



## CASE STUDY REPORT

# Transforming the school climate for learning: Stoke Damerel Community College

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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 raise standards faster than the national rate of improvement, change the way the college is regarded by the community, and create an atmosphere in which everyone is valued and contributes to learning.

**Aims:** The main aim is to raise standards faster than the national rate of improvement, change the way the college is regarded by the community, and create an atmosphere in which everyone is valued and contributes.

**Methods:** The participants in this case study include headteachers, middle leaders, National Strategies consultants, parents, pupils, senior leadership teams, subject leaders, and teachers. Methods used included robust performance management, weekly team and departmental training, transforming roles, listening to pupils, tracking progress, rewarding long-term endeavour, and providing additional funding.

**Findings:** The main findings are that the quality of leadership from the headteacher and senior leaders, combined with recognition of the potential of all staff, robust performance management, and a competitive atmosphere, have resulted in improved attendance, higher standards, and a positive learning culture.

**Implications:** The findings suggest that quality leadership, creative thinking, and recognition of strengths in all members of the learning community are essential for successful curriculum development and improved pupil learning. Additionally, capital funding and CPD sessions can help to create a positive atmosphere and foster student engagement.

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

Keywords: Secondary education

## Introduction

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

Recognition of the need to change expectations, raise standards and build a true learning community.

Watch the Teachers TV video of this case study:

### Who might find this case study useful?

- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- National Strategies consultant
- Parent
- Pupil
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- Subject leader
- Teacher

## Description

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

- All aspects
- All subjects

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

Building pupil self-belief as learners, combined with the detailed tracking of progress and improved attendance, helped to change expectations, develop learning skills and thereby to raise standards significantly.

### What were your success criteria?

- To raise standards faster than the national rate of improvement
- To change the way the college is regarded by the community creating success rather than excuses
- To create an atmosphere in which everyone is valued and everyone contributes, so that pupils and all staff enjoy making progress and have confidence and pride in their ability as teachers and learners

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

- CVA data
- Learning walks / study visits
- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupil consultation data
- Test results

### Describe the CPD approaches you used

Made sure that the potential of all staff, not just teaching staff was recognised and developed:

- Robust performance management for all modelling Investors In People (IIP), ensuring relevant and appropriate training to match college, team and individual needs.

- Focused on people's strengths, and thought laterally about where else those strengths might be valuable.
- Staff training and INSET sessions take place weekly at team and departmental level, with whole school training as needed.
- Transformed roles such as that of Dinner Staff into community support staff, who develop a positive relationship with pupils and with the community. They became community support workers. Enhanced role to work with students, parents and community, as shown below:
- To undertake various out of lesson time supervision of students, to include break-times and lunch-times.
- To support individual or small groups of students in lessons or on alternative curriculum activities.
- As part of a team, to help supervise students leaving College at the end of the working day.
- As part of a team, to offer support to members of the local community, particularly at the end of the College day when students are leaving College.
- To undertake other tasks that help to support students, such as first day absence telephone calling.
- Working alongside teachers and other support staff in all aspects of student care and management.

### Who provided you with support?

- External agency
- Local authority staff

### How were you supported?

- Limited additional funding from the LA related to the level of deprivation in our socio-economically challenged catchment area
- Basic Need Capital funding which facilitated physical changes such as The Street

Supported by NCSL, NPQH, Leadership pathways, Leading from the Middle and SIP training

## Impact

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

Pupils are motivated to learn through a belief in their own capacity as learners, through explicit support (through SEAL) for their feelings about living and learning.

### Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

The College learning culture is visible in everyone: students, staff, support staff and senior leaders. All are open to new ideas, honest about difficulties and proud about the progress they know has happened.

A climate for learning which included a competitive edge – there is a points system for attendance and progress which rewards long-term endeavour with prizes – has meant that achievement is admired rather than resented by peers.

Staff listen to pupils, especially about learning styles – pupils can suggest changes in style if they think it would be more effective – student advisers have lead role in developing and monitoring intervention plan.

## Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

A Year 12 student, who had lived through the changes, said "Here everyone is expected to be good at something, and there are more opportunities for everyone to be involved than there are in some other schools where only the top few have the most opportunities."

