Meeting the needs of vulnerable pupils; what makes exceptional schools exceptional?

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Comparing Exceptional and strong schools

- 8 Exceptional - Schools reaching 75%+ at GCSE including English and Maths in and serving high FSM communities

- 6 strong schools – schools reaching national averages in high FSM communities

- Funded by Teach First to help them identify how to differentiate support for TF participants

- We found some surprisingly clear distinctions between the two so TF agreed to publish the report

- Now hoping to follow up for schools that are struggling in different ways and for primary schools.

The evidence base

- 6 TF schools that were classed as 'exceptional'
- 6 TF schools that were classed as 'strong'
- 2 non-TF (but TF eligible) 'exceptional' schools

The data came from:

- interviews with both TF and non-TF teachers;
- group interviews with members of the SLT;
- focus groups consisting of three activities, with both TF and non-TF teachers;
- analysis of school documentation inc progress; and
- the analysis of an online student survey
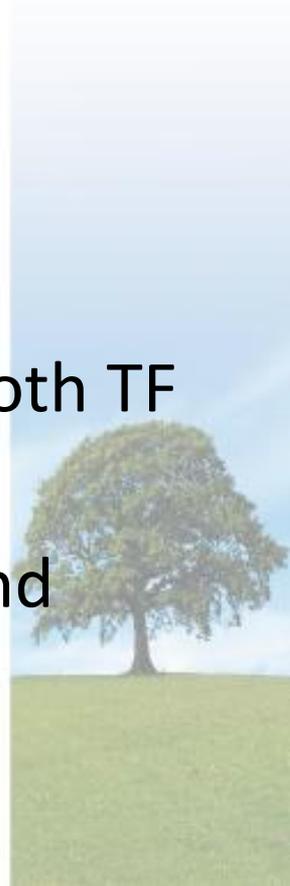
Professional learning (PL) environment

- *Exceptional schools* invested very systematically in Professional Learning
  - *In strong schools* professional learning was more centrally led
  - In *strong schools* there was less consistent teacher ownership of responsibility for Professional Learning
- *Exceptional schools* invested systematically in training for mentors and coaches across the school
  - *Strong schools* focused less on formal coaching and structured mentoring and in training coaches and mentors

Leadership

- Leaders more aware of the importance of modeling learning in *exceptional schools*
- *Exceptional schools were* more engaged in networked learning and external partnerships than *strong schools*.
- In *Exceptional Schools* all new recruits are expected explicitly to own schools' values and pedagogical priorities
  - Policies for supporting new teachers were less clear in *strong schools* –
- Most Exceptional Schools were involved in initial teacher education
- Performance management used rigorously and systematically in *Exceptional Schools* and persistent under performers left
  - In S*trong Schools* performance management and its effect of the quality of teachers was patchier

Relationships with students, parents and the community

- Exceptional schools' leaders were likely to work with outside organisations as a way to enrich the curriculum and to take a leading role in networks
  - In some Strong Schools some leaders did this

- Exceptional schools were also more likely to work extremely hard at involving parents
  - In Strong Schools this was patchier

Teaching and learning

- *Exceptional schools* had a clear focus on developing and maintaining a cross-school, explicit model of pedagogy
  - In *strong schools* some departments expected to and did develop their own
- Collaborative learning was more of a focus in *exceptional schools*,
  - but inconsistent in *strong schools*
- Subject knowledge was a high priority within *exceptional schools*.
  - Strong schools felt pedagogic expertise was *more* important
- More teachers in the *strong schools* wanted more support in behaviour management

The models of pedagogy

- Models of pedagogy varied in emphasis and structure. What was key was having an agreed approach & scaffolding

- One e.g. described multiple teaching and learning strategies in different sections of a guidance document.

- Use was monitored – e.g. in relation to securing breadth

- Benefits, rationale and pitfalls of approaches illustrated

- Strategies covered, e.g. peer and self assessment, questioning, inclusion and independent learning

- Tools were provided to support and structure use

Features of scaffolding

- Learning and Teaching Framework may cover a range of evidence-based practices directed at one higher level outcome

- There was differentiated support for colleagues using different aspects of the model. So for example, middle leaders are asked to model and support specific developing strategies for their colleagues

- Teachers are expected to apply the strategies in the model in their daily practice

- There is a shared understanding among staff of what constitutes quality learning and teaching

Another model was realised through a CPD programme incorporating

- A map of progression e.g. in independent learning

- Case studies

- Underpinning theory and research; and

- Chance to explore this through coaching supported experiments

Pedagogy through students' eyes

- Home work is used significantly more in ES

- More oral assessment in ES, esp. Maths, history and MFL

- Group work, is used more in ES except for MFL

- Broadly ES and SS students experience similar level of challenge - more consistently in ES esp. in MFL and history

- More games, puzzles and web sites in ES esp. in Maths and history but more IWB use in SS

- More web site use in ES, esp. science, maths and history

- But in English ES strategies narrower/more traditional than in SS

Sauce for the Goose

- Strong schools focussed more on *teaching* teachers than supporting, structuring their learning

- Exceptional schools focussed on colleagues' learning and recognised, reviewed and built on their' skills in line with their model of pedagogy

- leaders developed systematic, work based Professional learning opportunities and practices ie they treated their staff as their class

"I'll have what he's having!"

- Consistency, systematisation, rigorous monitoring and moral purpose and a pedagogic model = a virtuous circle

http://www.curee.org.uk/content/sauce-goose-learning-entitlements-work-teachers-well-their-pupils
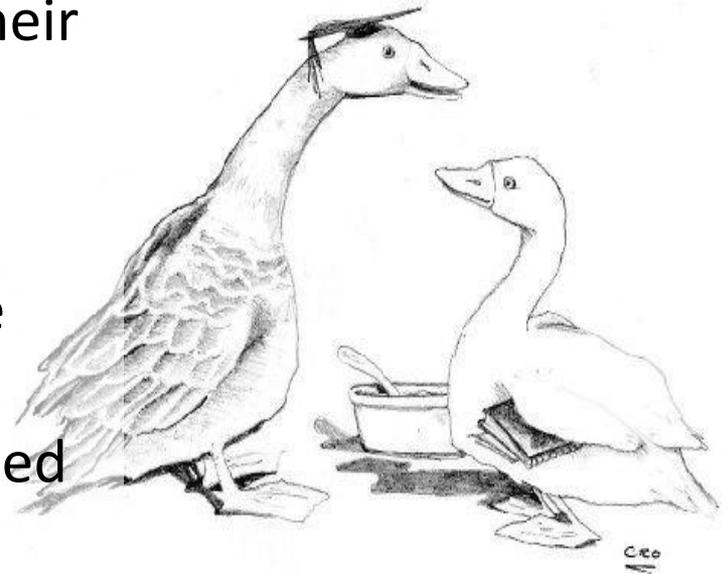
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