MOBILISE PROJECT

Mobilise Case Study: Benjamin Adlard Primary School
Benjamin Adlard Primary School in Gainsborough has experienced a rapid period of improvement in recent years. The school’s staff have successfully improved the quality of teaching and learning through a greater emphasis on high quality professional development, and the sharing of best practice both internally and through collaboration with other schools.

The school’s involvement in Mobilise came at an important time. As improvements bore fruit (the school was rated as ‘good’ by Ofsted in 2016), the leadership team were keen to ensure that the school continued to go from strength to strength and that it was increasingly drawing upon high quality research to further improve learning and teaching in all classrooms. The leadership team were aware of the Education Endowment Foundation’s research into ‘maximising the impact of teaching assistants’ and immediately saw its relevance to the school.

Debbie Glover (SENCO) and Debbie McKay (Assistant Head) were identified as the School-based Leads, working within the Gainsborough Cluster co-ordinated by Hazel Bell. Both are members of the SLT, with Debbie Glover being responsible for SEN and Debbie McKay responsible for the performance management and training of teaching assistants. “We were extremely excited to be involved in the project” says Debbie Glover, “we attended the initial briefing workshops in Lincoln and quickly gained a clear understanding of each of the Recommendations within the research, which was invaluable in itself. We could immediately see how it connected with our school – we knew that there was so much more we could do to maximise the impact of our teaching assistants.”

Debbie and Debbie introduced the Mobilise project to staff. As members of the SLT (not least with responsibility for teaching assistants) they found it relatively easy to bring senior colleagues on board and to move the project forward. The next stage was to inform both teachers and teaching assistants of the work (which they did in separate groups) – including providing colleagues with an overview of the research and the various Recommendations. “There was a lot of enthusiasm” says Debbie McKay, “teaching assistants in particular immediately felt that they were being recognised and invested in as a professional group. It was very important at that early stage to be open about what we were looking to achieve and how it would benefit staff and children alike. A key message was to reinforce to staff the evidence behind the work and to have trust in the Recommendations. People needed to know that it was an opportunity to learn and improve through access to a valuable body of research and practice, and that they weren’t being tested or checked up on!”

The initial exercise was to undertake an audit across the school of how teaching assistants were being deployed and the nature of interactions with children. Debbie and Debbie used data, lesson observations, book scrutinies, conversations with staff, and pupil-voice to understand the school’s strengths and weaknesses against the seven Recommendations. Teaching assistants were also encouraged to keep diaries of their activities and their involvement in lessons. As a result of this work it was clear, for instance, that teaching assistants were spending too much time with SEN pupils (to the detriment of those pupils gaining time with the class teacher) and that the work of teaching assistants was not necessarily supplementing and extending the teachers’ work.
“We decided to completely relook at the planning processes” says Debbie Glover. “We needed teachers and teaching assistants to be working cohesively and that required our teaching assistants to gain a better understanding of how they could add value to learning across the classroom and it also required teachers to be clearer on the progress and learning needs of SEN pupils who they were not necessarily interacting with for sufficient amounts of time. Improving communication between teachers and teaching assistants was key.”

Debbie and Debbie took some key steps. They first of all introduced time within the school day for teachers and teaching assistants to meet and plan for the day ahead – known as Professional Learning Talk Time. A number of strategies were deployed to ensure this became embedded. “Teaching assistants are now paid to come into school at quarter to nine and they have time for that professional learning conversation with teachers about the day’s work” says Debbie McKay. “As SLT, we work together to cover assemblies so that time is available for teachers too.” The meetings are supported by guidance developed by Debbie and Debbie (see appendix), which set out the expectations of both teachers and teaching assistants – including an expectation that the teachers are clear about the way in which teaching assistants can contribute to furthering the learning and the assessment focus, and an expectation that teaching assistants ensure they understand their role within each lesson. The guidance is very clear that the meeting is not intended to be used for activities such as photocopying, laminating or creating displays!

Alongside this, Debbie and Debbie introduced a new planning format which, whilst fundamentally remaining the teacher’s resource, has encouraged them to be much clearer about (and accountable for) the teaching assistant’s role in the lessons – including the information they should be gathering about pupils’ progress and learning needs.

