SSAT Journal 15

Summer 2019

ssat the schools, students and teachers network

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Welcome

Sue Williamson,
Chief Executive, SSAT

Like many people, I have been impressed by the determination and drive of Greta Thunberg, a 16-year old Swedish schoolgirl, who has become an outspoken climate activist. She started her campaign – *Skolstrejk for klimatet* (School strike for the climate) by standing outside the Swedish Parliament every Friday. Initially she was on her own, but she persisted and was soon joined by other young people. On 15 March 2019, an estimated 1.4 million students in 112 countries joined her call in striking and protesting. A similar event took place on 24 May involving students from 125 countries. Greta has lit a fire that has inspired millions of people. Her campaign has also highlighted the importance of listening to young people.

At SSAT we want to tackle a major issue – social justice – and we are launching our campaign, *Fighting for Deep Social Justice*. You have been sent the first pamphlet in the series: *Fighting for Deep Social Justice*. We know that schools cannot solve all the ills of the world, and, on their own, cannot solve issues such as poverty and mental health. However, we also know that education is a major driver for social mobility. A number of the articles in this edition of the journal focus on aspects of social justice. These include raising the aspiration and achievement of underperforming groups (such as boys) and indeed the difficulties facing moves towards social mobility.

Dame Martina Milburn, social mobility czar, writes in the 2018 Social Mobility Commission's report: "Schools have long been viewed as the engine for social mobility but we find that gaps between the poorest students and the others are prevalent at all stages in the education system. While the Commission welcomes initiatives such as pupil premium and the investment in 'what works' activity, we are critical of how schools are being held to account. We want to ensure that the inspection framework does not perpetuate cycles of disadvantage; and those delivering education excellence within the constraints of poverty are supported and their methods championed."

New ways of working

In our campaign, we will be looking at the main work of schools: teaching and learning, curriculum design, new technology and artificial intelligence, support structures, accountability, data and leadership. Working with schools, employers, politicians and other stakeholders, we want to champion the methods that work and innovate new ways of working that promote deep social justice. Please read the pamphlet and sign up for this year's National Conference – *Fighting for Deep Social Justice* – being held in Birmingham on 3-4 December. We will be providing opportunities for school leaders to meet and discuss the big issues and I look forward to you joining us.

I do hope you will enjoy reading the articles in the final edition of the journal in this academic year. There are so many inspiring and interesting case studies. The journal showcases and celebrates the work of teachers. We have a talented, hard-working teaching profession that dedicates itself to helping every young person to succeed. Thank you for all you do. Everyone at SSAT wishes you a good end to the academic year and a relaxing summer holiday.

Adapting foreign practice to meet local needs

David Wylde,
Riverside School

David Wylde, assistant head, Riverside Secondary School, explains the value and methods of implementing the Japanese-inspired collaborative lesson research

If I had to summarise lesson study (LS) in one sentence it would be 'structured and sustained collaborative lesson research with the involvement of external knowledge'. It has been one of, if not the main form of CPD in Japan for decades. However, if I asked several Japanese teachers to describe lesson study in one sentence, I would likely get different answers; even in Japan there are different models of LSI was lucky enough to go to Japan on the IMPULS project, the purpose of which is to help leaders establish LS practice in their own countries. As a result of the number of leaders from the UK who have been on this project, the model seen on IMPULS seems to be one of the most popular employed in the UK. To help set it apart, it has been called collaborative lesson research (CLR), which is the model we rigidly adopt at Riverside Secondary School.

At Riverside, we find that the CLR model captures the fundamental components of LS and we can make the process work for our context. I taught the first research lesson in the school about five years ago, and with SLT support it has now grown into our

main form of subject-specific CPD across all departments. Evidence (CUREE 2012) suggests that the most effective CPDL is collaborative, sustained, personalised, evidence-informed and engages external expertise. CLR is all of these things, which is why our staff enthusiastically engages with it despite the extensive time demands.

Yearly, subject-specific focus

The process starts before the school year even begins, with SLT setting a yearly focus based on whole-school CPDL needs. To ensure CLR is personalised and subject-specific, departments set their own research question that links into the whole-school one. For example, from the whole school focus of 'How can we enable students to apply learning to different scenarios?' the English department came up with the research question: 'How can we enable students to apply comparative skills to non-fiction sources?'

Once set, departments spend six to eight hours collaboratively developing a lesson that provides insight into their research question. We are a growing school and some departments are now too large for everyone to plan at the same time, so we split the teams up into planning triads. It is vital that this planning phase is research-informed, which is why we have recently opened a teacher library and signed up to online journals. (This process of carefully scrutinising resources and seeing where they fit in with the lesson/wider curriculum is a Japanese practice called Kyozai kenkyu.)

Rigour, using external expertise

We also aim to involve external expertise from the wider world of education to act as critical friends during the planning phase, adding another layer of rigour to the process. This rigour is why CLR is more effective in developing teachers than just planning collaboratively. The aim is to have a lesson plan so detailed that it reads like a script, which has multiple pathways depending on how students react to key parts of the lesson. This helps teachers at all stages of their career develop their ability to predict misconceptions and to plan how to deal with the anticipated student responses.

Detailed lesson plans have multiple pathways depending on how students react to key parts of the lesson. This helps teachers to develop their ability to predict misconceptions and deal with student responses

The idea is that the lessons themselves are open to everyone, so along with the departments and the 'knowledgeable other' (Koshi, in Japan), any member of the education community can observe. I remember there were 20+ observers for my first lesson study, and we even took a class of students offsite to an auditorium for a maths conference, where 50+ educators observed. It sounds daunting, but one of the benefits of CLR is that because the lesson is planned by a team, people are not there to evaluate you as a teacher, but to evaluate the findings the lesson raises. This part of the process is also structured and has very strict rules. In order to try and eliminate any bias, observers must not interact with each other or with the students. They just silently record as much detail about the learning as they can.

Post-lesson discussion

Immediately after, a post-lesson discussion takes place, where the observers discuss their findings in relation to the research question. This is highly structured, with a chair/moderator managing the conversation. This is also where it is vital that a Koshi is a part of the process. This 'knowledgeable other' raises points at the end of the discussion which address the research question and deepen participants' thinking. It only works effectively if the Koshi is an external academic, not a teacher, as they can draw on knowledge that is not available to most teachers present.

Every department will go through this process, but as we are all working towards the whole-school focus, we need to come together to share our findings. We dedicate a twilight session to this by creating a carousel of departmental presentations so staff can go to presentations that are relevant to their need and interests. The CPDL lead for the school collates these findings and summarises key points.

Finally, we publish a booklet which contains the lesson plans

and research findings from that particular CLR cycle, as well as the important but often overlooked element of CPDL– the evaluation. We look at the effectiveness of the learning, and use this to improve the process each time. As you would imagine, there are several barriers to effective CLR and we are constantly looking to improve our process so we can overcome them.

Tackling the issues

The biggest barrier is the time CLR requires. In order to overcome this, each department will be allocated one period per week where every member is off timetable so they can have a CPDL meeting. This is an additional gain for teachers and while it is very expensive for the school, without having this period each week to plan the lesson, CLR could not run effectively. Most of our CPD budget is allocated to the CLR process. To avoid the need for cover, the CLR lesson takes place during this period, where the department 'borrows' a class from another teacher.

Because the lesson is planned by a team, people are there to evaluate, not you as a teacher, but the findings the lesson raises

The harder barrier to overcome is that because LS is in its infancy in this country, we do not have many skilled people who are able to act as a Koshi. While we are lucky in that there are members of the CLR group we can call upon, most of them are maths specialists, as the IMPULS project is maths specific. So, our strategy for other departments has been to develop links with external academics, mainly through teacher training institutions, then informally train them so they are aware of their very specific role.

Staff value being given the time to take ownership of their own development by discussing subject-specific pedagogy. Effective CLR requires vast amounts of time and investment, however as we know there are no short cuts to developing excellent teachers, which the majority of Riverside teachers now are.

Purple challenge: Allerton High School's strategy to promote academic resilience and independent learning

Kirsty Bryant,
Allerton High School

Kirsty Bryant, Lead on T&L and CPD, details the methods and effects of Allerton High School's strategy to promote academic resilience and independent learning

'A rising tide lifts all ships'[1], is quoted by Tom Sherrington[2] as he describes how every class is mixed-ability and how a 'teach to the top' philosophy benefits all students. The key attributes he considers essential for this philosophy include: plan everything with the highest attainers in mind; celebrate intellectual curiosity; never dumb it down; and make it normal to do things that are difficult, academic and 'geeky'[3]. Coe agrees that 'learning happens when people have to think hard'[4].

Three years ago, one of our teacher development groups (TDG), a teacher-led CPD model[5] looked at ideas for differentiation, and considered how we might construct a universal approach to highlight challenge tasks to students. We wanted a simple, adaptable idea that could easily be incorporated into lessons and would help students have a go at challenging themselves. Purple is rare in nature, steeped in mythology, legend, history and... sea snail mucous[6], so it seemed the appropriate choice of colour for branding our challenge tasks.

The timeline began in September 2016 as a pilot trial to see how staff might stretch students by 'thinking purple'. All staff were given purple challenge (PC) badges and suggestions for using a new challenge logo, purple text and more in their classroom. In 2017-18, one of our TDGs looked at academic resilience and became the pioneers of a variety of PC ideas and strategies. In June 2018, we wanted to disseminate the PC concept to all staff and students. However, before launching this as a whole-school approach, a survey to Curriculum Team Leaders and student voices showed that we had some misconceptions to overcome. Some staff said they thought it was only aimed at high ability students. Student voice also showed that not all students saw it as aimed at them: simply "extra work for smart people", or "it was just for the try-hards".

Expect more, you get more

Hence, in June 2018, further staff training enabled us to clarify principles and perceptions and share examples of good practice. Staff had opportunities to discuss ideas and voice opinions, including "Isn't this just differentiation?" and "Isn't this done automatically by teachers when they use expert questioning and offer great explanations?" However, we agreed that the purple branding encouraged further differentiation by staff and was a recognisable stimulus to engage students.

We discussed how powerful the Rosenthal Pygmalion effect is: the phenomenon that explains better performance by people when greater expectation is put on them (ie, expect more, you get more and vice versa)[7]. We also agreed that in order for students to engage with challenge, we must continue to cultivate a growth mindset: that hard work and self-belief will help our students to flourish[8]. Dweck suggests that we

Retrieval practice challenge grid

What is crude oil made of?	Give 4 differences between a plant and animal cell	Describe why atoms bond
Describe the structure of atoms	Describe how you can make an electromagnet stronger	Explain how you calculate the actual size of a magnified image
Name two types of waves and give examples of their uses	Explain how crude oil is separated	Explain which part of the electromagnetic spectrum is the most dangerous
Where are metals found and how are they extracted?	Name 3 parts of the nervous system and describe their functions	Name the 3 subatomic particles in an atom

On point last week	Two points last term	Three points two terms ago	Four points last year

Giving a choice of questions using retrieval grids

can help our students to develop confidence and increased self-efficacy by a mastery of problems through resilience. Thus, we discussed how to help our students to have the courage and determination to attempt PC tasks in order to show a growth mindset and self-esteem[8]. Hattie's research also links the idea that achievement is more likely to be increased when students benchmark to difficult rather than easy goals and possess high rather than low efficacy to learning [9].

A learning environment that is characterised by high expectations raises aspirations and, with appropriate scaffolding, ensures all students are challenged[2]. Our 2018-19 performance management appraisal objective 1 is 'Promote academic resilience and independent learning through a range of purple challenge strategies to ensure stretch for all students: to be the best they can be; to be able to work independently; and to be ready for external exams.'

Hence, we needed to offer a variety of PC strategies and tasks, to train our students to use self-access resources, and to encourage them to 'have a go' before asking for help.

Purple challenge strategies

- Extension material: extra work if students have finished standard work. This could be specific to the lesson as extra questions or research, highlighted in purple text or purple boxes on resources or in students' work.
- Support material/scaffolding: extra layers of scaffolding and simplification to help students keep up. For example, essay writing guidance with varying levels of structure: no support, paragraph outlines or sentence-level starters.
- More open-ended tasks enabling 'differentiation by outcome'
- Same resources; different probing questions: teachers can use their expert knowledge and questioning to require students to give precise, extended answers used to widen discussion further.
- Tiered levels of problem-solving: either via self-levelling resources (as students work through questions of increasing difficulty, they self-check answers and move through at different rates), or by having different levels of questions that students can self-select from according to their confidence and success.
- Exemplars of excellence to emulate and inspire, or WAAOLLs (what an average one looks like) that students can aim to improve.
- Choice: for homework eg take-away menu, or tasks in class eg retrieval practice challenge grid
- 'Wow me' tasks: open ended projects where students can respond in any way they choose, as long as they dazzle!
- Use of timers to encourage 'purple time', eg establishing routines where for six, eight or ten minutes students must work independently in silence tackling a question before they can ask for help.
- Flipped learning: asking students to read ahead, self-teach via video clips or textbooks and then bring their learning back into class. For example, training A-level students to take rigorous notes in advance of a lesson, freeing up time for discussing questions and ascertaining their understanding.
- Self-access resources: linked to metacognitive ideas (eg complete a self-evaluation tree or 'gimme 5') in pur-

ple self-access folders that students can help themselves to once they have finished the work set.

- Independent learning logs: post-16 students evidence wider reading in a table (date, source, new concepts learnt).
- Excellence exhibitions: showcasing student work. For example, our year 7 students have a 'Celebration of Faith' festival, where parents, carers and staff can speak to students and see their interactive displays, from home-cooked celebratory food to beautiful illustrations.

By November 2018, a new staff and student voice showed that both staff and students knew exactly what PC meant and saw it as a positive innovation. When we asked staff members what PC means to them now, responses included: "It's about higher order thinking; mastery of an idea and application of it", "It makes our students more self-aware to challenge themselves and reflect", "Students aren't afraid to fail at PC and want to take deeper thinking on board" and "It enables our students to be more independent and to make choices".

We agreed that not every lesson has to have a PC or 'purple time', but that it is a key aspect of our overall pedagogical approach.

Students liked the branding, as they said: "It shows you are capable of doing more" and felt that "it expands learning and provides variation". Some felt that other students chose not to do PCs due to laziness and that they should all be pushed, while others disagreed and said PC makes you "more motivated to try harder stuff, and the fact that it is optional is really important". They also felt that linking PC to rewards was a good idea. There is an inevitable risk that students may be demotivated if they are struggling and feel that they cannot manage a purple challenge, but when we interviewed lower ability students they agreed that "only a few students aren't bothered about purple challenge" or that "it is for everyone, some people don't get there but it doesn't stress me out that I don't".

