School self-evaluation

Case study: Secondary
School self-evaluation

Background

This case study focuses on a larger than average state secondary school. The school’s population is largely of White British heritage, with a few pupils from other ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is low. The school’s most recent Ofsted inspection judged the school to be outstanding, with the same judgement being awarded for its capacity to sustain improvement. This case study charts the journey whereby the school grew in establishing its self-evaluation, monitoring and action-planning procedures.

This case study illustrates:

− the school’s need to improve its evaluation approaches
− strategies taken by a senior leader to implement a successful school-wide evaluation system
− a view of the senior leader role
− the challenges and issues this senior leader had to face and how these were overcome
− key personal and professional learning that the initiative stimulated

As a testament to the achievements of the school, Ofsted inspectors noted, in the school’s most recent report on the school, that:

Leaders and managers have established extremely effective systems to bring about improvements in student outcomes through rigorous strategic planning, highly critical self-evaluation and ambitious target-setting.

Analysis of need: the issue

The current headteacher noted:

In 2003, the school was underachieving. It had an image of itself as a good school but it had very few measures on which that judgement was based.

Nick, a deputy head with responsibility for school improvement, echoed this comment:

Our middle leaders were very confident... they’d got a clear sense of vision for their departments but we needed to remind our leaders that they are managers and monitoring is part of managing: [they needed to be able to say] we’re doing what we say we do.

Nick also appreciated there was a need to establish a clear monitoring and evaluation calendar, ensuring that there was follow-up from these activities. He commented that it was “nuts and bolts stuff really” but that there was no consistent practice across the school.
Initiating a whole-school evaluation strategy

The school has access to a range of quantitative data on pupil performance. Detailed statistical analysis indicated that pupils’ attainment in all key stages was outstanding. This analysis was echoed in verified RAISEonline data, which indicated that the school’s results were significantly above average. It would be very easy for the school to have accepted the status quo.

In putting together a strategy for self-evaluation, it would have been easy to leave this task to the senior leadership team (SLT), gathering and interpreting data from across the school. Nick, however, felt that the cornerstone of his strategy was to involve colleagues at all levels in evaluating the work of the whole school. Nick also felt that he had to find methods of delving beneath the headline quantitative data and to focus the perceptions of his colleagues on sustaining improvement by providing them with the means to evaluate and understand the parameters of effective learning and thus increase the proportion of outstanding lessons.

Involving middle leaders: work sampling

Nick realised that his work with middle leaders was critical. Middle leaders at this school included subject leaders as well as heads of year. In this school, the latter are referred to as ‘achievement co-ordinators’ to recognise their role in raising pupil achievement. Work sampling or ‘book looks’ was a strategy that Nick introduced to stimulate a detailed evaluation by his middle leader colleagues of the reality of pupil learning outcomes. Nick commented:

We’ve recognised the need to get much sharper at our approach [to evaluation] by sharing the responsibility for work sampling across two distinctively different groups of middle leaders in this school, achievement co-ordinators as well as heads of department.

By these means, colleagues, working from potentially different perspectives, would together evaluate the work of a year group and identify effective practice as well as areas for development. Exhibit 1 indicates the kind of activity involved in this exercise.
Exhibit 1: Work sampling form

Work sampling
Department/year feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year group</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carried out by</td>
<td>[staff named]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampled</td>
<td>12 pupils</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1. Essentials of marking/written feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant homework (at least fortnightly)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-to-date marking (within last three weeks)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed feedback (WWW/EBI)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels/grades given (one each term)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework marked/acknowledged</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major errors/inaccuracies identified</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 = Needs development 5 = Well developed
### 2. Review [key staff identified]

To include: Quality of homework and feedback, Frequency of homework and feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths: ‘what’s working well’ (WWW)</th>
<th>Areas for development: ‘even better if’ (EBI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of merit stickers</td>
<td>Teacher names not on books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of questions in feedback</td>
<td>Loose sheets not stuck in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Reading Assessment Focus (RAF) and Writing Assessment Focus (WAF) in English</td>
<td>Encourage pupils to make corrections rather than correcting everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWW, EBI and level for all work (Art)</td>
<td>Increase use of questions in feedback, as for responses from pupils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level criteria in front of all books (Art)</td>
<td>Acknowledge feedback by students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments written upside down</td>
<td>Use of national curriculum levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level sheets and info for project work (Design Technology)</td>
<td>Evidence of national curriculum levels – criteria and record of what level students are working at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graph for assessment marks at front of book (maths)</td>
<td>More use of WWW – we write targets but are not so regular in praising work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils recording/transcribing action points onto a sheet in front of book (maths)</td>
<td>Label homework as such in exercise books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of traffic-light system in maths</td>
<td>Put dates in books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer assessment in modern foreign languages</td>
<td>Challenge more able pupils with appropriate and challenging feedback – what next?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels tracker sheet in books to record half-termly peer and teacher levels</td>
<td>Acknowledge student/peer self-assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of excellent feedback [teachers identified]</td>
<td>Develop EBI points and make more detailed in some cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History – v. detailed and regular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English – use of questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DT – pupils acting on comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama - detailed comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama – use of praise and literacy corrections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Issues for action/follow-up [key staff identified]

