Singing from the same song sheet

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Key Points

- A bespoke vision of outstanding Parli teaching, outstanding Parli learning and ‘perfect’ Parli parenting
- Shared throughout the whole school community and integrated into every aspect of Parli life

Purpose

What were your reasons for doing this development work?

The overarching aim of this initiative is reflected in the first of the G4G Eight Pillars of Greatness: ‘Shared Vision, Values, Culture and Ethos’. In terms of tailoring this to the Parli context, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) focused on three objectives:

- To explore, debate and negotiate what outstanding Parli pedagogy looks like, sounds like and feels like.
- To create a vision of outstanding Parli learning, outstanding Parli teaching and ‘perfect’ Parli parenting, sharing this vision throughout the school community.
- To integrate this bespoke vision into all aspects of school improvement.

The ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted report in November 2010, recognised the school’s many achievements and its self-awareness. In response to the report, Parliament Hill School acknowledged that, to provide a world class education for all ‘Parli Girls’, structures and systems to share the vision and outstanding practice needed to be embedded. The challenge for the Senior Leadership Team was to create a highly ambitious and innovative vision of world class pedagogy, which would generate excitement, inspire and capture the imagination of the whole school community.

In light of this, the School Development Plan (SDP) focussed on strengthening an outstanding pedagogy, particularly collaborative learning, developing a growth mind set, exceptional challenge for Gifted and Talented students, and the explicit teaching of literacy.

Who were the identified target learners?

All pupils

What specific curriculum area did you intend to have impact on?

All curriculum areas and aspects.
How were you intending to improve pupil learning?

By strengthening an outstanding pedagogy, particularly collaborative learning, developing a growth mind set, exceptional challenge for Gifted and Talented students, and the explicit teaching of literacy.

One distinguished visitor commented that this was a ‘high-achieving, creative and happy school’ and talking to senior leaders and teachers, there was a consensus that this was built on more than the descriptors in the old or new Ofsted frameworks, yet no one could easily articulate the distinctive Parli outstanding culture for learning in the classroom at its best.

What emerged as a priority was a need both for a retrospective review of outstanding learning and teaching at the school, and also reflection about where it needed to go to be more consistently implemented across the curriculum and key stages. This would then be developed into a shared vision – with the learner firmly at the heart – owned by the whole school community. It needed to engage learners as active participants, not only in their learning, but also in the leadership and improvement of their learning. This would, it was hoped, foster individual and collective accountability for high achievement amongst both teachers and learners, based on robust evidence to identify learner needs and next steps for their progress.

What were your success criteria?

The strategic intentions of Parli are embodied in the school aims: to create a school where:

- All girls belong and where every girl is nurtured, empowered and succeeds;
- Everyone enjoys learning and is creative – trying new things, finding solutions, embracing their responsibilities;
- Relationships are positive, respectful and everyone does their best;
- We are regarded as an outstanding school by our community and when judged by formal external measures.

Methodology

What did you do - what teaching approaches did you use?

Two new deputies arrived in January 2012, providing an excellent opportunity to look at learning and teaching with fresh eyes. Formal quality assurance processes for the preceding year evidenced over a third outstanding lessons, providing a strong foundation and pockets of exceptional practice which kindled an optimism about further school improvement to progress from good to outstanding overall for learning and teaching. How was this practice to be shared with all teaching staff over and above the school CPD offer? And how would this seep
into the bloodlines of the school community until more consistently outstanding lessons were the norm?

The characteristics that made our learners so special were their maturity, confidence, openness and creativity. How could we use these qualities to sustain excitement about learning? On the down side, some teachers lamented that students were too passive, gave up too easily in the face of challenge and were not self-managing collaborators. Again, these insights were helpful in envisioning the model of outstanding learning and teaching.

The project started with a draft vision of outstanding Parli learning and teaching shared at the annual SLT planning weekend. These two competency models were presented in the first person through speech bubbles surrounding a central image of students and of teachers. As such, they represented a declaration of individual commitment to outstanding learning and teaching, as well as a celebration of it. It struck a chord with all members of the team, as it captured the spirit of the best in classroom practice. These were then used as the backbone of the new school development plan around which we framed key questions.