Our students would like to see PC have an even higher profile than it currently does. We are looking to celebrate students' ability to challenge themselves and show resilience by sending PC postcards home and linking to our rewards system. We are considering how to embrace opportunities for wider PC tasks outside of lessons, including the use of additional home-learning tasks.

We have created opportunities for students to challenge themselves; our next ambition is for our students to set their own aspirational goals.

Quotes from our Ofsted 2018 report – Quality of teaching, learning and assessment:

"Teaching is characterised by a strong focus on academic content. Teachers plan lessons that offer pupils intellectual challenge and that stretch their understanding of the subject being studied."

"Teachers are relentless in thinking how best to develop their craft. Recently, 'purple challenges' have been introduced to ensure that pupils think deeply in lessons. These have been effective in 'promoting academic resilience and independent learning'. Pupils told inspectors that they appreciate being challenged and that they enjoy thinking at a high level."

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Social mobility stalls: some suggestions for improvement

Peter Chambers & Colin Logan, SSAT

Some of the data in the Social Mobility Commission's new report on the lack of improvement is comparing apples and oranges so needs qualification, but the report includes useful suggestions for improvement, SSAT reports.

Inequality is now entrenched in Britain from birth to work, says the Social Mobility Commission's latest *State of the Nation* report, which looks at early childhood, schools, universities, FE and work. It concludes that social mobility has been stagnant for the last four years.

Schools are an essential vehicle for improving social mobility, the report suggests, but national statistics data shows the wide gap in school attainment and income between the rich and the poor has barely shifted, and the better off are still nearly 80% more likely to end up in professional jobs than those from a working-class background.

Disadvantaged pupils start school years behind their peers in terms of attainment, but they can catch up with good schooling. The report notes, however, "the latest figures show a 14 percentage point gap at aged 11, rising to a 22.5 percentage point gap at 19." A note of caution here: this is comparing KS2 and GCSE results, which use different scales and so are not really comparable. Yet it is true that there are considerable gaps in attainment at all key stages and these are not shifting significantly year on year.

More statistics quoted: by age 6 there is a 14 percentage point gap in phonics attainment between children entitled to free school meals and those more advantaged. At KS1 in 2018 there was an 18 percentage point gap in reading, 20% in writing and 18% in maths. By the end of key stage 2, less than half (46%) of pupils entitled to free school meals reach the standards expected for reading, writing and mathematics, compared to 68% of all other pupils. Again, the report quotes national statistics: only 16% of pupils on free school meals attain at least 2 A-levels by age 19, compared to 39% of all other pupils.

SMC recommends that the government should:

- extend the eligibility of the 30-hour childcare offer by lowering the lower income limit of eligibility to those earning the equivalent of 8 hours per week, as a first step towards making it available to more parents.
- consider whether pupil premium funding is effectively targeted at supporting disadvantaged students, and whether differential levels of funding might benefit those with long-term disadvantage.
- increase per-student spending in the 16-19 education budget "by a significant amount".
- introduce a student premium for disadvantaged students aged 16-19 that models the pupil premium in schools, with a goal of targeting funding and focus on raising attainment for disadvantaged students.

Ofsted

The size of the key stage 4 attainment gap, as measured by Attainment 8, is consistent despite a school's Ofsted rating. More broadly, Ofsted inspection outcomes largely correlate with the socioeconomic makeup of a cohort: schools with a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils do worse. The inspectorate is revising its framework this year; this should include ensuring their new approach truly supports those working in the most disadvantaged areas (including teachers, SMC did not add).

Among its recommendations for Ofsted, the report suggests it should use its new inspection regime to improve the accountability regime for schools by:

- Carefully monitoring the implementation of its new arrangements and reporting on the impact its new approach is having on schools in more disadvantaged areas.
- Identifying education excellence in "schools operating within the constraints of poverty", which peer-led school review structures could then explore and champion.

Ofsted and the DfE should work with others on finding ways to publicly acknowledge schools which attempt to genuinely tackle long term educational inequality.

Some of the report's criticisms may be choosing the wrong targets. For example, it states that schools with better Ofsted ratings "do not tend to have a lower attainment gap. Ofsted inspection outcomes largely correlate with the socioeconomic makeup of a cohort." But, with the current framework at least, if a school's outcomes for pupils aren't good, how can Ofsted be expected to judge the school to be good? Very often, if the school is working hard against the odds, Ofsted will give leadership and management a 'good' even if not to the other categories. Surely the problem is with the underachievement (for whatever reason) rather than Ofsted?

Ofsted's headline judgments are a crucial plank of a particularly high-stakes regime, the report points out. Ultimately, whatever the outcome of an inspection, there are significant consequences, whether disruptive or liberating, for a school on the basis of the single-word inspection outcome. This matters for social mobility because disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately served by schools which are rated poorly by Ofsted, and the consequences for those schools are the most disruptive. One area for improvement not mentioned in the report is that the target here ought to be the effectiveness of RSCs and MATs in securing improvement, rather than Ofsted for identifying the need for it.

To some extent, Ofsted labelling is reflecting the reality of how challenging some of these contexts are, the report admits. There are frequently more difficulties associated with teaching in deprived contexts.

Teacher supply

NFER research suggests the rate of teachers leaving the profession and moving school are highest when the school has been rated as being inadequate in successive inspections. The group with the next highest probability of teachers leaving are schools rated as requiring improvement. The same research concludes that schools which are downgraded have the highest proportion of teachers both leaving the profession and moving school.

The Social Mobility Commission is initiating further research into the workings of the admissions system and on the question of the extent to which socioeconomic balance in a school is positive for social mobility.

Funding

Schools have had to face an 8% real terms funding cut, which has affected their ability to deliver important services. Some schools are finding it harder to deliver a broad range of activities, many of which are particularly beneficial to those from disadvantaged backgrounds (such as after-school clubs), as well as reductions in support staff and supply teacher budgets. The government should consider the impact of these pressures and whether they have a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged students.

The commission is particularly concerned about the impact of funding pressures on those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). There is a high correlation between being disadvantaged and having special educational needs, with SEND children much more likely to be eligible for free school meals: 25.8% compared to 11.5% of other pupils.

Reasons why funding for SEND students is inadequate include a significant reduction in overall funding to local authorities. There has been a 55% real terms cut in local authority spending, partly driven by an increase in the costs of providing services; this excludes the dedicated schools grant, which has been protected. Schools are expected to fund the first £6,000 of a lower needs SEND student's support from their core budget, but this can be problematic when their budgets are also being squeezed. This can create an additional financial burden on those schools that are inclusive; and can serve as a disincentive to enrol SEND students.

Local authorities are then expected to top up funding for additional support. However, the funding that LAs receive has been based on historic levels of need, which have not reflected changes over time in the number of students with SEND – the new funding formula should address this issue. Schools and local authorities can also struggle when there are unexpected increases in the number of SEND students in a given year.

A further complication is the increasingly fragmented education system. Whereas previously all services were provided by local authorities, the academisation of much of the school system has resulted in differing levels of support provided. While larger academy chains are able to pool resources, single academy trusts and maintained schools can find it difficult to buy in the resources required to help children with SEND.

Pupil premium funding

PP funding is "designed to help disadvantaged pupils of all abilities perform better, and close the gap between them and their peers." However, the report does not mention a key factor undermining this: the effective cuts to school funding have eroded their ability to use PP funding solely for those pupils. The funding is also skewed, as it not based on numbers of those who are eligible for FSM, but on those who register as eligible. This is a crucial difference, as some one in 10 of those who are eligible do not register – which reduces the level of schools' PP funding. There are many different reasons why parents who are eligible do not register for FSM, including perceived stigma and lack of awareness. Many schools are increasing awareness among parents and reducing the likelihood of FSM pupils being identified by their peers, for example introducing cashless payment systems. However, government should consider ways to ensure that all schools are receiving the pupil premium funding that they are entitled to, and whether differential levels of funding might be more beneficial for those with long-term disadvantage.

The commission supports Ofsted's accountability framework requirement that inspectors should consider how a school uses its pupil premium funding when making a judgment, and encourages schools to use the PP guidance available through the EEF.

The SMC report's main conclusion is: "Great Britain's school system provides an excellent educational journey and outcomes for some children. For this excellence to be better distributed and for it to be less unfair, it needs to do more for the least advantaged in society."

How memes can engage students in school

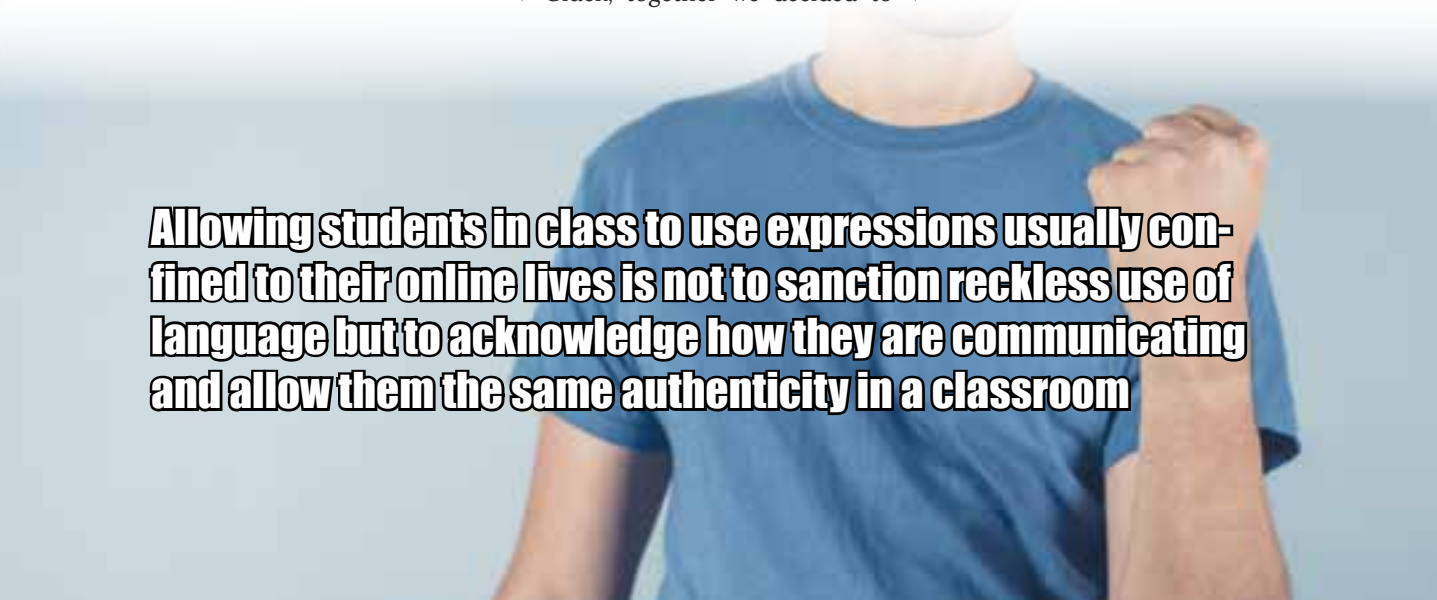
Rosemary Osborne,
Eltham Hill School

Rosemary Osborne, lead practitioner and Apple teacher, Eltham Hill School, with digital artist Jeremy Gluck, challenged students to share and respond to digital memes, which led to a variety of responses

As educators, we often assume that we need to validate our work. In the current educational landscape, there is a fetish for the recorded and the quantifiable. What would happen if we tore everything back to the minimal or the absurd, through the use of art? That is what I would call 'invisible impact'.

It is something that has increasingly become lost, especially for young people living as digital natives, who are being left to the whims of fast-paced social media. The dichotomy between the expectation to be 'placed' within society and regurgitate hard-learned knowledge is at odds with the rapid consumption of image, text and sound, which impels spontaneous deconstruction of standard norms and implicitly questions the reliability of conditioned identity.

Embarking on a collaborative project with the emerging digital and conceptual artist Jeremy Gluck, together we decided to embrace the digital narcissist. I decided to work with Jeremy remotely, setting up a digital link whereby work could be shared and responded to. Working initially with a pilot group of post-16 students, we explored the idea of creating digital memes, and having them communicate in a powerfully visual way in a very short period (five minutes). Using only simple original or internet-sourced images, and basic, intuitive text, typically humorous in nature, students' work brought initial findings that were instantly compelling and resonant of a society of non-connectedness.



Initial reluctance

At first, students were resistant to sharing any kind of image that might produce a negative reaction. Even though the memes were anonymous, there was a tangible fear of being judged. There was also an underlying sense of fragility that comes with the burden of 'performance'. Everything is judged, marked, graded. How can imagination, creativity and, ultimately, freedom thrive within that system? Some students reacted physically – with body language, such as folded arms. In a kind of symbolic shut-down to free creativity, others remained silent, refusing to do the task. But some were almost breathing a sigh of relief: this is a language we can relate to, here is a critical space in which to explore and think.

From the abbreviated expression of texting to the purely machine-driven language of coding, young people are engaged in reinventing and experiencing language in ways radically different to those of less than a generation ago. Extensive interaction with technology is permanently altering how language is used. Memes – so ubiquitous in their presence online – are a deceptively ephemeral example of the power of compressed, distributed expression. Are we seeing social media as the foundation of a new language revolution based in images instead of words? By allowing students in the classroom to freely make use of a means of expression usually confined to their vivid online lives outside school is not to sanction reckless use of language but to acknowledge how they are communicating and allow them the same authenticity in a classroom. Bridging language and art, ICT and emotional intelligence, creating meme art is a positive, flexible playground of the imagination for students, many of whom immediately resorted to humour. It became competitive, in a good way. However, other memes were private, highly personal reflections, introverted yet explicit, if often cannily lateral.

In my discussions with students, the discussions themselves became the memes. Students opened up about past experiences, why they had failed in some way, why they were still failing. Silent students were also opening up – protesting against

norms through the artistic process. This phenomenon was magnified by collaborative, creative interaction with Jeremy, who responded to student memes with memetic responses, often in the form of 'glitch art'.

Student work exhibited in galleries

In practical terms, I was the teacher in the classroom with the students and Jeremy was 'absent' in Swansea, sending replies to the students' work in the form of art or glitches of their work. One particular student had her marked writing as part of an art exhibition – her writing had always been a problem area with teachers – too untidy, 'all over the place', 'unreadable'. Here, we celebrated this genius of creativity and exhibited it in places like The *100 Years Gallery* in Hoxton.

