



TEACHING
SCHOOL
ALLIANCE



Kyra supporting
school improvement



Looking Outward, Moving Forward

Grimoldby Primary School



When Simon Clark made the decision to become a Head Teacher, he knew he wanted to lead a school where he could bring his experience in senior leadership roles, and the influence of his wide ranging professional networks, to achieve much needed improvement.

He relished the prospect of a challenge, and of making a difference to pupils at a school that needed change. In 2016, he was successful in his application to become Head Teacher of Grimoldby Primary School, a school which in December 2014 had been judged by Ofsted as requiring improvement, and shortly after, had been left without a permanent Head Teacher.

Simon tells us, "I was excited about becoming Head of Grimoldby Primary School, as I could see the great potential of the school; the pupils, and the staff. However, it was potential that could only be unleashed by making some considerable changes." Simon's first step was to look and listen, and, after joining the school in April 2016, he used the summer term for observation, monitoring, and talking with staff, parents and pupils to really get to the bottom of the school's performance and potential at that time. He tells us, "the summer term was invaluable for recognising and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and recognising the staff who needed support, and the staff who could offer support."

Indeed, the school was in need of urgent improvement; "the school had become isolated, both geographically and from an education standpoint too. The Interim Headteacher had begun to raise expectations, but there was no clear vision for the school. There were also many practical issues; for example, there was no school development plan, there was a limited level of data tracking, and we were expecting our Section 5 visit in the Autumn term. Accountability was low, morale was low, and ultimately this meant that pupils were disengaged and not fulfilling their potential. I was in at the deep end, but this is where I fully intended to be!"



Fortunately for Simon, there was a great deal of enthusiasm and momentum for change within the school, as well as a wealth of untapped potential within the staff team. "I was reassured because, whilst I could see the challenges, I could also see many of the solutions. We had some great teachers and some high quality potential leaders who were frustrated by the circumstances the school found itself in and, yet, enthusiastic about change and ready to make a difference. We needed a plan and we needed to build capacity in the first instance."

"I was reassured because, whilst I could see the challenges, I could also see many of the solutions. We had some great teachers and some high quality potential leaders"

Taking the time to really understand the needs and potential of the school was a very important base for the improvement process. Simon was able to put together a school development plan for September 2016 based on the observations in the summer term; he also re-structured the leadership, drawing on the skills and expertise of teachers already within the school by creating three new senior leadership positions.

He tells us, “having a strong leadership team has been extremely important, it has meant that during the times I have had to focus on HR and finance issues, I have been able to trust the senior leadership in the school to continue to drive things forward with teaching and learning. It’s also meant I have been able to go out of school to engage in peer reviews and my own professional development, secure in the knowledge that the school is in safe and capable hands while I am gone.”

Building the skills and capacity of leaders was an important part of Simon’s improvement strategy. Part of this was achieved by connecting them up to the wider Lincolnshire system and the CPD opportunities available. Simon was keen that Grimoldby became more outward facing, connecting with other schools, engaging with current developments in education, and becoming a part of the Kyra Teaching School Alliance. He tells us, “in part, due to the geographical location, the school had become isolated and insular; there was no conversation with other schools, and no mutual support or sharing of best practice.” Engaging with Kyra has led to opportunities for professional development for the new senior leadership team, which have included coaching and training for the new SENDCo, SLE training, and training through the Lead Lincs leadership programme, amongst others.

Other staff at the school have also hugely benefitted from the opportunities presented as a result of Grimoldby becoming more outward facing and connecting with other schools. Simon tells us, “most of the staff had never even been into another school since working at Grimoldby, but that quickly changed”.



Grimoldby joined a local school network which allowed for access to moderation, as well as enabling staff, including teaching assistants, to visit other schools to support their professional development and share best practice. It also meant that Simon had a network of other local Head Teachers to draw on for advice and support in his new role.

As well as this, joining the Kyra Teaching School Alliance enabled the school to access a wealth of CPD and expertise, and has brought substantial benefits including support through the Kyra school improvement fund and a variety of training and development opportunities. "Having that connection to 50 other schools in the area, and being part of something bigger, has made a huge difference", Simon explains. "As a school we also now engage in peer review, which assists us in continually reflecting, learning, and improving what we do based on the inputs of other schools." Simon has also had a great deal of support from Andy Craven, the chair of governors at Grimoldby, and himself a former Head Teacher. Simon tells us, "We have been extremely lucky to have Andy as our chair of governors; he has driven and led the governing body extremely effectively. He has also been a crucial source of advice and challenge for me; his support has been invaluable throughout the process of improvement at Grimoldby."

