

## NPQH Case Study

# Assessing the impact of a whole school language programme on children progress while attending a pupil referral unit / short stay school.

**Name** Andrea Howey

**School** The Link School, Sunderland.

The context of my home school is unique in that it is a short stay PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) based within The Link School in Sunderland. Recently judged by Ofsted as good (January 2018) we offer short-term (12 weeks) inclusive, focused intervention for children ages 3-7yrs who are struggling within a mainstream setting. We have 24 children on role with over 53% identified as having additional needs such as ADHD, Language / Attachment disorder, or ASD, with a high ratio of children to adults and male to female students (8:1). Over 75% of children score 5 or more ACE's (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and 63% of children qualify for FSM/PP. The school encompasses a highly structured Nurture Group approach with children being taught at their developmental stage.

As a deputy I have actively promoted and supported the head within the school and felt it now appropriate to ready myself for the role of head teacher so decided to embark on the NPQH course. While completing the study I had the opportunity to read educational journals and government documents and research, as well as speak to fellow professionals. Being aware of these well-established educational concepts gave me confidence to put the theory into practice. I looked analytically at our data and established an area that would make a significant difference to the learning and ultimately to the life chances of the children. This led me to design and implement an oral language intervention. "The correlation between vocabulary size and life chances is as firm as any correlation in educational research" Hirsch (2016)

Data showed over 80% of children were below ARE (age related expectations) in all areas. Concerningly language development was highlighted as a major barrier to learning, with some children entering the school with significant Language and Communication issues. Initial screening of all children using the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF) confirmed that 78% of our children were working below or significantly below peers of equivalent age. (322)

Evidence from the Scales study (2019) had confirmed the direct correlation between deprivation and poor language skills, with Save The Children research confirming 42% of boys growing up in poverty did not meet the expected level of language development by the age of five. This indicated a strong rationale for introducing a practical language-based initiative (86% of boys in the school are PP/FSM)

Data confirmed some of our current children's language skills were up to 18 months below children of the same chronological age. The NPQH helped me make considered choices around how to implement, organise, monitor and evaluate my initiative, testing methods I hadn't previously attempted as well as developing me as a leader. I audited how we currently supported children with language development and then supported the introduction and management of the initiative, which centred around the adaption and use of The Black Sheep programme. The course helped me to confidently oversee and manage all aspects ensuring it was delivered accurately and consistently and I also felt confident to address any shortfall quickly.

The impact quickly became apparent with children becoming more confident and their vocabulary broadening. Formative and summative assessments confirmed improvements to student outcomes. Pupils became more engaged and enthusiastic. On re-screening children at the end of the support 87% made significant improvements in all areas of language tested. Boxall profile confirmed that children's attention,

emotional security and cognitive engagement improved on average 27% and self-limiting features, undeveloped behaviour and unsupported development declined by 22%. Parents' *Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire* showed positive results with comments such as "Nurture Group is providing a valuable service... X is a totally different child! The Nurture Group do excellent work!".

The face to face days and additional reading have made me more aware of how changes in the external and strategic environment affect my school. Through this I have become a more reflective analytical leader. Interaction with my coach and school sponsor, and regularly evaluating my role have allowed me to reflect upon my strengths and style of leadership. The programme has helped me become a more considered leader highlighting my style of leadership as Brighouse (2013) suggests "recognising the need for different styles in different circumstances and at different times".

The 360 diagnostic and sessions with my coach have built on my experience and practical knowledge of learning theories and pedagogy and this has helped me feel confident to intervene and challenge underperformance. My self-awareness has increased and helped me identify and address areas for my own personal development. The diagnostic test emphasised areas staff felt were my strong point - "she is the most positive person I know" - as well as highlighted areas for development. The study gave me the opportunity to safely challenge myself in areas that I felt less confident. I believe I've been able to refine my leadership behaviours and increase my self-awareness. I am now more able to identify my own areas for improvement as well as build my resilience to ensure that when problems occur I have a more positive, affirmative solution.

The study gave the opportunity for myself and my manager to speak candidly about me as a leader and as a future head teacher. This opportunity highlighted areas within my personality and practice she felt was positive i.e. "she is resilient and can accept challenges. She demonstrates clear direction, is analytical and supportive." - a real confident boost! It also helped me to focus on what kind of a leader I aspired to be and which areas I would like to further develop. "As we look ahead... leaders will be those who empower others" (Bill Gates, Microsoft)