# Best Practice Network school improvement library

## To improve the percentage of pupils attaining greater depth

### Middle Leader, Catholic Primary School, North West

Tags: Primary, growth mindset, greater depth

### The issue

* The children in our school were achieving below those nationally in GD for reading, maths and writing
* Ofsted identified need to increase number of children achieving greater depth across the curriculum
* Children were not transferring the skills that they had acquired in English lessons into the written work of the foundation subjects
* Need to improve the quality of teaching, learning and achievement

I analysed the data from the end of the previous year and found that in all classes, children were achieving below national average in greater depth in Reading, Writing and Maths. In addition to this, all classes (apart from Year 5) the number of children achieving greater depth in humanities was lower than children achieving greater depth in writing.

### The solution

* Planned a programme of evidence informed CPD to improve staff understanding and skills in achieving greater depth
* Conducted audit of resources
* Included in school development plan to emphasise importance
* Implemented a cycle of improvement
* Developed a growth mindset in teaching and learning of foundation subjects, creating a Growth Mindset Award to celebrate pupil success
* Conducted book scrutinies and lesson observations to inform coaching and CPD sessions
* Surveyed pupil experience and needs
* Employed services of an education consultant to advise on curriculum reform and delivery
* Increased variety in the curriculum with topic-based approach
* Reformed curriculum delivery using metacognitive approaches to develop independent thinkers and learners

I analysed the data from the end of the previous year and found that in all classes, children were achieving below national average in greater depth in Reading, Writing and Maths. In addition to this, all classes (apart from Year 5) the children achieving greater depth in humanities was lower than children achieving greater depth in writing, as a team we discussed the reasons behind this.

My aim was to increase the amount of children achieving greater depth by using enquiry skills, embedded in a ‘growth mindset’ culture and to increase independence in learning demonstrated through greater depth skills in independent writing across the curriculum. The focus of my project was to increase the number of children achieving greater depth in all subjects across the curriculum. This was something that had also identified in the previous Ofsted inspection.

Lesson observations demonstrated that the children have become too reliant on the teacher to do the all the research and the analysis of the topic to enable them to answer the question, in effect the children were being ‘spoon fed’ rather than being proactive in trying to find the information independently. The teachers expected the children to produce work at a high standard without considering that not all children learn the same or have the capacity to work in groups and use a range of skills.

After discussion with the head teacher and an external expert, concluded it was essential to alter the way the curriculum was delivered to ensure that we had independent learners resulting in a positive impact on all the areas of the child’s learning. As a result, it would increase their confidence and create independent ‘thinkers’ using metacognitive approaches, using essential skills: team worker, self-manager, effective participator, reflective learner, resourceful thinker and independent enquirer, required to support the approach.

When implementing something new to staff I know that it is essential to share my vision with staff and ensure that everyone understands the rationale behind the changes and what impact they will have. I took this into account when introducing the changes with staff, it also enabled staff to see that their input and feedback had been taken into account – and held a discussion with them initially to get their views on the teaching of these subjects. I also discussed it with my class (year 5) to gather pupil voice.

From the Strategy and Improvement unit of the course I found the ‘understanding management and leadership skills document’ a constructive read, making me think about the different leadership styles but also reflect on the type of leader I wanted to be.

My project will allow the children to have more control over their learning – It will not be left up to the teacher to provide the information but for the children to research and find the answers, thus creating ‘independent learners.’

When researching, I found that lots of international school ensured that their curriculum was fun, engaging and not just about pencils and papers where the teacher ‘facilitates’ learning. In addition to changing the way we deliver the curriculum, I met with the Head and a recently qualified teacher, who was going to shadow me in implementing my project. We redesigned the curriculum ensuring that all classes accessed a broad, balanced, fun and engaging topic for the wider curriculum subjects.

With the head teacher, I observed lessons in other schools with a higher proportion of children achieving greater depth and we implemented a cycle of improvement; 1. Plan, 2. Implement, 3.Monitor, 4. Measure the impact and 5.Review and make any relevant changes.