Another student described staff/student contact as 'professional friendship'.

Headteacher: "We have an absolute belief in the pupils – this is a can-do culture"

## Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- CVA data
- Data comparison of cohorts
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

## Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupil consultation data

## Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

### Quantitative

- KS3: (84% Level 5+ in English and 61% in maths and science in 2007. The L6 proportion in English rose from 9% in 2004 to 36% in 2007. Now equalling that achieved in Maths.
- KS4: 72+% A\* C at GCSE in 2007 as opposed to 41% in 2004, and conversion data shows that 73% of pupils in KS4 made two levels of progress)
- CVA (1039 for KS2-KS4 in 2007),
- FFT (D) targets exceeded
- 92% pupil attendance, which is a significant improvement

### Qualitative

- Responses from Ofsted and other visitors, such as LA and National Strategies staff, which have featured recognition of the positive attitudes to learning on the part of pupils, their belief in themselves as learners and their determination to achieve.
- More students have attended after-school revision sessions and holiday catch-up days.
- Positive parental reactions: attendance at all parents' evenings has increased significantly.
- Pupil comments on their feeling of being valued and their pride in their work, which they are eager to demonstrate to visitors
- Improved staff attendance and staying-on rates

## What has been the impact on teaching?

This is still work in progress, but the norms of expectation have been transformed and students are aware of where they are in terms of standards, and what they need to do to make progress.

Teaching is now a partnership with learners, not something inflicted upon them against their will!

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

English curriculum leader: "The can-do ethos in this schools means that we can encourage pupils not to be satisfied with their current levels"

## Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring

## Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Ofsted noted 'Good achievement across the school arising from appropriate personalised curriculum development'.

Teachers and pupils comment on teaching as being a partnership. Teacher expectations have been transformed, as have those of pupils, and lesson plans (as well as the improved results) reflect those high expectations.

Student interviews and work scrutiny by National Strategies staff indicated that Study Plus teaching is already having an impact on the attitudes and achievements of the pupils involved.

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

The SLT model good leadership, and see it as their role to develop leaders within the school. Leadership skills are seen as important at every level – people within the school know that there is progression for students and for them.

## Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

The data shows much more consistent performance between departments in the school, largely achieved through leadership development – and putting the right people in the right roles, without being over-concerned by issues such as age and experience.

## Summary

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

The quality of leadership from the headteacher – and the senior leaders. The head is a dynamic and visible presence, and combines encouragement and challenge in just the right proportions.

In particular there has been careful judgement of the school's capacity to take on new initiatives, and excellent prioritising of the school's essential needs.

### What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

The key resource is people themselves, and a readiness to think and act creatively at leadership level. Time to talk and to listen is therefore the key resource, but the use of display to carry key messages in an imaginative and aesthetically satisfying way is also important.

### What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

Sessions where staff were able to give their honest impressions and be listened to. Once the staff (in its widest sense) were seen as the essential resource, all else followed, but the additional capital funding that enabled the College to roof in a previously open corridor between buildings (now known as The Street) helped to change the whole atmosphere.

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

- Agreeing a vision for the way forwards
- Looking for untapped strengths in all adults who are part of the learning community
- Making key appointments of people who could learn whilst leading
- Keeping the fun in learning alive – enjoy coming to school
- Recognising successes at all levels
- Carrying the whole community, and especially the students, with you

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

- Replicating the student adviser groupings at Year 10 and also Year 9 to give personalised support and utilising the wider range of staffing to support students.
- Developing student voice even further to deliver a student perspective on our effectiveness of delivery of the five ECM (Every Child Matters) outcomes – utilising the client perspective.
- Sustaining a nurture curriculum pathway from Year 6-11 and developing further a personalised curriculum based on students needs, abilities and aspirations
- Developing more e-learning resources through our 3D cinema and building up our virtual library of podcasts to truly have 24/7 resources

## Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- National Poetry Week at Stoke Damerel
- Welcome to The Street
- CPD Statement of Intent 07-08
- Study Plus presentation Jan08
- GCSE performance 2003 to 2007
- Learning
- Students at work

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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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