The process of creating something with such visual impact was fascinating to watch. Interestingly, older students were less inclined to share their ideas. In unpicking this, it was a genuine fear of failure. The mental health impact of constantly sharing and the fear of missing out is clearly having an impact on young people. In my view, their consciousness is undergoing transformation through constant liminal and subliminal interaction with technology. In essence, through memes we were capturing this state of youth consciousness in a highly focused way; one that even with cursory use suggests possible future use of memes as a form of therapeutic and/or diagnostic tool for child and youth psychology. We found a marked impact with pupil premium students through improved behaviour, engagement and achievement. In fact, 96% of students improved results in English and Drama and there was a reduction in behaviour points for the students involved.

The pilot was replicated with a group of year 7 students, who were much more willing to embrace the concept. For students with SEND, the process was liberating: students who normally find it frustrating to access tasks were suddenly free from physical and academic burdens, yet able to communicate.

How it affects my teaching

Through simple images and phrases, the states of their anxieties were captured, comprising a kind of snapshot for the digital age. Are we really nurturing the creativity of our young people? Or are we paying lip service to education through our class data and relative performances as teachers? Teaching language is one thing, essential and inevitable; our fledgling pilot discoveries suggest that using language is quite another issue when interacting with young people. Mediated by technology, they are effectively speaking a variant, viral language among themselves. Using memes to communicate ideas and feelings, self-concepts and daily concerns in and out of school lets many students be more 'at home' in their communication, with no sense of imposed conventions.

Increasingly, I find that I am working with students in less visible ways. If you ask anyone what their most memorable moment at school was, they might not tell you about a particular lesson. They would tell you about what was meaningful to them; about someone or something that was powerful. Valuing process and the dialogic is not about power and attainment; it is about exploration and investigation.

Our children, whose minds are being modified by constant interaction with technology, may have something to teach us about the leap we are making from merely using technology to palpating (recognising in an experiential way) with it. The time has indeed come to accept these connections and explore them openly, honestly, and with no little excitement.

How come the truths of learning have been hidden from us for so long?

Jon Tait,
Acklam Grange School

Jon Tait, deputy headteacher at Acklam Grange School, says we're ignoring valuable research that could change our learning practices for the better

Research is certainly the new buzzword in education. Whether it's evidence-based research or research informed practice, it seems that a new dawn has broken across the educational landscape, shining light on how we truly learn as human beings. For example, research on cognitive psychology by leading academics from some of the finest universities across the world is now being brought into the mainstream education arena as a basis for designing our teaching practices.

In a bid to echo a culture adopted by the medical profession, teachers are now being told that research should be underpinning their every classroom move, so as not to waste unnecessary time and effort coming up with our own strategies that might not work. Think of it like the medical profession – you wouldn't expect to go to the hospital and have a surgeon try out a new medical procedure on you, just because he or she thought it sounded like a good idea, would you?

Unfortunately, this has been happening in classrooms up and down the country for decades, with teachers trying to find effective ways to get students to learn, by a process of trial and error:

- Don't smile before Christmas
- 3 Part Lessons
- Students routinely copying down objectives
- Only 10% teacher talk

In our defence though, unlike the common cold or a broken leg which can probably be treated the same way in Middlesex as it can in Middlesbrough, in education context is key. No two children are the same and as the experienced ones among us will tell you, even a strategy that works for a group of students before lunch might not be successful with the same group straight after lunch.

Robust research from globally accepted studies gives you confidence

Having said that, and not wanting to dismiss or diminish the significant part that action research by practising teachers can play in education, a set of guiding principles firmly rooted in robust and globally accepted research would be a great place to start when thinking about how we might teach our children. Irrespective of the context that a teacher may find themselves in, whether it's socio-economic, geographical or a gender bias, robust research from

globally accepted studies gives you confidence. You know, if it is a tried and tested theory based on biology and psychology and not just on hearsay, rumour and tiny uncontrolled experiments, that this will be worth doing – even if you may well tweak it later based on your own experiences in the classroom.

If teachers had access to the tried and tested research results, how many children could have been exposed to better teaching techniques, meaning that they acquired more long-term knowledge and improved their life chances?

What is quite startling though is the extent to which some of the theories, strategies and practices that we've come to count on through folklore and staffroom whispers are at odds with what the research is now telling us. (Think Brain Gym and learning styles.)Even more surprising is that some of this research isn't hot off the press either. It has been around since before the majority of us began our teaching careers.

So why has it taken this long for the profession to grab hold of it, take it out of the clutches of the academics and put it in the hands of the teachers in our classrooms? Take for instance Ebbinghaus's 'forgetting curve' way back in 1885, Engelmann's direct instruction from 1964, Bjork's work on retrieval practice in 1975, or Sweller's cognitive load theory from 1988. How many of these theories have you wished you'd have known and understood at the start of your teaching career? How much time would that have saved you, rather than trying other strategies that may not have worked so well? And more importantly, how many children could have been exposed to better teaching techniques, meaning that they acquired more long-term knowledge and improved their life chances as a result?

As leaders it's vital that we now bridge the gap between classroom teaching and research by giving our teachers access to key studies and theories in bite-sized chunks. Our teachers don't need to do the research (it's been done for them and in far more reliable conditions than they could ever construct). They just need to have knowledge of it and use it to increase the effectiveness of their classroom practice.

Our job: use established research to develop teachers' understanding and practice

It is therefore our job to be the filter for all the research that's now available to us, condense it into accessible and understandable chunks, before helping to develop our teachers' understanding of it, so they can adapt their practices accordingly. It's one

thing just to tell everyone that they need to change their practice because a new piece of research says so, but it's another thing entirely to understand the real benefit that it will have on our children. Going back to our medical analogy, if you asked a doctor or nurse why they were prescribing you a certain course of medication, you'd hope that their answer would be a little more knowledgeable than just 'because I've been told to use this method'.

There is also a role to play in feeding some of these principles of how we learn to our parents and carers. In my experience of working with parents, the vast majority really want to support their child at home, but sometimes feel unable to, due to not having significant subject knowledge of the new examination specifications. However, by providing parents with simple strategies on how to get that knowledge to stick, through easy-to-use, low-stakes quizzing and spaced retrieval practice, you can begin to maximise the impact of your actions as a school by educating the whole school community on the guiding principles of how we learn and retain information.

Having started my teaching career through the GTP (Graduate Teacher Programme), I wondered if I'd somehow missed out on all of this foundation level research and knowledge. I thought I may have been one of the very few imposters in education, happily going about my business every day without the knowledge of these studies and evidence-based research underpinning my classroom practice. Luckily for me, but probably sadly for the profession and the children that have passed through our classrooms before us (and we can probably count ourselves in that, as children who have been let down by a trial and error system), everyone I meet and talk to about this is having the same realisation. How come the truths of learning have been hidden from us for so long?

Ebbinghaus's 'forgetting curve'
The forgetting curve hypothesizes the decline of memory retention in time. This curve shows how information is lost over time when there is no attempt to retain it.

Engelmann's 'direct instruction'
Direct instruction is a general term for the explicit teaching of a skill-set using lectures or demonstrations of the material to students.

Bjork's 'retrieval practice'
Retrieval Practice or *The testing effect* is the finding that long-term memory is often increased when some of the learning period is devoted to retrieving the to-be-remembered information.

Sweller's 'cognitive load theory'
Cognitive Load Theory says that because short-term memory is limited, learning experiences should be designed to reduce working memory 'load' in order to promote schema acquisition.

When boys get 70% of intervention time

Kelly Armstrong,
Parkside Academy

Kelly Armstrong, deputy headteacher at Parkside Academy, describes a whole-school approach designed to accelerate boys' achievement – without disadvantaging girls

Boys' underachievement is an ongoing issue nationally and is something that doesn't seem to be disappearing anytime soon. The debate as to why our boys underachieve shifts focus on a weekly basis: is it socio-cultural factors and the dominance of laddish culture? Is it a lack of motivation to achieve? Or is it a wider pedagogical problem linked to how we inspire boys within our classroom hour by hour, day by day?

This academic year our strategic whole-school focus centred on raising boys' achievement in all aspects of school life.

The strategy highlighted three key aspects: (Fig 1)

Pedagogical strategies: classroom strategies, relating to specific teaching approaches, classroom dynamics and developing an understanding of how boys learn best.

Individualised approaches: personalised approaches through quality-first teaching and additional intervention specifically targeting boys.

Socio-cultural strand: whole-school approaches to challenge stereotypes and raise boys' aspirations, and additional work

Fig 1. Narrowing the gap

in the community to enhance parental engagement and support academic success.

Pedagogical strategies

All school staff accessed focused CPD, which allowed them to explore the theory behind how boys learn best and examine additional topics such as how to support boys' wellbeing. This was effective to refocus staff at the start of the academic year and to establish a clear whole-school focus area for improvement.

Core CPD sessions for the rest of the academic year were used to explore practical teaching and learning strategies that have been proven to raise boys' achievement. Weekly staff briefings showcased teaching and learning strategies that staff had trialled to show how the strategies employed had accelerated boys' achievement. This was a vital part of the strategy as pedagogy was revisited weekly with all staff and was a key theme in weekly middle leaders' meetings.

In early October we held our first 'golden week' to share best practice relating to supporting boys' achievement. All school staff identified one lesson where they would be showcasing an element of best practice, and colleagues could sign up and drop in to see a key strategy in action. This approach to embedding whole-school pedagogy and practice ensured that the strategy retained a high profile. It also allowed all staff to develop a sense of shared ownership and responsibility to support the whole-school focus.

A sustainable model

As an academy we have a simple model of student progression, focusing on skills each child requires to progress:

Wave 1:
whole class learning

Wave 2:
small group intervention
both academic and pastoral

Wave 3:
individualised strategies.

At a whole-school level and within individual departments we started to explore how we could adapt practice to support boys across all year groups. We felt that this was vital to support sustained success, rather than a strategy being used short term to support a particular year group. The practice review included academic and pastoral interventions and support. As an SLT we mapped out what we were offering our boys across all year groups. This helped to identify any gaps in our provision and to modify practice. (Fig 2)

This approach was repeated with middle leaders to allow them to examine how they were supporting boys within their subject areas. Middle leaders developed individual action plans linked to key strands of the strategy. This was then followed up during SLT QA link meetings to ensure that any actions were carried out to support the success of the overall strategy. (Fig 3)

Individual approaches

We have a broad intervention programme which supports literacy, numeracy and overall pupil wellbeing. At the start of this academic year we made the bold decision that, at key stage 3, 70% of our intervention time would be given to the boys. This was a risk as there is a fine balance between supporting the boys without it being of detriment to the girls. Justifying this shift was a tricky one, especially with governors and in subsequent parents' forums. At KS4 we gave boys additional opportunities to access 1:4 intervention to support vo-

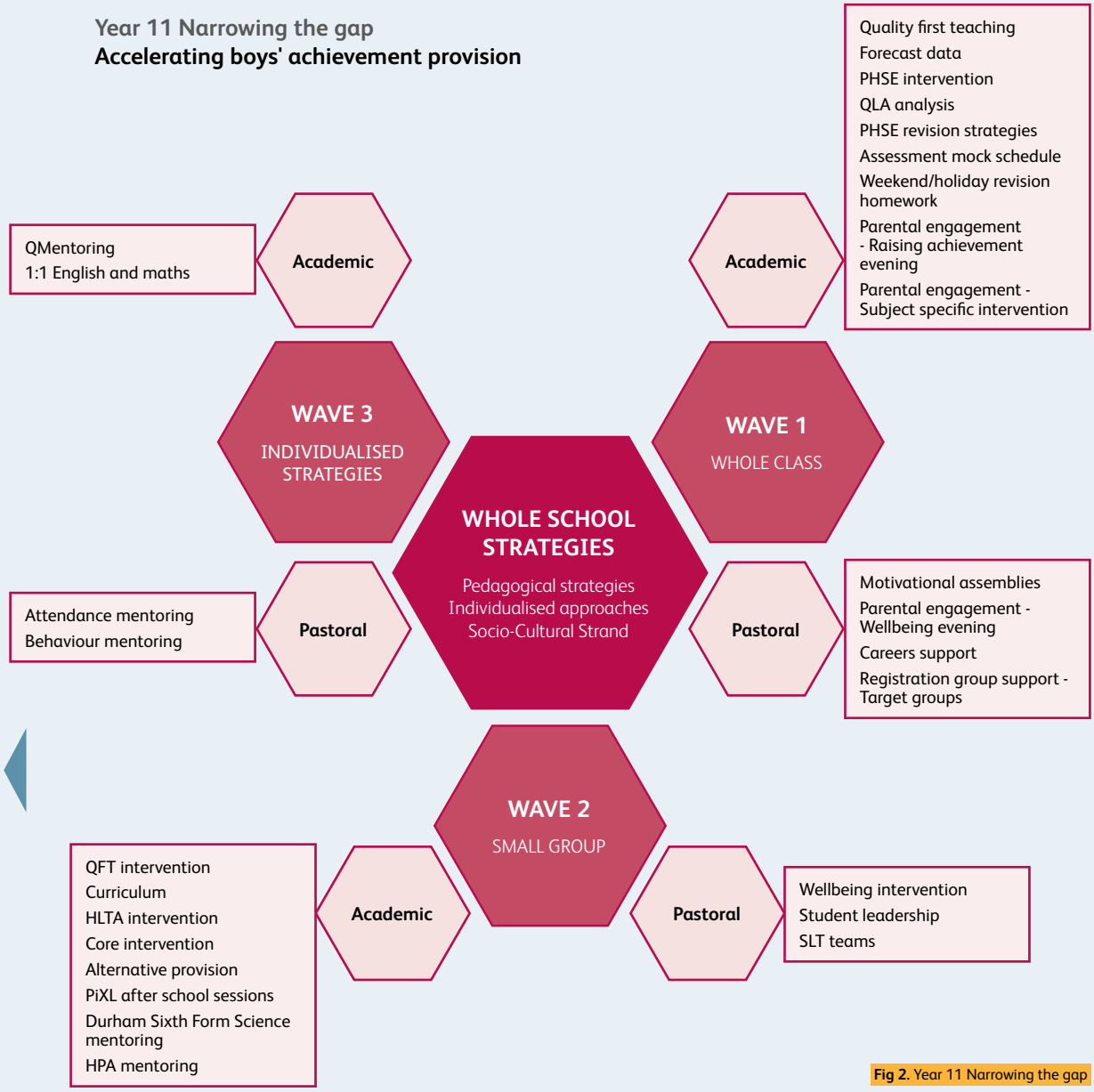


Fig 2. Year 11 Narrowing the gap

cabulary development. This has successfully given our boys the confidence to use complex vocabulary in their extended writing.