When I visited other schools, I noticed how inquisitive the children were and how the teachers ‘ran with’ the questioning from them rather than what they had planned. I spoke to other professionals about that method of facilitating the curriculum and what the impact (both positive and negative). I shared my action plan with staff, ensuring that staff knew that I valid their opinion and contribution to the project and if necessary changes were to be amended that was acceptable.

I arranged for an external advisor to deliver continued professional development (CDP) to teach and model ideas about delivering the curriculum in this new way. I also arranged for him to do a welfare visit, carry out lesson observations and a book scrutiny alongside myself and I gave the feedback to the individual members of staff. This feedback was not always positive and was a new experience for me, this made me reflect on the different types of teachers and how to communicate to different individuals (it is crucial that I did not use ‘one rule for all’ when giving feedback – knowing the individuals is important). One of the teachers that I had to give negative feedback to was a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

The face-to-face days have given me an opportunity to discuss my project with other professionals, share good practice and find out how their school works.

I kept my head update to with my progress and regularly held meetings with her to discuss my plan and clarify what budget I had. Concerning resources, I carried out an audit of the resources that we had and what I thought we would need but most of the money that I intended to spend was on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for staff (£1184) so they were fully aware of the reasons behind the changes. I also planned for a consultant, to visit school on 3 days throughout the year, advising us on how we are performing and changes that he thought of – costing £1000 per day. Other resources would incur small costs. This was a substantial amount to be budgeted for but as it featured on the School Development Plan and was already making a significant difference to the way in which our children were learning and making progress, it was money well spent and the impact would be long lasting.

However, time was something that would be needed as part of this project and I wanted to ensure that staff were committed to make this a success. I created an action plan with milestones, timescales and budgeting projections (verified by the head teacher) with very clear success criteria.

I first went to the Senior Leadership Team and explained to them what changes I had in mind and why. I then launched the project to the teaching staff and Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) in a staff meeting.

I planned for teachers to work in pairs to plan a unit together. They then did a ‘lesson study’ and had a valuable conversation about the outcomes and the approach of the lesson. This was especially useful in our recent Ofsted inspection, where I know there was a considerably amount of discussion based on the teachings of the foundation subjects.

I wanted to create a whole school award which recognised that children were taking on board this new way of learning and so I created the Growth Mind set award, this celebrates the success of the children and is an incentive to show Growth Mind set positively to the school culture.

The impact of introducing growth mind-set strategies has contributed to an increased proportion of children achieving greater depth. When I analysed the data at the end of Spring Term, it was clear that the way that the teachers were planning (having the enquiry skills at the forefront) and the way the children were now being taught was having a positive effect on their learning, that they were becoming more confident in their own abilities and therefore becoming more independent learners. After liaising with the teachers it was clear that some children found it easier to use these skills than others but that the children were becoming ‘critical thinkers’. Year 3 demonstrated that there was a decline in the data, this was due to the teacher and his inaccurate use of assessment. He left the school in the Autumn Term after an investigation had taken place. The progress in Year 4 was slower than other years and this was due to the teacher being an Newly qualified Teacher, she was a ‘laggard’ she found a problem with everything that was asked of her, she was very difficult to manage and took feedback personally rather than constructively, with the aim to make her a better practitioner.

We assess all subjects termly but as I had just introduced this new way of delivering the curriculum, I knew it would be too early to see an impact in Autumn data and Spring data but that by Summer data there would be some change. Also as this was a complete culture change for both staff and children so I knew it would require time to become embedded and show an impact.

Instead, I decided to conduct interviews with staff and pupils to find out their opinion on the changes that I had implemented. Interestingly staff initially found it difficult in becoming more of a facilitator and giving the children more freedom with their work but found that most children responded positively to the new approach and actually enjoyed being more creative and taking more of an ownership on their work.