The changes have had benefits for both teachers and teaching assistants alike. Teachers are gaining a much better understanding – via the input of TAs – of the progress and learning needs of their SEN pupils on a regular basis. They are therefore factoring this awareness into their planning of future lessons and ensuring they maximise the time they themselves devote to this group of pupils on a one-to-one basis. TAs meanwhile, speak of a better understanding of the curriculum and assessment and feel more confident to take on wider aspects of the lesson whilst teachers spend more ‘one-to-one’ time with pupils with additional learning needs. They also know more about other groups of children. “Overall, I know much more about the other children in the class” says teaching assistant, Becky Lloyd, “and the teachers know more about the children that we support than they did. It has broken down barriers and that is benefitting the children’s learning.”

Another key outcome of improved planning and information-sharing between teachers and TAs has been the move towards ensuring that the teaching assistants are working with the same
children in the intervention group work as those they are working with in class. “The teaching assistants are working with the same children in the interventions so that they can monitor and constantly feedback to the teacher on their progress” says Debbie Glover. “Before we found that TAs were being moved around quite a bit, and the link between what happened in the lesson and what was being taken forward in the intervention was quite disjointed. Now there is a lot more cohesion and TAs are much more confident in feeding back to teachers and in helping pupils move their learning forward outside of lessons.” This is supported by teaching assistant Tina Storey, who believes it has also improved the children’s confidence: “The children are working with the same group of adults who know their starting points, know the progress they have made, and know the challenges they are facing – that gives them confidence that we understand their needs and that we will follow up either in the lesson or in the intervention.”

Alongside the improvements to planning and communication, the school is benefitting from other key aspects of the Mobilise project including the introduction of scaffolding and the implementation of some of the evidence-based interventions.

One very positive implication of this has been an emphasis on ‘whole staff’ professional development – with teachers and teaching assistants across the school undertaking lesson observations and entering into regular professional dialogue about curriculum delivery, assessment and pedagogy. “We’re seeing much more in the way of identifying and sharing of best practice across classrooms. In the past, we would probably just focus on one or two individuals for delivering CPD, but now many of our TAs are throwing themselves into leading professional development conversations.” says Debbie McKay, “It has transformed the culture – TAs now feel much more ownership of the learning process.”

In terms of further developing effective planning and communication, Debbie and Debbie are keen to ensure that the opportunities for teacher/teaching assistants’ dialogue become further embedded, with a view to involving teaching assistants in pupil progress meetings, for example. This will be achieved by the SLT covering more assemblies in future and providing additional guidance for teaching assistants and teachers.

**Key Learning Points**

- When introducing the project, it is important to emphasise the evidence behind the work and to encourage staff to trust the process. It is an opportunity to learn from and engage in robust, research-informed approaches to improving practice.
- Teachers and teaching assistants need dedicated time if they are able to have meaningful conversations around planning – informed by the progress and needs of children. Catching up at the beginning or at the end of a lesson is challenging as colleagues can be easily distracted away from the conversation. This may mean changing TAs hours (starting ten minutes earlier in a morning) and SLT must be ready to cover assemblies, gate duties etc.
- Time dedicated to planning must follow guidelines so that it is not used for other purposes and it achieves the right outcomes. Colleagues at Benjamin Adlard have produced guidance which has been included in the APPENDIX.
- Ensure wherever possible that teaching assistants work with the same children in intervention groups as they do during lessons. This ensures a more seamless transition in learning, as TAs are aware of the learning needs and progress of the children they are working with. It also helps the TA to inform teacher’s planning of subsequent lessons.
Teacher/TA Professional Learning Talk Time will take place every day promptly starting at 8:45am. This time is necessary to ensure effective communication and understanding in order to teach, support and assess the children with maximum impact. Therefore in order to maximise this liaison time:

**Teachers should:**

- Ensure that they are ready to discuss the day’s learning with TAs at 8:45am.
- Ensure that TAs have the short-term planning for the lessons they are to support at the start of every week or before if possible for discussion at this time.
- Ensure TAs have a copy of the medium-term planning.
- Keep planning in the yellow and red planning folders, in order for TAs to have access to planning at all times.
- Ensure that planning indicates how TAs will be deployed during all parts of the lesson.
- Ensure that planning indicates a clear assessment focus for TAs to use when working with groups of children.

**TAs should:**

- Ensure that they are ready to discuss the day’s learning with class teachers at 8:45am.
- Read available planning and take up any queries/needs with class teacher.
- Ensure that they understand the level of support required by the class teacher for the lesson.
- Ensure that they understand the learning objective and assessment focus for the children they are working with.

Professional Learning Talk Time is not intended to be used for photocopying/laminating/creating displays.