New secondary curriculum

Vision into practice – leadership case studies

Resource

A joint initiative

Contents

How to use this overview

Six components

This overview has been generated from the findings of 17 case studies, the summary reports of which are included in this publication. It distils the key messages from across the studies in relation to **six components** identified from the research and used throughout:

1. Nature of the reforms

2. Leadership of the reforms

3. Transition

4. Evaluation

5. Challenges

6. Key learning

Each section provides:

– an overview of the key themes emerging across the 17 case study schools

– examples of practice extracted from appropriate case studies

– questions for school leaders to prompt their reflection

In combination with the summary reports, this overview aims to stimulate creative thinking, reflection and further innovation. It invites school leaders at all levels who are seeking to engage in 11–19 curriculum reform or who are already engaged to consider how other schools have led change. Using the findings as a tool to aid thinking, it is hoped that these materials will help inform their own curriculum leadership journey.

The **full case study reports** will enable readers to appreciate in greater depth the schools' developments and their leadership approaches. Readers may wish to explore further questions, such as 'How did they do that?', and the full reports aim to respond to these. They are available for downloading from the National College website at www.nationalcollege.org.uk/11-19

Background

The new secondary curriculum (11-19) provides an opportunity for the reform of curricular provision, to enable schools to further raise standards and help all their learners meet the challenges of a fast-changing world.

It provides:

– greater flexibility to tailor learning to individual learner needs

– programmes of study with a new emphasis on skills and processes

– personalised assessment to support teaching and learning

It aims to enable all young people to become:

– successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve

– confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives

– responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society

It offers schools the opportunity to:

– adapt the national curriculum so as to be able to make the most of their local environment and context

– give greater flexibility for in-depth study

– introduce cross-curricular dimensions to promote coherence between subjects

Many schools have already seized the freedoms that the 11–19 curriculum reforms have offered within the context of the raising of the participation age to bring about reconfiguration of:

– yearly cycles and the organisation of the learning day

– groupings of learners and the location of learning

– strengthening of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) systems

– the leadership of learning

This research project considered examples of good practice across a number of schools that have been engaged in such developments.

The research project

This research project explored how a sample of 17 schools across the nine English regions, identified as having developed good practice in 11–19 curriculum reform, have led this process. Conducted by eight National College research associates, themselves senior secondary school leaders, the case studies have sought to:

– map the multiplicity of 11–19 developments with which schools have engaged

– identify common themes of good practice in the leadership of change

– investigate how secondary schools are linking their developments with the new primary curriculum

– identify challenges which were faced and how they were overcome

– draw out the key learning that has ensued

The 17 schools demonstrated a wide cross-section of geographical and contextual features, ranging from:

– newly established academies with rapidly improving outcomes to consistently high-achieving selective and comprehensive schools

– community, Church of England and Roman Catholic schools

– contexts ranging from urban deprivation to more suburban and rural catchment areas

– numbers of students varying from 600 to 1,800, together with one special school with 74 on roll

– a variety of specialisms, together with a school undergoing a complete rebuilding programme as part of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) initiative to form an all-through school

Each school adopted approaches to curriculum reform that it deemed appropriate for its specific context, resulting in a wide range of approaches.

Each of the identified schools was visited for up to two days by a National College research associate, in order to explore their curriculum and leadership journeys. Case studies were developed through the use of semi-structured interviews with a range of contributors selected by the school, including:

– the headteacher

– key members of staff at both senior and middle leadership levels

– other stakeholders where appropriate

– students

The areas of questioning focused on in the interviews were:

– the context of the 11–19 reforms within the school

– how curriculum change had been led and enabled

– the extent to which consultation had contributed to developing the vision for curriculum change

– how the impact and success of curriculum change was being evaluated

– how the reforms were supporting transition between Key Stages

– what were perceived to be the biggest challenges and how they had been overcome

In addition, a group of students was asked to reflect collectively on how the school was helping them to be successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens both inside and outside the classroom.

In all the interviews conducted, the dominant focus was on the leadership of the reforms rather than the detail of their content.

The six components

This overview now deals with each of the six components in turn, drawing out key themes from across the 17 case studies.

1. Nature of the reforms

The case study schools have responded to the freedom offered by the curriculum reforms in a number of different ways, depending on their specific contexts. However, for the majority of schools, at least one of the following areas has been developed:

– condensing the Key Stage 3 curriculum into two years

– creating a themed curriculum in Years 7 and 8

– focusing on cross-curricular skills development

– expanding personalised pathways at Key Stage 4

– extending curriculum opportunities.

These are now illustrated in turn.

– **Condensing the Key Stage 3 curriculum** in order to allow fast tracking to personalised Key Stage 4 pathways commencing in Year 9.

Case study extract:
Henley-in-Arden High School

A culture described by a senior leader as "coasting: pleasant but not rigorous" in Year 9 was identified, especially among the boys and the most able pupils… Fast tracking showed that progress in Key Stage 3 could be accelerated without sacrificing outcomes. "Students are making the same progress in two years that they were making in three" (headteacher).

– **Creating a themed curriculum**, particularly in Years 7 and 8, through aggregation of subject inputs and opportunities for project work providing stronger links with previous primary school experiences.

Case study extract:
Park View Community School

In Years 7 and 8 some curriculum areas have been aggregated to enable a themed approach. History, Geography and RE have become an area called 'Explore', Drama and Music have become 'Perform', Art and Design Technology make up 'Design'. Pupils work in these areas for six to eight weeks on a single theme and their work culminates in a presentation called 'The Final Challenge'.

– **Focusing on cross-curricular skills development** rather than content, with bespoke or adapted programmes that include objectives for acquiring learning habits as well as skills, knowledge and understanding.

Case study extract:
Sandwich Technology School

3dom – a competency-based integrated and cross-curricular approach to learning with a 50% curriculum time commitment every week for Year 7 and Year 8 students with groups of either mixed ability or vertically mixed across the two year groups. Six half-termly units of cross-curricular learning, emphasising skills and focusing on how students learn … to help each pupil optimise their learning potential.

– **Expanding personalised pathways at Key Stage 4** to provide increased diversity of choice, with a particular emphasis on vocational and applied learning through links with external providers.

Case study extract:
Kirk Hallam Community Technology and Sports College

The school has developed applied learning at Key Stages 4 and 5 with courses including Agriculture and Horticulture, Engineering and Science BTEC First Certificate courses that have led to high-level pupil engagement and 100% pass rates. The success of these courses has led to a demand for Diplomas in Media, IT, Engineering and land-based studies across the consortium of schools in the South East Derbyshire Secondary School Improvement Partnership.

– **Extending curriculum opportunities** through an expanded and flexible curriculum that provides opportunities for periodic thematic days on issues such as Identity and Cultural Diversity, Sustainability and Enterprise.

Case study extract:
St Bede's Catholic School and Sixth Form College

Themed days, such as Identity and Cultural Awareness, resulted in memorable sights and experiences: Maori face painting, Peruvian Indian costumes and Japanese Manga comic design to name but a few, which were excitedly recalled by participating students. They valued the opportunity "to work with people you have never worked with before" (Year 7 student) and "to learn social skills, teamwork, communication and leadership skills" (Year 8 student).

Reflection points

Which of the range of curriculum initiatives strikes a chord?

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How might they be adapted to fit your specific context?

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What might you do to further its implementation?

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2. Leadership of the reforms

Leadership approaches adopted in the case study schools centre on:

– engendering cultural change

– distributing leadership

– supporting and developing leaders

Engendering cultural change

Cultural change was felt by many case study headteachers to be an essential part of curriculum reform. Such change began with a **vision** of a preferred future – 'what do we want our students to look like when they leave us?' – and a critical **self-evaluation** of existing curriculum provision in the precise school and community **context**. It was underpinned by a strong sense of shared **moral purpose** – 'wanting the best for all our kids' – and an appreciation that selective **incremental change** was often more likely to be successful than revolutionary change.

Case study extract:
Newstead Wood School for Girls

Formulating and articulating a new vision was essential: "I asked the staff who and what the school was for; there was no real mission statement. I said that everyone should be able to state that common vision and that we should all buy into it. There was some audible opposition", said the headteacher. However, the recent Investors in People re-accreditation confirmed that any member of staff or student would be able to cite this mission statement now. "Leadership is incredibly well distributed because the vision is absolutely clear" (deputy headteacher).

A vision of a preferred future was in some cases informed by researching curriculum models used by other schools and institutions through, for example, visits to see alternative curriculum approaches in action, attending conferences and desk-based research. These helped shape leaders' curriculum visions and what would be most likely to suit their schools. Different approaches were critiqued and in some cases combined or altered to better reflect what schools desired for their particular students.

Changing the culture demanded initial and widespread **consultation** in many cases to make sure that everyone was 'on the bus', felt understanding and ownership of the proposals and was secure in their role in implementing them.

Case study extract:
Lipson Community College

Extensive consultation followed with parents/ carers and governors at after-school forums and by invitation to continuing professional development (CPD) days. Students were consulted through the College's systems for student voice, for example faculty leaders heard students' views about preferred teaching models through focus, or 'barometer', groups.

In one small case study school, St Andrew's Special School, consultation took a further step in involving all students and staff (teaching and non-teaching) in the creation of the school development plan.

The case study schools reported the importance of an atmosphere of mutual **trust** which supported an innovative culture through giving what one headteacher described as "freedom to fly": the capacity to take ownership of developments, accept self-generated accountability for them and being prepared to engage in creative and structured **risk taking** to bring them about, with "the confidence to fail" because of the support of a learning community. As one subject leader cogently put it: "We are a learning school, and we are *all* still learning".

> *Case study extract:*
> *St Andrew's Special School*
>
> *Curriculum reform has been enabled through the creation of an egalitarian ethos whereby all staff feel important 'cogs in the wheel'; this has engendered a sense of 'permission to contribute' to curriculum reform irrespective of role, giving 'the confidence to fail' if need be.*

Distributing leadership

Securing 'buy in' to a collectively agreed vision through widespread consultation engendered a sense of ownership, commitment and involvement. This in turn provided the conditions wherein **distributed leadership** could thrive. Distributed approaches were employed as a result of school leaders making decisions related to capacity for reform. These related to considerations including who might lead reform, and with whom would they work and how?

There was significant variety in the ways in which schools led reform, making the point that there is no 'blueprint for success', and that schools will design approaches that suit contextual factors. However, the following findings emerged in relation to the questions above.

The role of the headteacher was often one of the initial catalyst for reform, seeking new ways of enabling students to achieve well and develop life and learning skills and establishing the vision. In assuming this role, it required them to, for example, create new leadership structures, facilitate new ways of working and identify personnel capable of leading change. One headteacher described their role as "… the stirrer, the relentless driver".

Headteachers ensured that reforms were led by individuals and groups that would create momentum, build capacity and establish credibility. This was achieved through a range of approaches, including:

– **Talent spotting** individuals with the enthusiasm and skills to lead change.

> *Case study extract: South Hunsley School and Sixth Form College*
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> *"The headteacher identifies key people to lead new initiatives … which have grown new skills, new needs ... you identify somebody who is an advocate, who can lead a pilot and then you bring on more people so you're enabling the development of people like me. She identifies talented people and there is an element of risk taking in doing this."*
>
> *(Member of staff)*

– Restructuring leadership:

- teams, for example increasing their size to lend greater capacity

- role re-profiling, for example:

  aligning roles with core purposes and key accountabilities related primarily to student achievement

  enhancing the role of middle leaders

  creating additional roles, for example by appointing a second-in-department in each core subject expressly to take the lead on Key Stage 3.

Case study extract:
Henley-in-Arden High School

Strong subject leadership is expected but the details of exactly how the vision is realised is for subject leaders to decide. The school's senior leaders are explicit in granting the authority and freedom to innovate and think creatively, as long as achievement and engagement remain centre stage.

– Establishing curriculum reform teams
that would:

- increase capacity

- provide a variety of perspectives from different levels

- enhance ongoing consultation as an 'on the ground' reference group

- lend critical mass to secure developments school-wide

- act as advocates of reform

- act as listeners to staff reservations and discuss these

- lead and/or support staff development.