To support wellbeing, we introduced the 'relax kids' programme, which aims to improve self-regulation and resilience. It has been highly successful with some of our most hard-to-reach boys and has helped them improve their overall mindset towards education and what is possible for them to achieve.

Sociocultural approaches

Parental engagement has been key to the success of the overall strategy. Currently we run weekly 'engage evenings' centred around family learning, subject awareness and enrichment. To target boys specifically we have introduced additional 'raising achievement evenings'. Boys who are underachieving or who need additional mentoring and support are invited into school to meet middle leaders and senior staff and review their progress. These evenings have been well attended, with 80% of the boys invited attending. Other subject areas have also adapted their offer to parents,

Year 7 - English Narrowing the gap
Accelerating boys' achievement provision

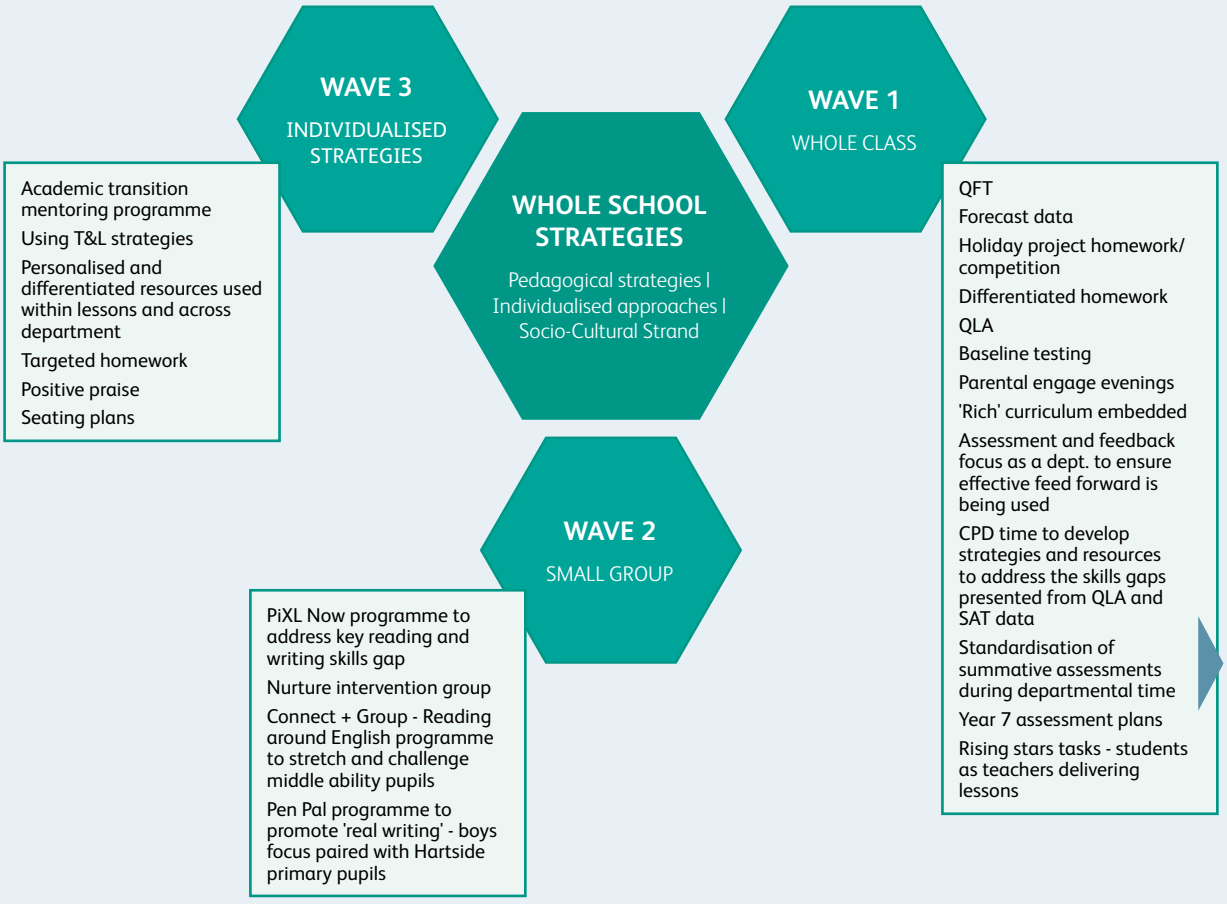


Fig 3. Year 7 - English Narrowing the gap

with masterclasses being offered to boys in key subject areas. Overall, this has been well received by both parents and students.

Outcomes and next steps

Whole-school data reveals that the gender gap is closing across all year groups. However, to sustain this progress as a school we need to continue to build and refine our sustainable model of whole-school support. The use of early intervention and a graduated, individualised approach to support sustainable improvement will be key to the success of the overall strategy.

Next year, our whole-school focus will continue to be raising the achievement of boys, with a focus on reducing passive learning in the classroom. Mike Hughes' 'magenta principles' (based on the premise that learning should be exciting and engaging) – for girls as well as boys, of course – will form the basis of our teaching and learning focus. If we can support engaging teaching and learning hour by hour, day by day, perhaps the gender gap can be a thing of the past.

Raising boys' achievement: changing a culture

Michael Todd,
Bishop Thomas Grant School

Michael Todd, deputy headteacher with responsibility for T&L, and Simon Brzezicki, head of English at Bishop Thomas Grant School reveal their thoughtful approach – still under development – and some of the useful sources in discovering a better way of teaching boys

Like many other mixed secondary schools, Bishop Thomas Grant School in Lambeth has had a longstanding focus on raising boys' performance and achievement. We have long felt that the reasons why boys underperform compared to girls are interesting and deserving of our attention and effort. It should be stated at the start, however, that whenever we talk about boys and girls, we have to recognise that there is as much diversity within each group as there is between them; a great many of our boys do exceedingly well.

The issue

The overall figures were stark. In our 2017-18 cohort, across the school the 93 boys had a collective positive P8 score of +0.34, against the 84 girls' much more impressive score of +1.10. In fact, across the curriculum, many boys were making less progress than girls with the same starting point. In English literature, for example, boys scored +0.59 against girls' +0.91. Looking at specific types of disadvantage experienced by these boys, we found that, although relevant, it was being a boy that seemed to be the major factor influencing this underachievement.

Useful resources – and the other sort

It's amazing how much has been published on this since we started in September last year. When we started the main sources, we found the DfE documents Helping boys to educate and Gender and education myth busting, which was the most informative, though it's a really short document. It set our minds racing. For example, the myths include 'boys like competition'; actually, it demotivates boys who don't immediately succeed, yet they are the ones who need most motivation. Another myth is that boys need topics that are relevant to them but well-regarded research from several sources shows that boy-friendly curricula do not improve their achievement; and gender stereotyping ignores pupils' actual interests and limits the aspirations of both boys and girls.

The main text most schools use about boys' education is *Breaking through barriers: boys' achievement*, by Gary Wilson, and for many years this has been the go-to book. Many teachers say Gary Wilson is great. However, we found, comparing it with something more evidence-based like the aforementioned gender and education myth-busting research and other broader scale primary research, that much of this appeared to be useful, but was more anecdotal. For example, Wilson takes it as a given that boys don't like reading fiction, and then recommends action based on preconception versus evidence-based evaluation. The book also promotes some discredited teaching techniques

such as Learning Styles and Brain Gym, which reflect the time in which it was written.

In contrast to this earlier work, we are both hoovering up Mark Roberts and Matt Pinkett's new book, *Boys don't try*, which came out in the last few weeks. This book absolutely hits the nail on the head on what we're looking at and the conclusions we are coming to.

Much of what helped start all this off for us was a very popular breakout session at the SSAT National Conference in December 2018, 'Lifting the lid on boys' achievement' by Heathfield Community College. The session created quite a buzz among the dozens of school leaders in attendance as it highlighted myths and suggested further reading. It really acted as a catalyst for us.

Focusing the school's attention

Three months into the project, after attending the SSAT National Conference, we delivered a presentation to the whole staff in which we said our summer results in English last year put us at the very top of the borough. But looking more closely, the boys as a cohort made substantially less progress than girls (see above). In our school, being a boy was a greater disadvantage than pupil premium or a range of other factors. So, Simon went through that myth-busting document with the other teachers.

In our school, being a boy was a greater disadvantage than pupil premium or a range of other factors. So Simon went through a myth-busting document with the other teachers

We feel that we as teachers tend to increase the problem with boys by the way we treat boys and girls differently. As Michael says, if you treat them differently, they can't be equal. In a series of meetings with smaller groups, we found some teachers with decades of experience who were saying, "I always thought I treated boys and girls similarly, but now I realise I was too hard on the boys and used a soft touch with girls." We think we have to use a soft touch with both boys and girls; when you try to "out-alpha" the boys to get them to come into line, you're modelling the very behaviour you don't want the boys to demonstrate. If you're going to be confrontational, raise your voice, and at times be aggressive, using the wrong tone of voice, boys who are insecure will demonstrate the same behaviour back. For lots of boys, school becomes a hostile environment – ever more hostile, confrontational and tense. It causes boys' relationships with school to deteriorate in ways that girls' doesn't.

Putting the theories to the test

We're still changing the conception, looking at the evidence about boys' motivation. So many of the strategies recommended on this topic fall back into the old stereotypes and "folk wisdom". We must be pickier and more careful about what we subsume into our own teaching.

Mark Roberts talks about that. He thought he knew what were the factors behind his successful teaching in one school – "I'd cracked it." But when he went to another school, he realised that those were not always the key factors in his teaching: "No matter how long you've been teaching, you don't necessarily have all the answers," he concluded.

We are using SSAT's *Leading Edge Directory* to talk to other schools that are also focusing on gender, about what they are doing in these areas and we are sure that this will lead to more enlightened moments as time goes on.

We looked into the data more closely and realised that there are boys who underperform compared to girls with all the same starting point – like for like. We are confident that there is something that is holding back boys, and it's cultural rather than genetic. Yet it's not one specific cultural factor that makes the difference. A lot of people have looked at class, background, single parents, etc. But this tendency to underachieve is common among all these groups.

It's a huge thing. That's why we must keep getting this message across to all our colleagues. And when new people come into the school, you have to go through it all again, to make sure it becomes embedded in the culture. In a way, it doesn't always matter if particular things don't work so long as the culture of the school is becoming more critical and evaluative about our practice.

Working groups

In school it's rare that you get a chance to work as a whole-school group of teachers, but discussion with working parties is really important in getting people to be more practical and reflective in the way they deal with boys. One of the good things about this approach is that whether you're an experienced teacher, an NQT, or a TA, your opinion is as valid as anyone else's.

Staff have been keen to learn at all these meetings we've had in this focus group. At the end of a meeting you may not have got much further than where you were before – we're just now getting around to the full student survey after nearly a year! But it's the conversations themselves that are valuable.

Introducing the myths about the differences between girls and boys as learners led to a long and sometimes heated discussion

Our working party started with 25 members of staff. Fortnightly meetings, with some 15-20 people present usually. Even those who have not been to every meeting are remaining interested and we're always generating reflection and conversation, starting to get the ball rolling in the right direction. The first time, we discussed the staff survey results, which showed a growing awareness of the issue. Then, we introduced the myths about the differences between girls and boys as learners. It led to a long and sometimes heated discussion. So, we must be quite creative about where and how we make changes – such as encouraging the staff to comment on the student survey results and building on their conclusions. This discussion, for example, revolved around the importance of relationships: how boys are addressed and treated, the difficult relationship they can have with school and the downward spiral this can create.

One of our governors, a sociologist in Lambeth, is also in the working group. He said he just came to listen, but he can't help participating – we don't mind that!

Changing teacher behaviour

Girls' role models tend to be people they know personally, which means they can get direct advice and support from them. Boys' role models are mostly famous people (from sport, world leaders, etc) with whom they have no personal contact, so boys cannot gain support directly. And there's an empathy issue: with boys there tends to be an element of machismo – a need to express admiration for someone famous, rather than a more immediate connection. These observations are backed up by our own experience as well as the initial research with a small group of 50 students. We are building on this research, conducting a survey with every student in the school.

So, have we seen any improvements? There have been no systematic changes across the school yet. But anecdotally, yes: Simon has had personal experience with individual students: one of the most difficult students in the school is in his Y11 English class. He had real difficulties with him last year. This year, as a result of the research and discussions we've been having, he decided to change his approach. He wouldn't try to tackle the student or con-

front him head on, but to be more nurturing, and not seek conflict, especially when there were other students around. Experience of him in this class was subsequently very different – and better – than it was in other classes, or Simon's classes last year.

You want everybody to do well, which is very different from expecting everybody to do well. Often, when teachers say, "I have a high expectation of my students," what they mean is: "I demand that they do well and I will punish them until they do."

For the first time, we've been frequently talking to boys who are much more positive about their teachers, who they no longer think bear a grudge against them or give them flack. Instead, teachers let them move on, without needless hassle. The teachers' reaction to poor work is now much more likely to be surprise than annoyance or anger.

A different kind of relationship

Even if you feel the relationship with the student is negative, you pretend to yourself – and to the student – that you think it's positive. In the end it will become positive. "Fake it 'til you make it", as they say.

So, if you expect high standards and they underperform, your reaction is surprise, not anger. Not: "oh, no, not again"; but, "I know this is not the best you can do; why don't you have another go and show you know how to do it?"

What we don't think is relevant is to try employing teaching strategies that are supposed to favour boys, which is inevitably oversimplistic. There is very little measurable difference between boys' and girls' brains, and there is no preferred learning style that suits all boys. Instead, we should simply be looking at the work and asking: "Is it good quality? Did it follow the brief?"

We need boys to have stronger relationships with school, to feel the teacher is on their side and that school is a good place to be

The key aspect is that the gap often comes down to the relationship boys have with school and the teachers. We need boys to have stronger relationships with school, to feel the teacher is on their side and that school is a good place to be. If there's one thing teachers need to work on is that very often girls feel these things, but boys don't. Our job is to change that, especially for those who seem least responsive. Michael uses a term "militant tenderness" from his reading; an approach to boys that is assertive, while also caring. In doing this, we model for boys what Roberts and Pinkett called "tender masculinity".

