Improving the quality of teaching

Case study: Primary
Case study: Daleton Primary School

Background

Daleton is a large three-form primary school which serves a predominantly White British population in an urban context. The school operates a phase leader system (Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1, Lower Key Stage 2 and Upper Key Stage 2) and there are year leaders for each separate year. Kate has taught at the school for 12 years and is what the headteacher Ruth describes as a “home-grown leader”. In that time she has been promoted to year leadership and is now one of two assistant headteachers (see Exhibit 1). Kate holds key responsibilities for English, and also for the continuing professional development (CPD) and performance management of two year leaders. In addition, she provides some school-to-school support in the teaching of phonics.

Exhibit 1: Leadership structure

This study focuses on:

- how Kate has led improvements in the quality of teaching, focused primarily (but not exclusively) on her role as English leader
- how she has worked with leaders at Daleton to develop their roles and skills in leading teaching

It is organised in five sections:

1. Areas identified for improvement
2. Strategies adopted
3. Impact
4. Key learning
5. Next steps
1. Areas identified for improvement

The school has prioritised English as an area for improvement over a number of years. This initially stemmed from self-evaluation:

“We had a standards issue, so we got our standards up [in English overall] but we couldn’t get any further with writing; we were sticking. So our standards looked pretty good but they were propped up by the reading. That [the writing] became a school improvement priority. In lessons you saw some really good exposition but very poor learning. You’d see some very good modelled work but the children weren’t taking responsibility for it, and so Kate got underneath it with an inspector. [They found that] the children felt they didn’t have ownership of their learning; they didn’t worry if they made mistakes [in their writing] because it was the teacher’s job to correct them. Teachers were working their socks off – children were having a lovely time!”

Ruth

As a consequence, there have been a number of strategies that over time have addressed issues of ownership and responsibility, leading to improvements in teaching, pupil progress and attainment. The improvements have been based on strategies:

- for learning assessment, for example, moderation of assessments to agree ‘levels and ensuring the effectiveness of feedback
- related to teaching strategies and techniques, for example: shared writing, guided writing, talk for writing, distinct daily phonics teaching sessions
- improving the climate for learning through the creation of engaging, relevant curriculum opportunities
- working with parents, for example, offering workshops on writing (led by Kate, year leaders and teachers) to develop their understanding and ways to support their children
- finding different ways to help teachers develop effective practice:

“[This was done by]...Mentoring and coaching and peer teaching, because we got our teaching to good with some outstanding but we couldn’t get it to the next stage and observations weren’t the way because they only told you what you already knew. What [teachers] needed to do was practice with friends...as it’s non-threatening.”

Ruth

As the years have progressed, the school has maintained its improvement focus on English, particularly written English, with recent focus on phonics and spelling. Areas for development are informed by school self-evaluation processes, including: Kate’s analysis of teachers’ and year leaders’ pupil performance data termly analyses, lesson observations, work and planning scrutiny. While the school has achieved high standards at levels 2 and 4, it was not raising the number of pupils attaining levels 3 and 5 and so improvements have been targeted, in part at raising expectations of pupils as writers.
2. Strategies adopted

Kate identifies that in securing improvements in writing – in terms of its teaching and pupils’ achievement/attainment – there has been no single standalone strategy but a combination of strategies, forming a multi-layered approach. She believes the overlapping of strategies contributes to the embedding of practice and its effectiveness:

“I think if there’s one strategy, one new thing coming in, you tend to ‘do it’ and you never get to an ‘I’ve done it’ point [as one strategy on its own is insufficient], and I think that’s a mindset of looking at new initiatives.”

Kate

The strategies included in this case study are those that Kate has taken a lead role in implementing and which have related closely to improving the quality of teaching. They combine specific projects and more generic approaches, reflecting the multi-layered approach adopted:

2.1 Using a year group-based action research study
2.2 Using a school-wide action research study
2.3 Modelling teaching and supporting provision
2.4 Carrying out lesson observations and offering feedback
2.5 Working with leaders at different levels
2.6 Leadership training for middle leaders

2.1 Using a year group-based action research study

A starting point for improving writing, that had subsequent wider influence across the school, was a specific action research study that Kate conducted within her Year 1 team, as part of her M level studies. This involved a team-teaching approach with another teacher, Lisa, while the class of third teacher, Jo, acted as a control group. The study took a pupil voice perspective as its starting point in an effort to understand what pupils perceived to be a ‘good writer’. The pupils’ concept related more to technical proficiency in the use of punctuation rather than writing creatively to engage readers. Kate therefore worked with Lisa to shift the emphasis of their teaching towards encouraging greater exploration of what ‘good writing’ looked like and the pupils’ creative response to this. This focus resonated with Lisa:

“I was perhaps focusing too much on the technical side of writing...and I shied away from the flair, which is a strength now. The [peer teaching] with Kate] helped unlock that side of it.”

