# Best Practice Network school improvement library

## Improving the quality of outdoor learning in order to increase learning behaviours and the percentage of lower attaining boys’ that achieve the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 2

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Tags: Primary, outdoor, boys

### The issue

* school performance data and OFSTED report in the academic Year 2016-2017 highlighted a significant gap between pupil premium boys and national other boys when compared against girls at the end of Key Stage 2
* need to motivate and engage reluctant boys
* children fail to transfer skills from outdoor learning to core subjects
* need to increase percentage of children achieving the expected standard at KS2

A key issue in our school improvement plan was to develop the quality of outdoor learning to improve the outcomes for lower attaining boys’. Changes to the curriculum mean that there is a greater emphasis on hands on learning so developing engagement is paramount. The biggest issue that I have encountered, is that children don’t transfer skills that they learn in their outdoor lessons to core subjects such as: English and Maths. My aim is to try and bridge this gap and improve and increase the quality of cross curricular work and therefore increase the percentage of children achieving the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 2, ensuring that we are in line with national averages.

Part of my role is to raise the standards of all children, with a particular focus on boys. This project was formed in response to our ASP, school performance data and OFSTED report in the academic Year 2016-2017, which highlighted a significant gap between pupil premium boys and national other boys when compared against girls at the end of Key Stage 2. I thought this project would provide the perfect opportunity to analyse data and evaluate the impact on the newly developed outdoor curriculum. The data for Key Stage 2 in the Year 2017, shows that the schools combined results were 47%, an 11% increase from the Year 2016 where the results came in at 36%. Although this indicates that we are moving in the right direction and are closing the gap for attainment and achievement, accelerated progress still needs to be made as we were 14% lower than the national average in all subjects. The schools leadership team has already made a start on this by developing a more appealing and engaging curriculum that takes into consideration the children’s interests, inspires and captures their creativity.

In 2017, boys significantly improved in all subjects when compared to the Year 2016. In the combined measure, they managed to close the gap from national, (-30% in 2016 to -13% in 2017), showing an improvement of 17%. In addition to this, boys have managed to close the in school gap to girls in English - boys’ reading was 52% similar to girls reading which was 58%. Boys’ writing came in at 64% which was similar to the girls who achieved 67%. However, the boys’ are still attaining significantly lower than girls in maths - boys attainment was 56% compared to girls who managed to reach 72%. In addition to this, we have noted the significant progress gap between boys and girls. For example, in maths the progress score for boys was -3.1 compared to the progress score for girls which was -0.2. Recognising this, the leadership team have introduced consistent approaches such as: short, snappy lessons, introducing competitions and approaching learning as more hands on and practical as we continue to bridge the gap.

The findings for disadvantaged children, indicate that attainment increased significantly in comparison to the Year 2016 especially in reading. However, all subjects decreased when compared to the national average in 2017 (-26% in reading, -18% in writing and -20% in maths). This would indicate that rapid progress needs to be made in order to raise attainment and achievement. Changes made within the leadership team, on practical ways to teach across the curriculum enables us to take into consideration the needs of all our children.

We identified that the prior lower attainment groups’ or children on the special educational need register, many of which were boys, made little progress. In 2017, 11% of children had SEN needs and were not applied to sit the test but in hindsight, we believe that the children may have been at an advantage if they were to have attempted some of the material. This needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the data as this could have resulted in a higher scaled score, giving a clearer indication of progress.

### The solution

* used evidence and data to improve the quality of outdoor learning
* ensured transferable skills from outdoor learning were reinforced in a classroom setting to support the attainment and achievement of the core subjects
* created curriculum links and worked across the curriculum, collaborating with other departments
* used technology to motivate and engage
* developed the 10 Measurable Steps strategy to measure pupil progress
* developed outdoor learning booklet and long term outdoor learning plans
* developed strategies in the outdoor learning team to increase vocabulary and talking

The focus of my project was therefore the performance of lower attaining boys’ at the end of Key Stage 2. This would be achieved through a focus on outdoor learning, looking closely at learning behaviours displayed, with regards to engagement and motivation of their work. I therefore, decided to lead my team to develop strategies and initiatives so that children could develop learning through talk, build up vocabulary and demonstrate teamwork qualities.

When reviewing the education system in Singapore, it is clear that their school mantra is about allowing the children to have fun. Teachers have adapted and embraced technology to engage learning in the classroom. Additionally, a major role teachers’ play is recognising and responding to change where the process of continuous CPD improves lessons.

This research lends itself to my school improvement project as a key priority for me is ensuring that children get an entitlement to different experiences. I am working with some reluctant boys so ensuring I make activities/cross curricular work fun, engaging and interactive is important. Using technology is one way I could achieve this as we are in the process of developing an outdoor learning APP where the children can track their own progress through the use of i-Pads.