This is an ongoing project. It has taken a year to get to a situation where we could actually start making concrete permanent changes. The only time you can start something fresh and new is in September. After that people find it difficult to take on major new challenges or changes to the way they work, because they have so much on their plates. In doing this, we like to think that now we're changing the direction of the stream, rather than standing in the way.

Resources found useful

Myth busters:
https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/9095/1/00599-2009BKT-EN.pdf

Mark Roberts blog:
https://markrobertsteach.wordpress.com/about/

IOE Gender issues in school report:
https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/9094/1/00601-2009BKT-EN.pdf

DfES Raising boys' achievement report:
https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5400/1/RR636.pdf

DfES Gender and education: the evidence (2007):
https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090108131527/http:/dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RTP01-07.pdf

Research-based strategies, Rosenshine's Principles of instruction:
https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Rosenshine.pdf

Pinkett, M. & Roberts, M.:
Boys don't try: Rethinking masculinity in schools (2019). Routledge

How can we challenge every child in every lesson every day?

Chris Harris,
Colyton Grammar School

Chris Harris, Director of Challenge, Colyton Grammar School gives a frank and helpful description of the approach, its obstacles and its benefits

When rethinking our school stretch and challenge policy this academic year we wanted to avoid some of the common pitfalls in this area of pedagogy. Too often, stretch and challenge strategy is reduced to a dustbin of subject-specific extension tasks that are handed out to students who happen to munch through the core content a little faster than the rest; tasks that often sit alongside the much-maligned 'all/most/some' learning objectives. Alternatively, a school might offer a challenge drop-down day or specific extracurricular activities for a select group of more able students. While such provisions can be key components of a school's overall challenge policy, on their own they risk being both tokenistic and overly exclusive. We wanted to strive for a more holistic and deeply embedded approach that left no student behind. Quite simply, could we challenge every child in every lesson of every day?

In attempting to find an answer to this ambitious overarching question we unearthed a series of sub-questions that needed to be addressed. The article below discusses some of the most pertinent challenges we faced and our attempted solutions to them, many of which remain works-in-progress.

Challenge 1: Could we always 'teach to the top'?
In attempting to challenge every student in every lesson it was important to encourage all teachers to 'teach to the top' or, in other words, to identify the most able students who would act as pace-setters for a given cohort: if these students were challenged then, in theory, all students would be. Furthermore, such approach would hopefully draw benefits from the 'Pygmalion effect' in which higher expectations can lead to a higher level of performance for all students. Abiding by such philosophy raised the need to create classrooms that combined high challenge with high support, in which less-able students are provided appropriate scaffolding from below. As such, out went our now redundant 'More able gifted and talented' lists and in came 'support for challenge' lists, which identified students that would most likely require targeted intervention during the most challenging point of a given lesson. This new direction led to valid concerns among staff that such an approach might require the creation of additional resources for 'support for challenge' students to allow them to 'reach the top'. To allay these fears, we stressed the importance of checking in regularly with such students during a lesson and, when required, offering appropriate 'adaptive instruction' so that they might access the task at hand. In turn, most teachers agreed that being alert to the needs of all learners and being able to adapt the language you use accordingly should simply be called 'good teaching'.

Challenge 2: In-school variation
Another question that arose was the extent to which we could achieve a whole-school challenge policy when the nature of challenge can

vary so much from subject to subject. Beyond our 'every child, every lesson' and 'teach to the top' mantras we felt it was important to have a degree of commonality in order to avoid a level of in-school variation that might unravel the entire process. To achieve this, we began by revisiting Bloom's taxonomy during a twilight teaching and learning session, agreeing that deep and specific knowledge should be seen as the all-important foundation of all higher-order thinking, rather than simply the lowest rung on the ladder of progress. We could, after all, broadly agree with Didau's refrain that 'The more we know the better we can think'. As such, it was important that our challenge policy worked in conjunction with our focus on a knowledge-rich curriculum and an assessment policy that prioritises regular, low-stakes retrieval practice. In turn, it was agreed that rote learning was of course not enough in itself and that challenge would come when students were forced to apply their encoded knowledge and understanding in a new and possibly unexpected context. As the draft School Inspection Handbook stated in January of this year, 'Pupils also need to develop fluency and unconsciously apply their knowledge as skills.'

With regards to what might constitute a new and challenging context, we were again pleased to find a huge degree of commonality across subject areas. A whole-school review entitled '*What does challenge look like in your subject?*' led us to create comprehensive, but by no means exhaustive, challenge criteria (Appendix) that could be referred to across the curriculum and ensure an appropriate level of whole-school unity without compromising the specific identities of individual subjects.

Challenge 3: The 'hogs'

Another unwanted side effect of 'teaching to the top' can be that you do just that: all lessons become exclusively directed towards the most able and, consequently, all learning and in-class dialogue is dominated by a minority of so-called 'hogs' at the expense of an increasingly passive majority of 'logs'. Therefore, it was important to

develop inclusive challenges that forced all students to think. For instance, teachers were asked to think not just about the challenging question they might ask but also about how they might ask it in order to widen participation. For example, they might insist upon a 'no hands up' policy, use 'pose, pause, pounce, bounce', utilise 'think-pair-square-share' or employ a Kagan-based strategy such as 'numbered heads together'. In turn, teachers were encouraged to further challenge a responding student with spontaneous follow-up questions – a kind of intellectual sparring – that insisted that the pupil validated their position with specific knowledge or utilised high-quality subject terminology. For example, a teacher might say, 'That's a great answer, but if you were a subject expert appearing on Newsnight, how might you phrase it and further justify your answer?'

Challenge 4: The fear of failure

Linked to the issue of the 'hogs', a more inclusive approach to challenge can seem daunting to many students, particularly those who had previously been content to reside in the shadows until the merciful release of the end-of-lesson bell. For such students, being forced to think aloud in a challenging context risks cruelly exposing them to their peers. Tackling this fear of failure – which can of course be even more pronounced among more-able learners – has been a particularly difficult nut to crack. One solution has been to adapt some of the principles of 'Fermi questions' in order to create icebreaker tasks for new schemes-of-work. Such questions work on the premise that the numerical answer is usually impossible to deduce and, as such, raw ideas and reasoning – rather than reaching a precise 'right answer' – are the only qualities that can be rewarded. Such questions now also form part of a weekly 'challenge dashboard' that is distributed to tutors in all year groups to further encourage a 'have a go' culture across the school.

A second solution to the fear of failure was the introduction of 'challenge zone' display cards, which were intended to denote to students when they were entering the most challenging aspect of the lesson. In turn, it was hoped that this sign would come to signify both a safe space – while the work might be challenging there was no expectation that work would necessarily be accomplishable until the arrival of additional support – and an exciting space in which personal progress can occur through a resilient attempt at the assigned activity.

Challenge 5: How do we know?

The final challenge is a familiar one to any area of school improvement: how do we know any of this is working? While recent 'learning walks' and student voice activities point towards positive developments, it is still too early to measure the longer-term impact of many of the initiatives discussed in this article. We cannot yet say with certainty that we are indeed challenging every child in every lesson of every day.

The most significant benefit that we can point towards at this stage is the intangible impact it has had on the overall learning culture of the school. There is now a sense that a shared language of challenge and a common set of questions are being discussed across the curriculum. While many of these discussions offer constructive criticisms of developments, in my view they conclusively show that all teachers are now thinking more deeply about the nature of challenge, support and inclusion.

Appendix

WHOLE-SCHOOL CHALLENGE CRITERIA

KNOWLEDGE

- Requires students to appropriately recall deep and highly specific subject knowledge
- Requires students to apply deep and highly specific subject knowledge
- Requires students to thoroughly justify and validate their position using precise subject knowledge

LANGUAGE

- Requires students to thoroughly justify and validate their position
- Requires students to use precise technical and disciplinary language (i.e. to 'talk like an expert')
- Requires students to understand and apply challenging ('threshold') concepts
- Requires students to work with challenging vocabulary

CRITICAL THINKING

- Requires students to understand the strengths and weakness of the evidence and arguments
- Requires students to understand why it is not possible to reach a 'correct' answer

SYNOPTIC APPROACH

- Requires students to make links between topics and (possibly) subjects (i.e. a synoptic task)
- Requires students to spot patterns and connections
- Requires students to see a topic or issue from a variety of perspectives

CHANGING CONTEXTS

- Requires existing knowledge and understanding to be spontaneously applied to a new situation
- Requires existing knowledge and understanding to be applied to a 'real-world' situation
- Requires students to work with an abstract idea or context
- Requires students to confront an unexpected change in circumstances

INDEPENDENT LEARNING

- Requires independent learning/ metacognition/'self-directed progression'
- Requires students to problem-solve
- Provides an opportunity for student leadership
- Requires students to work under pressure and with pace
- Forces student to confront failure
- An open-ended creative task with limited instructions.

Seeking to apply nine pillars of great schools

Mark Wignall,
Downlands Community School

In an interview with SSAT, Mark Wignall, headteacher of Downlands Community School, reveals his approach to school improvement, from cross country races that boost motivation to students leading on whole-school improvement.

Mark Wignall's career didn't start in education. When he first graduated from university, the sports science graduate was managing a health and fitness club. While work may have been fun, he felt his job lacked a sense of reward and it was this that prompted him to become a physical education teacher.

He taught PE full time at a school in Haywards Heath for four years. He remembers spending hours with other staff members discussing lesson planning and finding innovative ways in which students could make even more progress in lessons. Once he completed his Master's degree in physical education at Brighton University early on in his career, his commitment to learning and sharing knowledge grew.

"I never wanted my career to stand still. Every day I was thinking to myself, 'What am I going to do now to move myself forward, to learn something new?'" he recalls. "I took every opportunity to move up the ladder—assistant head of year, head of year, secondments, assistant headteacher, deputy headteacher."

Wignall understands that some people truly feel that the biggest difference can only be made within the classroom. However, as he advanced in his own career, he found that leadership gave a greater influence on a wider sphere of school performance and improvement. While he never saw himself becoming a headteacher, the confidence his peers had in his abilities inspired him to seek promotion and join Downlands Community School. He's had, he says, "a great journey" since as the school has grown in size as well as stature, achieving an Ofsted outstanding judgement in 2017. "Getting the outstanding was a real accolade and a tribute to the brilliant team we have at Downlands," he maintains.

Having a competitive nature has helped. He strives to make school the best it can possibly be for students and the wider community. There is a constant focus on delivering the skills, knowledge, experiences and qualifications that will enable students to succeed once they have left the school. As well as outstanding academic progress, the offer at Downlands has recently been extended by new PE, dance and music facilities and staff, on-site forest schools, a new outdoor amphitheatre and a relentless focus on encouraging all students to involve themselves in as many clubs, trips, activities as possible. Wignall believes that the way to engage students and create sustainable improvement is to inculcate a love of learning by providing as many different, exciting and relevant learning opportunities and experiences as is possible: "Students who love learning attend school and achieve great things!"

Cross country race inspired better performance all round

At first, Wignall was dissatisfied with some of his students'

commitment to activities like cross-country. He devised an intricate handicap system, the outcome of which was that given the chance to succeed, the less gifted runners almost halved their times, while the more gifted athletes also improved their times as they worked hard to catch the runners in front of them. "Everyone's times improved massively, and the students not only became fitter, but their self-esteem grew as a result," he recalls. "As a department we spent hours and hours discussing and devising lessons that would engage all students and ultimately lead to better outcomes in all activities for everybody".

He acknowledges that passion for school improvement must be paired with ability and willingness to work with all stakeholders. Downlands is built on teamwork, with a leadership team, middle leaders, teaching staff, governors, parents and kids working together to create a culture of success, he explains, creating a relentless drive to improve leadership at all levels.

Student leadership is a very strong feature of the school. Each section of the school development plan has a 'student focus group', and each group has a role in delivering aspects of the SDP and providing crucial feedback. This dedication to improving student leadership extends to ambassadors and student leaders in many subject areas; duty teams that clear and tidy up social areas; and an extensive team of prefects, senior prefects and four executive student leaders. This team is instrumental in the efficient daily operation of the school.

Leadership qualities

The role of school improvement extends to everyone – non-teaching staff, governors, parents and the community. All groups have taken part in bespoke leadership training which was originally initiated by discussion about one person in a participant's life who they have considered their most inspirational leader. This process led to a deep understanding of what is truly important in a leader. This in turn led to the creation of Downlands' own leadership competencies, used by all to understand the characteristics of a leader at Downlands and to serve as a tool for reflection and development.

Wignall feels that the real beginning of the improvement journey at the school was a commitment

to high expectations from every member of the school community. "There is a 'no excuses' culture and lessons focus on challenging everyone with 'thinking hard' strategies... so every child is engaged and makes great progress," he explains.

Bespoke leadership training was initiated by discussion about one person in a participant's life who they have considered their most inspirational leader

Engagement in class is supported by very consistent application of behaviour policy and there are effective systems in place to tackle low-level disruption. This approach is supported by the 'green rooms' inclusion unit, which works with vulnerable students and supports those who are struggling to find their feet in mainstream lessons. The aim is to reintegrate into class and the unit helps to ensure that all students are supported to make the best progress they can, with real impact .

He feels that as a profession, teachers are in danger of being driven by accountabilities. In previous frameworks, schools, often in challenging circumstances, have been forced to concentrate so much on outcomes that the essence of a rounded education has been sidetracked. "A 'great' school provides a great all-round education, and I really hope the new framework lives up to its billing and enables schools to focus on this," Wignall observes.

In considering what is 'beyond outstanding', the school has addressed the question: "how do we become a great school?" Wignall wanted to participate in the SSAT School Improvement Show 2019 since attending last year's event, where he particularly enjoyed the talks from schools in different contexts. "Our work with SSAT and with Leading Edge in particular has been crucial to our school improvement journey. We were slightly surprised that we tend to learn more from schools in completely different contexts to ours rather than those similar to us," he explains. "One of the talks, from a school in East London, helped us streamline our quality assurance documentation, and this has led to middle leaders' action plans having far more impact and improving the individuals' effectiveness."

A key aspect of school improvement has been to empower leaders by giving them ownership of their role. Crucially, this began by asking all leaders to consider their vision: what impact did they want it to have? This work led to remarkable improvements in leadership. One middle leader remarked: "I used to feel that I was a small cog in the machine, and now I know that I can really make a difference."

Downlands have found that the commitment to improve leadership, particularly middle leadership, has led to less in-school variation, a vital aspect of school improvement. A recent FFT Datalab blog post found that "reducing within-school variation in value-added between subjects would have 10 times more impact on overall attainment when compared to moving schools below the floor standard to just above it."

