from year 7 onwards, intervening where necessary and rewarding when deserved.

Identify and support wallpaper students

Following each of the four annual data collection rounds, data is rigorously analysed, with pastoral and curriculum teams heavily involved in reflecting on student performance. This informs planning and the next steps in teaching and intervention. Our 'war boards' (Work/Action/Result boards) and regular 'RAP' (Raising Achievement and Progress) meetings give a sharp focus to student progress discussions and help to prioritise students for interventions. A goal from the outset has been to seek out and support 'wallpaper students' – those who, left to themselves, drift through school without causing fuss and often leave without achieving their potential.

Our excellent student performance is founded on a strong curriculum. We have consulted widely with colleagues, particularly in relation to the new GCSE, and given additional time to ensure quality learning and teaching in all subjects. This, coupled with strong accountability and solid tracking, has led to some very pleasing progress figures. However, we take the responsibility for ensuring breadth and balance very seriously; all students have access to a full arts programme at KS3, which we believe is vital in developing well-balanced individuals. We aspire to having students who can communicate clearly and have a wide awareness of cultural issues, whether or not they choose to follow this route at GCSE.

Outdoor activities

We take a cross-school approach to the development of character and resilience. This is done through a range of outdoor activities in years 7-9, a DoE programme in year 10 and a personal development programme called ASPIRE. Through this, we give breathing space to the curriculum by allowing the development of interpersonal skills, leadership, community volunteering and social action as well as some robust, tracked intervention in core subjects. Students can supplement their studies with programmes ranging from reading to rock climbing leadership, where they work with younger students, as well as a range of skills-based and community programmes. This helps them to achieve strong progress academically as well as personally.

So where next? We are constantly looking to improve, and have plans in the pipeline for extending student opportunities. We are constantly tweaking everyday practices in line with local and national priorities, and extending opportunities to work with other partners both within and beyond our local area. Beyond all else, we remain focused on 'keeping the main thing, the main thing' – maintaining student outcomes, particularly in light of the demands of new GCSEs and striving for excellence for all. We want to ensure that all learners leave Pendle Vale as well-rounded, resilient young adults, well-qualified and equipped for the modern world.

A development programme aids interpersonal skills, leadership, community volunteering and social action as well as some robust, tracked intervention in core subjects

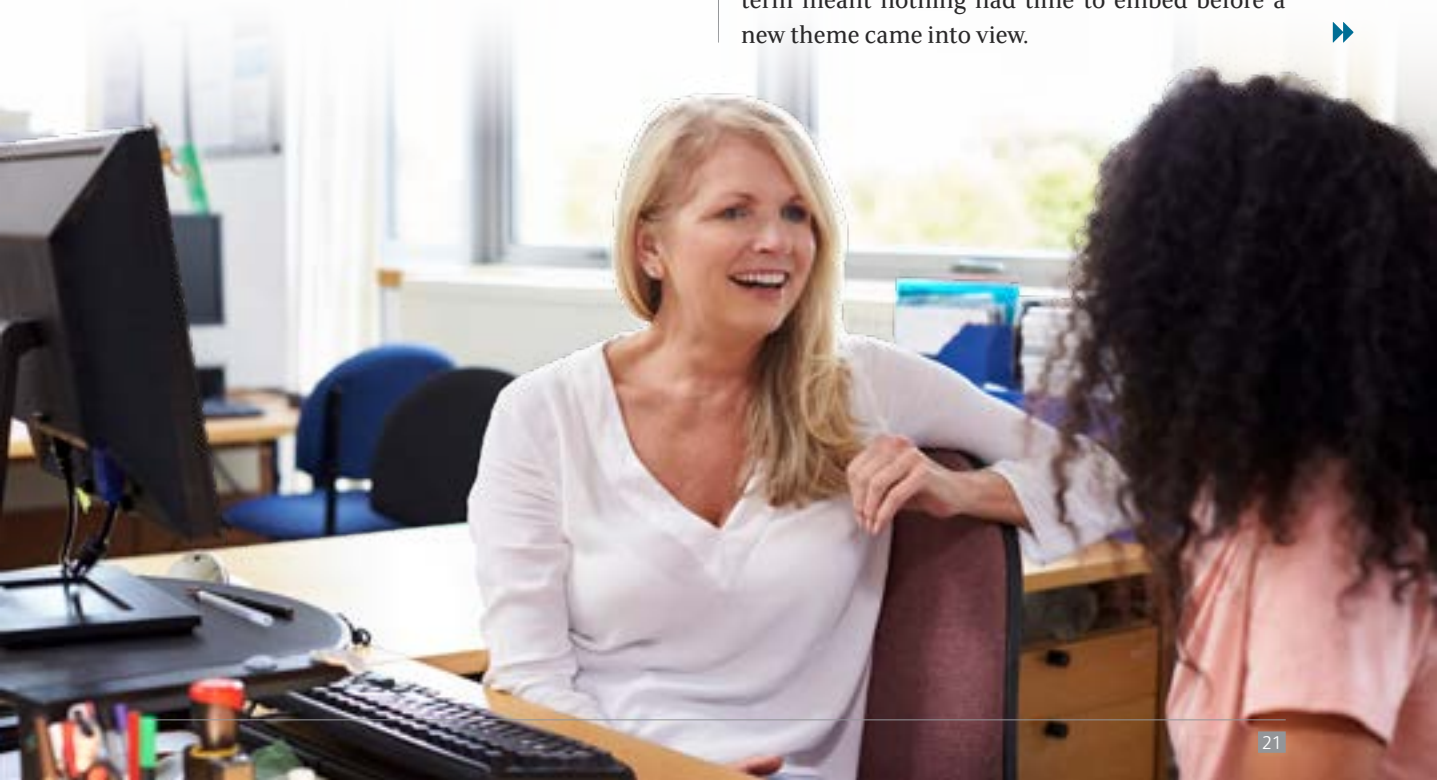
Engaging teacher stakeholders in their own professional learning

*Neil Feist,
Sackville School*

No grading, no judgements, just professional conversations about the successes and challenges of making specific improvements to their teaching. By Neil Feist, deputy headteacher, Sackville School.

I am extremely lucky. Like many of you, our school has a staff who are dedicated, eager to improve and generous with their time for the students. They also want to know any training they receive is relevant to them individually – that it will improve their teaching with practical strategies that have some basis in reality, rather than idealised theories that are impractical to enact on a day-to-day basis.

Our CPD model previously involved a large hall meeting with a guest speaker, who might be some internal champion of a pedagogical initiative or an outside speaker. Each term we had a different theme to explore: questioning, assessment, differentiation for SEND students, and so on. All sessions were met with engagement and polite applause. Yet after two years of this model, a staff evaluation questionnaire pointed out that while some sessions were thought-provoking and practically helpful, some were too generic to meet the needs of a diverse audience of professionals (ranging from NQTs to a teacher with over 30 years' experience). One size did not fit all. Staff also commented that swapping themes each term meant nothing had time to embed before a new theme came into view.





As leaders we were prompted to ask, if we focus on bespoke learning for our students, why are we not doing the same for our teachers?

If we focus on bespoke learning for our students, why are we not doing the same for our teachers?

We turned to the Department for Education's 2016 *Standards for teachers' professional development* to revisit the purpose and principles of effective CPD. It is a document that makes it crystal clear what is needed.

Choice of 10 research groups

Based on this, we have adapted how we run our CPD model this year. Last summer, all staff selected one of 10 research groups to join for a two-year project. This would give them ownership of their own professional development, not training purely decided on by the senior leadership team. The focus and work in the group became their teaching and learning appraisal target.

Staff members ranked the 10 different groups (as in the students' GCSE or A-level options model) in order of preference. I was miraculously able to give everyone a top three choice. By actively choosing a development focus, our teacher stakeholders feel they have taken control of their own development, and that CPD is no longer something that is done to them.

Groups are led by a member of staff who has expertise or interest in that area of pedagogy and learning. They meet every five weeks. Based on

further evidence of effective CPD delivery, we decided that four weeks wasn't enough time to try and embed new strategies and six or seven weeks was too long between meetings, and would lead to a loss of momentum and focus.

In the autumn term all staff were given a short article to read from the latest educational research on their focus. These prompted excellent discussions in the first meetings on what the implications were for effective practice. This addresses a key principle in the teachers' professional development standards: CPD underpinned by robust evidence. Real-world strategies based on real-world scenarios for staff to try themselves.

Staff then all write individual action plans to work on in their area of development, which are shared with the colleagues in their group. Action plans have to be written and shared by the end of each meeting, and progress on them is discussed at every meeting to promote accountability. Action plans are then amended, keeping them relevant and active. Google docs is used to record their work, so the action plans can be easily shared between colleagues. This helps me monitor their ideas and progress.

From the spring term, group members carried out peer observations and fed back on the impact of their work in lessons. In the summer term staff are now writing case studies of their development. We are using an Inset day at the end of this year for staff to present their group's work to colleagues from other groups so everyone hears about the research going on across the school.

The groups' focus lasts for this full school year and the next (so no more termly 'chopping and changing'). The areas, generated by the school's current priorities, are:

- improving differentiation for gifted and more able students
- improving differentiation for SEND students
- social, moral, spiritual and cultural education
- assessment
- developing higher order Bloom's thinking
- improving student motivation
- improving boys' engagement and achievement
- educating the whole child versus academic pressures – the role of extracurricular provision
- promoting independent learning, fostering students' resilience and stamina
- the use of new technology in the classroom.

