



## CASE STUDY REPORT

# Collaborative paired Assessment for Learning (AfL) driven swift school improvement

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*This study was originally published in 2009 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.*

## Abstract

**Background:** The purpose of the study was to improve teaching and learning in a deprived area by introducing Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches, and measure the impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership.

**Aims:** The main aim was to improve teaching and learning by using Assessment for Learning (AfL) approaches, resulting in accelerated pupil progress and higher attainment.

**Methods:** The participants included teachers, subject leaders, senior leadership team, and the school's deputy head teacher from Mayfield and Seven Kings High School. They collaborated to use AfL approaches to improve teaching and learning. Methods used included paired teaching and coaching, 'Show and Tell' suppers, monitoring of teaching quality, and CPD sessions with resources.

**Findings:** The main findings are that AfL approaches, paired teaching and coaching, and review of impact with a partner school have had a dramatic impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership.

**Implications:** The findings suggest that AfL approaches, paired teaching and coaching, and collaboration can have a dramatic impact on pupil learning, teaching quality, and school organization and leadership.

*This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.*

**Keywords:** Secondary education; Art; Design and Technology; Geography; History; Information and Communication Technology; Mathematics; Modern Languages; Music; Physical Education and Sport; Religious Education; Science; Drama

## Introduction

### What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

Mayfield is a secondary school which in 2004 had a history of lower attainment than it wanted. The school serves a deprived area of Dagenham. The school leadership, new in 2004, was determined to raise standards by improving teaching and learning with a relatively mature and experienced staff.

The school joined a network of schools working on AfL approaches and in 2004 paired up with one school: Seven Kings High School - which had been working with researchers from Cambridge University and Kings College London on the Teaching and Learning Research Programme. Teachers and subject leaders from Seven Kings coached colleagues at Mayfield in the use of AfL in different subject areas. The results were dramatic.

### Who might find this case study useful?

- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- Teacher

## Description

### What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- Art
- Design and Technology
- Geography
- History
- Information and Communication Technology
- Mathematics
- Modern Languages
- Music
- Physical Education and Sport
- Religious Education
- Science
- Drama

### How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

The intention was to create learners who understood better what was expected of their learning and how to use a range of tools in order to take control of their learning. Because the expectations and classroom skills of teachers and learners was being raised in this way it was intended that a key impact would be accelerating pupil progress and higher attainment.

### What were your success criteria?

Improved pupil progress, improved quality of teaching and improved test and GCSE results.

### What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment

## Describe the CPD approaches you used

Teachers from Seven Kings coached Mayfield colleagues in different subjects and year groups. This involved classroom based paired modelling, paired teaching and coaching. This was followed by 'Show and tell' suppers each month where teachers from both schools shared what was working for them as well as what was not. The group used these sessions to problem-solve ways forward. The sessions were highly valued and seen as critical to success by all involved.

The leadership of the school switched the role of monitoring of teaching quality to a more developmental approach where teaching quality was monitored and specifically which AfL techniques and skills were being used well to improve pupil learning.

## What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

- 'Inside the Black Box' Black, P and Wiliam, D (1998)
- 'Working inside the Black Box' Back, P and Wiliam, D (2002)
- 'Assessment for Learning: Ten Principles' Assessment Reform Group, (2001).
- 'How am I doing?' Suffolk County Council
- 'How Do They Walk On Hot Sand?' Suffolk County Council

## Who provided you with support?

- Senior management

## How were you supported?

Direct support was provided through the Redbridge AfL network and in particular through the partnership with colleagues from Seven Kings High School. Key points were the initial conference which the network helped to organise involving expert input from Cambridge University. Seven Kings teacher-coaches teamed up with their counterparts in Mayfield. Alongside classroom based work was interspersed with 'Show and tell' suppers where successful practice and approaches were shared. These were hosted by the network and the LA network leader. The work became a key responsibility for the school's new deputy head teacher who ensured it was given the highest priority and drove the work through.

## Impact

### What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Pupils became skilled in understanding what was being expected of them as outcomes of specific learning tasks by their teachers. This was as a result of teachers' use of clearer learning objectives, success criteria and feedback from teachers and other pupils to help them see how they were progressing, as well as what they needed to do next in order to secure the best improvement. As students grew in confidence in their use of these tools, their own expectations of what they could achieve grew. They also became skilled in assessing the work of their peers and their own work using success criteria and constructive feedback approaches. Pupil learning began to accelerate dramatically as the quality of teaching improved as a result of teachers' better pitching of lessons and greater clarity of objectives, success criteria and feedback. This greater clarity helped improve the teaching sequences planned by teachers. After 6 months GCSE results improved by 8% and have continued to rise ahead of the national results for the subsequent two years.

## Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Test results

## Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Observation outcomes

## Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Evidence from paired teaching/coaching and monitoring of teaching quality.

## What has been the impact on teaching?

Teachers are clearer about the learning outcomes they have in mind for pupils and precisely what they will look like and what the steps along the way will be. AfL techniques helped ensure that every brain in the class was engaging with a problem and in a culture where it is okay to have a go and sometimes to get things wrong. After six months of this work Ofsted confirmed the school's own self evaluation that teaching had improved very significantly and was moving rapidly towards being good overall from a much lower starting point.

Teachers are clearer about the learning outcomes they have in mind for pupils and precisely what they will look like and what the steps along the way will be. Because so much more attention is being paid to pupils' understanding of where they are with their learning through the use of peer and self assessment as well as such classroom devices as wait time and no hands-up, teachers have a much clearer view of the level of understanding and the kinds of approaches students are taking to tasks. This helps teachers diagnose misunderstanding, plan more personalised sequences for pupils to help them make progress or to get them back on track. It has also increased the confidence of teachers in the likely success for students and thus raised expectations.

## Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

No hands up has made the biggest difference in my class. You are given thinking time or you can choose a friend to help you. Before we did this, the same people would answer all the questions and lots of people would be afraid of giving the wrong answer.

## Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring

## Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Monitoring by SLT of quality of teaching with a focus on effective AfL strategies.

## What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The leadership of Mayfield used AfL and its implementation as a whole school improvement strategy. The deputy head, head and subject leaders would regularly review the impact of the CPD and coaching work with Seven Kings - often in collaboration in the early days with Seven Kings staff. The feedback on the improvements in the quality of teaching became tied to the specific learning objectives for the staff - AfL - and so a similar approach to the pedagogy of AfL was used with adult learning and CPD. Staff were getting clear, constructive responses with guidance on the next steps.

## Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

- School improvement strategy
- Review of impact with partner school

## Summary

### What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

- Partnership with another school: paired teaching, coaching, review of impact.
- Assessment for Learning approaches.

### If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

Start by researching into Teacher coaching and Learning how to learn materials.

Essential elements would include:

- an effective school with whom to partner
- an ethos of collaboration
- AfL approaches.

## About Camtree

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## About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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