

Project title: Increase and sustain the percentage of children reaching age related expectations in English reading by increasing staff capability and redeveloping the intended and implemented curriculum.

NPQ level: NPQH

Before beginning my NPQH, I had worked as a Senior Leader for just over 6 years. Following a period of self-reflection, and after a series of discussions with my school's Headteacher, I felt that I was ready to embark on the next stage of my career and begin the journey to headship. The NPQH programme gave me the opportunity to widen my knowledge and skills across the four domains set out in *'The National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers'*, which positively impacted on my confidence and ability to lead a school.

My school is a much larger than average-sized urban primary school, situated within an area of high deprivation. Our average number of pupils on roll is 456. In 2019, 32% of pupils were eligible for free school meals, with 40% eligible for the pupil premium grant. 52% of pupils fell into a vulnerable group, with 18% of pupils having a special educational need or disability. In 2016 and 2020, Ofsted judged our school as 'good'.

My project centred around a whole school change programme to construct and implement a new ambitious curriculum, centred around high-quality reading provision, underpinned by my commitment to give all pupils access to high-quality teaching that will improve their social mobility, productivity and wellbeing. The catalyst for this initiative was the end of KS2 progress and attainment data, which showed that only 46% of pupils were leaving the school having attained the expected standard in reading. Value added data also highlighted that pupils were not building on their previous successes in KS1. Furthermore, in house data showed that there were pockets of under achievement in all year groups across each of the strands of effective reading teaching.

In order to drive the changes that were necessary to enable pupils of all backgrounds, needs and abilities to achieve high standards in English, I rigorously evaluated current practice, which included a forensic analysis of triangulated data. Having previously explored the most effective ways to evaluate pupil attainment and teaching and learning, as part of the NPQH, I felt confident in my ability to carry out this analysis.

Using this information, I mapped out key areas of concern, finding that there were: weaknesses in staff knowledge and understanding of both evidence-based best practice for reading instruction and the rigors of the new national curriculum; weaknesses in curriculum design, with little thought given to the progression of texts used in day-to-day teaching; a limited range of high-quality literature used across the school; there were limited opportunities to develop pupils' vocabulary. My pupil surveys showed that children had inadequate access to high-quality texts outside of school, with 42% of pupils reporting that they had limited access to books at home. Furthermore, 37% of children identified themselves as non-readers, citing problems with 'understanding words'.

By identifying the underlying causes of underachievement, and drawing on findings from international research, I was able to develop a precisely focused strategic action plan that included training and development opportunities that were appropriately balanced between whole-school priorities and the development needs of individual members of staff and children. The ability to identify these key areas is a crucial leadership skill that I was able to develop throughout my NPQH. My analysis of pupil workbooks and pupil data also allowed me to swiftly arrange interventions for those pupils at risk of, or already, falling behind.

Given the high level of change associated with my redesign of our whole-school curriculum, it was important that staff understood that these changes were underpinned by evidence-based research. Over time, this understanding helped staff embrace changes successfully. In 2019, the results of a staff questionnaire showed that: their understanding of the fundamental principles of curriculum has increased from an average score of 3 to 8; their ability to plan a clear curriculum had increased from 5 to 9 and their ability to assess and provide feedback increased from 6 to 8.

By providing staff with precisely focused CPD, either individually or as a group, I was able to effectively manage the process of transition by eliminating the fears and threats outlined in Fisher's Personal Transition Curve (2012). Some

of the success of managing these changes were down to the two-year action plan I created at the beginning of my initiative. By taking two years, I was able to lead an evolution of the school curriculum, not a revolution, with carefully planned milestones, which were monitored and built upon. Staff reported that they felt guided and supported throughout, whilst also having the autonomy to make decisions for themselves; thus, resulting in a motivated group of professionals.

Consequently, we now implement a focused, balanced, rigorous, coherent, vertically integrated reading curriculum that is relevant and appropriate for our school and community. By the end of the first year, pupil outcomes increased, with 78% of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading by the end of KS2, and increased proportions exceeding the expected standard in KS1 and EYFS. These results were sustained and built upon by the end of the second year of my initiative.

Given the challenges associated with leading such a fundamental change, I felt that my skills and behaviours as a leader developed over time, particularly in relation to collaboration, awareness and resilience. Feedback from governors was overwhelmingly positive, with the chair of governors commenting that the initiative was successful because of my understanding of research outcomes and my depth of knowledge in leading organisational change. They felt that I was able to communicate well with all stakeholders and could articulate, throughout the process, the impact different actions were having on the whole school community.

The use of a 360° assessment of NPQH competencies at the beginning of the programme helped me to better understand my strengths and areas for development as a leader, as perceived by others. Using this information, sessions with my in-school coach could be precisely focused. The impact was evident by the improved outcomes in the final 360° assessment, with improved scores in every area.