This model has resulted in several benefits for our staff as stakeholders in their own development. It encourages our teachers not just to focus on areas that they are weakest at but gives them the opportunity to become experts in things they are interested in and often already good at, so they can become outstanding.

Cross-subject collaboration has been expanded through the mixed composition of these teaching and learning research meetings. Staff have chosen their own areas to improve, so whether you are an NQT or 30 years into the job, your development belongs to you. This is another fundamental part of the teachers' CPD standards on which we based our model. In the groups, experienced staff informally coach and support newer teachers. NQTs share new ideas with established practitioners.

More peer lesson observations take place. Staff see colleagues working on the same focus to help each other improve. No grading, no judgements, just professional conversations about the successes and challenges of making these improvements to their teaching.

This model means we have created 10 new whole-school leadership opportunities for staff through the group leader role. A PE teacher chairs the SEND group, an English teacher chairs the group working on boys' achievement, a science teacher is working on higher order Bloom's thinking. These are not staff in positions of responsibility already, but teachers who aspire to lead. It is a useful first 'step up the ladder' for them. The 10 chairs meet together as the steering group to plan each research group meeting and evaluate how the previous meetings have gone. Sharing tips and reflecting on their meetings every five weeks has also been essential for me to monitor how the groups are progressing.

A range of 10 pedagogical improvements are now happening simultaneously across the school. Not one per term that we all used to have to adhere to. There is time to reflect and embed changes. We are looking for small, step-changes over time that will change teachers' habits in their classrooms and make their improvement sustainable over time. Teachers have time to make mistakes and reflect on the educational research evidence available. Some are working on one of their classes, some with one child. All are focused on how their work will improve student outcomes.

Current challenges

We still have some way to go. Next year needs to see us develop a system that truly measures the impact on student outcomes and allows subject teams to benefit more from their staff's research and development. We need to keep this model fresh and relevant, so year two doesn't become a watered down, less effective rerun of an exciting first year. But these are challenges that we are ready to tackle after a solid introduction and positive feedback from our teachers this year.

We feel we are developing a research-led model at Sackville that is itself informed by research into effective CPD. We believe that continuing professional development misses a key factor, so we have amended what we call training here. We are now talking about engaging our teacher stakeholders in their own professional learning.

Changing lives through learning

Abby Deeks,
West Lakes Academy

Abby Deeks, vice principal, explains how the professional learning programme at West Lakes Academy has been designed to have an impact on student learning.

Remember the last time you went on a course, loved it, and then did... almost nothing with what you'd learnt? Or the last time you listened to an expert, only to be left feeling that you do most of that already? Ever read someone's blog on the next big thing only to think that it doesn't really apply to you in your context?

Yep, me too. In fact, it turns out that this is a pretty common experience of CPD for educational staff. So, two years ago, we decided to think differently about professional learning at West Lakes Academy.

Our academy's motto is 'Changing lives through learning'. It's our obsession – we're in it for the kids, basically. But that doesn't mean that we can't be in it for the adults too. In fact, wouldn't it be better if everyone saw themselves as a learner and was treated and supported as such? At West Lakes, learning is for everyone. It is not just the realm of the children. Recognising all our staff as learners was the first crucial step we took in reforming professional learning. And I do mean all our staff – principal included, support staff included... everyone included! It's not because we weren't good enough but as Dylan Wiliam says 'because [we] can be even better.'

Having taken the (now somewhat obvious) step of recognising all staff as learners, our eyes were opened to the wealth of research available on what works in professional learning. An early influence on our plans was the Teacher Development Trust's *Developing Great Teaching* report. We also learnt a lot from hearing Philippa Cordingley speak on 'What we know about effective continuing professional development and learning (CPDL)'.

As we started on our journey, we had a few guiding principles:

- Any training must have a focus on how it would improve learning for our students.
- All staff would take part, as they all had a role to play in changing lives through learning.
- The teaching and learning techniques we experimented with would be research-informed.
- The process of professional learning would be research-informed.
- Colleagues would have some choice in what they engaged in – to make it as relevant as possible to their own learning needs and those of their students.
- The programme would be iterative, building effective practice over time.

Our professional learning programme follows a simple but effective structure:



Inspire

Based on academy-wide student priority groups, all staff identify a small group of students whom they teach/support and who could make greater progress in their learning. They identify what they feel to be the barriers inhibiting the learning of these students.

The academy leadership group select a small range of research-informed teaching strategies which align with the academy's priorities. For example, this academic year, new GCSE and A-level specifications were a priority for many. Staff had raised concerns that students were not able to remember much of what they had been taught months earlier – and our student voice interviews substantiated these concerns. Based on this information, we opted for

teaching strategies that centred around memory and knowledge retention.

Staff then hear from external experts on the selected key strategies and choose one strategy that they feel stands the best chance of helping their target groups of students overcome the barriers to their learning.

Staff meet in professional learning communities to discuss and plan how they will experiment with the strategy that they have chosen to try to make a difference to the learning of their focus group of students. To aid these discussions, they have access to bite-sized versions of the research that informs their chosen strategy. Crucially, staff also agree what success would look like for their target students at the end of this project and how they will measure the impact of their actions.

Engage

Staff embark on their projects. They meet half-termly within their professional learning communities (PLCs) to discuss and refine their plans. All staff have a co-coach and use part of these PLC sessions to hold coaching conversations. At the end of each of these conversations, staff complete a blog post, helping them to evaluate the impact of their project as part of the process. They also arrange peer observations with their co-coach and receive active feedback on their projects. Some use video technology to help with this. ➤



Reflect

Staff evaluate the impact of their project on students' learning. Each PLC decides which projects to share with the rest of the staff body at an internal TeachMeet event. Following this, they receive feedback from staff across the academy on their projects. Using the TeachMeet as their inspiration, staff then re-engage with their projects, reshaping them in the light of what they've learnt from our internal experts, modifying and refining their approaches to have the maximum impact on student learning.

At the end of this process, staff write up their projects and these reports are shared across the entire academy community in a published research journal.

The projects which have had most impact on student learning are also shared at our annual middle leaders' summer conference. Subject teams are given time to work these effective strategies into their schemes of learning for the following year.



What next?

Our research project-based professional learning programme has been running for two years now with, as you'd expect, a tweak or two along the way. Last term, we surveyed our staff to get a sense of

how effective they felt the programme had been in changing lives through learning. Ninety-six percent of staff said that their projects had had a positive impact on the learning of their target students, while 89% felt that their projects had also improved the learning of other students that they taught.

The vast majority of staff value the academy's approach to professional development. They say they find it 'relevant' and 'challenging'. Support staff are happy that it 'allows [them] to be involved'. Working across departments is seen as a strength of the programme, as is engaging with research-informed evidence. Staff particularly enjoy the TeachMeet sessions, commenting that they 'could clearly see how the focus area was embedded into a lesson' and that the sessions 'challenged me to think about how I could use that strategy.'

However, not all staff have welcomed the changes in our approach to professional learning with open arms. Indeed, an early mistake we made was in not acknowledging from the start how unsettling this new process might feel. Some staff were used to being told 'the answer' and in the brave new world of research projects, there were no 'answers' given out any more. While some found this empowering, others missed the sense of certainty (albeit false) that their previous experience of CPD had given. The same was true at leadership level; we had to recalibrate our understanding of what makes great teaching and how we would measure whether staff practice was improving year on year.

We have also learnt that staff struggle to access research summaries independently, even if these are provided for them. In the next iteration of our professional learning programme, we intend to employ professional learning leads who will help bridge the gap between theory and practice for our classroom staff, identifying the barriers to staff learning and seeking ways to overcome these, just as we do for our students.

It is our ambition that these new professional learning leads will grow to become academy leaders of the future, changing lives through learning for a whole new generation of staff and students.

Under staffed: reflections on how best to integrate non-specialists into a department

*Russell Coombes,
Haydon School*

It was a steep learning curve for Russell Coombes, Leadership Legacy Fellow and history department leader, Haydon School.

As a first year head of department I had hoped for a fully staffed team of history specialists – but the department was 24 lessons per fortnight short of specialist teachers, and we were not able to recruit a new teacher. The 24 ‘spare’ history lessons would have to be distributed to teachers across the humanities faculty. Wanting to use this challenge as an opportunity to learn and

reflect, I decided to use this setting as my SSAT think-piece: how best could I integrate the non-specialists into my history department and what would I learn from the year?

Pre-September 2017

As an inexperienced department leader, I sought advice from a colleague in the often under-staffed science department. His advice was two-fold: make sure they feel confident in asking you questions, and praise them, because they will lack confidence. To help with this, I felt it was important that I met with them

before the summer holidays to discuss the schemes of work and assessment points. Along with my six specialist teachers (three of whom split their timetable with other subjects such as classics, and politics), my department was to also include four non-specialists (three geographers, and one from REP – religion, ethics and philosophy). I arranged to meet all 10 teachers in the summer term.

