

## Mathematics Specialist Leaders of Education (SLE) – Case Study

### Context

The maths department has been fully staffed with specialist maths teachers. In 2010 and 2011 three long serving and very experienced teachers retired. The school was fortunate to recruit specialist maths teachers although this level of staff turnover had not previously been experienced in the department.

The department is led by a subject leader and an assistant subject leader. The assistant subject leader had moved to a 0.6 timetable after returning from a maternity leave. There is some additional leadership and management provision in the department.

The maths GCSE results have fluctuated around the national average for a number of years. The table below gives the school's maths results between 2009 and 2011. Given the students prior attainment these results did not represent sufficient progress and as such were the biggest limiting factor in terms of the school raising the 5+ A\*-C including English and maths threshold.

	2009	2010	2011
%A*-A	17.1	21.8	14.6
%A*-C	62.2	67.9	63.8

A teaching and learning review carried out by the school improvement partner identified a number of positives in the department;

- students were positive about the subject
- teachers had good subject knowledge and were all specialist maths teachers
- teaching was variable but there were no major concerns over the potential quality of teaching
- a number of student focused interventions were implemented to support GCSE preparation
- a good database in place that recorded student assessment data.

However a number of areas that required significant improvement were highlighted within the department that centred on leadership.

A programme of support for the subject leader was implemented by the leadership team that incorporated the deployment of the maths SLE.

## **SLE intervention**

The deputy Headteacher who line managed the maths department met with the SLE prior to the visits. The concerns raised by the SIP were discussed along with the leadership teams' perspective of the issue. This provided an opportunity to outline the intervention that had been implemented so far.

The SLE visited the school twice. The first visit was an investigative process to look at the quality of leadership within the department. The visit included meetings with the subject leader and the assistant subject leader, a learning walk, two joint lesson observations with the subject leader and a meeting with the Deputy Headteacher who line manages the subject.

Towards the end of this visit the SLE met with the subject leader to discuss his initial findings. Through discussion three main areas of focus were established;

- assessment, marking and feedback
- monitoring and review cycle of work scrutinies, and recording of evidence
- improving teaching standards within the department focused on differentiation

The feedback provided by the SLE gave a far deeper insight into the areas that the initial teaching and learning review had identified. Each area for improvement identified was very clearly supported with evidence that the SLE had collected during the first visit. This entirely objective assessment carried out by an external person made the process of developing an action plan for the subject leader a straightforward one. The SLE fully contributed to the action plan by setting the initial targets for the subject leader.

The second visit had two purposes. Firstly to monitor the progress made towards the targets and secondly to help the subject leader to develop the strategies required to further develop practice in the department. The nature of this visit was more supportive than the first with the SLE acting as a "critical friend". Although this visit identified some areas that still required significant improvement, the overall feedback was that the subject leader had responded extremely positively to the initial visit and was implementing focused strategies with far more rigour than before.

## **Impact**

The SLE intervention had a rapid impact on the leadership of the department. Initially after the visits energy went into revising the policy and practice in the areas identified. More coherent assessment and marking policies were established. A rigorous policy for monitoring teaching, learning and standards was implemented and a focus on improving teaching standards was established throughout the department.

The impact on the subject leader's approach to leadership was even more profound. He shifted his focus from just initiating initiatives to monitoring standards and offering a higher degree of challenge when needed. The longer term impact is now being seen a year on as the changes are being embedded. The subject leader sees quality assurance amongst his key roles and as a result the standards seen in the department are now amongst the best in the school. It is worth noting that the GCSE A\*-C in the first year following the intervention increased by 10%.