When we spoke Wignall was planning a presentation for this year's event, exploring the theme of "where we are on the journey to being a great school". In tackling how to go beyond 'outstanding', much of his reading was influenced by articles and books about how to become a great school. Researching the topic was illuminating and there are many useful references to great schools to be found. An important text for him was *The nine pillars of great schools* (see panel) from the London Leadership Strategy – 'it's a brilliant framework for school improvement in itself'.

The research and subsequent planning formed the basis of Downlands' current long-term development plan. A key part of the document are the KPIs that enable staff and governors to monitor the success of the plan, or 'where are we on our journey to becoming a great school?'

Wignall hoped that his audience would be encouraged to think deeply about what they want their school to be; and ultimately, what skills, attributes and knowledge students need to be equipped with when they leave.

"Looking back, it was a mistake not to focus on becoming a great school when we were 'good' and aiming for 'outstanding'. School improvement was in danger of becoming an Ofsted box-ticking exercise. We should have released the shackles earlier, we would still have been judged outstanding – and we would have been a better school, providing a better education and stronger outcomes for all of the youngsters," he concludes.

The nine pillars of great schools

1) A shared vision, values, culture & ethos, based on the highest expectations of all members of the school community
2) Inspirational leadership at all levels throughout the school
3) Exceptional learning, teaching, assessment and feedback to support the highest levels of attainment and achievement
4) A relentless focus on engaging and involving pupils
5) Personalised and highly effective continuous professional development within a learning community
6) A stimulating and inclusive environment and climate for learning
7) A rich and creative curriculum, within and beyond the classroom, fully meeting the needs of individuals and groups of pupils
8) High quality partnerships, with parents and carers, the community, other schools and networks, locally, nationally and internationally
9) Robust and rigorous self-evaluation, data analysis and collective review

Teaching responsively in mathematics

Clare Hill,
Twynham School

Clare Hill, Assistant Headteacher at Twynham School, taking maths as an example, describes their effective use of a focus on children's conceptual understanding within each subject discipline

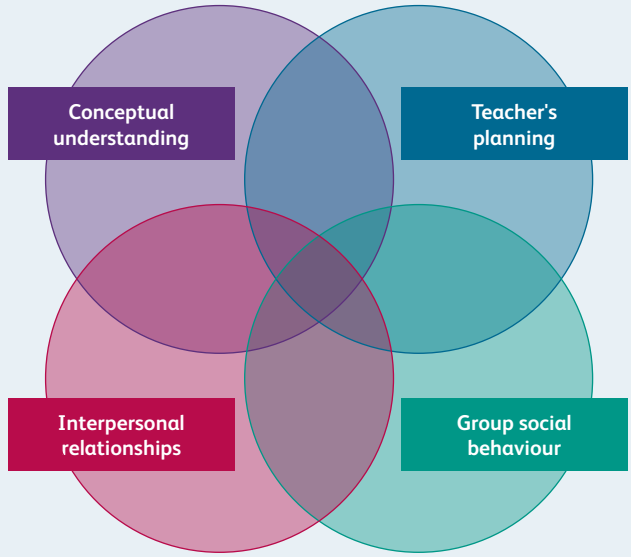
For many years, the way in which we have approached CPD at Twynham School has focused on the twin aspects of responsive teaching and the *Disciplined Mind* (Gardner, 2006). Within the disciplined mind approach, teachers identify essential topics within the discipline. They then spend time on these new topics, studying them deeply. Following this, they approach the topic in a number of ways and lastly develop 'performances of understanding' – encouraging students to use their knowledge in new and novel situations.

Our responsive teaching model permeates how we consider pedagogical approaches and supports us in ensuring we do not narrow our thinking to one specific element of teaching and learning.

To teach according to our responsive teaching model in mathematics, or any other subject at Twynham, teachers must be able to orchestrate all four characteristics of this model within a framework of a well-devised, coherent curriculum that supports our pupils in becoming rigorous students of the discipline being taught.

Although this framework is exclusive to Twynham, it is not a model that would be unfamiliar to many other schools. In fact, it is completely aligned with Dylan Wiliam's *Formative Assessment* framework . Within mathematics teaching at Twynham, the framework also promotes a dialogic teaching

Responsive teaching model



approach. This approach encompasses Robin Alexander's principles that teaching should be collective, reciprocal, supportive, purposeful and cumulative. Because our model attends not only to measurable academic outcomes but also to the affective nature of learning, we have been able to draw on both bodies of research in our work. However, we have maintained a focus on Wiliam's model of teacher learning communities and his five strands of formative assessment.

Conceptual understanding and teacher planning

The development of our behaviours within the top two sets has been hugely important in our response to changes at key stage 3. Teacher awareness of conceptual understanding (and misunderstanding) informs planning that allows students to express themselves mathematically, elicits evidence of their understanding, shapes and develops teacher awareness of how students learn. I observed a good example of this last year when a newly qualified teacher was eliciting evidence of year 7 students' prior understanding of algebra before starting his instruction.

Asking students what x could represent in the expression x+3, some students answered that it could represent any number, some that it represented the number in the illustration which accompanied it, and a small number of students wrote 10. In allowing students to offer their reasoning, the NQT discovered that students who wrote 10 understood the variable x as being the same as the Roman numeral X, which is studied during primary curriculum. Through use of mini whiteboards, the NQT had a deeper understanding of the starting point of all the students in his class, not just those he may have drawn on through the traditional initiation-response-feedback (IRF) approach that is commonly seen in early teaching. Indeed, with Roman numerals relatively new to the KS2 curriculum, this response also caught me by surprise.

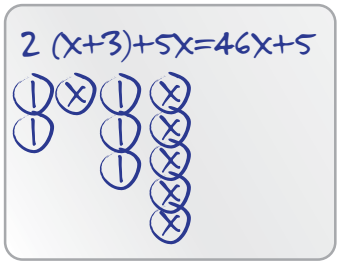
The use of multiple choice and true or false questions also allowed us to delve deeper into student understanding. As with any multiple choice questions, it is important for students to know they should consider all the alternatives in their thinking and be able to explain not only why their selected answer is correct but also why other choices are incorrect. These explanations also give students the opportunity to practise tier 3 vocabulary from the start of their secondary school experience, directly involving them in negotiating their understanding with both the teacher and the other learners. As I described in my article in SSAT Journal 10 *Life without levels – not 'measuring progress', but evaluating learning*, when it became clear that we were not going to use a flight path to measure progress at Twynham, keeping the principles of responsive teaching at the fore allowed leaders to work with their teams to deconstruct their key stage 3 curriculum. Thus they focused on the essential skills and concepts required to succeed in key stage 4.

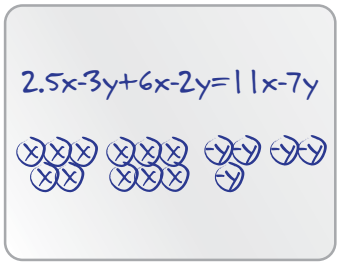
To help with this deconstruction, we returned to the original basis for the national curriculum – to identify what students needed to know, understand and be able to do. In maths, we focused on numbers, algebra, ratio and proportional reasoning, studying these areas intently and allowing students to apply their knowledge to shape, space and measure. By adopting the Singaporean approach to directed numbers and algebra through the use of tokens, students developed their understanding through a concrete, pictorial, abstract approach. This further enhanced our responsive teaching approach as it allows students to express themselves without first having to move to the abstract. It also gives teachers greater opportunities to 'see' student understanding.

Students developed their understanding through a concrete, pictorial, abstract approach to express themselves; this gives teachers greater opportunities to 'see' student understanding

In the two examples below, the first clearly demonstrates that the student has correctly represented each term and made a simple calculation error. It is apparent that they conceptually understand what they are doing. Whereas in the second

example there is a conceptual problem and the tokens revealed a poor understanding of the coefficient.





Not only does this pictorial approach give teachers insight into how students are thinking about the role of each number or variable, but through the use of mini whiteboards each learner can receive feedback that will move their learning forward in a way that would be harder and less effective if always working in an exercise book. Furthermore, questioning, by necessity, moves away from I-R-F described earlier towards a more dialogic epistemology which Alexander argues moves teaching on from simply being transmission and learning on to receiving and knowing on from simply repeating .

Interpersonal relationship and group social behaviour

While the importance of understanding and addressing students' conceptual understanding and misconceptions has been at the heart of our curriculum discussions for years, we remain aware that students also need to practise what they have learned to become fluent in each skill and able to apply their knowledge in novel situations. The art of successfully transitioning students from purposeful talk to focused independent study is predicated on several complex classroom factors. All of these factors would feature in the intersection of the interpersonal relationship set and the group's social behaviour set in our responsive teaching model.

An episode of independent working needs to be viewed as a norm in the maths classroom. This is much more likely to be achieved if students can successfully access the independent work that has been assigned. Through the approaches described above, students are aware that teachers value their participation and a learning environment is created where students are not only fearless but understand the value that discussion brings to their own learning. Our CPD model has also created time within TLCs for colleagues to reflect and develop their own practice in the working examples they share with students. Explicit modelling followed by practice of problems informed by variation theory or minimally different questions can also support students in transitioning to working independently. It can also lead to improved interpersonal relationships, as the students do not feel let down that the teacher is not responding to their personal needs.

Focusing on Wiliam's five strands of formative assessment and how they intertwine with our responsive teaching model has allowed us to consider group social dynamics in greater detail, particularly through the study of whole-class feedback. A mastery approach , as defined by the EEF, relies on the use of formative and summative assessments to systematically monitor learning and give detailed feedback on what is required to close the gap between current performance and the desired goal. This requires advanced skills in assessment for learning and feedback models. Mini action research projects into models of coded feedback have been shared through our TLCs. An issue is engaging students with summative test results beyond the number of correct marks, which remains a challenge. However using visualisers to provide model answers to exam questions and getting students to engage with 'shadow' questions – particularly at key stage 4 – has proved to be highly effective.

Our curriculum is supported by responsive teaching, which requires teachers to focus on what students should know, understand and be able to do

Equally, group social behaviours are not defined by the subject area, but by whole-school culture. Twynham's approach to this is based on the twin pillars of high-quali-

ty teaching and learning, and high-quality relationships. Our responsive teaching model keeps these two pillars central to all CPD. Through our TLCs (which are cross-curricular) we have an opportunity, once a half term, to discuss our approaches to maintaining and developing high quality relationships within and across subjects and through our pastoral approach. We recognise that this area of the model needs further work and routines and the need for them are something we are considering to support the development of group social behaviour. Future CPD will include a focus on cooperative group work (as one of Wiliam's five formative assessment strands) and is another example of where our responsive teaching model aligns with more familiar models. Within mathematics at Twynham, our focus on group social behaviours has been on student dialogue by working on a large wall of mounted whiteboards showing how students can communicate mathematically. This has proved to be particularly effective in engaging with Alexander's criteria for dialogic teaching without having to extensively change teaching methods.

In advocating for the responsive teaching model, I remain aware that implementing it successfully is associated with complex areas of teacher development. When time is limited for continuing professional development and we are working in an era of extensive spec change at GCSE and A-level; when there are many challenges to staff recruitment and a large proportion of part-time staff, creating such teaching environment poses many problems. However, we believe Twynham's whole-school curriculum intent is distinguished by its focus on children's conceptual understanding within each subject discipline. There is an emphasis on teaching for meaning that goes beyond simple rote learning or teaching to a test. Our curriculum recognises the importance of embedding substantive knowledge within subject areas and is designed to challenge all students. It is supported by the pedagogical approach of responsive teaching, which requires teachers to focus on what students should know, understand and be able to do. The curriculum is also designed to support the development of exceptional skills in literacy and oracy that will enable students to flourish in all manner of arenas. Therefore, aiming to meet the challenges that are posed by teaching responsively in mathematics remains at the top of our list of priorities.

The year of the sixth form: transformation change towards a culture of excellence

Nina Smith and Joanna Rodger,
Brooke Weston Academy

Brooke Weston Academy was established twenty-seven years ago in response to an overwhelming need within the community: to ensure that aspiration and excellence was at the heart of education for young people in Corby and the surrounding areas, to increase university applications from the three per cent when the school first opened and to create exciting and sustained opportunities in the workplace and higher education.

Our vision was clear: a handful of years at Brooke Weston would open doors. This core ethos guided the development and restructuring of our sixth form as we moved towards an exciting – and challenging – time in our school's progress. Despite high attainment in our sixth form, our progress and VA (value added) of 74% A*-B for level 3, L3VA -0.13 did not reflect our shared commitment to academic excellence. Recognising and owning this vulnerability meant that we took the necessary steps to ensure our curriculum and provision was fit for purpose and able to meet the demands of a changing cohort. In a time of huge educational reforms for post-16 provision, we also welcomed a new principal and SLT structure. Now was the time for change.

With a new found sense of cohesion and collaborative planning, we crafted the academic and pastoral programme for the year around the central idea of "we can always be better". Starting with an outward-looking focus, we invested time and money by joining various professional organisations that would help us reflect on our practice such as SSAT, NACE and PiXL – a vital resource for offering a sense of external scrutiny and validation of our internal practice. As leaders, we visited numerous other sixth form providers across the country, gaining insight into post-16 curriculum and transition. We didn't just travel: we read, researched and talked to – through social media and in person – as many different people as we could find. We were prepared to start again.

The first overwhelming conclusion was seemingly obvious: whatever works in year 11 would work in years 12 and 13. However, due to a depleted sixth form leadership team and a comparatively inexperienced staff body, the rigour of year 11 was yet to be matched in the sixth form, affecting transition and student accountability. Our students had not changed radically in the six weeks since they had left year 11, and our expectations and interactions with them needed to reflect this. We adapted our tutor time curriculum to focus on study skills that they would need to support their learning. Therefore, we introduced a whole-year group lesson called 'academic skills', where we built on current educational research around explicit modelling of cognitive skills: Cornell-style note taking, referencing for academic papers and developing our sixth form oracy programme. The latter has been supported by our work alongside '*The Noisy Classroom*', PiXL '*Up for Debate*' and the English Speaking Board with whom we are seeking to accredit our students for their speaking and listening ability. Our outward-looking focus led us to engage with more educational research than ever before: Willingham's

work on memory and Kuepper-Tetzel's research on cognitive load theory informed the structuring of these sessions. In line with our academy focus on the relationship between vocabulary and writing, we built on whole-staff CPD with David Didau and introduced more opportunities for "talking like a scholar": explicit modelling of tier 3 vocabulary, faculty expectations for the quality of verbal responses, an emphasis on 'elaborative interrogation', and increased membership and subscriptions to academic journals. (Didau [2014] and Quigley [2018]). In addition, by removing the concept of "free periods" and replacing certain periods with whole-cohort structured study, we were able to help students manage their non-contact time effectively.

