

Leading Coaching in Schools

Primary case study:

Coaching for personalisation and wellbeing

School: Lark Rise Lower School

Headteacher: Sue Attard

Background

- Lark Rise Lower School has 280 children aged 3-9 years on roll and 40 members of staff. It serves an urban area of social need.
- Its results are in the top five per cent of schools.
- The school received an excellent Ofsted report in 1999 and in October 2004.
- The school has Investors in People status.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have Masters degrees in educational management. The headteacher's course included a module on mentoring. The deputy headteacher's course included work on guidance and counselling.

Definitions of coaching

- The skills and practice of coaching are evident throughout the school and integral to continuing professional development. Coaching is seen as a way of helping staff achieve the action points that arise from performance management review.
- "Bringing out what is best in people."
- "It is both professional and a relationship. It happens within a structure and informally when needed. It is about career development."
- "To unlock the potential of each person."

The philosophy that underpins the process

The school wanted the very best for the children and therefore wanted to develop the staff. The use of coaching skills is part of becoming a learning organisation that believes in personalisation for all. Performance management is seen as unlocking the potential of the workforce. The school has a clear focus on teaching and learning coupled with a commitment to the wellbeing of every member of the school community. The aims are to secure high educational standards and improvement in wellbeing for each child. Coaching helps improve the wellbeing of adults so that they can take a pride in a job well done. Coaching is an entitlement to manage the performance of all adults in school. It is driven by the post-holder and links to the requirements of the current post and future career aspirations.

How coaching developed at Lark Rise Lower School

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and a member of the support staff introduced the “Wellbeing” project with a focus on work-life balance for all staff.
- From 1996, all continuing professional development programmes began to focus on learning and teaching. CPD is now planned with clear links to creating effective conditions for learning.
- The performance management policy of the school ensured that support for achievement of targets was integrated into the process.
- The role of middle managers was developed.
- The role of support staff developed to include taking pupil activities on a Friday afternoon to provide time for teaching staff. Opportunities for professional development were included for support staff.
- The headteacher and deputy have been the key players in developing a coaching culture within the school. The headteacher’s vision has provided a clear sense of direction that has put the relevant steps in place. “Coaching” was not introduced as a particular theme but emerged out of the focus on learning and development for all. The culture of openness has taken six years to secure.

The structure of the school-based programme

- Every member of staff has a performance management meeting with the headteacher to set objectives. Whole school and needs driven objectives are set. Before this meeting, the member of staff completes a sheet to help them reflect on their current practice and future aspirations. The meeting is based on a “learning” rather than a “teaching” model, with the member of staff in the driving seat. Senior leaders are explicit about performance and the roles and responsibilities of posts. Clear action points with CPD implications are set at this meeting.
- Support for achieving action points is provided by the line manager of the member of staff. The support provided is in the form of coaching conversations. There is a culture where everyone has become skilled at reflecting on their learning so that coaching takes place informally in peer situations as well as within the formal structures of the school.
- At the end of the year a review of the process takes place and the cycle begins again.
- The deputy headteacher has informal coaching sessions with all staff related to their agreed goals.
- The whole school engages in CPD focused on learning. Models of good practice and theoretical “think pieces” are used. This provides further opportunities for sharing skills and coaching each other.
- Line managers have meetings with the headteacher to explore their leadership role and support them in developing appropriate coaching skills using the “GROW” model.
- A member of staff has worked with the governors as part of her Master’s programme to help develop them.
- An AST works with other schools and with staff in the school and uses coaching skills in the area of ICT.
- All members of staff who attend outside CPD are expected to feed back to the staff. Every member of the community is seen as having skills and expertise to offer. Everyone takes a responsibility for sharing good practice and coaching others.

Coaching skills and qualities

- Active listener
- High EQ
- Skilled and knowledgeable about effective practice in learning centred organisation
- Focussed on achieving quality learning for pupils
- Ability to build confidence
- Honest but not critical
- Ability to celebrate success
- Questioning rather than telling and able to ask deep questions

The model of coaching

The model used is GROW:

- **Goal** What do you want?
- **Reality** What is happening?
- **Options** What could you do?
- **Will** What will you do?

What benefits have accrued to the school?

- Maximisation of the use of staff talent. Staff members often develop in their qualifications and responsibilities at the school. For example, one parent helper became a teaching assistant, studied for a degree and progress to the GTP scheme within the school.
- High quality learning for pupils. Ofsted stated that the quality of teaching was high and that this had been secured through effective coaching and mentoring.
- High staff wellbeing and loyalty to the school. Members of staff feel valued by the focus on their development and the many opportunities to reflect.
- Pupils experience learning as something that everyone does. Learning is part of everyday conversation at the school and it is normal to support each other with learning.

NB: Lark Rise was involved in the making of “The Shape of Things to Come: personalised learning through collaboration” by Charles Leadbeater. This can be downloaded from the DfES website at:

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit/imagination/thinkpieces/shapeofthingstocome/>

Elisabeth Gilpin, February 2005