



TEACHING
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Kyra School Improvement Case Study: Tetney Primary School



March 2019

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Tetney Primary School

Tetney Primary School, located near Grimsby, Lincolnshire, is a school which has undergone a great deal of change over the past two years, resulting in significant levels of improvement. In November 2018, Tetney Primary School was judged as a 'Good' school by Ofsted, with a positive and encouraging report praising (amongst other things) the school's strong leadership, clear direction, and its ethos of continuous improvement.

However, just two years previously, things were very different at Tetney. When Sarah Addison first became Headteacher in 2017 the school had not had a permanent Head for several months, and had recently been judged as 'Requires Improvement' by the inspectorate. Ofsted's report had highlighted a number of concerns regarding the school's provision, which included inconsistent approaches to teaching and learning, behaviour, and pupil welfare, and also insufficient pupil progress and outcomes. On top of this, pupil numbers were down, staff morale was low, and it was clear that parents were rapidly losing confidence in the school.

This case study is dedicated to exploring the key approaches that Sarah and her staff team have taken in turning things around at Tetney so successfully, in conjunction with support from the LA, Kyra TSA, and Local Leader of Education, Zoe Hyams.

Background

Sarah knew that taking on the role of Headteacher at Tetney would be a challenge. She tells us, "I had been acting Head at Halton Holgate Primary for 18 months before applying for the post of Headteacher at Tetney; the fact that the school was in real need of improvement was actually a big part of the reason that I applied; I was motivated and excited by the challenge, and the difference that I could make at the school". The interim leaders provided by Lincolnshire County Council had begun to address some of the school's most urgent problems before Sarah took over. They had identified and prioritised key areas in need of improvement, and had also sought help from both the Local Authority and the Kyra Teaching School Alliance to support the school's development moving forward. However, it was clear to Sarah that the main challenges still lay ahead, "the culture of the school was lacking in accountability. Safeguarding and SEND procedures all needed updating. There wasn't a clear School Development Plan, or a long-term Curriculum Plan, and only a very limited amount of assessment, and data recording and tracking. The majority of staff at the school were passionate and able, and wanted to make a difference, but had generally not been supported or equipped to do so, due to a lack of meaningful performance management or development. On top of all this, the school had no real leadership structures in place, and was facing financial difficulties too."

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LLE Support

With such a wide-range of issues needing to be addressed, Sarah knew that she needed support from the outset. "Fortunately, Kyra was able to provide this", says Sarah, "Zoe Hyams, a Local Leader of Education, and the Headteacher of Caistor Primary School and Grasby All Saints CE Primary, was deployed to work alongside me, and since day one, her support, input, and encouragement throughout the school improvement process has been invaluable. She is a highly experienced Headteacher, and she is extremely knowledgeable and capable." Zoe's role has been to support Sarah in developing and delivering her School Development Plan, monitoring and reviewing the progress taking place in each of the school's key priority areas for improvement, and to set milestones for improvement. It has also been Zoe's role to ensure that the support being offered to the school is having a positive impact. Zoe tells us, "many of the challenges that Sarah has faced during the school improvement journey are similar to challenges that I have experienced as a Headteacher in the past too; so I was able to act as a sounding board for Sarah. I was someone that she could go to at any time, with any problem. I would give support myself wherever I could, or otherwise, point her in the right direction to get the support she needed. I also provided encouragement to Sarah, reminding her of all positive changes she was making at Tetney, and how much she had already achieved." Sarah adds, "meeting with Zoe on a regular basis has kept me focussed and determined through all the ups and downs on the school improvement journey, and helped to give me the confidence to make all the changes which have been necessary at Tetney."

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The Essentials

Sarah's journey began by dealing with the essentials at Tetney, for example, making sure that robust safeguarding and SEND strategies and procedures were put in place straight away. Since pupil behaviour at the school was judged as requiring improvement by Ofsted (who stated 'on too many occasions, pupils are slow to respond to adults' instruction... because adults are not consistent enough'), clear behaviour policies and structures were also quickly put into place. "I made sure that the new behaviour policy was based on staff having high expectations of pupil behaviour at all times, and that this policy was followed consistently by all staff within the school", says Sarah. "The new policy outlined that good behaviour would no longer be over rewarded, but expected as the norm, with rewards being reserved for excellent effort and work instead."

Partly exacerbated lower numbers, the school's financial situation also needed addressing as quickly as possible, and with help from Kyra and the Local Authority, expertise was put in place to provide the necessary support. Kyra arranged for a school business manager from Woodlands Infant & Nursery School to come to Tetney on a regular basis to offer help and guidance to the school's administrator. The policies, procedures and systems that were necessary to ensure effective financial management were gradually put into place, and the school administrator was supported in learning how to manage these in the long term, in a way that would be sustainable.