Outside of these explicitly managed free periods, we also supported students during their private study. We had to ensure that students could effectively transition from year 11, ready to manage their own workloads. We built on and extended our current provision (library and subject study areas) by introducing a staffed and monitored silent working room in the run-up to exams.

Student response was hugely positive – they appreciated having a place to immerse themselves in their learning and an opportunity to manage their time and workload effectively. They commented on the 'academic atmosphere' and 'a dedicated space to concentrate away from the rest of the school'. This represented a significant investment and commitment to our core values and vision for the sixth form.

We also knew that it was time to spotlight the sixth form as part of our school improvement plan, where we were focused on raising our A/A* percentage. We started by dedicating our whole staff professional development on sixth form teaching and learning. Despite outstanding practice in individual classrooms, we needed a consistent, coherent approach to sixth form teaching and learning which built on our current practice – a 'no complacency or excuses' approach has always governed the way we do things at Brooke Weston. We began with an audit of our current practice and experience: this highlighted our predominantly young staff body who were growing their experience of sixth form teaching. Our philosophy is that excellent teaching and learning begins with excellent subject knowledge. We needed our staff to feel as confident delivering and assessing A-levels as they did GCSE. Through a series of twilight CPD sessions, we shared and celebrated best practice. This served the dual purpose of effectively talent-managing our staff body and providing tangible methods and strategies for stretch and challenge, flipped learning, modelling and questioning. We looked at embedding "thinking hard" strategies from PiXL (building on Willingham's research) and trained both staff and students in targeted "how to revise"

sessions (we looked at reducing, first to a page, then a paragraph and finally a sentence, representing the information in a different way such as a picture, students looked at different cognitive theories including spacing and interleaving, etc.) which we then shared with parents. Within these sessions, students collaborated with peers outside of their friendship groups, working on deliberate practice of various methods and tools to support their revision. As a trust, we also offered financial and time incentives to encourage our staff to become examiners. We now have a large number of examiners and moderators who bring additional rigour and robustness to our assessments.

For the last three years, we have actively engaged with learning development groups as part of our whole school CPD programme: groups which facilitate collaboration and expertise across a range of educational themes. By dedicating one theme to sixth form T&L, we have been able to develop our understanding of the retention of knowledge and effective use of cognitive processes in an educational context (Weinstein, Sumeracki, & Caviglioli, 2019). The passionate reflections so far have been inspiring to hear: teachers talking about teaching will always be a good thing. Staff have shared their enthusiasm for research-led strategies and said that they have 'genuinely transformed the way they deliver the curriculum' and 'techniques such as spacing and retrieval practice have supported their teaching by design rather than simply intuition'.

In line with our growing sixth form, we also expanded our team to include a dedicated raising standards leader (RSL) who focused on increased parental communication, more forensic analysis of data and a streamlined approach to early intervention in sixth form. One of the major changes this year was to introduce a dedicated 'year 13 mock results day' in line with practice in year 11. As well as foreshadowing the importance of A-level results day, the SLT and sixth form team were also able to hold individual one-on-one meetings with each year 13 student, tailoring our support for the last term. Students met with leaders who had not previously taught them, thus they were able to provide a 'critical friend' in order to offer new support and strategies. Therefore, leaders were able to make swift and impactful changes where necessary. Each student was provided with a clear and tangible action plan which was revisited throughout the term – a personalised strategy inspired by our ethos of "is this good enough for my child?"

The commonality across these strategies is a relentless attention on the sixth form. In an educational climate of such high-stakes GCSE accountability, we recognised the potential danger with year 13: despite our best intentions, teacher time and energy are finite resources and we had to ensure that we lived and breathed our vision for sixth form through every strategy, choice and priority. We now await results day with a sense of optimism, knowing we have made fundamental grassroots changes to our culture and climate in the sixth form.

Maximising memory: a whole-school focus on applying cognitive science

Elizabeth Francis,
Meols Cop High School

Elizabeth Francis, assistant headteacher learning & teaching, Meols Cop High School, shows how they are investigating and applying research on the best methods of learning

At Meols Cop High School we have, despite funding cuts and strains on the school's budget, continued to ensure that we prioritise staff CPD. We not only invest money in this, but ensure that staff are given adequate time to engage in personalised and high-quality professional learning.

One area that we decided to prioritise for all staff was deepening their understanding of the work of cognitive scientists on educational practice. With changes to the KS4 curriculum and the increasing demands of GCSE specifications, we knew that having a body of staff who had a better grasp of how memory works and the impact of cognitive load theory would potentially have a positive impact on student outcomes. As a result, we decided to write a CPD plan in the summer of 2018 using the EEF's implementation plan guidance, which would develop the knowledge and understanding of staff and students about memory and the best methods of learning. Influenced by the work of John Dunlosky, John Sweller, Paul Kirschner and the Learning Scientists, we wrote an implementation plan for a two-year cycle of CPD. The programme would be research-based, sustained over time with expert input, and include individualised enquiry to enable each member of staff to develop their classroom practice. The implementation plan was focused on three key areas – *teacher knowledge and understanding*, *attainment* and *learner behaviours* – and included a range of short, medium and long-term intended outcomes.

Implementation outcomes

Short term

- Staff demonstrate an understanding of the science about memory
- Staff identify areas within their own practice where they are not considering cognitive load
- Learning hubs created to work on aspects of memory

Medium term

- Staff identify areas of their practice to modify
- Staff undertake further research and development, through hubs, to upskill their chosen focus
- Staff carry out peer observations – plan, review, reflect and evaluate

Long term

- Specific changes to teachers' classroom practice
- Curriculum planning which reflects learning
- Lesson planning which reflects learning
- Skills and practices embedded

The plan would begin with the intended outcomes – improved attainment in KS4 – and would provide valuable CPD for staff, underpinned by clear knowledge and understanding, to develop their classroom practice. Working backwards from this point, we came up with the 'active ingredients' of what would be needed over the following two years to ensure that these intended outcomes were met.

Implementation active ingredients

Training

» Training sessions held across two academic years delivered to all staff. Sessions to incorporate both the theory and examples/reality of classroom practice.
» Training to be front-loaded with identification of issues and theoretical solutions, and followed up with practical sessions/strategies.

Classroom practice

» Training to result in development of individual classroom practice
» Evaluation after an extended cycle – 4/5 terms

Support

» Learning hubs
» Peer observations
» Memory buddies

The CPD began with staff engaging in a piece of research by John Dunlosky: *Strengthening the Student Toolkit*. It was deemed important to get staff to engage in the research that was out there and facilitate time for them to do this. Whenever training involves reading a piece of evidence, we have ensured that staff have the time and direction to complete this reading and develop their own understanding through the creation of allocated reading time each week. This takes place in a morning briefing slot of 20 minutes each week. Initially, this involved reflecting upon the work of The Learning Scientists in their book *Understanding How we Learn* as well as *Memorable Teaching* by Peps Mccrea.

The first year of the CPD plan was front-loaded with 'expert' input from staff whose understanding was already well-developed, as they had previously researched the area independently, as well as input from educational researchers at local HEIs. Addressing different models of memory and evaluating the implications of these in the classroom gave all staff a way of thinking about how their own classroom practice might be developed through a better understanding of the workings of memory, particularly the limited capacity of working memory. For example, in Spanish one teacher is looking at the 'routine practice' of speaking grids to reduce cognitive load and subsequently reduce anxiety about speaking in a foreign language.

"Long-term memory is now viewed as the central, dominant structure of human cognition. Everything we see, hear, and think about is dependent on and influenced by our long-term memory." (Clark, Kirschner and Sweller, 2012). This summary of the fundamentals of the research became the focus for staff developing their own enquiry questions. Focusing on different methods, such as retrieval practice, dual coding, modelling and routine practice, to transfer information into the long-term memory, they were able to come up with a clear question they wanted to answer about their classroom practice. For a few years we have had an evidence-based approach to our appraisal system and using the framework of PICO questions (as written about by Dr Gary Jones), staff are able to research an area of their classroom practice and find the evidence to show it is actually working:

P – pupil or problem: How would you describe the group of pupils or problem?

I – intervention: What are you planning to do with your pupils?

C – comparison: What is the alternative to the intervention/action/innovation?

O – outcomes: What are the effects of the intervention/action/innovation?

As part of the front-loaded expert input, we addressed areas such as the worked example effect, retrieval practice, schemas and the activation of prior knowledge. The expectation was that staff would create an enquiry, linked to developing their practice, to ensure that long-term memory was placed

at the heart of all they do. What resulted were some fascinating enquiry questions such as:

- Can the use of weekly recall quizzes and exploiting the hypercorrection effect lead to greater retention in long-term memory for year 10 students?
- How can the worked example effect be applied to the introduction and application of GCSE questions in KS4 history?
- Will a combination of dual coding and spaced retrieval enable students in year 11 set 7 to remember poetry quotations, the poem's title and name? And will this act as a prompt for analysis compared with students that are not exposed to the trial?

These questions form the basis for personalised CPD for a two-year cycle and are then used to create a series of learning and research hubs led by a research lead. These allow for shared experiences among colleagues – research, discussion, collaborative planning, peer observation, lesson study and sharing good practice.

Staff enquiry questions form the basis for personalised CPD: a two-year cycle with a series of learning and research hubs involving discussion, collaborative planning, peer observation, lesson study and sharing good practice

Staff have focused on developing an aspect of their classroom practice linked to a central theme and at the end of the year, through a celebration event, we will hear what the impact has been and how they plan to continue to develop or refine this over the following academic year. Having looked in detail at the research that exists around the workings of memory and cognitive load theory, we will develop this further in 2019/20 by looking at additional factors affecting memory, all of which are relevant to the students we teach.

The overarching theme of memory can be linked to all curriculum areas, and we allow staff to refine this in a way that applies to their specific subject in their classroom. In this way the work of cognitive scientists is becoming embedded into the daily practice of our teachers, and ultimately having an impact on their students' learning.

References and further reading

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Cognitive Load Theory: Research that teachers really need to understand (Centre for Statistics Education & Evaluation, August 2017)

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Principles of Instruction, Research based Strategies That All teachers Should Know, Barak Rosenshine (American Educator, Spring 2012)

Your SSAT network. Your ideas.

The Relationship Management Team, SSAT

A fundamental element of the SSAT network is giving schools the opportunity to explore, learn and share fresh ideas. To give schools an insight into what is happening across the network, we highlight some innovative approaches, themes, tips and resources that we have uncovered over the course of the last term. SSAT's team of relationship managers visit schools up and down the country on a daily basis, meeting school leaders and capturing the innovative ideas and approaches that could support other schools in the network.

ONE SCHOOL. ONE TEAM.

Schools typically provide a diverse environment, a huge melting pot for people of all walks of life. So building bonds between students, staff, parents and other key stakeholders is important to create a nurturing environment. We have recently seen an excellent example from one secondary school in Yorkshire that uses school mealtimes to create closer links. The school has developed a varied, international lunch menu for students and teachers, which it uses to enhance the opportunity for teachers and students to eat together.

This approach has had the impact of creating a cohesive, relaxed environment, with wellbeing at its heart, and we think is particularly impressive due to the challenging circumstances of the school's catchment area.

RAISING ASPIRATIONS

At a time when many schools are reluctantly reducing creative subjects in their curriculum offering, we have seen an example of a secondary school with a high intake of students from disadvantaged backgrounds providing extracurricular 'super learner' clubs. These enable students to experience activities ranging from sports to creative and performing arts. It also offers a variety of unique subclubs such as yoga, sign language and knitting.

Evidence has shown that access to the super learner clubs has enabled students to develop their knowledge, skills and cultural capital. It has also raised students' aspirations and expectations of themselves and helped to build confidence in the most vulnerable learners. We feel this is a great example of a school exposing students to deep experiences in their learning and supporting the aim of social justice – an area SSAT is championing with its Fighting for Deep Social Justice campaign.

NURTURING AND PICKING APPLES FROM THE TREE

With recruitment proving to be a nationwide challenge for schools, we have come across a number of schools that have thought differently about possible solutions. One approach that has particular impact is schools creating links with teaching courses at universities. This has meant that those schools have had access to a fresh crop of NQTs. In particular, one school offers experience in the classroom for undergraduates, which has created closer links and helped to nurture talented future staff.

CHARACTER AND CONFIDENCE

A number of schools are putting a lot more focus on character education. Many schools will already have a set of values that they embed into everything they do. However, a number of schools tell us they would like to develop this even more. The SSAT Student Leadership Accreditation and Pupil Leadership Accreditation both support schools in reaching this aim by providing a ready-made framework that develops students' personal and social skills. Once accredited, each student receives a certificate signed by SSAT's Chief Executive Sue Williamson, and in one case recently a student was invited to the SSAT office to be personally presented with his Gold award by Sue for an outstanding portfolio of activities.

Please contact **RMTeam@ssatuk.co.uk** for further information about any of the initiatives, to share your own story, or to explore other school improvement opportunities.

How to achieve and maintain high performance in MFL

Hayley Marston,
Bristnall Hall Academy

Hayley Marston, area leader of modern foreign languages at Bristnall Hall Academy, demonstrates how specific strategies based on particular difficulties helped BHA students flourish in language.

Bristnall Hall Academy is an 11-18 academy situated in Sandwell, a local authority with one of the highest levels of deprivation nationally. Students tend to join our academy with low prior attainment levels. For example, the prior attainment for students sitting their GCSE examinations in summer 2018 was significantly below the national average in several of key areas including reading, writing and mathematics. Furthermore, the cohort was in the top 20% of all schools nationally for both the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or with an Educational Health and Care Plan (7.7%) and for disadvantage with 43.3% of pupils being eligible for free school meals.

The challenge

Between 2014-2016, MFL results at BHA had plateaued, with 60-66% of a cohort comprising 100 students achieving a grade C or above. In 2017, results dipped to 42% A*-C with a similar number of students. This was the final year of the old specification. Our challenge was therefore not just to improve the outcomes in MFL at our academy, but to do this with students sitting the new GCSE.

The new specification called for students to be able to use language more independently and spontaneously as it moved away from 60% controlled assessment to 100% examination. Despite this, we were still determined to enter a large cohort of students which posed the difficulty of changing students' attitudes from "I can't do this" to "I can do this".