Key subjects for follow-up (frequency of marking):
- Science [subject leaders and staff identified in each subject area]
- English
- Drama
- Health
- Maths
- French
- Spanish
- RE
- Art

Discussed between .......................................................... .................................................. (Line manager)
AND .......................................................... .................................................. (Head of department/achievement co-ordinator)
Date ..................................................................................................................................................
The declared aim of the work scrutiny exercise was to identify effective practice so that it could be disseminated throughout the school.

Nick commented that there was a “rigidity” or robustness to the processes that had been initiated with a clear, unequivocal purpose:

The outcomes from [work scrutiny] underpin everything we do around self-evaluation [and] we want to share the best practice.

To supplement work scrutiny of a sample of the year group, a companion work-sampling activity is undertaken with individual pupils, looking across their work in different subjects (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 1 and Exhibit 2 share the six criteria in the ‘essentials of marking/written feedback’ and thus provide a mechanism for showing how each of these essential characteristics is demonstrated within a sample of pupils both in a particular year and by subject.
Exhibit 2: Work sampling record for an individual pupil

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject:</th>
<th>Example: English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher:</td>
<td>ABC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant homework: (at least fortnightly)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-to-date marking:</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed feedback: (WWW/EBI)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels/grades one each term:</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework marked/acknowledged:</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major errors/inaccuracies identified:</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWW:</td>
<td>Pupils responding to/acting on comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V detailed feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy corrections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBI:</td>
<td>Work assessed by national curriculum levels (no evidence in book)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments/action:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to sharing effective practice, this exercise also highlights areas where subject leaders and teachers need to improve their practice.

Nick commented on this:

We want to be more robust in the follow-up we require and request [actions] from middle leaders [and teachers] where there are issues or potential issues.

The senior leaders in the school, as well as being allocated an individual area of responsibility, also have line-management responsibility for particular subject departments and year groups. To this end, the findings of both work-sampling exercises will be discussed between the middle leaders conducting the evaluation and their line managers.

In the examples shown above, there is a clear section (Exhibit 1) where actions by subject leaders and named teachers are required. This is echoed in the ‘Comments/action’ column in Exhibit 2 to address the ‘even better if’ (EBI) issues raised. It should be noted that both evaluation processes involve positive achievements in the ‘what’s working well’ (WWW) sections, so that formulated actions following these sampling exercises are based on a balanced view.
Involving pupils

In implementing a whole-school evaluation strategy, Nick insisted on involving pupils in evaluating their own work, testifying not only to the weight and value of their opinions but also to the realism of their judgements.

In implementing a pupil feedback system, Nick noted that the system he had inherited, which was run by the heads of year (now achievement co-ordinators), meant that the system “was too far removed from the teacher and the department and had too little impact on change.”

Nick’s revised system involves every teacher seeking learner feedback using a questionnaire that is completed by all pupils (Exhibit 3) in class three times a year. The teacher is asked to reflect on the pupils’ responses, discuss the feedback with his or her line manager and department, and consider any subject-wide implications as a result. Nick noted:

The feedback process provides teachers with the opportunity to acknowledge pupils’ perceptions through dialogue with the class and encourages both pupils and teachers to reflect on their part in the learning process. Pupils understand the importance of the process and respond sensibly and demonstrate empathy towards the teacher.
Exhibit 3: Pupil feedback questionnaire

