




LOOKING FOR
LEARNING

The Looking for Learning Toolkit



What really
made you think
today?

Putting it into Practice

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Putting it into practice

Headteacher Nicky Simmons of Whoberley Hall Primary School in Coventry describes how she has used the Looking for Learning Toolkit to change the learning mindset of the whole school – children and staff.

“Going back to 2004, as a school our standards were low but we were looking for the good. We knew the conventional routes of strategy after strategy after strategy wouldn’t work. At this point in time Ofsted did a subtle shift and changed their focus from ‘teaching and learning’ to ‘learning and teaching’ which I thought was significant. As a result of this, our whole pedagogy and ethos within the school began to slowly alter and it opened my mind more and more to an emphasis on learning as we went along from there. When Looking for Learning landed on my desk I knew it was right because my mind was by now really open to this idea of focusing on the learning needs of the children. For me, Looking for Learning was about a leap of faith.

Since 2004 we’ve gone from very low standards to very high standards and one of the real keys to this has been more recently with Looking for Learning. Our children have progressed because of being given the skills for learning, not because of learning to the test, and they have changed to actually wanting to be learners.

The Looking for Learning Toolkit has impacted so much on staff too. They feel very differently. It’s all about the learning now and for me as the leader, the Toolkit has empowered me to then empower them.

Progress

We’ve really moved on in two terms. It all started on my holiday to Spain. I took some of the sections from the Toolkit with me knowing I’d have time to read them properly. It was my holiday and I was engrossed! Since then, two terms on, we’ve really moved on: we have learning walks with the children, we’ve really got to grips with learning intentions; pulling them apart and getting to understand how to do them. We are doing the Looking for Learning observations and focusing on the Looking for Learning questions in class too, we have a Looking for Learning staff meeting every

half term where we focus entirely on our successes, outcomes and identifying when, why and how learning is happening. We’ve changed our cohort profiles including our SIP, learning plan and intervention strategies in line with our Looking for Learning approach. The Looking for Learning Toolkit is clarifying for us the difference between teaching and learning. This is a massive grey area and many – including some Headteachers – still don’t get it. Teaching won’t raise standards. It’s the learning and how you facilitate it in your school, including empowering your staff, that raises the standards.

Support, where and when it’s needed

The Looking for Learning Toolkit is very well laid out. As a leader, it’s very easy for me to access. The messages are clear, the reading easy, it comes back to the same message time and time again which helps to clarify everything for you. It’s very good and very easy to dip in and out of, meaning that it gives me the support as and when I need it. I like the fact that all the concepts of learning are together within one folder which is easy and quick to read. This folder is really good for me as a leader and also very good to use with my staff.

The way I approach Looking for Learning with my staff is to drip feed the ideas from the Toolkit in different ways rather than just do an individual PD session. We try and embed it into our everyday learning activities instead; lots of little and often and we’ve kept coming back to it in the same way. This has helped reinforce the messages. For example, one of my focuses was to continually ask the staff the question: ‘what impact will what you’re doing have on learning?’ I’d ask this question of everything they did. Now I don’t have to steer them; after two terms they are thinking and doing this intrinsically. This approach has helped to keep all my staff in more or less the same place developmentally and as a whole team there’s a positive



feeling; like they're making a significant change together. It's inspired my staff to find out more about learning. They are questioning constantly, all the time, but now the thinking is not coming from the perspective of 'it's the child's fault if learning doesn't happen', it is more looking at what the teacher can do to help the children to learn and the children can see this change too.

A whole school focus

Everybody is involved in Looking for Learning in our school; the governors, parents, staff and children. We've changed our books home for parents to become Key Learning booklets which have questions in them to help parents ask children the right sort of learning questions. And at governors meetings we constantly use the language of learning. We all used to be consciously aware of using the word 'learning' and now we don't even think of saying it; it's just a constant. The language of learning is definitely a core part of making learning the priority.

Thanks to the Looking for Learning Toolkit, learning is now central to everything we do. What the Toolkit did for us was to join all the dots together. We were already doing some good things; Building Learning Power, Chris Quigley and more, but what the Toolkit did was join all that together into a proper picture that suddenly helped everything make sense and give everything real purpose for the school. The Looking for Learning Toolkit was very influential in how it helped to connect all our good elements together like an electric circuit; it lit up the learning.

Empowering teachers

There's a much more positive feel to the staff room now. Looking for Learning has empowered the teachers to become leading learners inside and outside

school. For some of the older teachers, the change has been much more difficult as they've had to change their mindset about what it means to be a teacher, but it is a whole-school change that we are making. The way I am approaching it is that teaching is 90% natural talent and that 90% is the learning bit. If you don't understand that, you'll never get it. I hope that has opened people's minds up a bit more.

For me, Looking for Learning has changed a point of view – that everything is possible when it comes to learning; every problem has a solution. I now use the analogy of a mountain when it comes to children's learning – we can all get to the top but we can do it in different ways and there's no right or wrong way to getting there. The Looking for Learning Toolkit is taking me on a journey as a leader and I now feel much more empowered to lead others.

Improving learning

I would say that the Looking for Learning Toolkit is really good value for money. Without a doubt, we wouldn't be where we are today without it. I think it's really valuable, but the people do need to be the right people with the right mindset to take it on; who are open to the idea of improving learning. Sometimes it's really hard to convince people that they're not doing the right thing. Many people don't 'get' learning and it can be so hard to get it because, for natural teachers, it's so intrinsic that they can't believe others don't get it! You have to have an open mind and you have to be in the right place; where you understand that learning is important, that you understand that you want to drive your school forward and that, as a leader you have to be prepared to lead it, drive it and manage it. If you have that mindset, then Looking for Learning will, without doubt, work for you. Even outstanding schools could benefit from this because with Looking for Learning you're constantly wanting to improve; the ethos is really powerful."



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

IDENTIFYING IMPROVING INCREASING LEARNING in YOUR school

