

## **Putting Teachers at the Heart of School Improvement.**

### **Intent**

In the spring of 2016, three Gravesham Head Teachers found themselves with an all too familiar problem, low aspirations, and outcomes in mathematics. In response, they bid to the fifth of The Great Livery Companies, the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, for specialist support in their efforts to regenerate their communities and the quality of mathematics education they could offer each of their pupils.

The Head Teachers proposed that employing someone with relative expertise in primary mathematics and school improvement would be an effective way to address each of these problems. The hypothesis was simple. Invest in teachers, make them feel valued and equip them to develop their autonomy, and they will grow as professionals, stay for longer, tangible cultural changes will manifest, and pupils will get a better deal as a result.

### **Implementation**

Establishing the mathematical calendar was one of the first points of order and it was identified that termly professional development sessions, involving members of each of the schools where possible, would be essential in the dissemination of information central to realising the schools' vision for mathematics education. In much the same way effective mathematics curricula revisit similar themes with increased complexity each iteration, the knowledge disseminated in these termly sessions cycled round from the essential basics, such as a working understanding of our best bets for the transfer of knowledge to long-term memory, to the intricacies of mathematical problem difficulty modification and proof.

Such sessions are not uncommon in schools across the United Kingdom, but what made The Gravesham Mathematics Collaboration different was the opportunity for someone with relative expertise to dedicate one hundred percent of their time to ensuring that these sessions had an impact on the practice of the teachers in their schools.

From such a position, and in possession of a codified roadmap through mathematics pedagogy, it was possible to extend what professional development encounters could be. Coaching formed the bulk of our work and the codification of pedagogy allowed for the development of those focused targeted assignments which allow teachers to continually improve their practice. When not team teaching or planning with teachers, modelling the behaviours of successful teachers was the order of the day for the specialist, allowing for the creation of a culture which encouraged teachers to think deeply and meaningfully about their craft.

### **Impact**

It is perhaps impossible to accurately measure the full impact of the project with any great degree of reliability. There are, however, key markers of school improvement, beyond rising standards across all schools and a place for King's Farm in the top 3% of schools for progress in 2019, which can be observed.

Teachers are more confident in their delivery of mathematics lessons, enjoy the trust of their leaders to make decisions on matters of pedagogy, and can explain the why in everything they do. As a result, pupils are taught in increasingly homogenous groups and the

expectation that all pupils will meet the aims of the Primary National Curriculum is firmly embedded in the culture of each school.

Mobility amongst staff has slowed significantly, allowing for the cultivation of an experienced and confident staff body over a sustained period, thus creating conditions in which the impact of the project might be felt long beyond the final curtain call.

Perhaps most importantly, the communities which our schools serve have engaged with mathematics in a way unseen before. They have attended workshops and celebrations, most notably the annual Gravesham Festival of Mathematics, in their hundreds, and given mathematics their full attention once more.

### **Interested?**

The power of such a model to transform schools and the lives of all those within their walls cannot be overstated. Better still, such a model is within the reach of all schools willing to seek out kindred spirits in their area, pool their resources and prioritise the development of their teachers in the name of creating the optimum conditions for the provision of the highest quality education. There could be someone in your inbox, your address book, or sitting across from you at your next Head Teachers' briefing, waiting to join forces and put mathematics back on the map. It's affordable, effective, research informed and waiting for you to make the first move.

For further information, please contact Chris Jackson, Head Teacher at King's Farm via the email [office@kings-farm.kent.sch.uk](mailto:office@kings-farm.kent.sch.uk). Or find Kieran Mackle on twitter @Kieran\_M\_Ed.