

Vulnerable schools with inconsistent results

Case study school 4

School context

This two-form entry school provides for pupils in the local area. The school was created in 2004 from a merger of the previous infant and junior schools. Practice, culture and ethos differed between the two former schools. English results were stronger for Key Stage 2 but mathematics results were stronger for Key Stage 1. Standards at level 4+ in English and mathematics fell below the 55% floor target in 2007 and 2008 with girls' performance in mathematics being particularly weak.

Barriers to improvement

- There was a large turnover of staff at the point of the merger, and a large number of inexperienced staff in place. The deputy headteacher was appointed as acting headteacher which took her away from classroom teaching.
- The merger of the schools meant that there were no consistent systems in place, and in many cases there were few systems at all. High mobility among pupils presented a further challenge.

The school-based issues – what needed to change?

Priorities for school improvement

- Improving progress and standards.
- Consistent and positive behaviour management with a focus on learning over behaviour and on behaviour for learning.
- Increasing accountability of teachers, with raised expectations of pupils.
- The development of skills for accurate teacher assessment.
- Development of systems for tracking, monitoring and evaluation to involve leadership at all levels.

What was done?

- The school entered the Improving Schools Programme (ISP). This replaced traditional staff meetings with professional development meetings focusing on staff learning, including, layered curricular targets, 'working' walls, questioning techniques, assessment for learning and setting up and developing the mathematics area.
- The ISP Raising Achievement Plan was a new, tighter document focusing on the priority areas for development relating to attainment.
- Subject leaders led hands-on staff meetings and attended planning meetings. The headteacher and deputy headteacher supported planning by scrutinising plans and attending meetings.

- Quality First Teaching was developed across the school, guided group work was implemented across all abilities and children were supported to work independently. Triangulated and 'squared' observation encouraged staff to reflect and develop effective practice. This involved teachers planning together, one teacher would teach and two observers would observe, discuss and feed back. This enabled development of good teaching and supported development of staff in recognising elements of good lessons and giving feedback.
- Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning was used to complement and build upon the positive ethos which had been developed to ensure all staff were making sure behaviour did not impact on learning. This approach encouraged children to take more responsibility for their learning, which ensured passive learners, often girls, were required to be in the learning zone and making contributions. The development of collaborative and paired working also encouraged a supportive team ethos.
- Half-termly pupil progress meetings were set up and developed. Provision was mapped and support deployed according to findings at pupil progress meetings.
- The school asked to be part of the Communication, Language and Literacy Development project and received support for implementing *Letters and Sounds*.
- The school worked with a consultant to develop a tracking system and monitoring strategies such as work scrutiny, pupil conferencing and lesson observation. The data was used to target groups of children with a range of intervention strategies including *One-to-One Tuition* and *Springboard*.
- The school started using assessing pupils' progress (APP) with all children in all subjects. Higher level teaching assistants were used to support this, and the data informed the pupil progress meetings, making them more accurate.
- Developing leadership across the school, e.g. inclusion team having a more sustainable focus on learning, particularly for children with special educational needs, from ethnic minority backgrounds and children who are 'vulnerable'.

What has been the overall impact?

- There are lower than average achievement gaps between pupils on free school meals (FSM) and their non-FSM peers.
- Improved tracking, analysis, provision mapping and support from the inclusion team has reduced the impact of mobility of children and staff.
- Children enjoy mathematics and are enthusiastic about learning. Pupils quotes include:
'We would never have linked pirates with maths, it didn't feel like maths, it made maths even better I liked it more.'
'We found our own way, we felt we were learning more doing it yourself than sitting here being told how to do it.'
'Being outdoors is more adventurous, inspiring and you remember it more if you have that experience.'

The full case study is available on the What Works Well website at www.whatworkswell.standards.dcsf.gov.uk. Please follow this link and then search for 'Leading on Improvement'.