93% of the children interviewed said that they enjoyed using the different skills and 88% preferred the new way of learning, 93% of the pupils feel that they can use these skills in other areas of their lives.

From the Spring data I could see that there was an increased in the greater depth but I knew that a number of factors could have contributed to this. Where impact was not evident, I facilitated alternative sessions to delve into what was happening in the classroom. I held a staff meeting where members of staff brought examples of their work to the meeting and we moderated what greater depth looks like in the different classes. We also discussed and shared good practice about what kind of tasks we would expect to see from a child if they had used a range of the skills. From this, we became more consistent in our approaches and ensured that we gave opportunities to children to develop their own skills and become an effective participator within the lessons.

I shared my vision with the whole of the teaching staff and sought their initial thoughts, this is something that as a school we are very good at, we share changes, implement them for a period of time and them revise them. Most members of staff were engaged and excited about the changes, some straight away found problems within my project, (these members of staff (x2) have since left our school). These members of staff supported my realisation that it is essential to treat each member of staff, as an individual and that you have to think about how you are going to communicate with them in the most effective way.

Following that, I arranged for staff to do some ‘peer on peer’ informal observations (myself included) and some collaborate planning time. This required time away from the timetable, I asked my head teacher if I could use a staff meeting for this as workload was always at the forefront of my mind. This deemed a positive move as it ensure staff working together to design a positive curriculum that engaged the children and enabled them to produce work to a high standard. I also made myself available to all staff to advise and support them if required.

We revised the learning themes that we were going to teach because of the 2014 change to the curriculum. However, after analysing data we decided that we needed to increase the number of children achieving greater depth across the curriculum (particularly around the foundation subjects). Research indicated metacognition and growth mind-set would support this. Resulting in a culture change within the school. To embed the new culture, I asked all classes to have a growth mind-set display in their classrooms and deliver a lesson about what growth mind-set was. In addition to this, I wanted a display showing the different essential enquiry skills and a lesson exploring these skills and what they would look like in the children’s work. This required two staff meetings, as after the first meeting, the staff were still unsure about the skills and so I did another meeting with a range of examples.

 This year has presented challenges, as there has been a changeover of teachers – 3 teachers have left. One of the teachers (who was on the SLT) struggled with the changes that were required. Every time I introduced anything to do with my project, she would create a barrier, believing that her class would not be able to do it (before even attempting it). Initially this was difficult, especially when after a scrutiny (completed with an external advisor) was negative and I had to give the feedback.

I had a plan but I wanted to consult with staff about the changes that I was implementing. I held a staff meeting and asked them for their feedback on the changes, this led to an interesting and positive discussion, one that everyone was involved with. I knew that as this was such a change to the way we deliver the curriculum it could have some teething problems. I ensured that my project was the agenda of many staff meeting just so I could keep up to date with any issues that arose.

I thought it would be good practice to carry out a ‘lesson study’, so teachers paired up and worked together to plan units, share ideas, carry out informal lesson observations and learn from each other. After these ‘lesson studies’ I arranged for a staff meeting so we could collectively reflect on what each pair had seen and how we could further develop the way that we delivered the curriculum. What was apparent was that some of the skills that we were expecting the children to use could be quite difficult to get evidence, so together we created some collective activities to facilitate these skills. This became a focus for my next book scrutiny.

I attended two CPD sessions and I liaised with other teachers in attendance of the course and discussed with them my project. They gave me some advice on what had worked well in their school and discussed how they approached the Growth Mind-set with their staff; I used some of this information in one of the staff meetings that I delivered.

My head teacher budgeted for an external advisor to come into school and support us in making this journey. I met with him on each of the days that he attended and discussed my vision with him and what I intended to do with it. He gave me a contact in another school for me liaise with on how we make these changes in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – the EYFS lead was very appreciative of this.

During one staff meeting, I arranged for staff to do some ‘peer on peer’ informal observations (myself included) and some collaborate planning time when staff could get together to plan and share ideas and resources.