Lisa

Kate taught alongside Lisa, for example, to model their writing to pupils and discuss its meaning with them and how it engaged them as listeners/readers. As a result, the pupils’ writing improved in terms of both quality and the levels achieved (see section 3). It also led to a set of criteria, identified by the pupils, which specified what made a good writer. The technical aspects became a set of ‘musts’: components expected in any writing, while not detracting from the pupil’s main focus in writing (for example, sentences ending in full stops). These were again devised with the pupils. The impact of Kate’s work on Lisa’s teaching was substantial:

1 Peer teaching is a collaborative approach to explore and secure improvements to practice aligned with a given focus. It enables teachers to discuss their strategies, techniques and aspects of pedagogy, and evaluate the success or otherwise of these in a non-threatening manner. Each year team member links with one or more colleagues to observe each other teach. It is further outlined in section 2.4.1
"I could observe her [and]...we used the Ofsted criteria so, when I watched her, I would bear that in mind. But then she would come and team-teach with me. It’s moved my practice from satisfactory and good to outstanding (my last four observations have been outstanding). She built on what my strengths were anyway; that’s the thing about her, you never, ever feel negative. She’ll build on your positives and share that so your self-esteem’s really high and, if there’s anything to improve, you do it together, or she suggests ways in which you can do that, and it just makes you want to improve. She’s got a special knack of making you want to do more work!"

Lisa

Kate’s sharing of her practice – for example about effective feedback or ensuring teaching responded to pupils through careful assessment for learning – helped Lisa develop this outstanding practice:

“She always involves the children – always, which is so evident and which I think the special thing when you watch her is. Children are so involved and it’s their opinions, their ideas, so she’s not afraid to change anything to where they would like to take things.”

Lisa

The outcomes of this study were shared with staff through one of a number of INSET sessions led by Kate, so they could subsequently carry out a similar process in their own year groups. These championed exploration of writing with the pupils, creating the ‘musts’ and components of ‘good writing’ with them, while using guided writing to develop their use by pupils. In turn, guided writing was then a focus for formal lesson observations, linked to the school improvement plan.

2.2 Using a school-wide action research study

Having found success in using action research in this study and transferring learning from it across the school, Kate sought to extend this approach. Utilising peer teaching, she developed a school-wide action research approach to improve the teaching of phonics and spelling. In part, this approach centred on increasing time for teacher reflection in relation to pedagogy:

“Having done a large literature review of quality CPD [as part of her Master’s study], I was really aware that the way we were using our staff meetings was not being truly effective. We were not giving staff enough time to be reflective about things we were asking them to improve.”

Kate

The strategy included empowering year leaders to take the lead in tailoring the focus and associated developments to their year group’s perceived needs. Once they had identified needs and selected their focus, year teams carried out research using publications and web-based materials to identify the latest thinking in connection with this. Based on their findings, they were tasked with identifying an approach that they would like to develop in their own teaching to address the focus for improvement:

“What it’s allowed people to do is it’s really enabled them to tailor it for their cohort.”

Kate

This would form the subject of focus for peer teaching. For example, Year 3 focused on how kinaesthetic strategies in the teaching of spelling might be applied to improve pupils’ learning of spelling patterns.

Kate’s role was to support year leaders throughout the processes involved and to prompt their thinking of the issues that might emerge, on a coaching basis:

“I acted as a sounding board, asking questions such as: ‘What would happen if…?’ ‘Have you thought about…?’ and ‘How would you do that…?’ That comes down in part to subject expertise as you can anticipate some of the pitfalls.”

Kate
One of the challenges Kate has faced in adopting this distributed approach to improvement is in monitoring that developments are taking place. While believing this was the right approach to take, it challenged her as she did not know every detail of what leaders and teachers were doing:

“There is that little bit of a control freak in all teachers. I’d really like to know every night how far they are with each project, how is it going and ‘Have they spoken to…?’ But you can’t and that’s quite hard, but that’s part of [distribution, and] you do have a deadline when everybody is going to report back.”

Kate

Management meetings provide these deadlines and were seen by Kate as the most efficient opportunity to check on progress. Kate set deadlines for reporting so that year leaders knew they would be required to update her on progress and impact:

“[The distributed approach] is great for those leaders who can bounce ideas off: good and bad and act on feedback. But you need to be wary of others and check that they understood what’s needed, that they implemented it, and that any issues are being addressed and not just hidden under the carpet.”

Kate

Knowing the year leaders – their individual strengths, likely management approaches, and areas where they might need her support or her follow-up to ensure agreed actions have occurred are all important, and Kate takes each aspect into account in her own leadership. She knows that, in some cases, expecting it to happen will not be enough and she has to adopt a more proactive stance:

“It’s about knowing your staff, knowing when you might need to intervene with somebody or check up on them, or when you can leave them alone as things are getting done. One of our barriers is the size of the school and trying to get consistency and I think that’s where, as a senior leader, you’ve always got to not assume that – just because you’ve said it – it’s going to happen. Everybody’s been at the staff meeting and you’ve told them all about it and you assume that they’re all going to go off and do what you want them to do, and it just doesn’t work like that. So that’s where we have to try and have that web of activity going on so everything’s layered; it’s not just one [strategy].”