It turned out the non-specialists’ concerns were very different from those I had envisaged. I had expected concerns



about content knowledge, and difficulties in teaching challenging historical concepts. However, their concerns were much more practical: where do I get exercise books from? Do they stick in their tracking sheet? How often do you mark books? What comes after the Roman SoW in Yr 7?

First learning point:

Do not assume you know the concerns that non-specialists may have.

Solution:

Meet individually with teachers and listen. Following our meeting and to support my non-specialists I created a document which detailed an overview of KS3 and addressed some of their practical concerns. For example, I arranged preparation lessons before assessments. And in response to concerns I ensured we would collaborate and share marking.

September 2017

So the non-specialists knew the practical steps in delivering the history curriculum, but now there were the challenges of creating a team ethos in my department. This comprised three specialist history teachers who were sharing their capacity with a second subject, four non-specialists, and three history teachers. Of the last three, one worked part-time as an AHT, another had recently been promoted to head of year 7, and the third was an NQT. Not an easy challenge.

To help cultivate a sense of togetherness, and for consistency across the large



department, I spent the first department meeting of the new academic year forging a collective vision. All team members were asked: 'What does a great history department look like?' The results of this round-table discussion were collated and resulted in the document in appendix 2. This 'vision' was then distributed to all history classrooms and was the foundation of our future department meetings. It proved extremely valuable in uniting the team and reminding us what we were working towards. In the same meeting we had two more round-table discussions: one on a department marking policy (appendix 2) and the second on quality control of lesson planning (appendix 3). By the start of the first day of school, I felt we had a team ethos with a vision created by all members of the department. Interestingly, the science colleague to whom I

had turned during the previous summer term, when shown these documents, said wistfully: 'I wish we could create this type of thing in science'.

Second learning point:

Do not assume you can't create culture, or won't get buy-in from non-specialists.

Solution:

Create a genuine round-table discussion on vision. You may be surprised at how liberated non-specialists feel in contributing to a new vision. It will also make them feel part of a new, dynamic team, and will help you hold them to account if your marking gets dropped to the bottom of their to-do list.

December 2017

As the first term progressed I became increasingly impressed with the vigour and enjoyment that these non-specialists



showed in teaching history. Some even admitted to enjoying teaching history more than their own subject. I had an 'open-door' policy when it came to supporting the non-specialists, and we met as a faculty once per fortnight where we could discuss any problems arising. One area which did require further support was in the marking of formal assessments. To assist non-specialists I held a drop-in session during the assessment weeks, moderating assessed work and helping ensure marking consistency. That said, I feel I could have done more in this area. One non-specialist was very keen for support and had the confidence to attend the moderation sessions and ask me when they were unsure. However, I saw considerably less of the other non-specialists. Given our busy workloads I had rather 'assumed' marking was not a problem. In hindsight, I

should have been more proactive in support and more consistent in book-looks. It turned out that one of the teachers was struggling with their marking, and by the end of the term was unable to deliver data in a consistent manner.

Third learning point:

Do not assume that if you don't hear anything, it's all going well.

Solution:

Organise consistent lesson observations and book-looks: ensure a collaborative and supportive approach to all.

February 2018

Reviewing the first term's lessons, I was struck by the improvements the non-specialists had made to our lessons. I had perhaps arrogantly assumed that the non-specialists would simply teach from the lessons on the system. But they

were improving them: adding glossaries for lessons, improving sentence starters, bringing contemporary images to lessons on modern London, etc. I had been so concerned about consistency and supporting my non-specialists that I hadn't considered the extent to which they would actually improve the department. Sometimes this was achieved through the questions they asked me: 'Why do you do it like that?.' And sometimes, simply because they are great teachers and could find a way of teaching the lesson better. This was one of the most profound and important moments in the year and made me reflect further on how and why we teach the things we do.

Fourth learning point:

Non-specialists can be great teachers – regardless of the subject.



Solution:

Give them the confidence and scope to help you improve your department. They may approach challenges from different angles or have experience of similar challenges in a slightly different context.

April 2018

During February half term there was a major shake-up within the faculty. One of my non-specialists went on maternity leave, which left geography with the 'correct' number of teachers, and history further under-staffed. The school allowed me to recruit a history teacher to cover this maternity period. We were fortunate to appoint an excellent NQT, which has resulted in all of the non-specialists going back into their original departments. My experience of working with non-specialists was cut unexpectedly short. That said, during this period I learnt a great deal which has made me reflect on my own practice and has undoubtedly improved the department that I oversee.

Key learning points

1. Do not assume you know the concerns that non-specialists may have.
2. Do not assume you can't create culture, or won't get buy-in from non-specialists.
3. Do not assume that if you don't hear anything, it's all going well.
4. Non-specialists can be great teachers – regardless of the subject, allow them to improve your department.

What does the Haydon History department want to achieve?

Students

STRONG STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND APPROPRIATE USE OF BEHAVIOUR FOR LEARNING TECHNIQUES

STUDENTS WILL BE CONSULTED REGULARLY & WILL LEAD THEIR TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THEIR PROGRESS THROUGH THE USE OF PLCS, REACT ETC

STUDENTS WILL BE APPROPRIATELY SUPPORTED AND CHALLENGED THROUGHOUT LESSONS

THERE WILL BE A STRONG UPTAKE OF STUDENTS FOR KS4/5

Consistency and Professionalism

THERE IS A HIGH LEVEL OF CONSISTENCY WHEN LESSON PLANNING, AND FEEDBACK IS OF A HIGH QUALITY

STAFF WILL FEEL VALUED AND WILL HAVE STRONG PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Leading in Sharing Practice

IT IS A DEPARTMENT THAT IS WILLING TO TAKE RISKS

IT IS A DEPARTMENT THAT TAKES THE LEAD IN SHARING PRACTICE ACROSS THE SCHOOL

Appendix 1

What does good quality marking look like in history? (agreed in dept, Sept 2017)

	Red	Amber	Green
Evidence of regular but shallow marking to ensure students are held to account (ie stampers, stickers, peer assessment)			
Clear targets for improvement following deep marking (2 per term)			
Assessment feedback sheets provided for all assessments to provide continuity and visual feedback			
Forms of ReACT or evidence that the student has attempted to improve their skill level / understanding following marking			

Teacher: _____

Students' books shared: _____

Comments or areas for development: _____

Appendix 2

DO MY LESSONS MEET THE HAYDON HISTORY DEPARTMENT STANDARD?

1. HAVE I FRAMED MY LESSON AROUND INTERESTING ENQUIRY QUESTIONS?

2. DOES MY LESSON HAVE SOMETHING THAT WILL ENGAGE STUDENTS OR GET THEM THINKING IMMEDIATELY?

3. HAVE I CONSIDERED HOW I AM GOING TO SUPPORT AND STRETCH ALL LEARNERS (EITHER BY OUTCOME OR BY TASK)?

4. IF I HAVE INCLUDED AN EXAM QUESTION - IS IT FROM THE CURRENT SPECIFICATION?

5. HAVE I CHECKED STUDENTS PROGRESS?

Appendix 3



Addressing teacher recruitment at academy level

*Thomas Bayston,
The Priory Academy LSST*

Thomas Bayston, Leadership Legacy Fellow and history teacher, Priory Academy LSST, on development of the Introduction to Teaching Scheme.

Over the past year my colleagues and I have developed an extracurricular activity for year 12 students that provides them with relevant experience to pursue a career in education. The Priory Academy LSST has run the Introduction to Teaching Scheme, under its former title, Teaching Bursary, for some years; this has now been developed and expanded as part of an SSAT Leadership Legacy Project. As part of this I have collaborated internally within the trust and with external training providers – the Lincolnshire Teaching Schools Alliance (LTSA) and

the University of Lincoln's School of Education – to develop the scheme's provision and delivery.

The main aims of the development were to give the course greater gravitas in the wider academic community. Originally, the bursary/scheme was an internal extracurricular activity with little standing outside the academy. Over the past year collaboration within the trust and with the external partners has not only made it more visible in the community, but broadened opportunities for our students.

Limiting impact of teacher recruitment crisis

Another, longer term, aim for the scheme's development was to go some way to limiting the



impact of the national teacher recruitment crisis on our multi-academy trust. If we can inspire young people from within the trust at an early age to pursue a career in education, they can develop their skills and qualifications appropriately, and perhaps even return as teachers to their former academy. Although we have now created a clear pathway into the profession for young people from GCSE to qualified teacher status, it will of course be several years before we can see whether this outcome is achieved.

Over the coming year, I will coordinate the continuation of the scheme at The Priory Academy LSST, and the first year expansion of the scheme at another academy within the trust. We then plan to expand it to remaining academies in the trust with relevant post-16 provision, taking it to a total of four academy sixth forms by 2019.

The first year expansion will also act as a trial period while a uniform approach to the scheme is developed and adapted to suit a wider multi-academy environment where different policies, cohorts and opportunities exist.

Students are selected for the course in year 11, with a few spaces also being put aside for students who may join the sixth form from different academies and schools in the September. A maximum 10% of our year 12 cohort are offered a place, some 25 spaces per year. Students are selected via a written application and interview process. We are looking

for students who embody what we expect not just as students, but also as staff:

- Academic excellence: students must be on target to meet the basic requirements to study at degree level.
- Role models: behaviour, uniform and attitude to learning must be of a good standard.
- Confidence and commitment: they must have the practical skills and confidence to be able to talk in front of a class and to manage their time effectively.