These teams had the following characteristics. They:

– varied in their size (up to 17 members in one school)

– varied in composition in terms of personnel, for example, including in some cases students and support staff

– did not always stay the same in terms of membership – some teams were deployed to address certain tasks and were then disbanded

– sometimes changed if their form did not aid function at certain points in the reform journey

– were at times invitational regarding membership, at others prescribed and sometimes a combination of both

– were generally led by a member of the senior leadership team (SLT).

Case study extract:
Estover Community College

The principal was keen to harness the enthusiasm of some less experienced members of staff. The leadership team and project leader targeted some less experienced teachers to join the group. "We had a dream team: a balance ... of experience and enthusiasm, tapping into each other's strengths", said the project leader.

In one school, three primary-trained teachers were recruited to its curriculum team to add cross-curricular learning expertise.

Certain cultural messages were however established through team creation:

– Enthusiasm, energy commitment to change and innovation-seeking attitudes are as, if not more, important than long-term experience.

– In some cases tough decisions would be made to ensure the right people were 'on the bus'.

– There was an emphasis on shared as well as individual accountability for achievement.

– There was an emphasis on an open 'done with' rather than 'done to' approach.

– Staff ownership and consultation provide an important barometer with which to check issues such as pace of change, ensuring these were well managed for effective implementation.

– Learning and reflection underpin development.

Engaging student perspectives was central to a number of schools' leadership approaches, for example, a student leadership group attending every alternate leadership team meeting.

However, all schools recognised the particular importance of distributing leadership to middle leaders, changing and re-profiling role descriptions where necessary to reflect changing learner needs.

Case study extract:
Lordswood Girls' School and Sixth
Form Centre

New structures and systems enable leaders to engage everyone in action research and to design the details of the solutions required. Leadership is distributed among a large extended leadership team that includes non-teaching staff. Everyone serves on one of several working groups led by members of the leadership team.

Supporting and developing leaders

The distribution of leadership is supported by a significant investment in CPD in order to identify potential, nurture staff and build capacity. This has been substantially in the form of bespoke in-house provision, with innovative approaches to facilitate staff release. For example:

– introducing an 'applied learning afternoon' one day per week where a range of optional enrichment learning activities is offered to students by external volunteers, thereby releasing staff for in-house professional development activities run by the staff themselves

– a weekly CPD session every Wednesday afternoon when school finishes an hour early. Sessions alternate between being facilitated by external consultants, Senior Leadership Team members or other staff, or being given over to departmental development time

– using video technology to film lessons to enable the sharing of effective practice

Staffing structures have also been amended and staff are supported through line management with designated members of SLTs. Investment in ICT has supported networking, collaboration and desk research to underpin programmes of learning visits, and dissemination has been secured through the use of virtual learning environments.

Case study extract:
Middleton Technology School

The school proactively invested in relationship building, developing trust and building leadership capacity through:

– *creating and developing teams*

– *engaging an external consultant to work on leadership and change management*

– *networking of middle leaders through regular scheduled meetings focused on the implementation and organisation of curriculum developments*

– *investing time in professional development including residential and twilight sessions focused on planning and preparation.*

Reflection points

How culturally ready is your school for curriculum reform?

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What further steps do you need to take to build leadership capacity?

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How can leadership best be distributed and supported in your school?

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3. Transition

Transition between Key Stages 2 and 3 has been enhanced by a variety of approaches, including:

– appointment of a head of transition, in some cases specifically to manage the process

– capitalising on primary school models of curriculum delivery through the use of primary-trained teachers and the partial aggregation of the curriculum for the more vulnerable students through the setting up of nurture groups, taught by a limited number of staff

– use of an intervention curriculum delivered by primary-trained staff with a focus on additional support in literacy and numeracy skills for those students in need of 'catch-up'

– concern for the location of the learning environment through the use of designated bases for younger students

– use of linked projects with primary schools, for example film-making, technology and a summer festival

– exchange of teacher expertise between the primary and secondary phases, for example by secondary staff teaching in feeder primary schools and joint staff meetings on 'vision days' to maintain unity of collective purpose and a focus on joint learning outcomes

– collaborative working through collective agreement of a common Key Stage 2 curriculum across the feeder primary schools with built-in Key Stage 3 progression, expanded in one case to include the formal concept of a 4–19 curriculum continuum

Case study extract:
Penketh High School

A dedicated Year 7 base building means that students perceive the school as smaller; this has further fuelled experimentation in the use of flexible learning spaces…. The primary link group were "learning from each other and planning transition together", said a middle leader, enabling the Year 7 curriculum to be closely linked to a primary model "to foster a feeling of family".

Transition between Key Stages 3 and 4 has been supported by:

– the introduction of personalised guidance systems to aid pathways choice particularly where the Key Stage 3 curriculum has been condensed

– replacement of separate Key Stage 3 and 4 coordinators by a single unitary responsibility across Key Stages

– formalised mentoring of Key Stage 3 students by older pupils, facilitated in some cases by the introduction of a system of vertical tutoring

Case study extract:
Passmores School

The move to vertical tutoring is reported by the students to be extremely helpful in their transition from Key Stages 3 to 4. Mentoring takes place within tutor groups. Work by the Anti-bullying Group has shown that the stereotype of Key Stage 4 students bullying younger students is unfounded, and strong relationships have developed across the year groups. One student described his tutor group as a "flexible family".

4. Evaluation

The case study schools have implemented a raft of embedded evaluation tools ranging from the use of hard data such as assessment results and transition rates to softer indicators such as staff self-evaluation, focus group discussions, questionnaire returns and feedback from student voice.

Student voice was seen as a valuable part of the evaluative process, not only through informal comment but also through more formalised mechanisms. For example in one school, school councillors attended whole staff meetings to discuss teaching and learning.

Senior staff were involved in both summative and formative evaluation of progress. In many case study schools, they were linked to specific departments, paired lesson observations were carried out and external perspectives sought as part of rigorous quality assurance (QA) mechanisms. There was also a collective expectation that staff would engage with and respond to student voice as part of their own self-evaluation.

However, it was recognised by a number of the case study schools that quantitative evaluation of the specific impact of the curriculum reforms at this stage of their implementation remained a key challenge.

Case study extract:
Barnfield South Academy

The quality improvement cycle is rigorous. Curriculum leaders meet with senior leaders at Targeted Improvement Process meetings (TIPs) to discuss the performance of the areas for which they are responsible. The College principal also attends these meetings. Student perceptions and feedback are an integral part of the school decision-making and evaluation process. Students are still cautious of change, but have learnt to trust the school leadership and are willing to try things. One student said: "At first, I hated the idea of vertical tutoring ... but actually ... it's brilliant".

5. Challenges

Reflection points

What evaluative processes might you employ to measure the progress and impact of curriculum reform in your school?

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What challenges do you foresee in implementing them?

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How do you currently facilitate and respond to student voice, and might there be further opportunities to engage with this?

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The principal challenges met by many of the case study schools comprised:

– changing expectations
– building staff capacity

There was a sense in some instances of having to challenge 'cultural complacency' among staff, parents and governors, an 'if it ain't broke, why fix it' mentality, and having to overcome initial staff resistance to working outside the comfort zone of subject specialism.

Such barriers to reform and change were overcome by:

– persuading staff of the worth of the proposed developments by highlighting the generic nature and transferability of the skills that would be acquired, and creating an atmosphere of professional trust and autonomy in which they could flourish

– preparing parents, governors and the local community through widespread consultation and persuasive enthusiasm

– ensuring that all staff were on board and not just a committed few by taking an inclusive, egalitarian approach to staff development

– creating an innovative culture which encouraged creative risk taking facilitated by team support and the sharing of good practice

– ensuring the strong rooting of the developments in practice through regular involvement in classroom visits by senior staff and sensitive coaching and re-profiling of roles and responsibilities, including those of support staff

– validating the impact of the reforms through progress measures, success indicators and "the celebration of successes along the way" (headteacher)

– maintaining the momentum of progress through a constant restatement of the vision of the preferred future

Reflection points

What challenges do you envisage in further implementing 11–19 curriculum reform in your school?

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Case study extract:
Castleford High School Technology and Sports College

The challenges facing the school and the levers used to overcome them were:

– *to establish a sense of common purpose through cooperation at different levels of leadership. The headteacher and SLT facilitated this by steering middle leaders into professional discussions about student achievement, and, where this was not forthcoming, tough staffing decisions were taken*

– *to implement a secure, rigorous use of data in raising achievement. Doubts were overcome by establishing a correlation between data, teaching and learning, and improving results*

– *to utilise the skills and ambitions of the apparently disenfranchised support staff. This was achieved by the appointment of a human resources (HR) manager who used structures and systems to bring them into the vision for the school*

– *the challenge now is to maintain the progress made. To stand still, to take things for granted, to feel satisfied, are not options. The only option, as the headteacher said, is taking the school "to the top of the mountain".*

What levers would you use in order to surmount these challenges?

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What additional support might you require to do this, and where could you access it?

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6. Key learning

The key learning that has emerged from across these case studies includes the following:

– Cultural change is a necessary contributor to curriculum change:

- consultation with a wide range of stakeholders secures commitment to the reform vision

- securing ownership of developments through involvement in decision making enhances their successful implementation

- allowing reform to evolve over time is a recognition that incremental change is more likely to be successful than revolutionary change

- development by senior staff of a culture of empowered creative risk taking needs to be underpinned by professional trust and distributed autonomy, while maintaining a collective primary focus on student achievement.

Case study extract:
Estover Community College

The success of the curriculum reform project rested on the actions of senior leaders simultaneously to inspire and empower.

– Leadership of change requires:

- securing and sharing a vision for what change aims to achieve for student learning

- the creation of leadership structures that are fit for purpose and encourage innovation linked with accountability for student outcomes

- establishing distributed approaches that empower staff to engage with others, for example students, in creating and evaluating the success of new curriculum models

- identifying key personnel to lead change – talent spotting

- creating and encouraging team-based approaches that build capacity, stimulate innovation and secure implementation.

Case study extract:
Penketh High School

What was created was "a team of people who were willing to come out of their comfort zone…. We looked for the people with the energy that would drive it through" (senior leader).

– Leadership of change needs to be supported by:

- the use of creative structural changes to enable staff release time for planning, reflection, teamworking and professional development

- bespoke professional development, often delivered in-house, with staff working together across areas to take responsibility for and to facilitate their own learning

- involvement of senior staff, informed by rigorous evaluation structures and data systems, in both monitoring and supporting the developments

- engaging student voice in evaluation and programme development.

The research associates and the participating schools who so willingly contributed to the development of these case studies hope that they will themselves form part of a contribution to that 'bigger picture', in giving an awareness of possibilities, a dissemination of good practice and an encouragement of creative thinking in relation to the ongoing implementation of the 11–19 curriculum reforms.

One case study sums up well the key learning that has accrued, as follows:

Participating case study schools

Barnfield South Academy, Luton
'Rising from the ashes': Securing engagement in a new academy

Bishop Justus Church of England School, Bromley
Faith in action: Building Learning Power (BLP)

Castleford High School Technology and Sports College
'Striking out for the top of the mountain' through common purpose, a focus on achievement, distributed leadership and accountability

Estover Community College, Plymouth
Skills and knowledge for learning

Henley-in-Arden High School
Condensing Key Stage 3 to raise student aspiration through early personalisation

Kirk Hallam Community Technology and Sports College, Derbyshire
Vocational curriculum development and community engagement

Lipson Community College, Plymouth
Consulting and collaborating on curriculum reform

Lordswood Girls' School and Sixth Form Centre, Harborne, Birmingham
Skills development and applied enrichment learning opportunities

Middleton Technology School, Rochdale
Raising the aspirations of a community through curriculum reform

Newstead Wood School for Girls, Bromley
Students and staff leading change

Park View Community School, Chester-le-Street
Transforming learning through a focus on the habits of effective learners

Passmores School, Harlow
'What do you do with the "can't do kids"?'

