

Good schools with the capacity to be ‘great’

Case study school 8

School context

This larger than average school was opened in 1998. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including pupils with a statement of special educational needs, is similar to that found nationally. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, but a significant number come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds and have English as an additional language. The pressure of rapid growth in numbers had initially made securing school improvement processes difficult, but in recent years the school has improved rapidly. This case study focuses on the school’s journey from being good to being a ‘great’ school capable of sharing highly effective practice.

Barriers to continual improvement

- There was a reluctance from some schools in the area to work collaboratively to share practice.
- There was a feeling that staff could become saturated by national demands and local accountability which put additional pressures on their time.
- Changes in staffing provided challenges to sustaining excellent practice.

The school-based issues – what needed to change?

- Pupil performance tracking and provision mapping needed to be further refined to ensure that the precise learning needs of pupils were identified, and appropriate pedagogical approaches put in place for all pupils to accelerate progress across the whole school.
- Further development of confidence of all staff to share practice within and without the school.
- The senior leadership team (SLT) needed to help staff to focus on the most important actions required to improve provision and practice.
- There was a need to broaden the curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils and to make meaningful links between subjects which add relevance, interest and enjoyment to learning.

What was done?

- Strong partnerships were built with local initial teacher training institutions and joint activities took place, e.g. Bachelor of Education students visited the school to find out about teaching *Letters and Sounds*, working alongside teachers in Reception and Key Stage 1 classes. As well as developing the knowledge and understanding of the students in the teaching of reading, this gave teachers confidence in their own practice.
- The headteacher worked with other local headteachers to build strong networks of support built on respect and trust.
- Self-evaluation systems were further strengthened with a continual and relentless focus on improving learning for every child.

- A dedicated period of 50 minutes has been established every week called 'Barriers to learning' when staff work with children identified as falling behind and/or work with colleagues to plan effective pedagogy to meet the needs of all pupils. Strategies such as the 'Secret agents group' and the 'WALT Queen' were developed to further involve children in their own learning.
- Staff accessed further training and support from local authority consultants. For example, the school took part in a project called 'From screen to page' which was designed to improve boys' writing through the use of video.
- Staff worked with another cluster of schools on a project to further develop assessment for learning practice across the school.
- The headteacher became a Local Leader of Education (LLE).

What has been the overall impact?

- The school has developed excellent practice at all levels which is being shared both within the school and from school to school. For example, the headteacher works as an LLE supporting the SLT of another school: a teacher is working as a strategy support teacher, using the lesson study model to develop practice and improve learning with a partner teacher in another school. The deputy headteacher is providing support to other schools in developing Assessment for Learning.
- The most recent Ofsted inspection in July 2009 judged overall effectiveness of the school to be outstanding. The report noted that the well above average standards at Year 6 had been sustained over time.

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'.