As part of the scheme, the students must complete the following compulsory elements over the course of two terms:

- Safeguarding and child protection: all candidates must complete a Disclosure and Barring Service check, and participate in an internal training course delivered by our academy safeguarding lead.
- Training sessions: candidates must attend 10 training sessions that cover skills and areas that will be relevant to them as part of the scheme, such as behaviour management, lesson planning, and differentiation.
- Secondary placement: candidates must participate in at least one lower school lesson a week in a subject of their choice, with the subject teacher acting as their mentor. As part of the scheme they are then expected to complete a selection of activities based on the DfE teacher standards.

Standard		Activity
1. Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils	1.1	Create a set of class rules that promote a good learning environment
	1.2	Act as a teacher for a small group of high achieving pupils and/or create a resource that challenges them
	1.3	Act as a teacher for a small group of low achieving pupils, and/or create a differentiated resource for low attainers
	1.4	Reward good behaviour, using the school reward system
2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils	2.1	Plan or discuss a seating plan with your mentor that shows the needs and abilities of different students
	2.2	Deliver part of a lesson or create a resource or activity where students reflect on a previous piece of work
	2.3	Deliver part of a lesson that uses differentiated resources or activities based on learning styles (audio, visual, kinesthetic)



Students can also participate in the following optional activities to broaden their understanding:

- Participate in educational trips: acting as an additional member of staff. Nine students can also participate in a week-long residential to Normandy in France with a year 7 form.
- Assist at open evenings and parents evenings: participating in wider roles of teachers.
- Primary school placements: visiting a local primary school where they can either observe or take part.

During the scheme the students will complete an evidence folder, similar to that completed by most trainee teachers. This will then be supplemented by references from their mentors and other staff who they have worked with. This is then assessed with the following grades being awarded:

Pass

- Complete 50% of the standards, including at least 1 standard from each of the 7 sections.
- Receive a satisfactory reference from their secondary placement mentor.

Merit

- Complete 70% of the standards, including at least 1 standard from each of the 7 sections.
- Receive a good reference from their secondary placement mentor.
- Complete 10 hours of the optional wider course elements.

Distinction

- Complete 80% of the standards, including at least 1 standard from each of the 7 sections.
- Receive a good reference from their secondary placement mentor.
- Complete at least 10 hours of the optional 'wider course elements', spread across at least 4 of the elements.

Aims of the development

The development of the scheme would involve collaborating with both internal and external colleagues and organisations, with the same common aims:

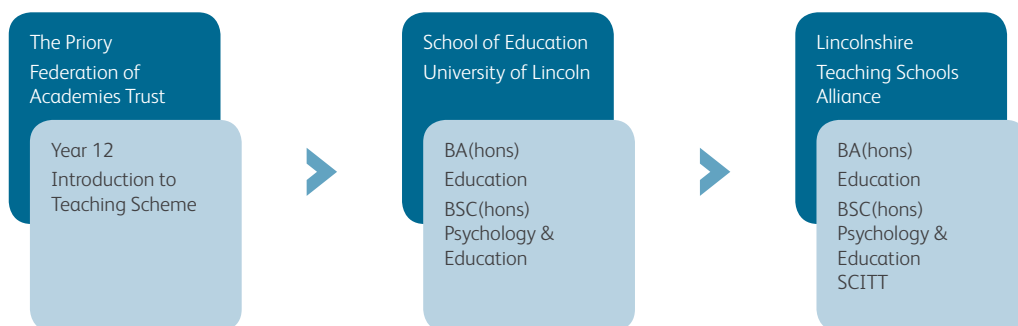
- Increase the standing of the scheme, taking it beyond simply an internal extra-curricular activity.
- Improve the opportunities available for students on the scheme.
- Develop a passion in young people to want to become teachers, and provide them with a clear pathway of how they can achieve that goal.

Creating a team

The first stage of development was internal within the academy, with the appointment of Jade Danby to the role of academy coordinator for the course. As of September 2018, she will be responsible for leading the course at the Priory Academy LSST, while I will focus on the management of the trust-wide expansion. She has brought many different skills to the scheme and we are currently looking at recruiting additional staff to widen the skills available.



Teaching career pathway



Trust expansion

The final stage of internal development was taking the scheme to other academies within the trust. This involved collaborating with the LTSA..

Following consultation, it was agreed that The Priory Ruskin Academy (Grantham) would adopt the scheme in September 2018, with either The Priory Witham Academy (Lincoln) or The Priory City of Lincoln Academy adopting it the year after.

Collaborating with external organisations

Our intention to collaborate with the two external organisations, LTSA and the School of Education at the University of Lincoln, stemmed from our understanding that each played a vital role in the development of future teachers. There was already a close link between the University and the SCITT as the university delivers and assesses the PGCE element of the training course. We should be working together to create a clear pathway into the profession for students, from the end of GCSEs right through to achieving qualified teacher status (see diagram).

After a number of formal and informal meetings with each of these organisations during September-December 2017, it was clear that we would all benefit from collaborating and working together.

In December 2017 it was agreed that the Lincolnshire Teaching School Alliance (LTSA) would act as a strategic partner to the scheme. As the Trust is the legal entity of LTSA SCITT there is a very close relationship between the academy, the MAT and SCITT. LTSA would:

- Allow the use of their logo on course materials.
- Fund and provide high quality formal certificates for those who complete the course.
- Maintain contact with students after sixth form, providing updates on teacher training opportunities within the trust.
- Act as an advisory body and quality assure the scheme.

LTSA's involvement gave the scheme the gravitas that we had been aiming for, taking it beyond simply an internal extracurricular activity at our academy. More importantly, it was essential in the long-term recruitment of teachers to the trust and surrounding area, as students would be aware of the training and employment opportunities within the trust at the appropriate time of their career.

Our other proposed strategic partner at that stage, University of Lincoln, was one of the most rapidly growing universities in the UK. With a new School of Education, it was seen as



a perfect opportunity to close the gap between the trust and post-degree provision of the LTSA. We were originally approached by the university, who wished to advertise their new education courses to our students, and we took this opportunity to informally discuss collaboration. This was well received and the School of Education was keen to participate.

As a strategic partner the University of Lincoln would:

- Allow the use of their logo on approved course materials.
- Deliver some of the training sessions, including talks on education degrees.
- Allow Introduction to Teaching Scheme students to attend some university lectures and gain some university experience.

With both external organisations keen to play an active role in the scheme, we feel we are achieving our main aims in terms of wider collaboration. In addition to improving the experiences of our students and the opportunities available to them, this has increased the status of the course.

Future of the scheme

In February 2018 it was announced that the government has failed to meet its teacher recruitment targets for five years in a row, leading to 10,000 fewer secondary school teachers being hired than intended. With what appears to be a long-term problem, school leaders should be looking for long-term solutions. Although we fully accept that our attempts will likely only be a drop in the ocean of the national picture, we hope that this will at least go part way to solving a local recruitment problem.

We have already interviewed our candidates for the 2018-19 course and as of September will be starting the course in two academies, with a total of four academies delivering it the following year. Internal collaboration within the trust has proven to be logistically more difficult than expected, however this has not hindered our ability to deliver. The support of the Lincolnshire Teaching School Alliance has been invaluable in allowing this to happen, helping us collaborate with other academies.

At the time of writing this, we are still collaborating with the University of Lincoln, but are hopeful that the university will have an increased practical involvement in the 2018-19 course.

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LGBT inclusivity in schools: teaching children there are ‘no outsiders’

Andrew Moffat,
Parkfield Community School

Andrew Moffat, author specialising in inclusivity and assistant headteacher, Parkfield Community School, explains why it is a mistake to focus on just one aspect of inclusivity.

What messages are children and young people getting about life in 2018 as they navigate their way through school and adolescence? Home Office figures revealed hate crime soared by 41% since Brexit, and police figures showed reports of hate crime in schools rose by 89% in the year to May 2016. In February 2017 the *Manchester Evening News* reported on the bullying of an 11-year-old trans girl which culminated with her being shot at with a BB gun. In January 2018 the *Guardian* reported a 48% rise in hate crime flagged as race related, and a 167% increase in hate crime flagged as transgender related. Meanwhile we are seeing a significant rise in terrorist activity, and many children will be used to seeing armed police on the streets.

2018 is a tough place for young minds making sense of the world.

If we're going to talk about LGBT inclusivity in schools we must talk about it in context. Gone are the days where single issue lesson plans are sufficient; schools need a strong narrative to explain the world and present an alternative to the negative messages.

Some years ago, I made the mistake of ignoring context; I focused on lesson plans that tackled just homophobia. In 2007 I wrote a first volume of lessons

plans called, 'Challenging homophobia in primary schools: an early years resource'. The resource used 12 picture books, most with LGBT content, to teach young children that LGBT people and different families existed. The resource was later expanded to include texts and lesson plans for KS2 children, and given a snappy title, 'CHIPS' (see what I did there?) But there was a problem; the lesson plans focused on just LGBT equality which, I realise in retrospect, undermined my aim. When you're focusing on only aspect of equality, you take it out of context and draw attention to it; you single it out; you invite a backlash.