Pupil feedback questionnaire

1. Do you feel you are making progress in this subject? (why/why not?)

2. What does your teacher do that helps you learn in this subject?

Circle one number for each line to show your teacher how you feel about lessons

3. My progress
None 1 2 3 4 5 Loads

4. What I am supposed to learn from lessons
Unclear 1 2 3 4 5 Totally clear

5. The difficulty
Easy 1 2 3 4 5 Really hard

6. Praise when I have done well
Never 1 2 3 4 5 All the time

7. What stops me from learning and making progress in this subject?

8. How could my learning be improved in this subject?
   What my teacher could do:

   What I could do:
9. Complete the grid below and indicate the strategies used in lessons and any comments you have about how they affect your learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment for learning</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>This helps me to learn because… I don’t find this helpful because…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am chosen at random to answer questions (e.g., no hands up, using lolly sticks, lucky dip etc.).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students, not my teacher, do the most talking in our classroom discussions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am involved in answering questions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use a mini-whiteboard to show my answers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use the traffic-light pages in the planner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher gives me thinking time when asking questions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils in my class support each other’s learning (e.g., peer assessment, work in pairs, groups etc.).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I take responsibility for my own learning in lessons.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In lessons, my teacher finds out what I have learned.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Statement of Views: Marking and Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My work is marked/assessed regularly by the teacher.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I receive marked/assessed work back reasonably soon after completing it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand how my work is marked in this subject.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher tells me how to improve during lessons.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am given useful written feedback on how to improve.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teacher expects me to act on comments and to improve my work after I have received feedback.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher encourages other students to look at my work in class and give me feedback.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nick added that he felt the feedback to pupils from teachers was authentic:

I think I couldn’t put my hand on my heart and say that all teachers regularly disseminate [outcome of pupils’ observations] to the students to the extent to which [the students have] internalised the feedback.

Again Nick was concerned that rigour should characterise the feedback process and that there would be consistency among teaching colleagues. To this end, a common form is used across subjects to crystallise professional and departmental learning points. As indicated on Exhibit 4, the content of the form would be discussed between the teacher and his or her line manager.

The information on the form works on different levels and feeds into whole-school, departmental and individual performance management targets.
Exhibit 4: Teachers’ reactions to pupil feedback

Pupil feedback: teacher self-reflection
(for discussion in line-management and dept/year meeting)

Completed by .................................................................
Class ............................................................... Subject .................................................................
Number of pupils ............................................................. Date .................................................................

Based on the comments/perceptions of pupils, what’s working well (WWW)?
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Based on the comments/perceptions of students, what would be even better if (EBI)?
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5.
What are the implications for your own professional practice?
1.
2.
3.

Are there any implications for departmental practice?
1.
2.
3.

Discussed between ................................................................................................................................................................... (Line manager)

AND ................................................................................................................................................................................................................  (Teacher)

Date ....................................................................................................................................................................................................................................
Discussion of findings

Thus far, evaluation activity at the school has included:

- work sampling from a group in a specific year
- sampling of work across subjects with individual pupils
- collection of pupils' views on their learning experiences
- processing of these perceptions by teachers

The final stage in this pupil-led process is to carry through the salient points for discussion in subject- and year-group teams.

The same form is used across the school. The feedback form asks:

- What does the feedback/perception of pupils tell us about the quality of provision?
- How well are pupils cared for, guided and supported within the department/year team?
- Are there any issues of concern for follow-up/further monitoring arising from this process?
- Are there any patterns/trends and implications for departmental/year-team practice?

Adding to the picture: surveys

Thus far, the evaluation strategies overseen by Nick have centred on observing, eliciting feedback and stimulating personal and professional discussion on classroom-based data. The school's evaluation strategy, however, extends beyond this as it moves towards establishing whole-school priorities.

For a number of years, the school has used the services of a company that specialises in assessing the attitudes and opinions of pupils and parents using commercial surveys. Nick outlined the value of such a system:

The questionnaires have provided us with information on perceptions, comparative data with other schools and with ourselves following the completion of this over a number of years.

To complement this data, feedback is elicited from Parent School Association meetings, which are attended by members of the SLT. Nick commented that this forum was "not just about jumble sales" but a place where parents could support the school.

In addition to this activity, Nick and a colleague established a school improvement focus group of parents that meets termly. Nick emphasises that there is a genuinely open agenda "to review the school and find out where it's at and to identify parent priorities for the school's improvement next year."

Nick indicates that this group is not simply a group of compliant parents but includes parents who have had issues with the school. The group contains parents described as 'hard to reach' and parents who in the past have challenged the school. Nick commented that it was "quite a challenge [to invite] parents who had been vocal in the past." He emphasised that the focus group was not designed to be "a comfortable talking shop" but one that would provide the school with challenge.
Adding to the picture: views of pupils

In addition to the survey activity mentioned above, the school has initiated more structured ways of gathering opinions from pupils and using them to evaluate the quality of learning in the school.

