

Vertical Tutoring at Regent High School

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Key Points

- Vertical Tutoring: small tutor groups of Y7-13 students, each with two tutors
 - Impact on attainment, staff/student/parent relationships, staff cohesion
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Purpose

What were your reasons for doing this development work?

Our horizontal tutor group system (occupying an hour a week of students' time) was not contributing to raising achievement; tutors couldn't fulfil their roles effectively, students' experience was variable and their commitment poor. There was little social cohesion between year groups. In changing it, we aimed to:

1. Raise achievement and attainment: improve outcomes for every student
2. Enhance the role of the tutor and build real tutor-student relationships
3. Improve community cohesion over the long term; strengthen pupil/parent/school partnerships
4. Reduce bullying
5. Build capacity and upskill all members of staff

Who were the identified target learners?

All students.

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

How were you intending to improve pupil learning?

Vertical tutor groups are essentially families: the tutors are advocates, older pupils give advice and instil the ethos of the school. Every student has a role in the group. Students develop responsibility for other students. The single 20-minute tutor group time, with its own curriculum, is in the middle of the day just before break time, when students are fresh and focused on learning.

What were your success criteria?

- Raised attainment
- Reduction in bullying
- Improved student attendance

Methodology

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

Vertical Tutoring is organised as follows:

- There are five equally balanced Learning Communities
- Ten Tutor groups per community
- 14-16 students per tutor group; 2 or 3 from each year group. Not more than one child with statement of SEN, one G&T, one behavioural needs in a tutor group.
- Two tutors per tutor group. All staff are tutors: headteacher, SLT, teachers, learning support, administrative staff, technicians, data staff, etc. Only the 5 heads of the Tutorial Communities are not tutors.
- The tutor programme is a skills-based curriculum called TRICs (Team Learner, Reflective Learner, Independent Learner, Creative Learner) plus Literacy. A team of people plan this curriculum. It is the same for all: values taught at the same time as softer skills. There are half-termly themes such as democracy, empowerment and creativity. Over the five days of tutor group time there is one assembly and one tutor session on the current theme, one on Literacy (eg reading for enjoyment), one on Admin (checking of diaries, uniform, equipment, student bulletin) and one of Competition (quizzes, physical challenges, team-building challenges). Year 12-13 lead a lot of this. The training for tutors is comprehensive and collaborative. The tutors are grouped together to collaborate on how best to achieve the curriculum plan, so there is cross-fertilisation of ideas and staff broaden their experience beyond their subject department.
- Because there are only a few students in each year, effective support for choosing options, work experience and academic mentoring is easier to achieve than with a year-group system.
- Because there are two tutors who stay with the tutor group year after year, continuity for students and parents is established. Parents meet with tutors four times a year for half an hour, at meetings informed by subject teachers. Though they are in different tutor groups, siblings are in the same learning community, so the head of the learning community provides a single point of access for a parent.

Implementation process

Introduction of vertical tutoring requires a year of preparation.

Initially I researched systems of tutoring, then I (DH, Support for Learning) and an assistant headteacher met with Peter Barnard, advocate of vertical tutoring. The two of us were thoroughly challenged by Peter Barnard, not a comfortable experience, but one which developed our own thinking and resolve to meet the challenges we would encounter at every stage of reorganising the tutor system.

We then went through the same process with the Senior Leadership team. The Head and SLT need to be fully behind the enterprise, or it will not work.

CPD for the whole staff started in Autumn 2010 with considering the current tutoring system and its objectives, collaboratively analysing its shortcomings and sharing ideas to fix it, then asking staff to work towards a solution themselves. Time must be invested to involve all staff, it is a long process. Staff across the school must buy into such a radical change in organisation. All staff are tutors; all are empowered. In January 2011, staff CPD with Peter Barnard focused on the ethos of vertical tutoring.

The Consultation phase took place in Spring 2011. Students, governors, parents were all consulted.

CPD on VT organisation was held in March 2011 for all staff and governors. In the interim, stakeholders visited a school in Bedford where VT was implemented.

Launch phase: The school was closed for two days to allow tutors to meet. A target-setting day was held where parents met new tutors and discussed targets for individual students

in the summer term 2011, tutor/tutees introduction and tutor training for the TRICs programme took place; also training for Y11-13 on their roles in the VT system.

What specific teaching resources did you use?

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

Peter Barnard – initial consultation, staff CPD. See verticaltutoring.org

Resources, experience and expertise of the whole school staff.

Outcomes and Impact

What has been the impact on pupil learning?

Raising attainment: Raising attainment: Value-added scores have been consistently positive, rising from 1000.7 in 2011 to 1013.6 in 2014.

Community cohesion: Four years in, the tutor groups feel like families – it's a very long process and needs support all the way. (The current Year 11 are the only students with experience of the old year group system).

Parents' involvement has improved – now over 90% attendance at the four-times-a-year progress review meetings.

Reported bullying has reduced significantly.

Attendance is healthy. External and internal exclusions have been reduced.

Racism and homophobia has reduced. In 2012 the school welcomed Sir Ian McKellan from Stonewall to work with students.

Evidence of impact on pupil learning

VA school score: 1000.7 in 2011; 1013.6 in 2014

Student perceptions: each year, students review their experience and how to improve it further. For example, the competitive element in TRICs started as a quiz, but has now broadened considerably as a result of student feedback.

'Our tutors are actually interested in us and check our planners and stuff'

'Gave us a peer mentor'

'Older students are good role models'

'We get to communicate with other year groups'

'Older students help the younger ones'

'Year 7 feel safer because they know older students'

'We don't have as much bullying now'

'A lot of us have made good progress'

'Advice on GCSE options'

What has been the impact on teaching?

All staff, being tutors, have upskilled themselves through their tutoring and training on the TRICs programme, in which they work in groups of 20 tutors. They wanted to be involved in developing the programme, and so have 100% confidence in the scheme of work. Their involvement in the school is broader than just their primary role. Their relationship with tutees is stronger because there are only 16 students who stay with them in the long term.

Evidence of impact on teaching

'It feels more like a whole school community, not just year groups'

'Most students have been united in revising maths'

'Bond with tutor group'

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The change to Vertical Tutoring has impacted deeply on school organisation and leadership. The tutor role is shared by all staff including the head teacher, which strengthens the organisation.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

This is the fourth year of implementation.

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

1. 100% support of Headteacher and 100% support of Senior Leadership team.
2. All staff buy in to it for its own sake (no extra pay for tutors, whatever their role)
3. Consultation and preparation is a year-long process; giving over significant CPD time to deliver it over that year.
4. Implementation can't be rushed.
5. The strength of the Tutor Group programme, at a time of day when students are keen to learn.
6. All five heads of the Tutorial Communities share an office, as they all have common goals and issues.

What would your next steps be?

Continuing review and development of the VT system.

If I were to become a headteacher myself, I would advocate Vertical Tutoring immediately.

Sharing Practice

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

Start with undergoing the challenging process of working with Peter Barnard. If you know your current system isn't working, he will show you how to change it. (Two training sessions, one with two of SLT, and one with whole staff.)

What would be the essential elements to include?

- Buy into the whole VT system. It can't be done with only certain year groups or involving only some staff. We have added to it (eg with Literacy and Competitive sessions) but not compromised on the basic structure of all pupils/all staff with a strong tutor programme.
- Include the people most negative about VT into the focus group that manages the change.
- Interested people are welcome to visit Regent High School and meet with me (Adam Tedesco). I can share our experience and training materials.