Kate

For this particular action research approach, feedback times were also built in at staff meetings at the end of each cycle:

“That’s so important because that’s where, as a school, you know that everybody’s working on it together, and it might be that what you’ve done in your year team hasn’t worked – but you can magpie the ideas from other year teams who have tried something out and then have a go as well. And I think that’s going to be more powerful than telling everyone to try one thing and finding out it worked in two or three year teams but it didn’t work in the rest of them.”

Kate

“There’s always a feedback time in staff meetings and we support one another. For example in phonics, making things more boy-friendly, when there was a lot of sharing between year groups. And that happens in discussion time led by Kate.”

Lisa
Kate sees the approach as one that has enabled:

− greater distributed leadership
− expansion of new strategies and techniques, rooted in the pedagogical foundations of research reviewed
− tailored relevance to particular year groups
− greater sharing of practice

One unanticipated by-product has been that, in some cases, it has alerted teachers to identify where they have subject knowledge gaps. For example, a newly qualified teacher (NQT) approached Kate after a staff meeting to request a time to observe Kate, so she might hone her knowledge in teaching phonics. This openness to request support has been culturally encouraged by Ruth and her leaders:

“You don’t feel bad about asking, in fact it’s welcomed that you say: ‘I don’t know how to do this.’”

Ruth

Although she would have been willing to do this, Kate again saw this as an opportunity to highlight others as sources of support. This is an approach she tries to adopt so that it:

− utilises others’ effective practice
− spreads the load
− extends teachers’ appreciation of where expertise lies
− develops those being observed:

“I said to her: ‘You need to go and see Lisa in Year 1 or Haley in Year 2, because I know they, as year leaders, teach phonics incredibly well.’”

Kate

Kate identifies impact through monitoring the termly progress reports that teachers in each year group write. These reports include pupil progress tracking in reading, writing and maths. They also identify areas of relative strength and development in each subject, along with associated actions to address them. She would also assess impact more informally through conversations with teachers. These sources of information can also often highlight aspects which can aid Kate in further supporting improvement.
2.3 Modelling teaching and supporting provision

Kate has worked to improve the practice of a number of teachers, including those who were underperforming. With some this has meant helping them improve from inadequate to satisfactory and better. Although, according to Ruth, Kate met with some resistance from the teachers concerned, she successfully managed this as a consequence of her approach:

“She’s patient and took the time to show people why it had to be in a different way to have the impact on children, and equally for their own professional development: ‘You can’t carry on doing this.’ She has patience to listen but I just like the way she won’t put up with nonsense. She’ll just say: ‘Yes, I understand what you’re saying…’, but she will get them to agree, for example that writing isn’t moving fast enough: ‘Yes, I can see you’re working really hard…but is it making a difference? No, so let’s look again.’ If they’re not making the grade and the children aren’t making the expected progress then the honesty has to be there and I think people appreciate honesty, if you get the relationships right.”

Ruth

The approach used involves a strong element of modelling and this is also in evidence at the start of each year when she offers those new to the school, or those who have moved year group, a timetable for when they can observe her teaching phonics. For example, with two teachers that have recently moved to Key Stage 1 from Key Stage 2, Kate models teaching or team-teaches with them and subsequently observes them to ensure their quality of teaching is of a high standard. Kate reflects on the pattern of support and its impact for one of these teachers:

“You’ve watched me a couple of times, I’ve been to observe you. It’s going great, now go off and practice. Do a few sessions yourself, try a few things out, make a few mistakes and play with it, and when you’re comfortable, I’ll come back and watch you teaching phonics again. I’ve been back in a few times since and her teaching is ‘wow’. In fact, she could end up being one of our experts on it.”

Kate

This modelling helps ensure teachers have the necessary subject expertise as this is something that can’t, Kate considers, be assumed. Kate sees it as important that any support is non-judgemental, as she wants to create a culture where teachers can seek support when they need it. The effectiveness of this approach in improving teaching is echoed by Ruth:

“She’s not a command and control person. She models good practice, shares it, gets people to practice it in a non-threatening way so it becomes part of their practice, so it embeds and the quality’s really high. And because it’s non-threatening, people come back and ask for more.”

Ruth

After working with teachers, Kate sometimes uses the feedback from their own year leaders, rather than return to observe them herself:

“Because that’s the whole thing about distributed leadership: she’ll go back and say: ‘How’s your team doing?’ or she’ll go and join a planning session. Her antennae are sharp and she’s watching.”

Ruth

This distributed emphasis is also reflected in the way Kate models the teaching of phonics to year leaders, so that they in turn have the subject expertise to support their team members in teaching it proficiently. Lisa, who has become a year leader in the past year, reinforces this point:

“Lauren, who job-shares with Kate, is always asking: ‘How can I improve this?’ and it’s not just after an observation. For example, she came to watch phonics in my classroom.”