Mary, a middle leader, had been asked by Nick to take forward the use of pupils’ views in evaluating the work of the school. She established a group of pupil learning consultants. She explains the purpose of this group:

They are a group of pupils from all age groups, from Years 7 to 13, with a range of abilities. They were asked if they would like to help in developing teaching and learning within the school.

This group of pupils has looked, for example, at the homework set and helped to identify what they viewed as useful feedback from members of staff. The information they had gathered was then passed on to the deputy with responsibility for teaching and learning and has been used to develop the school’s homework and feedback policy.

Mary highlighted another area of work conducted by the group:

This group has also worked with members of staff on looking at questioning within lessons and evaluating how effective different kinds of question are, so [things such as] how many questions are asked?, is it boys or girls [who are asked questions]? and are [the questions] open or closed? This information was passed to members of staff.

She pointed out that this group of pupils ranged from high-achieving pupils to pupils with statements of SEN. The group also contained pupils with behavioural, emotional and/or social problems and who have featured regularly on the school’s processes for pupils causing concern or displaying poor behaviour.

Mary fully appreciated that there were sensitivities relating to teaching colleagues with the work of this group:

We’re very careful with the language we use whenever there’s a new initiative both with the staff and with the pupils as well – the pupils are not there to assess [teachers] and there’s an opt-out so members of staff don’t have to get involved.

In turn, the pupils appreciated the concern that staff conveyed. One commented:

I think the main thing is that teachers genuinely care for the pupils’ wellbeing and how well they are doing not just in school but later in life as well. That attitude transfers from the teachers onto the pupil so that [the pupils] feel that they can do well.

Another pupil commented on the support systems in the school:

I think the support system is just brilliant, they focus very hard on children all the way though the spectrum... those who are at the top, those who are at the bottom and those in the middle. They try to make sure that everyone is making progress and that’s all they care about. It’s not being the best but making the progress you need, so they never leave anyone behind.

Pupils were asked about the value of the evaluations conducted by the group of pupil learning consultants and whether the teachers would find this work threatening:

[The teachers] take everything we say to them on board and they do care about what we have to say about our education. I think [this feedback] is really important because at the end of the day it’s the pupil that’s getting the education and you want to be learning [in] the best way possible.

One example of ‘learning in the best way possible’ was the work the school had undertaken in collaboration with the pupil learning consultants to identify the characteristics of effective learning. Once discovered, the expectation was that these features could be incorporated into lessons. The key point about this work is that the success criteria for effective learning came from the pupils themselves, who created an analytical diagram (Exhibit 5) to be incorporated into pupil planners. This would enable pupils to evaluate the quality of their experiences in the classroom as well as using the diagram as the basis for discussions between teachers and pupils on the nature and quality of learning.
Exhibit 5: Features of effective learning

Communication
Can I organise my ideas so that I can give a convincing answer?
Can I tell what mood someone is in and respond appropriately by understanding their point of view?
Can I arrange my ideas so they make sense to the appropriate audience?
Can I make notes in a variety of ways?
Can I sum up what I am learning so that it will be useful in the future?
Can I speak confidently in front of a large group of people?

Leadership
Can I lead by positive example?
Can I manage my work and time to avoid stress? Can I use my own ideas when approaching tasks and a team?
Can I be approachable and understanding? Can I stand up for what I think is right?
Can I motivate myself and others through difficult tasks?

Creativity
Can I question current understanding in order to invent a different approach?
Can I plan and research in order to create a structured response?
Can I dare to make mistakes?
Can I create something from scratch? Can I pick the best tools for the job?
Can I look at a problem from different angles and viewpoints?

Teamwork
Can I listen to and consider other peoples ideas? Can I ask for help when I need it?
Can I help people when they are stuck?
Can I take equal responsibility with others in group work?
Can I give constructive feedback to others in the group?
Can I do what's best for the team?

Independence
Can I act on feedback and self-reflection?
Can I have the confidence to take responsibility for my actions and progress?
Can I apply my learning to new and different contexts?
Can I persevere to meet success criteria (even when things are difficult)?
Can I improve my performance through purposeful practice?
Can I approach learning with curiosity and motivation?
Formal processes involving pupils

To complement the work of the pupil learning consultants, the school has established robust evaluation procedures for its pupil council. All year groups are represented, and there are formal communication channels between tutor group representatives and the pupil council. The council has extensive representation from the SLT (deputies and assistant heads) and a member of staff has been allocated to ensure its smooth running.

