



LOOKING FOR  
LEARNING

# The Looking for Learning Toolkit



## Case Study

St. Hilda's Church of England Primary School in Oldham, Lancashire introduced the Looking for Learning Toolkit in 2010 to develop a whole school focus on learning. Here Headteacher, Gill Pursey describes the difference the Looking for Learning Toolkit is making.



**Q:** You took on the Looking for Learning Toolkit from a position of strength – you're already a good school with outstanding features. What did you initially see in the Looking for Learning Toolkit that could help strengthen your school further?

**Gill answers:** The context came out of our Ofsted inspection in 2007. We were Outstanding in curriculum provision, but there was a niggle in the report; that our children were a bit passive in their learning.

We subscribed to the IPC to bring in some active learning and immediately saw that make a difference. But in our Ofsted inspection in February 2010, the notion of passivity in the learning was again mentioned, though this time relating to all the non-IPC subjects such as numeracy and literacy.

I realised, as a result of the inspection reports, that we needed to move our emphasis. Then I talked to Preet at Fieldwork Education about the Looking for Learning Toolkit and that's when I realised that our learners had got lost along the way. In considering the Toolkit, it looked like it would support us in what we were already doing but fill in the missing focus.

**Q:** At that point in time, did you believe that, as a school, you were focusing sufficiently on learning and has your work with the Looking for Learning Toolkit changed that opinion in anyway?

**Gill answers:** We'd done a lot of work focusing on 'teaching' with our teachers – what defines a good teacher, the best techniques, teaching resources in the classroom, etc. but we probably hadn't emphasised anywhere near enough the 'learning'.

Also, I'd become aware through my observations, that my teachers were working really, really hard but weren't getting the results; that the learners' learning was not so good and I started asking myself the

question: 'what is it about the learning?' What we had been doing was to focus all our efforts on the teaching and not on the learning and so had lost sight of how to know that learning is happening.

All our children are EAL. They're all from Bangladesh. Getting our parents to appreciate the broad sense of education is very important to us, and quite difficult and the children would sit absorbing the knowledge but would not be keen to be active learners; they were very passive. Getting the children to become more involved in their learning has been a significant shift for us, inspired by the IPC and also now by Looking for Learning because Looking for Learning helps us to help children understand how they learn and how they learn best.

Both IPC and Looking for Learning Toolkit have been natural additions for our school. Our children's attitudes to learning have improved with the IPC and we're now able to support them even more through Looking for Learning so it's been a timely journey.

**Q:** How easy/difficult was it for you as a leader to start implementing Looking for Learning?

**Gill answers:** I spent the summer reading through the files. They were really interesting and it got me thinking about learning and the fact that school should be all about the children and their learning.

Having now used the Looking for Learning Toolkit for a while, I don't feel it's a Toolkit you can just pick up and use immediately. As the leader, you've got to know the whole Toolkit and what's in it for you and for your staff to be able to use it effectively. But that's not a problem. It's an easy, interesting and very engrossing read because it's so relevant.

I felt it was important to use the Looking for Learning Toolkit in a way that would personalise it for our

school. It had the flexibility to achieve this. Any CPD that you're going to do that's going to have any impact on your school has to be personalised and Looking for Learning definitely allows for this. I don't think the Looking for Learning Toolkit is a one-size-fits-all solution; what it is is a tool that helps you focus directly on learning, adapting it in a way that will work for your children, your staff and your school.

As a leader I think you have to be at a point of realising you need to do something to make a change to appreciate how Looking for Learning can help your school.

**Q: How easy/difficult was it for your staff/whole school to get to grips with Looking for Learning?**

**Gill answers:** What we did, we used the closure day to do a whole launch day Entry Point for Looking for Learning. This involved the whole staff, including all teachers, TAs and student trainees (we're currently planning a Governor training session for the Spring). We worked together in the morning, talking about the definition of learning, looking at how children learn and the latest research into the brain and how it impacts learning. The session about the brain was particularly good as we'd never spent time learning about how learners learn; everyone found that really helpful. And also we came up with a number of activities that the teachers could do in their classrooms to help children understand about their own learning.

In the afternoon the teaching staff got together to start working on a strategy for how to measure learning. This involved talking about learning observations and how to transfer this focus on learning over to the children. This was the biggest concern of the staff; the question of how this new focus will look different in our classrooms, how will we get this message across to our children? It was excellent to have a whole day to introduce these initial thoughts and to discuss as a whole group some ideas for immediately making it real in the classrooms; from learning-focused displays to use of the language of learning with the children and throughout the school. The Toolkit manuals on leading a learning-focused schools were really helpful for ideas here.

However, everyone definitely started to get the message about the focus on learning and there was a sense of relief that this focus wasn't going to be all about them.

My approach with the staff in this first year of use has been to say that we'll tweak Looking for Learning as we go along in order to get it right for us and our school. We're treating this first year as an experimental year where we're feeding back regularly on progress and using this feedback to help our next steps.

**Q: How has the Looking for Learning Toolkit impacted your focus as a whole school?**

**Gill answers:** We launched Looking for Learning at the end of September and already 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 more crucially about the skills they need to find the knowledge and apply the knowledge.

Looking for Learning has drawn together all the strands that I wanted the school to take forward including collaborative learning and planning and learning. 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.

**Q: In his recent White Paper (November 2010), Michael Gove talks about improving the standards of teachers. Do you think the Looking for Learning Toolkit has a place in working towards this aim?**

**Gill answers:** We're quite a mature staff and we've seen this before; teachers having to jump through hoops. But I think the Looking for Learning Toolkit has reaffirmed what we all believe is the root to education. In recent years, we've been lost in the definition of what good teaching is. Good teaching doesn't necessarily result in good learning and the Looking for Learning Toolkit is helping us to appreciate that and to address how to make changes to ensure good wonderful, measurable, lifelong learning experiences are happening as often as we possibly can,

**Q: If you could give any advice to another Headteacher about to start using the Looking for Learning Toolkit, what would that advice be?**

**Gill answers:** Be prepared to do some preparation work; the 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.



The Looking for Learning Toolkit is based on six years of consultancy work with leading schools around the world. The rationale for the creation of a toolkit version of the consultancy support was that all schools should have access to a meaningful and jargon-free development programme at a cost that wasn't prohibitive. The Looking for Learning Toolkit was launched in March 2009 and is already being used in over 260 schools.

The Looking for Learning Toolkit is a cost-effective, practical, results-oriented leadership toolkit to help schools become more focused on learning. The Toolkit, described by one Head as "my new management bible" includes five manuals and supporting DVDs containing strategies and suggestions relevant for any school to become learning-focused. This includes the very latest information about

learning and how it happens, a unique protocol to identify, improve and increase learning in the classroom, an online database to record and disaggregate improvements in learning by kind, subject, class, year-group and whole school, a series of fully explained rubrics that help schools identify how learning-focused they are in more than thirty elements of school life, a collection of management strategies to help school leaders develop learning-focused schools and membership of The Learning Network; a live on-line community of learning-focused schools from around the world sharing best practice and experiences.

To find out more about the Looking for Learning Toolkit or to talk to a school working with the Looking for Learning Toolkit in your area call us at 020 7531 9696 or email [info@lookingforlearning.co.uk](mailto:info@lookingforlearning.co.uk)

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