Lisa
Kate also targets those who have less expertise, for example Key Stage 2 leaders or those who have changed year groups. One such instance was her work with a Year 2 leader who, after six years, moved to Year R where phonics is very different. Kate supported her through modelling, team-teaching, co-planning and signposting websites that would aid her teaching and the provision within Year R:

“I wanted to make sure that phonics was very intense in Reception...and that she was clear on the expectations and how to plan for it [within an early years environment]. So we had to do a lot of work on our vision for what phonics would look like in Year R. She could then go and lead her team in delivering a good phonics scheme.”

Kate

Kate reports this has led to high staff confidence in the teaching of Year R phonics, and that the level of expectation for pupils’ achievement is very high:

“It’s making sure those year leaders have those high expectations, and that I check the assessment of it.”

Kate

2.3.1 Using data to inform improvement

Through monitoring assessments of progression in phonics by class, Kate identifies any inconsistencies between classes that might indicate underperformance, and holds year leaders to account through conversations about them. In one case, there were significant discrepancies within two year teams (Exhibit 2). Through liaison with the year leaders and teachers, these were tracked down to an over-assessment of pupils’ achievement in a Year 2 class and an issue with blending in a Year 1 class. Kate’s mentoring of Lisa as a new year leader, which included a period of shadowing, helped Lisa develop a clear sense of her accountabilities:

“As a year leader, I collate all the data and then we look at that [as a year team] and have a discussion. If there’s two year team members where the data’s very similar and one where it’s not, then we need to focus on the areas of development for that person [where the discrepancy reflects underachievement by this teacher’s pupils].”

Lisa

In the latter case (the blending in the Year 1 class), this was rectified through further analysis of the data and a conversation with Lisa (as the year leader) to discuss the approach to be taken with the teacher concerned. A subsequent Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) session enabled Lisa to offer examples of her own practice that the teacher might use in her own class, supported by examples from Kate, to secure better progress. The result of this was that the teacher developed resources to rectify the concern and asked Kate, who was out of class at the time, to see these in action which confirmed that agreed actions had been implemented.
Exhibit 2: Mid-year phonics assessments for Years R2 showing per cent achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
<th>Phase 5</th>
<th>Phase 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>R3</td>
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<td>Y1a</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y1b</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>32</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y1c</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y2a</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>68</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y2c</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>82</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
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</table>

A further example relates to supporting a Year 5 leader, who had a group of 12 pupils making insufficient progress in spelling. Kate asked: “Do you know what they don’t know?” The reply from the Year 5 leader was: “No, they’re just not doing as well as they should be.” Kate then suggested carrying out an assessment of these pupils to identify their needs before any particular strategy was developed.
2.4 Carrying out lesson observations and offering feedback

As writing forms part of the school’s improvement plan, Kate has a role in observing the quality of teaching, alongside the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The process is cross-referenced with other sources of information to give an overall picture of teacher performance: pupil progress data, work scrutiny and lesson planning. The school’s lesson observation form (Exhibit 3) has evolved in response to revisions in the Ofsted framework criteria. Teachers are encouraged to use this to aid lesson planning.

Exhibit 3: Lesson observation extract – Assessment for learning criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Assessment for learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Children engage in activities that are well matched to their needs, and enable them to make progress. They know what they are learning and what the teacher is looking for in their work. The teacher uses day-to-day assessment to check on progress and support learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Children are enabled to check and monitor their own progress, to identify and correct their own mistakes and demonstrate considerable independence in their learning. Children know what they need to do in order to improve upon their previous best. They receive constructive feedback from the teacher about how they can improve, and are enabled to make good progress in their learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>The culture of the classroom reflects that assessment is a shared responsibility of both learner and teacher. Children are enabled to monitor and evaluate their own progress, and work interdependently with peers to resolve any difficulties and have minimum dependence on the teacher. Children have established learning strategies to know how they can improve further and what they need to do to make progress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The way in which this is used and the impact it has had at different levels is shown below. Kate uses this herself with Lisa as a year leader, who in turn has used it with Melanie, the NQT she mentored:

“Where in my lesson can I show that?” [an outstanding criterion]. And if I can’t show it, I address the lesson again and think: ‘What is there that I can put in? Do I need to change the way I’ve got the children paired? Do they need to be in groups?’ And I just find that really useful so I’ve shared that with other members of staff and really actively encouraged them to use that.”

Kate

“We’d shared [the Ofsted criteria] as a staff actually and then in year teams, and we would use that when planning to ensure we have actually covered all of those areas. And my role as year leader would be to use that with the others [in the team]...in PPA and ensure we had the questioning and the subject knowledge, and the pupil voice was present. And using our assessment for learning.”

Lisa
"I was observed regularly by my mentor, Lisa, and she would talk to me about my good practice and how I could improve. I would have a grid that I would talk through with her. We look at the Ofsted criteria and our targets are set from that; it's all very clear. Her feedback was always so positive and she'd pinpoint things that, yes, I needed to work on but do it in a way: 'Maybe you could try this' or 'You could come and see how I do this in Year 1.' I went to see how she used target cards in child-initiated learning and that's something we've implemented in Year R. She just had an amazing way of making me feel so positive as well."