Asked if they felt overwhelmed or marginalised by the teachers on the council, pupils pointed out:

[The teachers] try to make sure that we take the lead role on things. If we have a specific issue, then we can go to a specific teacher with that issue.

Nick paid tribute to the increasing role that the pupil council is playing in driving forward improvement in the school:

The pupil council in recent years has been more driven by the school improvement plan than ever before, so the pupil council not only feeds into [the plan] but [also] works with a significant focus on the [key priorities of the] improvement plan, without being closed to any of the issues students bring up.

Bringing it all together

A key learning point that Nick made in driving forward the school improvement plan was that previous plans and the associated evaluation strategies lacked focus. He pointed out:

There was a pivotal moment when I went to visit another school where there was a focus on four key school improvement priorities [that were] clearly known by every member of staff. So we’ve moved from a school improvement plan with 25 objectives to [one with] a limited number of key priorities.

So in our own case, through really wide consultation across the school including staff views, pupil views, tutor group views, year group views and parent and governor views, we isolated our priorities.

The school has adopted an acronym to communicate its central school improvement objectives for the year. Appropriately for a high-achieving school looking to extend its achievements, this is EXCELS and represents:

- EXceptional learning
- Community
- Expectations
- Leadership
- Support

These priorities in turn feed into subject- and year-group development plans and form the basis of teachers’ performance management objectives as well as the raw material for pupils to evaluate the effectiveness of their own learning.

EXCELS translates into whole-school objectives (Exhibit 6).
### Exhibit 6: Overarching school improvement aims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>E</strong></th>
<th>Exceptional Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To develop lifelong learners with the skills and attributes to excel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide consistent and regular, high-quality written feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To increase the percentage of outstanding lessons and teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To challenge and inspire pupils with a particular focus on the more able</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To challenge, support and inspire pupils with a particular focus on SEN students and those with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>X</strong></th>
<th>Exceptional Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To increase awareness of, celebrate and recognise more the diversity of the local community</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To become a hub for partnership learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>To be a truly global school</td>
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<tr>
<td>To raise the school’s profile within the community and with community partners</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>C</strong></th>
<th>Community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To improve the consistency of behaviour in and out of lessons</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To close the gap between departments and year teams, teachers and identified groups of students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To enhance all learning and social environments (improve site/accommodation and security)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>E</strong></th>
<th>Expectations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To implement fully school monitoring systems</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To implement and follow up on specific strategic actions identified through monitoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>To communicate effectively vision, values, expectations and information to all staff, pupils and parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>To develop leadership skills in all staff and pupils in leadership roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>To identify additional pupil leadership opportunities</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th><strong>L</strong></th>
<th>Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To ensure careers advice and guidance is proactive and targeted</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To improve overall school attendance and the attendance of identified groups</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To support and encourage pupils to make increasingly healthy lifestyle choices with regard to smoking, alcohol, sex, healthy eating and mental health</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>To ensure tutoring best practice is shared, supported and adopted by all year groups and tutors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support pupils in raising their ambitions and aspiring for excellence in all areas of life</td>
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As an example of how these overarching aims were extended to meet identified subject-level needs, Exhibit 7 is an extract from the English department’s development plan.
Exhibit 7: Extract from English department’s development plan

**Priority 1: Exceptional learning**

**Values**
1. High-quality, inspirational and innovative teaching and learning
2. Creative, exciting and memorable experiences inside and outside the classroom
3. Pupils’ need to develop the attitudes, characteristics and self-belief to tackle any challenges in future life
4. Pupils’ need to acquire the skills, commitment and resilience to become successful, independent lifelong learners
5. Pupils’ need to take responsibility for leading themselves and others
6. Pupils’ need to accept hard work and discipline as requirements for success
7. Teachers’ need to feel trusted and empowered to take risks in the classroom

**Actions arising from the department’s self-evaluation:**

- a. There is a need to improve the quality of some marked work so that it is consistently high across the school.
- b. Ofsted has identified a need for the school to increase the proportion of outstanding lessons.
- c. Improve the attainment and progress of more able students.
- d. Pupils should be able to demonstrate the capacity and desire to become even more actively involved in their own learning and to develop the skills to work and learn more independently of the teacher.

