

Taking Strategic Steps Toward

Two UK Headteachers look back one year to their schools' approaches to learning at that time: "In our school we had many teachers who performed well as teachers but were not very good at focusing on learning," says Deborah Cossins, Headteacher at Emscote Infants School in Warwick, England. "In our school our curriculum provision received 'Outstanding' from Ofsted,

but there was a niggle in the report; that our children were a bit passive in their learning," says Gill Pursey, Headteacher at St. Hilda's Church of England Primary School in Oldham, England. Since then, both Headteachers have started working with a toolkit created by Fieldwork Education to help them focus on learning throughout their school.



wards a Focus on Learning

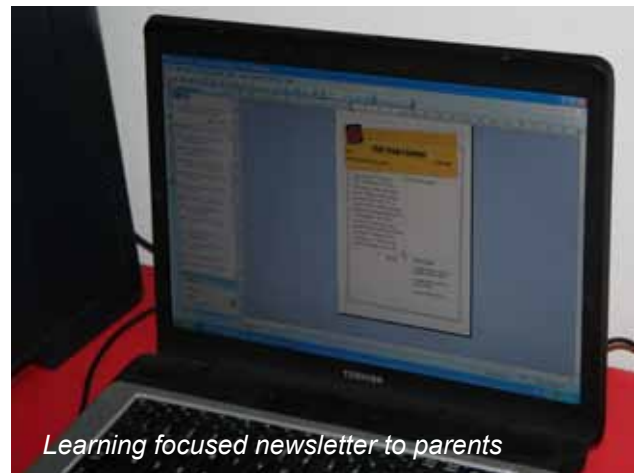
The Toolkit for Leaders

The Looking for Learning Toolkit was developed by Fieldwork Education as a leadership toolkit for school improvement focused entirely on improving learning and relevant for schools throughout the world. As a fully comprehensive, action-oriented guide to improvement, the Toolkit provides Headteachers with practical help and advice to lead their teachers, step-by-step towards delivering learning-focused lessons. In addition, it gives Headteachers recommendations on how to incorporate a learning-focus throughout every aspect of school life; from classroom displays, assemblies and reports to staff meetings and parents' evenings.

For Sheila Dentith, Senior Inspector for the Primary Team and Primary Strategy Manager for Warwickshire County Council in England, the Looking for Learning Toolkit has become a key component in moving her schools forward. "We introduced the Looking for Learning Toolkit as a tool for our Headteachers to work in a collaborative way to look at learning in the classroom and to develop a greater understanding of what learning is," says Sheila. "We chose the Looking for Learning Toolkit because I haven't found anything else that actually talks about learning in the way that this does."

What a difference a year makes

After a year following the Looking for Learning strategies, Sheila says she can see a significant difference: "The biggest thing that we're seeing with all our schools working



Learning focused newsletter to parents

with the Looking for Learning Toolkit is that everyone, everyone is now beginning to focus on the learning; starting with the learning and then and only then, going on to think about the teaching. It sounds like such a tiny thing but it's so effective."

The Toolkit is a boxed set of manuals and DVDs split into two sections. The first two manuals focus on learning in the classroom and include a properly structured action-research process for teachers to help each other identify the learning that is taking place in their classrooms. This empowers teachers with information they have never had; immediate feedback on how their teaching is influencing their children's



St Hilda's Oldham pupils learning with staff

learning as it happens. These powerful, non-threatening results lead to self-reflection, self-improvement and whole school development. The second two manuals within the Toolkit focus on identifying factors within a school that affect learning and guide school leaders, through simple action plans to make each of these factors more learning-focused. This, as a result, enables them to turn their school improvement plan into a learning-focused school improvement plan, to turn their staff meetings into learning-focused staff meetings, to help their teachers transform displays into learning-focused displays and so on.

A change for the better

Deborah Cossins is convinced the Looking for Learning Toolkit is helping her make a difference at Emscote Infants. "The Looking for Learning Toolkit has transformed the way our teachers think," she says. "They now start with the learning bit when they begin their planning. It influences the whole thing they do."

At St. Hilda's Primary School in Oldham, Gill Pursey believes that The Looking for Learning Toolkit has changed the entire school's focus on learning. "Looking for Learning has drawn together all the strands that I wanted the school to take forward including collaborative learning, and planning and learning," she says. "The Looking for Learning Toolkit is the vehicle for me for school improvement and I can see that this will continue. It's also helping us to develop our communication about learning with our parents and that, for us is really important. Since introducing Looking for Learning we've revised our learning intentions to the children and we've revised our skills focus to put more emphasis on skills. Already our children are understanding that it's not just about what they know but crucially about the skills they need to find the knowledge and apply that knowledge to help them learn."

Gill offers some advice to other Headteachers considering the Looking for Learning Toolkit: "Be prepared to do some preparation work; the Looking for Learning Toolkit is not an off-the-shelf CPD package, it's not a quick fix; it requires self-evaluation, whole school involvement, a complete change in mind-set and to achieve that there needs to be

some pre-planning but it is definitely worth the effort. It gets your teachers back thinking about the children and their learning rather than just on their teaching. Looking for Learning has helped us move the focus. It doesn't sound much but actually it's making a huge difference.

Also, spend some time working with your staff on how the brain learns. That was really helpful to everyone and it's helped us to think about our children and the way each individual child learns."

Ideas from the Looking for Learning Toolkit

There is now a great deal of philosophy available to schools on becoming more focused on learning, but very little in the way of easy, 'how-to' advice. The Looking for Learning Toolkit aims to address this; packing its manuals and DVDs full of practical ideas. Here are just three examples taken from the Toolkit:

Have a 'learning report' in your weekly staff meeting - At the beginning of each meeting, nominate one person to talk for no more than five minutes about some learning that has taken place in their classroom over the past week.

Plan learning-focused targets - Learning improvement plans should have targets that are explicitly about learning. If this happens, a successful outcome will also be about learning. So when writing your learning-focused targets, use evidence, focus first and explicitly on student learning, think about instructional and expressive targets, and use the 'what's the issue?' question.

Write learning-focused newsletters - Talk about learning, not just activities. For example, when reporting on an upcoming trip, make sure your newsletter starts with a description of the learning that will take place during the visit. The details of the trip need to be known of course, but not at the expense of learning. This will help parents to see that everything the school does has a focus on learning.

To find out more about the Looking for Learning Toolkit or to talk to a school working with the Looking for Learning Toolkit call Isabel du Toit at Fieldwork Education at 020-7531-9696 or email Isabel@greatlearning.com or visit www.lookingforlearning.co.uk



St Hilda's Oldham collaborative learning



Collaborative Learning



Looking for learning



Observing learning progress