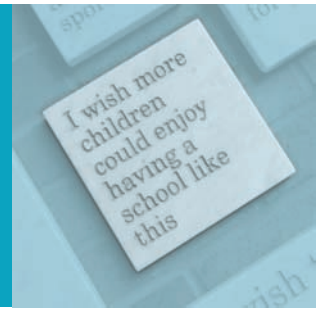


## Learning Journey: Longfield School



*Children feel like equal partners in how their school is run*

### Raising Aspirations and Standards

Longfield School is an 11-16 comprehensive school for 900 students drawn from the town of Darlington, County Durham. Head teacher Keith Cotgrave took over in 2003, after a turbulent period for the school with nine heads in ten years, low levels of achievement at GCSE and poor levels of attendance. Says Keith, "To say we had a huge task ahead of us is an understatement but we had a clear set of priorities, a sense of vision and, above all, a lot of determination."

One of Keith's first steps was to improve the quality and provision of ICT. There had been little previous investment in ICT with, for example, just twenty machines available for

the use of the whole school. By 2007 the school had achieved, almost entirely without external funding, a pupil-computer ratio of 2:1, increased out-of-hours learning and had put in place a sustainable, long-term ICT infrastructure. By 2007 the number of pupils achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE increased by eighteen per cent and in the same year Longfield became the school of the year in the British Educational and Communication Technology Agency's (Becta) ICT Excellence Awards. But as Keith explains, the key to transformation was in the staff, "The most important aspect of our plan was the involvement of all staff. Communication was key."

### It's Good to Talk

This level of communication can be felt in many aspects of school life and extends to both staff *and* students. In 2003, it would have been very unlikely for staff and students to work together to review teaching and learning. It is now becoming more central to practice. In the technology department, for example, students were invited to take part in a department review of teaching and learning with the aim of drawing on students' interests and providing a greater variety of learning strategies - individual, paired, small group and whole class. Following a whole school curriculum review in 2006-7 there is now an increased level of student choice and involvement in how and what they learn - and an increased level of pride in the school. Comments by students such as "teachers take time with us" and "teachers care about us" are now more prevalent. The increased level of dialogue has directly led to a curriculum that meets the needs of more learners more of the time and with measurable consequences for improved behaviour, increased engagement in lessons and a significant reduction in exclusion.

As Children's Commissioner, Professor Al Aynsley-Green commented after a visit in 2006, "It is clear that the children feel like equal partners in how their school is run and I have no doubt that it is this sense of empowerment which helps to create such a positive and nurturing environment."

### Managing Time

One of the most potent but limited assets available to schools is time. "We only have a certain amount of curriculum time available to us," says Keith, "so we need to use this efficiently *and* extend the time available for learning."



*An increased level of pride*

As a consequence, the school places a strong emphasis on managing the timetable effectively. Flexibility is inbuilt so that, for example, the timetable can be collapsed to enable any variety of teaching and learning opportunities whether it's external visits, catch-up sessions, activities for gifted and talented students, extension work, enrichment activities, or teaching and learning for additional qualifications. The school has also introduced longer lesson blocks for most subjects. This includes two four-hour blocks of each option subject to allow for more opportunities for deep learning. In Year 7, all students follow a competency-based curriculum developed from the RSA Opening Minds programme. The flexibility of the timetable enables students to have nine hours per week of Opening Minds with one teacher in the same classroom. Time for this is organised with one full day and two blocks of two hours per week to allow for project based work. This not only improves the efficiency of time-use, it allows for students

to work in a more focused and less fragmented way.

Even the structure of key stages and the teaching year is part of the management of time at Longfield. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is condensed into Years 8 and 9 and the academic year now begins in June. "Because students begin their academic year early, it allows for enhanced transition from Key Stage 2 and it gives us two full years' study at Key Stage 4," explains Keith. It's an apparently simple move but one that has a number of potential outcomes. One of these is that mixed-age classes have been created in all option subjects at Key Stage 4 (Year 10 and Year 11 students can be found in the same class). These mixed-age classes enable students to focus on fewer subjects at one time by completing option GCSEs, or their equivalent, in one year and, if appropriate, sit core subject exams early.

To extend the time available for learning, Longfield School is now open well into the

evening. It's now commonplace each evening to find over two hundred students continuing their learning in study spaces, in department drop-in support clinics for students, or in extra-curricular activities. Students can continue their learning away from school too, at their own pace and in their own time, through their personal online learning spaces provided by the school's learning platform.

So, managing time is much more than achieving greater efficiencies. As Keith comments, "Our evaluation of our management of time has shown very positive consequences for learning in that we now provide a much more personalised learning experience. And this is helping to develop learners who are more independent and self-directed."

### **Next Steps**

The school has a clear set of next steps to continue its transformation. Its specialist school status is one focus as the school aims to become a high performing specialist school, develop a second specialism and improve its sports facilities.

A second area of concentration is on the curriculum with an intention to implement year two of the RSA competency-based curriculum and introduce the Opening Minds programme to Year 8 pupils. In Key Stage 4, the school intends to further develop Routes 1, 2 and 3 including a re-design of the accelerated curriculum and the introduction of alternative accreditation for new and existing courses.

As for the final area for future focus, "We intend to progress with TLA accreditation for all staff and to be a lead school for delivery of this continuing professional development. The most important aspect of our plan so far has been the involvement of all staff and developing all our staff will continue to be a priority."

To find out more visit the Longfield School website at

[www.longfield.darlington.sch.uk](http://www.longfield.darlington.sch.uk)