When you're focusing on only one aspect of equality, you take it out of context and draw attention to it; you single it out; you invite a backlash

Why context is important

My experience in 2013-14 was a result of focusing on only one aspect of equality. Some parents in my school were concerned that the school was teaching 'gay lessons'. The first letter of complaint included; 'As a Christian I don't mind my child learning about different people, but I also want him to learn about the correct way of life.' This was followed by a flurry of similar letters and then a difficult public meeting of about 40 parents making clear that they wanted not only the word 'gay' to be removed from the school, but also any books with an LGBT subtext to be removed.

I had encouraged this backlash by singling out LGBT above other equalities and failing to engage with a parent community who found the concept threatening to their faith. I left the school under a cloud and scrapped my lesson plans. I rewrote the whole scheme as 'No Outsiders', this time using the Equality Act 2010 as a cornerstone for the work and, most importantly, removing the focus on LGBT equality. Instead, the lesson plans were about all equality: all the protected characteristics mentioned in the Equality Act, in fact; race, religion, disability, gender, gender identity (gender reassignment), age, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership.

One protected characteristic is not more important than any other and we cannot pick and choose the ones we want to talk about. 'There are no outsiders here,' we say; everyone is welcome.

In the resulting how-to guide, I make very clear that holding small parent meetings are key to the success of the project. There are 35 picture books used in the No Outsiders scheme, and at parent meetings we talk about all of them, allowing parents to read them and get an understanding of what the lessons are about. 'After seeing the books, I felt quite relieved,' says one parent in a short training film I use when I deliver Inset. 'It's not going suddenly into "this person is a gay person" or "she's a lesbian." It's slowly, slowly, bit by bit exposing children to the intolerance that exists between people.'

In my school, with an intake that is 98% Muslim, we had challenging discussions about how to align LGBT equality with an understanding from some parents that it was forbidden. In the film a mother explains, holding up two hands to show two sides to an argument; 'Ok so this is our religion, but this is also how the world is. And it's important for our kids to know there are two sides. They can put these ideas in to their heads and hold both views.'

Working with difference to find solutions

Our relational trust with our parent community pulled us through some challenging discussions, but I learned so much about working with difference and finding solutions. Within a year of the meetings I felt able to come out to children and parents and today we hold regular 'No Outsiders' training days for other teachers at the school. Putting LGBT inclusivity in

context with other protected characteristics in the Equality Act is key to developing our whole-school inclusive ethos. Children no longer see being gay or lesbian, bisexual or trans as a negative to be feared or laughed at, or as something we can't talk about.

Putting LGBT inclusivity in context with other protected characteristics in the Equality Act is key to developing our whole-school inclusive ethos

Returning to my original question, this is how we make sense of the world for the children. When there is a terrorist attack or a significant world event that threatens community cohesion, we discuss in relation to our 'No Outsiders' ethos. We reflect that not everyone understands; some people want one kind of person, one faith or culture – which is the opposite to us.

We want a world with different kinds of people, different faiths, different cultures. And if we encounter someone who does not understand, we talk to them. We reinforce the message that there are very many more people in the world who agree with us, and want to see peace and cohesion, than those who do not agree. Our job is to spread the No Outsiders message so that more and more people hear it and we reduce fear and prejudice. In this way we build confident and resilient citizens for the future generation.

Lesson plans and detailed descriptions of how to build an inclusive ethos in schools can be found in two books by Andrew Moffat:

No outsiders in our school: Teaching the equality act in primary schools (Speechmark, 2015)

Reclaiming radical ideas in schools: Preparing young children for life in modern Britain (Routledge 2017)

www.equalitiesprimary.com

Andrew leads No Outsiders training days at Parkfield Community School and also delivers training days at other schools modelling lessons across key stages, followed by inset.

Preparing for life after school – especially relevant to young people with special needs

*Peter Chambers,
SSAT*

Some specialist SEN schools are undertaking inspirational work, in partnerships with employers and others, to help their students achieve a fulfilling life. Many of their approaches are relevant to other schools that support young people with SEND too, reports SSAT publications editor Peter Chambers.

Schools are now widely recognised as being instrumental in developing qualities such as team working, co-operation, empathy and resilience, as well as enabling their students to achieve academic results. In short, we have the task of preparing our youngsters to become fully rounded citizens who can benefit from and participate in all the opportunities that exist in communities.

‘That is all well and good for those who are able to seize these opportunities – but what about young people with additional or special needs? I would argue that

these populations are growing, nationally,’ says Graham Quinn, CEO of New Bridge MAT, an Oldham-based cluster of schools and associated organisations that support the learning, social and pastoral needs of over 700 children and young people aged 4-25 with additional needs. Schools must also, he contends, cover areas such as learning support, appropriate behaviour and mental health. ‘Where does the vision of “work is good” fit for all these learners?’

Less than 5% of adults with learning difficulties are in employment, notes Pauline Holbrook, SSAT’s head of SEND. ‘That’s a sad reflection on our society. Organisations are often reluctant to get involved with people with special needs as potential employees, not knowing how to make those reasonable adjustments that are needed. A number of schools are preparing SEN students for work life, but even if those students achieve industry standard qualifications, they are still not getting employment.

‘This is not only a moral and social issue,’ she adds. ‘For every young person with special needs who goes into employment, the economy could save some £1 million over their lifetime in health and social care, etc. And there is huge benefit for the young people, through their sense of self-worth and of being valued. So this is not something to be taken lightly.’

The Parliamentary Education Select Committee agrees, it seems. Its inquiry into the SEND system is looking at assessment of and support for children and young people with SEND; the transition to EHCPs; level and distribution of SEND funding; the cooperation between education, health and social care sectors; and provision for 19-25-year olds including support for independent living, transition to adult services, and access to education, apprenticeships and work.

What some special schools are doing

Many special schools are working successfully with local

employers and getting results, though mostly on a small scale. A major benefit of these initiatives is that they show employers what these young people can do, rather than focusing on what they can't. For example, people with autism often have an exceptional attention to detail which can be an advantage in some jobs. As Pauline points out, they would stick at a job that others might find hard to focus on. 'In fact they may well regard it as their dream job!'

A major benefit of special schools working with local employers is that they show what these young people can do, rather than focusing on what they can't

Among the schools enabling these activities is Fosse Way in Bath, where 'project search' has since 2009 involved students working at Royal United Hospital, Bath, with external support from employment agencies. One

autistic girl sterilises equipment for the dental surgeons. Each time, she has every piece of equipment in exactly the right position, taking into account whether that surgeon is right or left handed. There are now 32 young people working at the hospital, and a follow-along job coach is based there. The retention rate over five years is 87%. A second site started in the county a year later, with Bath College as the education provider.

At Brookfields School, in Reading, in an enterprise project a local wine merchant gives the school wine boxes free of charge. A group of local men with mental health issues then deconstruct the boxes and produce kits for the students to assemble into trays and other objects which are then sold – mostly back to the wine merchant. They recently fulfilled an order of over 100 boxes for a wedding picnic.

Inclusion and community engagement

Isebrook SEN Cognition & Learning College, Kettering, and a large nearby park with many facilities are in partnership with

three important aims:

- to promote inclusion for young people with special needs
- to enhance the professional development of staff
- to raise awareness of diversity, inclusion and disability.

The project will give the young people experience of the world of work through work experience and an internship programme. These opportunities will include four intern candidates working at the park from this September onwards, in areas such as retail, catering and community engagement. Park staff will also have the chance to learn about the challenges faced by students and adults with multiple and complex needs.

Gareth Ivett, assistant headteacher at Isebrook, says: 'Many of our students can add immense value to businesses, yet nationally figures show that less than 5% of adults with additional needs/disabilities are employed. We need to do our bit to address this employment gap.'



Less than 5% of adults with additional needs/ disabilities are employed. 'We need to do our bit to address this employment gap.'

Gareth Ivett, assistant headteacher, Isebrook SEN Cognition & Learning College

SSAT's Pauline Holbrook comments: 'This is true community engagement which provides deep understanding of the needs of your students while showcasing the skills, knowledge and attributes they possess.'

SEND students run businesses

Catcote Academy in Hartlepool has a café in the school hub run by students, a bistro run by post-19 students, and another café run by the students in an art gallery in the town. The school coordinates these entrepreneurial activities to facilitate students' successful involvement: for example, the coffee machines are of the same design in all of these outlets, so the students' training in the school café enables them to be familiar with the equipment outside. It's simple, reasonable adjustment.

Students also do gardening, music and arts and crafts activities. Catcote also has post-19 and lifelong learning provision; its oldest student is age 41.

'Catcote Metro', a shop in the town centre, provides retail experience for sixth form and post-19 students. Some receive

bursaries to work in the shop during school holidays and weekends. And a new programme called 'Step in, step up and stepping out' enables more able sixth form and 19+ students to become work ready, with the intention of gaining internships leading to employment. There are currently four placements, and one student has progressed to an apprenticeship.

A shop in the town centre provides retail experience for sixth form and post-19 SEN students. Some have bursaries to work in the shop during school holidays and weekends

ICT firm Agile Group is collaborating with Catcote to provide six months' work experience for one student, 15-year-old Mathew. During his time with the company, Mathew will work in various departments to get a good understanding of how the company functions, including installing a new network for a business, providing onsite and remote IT support, attending sales meetings with the business development team and helping out the marketing team with social media activity. Of the opportunity, Mathew says, 'the staff have been very welcoming and they are a great and funny team. I've been shown various systems and processes and it has allowed me to gain more responsibility. This is my first experience working in a business and I am looking

forward to a career in IT.'