Melanie

Kate and others using the form also encourage teachers to bring it with them for lesson observation feedback, so there can be a genuine dialogue about the lesson and their demonstration of the criteria. This enables teachers to challenge judgements based on sound evidence:

"I think that really arms people with understanding what they've done and why they've done it because, when Ofsted inspectors go in and we go in, we see a snapshot and if people can express the reasons behind [choices made in lessons] I think that helps."

Kate

2.4.1 Peer teaching and lesson study

The school operates two approaches whereby teachers engage in peer-to-peer learning to develop their teaching practice: peer teaching and lesson study. Both can be used to focus explicitly on pupils’ learning or on particular aspects of teaching, and allow for more informal exploration of practice and its impact. For example, they are used to respond to areas identified for development as a result of Kate’s self-evaluation. At times, the use of either peer teaching or lesson study is stipulated. At other times, the choice of which approach to use is left to year leaders.

Once there has been sufficient time, through either model, for teachers to explore approaches, develop solutions and refine them, Kate and Ruth will follow-up with formal lesson observations to evaluate their impact.

They provide teachers with many opportunities to share practice and observe peers, which Kate sees as very valuable in developing practice. This is also valued by teachers:

"We're always encouraged to go and have a look [at others’ practice]. It's really useful."

Melanie

2.4.2 Peer teaching

This is carried out regularly throughout the year, for example on a half-termly basis. Teachers might work together in triads observing, for example, their peers using questioning across the year group. There would be subsequent discussion about what was effective in terms of its impact on learning, for example highlighting a response that was gained through one teacher’s use of a certain question, or a missed opportunity to ask a question that might have elicited an important response.

There is no written feedback and, although outcomes are discussed, it is less formal than lesson study. Lisa identifies that there is also confidentiality about the arrangements and trust between colleagues to talk openly about what might not have gone well in a session, as well as what did go well.

2.4.3 Lesson study

The approach to lesson study uses the structure offered by the National Strategies document: ‘Improving practice and progression through Lesson Study (2008)’. Lesson study is more time-intensive than peer teaching but Kate considers this can offer richer outcomes, in terms of learning about teaching strategies and techniques.
2.5 Working with leaders to improve the quality of teaching

Where teaching improvement needs are identified within a particular year team, Kate has a responsibility to work with the year leader to develop strategies to secure those improvements. The following are three examples of Kate’s work in this respect.

2.5.1 Working with the Year R leader

In Year R, a teacher was observed to be satisfactory but her pattern of observations revealed she was not secure in this and not moving towards good. The teacher was aware of this and willing to improve. Kate determined that the year leader’s involvement would assist her development so she arranged a meeting between herself, the year leader and the teacher in question to unpick the lesson observation outcomes and ‘Be truthful and honest about the strengths that were there and being really clear [about which] elements were very strong and identifying one or two elements to work on’. Kate noted:

‘Perhaps she just hasn’t seen models of good practice yet, perhaps she’s not clear about what outstanding looks like and good looks like. And I knew that the year leader would be able to do that. It didn’t need to be me and actually it was going to be better coming from her as I wasn’t working in Reception. So it was ensuring that the year leader was clear about what that teacher needed to do to improve, making sure she had the right strategies [to help her, and] that she had the time, eg supply cover.’

Kate

Kate drew on her role in offering school-to-school phonics support to teachers in emphasising the need for absolute clarity in all such cases:

“Having been around lots of different schools, I’m quite often working with people that are not doing so well. They quite often are not clear about what it was that they didn’t do well or needed improvement [on].”

Kate

The result of the meeting was a clarification of the teacher’s needs and what could be done by the year leader to aid her in improving her teaching. This involved the year leader team-teaching, modelling good/outstanding practice for the teacher to observe, and viewing examples of effective teaching practice on video with her and discussing this.

Kate states that both the year leader and teacher knew, at that point, that nothing was being recorded about the support and this helped as it took the pressure off the process. The lesson observations conducted by Kate and Ruth were recorded but not the support:

“People then become a little bit freer to actually try things out.”

Kate
The teacher invited Kate and Ruth back on four occasions to carry out formal observations so she could demonstrate the impact of the teaching strategies developed with her year leader’s support. She wanted the formal recognition that her practice had improved:

“She started to thrive on: ‘Great, I feel positive, I have improved in that.’ But, as with any observation, you have elements that can be better and, as she was thriving on knowing she was improving, it was a case of: ‘Can you come back in two weeks and observe my teaching as I’m going to try and improve those elements of my teaching now?’ I think you’ve hit the tone right if you’ve got people inviting you back.”

Kate

The teacher continued to get support from her year leader in between observations to help her develop the elements identified. However, having set up the initial programme with the teacher and the year leader – and the ways of working between them – Kate did not need to do this again. Instead, this was agreed informally between the year leader and teacher:

“I know that year leader very well [for example, through lesson observations] and I know she’s got the strengths to do what we were asking. She didn’t need any help about subject knowledge or how to go about it [once the approach had been agreed], but that comes down to knowing you’ve got the right staff in the right place to be able to do that for you.”