**Example of how these are turned into a departmental objective**

Values: 1, 2 & 7
Actions: b, c & d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To increase the percentage of outstanding lessons and teachers</th>
<th>1. More departmental time spent on professional development and sharing good practice</th>
<th>1. Staff have a greater understanding of what outstanding lessons look like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Teachers to participate in the Outstanding Teacher Programme and share information with department</td>
<td>2. More staff deliver outstanding lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. More cross-curricular observations</td>
<td>3. All teachers achieve positive value-added outcomes (as an average across all examination groups)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exhibit 8: How the elements fit together

Qualitative data
- Parent and pupil surveys
- Pupil council
- Focus groups

Quantitative data
- RAISEonline
- Pupil performance data
- Ofsted

Cumulative data
- Work sampling (by year and by individual pupil)
- Learning walks
- Lesson observations
- Pupil feedback
- Pupil learning consultants
- Teacher/line manager subject area discussions
- Line-management discussions

Whole-school priorities
- Exceptional Learning
- Community
- Expectations
- Leadership
- Support

Subject- and year-group priorities and plans
Linked to and developing these
- Exceptional learning
- Community
- Expectations
- Leadership
- Support

Objectives
- Teacher performance management objectives
- Pupil lifelong learning objectives
Key roles for a senior leader

A key role for Nick is in ensuring that the processes in Exhibit 8 are embedded and operate smoothly and consistently across the school.

In terms of operational activities, certain areas such as surveys, focus group work and overarching data analysis are under his direct control. Similarly, he can achieve iterative feedback on the progress of the school’s priorities embodied in the EXCELS approach through the data collected from lesson observations, learning walks, work scrutiny and line-management discussions with subject and year heads. It was an important part of his role to report progress to his headteacher and through him to the governing body.

Nick observes that he knows that evaluation activities were happening because there was a requirement to feed back to him the evidence at the end of work sampling. Additionally, several of the documents used for evaluation activity required a discussion between subject leader, achievement co-ordinator or teacher and senior leader. These need to be signed to indicate that such discussions have taken place. Information derived from this activity are passed onto Nick so that he can fulfil his monitoring role. He highlighted a limited degree of flexibility in evaluation strategies in order to engage colleagues, but at the same time indicated the imperative to focus on the school’s processes and development priorities:

[There is a balance to be struck] between giving people the freedom to evaluate and monitor in a bespoke way - which we do - as well as [moving the school forward] on its key school development priorities.

Whilst he had been granted the authority by the headteacher to lead on school improvement activities, Nick found that whilst he could require people to perform evaluative activities in order to achieve these objectives, he had to work through influence rather than authoritative dictation.

A related difficulty was to gain acceptance by staff of the use of pupil learning consultants to monitor learning activity in lessons. There were some issues in getting some members of staff “on side and involved”. He added that there was a view among some staff that the pupils were there to monitor and assess staff, together with a wariness about the value of and weight attached to student voice. As noted earlier, staff show a marked intention to support pupils and are open to discussing the nature of the learning experience.

Working with and through middle leaders

An important part of Nick’s role is to engage other leaders in self-evaluation. Clearly there is pressure on subject leaders and achievement co-ordinators to produce results, which could have given rise to authoritative approaches where the middle leader dictates to subject colleagues the action plan for the department. One middle leader referred to such an approach in observing that this was not the most effective way of proceeding:

For the last two years I’ve handled the whole thing differently because what I felt was happening was that I was completing a departmental self-evaluation in isolation. I was doing the development plan and I was feeding that to the department and I felt that I was dragging people along with me. It occurred to me that I needed to involve them in the decision-making, so we now have a day in June which is given to the [heads of department] to run as they see fit. I run it as an activities day whereby [the department works] in groups. We evaluate what we did on our priorities in the previous year [and look at our priorities for the coming year]. It involves the whole department so that we have buy-in, so I’m not dragging people and I’m not having people saying to me: ‘Those are your priorities, they’re not ours’. It moves away from me dragging people to leading them. It was the starting point for leadership to me.
As a testament to Nick’s leadership, a middle leader contributed the following opinion:

Nick is an excellent line manager who’s helped me develop as a head of department, and also when I walk away from a meeting with him I feel like I’ve got less of a weight on my shoulders and I know what I need to do.

A senior leader can also fulfil the roles of coach, guide and critical friend. A middle leader of a small department noted that:

We had never achieved an A* [grade] and that was a gap we needed to look at and formed the subject of discussions between myself and my senior leader. We contacted the exam board and identified what it was that we needed to be doing and came up with a list of things, then we talked about how to include these things in lessons. [From then on] there was checking and supporting each other that those strategies were being used.