Cross-curricular learning linked to off-site activities

West Oaks SEN Specialist School and College in Boston Spa also focuses on preparing its young people for adulthood. Principal Andrew Hodgkinson has an ambition to develop a curriculum to age 25, and the site includes a bungalow where sixth formers develop their independence skills.

A student-led enterprise, WeCanDoCo designs, customises, prints and sells gifts, cards and other products including aprons, bags, green tomato chutney, keyrings, money boxes, mugs and water bottles. It has made products for organisations including the parish council, local schools, Leeds library service – and the railway museum in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Students age 16+ are involved in charity and community events to develop skills, knowledge and experience that is transferrable to the world of work, including teamwork. These are linked to cross-curricular activities for students to take away learning. Students have, for example, undertaken a 'concept to market' activity with the Royal Horticulture Society, and raised money for Red Nose Day and Children in Need.

Cross-curricular activities and vocational learning include outdoor learning and food technology, which enable students to see products grow and find out how they are prepared for sale. For example,

students grow fruits and vegetables from seed, make jams and chutneys, design and make the packaging and then sell these items within the WeCanDoCo shops. The aim is to give them the opportunity to understand the world of work and the relevance of functional skills such as English and maths. Gaining workplace skills such as communicating with a variety of different people, teamwork and independence in turn increases pupils' confidence. Students are encouraged to reflect on their work experience and keep a learning log.

Radio West Oaks allows the whole school community to share students' daily/weekly/termly broadcasts. The programme includes content chosen by pupils, such as music, jokes, competitions, interviews, West Oaks news headlines, student reviews and readings including poems and stories. Most classes play this to their pupils during school hours such as at snack, play and break times.

Students in 16+ have led the development of the radio station. Some of the students involved have been on educational visits, exploring local radio stations and media organisations, questioning experts in the field before generating their own ideas for Radio West Oaks. It is a creative way to improve literacy, develop communication skills (presenting in a clear, audible manner) and problem solving. It allows students to raise their confidence by communicating in a safe and controlled environment.

Students in 16+ have led the development of the radio station, exploring local radio stations and media organisations and questioning experts in the field before generating their own ideas for Radio West Oaks

Some of the richest resources for learning lie just outside the classroom, starting in the school grounds and within walking distance of school, while others may be further afield.

As well as the benefits already noted, such opportunities teach pupils about both their rights and their responsibilities (eg responsibility for self and others); help them to understand a healthy lifestyle; and make them aware of safety issues.

The challenge: spreading good practice more widely

These examples illustrate some of the excellent work going on in and with special schools around the country, and the vital contribution that local businesses and charities are playing to make it successful in providing real preparation for adulthood. So far, so good. But as Pauline Holbrook observes, while there are pockets of good work, 'how do we turn local into national? How can the examples we have looked at become the norm? How can we embed it into the psyche of big business – and even harder, smaller businesses?'

Graham Quinn agrees on the scale of the challenge: 'if "work is good", where is the investment and co-ordination to support this growing group of learners into the workplace?' The answer, he believes, lies partly in communication and promotion: 'The pockets of excellent practice across the country need to be urgently promoted so that other schools and businesses can learn from them.'

'What we also need, however, is a root and branch understanding of the challenge we face. Can we use the National Audit Office and other government departments to offer us an initial baseline position? Where are the opportunities in today's economy for these young people? What will these future opportunities be? How can we be ambitious for this group of youngsters? How can the evidence inform future curriculum design?

'We have to acknowledge that there will always be some people with special needs who cannot go into employment. But that number will shrink if we can provide quality provision more widely.'

Why is visible leadership so important in schools?

*Laura Clash,
Cambourne Village College*

Laura Clash, SSAT Leadership Legacy Fellow, Cambourne Village College, examines why visible leadership is vital in successful schools.

In the course of the SSAT Leadership Legacy Project this year, I have begun to consider how a school can be successfully run beyond the context of the classroom, to give me a broader picture of the opportunities and challenges facing school leaders.

One of these issues is how to 'visibly' lead a school. This issue particularly struck a chord with me this year due to the changing nature of my school: Cambourne Village College has entered its fifth year of being open, which has led to an increase in the number of the SLG in order to cater for its needs as a growing school. This has meant that leaders at the school, both old and new, have needed to adapt their leadership style. It has been naturally more challenging for a greater number of leaders to all guide, support, and innovate to the same degree of visibility as the original two leaders were able to do when the school was established. Additionally, the promotion of one of my colleagues and good



friends to the SLG has led to many conversations about how to be an effective leader, leading me to reflect on this topic myself.

So, what is visible leadership? To put it simply, it is being 'seen and heard as a leader', or 'walking the job'. Owen Carter describes how by 'modelling professional behaviours, responses and attitudes', it encourages all staff to have the same outlook, embedding the leader's vision for the school. However, as Carter and Brighouse acknowledge, it is about more than being seen around school: such visibility enables leaders to have a deep knowledge of the school, its pupils, families and staff, gained through face-to-face conversations, which supplements and provides a human context for the raw data. This enables schools with visible leaders to have a motivated staff and student body, where everyone feels valued and part of the school community. By such lengths, a central moral purpose can be shared, enabling the system to impact upon the local area.

Seeing it in action

Having considered the theory behind the concept of visible leadership, I was keen to see it in practice. In December, I attended the SSAT National Conference in Manchester, where I heard the executive principal of a local school speak about what visible leadership meant to her. She explained that she saw visible leadership as 'getting into classrooms' to ensure that her understanding of the school was both current and focused on people and human interactions. She then discussed her use of technology to share the 'positive things going on' at her school to create a warm, supportive and collaborative atmosphere for staff and students alike. In February, I was lucky enough to arrange a shadowing opportunity at this school, where I spent a day with the SLT there. This enabled me to see visible leadership in action.

I was struck by the presence of the leadership team around the school: although their offices are in a separate part of the main school building, which perhaps might create a sense of detachment, the senior leaders each conduct a learning walk every week. This means that a member of the SLT is likely to pop into each teacher's classroom on a daily basis.

The team explained that these are not formal measures taken to evaluate teaching and learning against a rigid list of expectations; leaders try and get round as much of the school as possible in an hour, spending a few minutes in each lesson to 'get a feel' for the teaching and learning taking place. The aim is to foster the sense of a school community, where the whole staff body is working together to increase outcomes for their local area.

Leaders try and get round as much of the school as possible in an hour, spending a few minutes in each lesson to 'get a feel' for the teaching and learning taking place

Celebrating learning

High expectations are created in an informal way by then celebrating the learning that is taking place: iPads are used to take photos of exciting learning which are then shared on the school's Twitter feed. The executive principal explained that the aim for this is manifold:

- Hopefully, it encourages students to aspire and to feel their hard work is valued.
- It celebrates teachers' excellent practice and shares it with colleagues at the school and those on the Twitter-sphere.
- It gives parents a clear idea about exactly what goes on at the school.
- It provides a transparent view of the school to prospective students and their families.

I also noticed that every image shared was tagged with one of the school's core values, thereby meaning that this strategy is used to embed the culture that the leaders wish to promote. Therefore, visible leadership is used to share the school's chosen moral purpose with the community.

In one day, I was unlikely to get a complete understanding of this model of visible leadership. However, by observing the practice of the leaders there in the time that I had, I was able to reflect on the benefits of increased visibility in a school. As an outside observer, I appreciated the collaborative feel of the school, where leaders are 'out and about' on a regular basis and stay close to the classroom.



Leaders being 'out and about' on a regular basis and staying close to the classroom has created a collaborative feel in the school

I also admired the way learning walks were made more informal by their regular occurrence, enabling leaders' understanding of their school to be current and for good practice to be shared on a regular basis, leading to a celebratory, thriving school community.

I would be interested to explore to what extent classroom teachers felt that the learning walks were useful. Were this to be implemented in another school new to this strategy, I could imagine teachers appreciating how leaders were now more clearly an integral part of the school, but possibly some teachers might interpret leaders' increased presence as part of a monitoring process. Additionally, while the short time spent in each classroom minimises pressure on teachers and allows for a holistic picture of the school, some might question the extent to which a few minutes in a number of classrooms gives leaders 'deep knowledge' of their school.

It is therefore clear that the key to this school's successful use of visible leadership – and indeed visible leadership in any school – is genuine, sustained, personal relationships with staff, students and parents. Acknowledging this allowed me to understand the true nature of visible leadership. Increased presence around a school might cause damage if it is not coupled with strong relations, enabling the school community to know that leaders are not sitting in a position of judgement, but are consistently reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of the school to help guide it to improve outcomes for all.

Authentic engagement essential

A few minutes in a classroom might not provide detailed understanding of a school's context, but when built up over the course of a whole term or year, and when combined with a range of other sources of information, this would provide a genuine picture of teaching and learning at a school. This is a conclusion DeWitt reaches, insisting that 'being visible isn't good enough' without 'authentically

engaging' with the whole school community. Visible leadership cannot be a policy or a strategy: it is an integral part of your attitude to education.

