



CASE STUDY REPORT

Leading on Improvement - St Mary's Haslingden changing from vulnerable to great!

Donna McNicoll

This study was originally published in 2010 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 the quality of teaching and learning in a small school in a disadvantaged area, with a focus on writing and mathematics, and to track pupil progress.

Aims: The main aim is to improve pupil learning by implementing consistent approaches to teaching, developing rigorous assessment systems, and providing support for teachers.

Methods: The participants in this case study are the headteacher, middle leader, subject leader, National Strategies consultant, Senior Leadership Team, and School Improvement Partner. Methods used included rigorous assessment and pupil tracking, developing subject coordinators, strengthening accountability systems, and providing CPD materials and support.

Findings: The main findings are that the school has seen a significant improvement in pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership. This was achieved through a clear vision, high quality teaching, rigorous assessment, and targeted intervention.

Implications: The findings of this case study suggest that a rigorous assessment system, high expectations, and access to leading teachers can help improve pupil learning and teaching standards in a school.

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

Keywords: Primary education; English - writing; Mathematics

Introduction

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

This small school is situated in one of the most disadvantaged wards in the country. It had been defined as a vulnerable school with inconsistent results. The percentage of pupils claiming free meals is well above the national average and 21% of pupils have special educational needs. From September 2004 to September 2006 there was no substantive headteacher in post due to threat of closure. Mobility of children leaving/joining the school had been at a high level during these turbulent few years. When the current headteacher joined the school in September 2006, the school was 'vulnerable with inconsistent results'. Although the quality of teaching in Y6 had ensured high standards at the end of KS2 overall progression across the school was inadequate with significant underachievement of pupils in some year groups.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Head of school improvement
- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- National Strategies consultant
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- SIP (School Improvement Partner)
- Subject leader

Description

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

- All aspects
- All subjects
- English - writing
- Mathematics

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

Barriers to improvement were:

- When the new team were appointed in Sept 2006, there were only 72 pupils on roll and only 3 classes: Class1 (Rec, Y1, Y2), Class2 (Y2, Y3,Y4) and Class 3 (Y4, Y5, Y6). The polarised spread of ability and the fact that there was at least 3 age groups in each class presented a difficult task for teachers to provide suitable support and challenge for the extreme levels of able, gifted and talented children alongside children with special educational needs.
- The growing number of pupils joining the school since September 2006 meant classes had to be constantly re-organised. Changes mid-key stage impacted on the year-on-year performance.
- A new class team started at the school with 50% of teachers being NQTs. Whilst their enthusiasm was a considerable advantage, they required support in their first year of teaching in very challenging circumstances.

The issues which needed to be addressed to impact on pupil learning were:

- The quality of teaching and learning needed to improve significantly.
- Assessment systems needed to be established to effectively target and challenge all pupils.
- Lack of subject coordinators meant monitoring systems were not sufficiently developed and staff

needed to have a thorough understanding of achievement and standards and be able to evaluate the impact of intervention on standards.

- Standards and progress in writing across the school were unsatisfactory.

What were your success criteria?

- To implement a consistent approach to teaching all aspects of writing to raise standards and improve progress.
- To develop a consistent approach for teaching standard written methods in Mathematics so pupils were confident in problem solving / using and applying.
- To implement a rigorous assessment / pupil tracking system where staff could clearly identify children who are underachieving and plan appropriate support to ensure children achieve (or exceed) targets.
- To develop the role of the core subject leader so that school improvement planning is secure.

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

- CVA data
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

Describe the CPD approaches you used

- Accountability systems were strengthened and performance management was put in place for both teaching and non-teaching staff.
- The headteacher modelled the role of an effective subject leader. Rigorous evaluation systems were put in place through analysis of progress and attainment data in core subjects, focused lesson observations, scrutiny of work and pupil interviews.

Who provided you with support?

- External agency

How were you supported?

The LEA advisers for Literacy and Numeracy supported the school and helped implement new national initiatives, particularly APP.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

- Standards have risen in all subjects, particularly writing across the school.
- AfL with APP is embedded across the school.
- There is a positive 'can do' culture where praise and encouragement prevail and self-esteem is high.

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- CVA data
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

The most recent attainment data for KS2 (2009) indicates that the school's focus on improving writing has been highly effective with 90% of pupils achieving level 4 +, a rise from 47% in 2006 and 30% achieving level 5 in writing, a rise from 0%.

In Maths, 100% of pupils achieved level 4 and 50% achieved a level 5.

The CVA for all subjects in 2008 was 101.1 and 100.7 in 2009.

What has been the impact on teaching?

Subject leaders now carry out their role effectively. Staff know what is going on strategically in their subject and what is needed to improve it. Subject audits, lesson observations, planning/work scrutiny, pupil interviews, data analysis examination helps them know what hinders or prevents achieving objectives and this then feeds in to the school improvement plan.

Leading teachers share their expertise with less experienced members of staff. All staff share a vision to keep taking the school from strength to strength and there is no room for complacency!

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

There is a high level of rigour and consistency: the teachers plan closely together to ensure the quality of lessons is high. This includes behaviour.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The head teacher's leadership has evolved to suit the changing circumstances of the school. At the beginning, she took on a 50% teaching commitment to demonstrate good practice and personally mentored and coached new staff. As the school has grown, she has carefully chosen colleagues who are enthused by her vision and are happy to join a culture of 'high expectations'. As the staff team has developed, and become more experienced, there is much more democracy and staff are more involved in strategic and operational leadership.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

The overall impact has been the school was found to be 'outstanding' by OFSTED in every area in March 2009, a huge achievement in less than 3 years! The school is now a 'Great school with the potential to provide system leadership' and already shares good practice with a local cluster. The head has recently been invited to be a host head teacher for the NCSL Associate Headteacher programme.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

- The role of the headteacher in creating the ethos of the school and having a clear vision
- Thorough teaching by high quality staff who show great commitment and passion
- A constant focus on maintaining and improving standards of attainment, emphasising the systematic development of both basic literacy and numeracy skills
- High quality planning, assessment and targeted intervention which enables ALL pupils to achieve their potential

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

- A rigorous assessment system which tracks all pupils termly
- Resources/ INSET to develop teacher's understanding of what is needed to move pupils to the next sub level
- Access to advanced skills/ leading teachers to share and model outstanding lessons

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

APP material/ INSET

Primary Strategy materials mentioned previously. (See What Page for full list)

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

- Carry out accurate, positive and very rigorous self evaluation of where your school is and where it needs to go
- Produce a school improvement plan which focuses on a few, highly strategic areas
- Set high expectations for both staff and pupils
- Access leading teachers in the authority to support your work
- Have a personalised tracking system for each pupil, which monitors and tracks their progress, termly

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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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