Learning from looking back, living our vision forwards: using evidence to gain momentum in school improvement

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This session

• An evidence based metaphor
• Learning from comparing exceptional, strong, developing and struggling school practices
• Helping the move form strong to exceptional
• Crystalising differences
• The contribution of CPDL
• The contribution of leadership
• The role of tools
• A final metaphor
Evidence and hope

• “If you want to change the world you must pay attention violently to the present and hopefully to the future; pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will”

• Gramsci The prison notebooks
A Tool for making senses of the past - the performance review cycle

The School Development Plan

Learner learning goals

Teaching and learning strategies

Knowledge skills needed

What I know and can do now
A CPDL Tool for the future – for aligning CPDL with aspirations for pupils
Some powerful, relevant evidence about school and school to school learning?

A two phase project for Teach First involving

- A review of international school improvement research
- Which shaped in-depth research into practices in 26 schools serving vulnerable communities
- To identify and compare:
  - strong and exceptional schools; and
  - schools needing to gain and/or sustain momentum in accelerating pupil progress
- Comparisons of practices across these schools and with the international evidence base
Strong, exceptional and developing schools

- **Schools seeking and or approaching momentum**
  - were fighting on many fronts; and
  - prioritised improving the quality of teaching and learning, behaviour and consistency; but
  - lacked capacity, at different levels, to align activities

- **Strong/gaining momentum** schools did many of the things **Exceptional Schools did** – but less intensely and or inconsistently

- But there were also some intriguing contrasting practices, especially regarding CPD and its evaluation
What makes exceptional schools exceptional?

• With a neighbour take 1 cell from the table of strong practices and identify what you think the Strong Schools could do to push their practice towards being Exceptional.

• Here is an example:
  – Specific teams in Strong Schools focus on involving parents
  – In Exceptional Schools it is every one’s job to spot possible opportunities for drawing on parents’ knowledge & expanding their input
  – GSM schools, leaders focus hard on recruiting parents to supporting the school and teachers & teaching them re curriculum.
Key practices in strong/gathering momentum schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching and mentoring offered by leaders and is fluid and relatively spontaneous</th>
<th>Support for new teachers is distributed across departments</th>
<th>Leaders focus on providing expertise and establishing systems. Middle leaders run them.</th>
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<td>Pedagogic skills and knowledge are seen as the core of improvement</td>
<td>Performance management works to extended timescales and is shaped within departments</td>
<td>Leaders prioritise in-school capacity building</td>
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<td>CPD is centrally directed but encourages volunteer contributions</td>
<td>In strong schools some departments expect to and do develop subject specific models of pedagogy</td>
<td>There are nationally recognised pockets of excellent practices</td>
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Subject knowledge

• In all but Exceptional Schools (ES), pedagogy was the priority, there was some concern re over emphasising subject knowledge and curriculum development was seen as a luxury

• ES saw depth in subject knowledge as key to developing;
  – Clarity about why curriculum matters to everyone
  – Teachers’ ability to “see” the curriculum in pupils’ lives beyond school and make strong links between the two
  – Coherent, cumulative learning experiences.

• They saw curriculum development as driver for CPDL
Pedagogy in Exceptional schools

- In all ES there was a single, shared model of language for pedagogy
- Reinforced though intense induction for all
- Monitored carefully
- Organised around identifying and removing barriers to learning for each and every pupil
  - Eg delaying collaborative group work until they could be reinforced and used in every subject by every pupil or ensuring that vulnerable pupils catch up with literacy/numeracy without missing out on e.g. sport or art
- Other schools had some core protocols but lacked a shared model or clarity re purpose
Seeking and Approaching Momentum Schools prioritised consistency - either via compliance, with low level strategies or unsuccessfully. Strong schools required some consistency with protocols but also celebrated differences. But they lacked clarity re principles and underpinning rationale.

Exceptional Schools:

– emphasised systems for ensuring consistency and efficiency
– organised around a shared model of pedagogy e.g. behaviour incidents = *trigger for learning intervention*.
– shared model and purpose translates consistency into *coherence*
Consistently good v pockets of excellence?

• Approaching and Seeking Momentum Schools, and to a degree, Gathering Momentum schools had:
  – 1-2 areas of significant improvement/ excellence
  – e.g. links with parents and the community, student behaviour, one of the core subjects, coaching for staff, etc

• But in Approaching and Seeking Momentum Schools these risked working as a distraction rather than springboard for further improvement

What might be a hindrance and a help here?
A strong learning environment

• Approaching or Seeking Momentum Schools saw CPD as “instruction for fixing teaching” I.E. remedial support as opposed to building capacity

• In Strong and Gaining Momentum Schools CPD was distributed and focussed on raising the quality of teaching

• In Exceptional Schools, emphasis was on
  – Leaders treating “staff as their class”
  – Using curriculum, model of pedagogy and removing barriers as drivers
  – Highly professionalised CPDL e.g. all coaches trained

  http://www.curee.co.uk/node/3279  http://www.curee.co.uk/node/3272
Key CPDL characteristics

Systematic reviews [http://bit.ly/1J1y18X](http://bit.ly/1J1y18X) show effective CPDL involves sustained, iterative, aligned combinations of:

• access to specialist expertise **coupled with peer supported, evidence rich dialogue** re learner responses to changes

• exploration of disruptions, assumptions & beliefs to support development of practice and theory side by side.

• activities focused on aspirations for learners/students; accompanied by AFL for teachers;

• support via tools and protocols that help contextualise content for subjects and sub groups of learners
Effect sizes for leadership interventions

- Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment
- Establishing ambitious goals and expectations
- Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
- Promoting, modelling and participating in teacher learning
- Strategic resourcing - *alignment and tools*

http://www.curee.co.uk/resources/publications/robinson-summary
Effect sizes for leadership interventions

- Promoting and participating in teacher learning (0.84)
- Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum (0.42)
- Establishing goals and expectations (0.35)
- Strategic resourcing - *alignment and tools* (0.34)
- Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment (.27)

http://www.curee.co.uk/resources/publications/robinson-summary
Robinson’s notion of “Smart” tools

• Benefit of tools is capacity to embody knowledge and ideas in ways that shape/scaffold actions for coherence

• Tools with evidence of success are:
  – Underpinned by evidence/research based knowledge
  – Designed around sound theories re both goals and process
  – Define what good practice looks like
  – Take account of/manage the cognitive, practical and affective load
  – Scaffold navigation of complexity to focus effort on depth
Mobilising and leading effective evidence informed school improvement means:

• Developing well crafted tools - "electricity pylons" that...
• Practice what we preach in supporting their use
• Increasing and deepening your approach to the power you focus on learning for pupils, for staff and for yourselves
Web links

• The full research report re gaining and sustaining momentum

• Two blogs about different aspects of consistency and coherence (one relates to behaviour the other to data, CPDL and behaviour)
  http://www.curee.co.uk/node/3273

• http://www.curee.co.uk/node/4926
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