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Sarah then took some time to really get to know the school and understand its current situation, including the key strengths and weaknesses. To do this, she observed lessons, undertook work scrutinies, examined data, and spent a substantial amount of time talking and listening to staff, pupils, parents and governors. "I wanted to get to know the school inside out so that I was in a position to write a really focussed School Development Plan", says Sarah. "What became evident to me through this process was that Tetney had many committed and talented members of staff. However, a lack of vision, strategic governance, business management, purposeful curriculum, and effective leadership structure, were, combined, holding the school back." With the support of Zoe, Sarah then put together a School Development Plan which addressed the school's most pressing issues and would enable improvement to take place as quickly and effectively as possible.



Creating a shared vision

“The next step was collaborating with staff and governors to create a vision for Tetney, which everyone bought into, and which would set the trajectory for us as a school, moving forward”, Sarah tells us. “I collected views from as many people as possible, including parents and pupils, as we were all on this journey together. Then, as a staff team, we took part in a values and visioning workshop, and we used that day to clarify our vision”. Sarah explains further, “our vision is, at its most fundamental level, to support and nurture the development of happy, well-rounded children, who feel safe and loved at school, and who enjoy their education, and love learning.” However, for Sarah and her team, the school’s vision is not something static, but instead, something to be continually reflected upon. “We base everything we do at the school around two key questions – ‘why are we doing what we’re doing?’, and ‘what do we want for our pupils?’” These two questions help Sarah and her team stay continually focussed on the wider vision they have for their pupils in everything that they do. The latest Ofsted report reflects the success of Sarah’s emphasis on vision, stating, ‘she has instilled a sense of pride and purpose into the school’.

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Leadership Structure and Staff Development

After clarifying the school’s vision, a focus on leadership structures became the next key priority. “The development of middle leaders was an absolute necessity”, says Sarah, “as I could not juggle everything myself and be effective. Therefore, we invested time, money and CPD into developing leaders at the school, including a Maths lead, an English lead, a SENDCo, and EYFS lead.” By talking to her staff during performance development about their skills, passions, and aspirations, Sarah was quickly able to identify members of staff who may be interested in these new roles. “Their enthusiasm has blown me away”, says Sarah, “they have been so keen to learn, and have really risen to their new responsibilities. Having specialist middle leaders has been hugely beneficial for our pupils and our staff, and without a doubt has been one of the key factors in raising pupil outcomes.” Sarah has supported her staff in their development with CPD from Kyra, and also with SLEs who have come into the school to work alongside the new middle leaders. The school’s current SENDCo has completed her formal qualification for the role, as well as working alongside SLEs, and taking part in a secondment at another school for two terms to learn more about the role in a different setting. “She has since become an SLE herself”, says Sarah, “which is fantastic, and a real testament to her enthusiasm and determination”.

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Sarah has also focussed on helping staff at all levels to identify their strengths, as well as areas for improvement, in order to support their continual growth as professionals. This has taken place through observations, learning walks, developmental conversations, and support from middle leaders and SLEs. Sarah explains how she has witnessed a real change in the mindset of staff since becoming Head; “in the early days, many members of staff really disliked being observed, or taking part in peer book scrutinies, as they were afraid of being judged. Now they are used to sharing their practice, and welcome advice and collaboration. They are not fazed by lesson observations or work scrutinies like they used to be, and are able to take on board constructive criticism, valuing feedback as an opportunity to improve. There has been a real change in culture as reflective practice and continual professional growth have gradually become the norm at Tetney, and that has resulted in substantial improvements in teaching and learning, and the development of a really strong team spirit.”

Curriculum

A long-term curriculum plan also needed to be put into place which would ensure high levels of pupil engagement, and consistency throughout the school. Sarah chose to invest in the Cornerstones curriculum, which supports schools in implementing a rich, meaningful and relevant curriculum in a variety of subjects, through themed projects and engaging activities. “Cornerstones was by no means a ‘quick fix’”, says Sarah, “but what it did for us was provide lesson plans and resources for our teachers so that they did not have the pressure of ‘re-inventing the wheel’, and creating a new curriculum from scratch, at a time when so many things were changing at Tetney. We visited other schools using Cornerstones and spoke to them about it before committing, and it was clear that Cornerstones offer fantastic, tried and tested curriculum resources that really engage children, while covering all the key areas of the curriculum at each key stage. Of course, each teacher has to personalise the curriculum, and make it their own, considering carefully what will work best in their own class context, and adapting lessons and resources where necessary. The children love the variety of activities they get to take part in through the Cornerstones curriculum; it has really helped to bring their learning alive.”

