

Good schools with the capacity to be ‘great’

Case study school 7

School context

The school serves a village catchment as well as attracting pupils from the outskirts of a nearby city and town. The catchment is best described as mixed, but with a higher than average number of pupils coming from the higher socio-economic groups.

In 2006 the school was characterised by:

- good progress for most pupils
- above the national average for attainment at Key Stage 2
- Ofsted grade 2 for overall effectiveness, with a mix of grade 2s and 3s in achievement and standards, and leadership and management (inspected in June 2005)
- a high level achieving at or above national expectations in reading/mathematics but fewer in writing
- A curriculum segmented into individual subjects and heavily reliant on published schemes of work
- a learning environment that needed substantial investment and updating.

Barriers to improvement

- The staff were a well established team but many had served in the same year group for many years and so had become ingrained in one way of working.
- The leadership of the school, while producing high standards, had not changed for a significant amount of time – new approaches could open new avenues for staff and children.
- The learning environment needed substantial updating.

The school-based issues – what needed to change?

- To improve writing across the school.
- To increase opportunities for cross-curricular teaching – applying and extending appropriate cross-curricular links while retaining the high quality of subject and skill-based teaching.
- Update and remodel the learning environment to make the children into more independent learners.
- Implement assessment for learning strategies.

What was done?

- Working with the literacy subject leader we developed a school approach to writing that incorporated national resources, e.g. *Letters and Sounds* and was based around each class having a ‘writing pathway’ that showed the children how a unit of work would develop – what the small steps for learning were and providing prompts for the final piece of writing. The children were also involved in peer assessment. This was developed over two years and is now used for all the literacy units of work taught from Year 1 to Year 6.

- Over three years the whole curriculum was rewritten for the needs of our children. Where units worked well and links existed these were used and expanded; where new units were needed these were developed and evaluated until we reached areas of learning that engaged our learners. For example, a new unit was developed in the mixed Reception/Year 1 class entitled 'In the park'. The final unit uses the local area and its recreation space along with areas of the school grounds to explore the theme fully. A clear progression has been used with Key Stage 1 units developing from Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision (as in the example above) and upper Key Stage 2 units working towards a more subject-specific focus in preparation for Key Stage 3. This is now in line with the Rose Review recommendations.
- The EYFS approach was first moved across Key Stage 1 with far more teacher and teaching assistant lead group and guided activities used – this allows focused skill development to take place.
- A range of models have been used to share and transfer practice:
 - the headteacher and deputy headteacher modelling pedagogy across the school.
 - headteacher involvement in wider support for others in curriculum development.
- The school has undergone remodelling of work space to create learning areas that facilitate the new models of working and provide bright and open spaces that are conducive to learning.
- Training using National Strategies resources was given to all staff on Assessment for Learning and this is now embedded in our daily work.

What has been the overall impact?

- Children in school are working at high levels at all stages: EYFS/Key Stage 1/Key Stage 2 based on units of purposeful work that develop skills needed in everyday life.
- An outstanding grading at Ofsted (February 2008).
- The use of the writing pathway and a focus on cross-curricular writing has been beneficial across school. For the past three years the percentage of children achieving level 2B+ at Key Stage 1 has been an average 84% compared with 59% nationally and at level 3 36% compared with 12% nationally. At Key Stage 2 80% achieved level 4 + and 32% level 5 compared with 67% and 19% nationally – this trend is expected to continue as strategies work their way through school.
- There is a culture of learning together – e.g. when staff have recently moved year groups those who taught the class before or who have expertise have supported those new to the class. Literacy and numeracy subject leaders support other staff through staff meetings, one-to-one support, planning and work scrutiny. The leadership team are active around school in offering support as needed, e.g. in curriculum development.

The school has actively supported others in a number of ways.

- The deputy headteacher has been a leading teacher for the county's National Strategy leading teacher programme.
- The deputy headteacher has also supported mathematics subject leaders in other schools in developing their role and has led area INSET.
- The headteacher has worked with other heads and advisors in supporting curriculum development across the county.
- The Early Years teacher has supported colleagues from other schools pointed in our direction by the school adviser.

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'.