The next step was to share these models with middle leaders, students, governors and parents to help refine the competencies and ensure they blossomed in line with stakeholders’ responses.

The final version of the outstanding Parli teaching model was disseminated to teaching staff in a variety of forums and used as a starting point for whole-school CPD days. It was also included in induction materials and CPD for new and beginning teachers along with a teacher version of outstanding Parli learning. For students, the outstanding Parli learning model was included in year 6 interview induction packs, student organisers and presented in year group assemblies in relation to learning and teaching priorities- collaborative learning, growth mindset, G & T provision and literacy. Both models were shared with parents and carers through the Parent Forum and in the school newsletter, and feedback was sought. Once the parenting model was finalised, this was shared through the Parent Forum and a year 9 and 10 parents’ meeting about GCSE expectations.

See attachments below for the three models.

What specific teaching resources did you use?

What CPD experiences, materials, research and expertise have you drawn on?

Outcomes and Impact

What has been the impact on pupil learning?

A semi-structured focus group with a small group of Year 9 students revealed that they liked
the ‘Perfect’ Parli Parent. They were able to give examples of parents praising them for the effort they made and were grateful for this because, “Sometimes you don’t get the results that you want”. They found the models “inspiring” and a useful learning tool: “It shows me how I can improve myself, and my learning”.

For progress review, it was adapted for use with students to self-review as part of a preparatory homework in years 7 to 11. "This is the first time I've been asked to think about the way I learn and how to improve on that. It made me realise what I was doing well and gave me time to think of the few things I needed to get better at.” (Year 8 student)

The impact on Parents and Carers

Feedback from parents and carers suggests that they appreciated and valued being involved in prioritising the attributes of the ‘Perfect’ Parli Parent: “the discussion went to the heart of learning and how children learn best and what motivates them ... it is very impressive to talk about the personal challenges that children face or indeed anyone in the learning process. I am sure that many parents will be touched by this”. (Year 8 parent)

The G & T Team used the models when drawing up Individual Learning Plans with exceptionally able students, finding them an excellent resource for discussing growth mindset and the need for risk-taking and resilience. Parents reported this had been very helpful in supporting their daughters to embrace opportunities to take on new challenges.

Evidence of impact on pupil learning

What has been the impact on teaching?

Teachers who were new to Parliament Hill School found the Outstanding Parli Learning and the Outstanding Parli Teaching models particularly useful. “It allowed me to ‘tune in’ with the school ethos, which developed a sense of community and consistency throughout the school.” Mark Fowle (History NQT)

Team Leaders reported finding the models “ambitious”, “easy to digest” and “motivational”, clarifying the skills they need to develop in their teams when planning professional development. They particularly welcome the fact that the models are based on research into best practice and focus on relationships and expectations. When working with visitors, departments have used the models to convey the Parli ethos succinctly and visitors reported finding them to be accessible, innovative and inspiring. Many teachers and Team Leaders used the models when planning for lesson observations or when feeding back to colleagues on lessons observed as a coaching tool. “They clearly outline what is expected from both the teacher and student. Having the ‘criteria’ visible in the classroom allows me to refer to it directly in lesson …” Zoe Thorpe (PE and Dance teacher)

Evidence from Learner Observation Fortnight highlighted the impact on increased collaborative learning with more structured opportunities to develop oracy skills and being more resilient in the face of setbacks. Feedback was noticeably more diagnostic and students
reported greater clarity about their next learning steps. “All students are clear of exactly what they need to be doing in order to make as much progress as possible ... I refer to these when planning and evaluating my lessons.” Alex Russell (Dance teacher)

The Senior Leadership Team benefited from a shared vision in line management meetings and the distillation of responsibility for developing consistently outstanding teaching. The models had been particularly useful when inducting new staff and when working with teachers who needed support to develop their practice.

Subject Mentors have used the models with trainees, who have reported that they are able to see how the Teachers’ Standards are designed to support students’ progress in the classroom, bringing the standards to life and accelerating their understanding of what they are aiming for in terms of learning and teaching. “The learner version ... allows me to reflect upon the skills I should be helping the students to develop.” Dan Abbott (Science Teach First trainee)

The History Department have created a model of Great Historians, personalising the original models through deep discussion of the attributes they aim to develop in students in preparation for lifelong learning. This process is being replicated in other subject areas.

