

More able learners' project

"To create a learning environment within which every individual can realise their full potential"

Brief Context

Over the past few years' pupil outcomes at KS1 remained fairly static and pupil outcomes varied significantly across schools. At KS2, although the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 (i.e. higher than expected attainment) in English and maths compared positively with national outcomes, there was a vast variation in the performance of pupils achieving L5 across the borough. In 2011 KS4 the percentage of students achieving A*/A in English was 3.5% below national, but in mathematics the picture was slightly more positive with the percentage of students achieving A*/A at 21%, 1.6% above national.

Hence, one of the key priorities for the Croydon School Improvement team last year was to develop an LA wide strategy for its more able pupils, supporting the creation and implementation of educational strategies, policies and interventions that addressed the particular needs of this target group of pupils. We wanted to work towards eradicating inequalities of and variability in provision and ensure all able learners reached their full potential. Hence the More Able Learners project was introduced to schools in January 2012.

The More Able Learners' project was launched to a group of schools, 11 Primary and 6 Secondary, primarily focussing on improving the quality of teaching and personalised learning. The principles behind the project were to ensure all more able learners were challenged and supported in every lesson, and not only through intervention programmes and/or extra-curricular activities. Some of the schools were specifically targeted because of their 2011 performance for this group and/or if they had this as a theme for improvement as part of their most recent Ofsted report.

The key elements of the programme ensured schools

- Involved a member of the senior leadership and keen practitioners who wanted to strengthen their practice in this area
- Audited and evaluated the impact of current and proposed provision through a mini action plan, a mid-term and final report/case study.
- Used rigorous mechanisms for tracking and monitoring targeted learners to fulfil their full potential.
- Attended a "More able learner's" network twice a term.
- Used the small funding allocated to embed sustainable practice.

Outcomes

The project schools were able to demonstrate in some way the impact this project has had on their target group of pupils to date. In their mid-term reviews there was clear evidence outlining the impact some of their adopted strategies have had in improving the performance of their target pupil's Writing, Reading and/or numeracy skills.

In 2012 provisional LA results indicate an increase at KS1 and KS2. At KS2 English, Mathematics and combined English and Mathematics all increased by 10%, 3% and 7% respectively. Individual school results showed good improvements from last year.

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For example 7 out of 10 schools achieved above the Croydon average for L5+ in maths compared to only 4 out of the 10 last year. In English 8 out of 10 schools achieved above the LA average compared to only 3 out of 10 in 2011. Three schools more than doubled the proportion of pupils achieving a L5+ in maths from last year and similarly five schools in English.

In 2011 Croydon KS4 results for A*/A in English indicates a slight rise in the proportion achieving these higher grades, but in Mathematics there has been a slight decline. Early results from some of the Project schools, however, indicate a rise in these results which is very encouraging.

In addition to the quantitative evidence, many schools have reported on other positive outcomes the project has had on enhancing whole school systems and practices. For example the improved use of data to track and monitor pupils' progress and plan challenging and appropriate interventions have enabled pupils to meet or exceed their targets; improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, probing questioning, extended writing and problem solving in maths ; good use of assessment has helped identify pupils' strengths, gaps, misconceptions and supporting them to identify their next steps;

Pupils have also demonstrated greater confidence in decision making, using thinking and independent learning skills in new and different situations. Schools have commented on the positive impact this project has had with their active involvement with parents. 'Parent voice' activities showed parents welcomed the project and how their child was being challenged and tracked to ensure they made the expected progress. Some schools invited parents to attend maths and English workshops where they were informed about the different levels and grades and what these mean.

Project schools found the "More able learner" networks very informative and reassuring. These meetings enabled effective collaboration between Primary and Secondary schools, the dissemination of what works well and the sharing of good practice.

Informed by the work of the project schools and drawing from the existing outstanding practices in our schools, the local authority has produced a More Able Learners strategy document for all schools and local authority colleagues to use. This document provides advice and guidance and resources that inform holistic, whole school approaches to raising achievement and aspirations for all learners through the development of high quality learning experiences. In addition, by July 2013 all project schools will contribute to a Croydon good practice document which will capture individual case studies.

For further support with improving the provision for your Gifted, Able and Talented (AGT) learners please contact tomris.ibrahim@croydon.gov.uk

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