Penketh High School, Warrington
Curriculum redesign through consultation

St Andrew's Special School, Breadsall, Derbyshire
Personalised approaches to curriculum delivery

St Bede's Catholic School, Lanchester, Durham
Thematic approaches to curriculum provision

Sandwich Technology School, Kent
3dom: A competency-based integrated curriculum

South Hunsley School and Sixth Form College, Hull
Vision, capacity, collaboration: A school's journey towards a personalised 4–19 curriculum continuum

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CfBT Education Trust

The National Strategies

Youth Sport Trust

National Curriculum

Triumph Road
Nottingham NG8 1DH
T 0845 609 0009
F 0115 872 2001
E enquiries@nationalcollege.org.uk
www.nationalcollege.org.uk

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PB553/overview

'Rising from the ashes': Securing engagement in a new academy

Barnfield South Academy, Luton

Key themes

Changing expectations and enabling cultural and curriculum change through:

– curriculum reform as a vehicle for cultural change

– high levels of consultation and headteacherpersonalengagement

– federated linkage with a sponsoring further education (FE) college

– distributed leadership within a culture of ongoing achievement

School context

Barnfield South Academy was the first school in the UK to federate with an FE college, the sponsor Barnfield College. The school had rapidly falling rolls prior to 2007, but is now oversubscribed, with 800 on roll. GCSE results have doubled from 18% 5 A*-C (including English and Maths) in 2006 to 36% in 2009. Attendance has risen from 83% to around 92% over the same period.

Nature of the reforms

– Two-year **condensed Key Stage 3**.

– **Foundation curriculum** in Year 7 where learning takes place in themed conditions similar to a primary school.

– **Expanded choice and pathways in Key Stage 4**, including enrichment for able students in Year 11, diplomas, Level 2 qualifications in Year 10 and twilight GCSE courses.

– **Vertical tutoring** and a house-based pastoral system.

Leadership of the reforms

When the current headteacher took over in 2007, he was the seventh appointed in just four years. His **vision** was that curriculum change and innovation was vital to ensuring that Barnfield South was seen as a truly new school and not just a new name on an old school.

The new headteacher had a two-term **lead-in time** as headteacher designate. He engaged in extensive personal **consultation** with staff and students. Some key changes were immediately put in place – new school day timings, the absence of bells in the school, a new uniform and branding agreed– to enhance the **practical visibility of the vision for change** to students and staff and to signal a new beginning.

The **federation** has also been valuable in driving curriculum change in the school. Strategy groups were created across the federation to harness collective expertise, and to address curriculum and other issues. The planning and implementation structures within the school were strengthened by its **distributed**

'Rising from the ashes': Securing engagement in a new academy

leadership and by innovative in-house approaches to continuing professional development (CPD).

A significant **cultural change** has been to move from an environment in which people worked hard but expected to be disappointed to one in which people worked hard and were excited at the prospect of their success. Relationships between teachers and their students have improved. Students feel that their teachers know them and care about their progress.

Transition

The **innovative curriculum** in Year 7 provides a valuable way to ease transition from Key Stages 2 to 3. The model is purposefully similar to primary school learning, with students spending their **foundation days** in one place. Links with primary schools are strong. Older students have a formalised **mentoring relationship** with younger students to aid the transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4.

The main challenge was in changing people's expectations… Perceptions can change rapidly if people are given the opportunity to become involved.

Evaluation

Attendance has improved dramatically. The **school roll** has risen sharply as community perceptions have become more favourable.

The **quality improvement cycle** is rigorous. Curriculum leaders meet with senior leaders at Targeted Improvement Process meetings (TIPs) to discuss the performance of the areas for which they are responsible. These meetings are also attended by the principal of the academy sponsor, Barnfield College.

Student perceptions and feedback are an integral part of the school decision-making and evaluation process. Students are still cautious of change, but have learnt to trust the school leadership and are willing to try things. One said: "At first, I hated the idea of vertical tutoring … but actually … it's brilliant".

Challenges

The main challenge was in **changing people's expectations**, to take a school that was disaffected and under-achieving and to make it a place where students wanted to learn and teachers wanted to teach. This has been achieved through significant headteacher personal engagement.

Recruitment was a problem. By galvanising the existing staff through consultation, distributed leadership and engagement, the school leadership enabled the school to succeed and thus improved the prospects of recruitment for the future.

Another significant challenge has been the **timetabling of ongoing curriculum developments** at Key

Stage 4. This will be addressed by the production of three alternative timetables to cater for different numbers of students in each curriculum pathway.

Key learning

- **Cultural change and curricular change are compatible and complementary**. Without concomitant curriculum change, Barnfield South Academy would have struggled to fulfil the promises of its cultural changes, and those cultural changes would have failed to take root and become established.

- **Perceptions can change rapidly** if people are given the opportunity to become involved in the decision-making process and if they feel that they are truly listened to. Students are a valuable conduit of information to parents. If students and teachers feel positively about their school, so ultimately will the community.

Research Associate: Andrew Hunter, Soham Village College

Case study

Faith in action: Building Learning Power (BLP)

## Bishop Justus Church of England School, Bromley

Key themes

– A child-centred ethos – 'faith in action' – is the backbone of developments.

– An integrated approach to learning underpins the concept of Building Learning Power (BLP).

– A distributed approach to leadership.

School context

Bishop Justus Church of England School newly opened in 2004 and is now full, with 180 students in each of Years 7–11, plus its first cohort of Year 12 students. It serves a large catchment area, centred in Bromley, with diverse backgrounds. The proportion of students with special educational needs (SEN) is above average but the proportion of students with English as an additional language (EAL) below. The school has specialist status in Music.

Nature of the reforms

Curriculum development has been evolutionary rather than wholesale reform. The ethos underpinning this and all aspects of school life could be summed up as 'faith in action', led and delivered through four interconnected 'pillars':
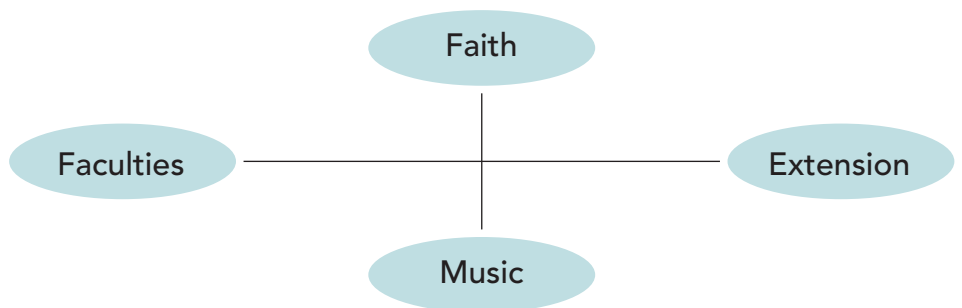
A faculty structure with innovative department groupings, for example, Communications, Performance, Logistics, supports an integrated learning approach in which BLP is embedded across the curriculum.

Curriculum design is built around the four pillars:

– The **faculties** drive subject provision and BLP across the curriculum, with each taking responsibility for one element of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education in each year group.

– Collective worship enables students to connect with **faith** and raises awareness of key local or global issues.

– **Extension** centres around breakfast clubs and after-school activities, including one-to-one tutoring, catch-up and one-to-one sessions with cover assistants for vulnerable learners.

– **Music:** through weekly one-hour choral singing lessons students learn to take risks, develop confidence, set their own learning objectives to achieve outcomes and take responsibility.

Case study

Faith in action: Building Learning Power (BLP)

Leadership of the reforms

Being a new school meant that the curriculum could be built around the needs and aspirations of the students.

Features that have contributed to leading curriculum reform include:

–   The headteacher's **clear vision** and development of a culture among the staff of continuous change.

–   **Distributed leadership** across staff at all levels, and students. A 'bottom-up' approach is encouraged so that ideas are fed through to the leadership team.

–   An investment in **individual coaching and support**.

–   As the school increased in size the **faculty structure** was introduced to involve staff from across the school in leadership; faculty leaders work closely with staff and heads of department.

–   A **student leadership group** attends every alternate leadership group meeting as well as governors' committees.

–   In-house continuing professional development **(CPD)**, for example:

    •   **weekly twilight training** led by a team of three advanced skills teachers (ASTs) and a lead practitioner in teaching and learning

    •   **sharing of good practice and pedagogy** supported by IRIS Technology for videoing lessons.

–   The headteacher initiated a major programme of **consultation** on a five-year strategic plan, including curriculum reform. Initial meetings with staff and governors were followed by a series of evening forums/Q&A sessions for parents, the community, then stakeholders from business and the local authority.

Investing substantially in in-house CPD to develop pedagogy and practice.

Transition

From Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 this includes:

–   Year 7 staff liaising with primary schools, including visits to observe lessons, looking at ways of studying and working patterns

–   Year 7 students being kept initially in form groups for **transition teaching** so that staff and students can gain familiarity before assessments are used to create two 'advanced learning' groups and mixed ability groups

The flow between Key Stages 3 and 4 is blurred, with a continuum approach enabling students to choose preferences at various stages to suit their futures.

Evaluation

A **year learning director** is responsible for each year group, supported by an assistant headteacher, in monitoring the impact of groupings and learning styles. Feedback is gathered from students in each year group on learning, progress and perceptions.

Academic tutoring, including self and peer assessment, is contributing to tracking and monitoring the students' acquisition of skills against the 4Rs of BLP. Surveys and evaluation sheets provide opportunities for parent and student feedback.

Students spoke articulately about the skills they acquire through the BLP approach in each of the four pillar areas, for example, Bowland Maths lessons where they apply skills such as taking different roles in a team and finding creative ways to understand and get around problems to projects.

Challenges

As a new school, the main challenge related to the small number of staff that initially limited the curriculum offer. Strategies to tackle and overcome this included:

–   allowing time for the school to grow and staff numbers to increase, thus giving flexibility and enabling the curriculum to broaden

–   raising the capacity of the staff to be confident in tackling learning areas outside their main specialism by showcasing best practice and using paired or team teaching.

Key learning

–   Developing a curriculum model centred on core beliefs about faith and learning and creating the **leadership and organisational structures** that support this.

–   Investing substantially in **in-house CPD** to develop pedagogy and practice.

–   **Consulting widely** and engaging stakeholders in ongoing evaluation.

Research Associate: Aydin Onac, Fortismere School

Case study

'Striking out for the top of the mountain' through common purpose, focus on achievement, distributed leadership and accountability

Castleford High School Technology and Sports College

Key themes

Castleford High School has established a culture of achievement through:

– a clear focus on achievement across all levels of leadership

– a supportive and challenging relationship with middle leaders

– the use of data as a monitoring tool

– enhancing the role of support staff

School context

Castleford High School Technology and Sports College is an 11–16 community comprehensive school in Wakefield Local Authority, West Yorkshire. It is a mixed school of 1,250 students, including some with a hearing impairment, for which the school is resourced. The school's students are mainly White British and mostly come from the school's locality.

Nature of the reforms

As summed up by one senior leader, the school's approach to its curriculum journey has "not been a quick fix, but a gradual evolution within a supportive school". This has been achieved by:

– the **introduction of a broad Key Stage 4 curriculum with a vocational emphasis**, based around **personalisation**

– the implementation of a **skills-based curriculum in Year 7**, with each subject's schemes of work required to address Personalised Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS)

– the inception of **project-based learning** for a group of Year 7 students who benefit from a primary model of delivery, with fewer teachers

Leadership of the reforms

Curriculum reform and a rise in student attainment has been enabled through:

– initiation of a proactive process of **curriculum review**

– increasing the size of the **senior leadership team (SLT)**

– locating **achievement at the centre of role specifications** for senior leaders

– **distributing leadership to middle leaders** who were charged with powering the reforms, with ineffective ones moved on

– focusing on the **role of support staff** by appointing a human resources (HR) manager

– developing **data systems for self-evaluation**

'Striking out for the top of the mountain' through common purpose, focus on achievement, distributed leadership and accountability

Transition

In most respects the school adopts a conventional approach to transition in liaison with its primary partners. In recent years, however, it has developed Year 6 extra-curricular project-based learning that is continued after transfer through participation in national technology competitions. It has also implemented a model of delivery for weaker or more vulnerable students that involves significant amounts of core curriculum time being spent with a former primary-trained teacher, where a sheltered learning environment has been nurtured.