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Governance

Securing improvements in governance was another key developmental priority at Tetney, especially as short-comings in governance had been highlighted in the school’s 2016 Ofsted report. “The governors were very well-intentioned, and cared about the school”, says Sarah, “but they needed support to fully understand the importance of their role in holding school leaders to account, and providing adequate challenge, as this had not been happening.” The Local Authority provided the governing body at Tetney with support from a National Leader of Governance, Sean Westaway, who worked with them to introduce a new model of governance, complete skills audits, identify training needs, and recruit new governors to fill skills gaps. The governing body were also provided with training from Sean on the appropriate

and effective questioning of school leaders to ensure suitable challenge, and also how to document this challenge clearly in the minutes. A new Chair of Governors was also appointed in November 2017. "Thanks to Sean, and the welcomed support from our governors, we now have a really strong governing body who understand their roles and responsibilities clearly, and provide effective challenge", says Sarah, "and that improvement was outlined in the Ofsted report in 2018, which stated that governance had improved considerably since the last inspection."

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Impact and Outcomes

Sarah and Zoe knew that the various strategies and interventions that had been taking place at Tetney were really starting to make an impact when, gradually, a number of positive changes started to become apparent. "It was evident that parents were beginning to regain their trust in the school" says Sarah, "and parental engagement and feedback in the playground was becoming more and more positive. Staff morale also began to rise, and as a result, their commitment did too. The atmosphere of the whole school began to transform and became much more positive, and it was clear that, overall, our pupils loved being at school, and were thoroughly enjoying their lessons."

On top of all these positive signs, pupil numbers were increasing, and their progress and attainment levels were rising, resulting in outcomes higher than the national average in most areas. External feedback from Kyra and the Local Authority was also extremely positive. "Then, of course, when Ofsted arrived in November 2018, we had the opportunity to demonstrate just how far things had come since their last visit", says Sarah, "and that's exactly what we did. The Ofsted report praised the school's teaching and learning provision, pupil behaviour, welfare, safeguarding, governance, SEND provision and Early Years provision, which had all been outlined as weaknesses previously, and we were judged to be a good school."

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Sarah concluded by emphasising the importance of her staff team, and all of the support that she has received throughout Tetney's school improvement journey. "There have been many challenges along the way, and it certainly hasn't always been easy", says Sarah, "but it is the support that I have received from Kyra, the Local Authority, local networks, and, of course, Zoe, that have made all of this possible. Zoe in particular has supported me every step of the way, and I don't think the school could have made such significant improvements so quickly without her continued help, guidance and expertise. A motto which I hold close to my heart is, 'the most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other', and I can think of no better example of this than what we have managed to achieve together at Tetney."

Learning Points

1) Deal with the essentials straight away – If adequate strategies and procedures regarding safeguarding, pupil wellbeing and SEND provision are not in place, this must be dealt with immediately, and prioritised before anything else. Above all else, pupils must feel safe, secure, and that their needs are being met.

2) Get to know your school inside out – By really getting to know the school's key areas of strength and weakness, you can begin to formulate a focussed and effective plan to address the issues, build on the strengths, and move things forward based on the depth of knowledge you have gained. Spend a lot of time listening and looking!

3) Have the right support in place – Reflect on where you need support, and then make sure you get it. Finding the right people/organisations, who will offer an appropriate balance encouragement, advise, challenge, and resources, will help to substantially increase the speed and efficacy of improvement.

4) Create a shared vision for the school – Creating a shared vision which your staff buy into helps to put everyone on the same page, and provides a focused trajectory for the schools which everybody is aiming towards.

5) Put together a focused School Development Plan – A clear and focused development plan outlines the concrete steps and goals which all staff will be working towards, in order to secure school improvement and fulfil the school's vision. The School Development Plan should be referred to regularly, and progress towards goals should be continually discussed with staff and governors, with evidence of impact monitored, and recorded.

6) Develop a great leadership team – No Headteacher is an island, and the main role of the Headteacher should be to lead the school's overall development, and to make sure that staff are equipped and empowered to fulfil their roles effectively. To do this you must develop a team of specialist and skilled leaders who can take on key responsibilities, and be trusted to take the lead in those areas.

7) Support your staff in their professional development, passions, and goals – Invest in your staff, and support them in their professional development and in their career goals. This will increase levels of enthusiasm and commitment, and should also result in happy, and highly capable, staff.

8) Have a clear long-term curriculum in place – An excellent curriculum is the foundation of excellent teaching and learning, and should engage and challenge pupils, not only to learn, but also to develop a love of learning.

9) Get governance right – Excellent governance will ensure that standards and expectations remain consistently high by holding school leaders to account, asking the right questions, and providing suitable challenge. An excellent governing body will continually support and promote further school improvement.



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