Nick has implemented formal evaluation strategies for evaluating the progress of each subject area as well as determining intervention and support strategies. This was based on the red, amber and green (RAG) rating method. Red indicates subjects or areas causing concern, amber less severe concerns and green low concerns. Nick explained:

Each year we update our value-added tracking data for each exam course or subject, look at the established and establishing trends and categorise each subject according to outcomes and achievement (red, amber, green). This allows a ‘light-touch’ or ‘no-touch’ approach to some subjects and courses and a more forensic, investigation-based approach to other courses, during which the head of department, SLT line manager and an SLT lead colleague will carry out lesson observations, detailed data analysis, scrutiny of documentation and student and staff interviews.

If a subject was graded amber, the approach would be ‘light touch’. The school would provide the opportunity for colleagues to meet and identify, through the use of analytical tools such as ‘The five whys’, the causes of underachievement and produce a one-page action plan.

To complement this activity Nick has provided the opportunity for colleagues to work with heads of department on courses rated green. He noted:

Colleagues appreciate the opportunity to work collaboratively with other middle leaders and to work with other senior leaders, not their immediate line managers. The discussions provide us as senior leaders with an insight into the issues facing our middle leaders, help us to better support their actions and identify whole-school changes we need to make to systems.
Senior leadership challenges

Nick was asked about the challenges faced by a senior leader in his role. Top of his list was ensuring that colleagues responsible for evaluation at different levels in the organisation were held to account. He commented:

Holding others to account is a particular trait that I think underpins self-evaluation so having ‘fierce conversations’ is something that I wouldn’t say comes naturally [but is an essential component of the role].

His other concern was that the school did not always commit itself sufficiently to actions, or review and evaluate the impact of previous plans. To address this, Nick introduced monitoring grids. These grids require the identification of issues, planned actions, a review date and a requirement to build in an evaluation of impact. Nick commented that, as a result of this practice, “We are now better placed to track issues over time, identify the successful strategies from the unsuccessful strategies and demonstrate impact.”

A further challenge was the need to influence his senior colleagues. The other deputies at the school held responsibility for teaching and learning and achievement. Nick saw it as pivotal to his role both to communicate to them the results of school evaluation as well as to receive information from them that would inform his own responsibilities.

An example of this interchange of information was lesson evaluation work being conducted by pupils. The information from this activity led directly into the exceptional learning priority in the school improvement plan so that Nick could monitor progress. At the same time Nick was discovering issues of pedagogy were being raised which were passed onto the deputy in charge of teaching and learning for further action. It was activating this important symbiosis that was an integral part of the senior leadership role.

A consequent challenge was to get some members of staff “on side” for all of the evaluation activities undertaken in the school. He highlighted the use of pupil learning consultants as being problematic, adding that some colleagues were suspicious about the use of pupil voice. This required Nick to communicate the purposes and value of the exercise and to support it unequivocally. In summary he commented: “I think there’s a degree of influence that’s needed in supporting colleagues to [fully] understand the benefits of self-evaluation.”

One of Nick’s personal challenges was to acquire the skills to interpret data and to make his analyses meaningful to his colleagues. Once he had acquired this ability, he was clearer in his own mind about the ongoing data collection required from his colleagues; for example, he has been able to rationalise the data and the data demands and requests placed on members of staff.

An innovation of which Nick is particularly proud concerns the development of what he calls ‘the professional trio’ as a method of peer evaluation. The trio in question includes the teacher’s performance manager and two other colleagues who evaluate each other’s performance. Nick commented that the system had removed some of the threat associated with monitoring and evaluation.

Communication was another challenge for Nick. As a senior leader, he noted that he had to be able to communicate the results of feedback received from colleagues, parents, pupils and governing body. Feeding back to the governing body he felt was a particular strength, ensuring that they had a clear understanding of the progress of the school improvement plan as well as appreciating the significance of the data that had been gathered through evaluation activities. The chair of the governing body commented on Nick’s abilities here:

He is terrific in terms of that strategic view of what’s going on in the school. The way he does it is often [as] one-page summaries and he’s always getting input [from the governing body], asking ‘what do you think?’
Other views of the role

The senior leader role that has been explored in this case study is extensive and covers a range of school improvement activities. The headteacher, whilst expressing confidence in Nick’s capabilities, captures the totality of the role:

Nick’s role [covers] planning through to evaluation [and means that the leadership team is] clear about the journey we want to go on. [He also needs to inform us] where we are on that journey and how we’ll know when we’ve arrived there. To have someone that has this oversight as well as the drive for the whole process is vital.