Kate

The result of the support was that the teacher moved from the lower end of satisfactory to good with outstanding features, and has since gone on to gain outstanding lesson observation judgements.

2.5.2 Working with an advanced skills teacher

In this example, a Year 4 teacher had successfully completed his NQT year but faced challenges in his second year. He had evident potential but was expending considerable effort on meeting the very challenging behavioural needs of some pupils. Lesson observations showed that the learning-orientated aspects of his preparation and practice were not as rigorous as expected by the school. This resulted in lessons that were satisfactory with some elements of good, but clearly below what Kate, Ruth and the year leader (the other assistant headteacher) considered he could achieve. There were two rounds of observation, with peer teaching in between, before the level of support was increased, as a result of discussion at senior leadership level.

In this situation, Kate drew on Niall, the school’s teaching and learning advanced skills teacher (and former year leader), who also had strengths in English and was in the same year team. The decision was made to use Niall rather than the year leader due to his coaching expertise as well as his classroom skills:

“We then talked to him about how he could use his knowledge of coaching to develop this member of staff. We felt it was coaching that was needed as we felt it was there, it just needed the right person to draw it out of him.”

Kate
Coaching was seen as a better fit as it aimed to enable the teacher to take greater responsibility for his own next steps, rather than depend on the support of others. This was a different approach to the one taken in the previous example with the Year R teacher.

“I think some of it is just having that person to sit down and identify, through the coaching model: what it is that they wanted to get better at themselves; how could the coach help them get better at that; what could we provide for them in order to improve?”

Kate

Although discussions about which approach to take were held between Niall, Kate and the other assistant headteacher, Kate emphasises that their preferred approach was to empower Niall to use his experience to develop the approach in response to the impact of the coaching. Niall would then liaise with Kate on an informal, ongoing basis so that she could assess Niall’s progress in supporting the teacher, for example, arranging supply cover in her CPD leadership role.

2.5.3 Working with a new year leader

Kate has worked with Lisa as a new year leader to ensure she is managing the role and its expectations. While this might be providing guidance and advice, it also focuses on using questions (such as “Have you thought about...?”). These questions can stimulate Lisa’s thinking about her leadership and management responsibilities, including leading teaching. Kate’s assessment of how to nurture Lisa’s skills and manage her development in the shadowing process has been noted by Ruth:

“I've been in the year meetings where Kate has just sat back and Lisa has taken over because of the way it is. Kate makes sure that, if you've got potential, you can take the responsibility and the lead but not feel you're being delegated to or dumped on: ‘Oh, would you like to...? That's a much better idea than mine.’ She’s selfless and so is Lisa. Lisa caught the enthusiasm from Kate.”

Ruth

Kate’s work with her, with respect to improving others’ teaching, has focused on

- supporting Lisa in developing people management skills
- peer teaching with Jo

Being in the same year group has meant that Lisa has been informally mentored by Kate. In supporting Lisa’s management of PPA meetings, Kate discussed Lisa’s concerns about managing Jo’s contribution. Jo was highly task-orientated and efficient but this efficiency meant PPA meetings were more a time to quickly complete planning proformas, without willingly giving time to discuss underpinning pedagogies and teaching strategies. As her friend and colleague, Lisa wanted to manage the situation sensitively but felt that time needed to be given to discussion that would impact upon the quality of teaching and pupils’ learning. Kate at this time was seconded to work one day per week with the local authority and this coincided with their PPA day, which Kate saw as fortuitous as Lisa would need to take the lead without her being present:

“Lisa would very definitely talk with me each week about: ‘How am I going to work with Jo this week? Can you give me some ideas, phrases and suggestions about how do I encourage Jo to talk more and do less without offending her?’ She was very aware of the personal side of it.”

Kate
Kate would therefore share some of the strategies she had used in the same situation so that Lisa could try these:

“One week Lisa would say: ‘Would it work, Kate, if I said, I’m doing the typing this week and Jo has to feed things into me? Would it work if every time we fill a box we say we have to have discussed it first and give reasons why we’re doing [something]?’ [This would help] to deepen the understanding.”

Kate

Peer teaching with Jo has taken more than one point of focus and Lisa has done this in relation to shared writing and phonics. They describe below what the process included:

“She would carry out her shared writing and we [Kate and Lisa] would make notes [for example] on when they were engaged, when they were most engaged and we would have a talk with three specific children afterwards to say: ‘What did you really enjoy? What could we improve?’ These might be children on Individual Education Plans (IEP) or more able – are they being stretched enough? Then we would have a reflection session where we would feed back the outcomes and then, in the next PPA session, we would try and implement those things [steps agreed].”

Lisa

“This is what the kids are saying, this is what we’ve observed; now what do we need to do to make things even better? And then we’d try and implement that as quickly as possible. And that’s the good thing here, there’s lots of professional dialogue.”

