

Jurassic Coast Teaching School Alliance

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Case Studies

Name of School: Gillingham School

Title of case study: Professional Development

Where did you start from, what did you set out to do and why?

At Gillingham School our traditional professional development, to improve teaching and learning, has been transformed in recent years. We are only part way through our journey but the results have been powerful and sustainable. We have embarked on evidence informed practice, peer to peer coaching and a belief that teachers will perform best when trusted and supported.

What did you do and who was involved?

We started by introducing three key educational thinkers through a series of twilights; John Hattie's focus on above impact strategies, Carol Dweck's theories on the psychology of our learners and Guy Claxton's belief in preparing children for life beyond school.

Next we looked at developing high quality assessment and feedback practices across the school, with a focus on what we had learnt from Hattie and Dweck, as well as, Alistair Powell and others.

A principle led school policy emerged from a staff development day and an assessment toolkit followed. Quickly we moved onto replacing our old effort scores with 'Attitude to Learning' to include; perseverance, resilience, risk taking, collaboration and reflection.

We are increasingly becoming aware of the psychology of our learners and the harm we might inadvertently do to our students through the use of certain language, labels and actions. Then we spent time replacing levels with a new system that focused on progress from prior attainment and promoting growth mind-sets.

To improve teaching across the school we developed a three day internal course called the 'Learning Lab' which focuses on Hattie's most impactful strategies (feedback, metacognition, self-reported grades and teacher credibility), cognitive science and the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit; we also revisit Claxton and Dweck's work.

Colleagues develop peer to peer coaching techniques and are given time to observe each other's lessons. Risk taking is promoted! There is a follow-up day in the second year to look at the implications of research findings in cognitive science for classroom practice, particularly focusing on the work of Willingham, Hattie and Yates.

We have tried to look beyond Dorset for best practice and many of our teachers are now engaged in education through Twitter and some write educational blogs.

We were recently represented at the Research Ed conference in London by three teachers and have just hosted an INSET by Mike Bell from the Evidence Based Learning Network.

The current focus is to give teachers as much 'nuggeted' educational research as possible to feed into the lesson planning for the new exam courses.

We're using Staff Development Days and the revitalised Teaching & Learning Group to explore combinations of impactful strategies, for example, flipped learning to improve the impact of homework, mass versus spaced learning and the principle of cognitive loading.

What difference did it make?

There have been numerous impacts but I would highlight just three:

- There has been a monumental increase in chat about teaching, learning and research evidence amongst colleagues
- We now involve research to help inform any changes, for example curriculum developments, so that we are more likely to increase the impact of any decisions
- The promotion of 'expert' teaching brought about by deliberate practice. We're never the finished article!

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