It was important that I was overseeing any money that was spent on my project. I knew that the CPD was the biggest cost but it was more staff’s time than money that I wanted to focus on. When CPD was arranged during school hours, we used the HLTA and Learning Mentor to cover so this would not incur an additional cost of a supply teacher. I also discussed with my head teacher that, where possible staff had time to implement anything that I had asked of them i.e. dedicated staff meetings for staff to work collaboratively to avoid an additional workload.

 As part of ensuring that each class was experiencing an enrichment opportunity, I had to discuss with the head teacher the budget available, resulting in a conversation with each teacher to arrange a suitable activity that had an acceptable price.

When the SLT and I originally discussed my project, I knew that CDP was vital if I wanted this project to be a success. The first thing I did was arrange for an external advisor to come into school and deliver some CPD training which would explain the rationale behind the changes that I was going to implement. Most staff understood why we going to introduce these changes and were supportive of my project. After the first book scrutiny I arranged for staff to carry out informal peer observations to witness good practice. One member of staff (who was a member of the SLT) found it difficult to implement these changes. After a book scrutiny I sat down with her at length and discussed some of the issues, she had a problem with each one and was very defensive. I knew that further support was needed here (at this point I did not know that she was struggling with other areas of her role) so I arranged some time for her to meet with myself and an external advisor; however she reacted in a similar way to when I discussed this with her myself.

The purpose of this course was to become a better practitioner and a leader that has a positive impact on school and the people who work there. I feel that I am an approachable person, but was lacking in confidence in my own leadership. From other staff members completing the diagnostic test at the beginning of this course, I knew that they had confidence in my abilities and so this course gave me the chance to develop my confidence by planning, implementing and making a change within the school. During OFSTED last year, I had to talk with the inspector about my role and I discussed my project, this was the quote that added to me wanting this project to succeed ‘Middle leaders share the same passion and ambition as senior leaders. Middle leaders have excellent subject knowledge and understanding in the areas they lead.’

Halfway through last year, my head teacher approached me and said that a teacher (in his 3rd year of teaching) needed some professional development and would it be ok for him to shadow me with my project. This enabled me to develop my leadership skills in a different way. As he worked in EYFS unit, I had to analyse what knowledge he had of Key Stage One and Key Stage Two and be mindful not to assume he knew what I wanted from him but to help develop his skills as well as the whole staff delivering these changes.

### Impact

From looking at the data over the past year, it is clear that in most classes the percentage of children achieving greater depth had increased and in the classes where it has not (Year 3 and Year 6) there have been staffing issues. One member of staff was put on a capabilities procedure and an investigation was made into his assessments and the other was a newly qualified teacher, who struggled to take constructive feedback (by myself and more senior members of staff) and as a result has left school without completing his NQT year.

From completing book scrutinies and lesson observations it is clear that children are becoming more independent when completing their work, they are thinking critically about the question and being creative with the way they present their findings – not all books are presented the same. From completing questionnaires, the children prefer this new way of teaching the foundation subjects and are better skilled at finding information, analysing it and understanding what it means. This has been transferred into their writing and in turn is creating a better standard of writing.

I knew that CPD was vital in making this project a success. After meeting with an external advisor I found that I was interested in this way of thinking and I spoke to a number of professionals from other schools to get feedback on their thoughts about this. I knew that for me to be able to lead this change, staff needed to be clear on what was asked from them and so I used my time to gather and create essential information to help staff, which enabled them to have this understanding. This was not something that would have impact straight away and I had to ensure that staff put time and effort into the changes and teaching the children about these changes too. The time spent with the external advisor was crucial, as it enabled me to understand the rationale behind these changes but also ensured that staff knew how to implement the changes so they could get the best out of the children. This change in culture has altered the way the staff teach, the way children learn, and as shown on the data analysis has had a positive impact on the results, therefore this is proof that the CPD that I arranged was cost-effective. Apart from the CPD, other costs were kept to a minimum.