Jo

In peer teaching within the year team, Kate has withdrawn herself from the arrangements, primarily so that Lisa has to lead them and, secondly, so that Kate’s job-share teacher can be included. Kate met with Lisa to discuss the phonics focus for peer teaching and three elements were identified that warranted investigation. Kate then left this for Lisa to organise. Lisa arranged it so that they would all have the opportunity to focus on one identified element each. Each teacher demonstrated their allocated element in use observed by the other two teachers, with pupil interviews used to help evaluate effectiveness. Kate attended the feedback session between the three staff once all peer teaching observations had been completed.

Each approach was successful and will be used within the year team. This gave Kate the opportunity to see Lisa leading the peer teaching process, as well as monitoring actions and their likely contribution to improving outcomes in phonics in her role as English leader.

Lisa states that she is made aware of any staff development needs arising from formal lesson observations and, if required, there will be a dialogue between Kate and Ruth about where the teacher concerned should be directed, in terms of practice to aid improvements. Where Lisa is seen as the best person to provide support, she states that Kate has helped her consider aspects of emotional intelligence to get the approach right:

“We will know [as a year leader] if something from an observation hasn’t gone so well and it’s the way you encourage your team member to want to come and see you. We’ve got that relationship, that trust that we’ve built up over time... ‘Would you like to come and see this?’ or ‘Can I help?’”

Lisa

“Kate and Lisa are both very supportive and not judgemental...it’s all about the dialogue and the professional discussion. I was trying something new and Lisa came in and said: ‘I like that, I might try that with my kids.’ We pick up things from each other.”

Jo
2.6 Leadership training for middle leaders

All of the school’s middle leaders are engaged in training and development programmes, aimed at enhancing their leadership skills. These comprise a leadership programme provided through a local collaboration of schools, a university-based programme with M level criteria and National College’s Middle Leadership Development Programme (MLDP). As Kate applied her own studies to inform school improvement, so middle leaders are expected to feed back their own learning into the school’s improvement agenda.

For Lisa, this has focused on the transference of maths and literacy skills in independent learning and pupils’ awareness of these. In the same way that Kate worked with her on a small-scale action research study (see section 2.1), this has enabled Lisa to conduct a small-scale research study with Jo, with the control class being Kate’s. Through this, Lisa was able to use dialogue with Jo to influence her teaching, for example around challenging the amount of structure that pupils needed to support their learning. This has been followed up with further dialogue and an observation as part of the study demonstrating impact. Lisa identifies that the regular, informal dialogue that Kate uses with her is something she also uses with Jo. This helps her to monitor how Jo’s implementation of agreed strategies adds value to developments, through discussing the issues and key messages to aid ongoing momentum.

Jo sees the impact of this work in her increased awareness of pupils’ knowledge and the skills they apply in their independent learning:

“The children are very much aware that it’s a learning time – ‘I am doing this to get better at [subject]’. They are taking more control [and] I can check – do they actually understand that concept … on their own? And if I hadn’t have given them that opportunity I wouldn’t have known.”

Jo
3. Impact

Kate’s work has contributed to the quality of teaching in the school, with the prioritisation of aspects of English being part of the school’s improvement focus meaning that efforts to raise standards have centred on teaching. In turn, the teaching strategies and techniques developed through work in English have, Kate believes, impacted upon teachers’ wider practice so that teaching overall has improved. Observation data collected by the school shows upward trends in recent years, reflected in that from a single year (Exhibit 4).

*Exhibit 4: Whole-school lesson observation data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn 2011</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The impact upon pupil attainment can be seen, for example, in the outcomes for Year 1 writing, which was the initial focus for Kate and Lisa’s research study work and subsequently for all three Year 1 teachers (Exhibit 5).

*Exhibit 5: Year 1 attainment in writing – 2009-11*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1b+ writing</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In writing at Key Stage 1 and in English overall at Key Stage 2, there has been improvement (*also Exhibits 6 and 7*).

*Exhibit 6: Key Stage 1 writing attainment – 2009-11*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Stage 1 writing attainment</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2c+</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2b+</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2012</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exhibit 7: English attainment at end of Key Stage 2 – 2009-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>End of KS2</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4+</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the impact on culture, Kate believes the way in which practice is frequently shared and observed means there has to be an openness and willingness to engage in this culture. It has been generated as a consequence of such developments and is now sustained as an accepted norm, with applicants for teaching posts made aware of the culture they would be buying into if they joined the school:

“I’d like to think that the culture has become very open and that people have learnt to trust people coming in and out of their classrooms and, because of that, we’ve all been able to move forward in our teaching and learning. Because you can’t help but learn – whatever lesson you go into you always learn something. And I just can’t imagine what it would be like where the only time you go in a classroom is once or twice a year for formal observations.

“We all pick up on that one thing that needs [improving from a teaching observation] and we all say: ‘Woe is me, I’ve got to improve on that.’ But if it’s done in the right way then people have those small stepping stones to move on, and I’d like to think that we’ve done what we’ve done in a way that’s enabled the culture to be very positive about being lifelong learners and expecting to be told how we can improve.”