The initial part of my project was to ensure that my team ‘bought’ into the idea as their support and concepts would ensure that the plan was successful and effective. From the onset of developing outdoor booklets and long term outdoor plans, the children have been at the forefront of everything we have done. Therefore, I wanted my team to be clear in ensuring that our long term goal was to help children develop key skills for example: building teamwork, confidence and relationships, that would carry them throughout their schooling life. The aim was to ensure these transferable skills were reinforced in a classroom setting to support the attainment and achievement of the core subjects. The breadth of this project lends itself to the STEM Department where collaborative learning takes place regularly.

From having regular meetings with the schools’ business manager, I was able to analyse the financial implications of my plan. As we are part of a trust, we do have to follow and implement strategies directed by them, which could potentially mean that medium and long term plans aren’t carried out. However, we do work closely with our achievement partner and developments of networks within the trust are under development; enabling teachers to meet together to share ideas and analyse data.

Unfortunately, we are facing a 3 year deficient which means that in the year 2020-2021, the school could have a significant finance issue. This could affect my school improvement plan as it might not be sustainable in terms of the need for ongoing resources, trips and adult support. Having said this, if my project can outline a distinct positive impact then there is the potential that the trust would implement this as a trust wide initiative, which would create extra funding.

I decided that to launch this initiative, it would be beneficial through a team meeting so we had a chance to discuss and share our ideas. The idea of a practical approach to teaching was widely received. The main issue that was raised was how we could measure the impact of engaging activities. We discussed ways to further understand what we expected our children to gain from practically doing. My team wanted a clear understanding of expectations so that we could ensure we were consistent. We evaluated objectives taken from the Early Learning Goals document and tweaked these to develop our own set of skills, 10 measureable steps that we could measure the children from. Each member of the team took on two of these objectives to try out with the pilot group of x6 pupil premium boys. We then had another team meeting to discuss how it went, the reaction from the children and the quality of engagement. Observing and assessing the children at the beginning of the project was important to see the progress made and clear curriculum links to be created.

During this time, myself and some team members did observe an outdoor learning lesson with a focus on creating curriculum links to better analyse what teachers’ expectations were for our children. This enabled us to see how important it was that we create links with other subjects through the use of engaging activities, both practical and written learning.

My risk register (Appendix 7) identified some risks associated with my project. The biggest risk was ensuring that teachers had adequate time to undertake and develop the outdoor curriculum to ensure coverage of curriculum links were made. This was achieved by using the already directed time in staff/phase meetings and whole school training days where we integrated outdoor learning into our long term topic plans.

In addition to this, I needed to ensure that staff were able to implement these changes effectively to guarantee maximum impact by using a supportive, consistent approach which captivated boys’ learning. To reduce this risk, I set up fortnightly meetings where we could share concepts and experiences, connect ideas and keep track of progress through analysing the ‘10 measureable steps’.

My school has 3 data assessment windows where we update and analyse children’s progress every term. The first update, taken from the 10 measureable steps (Appendix 6), was in November. This showed that the targeted group of pupil premium boys’ were baselined at coming in with low starting points, for example: child 1 only managed to obtain 10% of the steps they were assessed against. Looking further into this, my team decided that we wanted 4/6 children to obtain the expected level at the end of Key Stage 2.

The second update was in February where an analysis showed that there had been some progress. It was apparent that some boys responded well and were now motivated and engaged, child 4 and 6 had made 30% progress and child 2, 3 and 5 had made 20% progress from their starting point in November.

However, there were still some reluctant boys, for example: child 1 who had only made 10% progress, which remained as a barrier to this project. With regards to this, we introduced positive role models so the children could magpie positive learning behaviours.

From this data, it was clear to my team that we needed to continue to focus on how we could promote team building skills with a particular focus on role models. By introducing positive role models we wanted to raise the children’s expectations and help shape the children in overcoming obstacles and making difficult decisions. Part of this was about how the children communicated with one another so ensuring that all teachers were using the talk/questions stems provided would promote open ended discussions.

As a middle leader I have realised that ensuring we have a consensus build upon by those in the team enables clear direction which motivates and engages in achieving the common goal. Coordinating this has allowed me to set high expectations whilst also giving my team the freedom to take ownership.

One change that we have developed this year is ensuring that classroom practise is shared across school. Observing and modelling how to apply knowledge and skills gave us a better understanding of the rationale behind why changes were made. Carrying out hands on staff meetings and joining in activities gave staff a better understanding of the children’s learning, questioning skills and thought processes. Having that open dialogue where an open door policy was created showed that any problems would be supported and any ideas shared.

We are lucky that we have an education and sports consultant working alongside school which means that a new, varied and engaging curriculum was brought in around 3 years ago. From this my team produced a key skills progression map which allows us to monitor attainment and achievement through the year groups. In addition to this, my team were able to get together to develop long term outdoor education plans that include curriculum links as we believe this is essential rather than outdoor learning being a standalone. A quote from Ofsted, 2016 shows how the curriculum is developing as a school, ‘The principal has brought much-needed stability to the school. She is relentless in her determination to improve pupils’ outcomes and is equally determined to raise the aspirations of all pupils by providing an engaging curriculum that instils a love of learning and embraces the wider community’.