In discussing his senior colleague, the headteacher also outlined the skills that were central to the role, both intellectual and practical. He emphasised the need to possess good analytical skills as well as the ability to present and communicate to staff in a way that “brings people on board and gets them involved in the process.”

The head added:

What [Nick] has is not just the drive but also the responsibility for ensuring participation in the whole self-evaluation process, ownership not just for the leadership team and the governors but for the whole school. I want to know everything but I don’t do everything. Likewise I expect Nick to have a complete overview but I don’t expect him to do everything.

Both Nick and the head highlighted the nature of the interactions between the senior leader and other staff as being central to the role. Nick appreciated that he was expected to hold people to account and have ‘fierce conversations’ when necessary as “the road to school improvement has many pitfalls.” The head added:

You need to have someone who is resilient and on top of [school improvement] on a day-to-day basis. All the time he needs to be asking, ‘Where are we on this issue? How do you know? Give me the evidence.’ I expect him to get in that helicopter and look down and say [of the journey towards achieving the priorities in the school improvement plan] ‘we’re getting blocked up there’ or ‘we didn’t get the evidence’ or ‘we didn’t have that right’ and [to have] the courage to say when it’s not working.

Key personal and professional learning that the initiative stimulated

Nick reflected on the preparation that he had experienced to prepare him for his role. Central to his effectiveness has been his “key role in the school’s last Ofsted inspection” because of his detailed knowledge of the Ofsted evaluation schedule. He stated that he “knew it backwards” including familiarity with benchmarking data within the school and between similar schools. He has carried forward his learning from the Ofsted inspection to monitoring and evaluation activities represented in his current strategies. Nick added:

One of the other things that’s been really useful is being able to invite... experienced colleagues [for] the opportunity to work with an [Ofsted inspector] and an opportunity to walk through this school with them.

Before this, Nick felt well prepared as a result of undertaking the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) as well as the training that he had been offered by the school through dedicated CPD on line management. On a personal level, he felt that the support and challenge offered by his headteacher empowered him and gave him the confidence to talk through his ideas for effective school evaluation. He also appreciated the freedom he had been given to come up with models and activities.

Whilst Nick emphasises that skills in analysing data are central to his role, he is also insistent that the development of interpersonal skills is critical. He has come to understand that an appreciation of his colleagues’ concerns and motivations was central to ensuring the effectiveness of the evaluation processes he had developed. Establishing an ethos of continuous improvement through rigorous evaluation is essential, he feels. Deviating from this philosophy, he insists, was not an option.
The area of evaluation that had proved most problematic was the involvement of pupils in evaluating their own learning. Some staff clearly felt threatened by this activity and so Nick had been involved in a careful strategy to win hearts and minds through clear protocols, careful explanations to staff and training pupils themselves. This strategy, he felt, was particularly innovative.

Nick also referred to development activities that the school had been involved with, such as developing the Training and Development Agency’s school improvement planning framework. This had enabled him to extend his data-gathering activities. He quoted as an example the use of the ‘the five whys’ tool, which subject departments had used to examine the root causes of an issue. Nick noted that in preparing their action plans, middle leaders had told him that the tool had helped to highlight areas they had overlooked.

Next steps

This case study has charted the progress of the school in implementing its extensive self-evaluation procedures. It has highlighted the nature and depth of an array of feedback mechanisms. Nick noted that “consistent and regular, high-quality written feedback” has been highlighted as an area of future focus to further develop the quality of teaching and learning. Nick also reiterated his overarching aim:

We want to share the best practice and [be] more robust in the follow-up we require and request from teachers and middle leaders where there are issues.

Reflection points

− Which of the processes outlined in this case study do you find most useful? Are there elements where you have reservations?
− This school has implemented a system for gathering feedback from pupils about their learning. If you were to consider implementing such a system in your own school, what might be the issues you would need to address and how might these be overcome?
− In gathering pupil opinions, how would you ensure that the views of disaffected pupils were adequately addressed?
− How might you prepare the governing body and parents to accept and play a role in school self-evaluation activities?
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- Enabling leaders to work together to lead improvement
- Helping to identify and develop the next generation of leaders
- Improving the quality of leadership so that every child has the best opportunity to succeed

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