Kate
4. Key learning

In leading teaching, Kate identifies the following as key learning:

- The need to work alongside teachers to improve practice – ‘done with, not done to’. This stance is fundamental to Kate and she believes this is the reason why teachers trust her and are prepared to “come on a journey” with her.

- The importance of modelling effective practice to help teachers develop subject knowledge, strategies and techniques.

- The importance of being available to staff but not to the extent that teachers or leaders lean on her.

- Brokering the support of others – knowing where effective practice lies and directing teachers to see this. This has positive implications for Kate’s time as well as the development of those whose support is brokered.

- Don’t assume that everyone has understood and done something just because you’ve told them: “You have to be rigorous, a bit like a Rottweiler but in the nicest possible way.” Kate considers that this has implications for the approach taken to improvement and where she feels that a multi-layered approach, for example one that includes peer teaching, is more likely to have an impact on improving practice than INSET (that expects practice to improve as a result of ‘telling’ teachers about effective practice).

- The importance of modelling practice as a leader and outstanding practitioner yourself.

- Ensuring that reflection time is built into whichever approach is taken so that teachers can evaluate practice and their learning about this.

- Striking the balance between having a tight rein on what is expected of teachers and ensuring requirements are met (the rigour), while giving them the freedom to try things out and experiment with their practice. This again, Kate sees as linked with knowing the staff and weighing up situations individually: “Somebody who was tight rein all the time I don’t think could ever let other people develop and flourish; it just wouldn’t work.”

- Using distributed approaches whereby other leaders are empowered to lead developments but ensuring support and checks are put in place to monitor these and evaluate impact.

- Always doing the best for the children and having high expectations of others accordingly.

- Taking pupils’ views into account in developing improvement strategies.

- The importance of being a lifelong learner oneself and using this to influence practice in school. Kate reflects how Ruth has encouraged her to apply for development opportunities that involve her, for example, in supporting other schools. Ruth’s encouragement also influenced Kate to study for her M level degree – which has had evident impact on the CPD approaches she takes, and so influence upon the school.
Leadership traits

Those who have worked with Kate identify her leadership traits as:

- Honesty about what needs improvement: “She has integrity: ‘This isn’t good enough, what are we going to do about it?’” Ruth

- Supportiveness and reliability aligned with ‘done with, not done to’: “Because she’s reliable and people recognise her very good subject knowledge and leadership skills, they respect her and they want to work with her. And they have belief that she is going to help them, not go in and tell them how to do it.” Ruth

- Providing clear models so that teachers are clear about expectations and approaches.

- Communicating clearly.

- Engaging in regular ongoing dialogue to support improvements.

- Balancing being both very understanding and uncompromising.

- Being highly informed about effective practice externally as well as internally and, as a consequence, making decisions on developments that will both add value and be for the long-term: “She keeps her eye out: what’s appropriate for our school, what’s not appropriate.” Ruth

- Being aware of where expertise lies within the school but sharing the load so that teachers and leaders are not burdened.

- Leading by example: “She is outstanding. You see the evidence of it with her children. She stresses the importance of the impact of it, while understanding that it’s a lot of work.” Lisa

- Leading through others.

- Managing challenges effectively: “I often think [in a difficult situation]: ‘What would Kate do in this situation?’ Because Kate won’t make a sticky situation worse, but neither will she shy away from it.” Ruth
5. Next steps

- In English, Kate’s next steps are to continue with efforts to make improvements in teaching so that standards at level 3 and 5 are raised.

- The school will be working on a Key Stage 2 to 3 transition research project with local schools, focused on reading and, in particular, helping secondary teachers manage the improvement of pupils’ reading skills – where these are barriers to their accessing the curriculum.

- Kate is moving to a non-class based role in the year ahead to enable her to spend more time as a leadership and teaching coach and she is looking forward to this role.

- Improving the Key Stage 2 teachers’ phonic knowledge, including two new teachers: “I think I’ve got strong enough teams to develop the Key Stage 1 [provision]. I’d like to develop the Key Stage 2 experience.” Kate

Part of this approach is further developing the role of Debbie, an assistant English leader (and also the Upper Key Stage 2 phase leader). Debbie supports developments in English and this has allowed Kate to focus more attention on the Lower Key Stage 2 years. Debbie is another leader Kate has worked with and helped to develop. Ruth identifies that this also requires skilled person management to ensure support matches staff needs:

“Now [Kate has identified that] Debbie needs to step back a little and let [Year] 5 grow a bit on their own. Kate’s antennae are up and she knows she needs to lead Debbie back…otherwise Debbie will swamp Year 5 because she’s such an enthusiast, but that doesn’t develop anybody. Year 5 are champing at the bit and want to do it for themselves and Debbie [now, after Kate’s intervention] just goes down for a short time to their PPA meet to check everything’s ok. Give them the chance to fly and to fall, because you only learn through your mistakes at the end of the day.”

Ruth
The National College exists to develop and support great leaders of schools and children’s centres – whatever their context or phase.

- Enabling leaders to work together to lead improvement
- Helping to identify and develop the next generation of leaders
- Improving the quality of leadership so that every child has the best opportunity to succeed

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