In conclusion, my exploration of visible leadership this year has highlighted the benefits of 'walking the job' as a school leader. It can inspire confidence and trust from staff, students and parents, while giving leaders a clear, up-to-date and human-focused understanding of their school.

It has also shown me that this strategy cannot simply be enacted as policy in the course of one year: to work successfully, it has to be the result of much time spent around the school, building up relationships with the community and developing knowledge of the school's context. It also works alongside other sources of information about the school's progress, such as data produced internally, and outside observations and reflections.

By doing all of this, leaders get to know their school really well, and can be in an excellent position to enact their moral purpose, improving outcomes and inspiring the next generation. I look forward to 'learning the ropes' of this delicate balancing act in the future.

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Consider your ‘why’ to build and develop the school’s culture

*Dr Patricia Thompson,
Sir Jonathan North Community College*

Dr Patricia Thompson, director of teaching school, Sir Jonathan North Community College, explains how they are applying what they learned from the Apple leadership study visit.

I went on the Apple leadership study visit intent on finding out how one of the world’s great organisations operates, hoping to glean any leadership lessons from experts. Right from the outset it was striking how every member of the organisation, from store worker to senior executive, gave the same consistent message. It was, in effect, an exemplification of Simon Sinek’s ‘golden circle’ theory: that every organisation knows what they do, but only some organisations know how they do it, and fewer still know why they do what they do – what that higher level purpose is. Every Apple employee we spoke to was able to articulate that higher level purpose and felt they were part of an organisation that was in the process of ‘making a dent in the universe’, as Steve Jobs used to succinctly put it.

Apple leaders conveyed the importance of communicating that high level purpose and how this was a key factor in staff retention: they recognise that young people are purpose-driven, and without that purpose they will leave. So leaders focus on ‘feeding the souls’ of staff. New employee orientation is focused on employees understanding the ‘why’, the culture and the values, so all subsequent actions are true to the culture and values of the organisation.

Four key behaviours

There were four key behaviours that Apple seeks to develop in employees, and these all are readily applicable to schools and colleges.

The first is about raising the bar through a subtle language change by using the word ‘expectations’, rather than ‘goals’ or ‘targets’. How could this change student and staff perceptions in our educational contexts? We all know the value of high expectations, but does our language always reflect it?

The second behaviour is the belief that failure leads to success. We were given the example of the G4 Cube, a product that was derided by many as an example of form over function, with an outrageous price tag to boot. It was discontinued after only a year, following disappointing sales. But Apple learned from these mistakes quickly, quick enough to introduce the successful iPod only a few months later, using lessons learned from G4, including a more realistic price.

Taking risks, and managing them

Although the importance of growth mindset is now well established in many schools from a student perspective, it is not, in my view, something we necessarily encourage enough with staff. Bringing to mind the adage attributed to Henry Ford: ‘If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.’ do we trust our staff to take reasoned educational risks in order to improve outcomes for our students, while acknowledging





that not all risks will be successful? And how to we manage this risk?

This links to the third behaviour, about the need to be brave. Apple defined bravery as 'boldness with a willingness to endure pain as part of your decision'. This creates an interesting paradox in education: we want to encourage bravery, but we need to be mindful that 'pain' in education is different to 'pain' in industry. In schools, brave decisions don't simply affect profits, but they do potentially affect the life chances for young people. So our decision-making process needs to be robust, sound and collaborative.

Their final behaviour, collaboration, was something that really resonated with my senior leadership team. When talking about his team, Steve Jobs regularly used the analogy of a rock tumbler, a machine where dull pebbles would be rubbed against each

other until gleaming polished stones emerged. He likened this to having a group of highly talented people rubbing against each other, causing friction and working together until they polish each other and the emerging ideas.

Duty of dissent

Apple discussed the 'duty of dissent': individuals have a responsibility to challenge each other, but then, once an issue has been discussed, staff need to commit to the decision 'whether they like it or not'. This behaviour may be exemplified in some leadership team meetings up and down the country, but does it happen in all teams at all levels? How can we ensure that a culture of healthy challenge is being fostered in every team in our schools and colleges in order to foster brave decision making, when the temptation might be to give in to complacency?

So, how does this fit into an educational context? I would

argue there is very significant overlap. At my school, Sir Jonathan North, an inner city girls' school in Leicester with an exceptionally diverse intake, our staff would say the culture is about aiming for excellence in everything we do, but also about treating the students as individuals. Our strapline is 'chase perfection, catch excellence', and that can be seen in how we approach everything from Young Enterprise competitions (where our year 10 girls regularly beat A-level students) to sports, where if a netball team goes to compete, we expect them to get to at least regional levels, including beating the local private schools.

But maybe our next step is to ban the word 'target' in the context of grades. Those aspirational grades are what we expect our students to achieve, not nebulous and perhaps unrealistic targets that they might aim for and never achieve.

Classroom impact projects

What does risk-taking look like in the context of the accountability framework of education? We have sought to develop this culture through our 'classroom impact projects', based on John Hattie's collaborative expertise model. Each teacher is paired with a trained coach, and given time to work on a research project that is intended to have positive impact on student outcomes. We explicitly state that we expect staff to take risks and not all projects will be successful: the learning comes from the process, not just the result. And to exemplify this risk-taking approach, the projects were first launched in a CPD session that involved a (willing) member of staff being coached into doing a headstand in front of the entire teaching staff. Fortunately the risk paid off and no bones were broken!

To exemplify the risk-taking approach, the projects were first launched in a CPD session that involved a (willing) member of staff being coached into doing a headstand in front of the entire teaching staff

At Sir Jonathan North we recognise the importance of collaboration, particularly given the statistics on in-school variation, and seek every opportunity we can to enable it. This year we have successfully trialled weekly collaboration

time, where through the judicious use of directed time, every teacher has one hour a week dedicated to collaborative planning. This has had a positive effect on staff workload through the collective preparation of resources and is something that we would highly recommend introducing. Our next step will be to make our expectations (that word again!) clear about how that time is used and what the outcomes will be.

Get all staff buy-in

So, what next for us? In order to get high consistency at every level I think we need to ensure that all staff buy into that clear purpose. One challenge for my school is to relook at the new staff induction programme and to flip the balance between the 'what we do' and the 'why we do it'. The diversity of our school and the richness of our cohort means that we have many stories illustrating the impact we have had on the life chances of some of our most vulnerable students. When new staff visit us for their

induction day in July, I intend to start on the process of 'feeding their souls', of telling the story of what a difference we have made, and continue to make, to the families in our community.

But before that I think we need to consider the 'why we do it' in terms of recruitment. Are all prospective candidates, for every position within our college, clear about our ultimate purpose? Are all support staff attracted to us because of the difference they can make to young people? And how can we ensure overall alignment between an employee's purpose and that of our college, so that we can all play our part in making the biggest possible dent in the universe?

The Golden Circle

What

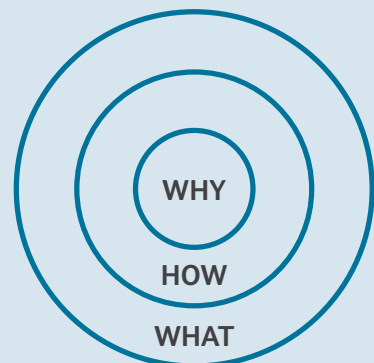
Every organisation on the planet knows what they do. These are products they sell or services they offer.

How

Some organisations know how they do it. These are the things that make them special or set them apart from their competition.

Why

Very few organisations know why they do what they do. Why is not about making money. That's a result. It's purpose, cause or belief. It's the very reason your organisation exists.



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Where students are empowered to improve teaching and learning

*Chris Stephens,
The Romsey School*

Chris Stephens, assistant headteacher for KS3 assessment and pupil premium intervention, The Romsey School, describes the significant impact of their 40 student leaders of learning.

Student voice has always been promoted and celebrated at The Romsey School. In January 2017, Annie Eagle (deputy headteacher) and I decided that we wanted to take it to the next level. We started by creating a vision for our student body where we aimed to move from students contributing towards school life in a committee towards proactive behaviours that make a sustained difference to learning.

The vision that we created was ‘for students to be empowered to enhance the quality of their learning experiences at The Romsey School and to assist in the development of positive learning behaviours with our whole student body.’ This vision led to the creation of a small group of pupils from KS3 who were branded student leaders of learning (SLL). Some of my reading (Berger, 2003; Creasy, 2014; Futurelab Report, 2006; Hattie, 2011 and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) website) informed me that by empowering the students in this way, students would increase their intrinsic motivation and sense of belonging towards school, thus improving their experiences of school and their wellbeing.

As part of constructing the SLL vision, we also aimed to have the following impacts on our students:

- develop the students’ use of our ‘habits of mind’ (metacognition) so that they are more proactive in their learning and lives
- improve their confidence
- allow them to make an impact on their school, and empower them to be agents of change in their future lives
- develop their leadership skills
- prepare them for prefect status.

And the impact these students would have on the school would be:

- to further change the ethos so that we are ‘doing with’ pupils rather than ‘to’. It would empower students and shift our school’s culture
- help to develop the school’s teaching and learning provision
- help us to become a research active school.