Evidence of impact on teaching

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Involving Governors in drawing up the vision and discussing the final versions enabled them to understand what we were aiming to achieve, and how complex the learning and teaching processes are. ‘These are very impressive. They manage to capture the ethos of the school in a way that is accessible to everybody. I now understand what you are trying to achieve and how you’re going about it. Visiting classrooms has been a much more rewarding experience now I have the learning and teaching models.’ (Learning and Teaching Committee)

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

What went well ...

The outstanding Parli models have had impact because of their simplicity, their coherence and their accessibility. They provide a holistic image of ideal Parli classroom practice. As such, they are readily transferrable as skills every teacher, student, parent and carer can aspire to and practise. Designed in such a visual format, and easily displayed on classroom walls and in corridors, these models communicate Parli core values and pedagogical ideals. They looked afresh at what was working well, and in the spirit of continuous school improvement created a bespoke set of competencies that also drove initiatives to extend and embed outstanding
practice across the school community. Above all, it kept the learner at the heart of its vision, in an ambitious and inclusive approach.

Opting to focus on Outstanding Parli Learning, Outstanding Parli Teaching and ‘Perfect’ Parli Parenting (rather than Teacher, Learner or Parent) made it clear that the models were about behaviours, not people themselves. The implication was that this was an aspirational continuum for personal improvement in a shared context.

Including the Parli Learner model in Student Planners and using it as the screen saver across the school ensured it was highly visible and a constant reminder to everyone.

**Even better if ...**

On reflection, this initiative would have had even more impact if more staff, students and parents had been on board and actively creating and promoting it from its very inception so everyone felt ownership. Students in Years 10 and 11 felt less ownership of the models than younger students and all year groups would have liked teachers to use the models more in lessons.

The images used could have been more representative of the school community, eye-catching and less stylised.

**What would your next steps be?**

Maximising the potential of the outstanding Parli models is a priority. This year, Parliament Hill School has established a revamped School Council and this will enable both further consultation and leadership of how the competencies can be further shared and acted upon. This student voice body will also provide a fertile forum for reviewing its impact and keeping it alive through further modifications and adaptations. Students have suggested making the models more aesthetically pleasing and colourful with designated spaces in planners to write their personal targets in order to achieve outstanding learning.

The models must also be shared with a wider parental audience, through parents’ evenings and the home-school agreement for example, and forums such as the Parent Forum will be encouraged to be involved in devising ways to develop and disseminate their model.

The models will become an integral part of the induction process for new staff, students and Governors as well as being available on the school website for prospective parents and for students to consider when selecting a secondary school. The parents’ model will be useful for targeting parents who might be struggling at home or those parents whose daughters need to make more rapid progress.

The models have accelerated the shared understanding of the Parli vision for outstanding learning and teaching, generated fertile discussion around pedagogy and parenting, and empowered students to become leaders of their own learning. Our next steps must be to sustain the momentum, the excitement and harness the creativity of the school community.
Sharing Practice

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where should they start?

Start with one model. I suggest the Learning model as this is at the heart of everything schools do. At PHS, SLT drafted a model and then took it to the rest of the staff for discussion, debate and amendments. If I did this again, I’d start with an open discussion with all staff about what we want our students to do, say and feel. Using this to create the draft would ensure everyone had a say from the outset and it can be re-drafted as needed, keeping it alive and active.

Once the model is created, keep it alive. Use every opportunity to use it, e.g. at induction events, in tutor times, displayed in every classroom and around the school, at parents’ evenings and workshops, when setting targets with students, as the screen saver for all the school’s computers.

What would be the essential elements to include?

The discussion and debate around the vision for Great Parli learning were the most valuable aspects of the process. Although we now have models to use, the learning and sharing came through the process of creating the models. Allow high quality time for this.

Involving governors and parents helped ensure that the whole school community understood our vision and values and we were delighted by the response.

Use it in as many different ways as you can so it is embedded into the culture of the school.