Achievement as the No 1 priority of senior leadership…locating achievement at the centre of role specifications

Evaluation

The headteacher introduced robust systems for the self-evaluation of the school's work. These included:

– self-evaluation systems in which the **school's development plan** and **continuing professional development (CPD) and performance management** policies and practices are **linked together** via the online 'BlueSky' package

– some well-established **monitoring** tools such as Kirkland Rowell surveys, with a focus on student responses

– **'light touch' evaluations on areas of priority**: the SLT identifies an aspect of the school's policies for assessment, and then initiates a period of information collection

– 'soft evaluation' such as **student voice** emerging through year and whole school councils. In addition, it is school practice to invite members of the school council to go in to whole staff meetings to discuss teaching and learning

Challenges

The challenges facing the school and the levers used to overcome them were:

– to establish a **sense of common purpose through cooperation** at different levels of leadership. The headteacher and SLT facilitated this by steering middle leaders into professional discussions about student achievement, and, where this was not forthcoming, tough staffing decisions were taken

– to implement a **secure, rigorous use of data** in raising achievement. Doubts were overcome by establishing a correlation between data, teaching and learning and improving results

– to **utilise the skills and ambitions of the apparently disenfranchised support staff**. This was achieved by the appointment of an HR manager who used structures and systems to bring them into the vision for the school

– **to maintain the progress made**. To stand still, to take things for granted, to feel satisfied, are not options. The only option, as the headteacher said, is taking the school "to the top of the mountain"

Key learning

– **Achievement as the No 1 priority of senior leadership,** with specific responsibilities for this ascribed to individual roles.

– **Active management of support staff** within an overarching collective purpose of student achievement.

– **Leadership distributed to middle leaders** with under-performance issues firmly grasped.

– **Successful systems of evaluation and data usage** "to tell you if you are working effectively – including what your students say about your impact".

Research Associate: Steve Shaw, Brighouse High School

National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Case study

Skills and knowledge for learning

Estover Community College, Plymouth

Key themes

– Development of a skills-led programme for Key Stage 3 learners that aims to prepare young people for life beyond school.

– Leadership, including design of the programme, distributed to classroom practitioners.

School context

Estover Community College, Plymouth, is an 11–19 comprehensive college of 1,250 students. It is situated in an area of average social and economic circumstances, though serving pockets that are below average. The College's campus is undergoing a complete re-build as part of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, to become an all-through school with the college reorganised into four 'schools within a school'. The college has a visual arts specialism.

Nature of the reforms

Curriculum reforms were introduced to address challenges identified by the principal and the leadership team:

– The existing curriculum failed to prepare learners adequately for life beyond school.

– Students lacked independence in their learning.

– The school serves an area in which education is undervalued.

– Within the context of the campus redevelopment, there was a need for a curriculum to appeal to a wider spectrum of young people.

The curriculum model

Skills and Knowledge for Learning, the **SKL curriculum**, is being rolled out for Key Stage 3 students for half a day per week. It aims to enable them to develop transferable learning skills through extending and enriching their experiences inside and outside the classroom. It comprises:

– termly projects which serve as authentic vehicles for the acquisition of skills

– celebrating student outcomes with the local community

– transferable skills-based areas, which are attainment targets with planned outcomes, incorporating functional skills

– students assessing their own progress in SKL

– Kagan Structures, a collaborative learning approach

Leadership of the reforms

The leadership model consisted of three layers:

– **commissioner:** the senior leadership team (SLT), gathering information on other schools' practices and appointing the project leader

– **director:** the project leader, putting the SKL team together with the vice principal's support

– **practitioner-writers:** the SKL group, writing the programme of study and scheme of work

Vision

The principal, together with the two senior leaders responsible for the curriculum, visited other schools to research models of skills-based curricula.

Skills and knowledge for learning

Identifying a lead person

The principal appointed an advanced skills teacher (AST) to be **project leader**, giving her significant freedom to develop it.

Team-based leadership

An **SKL group** was formed to create the SKL programme of study. It comprised:

– an AST (the project leader)

– the head of Citizenship (who became the SKL leader)

– 12 volunteer classroom practitioners

The principal was keen to harness the enthusiasm of some less experienced members of staff. The leadership team and project leader therefore targeted some teachers to join the group. "We had a dream team: a balance ... of experience and enthusiasm, tapping into each other's strengths", said the project leader.

Programme development took place over six weeks. The group worked after school, on non-pupil days, and worked off site for three days.

The SKL group was the sole consultative body with autonomy to design curriculum change and plan its implementation. The principal's confidence in the group was absolute, so no further consultation was thought to be necessary.

Transition

– Estover leads a project called Fusion, an exchange of teaching expertise between primary and secondary phases. The SKL project evolved within this framework, with a focus on modes of delivery.

– Some of the SKL skills have been identified as those essential for independent learning in preparation for the transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4.

The principal appointed an advanced skills teacher (AST) to be project leader, giving her significant freedom to develop it.

Evaluation

Informal self-evaluation reveals that teachers in other subject areas have found that students who have participated in SKL:

– are better at working independently and collaboratively

– can identify strengths and set targets for future learning

– demonstrate maturity and responsibility

– display improvements in behaviour and attendance

Students who have participated in the programme understand its aims and enjoy their learning. One said, "SKL is learning to be independent; it's learning to work together and try out new things".

Challenges

An initial concern was that the SKL group, with its diverse membership, might find it difficult to work together effectively. The diversity turned out to be a strength, however, as it established a creative and dynamic culture.

Key learning

– **Learning from other schools** to determine a direction that was right for Estover.

– Leadership was **distributed** through three tiers.

– The success of the project rested on the actions of senior leaders simultaneously to **inspire and empower**.

– The **appointment of a strong project leader** at the start of the planning process was important for change leadership to occur.

– Members of the SKL group were enthusiastic about **recapturing a sense of themselves as learners**.

Research Associate: Stephen Clarke, Brixham College

National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Case study

Condensing Key Stage 3 to raise student aspiration through early personalisation

Henley-in-Arden High School

Key themes

- Condensing Key Stage 3 to stimulate more rapid progress.

- Allocating explicit curriculum provision for Personalised Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) in Year 7.

- Introducing flexible curriculum days for all year groups.

- Moving from a coasting culture to one focused on pace and progress.

- Motivating and engaging learners by personalising pathways from Year 9 onwards, and commencing the options process in Year 8.

- Inviting and expecting innovation and leadership by middle leaders.

- Rigorously tracking students to ensure progress is sustained for all.

School context

Henley-in-Arden High School is a mixed 11–16 specialist performing arts school, with 619 students on roll. The school has used the freedoms afforded by the reform of the secondary curriculum to effect a culture shift, increasing pace, progress and engagement in Key Stage 3 and offering personalised pathways from Year 9.

Nature of the reforms

A culture, described by a senior leader as "coasting: pleasant but not rigorous" in Year 9, was identified, especially among the boys and the most able pupils. This was not proving to be the ideal preparation for Key Stage 4, as pupils were carrying these attitudes forward and had relatively low aspirations.

Fast-tracking pilot groups in core subjects in 2007–08 showed that progress in Key Stage 3 could be accelerated without sacrificing end of Key Stage outcomes. Personalised Key Stage 4 pathways, beginning in Year 9, allowed pupils to spend longer securing success at GCSE; to follow additional Level 2 courses

such as Statistics; or to move on to AS courses, for example in English Language and Literature.

The condensed Key Stage 3 model was then extended in 2008–09 to include all pupils. The headteacher evaluated the impact very positively: "students are making the same progress in two years that they were making in three".

The new culture of engagement and acceleration was supported by a focus on PLTS through allocating two hours per week in Year 7 to a learning skills programme, and the addition of eight flexible curriculum days for each year group.

Condensing Key Stage 3 to raise student aspiration through early personalisation

Leadership of the reforms

Key aspects of the leadership strategy were:

– **distributing leadership**, placing trust in subject leaders to plan and make decisions about the details of delivery. Authority is granted to middle leaders, and innovation is expected, provided achievement and engagement remain the top priority

– **amending staffing structures**, appointing a second-in-department in each core subject specifically to lead on Key Stage 3

– **acknowledging work in progress**, and being willing to accept short-term imperfections and continuous adaptation of plans in the pursuit of the key goals of acceleration, personalisation and engagement

– **implementing rigorous tracking and monitoring**, including half-termly meetings of subject leaders with senior staff to check progress data

– **providing time for creative planning** through full-day sessions early in the strategy, **and ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) support** on a weekly basis

– **enhancing consultation** by involving the governing body and other key groups such as a committee known as the School Improvement Board at an early stage, and holding specific curriculum evenings for parents

Transition

Transition into the condensed Key Stage 3 is supported by visits made by a senior leader to feeder schools, to audit the learning skills of Year 6 pupils through the medium of a film-making project. This enables the learning skills curriculum to be tailored to the needs of the pupils on arrival in Year 7.

Transition to Key Stage 4 is enabled by running the options system in Year 8, with most courses beginning in Year 9. Where vocational courses are offered by partner organisations and cannot begin until Year 10, special taster and foundation courses are in place for pupils to follow in Year 9 to ensure effective participation when they move into Year 10.

> The vision focussed on a limited number of core ideas…to re-engage and motivate pupils and pave the way for early personalisation.

Challenges

The principal challenge was in **persuading all staff** of the worth of the proposed developments by highlighting the generic nature of transferable skills across subjects and placing a greater emphasis on autonomy and levels of professional trust. **Collaboration difficulties** with other external providers also had to be overcome.

Key learning

– Frank **feedback** on early ideas, from governors and school leaders, ensured that detailed proposals were strong.

– The vision focused on a limited number of **core ideas**, essentially that a condensed Key Stage 3 would not jeopardise standards but would re-engage and motivate pupils, and pave the way for early personalisation.

– **Distributed leadership** to subject leaders who were invited and expected to lead the development of innovative practices.

– Rigorous **tracking** limited risk and ensured progress was sustained.

Research Associate: Mike Cook, Heckmondwike Grammar School

Vocational curriculum development and community engagement

Kirk Hallam Community Technology and Sports College, Derbyshire

Key themes

Kirk Hallam has introduced personalised approaches to the curriculum to create a flexible 'agenda of achievement' through:

– development of applied learning within the vocational curriculum at Key Stages 4 and 5

– community engagement and involvement through the extended curriculum

School context

Kirk Hallam Community Technology and Sports College is an 11–19 specialist leading edge college with 1,025 on roll, serving an urban and rural area of Derbyshire. The newly opened sixth form centre is shared by three other local secondary schools.

Nature of the reforms

The school has adopted an incremental, flexible approach.

– It has developed **applied learning** at Key Stages 4 and 5 with courses including Agriculture and Horticulture, Engineering and Science BTEC First Certificate courses that have led to high-level pupil engagement and 100% pass rates. The success of these courses has led to a demand for and delivery of Diplomas in Media, IT, Engineering and land-based studies across the consortium of schools in the South East Derbyshire Secondary School Improvement Partnership.

– **Personalised approaches** have been introduced to the Key Stage 4 curriculum; for example the science curriculum offers students five different pathways, generating a flexible 'agenda for achievement'. Innovative approaches to Key Stage 4 English and Maths have introduced new areas of study and created opportunities for higher achievement.

– An **extended curriculum** has been developed, engaging and involving the community that supports the personal development of the students. The annual exchange programme with schools from Toyota city in Japan and participation in the Toyota Challenge Engineering competition has encouraged Key Stage 3 students to engage with the vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4. The College raises student awareness of cultural diversity through events such as a World Culture Day and a Sikh Awareness Day and through the large number of international visitors arranged as part of the extended curriculum. Parents and the wider local community are encouraged to become involved in the wide range of extra-curricular activities available to students, for example the gardening club.

Vocational curriculum development and community engagement

Leadership of the reforms

Curriculum reform has been enabled through:

– a **vision** based on the principle that incremental improvement, within a complementary formal and innovative extended curriculum that provides breadth and balance, will lead to success for every learner

– a **culture** of shared values, with the centrality of student learning needs at the core, leading to the development of a personalised, flexible curriculum encouraging the highest level of success for all

– a curriculum **structure** generated from whole staff, cross-subject discussion and work with cluster schools, which has enabled diploma lines to be developed successfully and has led to a newly opened sixth form centre

– a commitment to **distributed leadership** and an extensive programme of continuing professional development (CPD) that underpins and supports the principles of teaching and learning across the College and in particular a heavy investment in ICT that supports collaborative learning within the new technologies

– a **consultation** process that has engaged contributions from all staff, cascaded them through subject leader and focus groups and engaged with the views of students through the work of a strong student council

Transition

Continuity and progression through the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is supported by the employment of a head of transition to foster liaison with feeder primary schools and to develop a clear understanding of the pupils' needs prior to transition. Transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 is supported by an investment in a personalised system of guidance offered to each student.

Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation occurs by internal monitoring of developments through regular curriculum review and annual consultation with all stakeholders.

Challenges

The leadership challenges faced by the school and the levers used to overcome them were:

– ensuring that "**all staff are on board**" and not just the committed few. This was achieved by taking an inclusive, egalitarian approach to staff development, and encouraging staff voice through forum meetings and annual review

– creating an **innovative culture** that encourages **creative risk taking** that has been facilitated through teamwork and a robust quality assurance system, with sharing of good practice across the consortium of schools

– the College principal views **levels of additional funding** as a potential significant barrier to continued development

Key learning

– **Incremental** rather than revolutionary approach to change.

– **Holistic** personalised approaches to student development.

– **Focus on breadth and balance** within the developing curriculum.

– Facilitation of cross-curricular **team working**.

– **Community engagement** to facilitate the extended curriculum.

Research Associate: Susan Jardine, Caistor Yarborough School

Incremental rather than revolutionary approach to change.

National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Case study

Consulting and collaborating on curriculum reform

Lipson Community College, Plymouth

Key themes

- **Key Stages** merged in 11–19 curriculum.
- **Extensive consultation** with stakeholder groups.
- **Leadership distributed** at all levels.

School context

Lipson Community College is an 11–19 comprehensive college in Plymouth. It has approximately 1,400 students on roll. Students join the college with standards that are below the national average, with a higher than average proportion having learning difficulties and/ or disabilities. It has a performing arts specialism and has recently become a cooperative trust school.

Nature of the reforms

The **structural changes** that have resulted from the curriculum reforms are those that underpin greater personalisation:

- Key Stage 3 condensed into two years with five years to cover Key Stages 4 and 5.
- Students entering Year 7 at Level 3 or below in English and Maths follow a modified curriculum in Years 7 and 8, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy.
- Students follow personalised pathways by choosing two subjects at the end of Year 8 to study for five hours per week for one year, and two more at the end of Year 9.
- Students are guided to ensure that they make appropriate choices.
- Key Stage 3 students are given opportunities to develop independent learning skills by engaging in personal study in an interest beyond the national curriculum for one afternoon per week.

- Offering vocational courses at Key Stage 4, including diplomas, has strengthened partnerships with other providers.

Leadership of the reforms

Distributed leadership

Leadership is modelled on the 'four deeps', developed by Professor David Hargreaves and others:

- deep learning
- deep experience
- deep support
- deep leadership

The model of distributed leadership followed the same model, but was structured so that individuals could impact on the process without the hierarchy being flattened.

Consulting and collaborating on curriculum reform

Reviewing the curriculum

– The senior leadership team (SLT) examined the **career progression routes** of Lipson learners, and worked backwards to the skills that needed to be developed at Key Stage 3 to equip students for future learning.

– The principal delegated leadership of the curriculum review to his curriculum vice principal.

– Staff were invited to join 'deep' **consultation groups** to think creatively about a curriculum that would engage Lipson learners most effectively.

– Faculty leaders worked with their teams to consider possible curriculum offers.

– All staff were invited to undertake **learning visits**, sometimes with governors, to schools recognised for curriculum innovation.

Extensive consultation followed with parents/carers and governors at after-school forums and by invitation to continuing professional development (CPD) days. Students were consulted through the College's systems for student voice, for example, faculty leaders heard students' views about preferred teaching models through focus, or 'barometer', groups.

Developing the curriculum model

Staff who had undertaken learning visits presented their findings to their colleagues. A variety of staff forums then made decisions about continuity, groupings and timetabling.

The leadership team collected data, and the resulting curriculum model was published to staff.

Transition

– All faculties are involved in primary transition. The College hosts a summer festival with partner primary schools, and the new curriculum has put a stronger focus on joint learning outcomes.

– Curriculum changes have incorporated systems for information, advice and guidance so that students at the end of Year 8 are able to make informed choices about their future learning.

Evaluation

Formal evaluation has yet to be conducted. However, it is anticipated that the curriculum developments will show increased success for learners by:

– increased engagement

– raised attainment

– raised achievement, especially in English and Maths

– enhanced skills for living

– improved attendance

Faculty leaders learn student views about the delivery of the new curriculum through student barometer groups. "We do a lot of role-play and learning through games. It makes lessons fun, and we learn to work together" (student).

Staff who had undertaken learning visits presented their findings to their colleagues. A variety of staff forums then made decisions about continuity, groupings and timetabling.

Challenges

Planning and consultation were so rigorous that the curriculum changes brought very few challenges. Staff acknowledge that it was ambitious to plan and implement such profound changes within a year, and it was their commitment and time management skills that enabled the changes to come about.

Key learning

– The **leadership structure** developed was learning-focused and supported curriculum reform.

– The **leadership team consulted extensively** with a wide range of stakeholders, and the data from the consultations was used to inform developments.

– All teaching staff could take part in **learning visits**, and feed back to staff what they had learned.

– The curriculum vice principal who led the reforms at an operational level writes the college's timetable, and so could ensure that they were implemented fully.

– There are **clear expectations** of what the reformed curriculum will provide, and this is to be measured in terms of student achievement.

– The programme includes procedures for **information, advice and guidance**.

Research Associate: Stephen Clarke, Brixham College

Case study

Skills development and applied enrichment learning opportunities

Lordswood Girls' School and Sixth Form Centre, Harborne, Birmingham

Key themes

– A Learning for Life skills framework (known as TRICS) embedded from Key Stage 3.

– A broader range of applied learning opportunities in Key Stage 4.

– A restructured Wednesday creates applied learning enrichment opportunities for pupils, and continuing professional development (CPD) release time for staff.

– A review tutor model with achievement coordinators supports tracking individual progress and skills acquisition.

School context

Lordswood Girls' School and Sixth Form Centre, Harborne, is a specialist media arts school in Birmingham, with a second specialism in applied learning; 850 pupils are on roll.

Nature of the reforms

A culture change has been effected. While standards remain of the utmost importance, school leaders have replaced an ethos of 'points make prizes' with one where **applied learning, enriched experiences** and the **development of skills** are considered more beneficial than an unnecessarily long list of GCSE outcomes. The curriculum model, the nature of teaching and learning and enrichment experiences reflect a new culture of engagement.

The main developments include:

– **extended induction** time in each year group

– a **Learning for Life programme**, delivered in a **review time** period every day except Wednesday and supported by a fortnightly **humanities day** in Year 7

– an **applied learning afternoon** every Wednesday, when a range of optional **enrichment learning** activities is available and staff can be released for in-house CPD

Leadership of the reforms

The headteacher's **role** is seen as direction setting and empowering within a secure framework. New structures and systems enable leaders to engage everyone in action research and design the details of the solutions required. Leadership is **distributed** among a large extended leadership team that includes some non-teaching staff. Everyone serves on one of several **working groups**, led by members of the leadership team. Working group foci include curriculum innovation and development, student voice, specialisms, teaching and

Skills development and applied enrichment learning opportunities

learning, developing next practice, virtual learning environments and sustainable schools.

Pilot work and research by the teaching and learning working group led to the implementation of the **Learning for Life** scheme. A skills progression matrix and supporting materials in the pupil planner also emerged from working groups, as did a curriculum design, which includes the thematic induction period, review time, applied learning afternoons, varied Key Stage 4 pathways and fortnightly humanities days.

The **review tutor** system, led by two achievement coordinators who monitor and track progress, involves all staff including the headteacher, and an hour per week is allocated for each review tutor to meet their tutees individually.

Student voice is engaged through all subject areas being obliged to hold **student forums** as part of their self-evaluation, a sophisticated school council structure, known as the **student executive team**, and **parents' forums** giving an opportunity to ask questions and contribute views.

Transition

The development of the Learning for Life programme was designed specifically with transition to a range of academic and applied learning pathways in mind. Independence and Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) are anticipated to bear fruit in Key Stage 4. A city-wide transition project lays the ground for potential future collaborative work related to the new Key Stage 2 curriculum.

Evaluation

Provision is evaluated by:

- **paired lesson observations** with a dual focus on skills as well as subject quality assurance

- **senior leadership team (SLT) links with departments** which help to make evaluative use of data

- a **quality assurance schedule** for departments

- **achievement coordinator** reviews of the tutor system, as well as monitoring the progress of individuals and groups

- half-termly **celebrations** which identify students' achievements

Structural changes to the working day released time for CPD and departmental meetings…providing acknowledgement of the importance of their work.

Challenges

A forward-thinking staff meant that barriers to reform were few, but challenges included some parents who believed that a long list of GCSE outcomes was a more desirable goal. The school has patiently won these over with persuasive enthusiasm for the virtues of applied and enrichment learning. The applied learning specialism acted as a lever, giving authority and relevance to the proposed developments, and ensured conditions were right to engage with change in the school.

Key learning

- **Distributed leadership** and engagement of all staff, teaching and non-teaching, established via a series of **working groups**.

- **Structural changes** to the working day released time for CPD and departmental meetings, so that working groups could meet in directed time, providing an acknowledgment of the importance of their work.

- A well-timed **second specialism** in applied learning lent authority and relevance to the reforms.

- Embedding the **bespoke PLTS** (TRICS) scheme was supported by and included everyone in the review tutor team, facilitating leadership via the achievement coordinators, adding skills explicitly to the curriculum in review time and creating a progression matrix.

- Pupil engagement was much enhanced by the introduction of the student executive team to capture and respond to **student voice**.

Research Associate: Mike Cook, Heckmondwike Grammar School

Case study

Raising the aspirations of a community through curriculum reform

Challenges

– The smooth running of the curriculum was an initial challenge. Establishing **clear operating procedures** and **micro-managing** the 'day to day' through networks and management teams were crucial in addressing this.

– "Changing attitudes from competition to collaboration" (senior leader) across the three schools. An investment in developing staff relationships, helping colleagues across schools work together and reconfiguring leadership structures were central to meeting these challenges. For example, work with the external consultant helped break down adverse perceptions, limit cultural dissonance and group members' resistance to change. It also promoted collaborative honesty and teambuilding between the schools' leadership and management groups.

– **Setting up emerging courses** was a challenge met by the staff themselves through:

  • resourcefulness and a commitment to becoming **experts** in these new fields

  • a growing professional relationship between the departments across schools in the partnership, for example through planning residential meetings.

Key learning

– **Commitment to the holistic vision** for a community. When the 11–19 curriculum reforms emerged they were viewed as an opportunity to enable the school to realise change.

– **Investment in relationships** has built a real sense of trust in the senior leadership of the school from all stakeholders.

– Establishing **key management teams and department networks** to establish procedures and accountability.

– Cultivating an **ethos of 'hard work' and continuous improvement** evident in staff and students' attitudes.

Research Associate: Zoe Morris, Chorlton High School

When the 11–19 curriculum reforms emerged they were viewed as an opportunity to enable the school to realise change.

Case study

Raising the aspirations of a community through curriculum reform

Middleton Technology School, Rochdale

Key themes

– Taking an holistic view about the needs of the local area.

– Seizing opportunities provided by reforms to realise the school's vision.

– Forging and leading effective partnerships with partner institutions introducing the specialist diplomas.

– Developing a culture of commitment, dedication and self-improvement.

– Creating leadership teams and key roles to drive developments.

– Investing in professional development.

School context

Middleton Technology School, Rochdale, is an 1,100-student 11–18 community school serving an urban area of social and economic deprivation. The school has specialist designation for Technology, Vocational Education and Raising Achievement Transforming Learning (RATL).

Nature of the reforms

Underpinning the vision for Middleton was a concern about **progression for young people at 16 and 18**. This aligned with its development of vocational specialism and partnership development, enabling it to establish:

– a **range of vocational qualifications**, including three diploma lines and **post-16 provision** offered through collaboration with two other schools – the Middleton Partnership. This was aimed at improving student motivation, offering purpose and the promise of relevant skills

– a **new purpose-built sixth form centre** designed specifically for the delivery of the new diplomas

Leadership of the reforms

The transformation of the curriculum design and education provision was underpinned by the headteacher's 'outward-facing' leadership, focused on a commitment to **raise the aspiration of the local community**.