The journey

Planning is vitally important when a GCSE specification changes. Therefore, we kept up to date with key changes as they were announced prior to the specifications being published. Our key stage 3 schemes of work were revised, concentrating on delivering the GCSE themes from year 7 to year 9, which we then repeated in greater depth at key stage 4. Once specifications were published (we chose AQA) and sample exam papers appeared, we immediately began teaching using 'GCSE style' activities. We implemented photo cards as prompts for speaking and writing right from year 7, with translation activities, overtly teaching grammar and ensuring students could move language from one context to another. Our writing activities stemmed from bullet points, and the use of target language increased across the department.

As a department, we worked collaboratively. We called our work "the three D's: Decide – Do – Develop". All new strategies were approached as a team, introducing new challenges and ways of learning to our students. We persevered, and this attitude seemed to transfer to our students. We knew that the new GCSE was more challenging for our students, but we never told

them this. We simply taught the themes, and embedded GCSE skills and exam practice throughout.

Writing and speaking became a huge strength in the department as we adopted the Pearson Progression Steps to produce our own success criteria, almost giving students a 'tick sheet' of language they should consider using to achieve each grade. This ensured that tenses, personal opinions, negative structures and even subjunctive phrases were seen regularly in students' work.

In year 11, we received bespoke training from AQA, concentrating on how the writing and speaking elements would be marked. This training helped enormously as we were able to focus on what the students needed to produce in their exam to reach their potential. Three members of the department also became examiners for AQA, marking both the speaking and writing papers in summer 2018. This experience was incredibly valuable as it allowed us to become experts in two papers and know exactly what students needed to do to achieve the best marks possible. It also provided a great insight into the language, idioms and structures that other schools teach their students.

As well as getting to grips with the specification, we were fortunate that in both key stage 3 and 4 our students were all taught at the same time, thus enabling us to set our own classes. Key stage 3 have five, 55-minute lessons a fortnight and key stage 4 have six. This commitment to languages allowed us to have sets that are fluid, ensuring that we can target and intervene as necessary. In key stage 4, sets were changed regularly, following assessments and mock exams. After mock exams early in the spring term, we produced a target group of students who were borderline grade 4/5 with the idea of teaching strategies specifically to ensure these students moved to a grade 5. We narrowed language down, teaching two or three phrases in each tense which could be used in different contexts. We also identified different ways of expressing and justifying opinions, and taught language which allowed students to show a variety of vocabulary. Students in this group also had plenty of one-on-one general conversation practice with our MFL learning support practitioner.

Intervention sessions became compulsory at Bristnall Hall last year with MFL intervention taking place fortnightly. We ensured that sessions were well-planned and were based on weaknesses demonstrated by students

in their most recent exams or assessments. Students soon realised that these sessions were important and that they would benefit by attending.

A revision weekend at Edgmond Hall in Newport, Shropshire was also enjoyed (!) by approximately 50 students. Learning away from the classroom and in the beautiful countryside allowed students to involve themselves in planned, differentiated and targeted revision sessions alongside their peers in a relaxed atmosphere. Building positive relationships and confidence just before the speaking exam was also invaluable.

Problems encountered

Workload increased by having to create new resources and schemes of work and to plan new lessons from scratch, all of which was very time consuming. We used OneDrive as a department to share our MFL resources, and collaborative planning in our fortnightly MFL CPD session allowed planning and strategies to be shared and discussed.

On the rare occasion that staff absence occurred, we decided that year 10 and 11 would always be taught by a specialist. Therefore, if a member of staff were absent, their group was split up and put into other classes, which is another advantage of teaching all sets at the same time.

A student seeing their own progress was the biggest motivator, particularly for students who had previously been disengaged

Not knowing grade boundaries was an obstacle faced in teaching this course for the first time. We estimated grade boundaries for the purpose of data drops, but for the students and MFL teachers we concentrated on percentages. After each exam, students wrote their total percentage on the front of their exercise books, and then set themselves a personal target for their next mock exam.

Despite a lack of motivation from a small minority of students, we never gave up. We focused on our teaching by planning motivating, enjoyable lessons and celebrating their progress. A student seeing their own personal progress was the biggest motivator. By March, students were increasingly noticing their progress and acknowledging their success. This was particularly motivating for any students who had previously been disengaged.

Outcomes

Summer 2018 brought with it the best MFL results Bristnall Hall Academy had seen in 20 years. With a cohort of 98 students, 87% achieved a grade 4-9 with 62% achieving

grades 5-9; 16.3% of students received higher grades 7-9. These outcomes exceeded national average 4-9 (70.5%).

Resources we found to be effective and supported our teaching were *Exampro* (kindly provided by our trust), *Active Teach* (Pearson), revision guides and workbooks (Pearson) for each student (funded by PP) and our Edgmond Hall revision weekend (our academy subsidised the majority of this cost).

Continuing challenges

Undoubtedly, we still face challenges – particularly with our current year 11s studying French. We are finding that the French role-plays, photo cards and bullet points can be more difficult for students to access than the Spanish versions. We are continually developing our strategies to ensure that more students achieve higher grades.

The department is focused on improving outcomes for higher attainers, which remains a challenge for us and one that we hope to meet by summer 2020. Strategies for this academic year include having EBACC form groups. We currently have Spanish tutor groups where we can focus on developing spontaneous speech, work on role-plays, photo cards and conversation questions. As a result, we have at least 60 minutes extra per week to devote to MFL learning. We have also increased the use of our success criteria, highlighting the importance of having more complex language, idiomatic phrases and a wider variety of tenses and vocabulary in pieces of writing.

Reflecting and sharing – top tips

Reflecting on what we did and its impact, we have identified the following strategies as the most important:

- Bring key stage 4 into key stage 3.
- Collaborative planning and resource making.
- Know the specification, what is needed and what is not.
- Take time to evaluate and reflect (we meet informally most lunchtimes).
- Positivity and resilience.
- Support each other.
- Set by ability from year 7 and block teaching, allowing for fluid groups.
- Identify MFL cohort as a department in year 9 and decide on tiering for all students. (Support from SLT is vital in this and in gaining sufficient time with students.)
- Become an examiner.

Research-informed professional planning through collaborative group work

Becka Lynch and colleagues,
Heathfield Community College

Three years ago, Heathfield Community College decided to take a different approach to continued professional learning (CPL). At that time, teaching and learning had been refocused around four 'pillars of learning': *challenge*, *feedback*, *independence* and *engagement*, a synthesis of key ideas inspired by Dylan Wiliam and Griffith and Burns. While the pillars were very successful and created clarity around teaching and learning, the method of delivering the CPL for their implementation received mixed feedback.

Research from David Berliner shows that expert teachers have a wealth of experience that could be utilised in a school context, and need far less specific instruction than novice teachers. This explained why the delivery of those first CPL sessions were not completely fit for purpose: 87% of Heathfield staff are teachers with five or more years of teaching, so their expertise would have been better utilised if a different approach was adopted. If that approach simultaneously ended an over-reliance on SLT to deliver whole-school CPL, it would have been even more beneficial.

We concluded that for effective delivery, for the pillars to be embedded properly in teaching and learning and for CPL to meet the needs of all teachers, the key component required was a depth of time. To implement this, we recognised that the given time needed to go beyond the hours already allocated in the yearly CPL diet teachers received, to include hours in their regular working week. Subsequently, as reflected in Paul Garvey's *Talk for Teaching*, each member of staff was given the opportunity to teach one hour less as part of their fortnightly teaching allocation. In return, they would meet with a small group of colleagues from a variety of subjects at various points in their teaching career. This would become known as collaboration time – a protected hour during the school day for teachers to engage in a professional dialogue and work collaboratively.

Implementation

In the first year, virtually all teachers opted into a collaboration team, which was assigned to them as part of the timetabling process before the academic year began. The teams were also provided with an agenda, created by the college's pedagogical practice team or 'ped team', a group of teachers interested in reading and applying research to everyday classroom practice. This evolved into a cyclical process: teachers would take part in whole-school twilight CPL at the start of the term (often also led by the ped team) which set the theme for the term, linked to the pillars. This would be followed up in collaboration, which would also focus on the theme in three meetings, across a six-week cycle:

- **Meeting 1:** focus on research and provide a platform for teachers to discuss how this could translate to their own classroom practice. Over the last three years, teachers have had the opportunity to explore a range of research including: Allison and Tharby on modelling and scaffolding

work that challenges all pupils; Mark Roberts' *Rethinking Boys Engagement*; the work on *Embedding Formative Assessment* by Dylan Wiliam, SSAT and the EEF; and Alex Quigley's ideas on *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*. In the latest cycle, the discussion planned for collaboration meeting 1 uses an opinion piece by Caroline Creaby (director of Sandringham Research School) on *How research can help address students' recurring mistakes*, as its stimulus.

- **Meeting 2:** research in action. Teachers use research within their practice, for example by sharing and evaluating lesson plans in their collaboration teams, completing peer observations or carrying out 'book looks' to find and evaluate evidence of the research in practice.
- **The final meeting:** time for reflection, for teachers to discuss within their teams how the research has impacted their teaching and using part of the protected hour to complete a personal reflection blog (which also helps to inform their appraisal).

The reflection blog is the only formal way in which collaboration is monitored, as a key component from its inception has been the professional trust placed in the teachers. Meeting 2, for example, sometimes requires teachers to observe one another (which cannot be done in the allocated collaboration hour as none of the team is teaching). Teachers organise the observations among themselves at a time that is convenient and suits their professional needs; but there is no requirement for this time to be formally agreed and there are no collaboration 'drop ins' by members of SLT. This has helped develop an ethos of trust, whereby teachers have the space to try new things, make mistakes and be open about their practices with their colleagues. The informal nature of collaboration is typified by the location that teams choose to meet in – although every team is timetabled a classroom to utilise for this, many choose to meet in the staff room and discuss educational research and their own practice over a cup of caffeine.

Impact

The impact on our staff of working and learning together in these ways has been transformational. CPL is now continuous and no longer an isolated event that result in few actions or long-term change. Lesson observations across the college require line managers to state whether or not they have observed aspects of the four pillars as either an area of strength or an area of development (this is the only way lessons are judged). Data shows that, since starting collaboration in 2016-17, more teachers have become confident in incorporating the pillars into their lesson planning and delivery, leading to greater consistency of teaching and learning across the college. At the end of the academic year 2017-18, *Challenge* was seen as a strength in 75% of lesson observations, *Engagement* a strength in 79%, and *Independence and Feedback* in 66%.

Unsurprisingly, we use the lesson observation data to inform future CPL and collaboration cycles. For example, although more teachers last year demonstrated that the pillars of *Challenge*, *Engagement* and *Independence* were an area of strength than in the year before, *Feedback* was only seen as a strength in 66% of lessons, whereas the figure at the end of 2016-17 was 72%. Consequently, we can infer that teachers would benefit from engaging with more research linked to different types of feedback in the current academic year and have built that into this year's agendas.

The habits fostered through collaboration of evaluating our own and each other's teaching has created a greater sense of

openness across the college and a genuine 'open-door' policy. This has also supported staff wellbeing, particularly as the introduction of collaboration has coincided with GCSE and A-level specification changes across all subjects. Teachers can share experiences, barriers and methods of overcoming them beyond their own departments, providing an additional platform to share concerns and ensuring that no one struggles in isolation.

We would also argue that having one hour protected time on a timetable to explore the academia of teaching and learning rather than having an additional hour of teaching, has aided the retention of teachers at the college.

Having one hour protected time each fortnight to explore the academia of teaching and learning rather than having an additional hour of teaching, has aided teacher retention

Logistically, we acknowledge that this is a costly model. However, we strongly believe that the cost is an investment in teaching staff, aiding our continual striving towards excellent teaching and learning. We could argue that there is a likely correlation between the implementation of collaboration and the college's improved GCSE results over the last two years. Furthermore, collaboration is valued by teachers themselves. In a 2019 staff voice survey, teachers comments included: "[It is] useful to discuss what colleagues are doing in their subject versus my approach" and "Meeting with other teachers from other subjects is so informative... We always leave the session with new ideas to try from each other. Sometimes ideas are so simple and yet so effective."

Although collaboration is now common practice at the college as every teacher belongs to a team, we continually evaluate it and make amendments where necessary so that it remains fit for purpose. Following feedback from teachers, we have adapted the set discussion questions during Meeting 1 to include questions specifically aimed at middle leaders and those teaching predominantly KS5.

We remain aware that some elements of collaboration are not perfect for all. During a recent peer review of our CPL model, a local school asked us how we ensured that all teachers fully adhered to the collaboration agendas so that there were no "rogue teams". This was an excellent question, considering that our ideals of self-regulation could lead to inconsistency of delivery. Our response to them was that we don't know for sure, but we see groups meeting in the staffroom, hear teachers talking about their collaboration meetings and witness research being implemented on learning walks. As a result of timetabling restrictions, collaboration teams change from year to year, naturally changing their dynamics, which helps protect against persistent rogue teams.

Another ongoing balance that has to be addressed is the subject-specific vs broader pedagogy: although staff voice surveys show that most support and value collaboration, some teachers would still prefer to use all CPL time for department meetings. At Heathfield, we value the importance of subject-specific pedagogy, but we feel that this has outlets in department meetings already and during subject-specific CPL weeks which run in conjunction with our six – week collaboration agendas. We believe there is equal value in meeting with experienced colleagues outside your department for an alternative perspective and an 'outsiders' evaluation of your practice.

Three years on, collaboration is embedded in our ethos and values at Heathfield Community College. We seek "a community culture of high aspiration, underpinned by collaboration and compassion" (one of Heathfield's goals). This is now reflected in our structures as well as our habits of working.

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How SSAT can support your school improvement journey

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

Examples of our professional development and school improvement support include:

- **Curriculum intent and quality assurance seminars (autumn 2019)**
  Using the *Four Pillars of Principled Curriculum Design*, review your current curriculum provision and identify areas for development
- **Embedding Formative Assessment Programme**
  Improve teacher practice and help your students make two months' extra progress
- **Coaching**
  Tailored one-to-one support and bespoke group training
- **Improving whole school attendance and punctuality**
  Identify new approaches to improve attendance and punctuality rates
- **School perception surveys**
  Analyse how staff, learners and parents feel about your school
- **Leaders for the Future**
  Develop the leadership skills, knowledge and mindsets of teachers showing leadership potential
- **Peer Review**
  Work with other school leaders to self-evaluate and plan for further improvement
- **Department for Education's National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML) Modules**
  Become an accredited delivery partner and offer this middle leadership training across your school and networks
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