

The Great School Framework

Shared aspirational vision, values and culture

Case study - Ashtree Primary School and Nursery

www.ashtree.herts.sch.uk

Focus area, aims and background context

This case study describes how the Ashtree Primary School Reception team adapted and improved their practice and provision. Following an Ofsted inspection in 2018, when the school was graded 'Requires Improvement', it was vital to move the EYFS back to 'Good' as rapidly as possible. Despite the EYFS having above average GLD outcomes in all but one academic year, there were issues with the day to day ethos of the setting. The provision lagged behind modern 'best practice'.

What did we need to change?

- The structure of our day
- The classroom environment, to allow for greater independence
- Our planning: it needed to be more explicitly child-led
- Our Learning Journals, so that they explicitly demonstrated the children achieving 'Next Steps' and progress with their learning overall
- The ethos, to one where the children choose to challenge themselves.

The story

How did we change?

The Ashtree Reception team is an extremely hard working group of people who have been together for many years. After Ofsted in January 2018, the team was deflated and defeated. It was a low point for us all. As the Reception EYFS Leader, I felt a huge responsibility to navigate these extremely uncertain waters and attempt to restore positivity within the team.

Before Ofsted, Ashtree School had signed up to be part of a brand new project entitled 'Communicate to Succeed' led by Herts for Learning in conjunction with Acorns teaching school alliance. This project was aimed at schools working within certain areas of Hertfordshire to improve both Literacy and Maths through communication.

The project began in March 2018, perfect timing for us as a school to engage with other settings, listen to expert advice and to take inspiration from different sources.

The project felt overwhelming to begin with. There were so many ideas, opinions, thoughts and schemes that I was interested in implementing. However, I knew for the sake of my team that it was important I absorbed as much information as I could and decided what would be most pertinent for our school. It was important to reflect on the ideas and new ways of working that would change our outlook and practice for good.

After every conference, course, meeting and workshop, I reflected on what I had learnt that day. I wrote additional notes while the ideas were clear and fresh in my mind, notes that I knew would be key messages of change to cascade back to my team at school. At first the team felt reluctant to change, the morale was still low and enthusiasm had dwindled. I knew it was imperative that I involved my team as much as possible by playing to their key strengths. I devised action plans

with deadlines and expectations for how we were to go about bringing this change. I allowed my team to talk about what they perceived their expertise to be and assigned responsibilities based on their opinion and voice. This was absolutely critical to the success I knew we could achieve.

By involving my team in the entire process from the very beginning, they

- felt listened to
- had a voice
- felt part of everything
- **owned the change**

As the 'Communicate to Succeed' project continued, my team were eager to find out which fresh new ideas I would be bringing back next. Morale was high again, the enthusiasm was back and we were making significant changes to all of our prior areas of development.

This was all without diluting our vision. We rigidly stuck to our intended outcomes through monitoring by myself, SLT, HfL EYFS Advisors and our Improvement Partner. This aspect was very important to continuing to drive the Reception forward. We had to remain focused on the outcomes intended, with everyone being able to talk confidently about our new way of working.

- The structure of our day ✓

We worked alongside HfL EYFS advisers to ensure we followed best practice. As a team we worked together to immediately change our timetable.

- The classroom environment, to allow for greater independence ✓

We listened to advice from the 'Communicate to Succeed' team and our EYFS adviser. We created a mood board as a team for what we wanted our setting to look like using all the key points from the advice we had received. Open-ended resources, inviting spaces and room to extend the children's imaginations were all vital to our vision. Two of our teaching assistants (TAs) took on the role for zoning our classrooms and created an environment that allowed for greater independence and imagination.

- Making our planning more explicitly child led ✓

We worked alongside EYFS Advisers to devise a new way of planning for the Early Years at Ashtree School. The teachers ensure the planning format is adhered to and the TAs are included by being able to record their thoughts and findings on the plans, which are displayed, and are working documents. This way all members of staff understand the Intent, Implementation and Impact of anything we do. We value the children's voice and actively promote a culture of open-ended questioning and child led learning.

- An overhaul of our Learning Journals to explicitly demonstrate the children achieving 'Next Steps' ✓

As a team we worked together to source many different Learning Journals from other settings. We looked for different ideas and best practice. Through the 'Communicate to Succeed' project I was able to ask for opinion and advice from a wide range of professionals. I collated all of the information gathered by the team and created a new way of recording observations, using a 'What's Next...' format to show how we immediately move the child's learning forward with every observation. Along with SLT we decided to create longer term 'Next Steps' that would be displayed in the back of each child's Learning Journal.

- Creating an ethos where the children choose to challenge themselves ✓

Although our 'exceeding' level data has always been high, we felt that the culture of challenge wasn't something the children actively chose with independence. As a team, we contacted and visited different settings to find out how they promoted this aspect. After a few trial and error versions of challenge, we finally settled on a reward system that worked for our children and us. It was important to find a system that was right for Ashtree, we didn't give up when previous versions of challenge incentives were not as successful. The 'Challenge Star' system was created. Children could receive a challenge stamp on their star for completing a practical activity that had a challenge element attached to it, but they could also receive a star for completing a challenge that was personal to them. When they receive ten stamps they take their star home and the next colour star is added to the display for them to start again. The culture of independent challenge now thrives in the Ashtree Reception. Our Challenge Star incentive was noticed by other staff and is now successfully used in Year One.

Impact

The impact was initially seen in the morale of the Reception staff. By valuing and including my team, their confidence was boosted. We could not have achieved the desired changes required to the setting unless their wellbeing was high.

With regards to data, our child-led approach allowed us to better support our boys, particularly within Literacy and by making our Phonics lessons more active and games-based.

The autumn 2018 GLD figure for the boys has been 41%. The summer 2019 GLD figure for the boys was 70%.

Moderation of our data *"confirmed that the school's judgements were consistent and accurate, that the EY practitioners were well prepared and that they had a thorough knowledge of the children"*. JARV 2019.

Because of the changes implemented, our in depth knowledge of the children has allowed us to *"plan pertinent activities that support their next steps in development"*. Communicate to Succeed Project 2019.

SLT now judges Reception to be 'good'. This has been validated by our Improvement Partner and TLA Advisers.

Reflection

By involving your whole team, they feel included, valued and their voices heard.

By ensuring you stick to an agreed vision, your team will support you and one another by utilising their own ideas and strengths. Because they own the process with you, it belongs to you all.

The longer term initiatives will succeed when everyone is invested.

Next steps

As a Reception team, we already know that our next step is to understand the needs of our children with English as an additional language (EAL) better. Together we highlighted that this group of children need our attention to ensure good progress is made with the EYFS.

We have already researched and sought advice regarding children with EAL and this will continue to be our next collaborative change to drive our practice forward.