



Assessment Lead Programme: Case Study

Falinge Park High School

Falinge Park High School is a large, multi-cultural, vibrant comprehensive in Rochdale, Greater Manchester. We have one objective which is: To Create a Compelling Learning Experience. We were awarded Silver for the quality of professional development in the Teacher Development Trust audit after just two years and aim to be a school which is continually learning and improving.

We became aware of the Assessment Lead Programme through our engagement with EBE – we had been to one of their CEM training workshops – and through the pilot programme which was widely shared on Twitter. We had already spent considerable time since 2015 looking at our curriculum: we had identified our big aims – across the school and in individual subject areas; we had broken the curriculum down into the deep acquisition of knowledge and acquisition of subject specific skills; we had identified misconceptions that were linked to the evidence from Key Stage 2.

However, our assessment was not aligned fully with our new Key Stage 3 curriculum and was not helping us to make the improvements we knew we could. We had all the tools in place but not the means to understand our successes and areas we needed to develop.

The course does take you into the liminal space – it challenges you and really makes you question yourself: it allows you to go back and review, to respond to your own misconceptions; it assesses you throughout giving you guidance and going back over the areas you don't quite understand; it allows you to delve deeper based on your interests directing you to different research; it opens up new doors and possibilities that you thought you knew, but perhaps you only knew on a surface level.

It doesn't allow you to just speed through and gain the accreditation as a "badge"; key components are the lessons and meetings you take together as a team. For a distance learning programme, it really is a collaborative approach, and the EBE team is there to help and answer any questions. We have all thoroughly enjoyed it and have learnt a great deal – it has proved to be a compelling learning experience for us at Falinge – just what we want for all our community.





Has the way you think about assessment changed as a result of training to be an Assessment Lead? If so, how?

The training has made us go back to the beginning and think carefully about the purpose of assessment. We recognised that this was the essential area to focus on when sharing our learning with our Middle Leaders and staff. It has made us confident to discard certain practices which weren't having a benefit on learning and do more with less.

What are you able to do now that you couldn't do before you began the ALP?

We had no idea how to weight assessment questions. I'm not ashamed to say that as I don't think assessment design has been a key feature of my practice as a teacher over the past 20 years and I don't think I'm alone in saying that. We haven't got there yet but we are certainly keen to develop this area of our practice.

What impact do you perceive ALP has had on your own teaching practice?

As the leader of learning across the school, the impact has not been as strong as some other members of the team simply because I don't teach a full timetable. However, in the lessons I teach it has made me much more considered about how I am checking pupils' learning and, in the development of staff practice, I have used many of the techniques in the programme to shape and model our professional learning.

What impact do you perceive ALP has had / will have on your colleagues' teaching practice?

Our Computer Science lead recognised that whilst the aims of their curriculum and the description of deep knowledge and deep skills were absolutely where they should be, their assessments weren't allowing children to reach the deep knowledge and subject specific skills. They went back and reviewed how they were assessing, the purpose of it and reframed their assessments.

Our Head of RE questioned, through the dissemination of the programme, what the purpose was of them using questions from the GCSE papers with Year 9. It helped them to recognise the importance of assessing the key curriculum constructs rather than just helping them to gain 6 marks to a certain question to an exam they would sit three years later.

These sound really simple and maybe we were very behind but, from my experience as a Deputy in two schools prior to Falinge, I don't think so.....





Do you think that any changes in your practice and your colleagues practice will be sustained over the coming months and years? If so, why is this and how do you see it happening?

Absolutely. One of our three priorities this year was to improve the curriculum and assessment across the school. It's going to form our priority next year and, following our recent Ofsted, has been identified as an area to continue the good practice we have started. It has to as our big aims of the curriculum drive everything we do. We have the commitment from staff to do this, we have given them the time – we now have the tools to make it a reality.

We aim to train a further six assessment leads over the next 24 months via the Assessment Lead Programme so that we have specialists in every subject area.

Do you think that doing ALP will have a positive – if indirect – effect on student outcomes?

It has to, or else we wouldn't be doing it. If we understand our curriculum fully and if we understand the most effective ways to assess our curriculum then we can go back and teach those areas which pupils have struggled with.

Since I joined Falinge in 2015 we haven't chased short-term results, instead we have invested in Key Stage 3 for sustainability and to help us achieve the eight big aims of our curriculum. Whilst we might not see the direct effect on student outcomes immediately, all the evidence from Key Stage 3 suggests we are heading in the right direction. It's also helped teachers to become more expert in their subject specific knowledge through collaboration and external support and, if we have a body of teachers who love their subject, feel valued through the investment and want to work in an environment which enables them to be creative and take calculated risks then this can only have a positive effect on student outcomes. It's cheesy but we have built a culture where learning and reflection is valued at Falinge amongst the staff – and if the staff love it, want to stay and want to continually improve, then this can only have a positive impact on pupils.

Janice Allen
Headteacher

February 2018