The creation of the **Middleton Partnership** was central to enabling this vision, with time invested in creating:

– a **common vision and core purpose**

– the **leadership structures** required and **good working relationships**

Raising the aspirations of a community through curriculum reform

The **appointment of an assistant headteacher** to establish curriculum partnerships across the three schools began the **structural reconfiguration** that included establishing the following teams:

Strategic Management Board

Membership: Headteachers from each school and the Assistant Headteacher for Partnerships

Remit: to develop a leadership model that clearly signposted accountability across and within the three institutions

Curriculum Group

Chair: Assistant Headteacher for Partnerships

Membership: Curriculum Leads from each school

Remit: to develop an overview for curriculum design that allowed the three schools to offer post-16 courses that complemented each other and would be developed from strengths within the schools in terms of staff, specialisms and resources

Management Group

Chair: Assistant Headteacher for Partnerships

Membership: Heads of Sixth Form and those responsible for timetabling from each school

Remit: to develop the operational structure of the partnerships, for example the alignment of timetable blocks, planning the transport systems that would be needed to move students between each school and development of registration across three sites

The school proactively **invested in relationship building, developing trust** and **building leadership capacity** through:

– **creating and developing the teams** above to shape and manage the partnership

– **engaging an external consultant** to work with the management group on leadership and change management

– **networking of middle leaders** through regular, scheduled meetings focused on implementation and organisation of the curriculum developments

– **investing time in professional development**, including residential and twilight sessions focused on planning and preparation of the new qualifications

In addition to working with partner institutions to review and develop provision, the school **consulted with stakeholders**:

– students, for example through department reviews

– parents, for example through using interactive ICT at evening events

– local businesses, for example through Business Breakfast meetings

Transition

A coordinated, supportive Year 9 **options process** provides genuine pathways from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4. Diploma and Key Stage 5 provision is central to the structure of the Year 9 curriculum that includes the delivery of Functional Skills. Forward planning 'pathways' through to 19 and students' skill progression drives the curriculum structure.

*"It makes you feel excited about the future and want to get there." (student)*

Evaluation

The school uses extensive monitoring and self-evaluation systems including:

– a two-year departmental review cycle

– using the 14–19 partnership toolkit with the partnership management group to evaluate and shape future provision

– analysis of vocational diploma results

– analysis of not in employment, education or training (NEET) data, retention rates and progression to higher education (HE)

The impact of the developments has been:

– a downward trend in NEET

– excellent retention rates during the first two years of the sixth form

– high level of support for the first Year 13 students moving into HE provision

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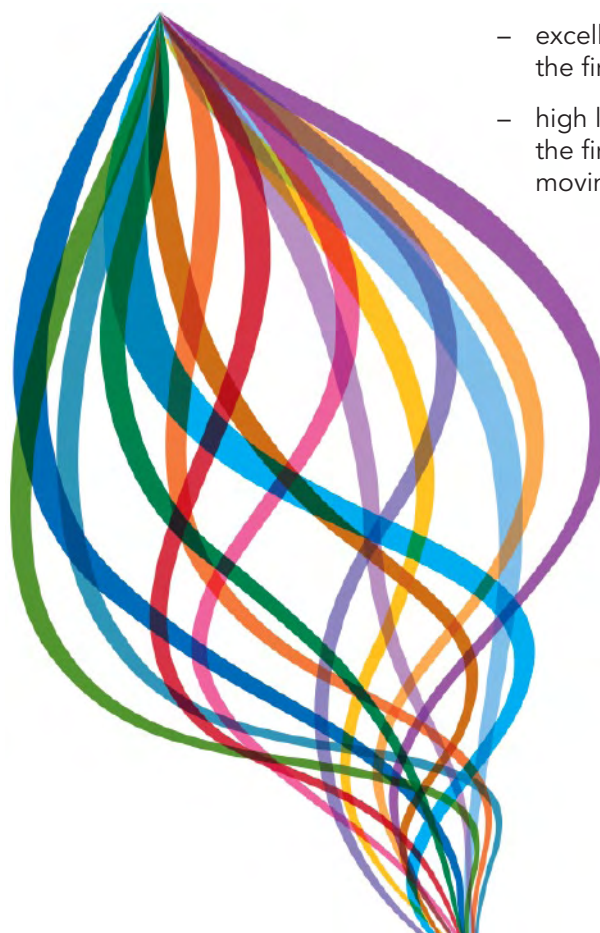
Case study

Students and staff leading change

Newstead Wood School for Girls, Bromley

Key themes

– Project-based learning linked to Personalised Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS).

– A distributed leadership model with a strong focus on learning.

– Student leadership.

School context

Newstead Wood is an 11–18 selective girls' state school, with just under 1,000 students on roll. The intake includes a wide range of socio-economic groups and 35% of students are from minority ethnic groups. The Engineering specialism focuses on creativity, problem solving and thinking skills across the curriculum as well as in the wider community.

Nature of the reforms

Formerly a traditional grammar school, students were focused on attainment but had the capacity to be more actively engaged in their own learning, the school's development and decision making. The school developed a **new Year 7 curriculum** model, Journeys of a Lifetime (JoaL):

– a cross-curricular project with three themes, each occupying six days per term – either the same day each week or a block

– each theme (for example 'The Road to Sustainability') has specific learning outcomes and key concepts as well as Citizenship links and presentation evenings/events

– students record their progress and PLTS acquisition in learning journals

The model forms part of a **wider philosophy of student leadership**, for example Year 12 Geography Society members ran a JoaL session on sustainability.

Leadership of the reforms

Central to the school's leadership of curriculum change have been:

– The headteacher's role, described by her as, "… the stirrer, the relentless driver".

– Opportunities for staff to **research curriculum models**, for example that used at Flinders University, Australia to inform the school model, alongside action research in school.

– A **distributed leadership model** inclusive of the students. **Structural reconfigurations** have included:

• **broadening the leadership group** to four deputy headteachers and nine senior teachers who have autonomy linked to accountability and targeted responsibilities, for example deep learning and continuity

• **teaching and learning responsibilities (TLRs)** linked to the new changes.

– **Leadership group** members leading developments, for example:

• focusing meetings on planning improvements, widening opportunities and linking initiatives

Students and staff leading change

- the first deputy leading the curriculum review.

– **Student leadership and ownership**, for example:

- the student leadership structure, led by sixth formers, enables students to take ownership and be fully involved in decision making: "We take it very seriously. You wouldn't want to miss a meeting and not have your say when decisions get made" (head girl)

- gifted and talented students and sixth formers work with staff and younger students to develop the curriculum and schemes of work, inputting ideas, delivering modules and supporting a range of departments.

– **Continuing professional development (CPD)**, focused on shifting understanding of the learning process, for example:

- exemplary practitioners modelling learning skills-based pedagogy in training sessions, in which the headteacher also played a prominent role

- peer observations.

– **Consultation** included:

– a focus group of staff and Year 7 students reviewing the first JoaL project

– the Parents' Association as a sounding board

– a curriculum working party, led by the first deputy, focusing on curriculum models

– staff focus groups.

Transition

Staff consider the development of the competencies will support better transition, with students able to make more informed choices based on the nature of learning in each course. A strategic decision has been taken not to do modular GCSEs because the view is that these tend more towards test preparation rather than learning processes.

Evaluation

This includes monitoring the extent to which PLTS are permeating across the curriculum, for example through department meetings and student focus groups. A criterion-based assessment for JoaL, linked to national levels for Citizenship, is being developed alongside use of a log book.

Staff confirm that students are becoming better at articulating their skills development and applying these in other curriculum areas.

Year 7 students interviewed spoke positively of the reforms, stating that they have enabled them to be more independent in their learning, solving problems, taking responsibility, making decisions and leading their own learning pathway.

Challenges

– Getting everybody 'on the bus' so that staff understand and feel supported was aided through, for example:

- the leadership group 'marketing' ideas diplomatically and gradually with realistic implementation timescales

- staff focus groups

- creating opportunities to showcase and share pedagogical practice

- a large team leading developments, enhancing capacity.

– Ensuring that the new approach actually happens in the classroom was aided through:

- monitoring having a high priority in whole school and team development plans.

– Differentiating between a teacher and a facilitator, what students appreciated and described was "an in-betweeny" teacher:

- showcasing good practice supported the development of this approach.

Research Associate: Aydin Onac, Fortismere School

The model forms part of a wider philosophy of student leadership.

Transforming learning through a focus on the habits of effective learners

Park View Community School, Chester-le-Street

Key themes

A high-performing school looking to break through an achievement glass ceiling by transforming learning through:

– a restructured curriculum with some aggregated curriculum areas in Years 7 and 8 and a condensed two-year Key Stage 3 for core subjects

– a focus on learning habits with a shift towards enquiry-based learning through a phased introduction of a local adaptation of the Building Learning Power (BLP) model, dubbed Park View Learning (PVL)

School context

Park View Community School is an 11–18 mixed language college with 1,458 students on roll, located in Chester-le-Street, County Durham.

Nature of the reforms

Outcomes at the school were already very good, but an examination of how that had been achieved suggested high levels of teacher dependency and this was having a detrimental impact on students' capacity as learners. As a response to this situation, the implemented reforms have two strands: structural reconfiguration and a focus on learning habits.

Structural reconfiguration includes a **condensed core Key Stage 3** for English, Maths, Science, Languages and RE completed over two years. In Years 7 and 8, some curriculum areas have been aggregated to enable a **themed approach**:

– History, Geography and RE have become an area called *Explore*

– Drama and Music have become *Perform*

– Art and Design Technology make up *Design*

Pupils work in these areas for six to eight weeks on a single theme, and their work culminates in a presentation called *The Final Challenge*. The reforms are additionally supported by several **curriculum special days** such as a Campaign Day and a Space Day in Years 7 and 8 and the provision of a weekly **reflection hour** for students informed by the keeping of learning logs.

The **focus on learning habits** led to the development and adoption of Park View Learning (PVL). The model emerged from a period of intense research by a working party, and was constructed on the principles of *Building Learning Power* (BLP). Teachers engage in 'split-screen planning', working to objectives for learning habits as well as content, knowledge and understanding.

Case study

Transforming learning through a focus on the habits of effective learners

Leadership of the reforms

Key aspects of the leadership strategy were:

– a clear **vision** from the headteacher to transform the dependency culture to one where students are equipped with the habits of effective learners

– **distributed leadership** empowered through establishment of a volunteer working party to look at options for transforming learning, an approach that created **learning advocates** and stimulated learning conversations

– generous initial resourcing through a pump-priming **investment in continuing professional development (CPD)**, with in-house provision supplemented by a culture of voluntary additional twilight INSET

– linkage of members of the **senior leadership team (SLT)** to work closely with faculty leaders to monitor and evaluate the impact of provision, and **coaching for transformation** where senior and subject leaders visit lessons, join in with the teaching at key points and give feedback

– systematic evaluative **learning reviews** with external inputs that gather and respond to student voice, and an expectation that teachers will engage with **student voice** as part of their own self-evaluation

Transition

Key Stages 3 and 4 have been re-balanced to increase time allocated to Key Stage 4 in the core subjects and to allow enriched learning experiences, to support the twin goals of high standards and the creation of capable learners.

Challenges

Challenges identified by senior leaders included:

– **getting the coaching model to work well for all staff**, by refinement to individual circumstances

– an initial focus on humanities subjects that could have led to some anxiety about **effective transfer to other areas**. Learning advocates have been used to mitigate this effect

– developing the **use of the language** of PVL, with subtle adjustments for the age of each year group

– combating **"shallow enthusiasm"** which bolts ideas onto existing methods rather than embedding new habits, through the use of regular classroom visits by senior staff and sensitive coaching

– maintaining **initiative continuity** as pupils move into Key Stage 4, and preventing it being seen solely as a feature of Key Stage 3

Implementation of continuing coaching strategies sustained and refined the shifting of practice.

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Case study

'What do you do with the "can't-do" kids?'

Passmores School, Harlow

Key themes

– Developing students to be effective managers of their own learning. "How do you pass on the responsibility for learning to the children? Secondary education too often takes away the independence taught in primaries" (headteacher).