It was no easy task to become a SLL. To start with, students had to be nominated by their head of year. Annie and I had been concerned that some traditional models of student voice may empower only the most articulate and confident students. We were keen to avoid this and to use our SLL body as a vehicle for social change. So I asked our KS3 year leaders to nominate a broad range of students, including a significant proportion of those that were pupil premium, as I was interested in the impact we could have with students from this sub-group (one of my roles is intervention). We also wanted to have a representation from SEND students.

Once the students were nominated, they had to complete an application form, highlighting one thing they would like to change about how they learn at Romsey, among other questions. The following figures (1-5) illustrate these questions, along with some of our student responses.

2. What does 'Learning' mean? Can you define it?

Opening your mind to new ideas, developing different thoughts and opinions, learning through various avenues... watching, trying, thinking, reading and taking part. Gaining new skills and knowledge to help me grow and develop.

Figure 1: Written by a year 8 Pupil Premium child

3. Describe what good learning looks like:

I think good learning looks like a person who enjoys and is curious about his or her world. He/she reflects on what they see and also how they feel in order to build on their experiences to create an enjoyable life for themselves.

Figure 2: Written by a year 7 SEND child

5. Lastly, what has been your most memorable learning experience?

My most memorable learning experience was most probably making my USB LED light it tech. It was my most memorable moment because it provided me with new experiences, learning how to use a soldering iron and circuit board. Also it provided me with a job to be an adult because I had to complete my task in a specific time limit - just like the real world.

Figure 3: Written by the same year 7 SEND child as Figure 2

4. If you could change one thing about how you learn at Romsey School, what would it be and why?

If I could change one factor of the way The Romsey School teaches, it would be to let the children influence the way we learn because at the moment lots of ~~other~~ pupils aren't enjoying their learning because the teacher will talk at and the children feel left out.

Figure 4: Written by a year 8 Pupil Premium child

1. Why would you like to become a Student Leader of Learning?

I would like to become a student leader of learning because I would like the responsibility for excellence as I would like to be a peer supporter and a prefect. I also care about learning of the school because it is important that students enjoy learning because I know from experience that when you do learn you learn more about it.

2. What does 'Learning' mean? Can you define it?

Learning means everything to me because I am fortunate to have the opportunity to go to school for free. To me learning is when you are given the tools to get to the gateway of success. ^{the tools.} ^{the tools.}

Figure 5: Written by a year 9 child

Putting their plans into action

Over the course of this last year we have seen our team of 40 SLL do some amazing things as they have completed 'spirals of inquiry' into an aspect of learning that they wanted to change, and then gone about leading the change that they would like to see in the school.

After their applications, Annie and I delivered some training to the students to help them understand our construct of leadership. While leading this training with our students, we felt it was important to teach pupils to be respectful of staff and of their experience and professionalism. With all the projects our SLL have led on we didn't want our staff feeling undermined or judged by our students, nor did we want our students to think that they should be having such effects.

During these initial meetings we also introduced the SSAT SLA (Student Leadership Accreditation) to the SLL team, as this helped the students realise the importance of the job in hand and the national accreditation they could work towards. This is being led at whole school level by Emily Slade, who is one of our SSAT accredited lead practitioners.

Then I used their applications to group the students into six different research teams, to mirror our school action plan and the performance development teams that staff had been placed into. Each team focused on one of:

- effective learning
- literacy and challenge
- modelling learning
- feedback and assessment
- challenge in lessons
- focused learning.

This grouping allowed the SLL the opportunity to work with students from other year groups on a topic that they all wanted to change in the school. The teams had a shared vision, as their applications demonstrated that they all wanted to work on the same concept.

The starting point for the students was to help to co-construct the school action plan for teaching and learning for 2017-18. This element was given special mention when we were visited by Ofsted in June 2017:

'Pupils seize the opportunities that the school gives them to develop their leadership potential. For example, student leaders have the opportunity to discuss the school's strategic plan with leaders.' (Ofsted 2017)

Having seen the school action plan, students then conducted research into their area of development. This included them covering the following guided research (or 'spiral of inquiry').

- What is your group's shared vision?
- What should be changed to make teaching and learning even better at The Romsey School?
- Why does this change need to happen?
- What evidence have you found to support this?
- How will this change come about?
What will you do to lead this?

Having established their vision, SLL worked to understand the area they were researching more fully. The SLL read (or watched via YouTube) key research from several practitioners such as Dylan Wiliam (2011) and John Hattie. They also conducted surveys and questionnaires with staff and students, to gauge current perception which would help them develop the required change.

Each group has had the freedom to research their area of teaching and learning and then propose a tangible (evidence informed) change that they would like to see in the school.

Students changed marking policy

For example, one group challenged our marking policy. This led the group to look at research on feedback to improve student progress. Their key finding was that feedback should be given by the teacher, on the best work the student is capable of. They found that written feedback should be given after a student has had a long process of oral feedback. The suggestions the SLL came up with were that this oral feedback could come from teacher questioning, modelling work, setting tasks carefully (scaffolding) and planning careful drafting by the pupils. A second group also ended up focusing on feedback. Their findings illustrated

the need for quality feedback over quantity, whereby students are given specific targets to work on and given time to improve on these targets. This research from both groups has now changed our marking policy, as we have extended this to create a policy that focuses on all assessment of learning.

Another group of SLL have researched digital learning as they want to change our use of a moodle system to Google Classrooms. To do this, they surveyed the teaching staff and students, spoke to our ICT administrator to obtain his opinion and even visited a local sixth form college which already has Google Classrooms in place. Their aim was then to be able to train all our staff on how effective Google Classrooms is as a tool for teaching, learning and assessment.

The ultimate test for all our SLL was what to do with their plans. Annie and I felt it was appropriate for them to meet with and present their ideas to our governors of the teaching, learning and assessment (TL&A) committee. All of the SLL groups presented their findings to our governors. These presentations included ideas for how to make teaching, learning and assessment even better at The Romsey School. We were extremely impressed by the professionalism and insight that the SLL demonstrated during this phase. The chair of the TL&A Committee wrote the following feedback to Colm McKavanagh (headteacher) and Annie, which we shared with our SLL (see below).



Good morning Colm and Annie,
This is simply a note to ask that you pass on my heartfelt thanks on behalf of the Governors to all of the participants at yesterday's Student Leaders event.

All the presentations were well made and presented. In each case the research was evidence based, and the analysis was thorough. Each presentation was communicated in a clear and structured manner. Significantly in my view, the conclusions were enlightening and thought provoking.

Importantly, these conclusions were accompanied by concrete suggestions for change in a number of areas. Some are already the subject of strategic focus, action or review but in several instances the pupils offered entirely new and valuable insights. Alongside these conclusions were fresh perspectives about the need for further research together with practical recommendations for implementing change. These merit serious consideration and discussion among Governors.

The findings dealt with a range of issues across teaching and learning. The presentations provoked questions that led to extremely valuable exchanges between pupils, governors and the senior professional team. If only there had been more time. I think we were all falling over ourselves to fit in our questions!

It seems to me that the Student Leaders have thrown down the gauntlet. There is much to celebrate and much to change.

The presentations will be on our next agenda for discussion of course. I hope consideration is given to giving the opportunity to Student Leaders to repeat these presentations to curriculum leaders too, if appropriate, or find some other way of ensuring the presentations or the slides are communicated among the staff in another suitable way.

Again please pass on my thanks on behalf of the TL&A Committee to the Student Leaders for their considerable efforts, their confident presentations are in my view a highly effective and successful contribution to the implementation of the school's strategy. They challenge us all to continue to provide pupils with the highest standards of teaching and learning.

Very many thanks,

Matthew Gilks
Chair of the TL&A Committee



Student leaders' next steps

Our SLL group will be presenting their research to our middle leaders over the next term. This for us is 'real' leadership. They will start to influence our curriculum leaders and work collaboratively with them to enhance the quality of teaching at the school.

We have indeed decided to abandon our moodle and adopt Google. The team focusing on Google Classrooms are starting to prepare the training that they will deliver to staff so that all staff know how to use the system.

All SLL teams have written their research findings into a spiral of inquiry poster, which is what all teaching staff also completed for their performance development reviews. Annie Eagle is in the process of collating staff and student research to create a journal highlighting Romsey School action research. Nick Chafer, who leads teacher training at the school, has also organised for some of our SLL to find more out about teaching via our local teaching school; we are keen to encourage our excellent student leaders into the teaching profession.

Some of our SLL are now in the latter stages of their SSAT SLA. The students are looking forward to submitting their applications and receiving accreditation for their hard work.

We are really proud of our student leaders of learning as they have begun to implement real change within our school community. As a consequence, we are convinced that this group of pupils are much more motivated to succeed at school than they were a year ago as they feel, rightly, that they are making a real difference to the way students learn at The Romsey School.

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Our school improvement solutions are built around the three strands of the SSAT Framework for Exceptional Education (FfEE). Designed to support you with the process of self-review and strategic development planning, FfEE offers a principled approach to school improvement that takes you beyond the statutory inspection frameworks.

The full SSAT Framework for Exceptional Education is available to you as part of your SSAT membership. Visit ssatuk.co.uk/the-exchange and log in to download your copy.

Visit ssatuk.co.uk/school-improvement to find out more and start your improvement journey with SSAT.



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