"Having that connection to 50 other schools in the area, and being part of something bigger, has made a huge difference"



A further significant change at Grimoldby since the Ofsted of 2014 has been the introduction of a new curriculum. Antonia Brooks, Deputy Head, explains “as a school we were not keeping pace with the national changes in the curriculum, or adapting our practice accordingly. There were no strategies put in place to adapt to the new curriculum, and teachers were left to their own devices, with varying degrees of success. Overall there was a lack of direction, and as a result, the pupils were disengaged.” In 2015, the interim Head Teacher saw that something needed to be done urgently, and made the decision with the staff that the school should follow the Cornerstones Curriculum, a thematic, project based, creative curriculum.

This helped to bring a much more consistent approach to lessons across the school. Another exciting and significant change to the curriculum was the introduction of “wow moments”, where each new term begins with a special themed day to introduce each year group to a new topic that they will be learning during the term. Antonia explains, “the wow moments have made such a difference; pupils are welcomed back to school with new displays in classrooms based on a new topic for the term, themed activities, and usually some kind of dressing up! Pupils are excited to come back into school, and it is such a positive to start to each new term. Wow moments have really helped pupils to engage with their learning and it is wonderful to see”.

According to Ofsted, pupils’ engagement, as well as their progress and achievement, has dramatically improved due to developments in teaching and learning under the headship of Simon. Stuart Spendlow, a senior leader at Grimoldby and an English SLE, tells us “the introduction of the school development plan, which was shared with all staff, has given the school a shared vision. Before, some expectations were not high enough and there was a lack of accountability. Now everybody knows their responsibilities and exactly what our overall aims are”. Simon explains that when he came to the school, there was inconsistency in the teaching, “the majority of teaching was good across the school, with some pockets of outstanding practice.



However, some teaching was also not good enough, and this had gone unchallenged for a long time. There were some difficult conversations to have and decisions to make to ensure that teaching across the school became at least consistently good. Doing what was in the best interests of the pupils was in the forefront of my mind at all times, and ultimately drove all of my decisions.” Simon also put a key focus on the development of teaching assistants, encouraging teaching assistants to engage in professional development and CPD, and to visit other schools to learn and share best practice. Grimoldby has taken part in the Kyra ‘Mobilise Project’ with the aim of making best use of teaching assistants to support pupils towards independent learning.

“Doing what was in the best interests of the pupils was in the forefront of my mind at all times, and ultimately drove all of my decisions.”

Consistent monitoring of practice across the school is now an established and regular occurrence, with mutual support forming the basis of the staff meetings and observations. Pupils’ books from all classes are scrutinised on a regular basis at staff meetings, and the staff as a whole discuss the standards, marking and progress demonstrated. According to senior leaders, data is tracked much more rigorously now, and there is greater understanding within the staff of what pupils at each key stage should be achieving due to the practice of sharing pupils’ work and regular monitoring. ‘Lesson studies’, rather than lesson observations, often take place with colleagues taking joint responsibility for a lesson and providing each other with support and suggestions, rather than simply evaluating performance. Stuart tells us, “expectations and standards are high at the school, but this is facilitated through a positive and supportive approach to challenge and improvement. As a staff, we support and challenge one another to achieve the very best for our pupils”.

Simon is clearly passionate about developing his current staff to fulfil their potential to achieve the highest standards of teaching possible. He is also very keen to utilise the talents and enthusiasm of NQTs and trainee teachers at the school. Simon has employed three NQTs since becoming Head, and the school now regularly takes on student teachers on placement. He tells us, “I think there is a great benefit in having young and enthusiastic teachers coming into the school; they are often extremely up to date with current educational practice, and can bring a fresh perspective. They are always really well supported and developed by our senior leadership, so it is a win-win situation for everybody involved.”

The school's latest Ofsted report – in which it was judged as 'good' - confirms Simon's comments, stating that "the strong practice in the school is shared with less experienced practitioners to improve the quality of teaching further". According to Simon, taking on enthusiastic and capable NQTs and developing trainee teachers at the school helps to support the recruitment of high quality teachers, since many choose to work at the school long term should the opportunity arise. Simon tells us, "I think this strategy is key in a rural area such as Grimoldby, where recruitment options can often be limited."