School context

Passmores School is a mixed, medium-sized community comprehensive school and specialist technology college, with 850 students on roll, aged 11–16. Passmores has worked hard to raise student achievement and aspiration. Fifteen years ago Passmores was used to achieving around 25% 5A*-C GCSE passes. In 2008 65% of students achieved 5 A*-C grades, with 49% 5A*-C including English and Maths.

Nature of the reforms

– **Competency curriculum** that replaces a group of discreet subject lessons for all Year 7 students with a series of project-based lessons aimed at developing the competencies outlined in Personalised Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS).

– **Flexible Fridays** where every second Friday has a collapsed timetable to allow for a wider range of teaching and learning experiences.

– **Option days** where on certain days of the week Key Stage 4 students study only their option subjects, in three 100-minute lessons.

– **Vertical tutoring** where all tutor groups are vertical, and heads of year have been replaced with heads of house.

– **Years 7 and 8 fast track** where more able students experience more rapid and wider-ranging learning.

Leadership of the reforms

The vision for the curriculum changes was the headteacher's. The plans were developed to an early stage by the senior team and were then put to the whole staff, who had an opportunity to discuss and shape the proposals.

The headteacher is clear about the **ethos** that needs to be created to enable change. "You make the weather – the responsibility for creating the atmosphere for change was mine. You need to be transparent about the pitfalls of change and you make sure you celebrate your successes along the way."

Following from the initial **consultation**, the school organised a staff residential to encourage ownership and involvement at every level. In addition, there were a number of key **managerial changes** made in order to put the leadership and consultation pathways in place. Heads of departments were paired with senior leaders in a coaching relationship. Clear pathways were put in place to allow any member of the school staff to put their concerns to the senior team.

'What do you do with the "can't-do" kids?'

All the senior team operate an **open senior leadership approach**, which means that staff at all levels within the school can and do discuss their feelings with them.

Significant time was made available for **continuing professional development (CPD)** throughout the changes and beyond, into the period of consolidation. The leadership team were clear that they didn't want to compromise a good idea for want of funded planning time.

Students can be developed so as to be effective managers of their own learning.

Transition

The competency curriculum has provided much **continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3**, using a similar model of curriculum to teach students the skills they need in order to become more effective and independent learners.

The move to vertical tutoring is reported by the students to be extremely helpful in their **transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4**. Mentoring takes place within tutor groups. One student described his tutor group as a "flexible family".

Progression is measured carefully and, crucially, the students want to progress. Students say that the chances they are given to reflect on their learning are useful and that they "know what to do next". Results at Key Stage 4 have risen rapidly, year on year.

Evaluation

Evaluation shows that the school has avoided the possibility of a dip in standards during the period of most rapid change. A range of data are used to inform the evaluation, from examination results to student voice questionnaires. Students feel involved in their education and as a result are highly motivated.

Challenges

A significant and immediate challenge was the **timetabling** requirement. The proposed system required options choices to be timetabled across one day a week, during which lessons would be a different length to usual; for Year 7 students to follow a different style of curriculum to the rest of the school; for more able Year 7 and Year 8 students to be given an enriched curriculum; and for every second Friday to be "collapsed". The curriculum model is extremely complex but is effective.

A greater challenge, however, was "justifying to **parents and governors** why a school which looks increasingly successful has to change" (headteacher). The perceived success of the curriculum initiatives looks likely to be a significant factor in engaging parents.

Key learning

– Multiple changes are a challenge but not a constraint. They can be overcome by flexible timetabling.

– Students can be developed so as to be effective managers of their own learning, to do "other things apart from just passing GCSEs".

– Leadership can be distributed to encompass virtually everybody if people feel that their opinions are truly listened to and valued.

Research Associate: Andrew Hunter, Soham Village College

Case study

Curriculum redesign through consultation

Penketh High School, Warrington

Key themes

- Using curriculum change to address **raising attainment**.
- A **team approach to curriculum reform** and changing approaches to learning within the school.
- **Consulting with stakeholders** to shape the curriculum offer.

School context

Penketh High School, Warrington, is an 11–18 comprehensive school with 1,500 students on roll. It serves an area of average social economic circumstances with around 25% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The school has specialist designation as a media and visual arts college.

Nature of the reforms

The impetus for curriculum reform was to **raise learners' attainment** and focus on **student engagement**.

Using the Royal Society of Arts (RSA's) **Opening Minds** programme as a starting point, the school developed and introduced its new Year 7 curriculum to students in September 2008. It includes:

- a **thematic curriculum**
- one member of staff teaching 14 hours' learning over a two-week period within **mixed-ability form groups**
- **Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)** and **a focus on literacy** providing links with the primary model

Leadership of the reforms

In response to the 11–19 reforms the school entered a **year-long consultation and development stage**. Its key actions were:

- **a whole school audit** of the "learning outcomes of the curriculum not being demonstrated by the majority of our pupils"
- creating a '**cross-curricular development' role** for an assistant headteacher to bring strands of learning from different subject areas together into planned topics
- **an audit of Key Stage 3 content** to identify opportunities for curriculum collaboration

A **development team** was established with key staff, in terms of curriculum experience and leadership, encouraged to be part of the group: "We looked for people with energy that would drive it through" (senior leader). An 'open invite' was also extended to all staff. This team and their meetings created:

- an energetic and enthusiastic 'driving force' for change
- a forum to facilitate curriculum collaboration

Curriculum redesign through consultation

- a sounding board for staff reservations

- a mechanism "to control and prioritise the teaching and learning initiatives" (senior leader)

The team identified that learning needed to 'look different' and that for this to happen planning needed to be extensive. The team, which had grown to include over 30 staff members, divided into **six separate topic planning groups**, each including a mix of subject specialists, and led by a curriculum leader to plan one of the six half-term topics.

Once the curriculum was launched, the development team and topic planning groups continued to meet to create a **circular model of ongoing review and development** which:

- reinforced a loyalty and commitment to the programme

- promoted further development

The development of a primary/secondary model through **consultation** with primary staff was of key importance. This involved:

- termly **meetings with the primary headteachers**

- **learning from the primary schools** in terms of SEAL, literacy and competence-based learning

- **networking of Year 7 and primary staff** – a primary link group worked together and observed each other's practice

- working together to **reshape the transition curriculum**

Transition

The outcomes from this have provided continuity for students entering Penketh:

- mixed-ability groups are created based on shared knowledge of the different primary schools alongside students' leadership potential

- a dedicated Year 7 base building means that students perceive the school as smaller; this has further fuelled experimentation in the use of flexible learning spaces

The primary link group were "learning from each other and planning transition together" (middle leader), enabling the Year 7 curriculum to be closely linked to a primary model: "to foster a feeling of family".

"We looked for people with energy that would drive it through" (senior leader).

Evaluation

A change of headteacher and key leadership members since the introduction of the curriculum has led to a **formal period of assessment of its quality and benefits** as the school considers its next steps. It will be focused on rigorously evaluating impact on academic outcomes, including an examination of how:

- it has made a difference to **Year 8 students' skills development** (the programme's first cohort)

- **learning skills are now used within subject areas**

Challenges

The team ethos in planning, developing and evaluating has helped the school face a number of challenges in its two-year journey:

- **Initial staff resistance** was dissipated through the development team with its commitment and openness in considering staff concerns being clear levers.

- To **ensure that learning really did "look different"**, leaders within the development team employed a number of monitoring strategies including drop-in observations. Good practice and commitment to developments were also regularly reaffirmed through staff briefings.

Key learning

The strength of Penkeths' curriculum development has revolved around:

- **team-based leadership**, with staff working together to facilitate their own learning. Harnessing staff energies and commitment across all levels and subject areas

- **consultative engagement with a range of stakeholders** to shape provision

- **developing reflective practices** that look for continuous improvement

Research Associate: Zoe Morris, Chorlton High School, Manchester

Case study

Personalised approaches to curriculum delivery

St Andrew's Special School, Breadsall, Derbyshire

Key themes

St Andrew's Special School has introduced a personalised approach to curriculum provision through:

– flexible approaches to learning within a child-centred curriculum

– distributed leadership within an egalitarian culture of empowerment

School context

St Andrew's is a mixed day and residential special school for young people with severe learning difficulties. There are currently 74 on roll who are drawn from across the county of Derbyshire. In September 2008 the school was designated as a specialist school in the special educational needs (SEN) strand of Cognition and Learning.

Nature of the reforms

The school has adapted a personalised approach to the 11–19 curriculum reforms. It has:

– adopted a **flexible approach to curriculum planning**

– introduced three-year **strategic planning** to put strategy into practice

– introduced **ability-based groupings** and restructured specialist groups

– formed **links with outside agencies** to develop learners' independent skills and to enrich experience

Leadership of the reforms

Curriculum reform has been enabled through the following:

– A philosophy of 'if we get it right for the child it drives everything else' emanating from the headteacher who has promoted a culture of **distributed leadership** with 'self-generated accountability' for all staff, but particularly at subject leader level.

– The creation of an **egalitarian ethos** whereby all staff feel important 'cogs in the wheel', which has engendered a sense of 'permission to contribute' to curriculum reform irrespective of role, and giving 'the confidence to fail' if need be.

– A **child-centred cultural vision** which places children and their learning needs as central to the school's mission and values whose principal aim is to provide a stimulating, challenging and caring environment that allows everyone to deliver their full potential.

– Utilisation of the 'new freedoms' which 11–19 curriculum reform has brought to increase the **personalisation** of the curriculum offering, **informed by data** and realistic target setting so that there is tangible student-specific evidence of impact.

– A senior leadership strategic role in promoting innovation and freedom to initiate, through **investment in staffing and continuing professional development (CPD)** and providing teacher release time

Personalised approaches to curriculum delivery

for team coaching and review to promote engagement and ownership at all levels.

– A consultation process that has **engaged all stakeholders**.

Transition

Continuity and progression from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is supported by:

– a foundation of close relationships with feeder schools

– an incremental and personalised process so that needs are fully understood and catered for

– flexible liaison between staff, for example through secondary staff involved in the teaching of primary school days within the Creative Partnerships programme. This has been validated in the school having gained an International School's Award for Global Learning

Transition from Key Stages 3 to 4 is supported by the establishment of two classrooms at the local community college for St Andrew's school pupils. Students value this opportunity to develop social awareness and communication skills.

Transition from Key Stages 4 to 5 is supported by individual interviews and action plans for career planning, using external expertise and work experience and college familiarisation opportunities.

Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation occurs by the internal monitoring of developments by a committed staff through regular curriculum review, drawing on data from staff reviews and annual pupil reviews.

A child-centred rather than revolutionary approach to change.

Challenges

– Getting staff to understand the **difference between attainment and achievement** in order to set tangible, measurable and meaningful targets for the students. This was overcome through developing a sense of collective engagement, monitoring of lesson objectives and matching the curriculum to the needs of the child.

– **Enhancing the skills sets of staff** through high-quality CPD opportunities. It is felt that initial teacher training pays little attention to schools in the SEN sector. This weakness has been overcome through the decision to appoint 'good people' who can fit into the school ethos and then investing in their skills development, for example by intensive residential courses using trusted supply staff to facilitate this.

– **Identifying onward pathways** for the students. An ongoing concern is the perceived lack of access to opportunities for students when they move on from St Andrew's. There is little that the school feels it can do to overcome this; they only hope that their students will continue to have 'faith in the system'.

Key learning

– **Child-centred** rather than revolutionary approach to change.

– Empowerment and **ownership** at all levels.

– Focus on **skills development** rather than content.

– Facilitation of teamworking and encouraging **distributed leadership**.

– Emphasis on a culture of 'having a go' to **encourage innovation**.

– **Consistency** in approach within a **flexible and personalised curriculum** offering.

Research Associate: Susan Jardine, Caistor Yarborough School

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Case study

Thematic approaches to curriculum provision

St Bede's Catholic School and Sixth Form College, Lanchester, Durham

Key themes

St Bede's has introduced thematic approaches to curriculum provision through:

– thematic days when the timetable is suspended

– cross-curricular thematic working across subjects

School context

St Bede's Catholic School and Sixth Form College is an 11–18 specialist language college with 1,400 on roll, including around 300 post-16 students, serving a predominantly industrial area of County Durham.