Results over the past 3 years has shown that the trend is improving (2015-16 - 36%, 2016-17 -47 %, 2017-18 - 67%) however, there is still a gap between boys and girls. We believe a focus on engaging outdoor learning, looking closely at learning behaviours will improve outcomes, hence the focus for this project.

From September to February we trialled a wide range of strategies to engage and motivate our pilot group of pupil premium boys. We had lengthy discussions about the impact of the tasks we had agreed upon to determine their progress. Sharing practise was important as we were able to create a culture in which innovation was strongly integrated.

We developed engaging lessons using a bank of varied resources to analyse the children’s learning behaviours. We agreed that our focus needed to start with Key Stage 2 before extending to Key Stage 1 and then Early Years. We were already in discussion about developing a more age appropriate activities booklet for the smaller children. We agreed upon a deadline of a week to see how the children responded and would then meet again to feedback and share resources. Throughout the week, I ensured that I was available to see how my team were progressing and was there for support should they have needed it.

Our meetings were always very successful as we had a great open dialogue however, time constraints got in the way and our plan lost some momentum. As this project was one of the school’s main drivers, it was agreed that an INSET day would be used to bring the focus back.

The INSET day was welcomed by all as a chance to re-boost our aims and goals. My team had previously spoken to the English lead so we could develop talk/question stems to build upon children’s learning behaviours and bring meaning to practical learning.

It was also important to assess the impact of our work through the developed 10 measureable steps. This gave a clear indication that all children were making progress however it was recognised that the rate of speed for the progress differed from child to child.

I teamed up with the English lead who is also my NPQML mentor so she had a good understanding of what I wanted to establish. I asked for support with developing children’s language skills and how we could incorporate these into engaging activities to make them more focused. She was really helpful and together with my team we developed some talk stems to ensure the children had a bank of sentence stems and were confident in delivery.

Due to outdoor learning already being implemented and through the use of school training days and meetings already put aside there was no extra need for delivery and monitoring progress, therefore my project was time and cost effective. I did ensure that I kept a handle on replacement outdoor resources to keep the cost within the budget and kept track of this through the use of an audit.

As my team is made up of an outdoor HLTA and TA, they lacked confidence when using focused question stems related to Blooms Taxonomy. Therefore, we worked collaboratively with the STEM department on how would could engage the children in practical enquiry whilst developing the children’s talk and vocabulary. This collaboration helped my team to become more self-assured and observations/feedback showed to be having a positive impact as there was a focus for the practical learning happening. It also developed my leadership style because it was highly imperative that I recognised the CPD need my team required in order to be successful. By doing this I managed to establish a sense of trust where we could link principle and practise to develop a shared vision.

### Impact

The data for Key Stage 2 in the Year 2018, shows that the schools combined results were 67%, a 20% increase from the Year 2017 where the combined results came in at 47%. This shows that attainment and achievement is above the national average by 3% in all subjects. The leadership team have analysed the results and a number of factors support this data. For example: themed weeks were introduced, competitions were created, hands on, practical problem solving was developed and praise was a necessary.

In 2018, boys continue to significantly improve in all subjects. In the combined measure, they managed to close the gap from national (-13% in 2017 to -1% in 2018). However, girls still continue to out-perform boys by 12%.

We identified that the prior lower attainment groups’ or children on the special educational need register, many of which were boys, made significant progress. The children attempted the material which gave a clearer indication of progress made.

Although, I can’t be 100% certain that outdoor learning as a standalone worked, I am sure that it was a contributing factor (Appendix 3). I believe that ensuring the children can transfer the 10 measurable steps (connecting ideas, are resilient learners, can problem solve, listen to one another’s ideas and demonstrate high expectations) supports their attainment and achievement within the core subjects. This was evident when analysing the data; we compared averages from the start of the Autumn term to the end of the Summer term. The findings show that the children averaged at 15% in the Autumn term in comparison to the Summer term where they averaged at 63%, showing significant progress.

Additionally, it showed that 2/6 children reached the combined expected level but 6/6 children made better than expected progress. Averaging the progress for the 6 children mentioned shows that the progress score for reading was: +5.5, SPaG +6.5 and maths +5.5. When compared against the whole lower prior attaining group in 2017, its clear significant impact in progress has been made as reading was: -8.45, SPaG -4.23 and maths -5.72.

I used my management and leadership time to research and plan this project, which benefited myself as a leader and had a positive impact on my own learning behaviours especially my personal drive and awareness of others.

I defined the CPD that was needed to upskill my team members, this was cost effective as we used the education and sports consultant already working for our school. In addition to this, we also collaborated with other departments within school, this helped to support and strengthen my team’s knowledge and expectations.

Moving forward, we are introducing a collaborative learning policy which effectively contributes to children and staff working together in a positive and inclusive whole school learning environment. We will be continuing to develop pace and questioning skills to develop higher level thinking as a way to engage all children.