"Expectations and standards are high at the school, but this is facilitated through a positive and supportive approach to challenge and improvement. As a staff, we support and challenge one another to achieve the very best for our pupils".

All of the positive developments in curriculum and teaching and learning at Grimoldby have been underpinned by the development of strong school values and a clear ethos at the school. Antonia tells us, "we now have a school assembly every day, which all pupils, teachers and teaching assistants attend. The assemblies are based on our school values and encourage reflection on how to behave and act in accordance with those values.

Everybody in the school hears that message every day; pupils and staff really believe in those values and that is reflected in day-to-day school life". Stuart tells us, "the important thing about the school values is that they were created by everybody in the school; we asked pupils, parents, governors and teachers alike what they thought the values should be, and we chose the most popular responses. These truly are our values, which crucially means they are not being imposed; they are the shared values of the school community".



In addition, the new School Charter has supported positive behaviour for learning, and has encouraged pupils to take more responsibility for their behaviour and actions. The charter is a set of principles which are also discussed frequently in classes and assemblies, including 'We always work to the best of our ability,' and 'We are kind and thoughtful to everyone.' Antonia tells us, "behaviour has really improved since the 2014 Ofsted; our 'reflection table' (where pupils sit to reflect on poor behaviour) is rarely ever in use these days! Even better is that pupils now have a clear pride in their good behaviour and in producing the best standard of work that they can, which often wasn't the case before".

For Simon, the foundation for school improvement at Grimoldby began with really getting to grips with and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the school. From this basis, he has been able to draw on the strengths of the school, and to build on these strengths to facilitate improvement and progress at a rapid pace. Where he has identified weaknesses, he has used CPD, the dedication of talented and committed staff, and connections with other schools to improve practice across the board. He tells us, "since becoming Head, I have always been transparent about what our priorities are, and why they are our priorities, based on the evidence gathered through careful and thorough monitoring. This is so staff and parents alike can understand the reasoning behind the changes which have been made.

Decisions have always been made by considering what is in the very best interests of the pupils and their progress, and will continue to be made that way. Staff as a whole have understood and supported this, and that has strongly contributed to our overall success in securing improvement."

The impact of the changes which Simon and his team have made are clear to see, from the attainment of the 'good' OFSTED report in 2017, to the marked improvements in pupils' progress and achievement which are apparent from the data, Grimoldby continues to go from strength to strength. Simon concludes by telling us, "It has been an exciting 18 months since I became Head Teacher at Grimoldby, and we have all worked hard and come a long way; but we are not resting on our laurels. The journey continues, and we will keep focusing on school improvement to ensure that our pupils are given the best opportunities and education that we can provide."

Learning Points

Commit to developing a deep understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of your school – it is from this basis that strengths can be enhanced, and weaknesses can be improved, enabling quicker and more focussed improvement.

Be outward facing – secure connections with other schools, and consider becoming part of a larger network of support; this will provide valuable opportunities for learning, development, support, collaboration and CPD.

Recognise and develop the talent already within your school – consider which staff would thrive through development and taking on a greater amount of responsibility. Harness the talent and expertise of current staff wherever you can.

Provide opportunities for CPD for all staff, and encourage them to engage with CPD regularly – this will engage staff in their professional development, and support them to improve their practice further.

Encourage staff to visit other schools – this is especially important where staff have only ever worked in one school. Staff who have the opportunity to visit other schools will bring a fresh perspective, new ideas back with them.

Consider collaborative and supportive book scrutiny and observations – this is a good way to avoid a 'done to' culture, and to encourage staff to support one another in achieving high standards without feeling defensive.

Don't be afraid to take on NQTs or trainee teachers – they can bring so much to the school in terms of energy and enthusiasm, you can have an influence on their training, and this can often lead to long-term recruitment of high quality teachers.

Ensure that the culture of the school is based on strong values – Strong values which are communicated and shared within the school community, and referred to and drawn upon in all aspects of school life, will encourage a culture and environment which is positive for pupils and staff alike.



Contact us for more information

Mount Street Lincoln LN1 3JG

Telephone: 07769 661479

Email: kyra@lincolnmountstreet.lincs.sch.uk



@KYRAteaching



Kyra Teaching School Alliance