Nature of the reforms

The school has adopted an incremental evolutionary approach. It has:

– introduced **thematic days** on issues such as Identity and Cultural Diversity, Sustainability and Enterprise

– developed **cross-curricular thematic working** in groupings of subjects such as Geography/History/RE and Art/Music/Technology in Year 7

– integrated **skills development** through provision such as Learning to Learn in Year 7 and Functional Skills in Key Stage 4

– delivered the **drama** component of the Year 7 curriculum through the medium of French

– amended its previous mixed-ability approach to **pupil grouping** to one based on banding and subsequent setting within bands

– adopted a more **personalised approach** to curriculum provision through a focus on additional support in literacy and numeracy for those with some gaps in their knowledge (in place of a second language) and the setting up of a nurture group with a single teacher for lower-attaining students

Leadership of the reforms

Curriculum reform has been enabled through:

– a culture of **distributed leadership** with autonomous self-generated accountability for all staff, but particularly at subject leader level, to initiate and take responsibility for developments

– a **vision** of the centrality of student learning needs, leading to the development of a personalised curriculum offering informed by individual student-specific data and aspirational target setting

– a curriculum structure generated from whole staff and cross-subject discussion which has enabled **themed approaches** across clusters of subjects, supported by Learning to Learn and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) provision, together with suspended-timetable themed days such as Identity and Cultural Awareness

Thematic approaches to curriculum provision

– a **senior leadership facilitatory role**, promoting creativity and freedom to initiate, providing teacher release time for team planning and review, supporting an extensive in-house and local continuing professional development (CPD) programme focused on leadership, and promoting engagement and ownership at all levels of staff, together with students and parents, within an overall evolutionary approach

Creating a 'can do, want to do' culture which encourages creative risk taking and removes the fear of failure.

– a **consultation** process which has engaged contributions from all staff, cascaded them through subject leader and departmental working parties and engaged with the views of students through the work of a strong student council and sought parental views though a focus group and bespoke questionnaires

Transition

Continuity and progression through Key Stages 2 to 3 is supported by:

– employment of a **transition coordinator** to foster liaison with feeder primary schools

– introduction of a **banding system** which replaces second language access with additional literacy provision for some pupils

– introduction of a **nurture group** of lower-achieving pupils in Year 7 who receive a partially aggregated curriculum offering from one single teacher

Transition between Key Stages 3 to 4 is supported by:

– individualised student **data** which facilitates informed choice from a range of curriculum pathways

– **early commencement** of GCSE courses part way through Year 9

– replacement of separate Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 coordinators by a single **unitary responsibility**

Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation occurs by the internal monitoring of developments by an engaged and committed staff through regular curriculum review within the departmental meeting structure, and drawing on data from evaluative questionnaires and student feedback.

Challenges

– **Overcoming 'cultural complacency'** by a focus on changing learner needs, leadership facilitation of teamworking contributions and maintenance of a high standards ethos.

– **Ensuring that 'all staff are on board'** by creating a sense of collective engagement within an atmosphere of evolutionary incremental change.

– **Creating a 'can do, want to do' culture** which encourages creative risk taking, removes the fear of failure, supports staff through CPD and release time, and a flexible and adaptive approach to staff recruitment, thus empowering staff at all levels to contribute.

Key learning

– **Evolutionary** rather than revolutionary approach to change.

– Empowerment and **ownership** at all levels.

– Release of **creativity** and reduction in fear of failure.

– Facilitation of **teamworking** approaches.

– Promulgation of a continual **'search for excellence'**.

National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Case study

3dom: A competency-based integrated curriculum

Sandwich Technology School, Kent

Key themes

– Developing a new curriculum model, 3dom, a multidisciplinary competency-based curriculum.

– A distributed, team-led leadership approach.

School context

Sandwich Technology School, Kent, has specialisms in technology, applied learning and training. The school has around 1,400 students and attainment on entry is below average as it competes with local grammar schools. It serves a coastal area with pockets of rural deprivation and there are very few minority ethnic students or those with English as an additional language (EAL).

Nature of the reforms

3dom is a student-devised title. The idea for reforms emerged from a **learning development team** identifying pedagogical approaches that would most benefit Sandwich's students. It comprises:

– an integrated and cross-curricular approach to learning

– a 50% curriculum time commitment every week for Year 7 and Year 8 students with groups of either mixed ability or vertically mixed across the two year-groups

– six half-termly units of cross-curricular learning emphasising skills and focusing on how students learn. The titles include:

• learning styles, to help each pupil optimise their learning potential

• conquests – based around local historic invasions

• evolution

– classes of up to 54 students with two staff, who then have considerable freedom in terms of their learning choices within the broad unit headings

– students working in mixed-ability teams of four; they discuss the lead question and learning outcomes, producing individual assignments as outcomes

Catch-up is an important component of the integrated curriculum. The 3dom learning team run:

• ongoing supported study sessions

• one-to-one for approximately 40 students in English and Maths

• half-term and other holiday support

An intervention curriculum in Years 7 and 8, run by primary-trained staff to raise literacy and numeracy skills, occupies 50% of some students' time.

Leadership of the reforms

Curriculum reform leadership emphasised a **distributed approach** that included:

– The executive headteacher:

• recruiting a team of enthusiastic, outward-looking staff by invitation and through volunteers that met for half an hour every day

• using different forums, including staff meetings, to promote and explain developments.

3dom: A competency-based integrated curriculum

– Creating a leadership group committed to the initiative, several of whom have line management responsibilities related to 3dom.

– Creating a learning team of 13 staff, solely responsible for teaching 3dom, led by a director of learning accountable for aspects including:

  • student achievement

  • structures and implementation, for example timetables

  • aspects such as module design

  • mentoring and coaching

  • showcasing best practice.

– Establishing the right staff team including recruiting primary-trained teachers, with experience of cross-curricular learning.

– Personalising continuing professional development (CPD), for example by setting individual pathways for key leaders and staff. Training has included:

  • staff visits to other schools to see and reflect on other curriculum models and practices

  • experienced subject leaders running sessions on leadership, tracking, mentoring and behaviour.

– The school developed its new curriculum without substantial **consultation** based on its good reputation. Parents were invited to see developments and to feed back on these, either in writing or through discussion forums. Their main requirement was information and this has been met through issuing regular newsletters.

Transition

Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 has been enhanced by:

  • greater connection between primary and secondary learning and teaching styles, including developing cross-curricular skills

  • primary-trained teachers involved with the 3dom learning team

For transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, Year 8 students opt into Key Stage 4 pathways, to find routes best suited to their learning needs, with some vertical grouping across Years 9 and 10 for option subjects.

Evaluation

"3dom has enabled staff to blossom through a collaborative approach, leading to a better deal for the children. Tracking systems are already demonstrating that children are making improved progress." (executive headteacher)

Monitoring and evaluation strategies include:

  • half-termly assignments and a summative end-of-year assessment by conversations between staff and students

  • 'assessment by exhibition', for example presentations

  • Year 8 groups evaluating projects with staff

Software is being trialled to assess individuals' progress and skills development.

Students spoke more positively about the Year 8 experience of 3dom than the Year 7 and are pleased their feedback has made a difference.

Challenges

– **Convincing staff of the need to change**: the use of the 3dom learning team to lead change allied to careful rolling out of the programme were central to success, with efforts made to ensure staff felt comfortable.

– Some staff found it challenging to **facilitate rather than teach too much**; CPD, including showcasing best practice, has helped staff develop their skills.

– Staff initially voiced concerns about **lack of appropriate space** to enable 3dom to work – refurbishment including wall removal created a large, versatile space that is more flexible, for example, for groupings.

Key learning

– **A distributed approach** involving a learning team led by a director of learning: *"We wouldn't have been where we are now without the creativity and motivation of the team"* (executive headteacher).

– **Engaging student voice** in evaluation and programme development.

– **Allowing the project to evolve over time and ensuring staff are listened to.**

Research Associate: Aydin Onac, Fortismere School

Vision, capacity, collaboration: A school's journey towards a personalised 4–19 curriculum continuum

South Hunsley School and Sixth Form College, Hull

Key themes

– A clarity of **vision** of the 4–19 continuum and the creation of personalised curriculum inputs to support it.

– Building **capacity** through distributed leadership, role re-profiling and a systems-led approach to developing teams.

– A relentless focus on **personalisation** to meet the needs of all, within a framework of **collaboration**.

– The importance of **communication and consultation** in developing and implementing a shared sense of purpose among staff.

School context

South Hunsley School is an 11–19 mixed, community school of approximately 1,800 students, situated in the North Ferriby area of Hull. It is an engineering specialism school, and a training and leadership partner school. Designated a high-performing specialist school by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT), it is also a recipient of the Rolls-Royce Award from SSAT for outstanding achievement in sustainable engineering and manufacturing. The school has strong partnerships with industry and business, such as BAE Systems, and it has recently established a partnership curriculum at post-16 with a neighbouring college.

Nature of the reforms

A curriculum continuum 4–19

The staff asked themselves 'what do we want a South Hunsley student to look like?'. This perspective encouraged them to begin thinking in terms of the vision of a **4–19 curriculum continuum** rather than simply 11–19, and to really grasp the opportunity to build partnerships with the school's primary feeder schools

through the creation of a collective Key Stage 2 curriculum with in-built Key Stage 3 progression and centred around **Personalised Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS)**. Cross-phase partnership staff meet half-termly and vision days are used to maintain clarity of collective purpose.

A re-modelled Key Stage 3 curriculum

New schemes of learning have been introduced, changing both the 'how' and 'what' of the curriculum, and are supported by an **induction week** to introduce the PLTS lexicon, the introduction of **new subjects** such as Drama, Dance and Enterprise, and the possibility of **fast tracking** in Year 9. **Timetable blocking** of certain subjects has freed up departments' creativity and innovation by allowing them to collaborate on joint projects with the PLTS philosophy underpinning it all.

Curriculum collaboration at Key Stage 4

At Key Stage 4 the school has done significant work in the area of **cross-departmental collaboration** within the framework of four pathways, allowing greater choice and flexibility.

Case study

Vision, capacity, collaboration: A school's journey towards a personalised 4–19 curriculum continuum

Leadership of the reforms

The headteacher is the key driver of the changes, applying a philosophy of embracing change within a culture of disciplined creative innovation. Central to the change in **culture** has been the way in which the headteacher has been determined to **change and re-profile teaching and associate staff roles in order to meet changing needs**. Although the senior leadership team (SLT) drove the change agenda, it was delivered through **distributed leadership** to the school's area leaders' group. With a common clarity of purpose and focus, SLT members work closely with their respective area leaders in this group.

The importance of **continuing professional development (CPD)** in building a momentum for change within the staff is seen through investment in leadership coaching and a shift in focus and terminology from management to leadership. Engagement with **student voice** is enabled both through the school council forum and particularly through the virtual learning environment.

Seeing the curriculum as a journey from age 4-19

Transition

Transition between Key Stages 2 and 3 is facilitated by the collective agreement of a common Key Stage 2 curriculum across the partnership of feeder primary schools and the appointment of a **head of transition** to lead and manage progression. Transition between Key Stages 4 to 5 is further enhanced by new collaborative partnerships and the extension of the range of the curriculum offer and its outcomes.

Evaluation

The school has used a raft of embedded **evaluation tools**, from the hard data of examination results and transition rates, to softer indicators such as staff self-evaluation, student informal feedback and capturing of parents' views.

Challenges

- **Selling the vision to staff:** the key lever was showing middle leaders their essential role in the change process and their accountability for it.

- **Receiving the reforms by parents:** honesty and preparation in communication regarding the benefits of the reforms.

- **Re-profiling roles:** barriers to change were overcome by recognising people's innate strengths, moving or elevating them to a position where they could be beneficial, and then giving them some autonomy to act.

Key learning

- Seeing the **curriculum as a journey from age 4–19**, with a **commitment to partnership work** especially at transition points.

- Having a **clarity of vision** that is supported by **systemic, distributed leadership**.

- Holding **middle leaders accountable**, with explicit reference to professional standards.

- Being genuinely **committed to professional development**, including that of associate staff.

- **Embracing change**, seeing change as something to be planned for and engaged with, not reacted to.

Research Associate: Steve Shaw, Brighouse High School