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# Focus on Schools

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This document provides an extended description of the work of the three schools featured in the report 'Narrowing the Gap: Giving every child the chance to succeed'.



# Lord Scudamore Foundation

## ‘Ambassadors’ provide support for Level 2C in maths

Lord Scudamore Foundation School is a very large primary school in Hereford with over 620 children. It became an Academy on 1 June 2011. It continues to be the lead school in a federation that includes three very much smaller village schools. Around 7% of the children at Lord Scudamore come from a minority ethnic background and just under 10% of the children are learning English as an additional language. The two main language groups are Russian and Polish. Unusually, the school has two headteachers.

This example focuses on the school’s approach to improving the performance of children who were working only at Level 2C in maths at the end of Key Stage 1 by using ‘maths ambassadors’. The data below show the impact on both the ambassadors and the children they were helping.

### Identifying the problem

Led by the two headteachers, the school has used staff research groups across the federation since 2009 to improve its performance across a range of areas (not just the curriculum). During 2010/2011, the mathematics research group wanted to improve the performance of children who were working only at Level 2C at the end of Key Stage 1. The group identified around six common difficulties for the children who were struggling, including number bonds beyond ten, understanding equivalence, as well as multiplication and division.

### Action taken

Children across the eight local schools involved in the maths research group were invited to reply to an advertisement to be a ‘maths ambassador’. Ambassadors would be older children (Years 5 and 6). The plan was that they worked with children in Years 2 and 3 who had been identified as needing help.

Lord Scudamore recruited 12 maths ambassadors (eight boys, four girls). Workshops, led by teachers from each of the eight schools involved, were used to train the potential ambassadors to teach the younger children and to use the structural apparatus, *Numicon*, to support them.

The first programme ran for six weeks, during which the ambassadors worked one-to-one with a younger child for three thirty-minute sessions a week. All in all, the ambassadors and their buddies spent around nine hours over the six weeks out of their own classroom. Sessions were held at the beginning of the day to minimise the impact on other learning.

### Evaluating impact

At the end of the programme (December 2010), the maths research group met to assess the results, both in terms of the development of maths and more generally.

The school's detailed tracking showed that, in two terms, both buddies and ambassadors had made progress. All 24 Year 3 buddies had made progress: one made five sub-levels' progress; 14 made two sub-levels' progress, and nine made one sub-level's progress. Three ambassadors had made three sub-levels' progress; two made two sub-levels' progress; five made one sub-level's progress. Only two had made no progress (one of whom had suffered a family trauma).

There were other gains, too, for both ambassadors and buddies.

The ambassadors had had to be very secure in their own knowledge in order to teach the younger (struggling) pupils. By the end of the programme, the ambassadors believed they were good at maths. They had developed the personal skills they needed to explain their understanding and teach others. The importance of talk as part of embedding key mathematical concepts was clear. They were able to do this teaching successfully, because they had already understood the work themselves. The buddies benefited from having extra attention as well as additional support in aspects of maths that, if not understood, lead to underachievement.

Both the ambassadors and the children they were helping felt that the programme was something important. The school gave it high status and the ambassadors wore their special badges proudly.

## Next steps

Following the evaluation session in December 2010, the school organised an extra training day, attended by the same ambassadors, along with teaching assistants. The 'ambassadors' programme was adapted slightly so that a teaching assistant supported the ambassadors by using a session to go through the lesson plan first. Following this, the ambassadors were then responsible for planning and for providing feedback to their buddies and the class teachers. They saw themselves as teachers and were very astute in describing the best and worst aspects of the role. The most difficult aspect, they found, was keeping the attention of their buddies. Their advice to future ambassadors was, 'Don't be too nice too soon'. Essentially they described what makes a good teacher – and the challenges.

## Building on success

The ambassadors programme represented good value for money: there were benefits for both the ambassadors and their buddies. As a result of this positive impact, there are now ambassadors for literacy, too, with a programme running in a similar way.

The school's two headteachers, Peter Box and Paul Whitcombe, feel that confidence and self-belief are the keys to success, characteristics that underpinned this programme.

## Action points

- Set up a group of teachers – and maybe teaching assistants, too – to identify a small number of common difficulties that are holding back children who are still at Level 2C in maths by the end of Key Stage 1. Are these conceptual difficulties (e.g. about place value), about recording or about recalling number facts?
- Ask a governor to hold some discussions with small groups of children about their confidence in maths. Try to pin down (i) the areas where they feel secure (ii) those areas where they feel they get stuck (iii) what sort of help might make a difference. Ask your maths coordinator to brief the governor beforehand.
- Observe a selection of maths lessons across the year groups. In each lesson you watch, really focus on finding answers to the following questions.

- How much time do the children have in the lesson to talk about maths *to each other*, for instance by working as a group to solve problems (rather than simply answering the teacher’s questions)?
  - How well does the teacher probe and build on children’s answers to questions?
  - What new mathematical vocabulary is introduced – and how well? Check children’s understanding of it by asking them questions towards the end of the lesson.
  - How flexible are teachers in moving away from their planned content to talk about misconceptions and secure key learning?
  - If teaching assistants are supporting individuals or groups, what is the quality of their talk with children?
  - Ask a few pupils in each class to solve a problem that you know they did some weeks earlier. Can they solve the same problem again and, importantly, can they tell you how they did it?
  - Add your own questions, but focus on *talk*.
- Are there times in the school day when you could fit in extra teaching, as described here? Could children teach other children in your own version of an ‘ambassadors’ scheme? This would also increase opportunities for talk about maths – or, indeed, other subjects.
  - Read Ofsted’s latest maths report, published in November 2011: *Good practice in primary mathematics: evidence from 20 successful schools* (110140). In particular, read the short illustrations at paragraphs 26 and 37 that involve pupils’ talk.
  - Whatever the intervention or support you put in place, is it value for money in terms of the progress the children make compared to the time and staffing you allocate to it?

# Temple Primary School

## ‘All different. All equal’: literacy for boys in Year 6

Temple Primary School is one of the largest schools in Manchester. Its 560 children come from a range of ethnic backgrounds: Asian Pakistani, in the main, but there are also Arab and Somali children. Over 90% of the children speak a language other than English at home – mostly Urdu, Punjabi or Arabic – and, for some, English is their third language. Eligibility for free school meals is over 34%. The school is heavily over-subscribed.

This account illustrates the single-sex teaching for English in Year 6, put in place to raise boys’ achievement. It also looks at the changes in their attitudes and behaviour.

### Identifying the problem

‘All different. All equal’ is the school’s motto. One of the distinctive features of Temple Primary School’s approach to literacy is the single-sex teaching for English in Year 6 that has been used since September 2007. It began as an experiment when the headteacher, Vicky Morton, and the assistant headteacher, Shaghafta Talib, noticed the marked difference between the performance of girls and boys in English. In the tests in summer 2007, the boys’ performance at Level 4+ was 13% points below that of the girls and 11% points below that of boys nationally. This was not a problem for their school alone – the national gap at Level 4+ between boys and girls was 9% points – but they decided to teach the boys and girls separately. ‘Pupil voice’ surveys had also already revealed the boys’ low self-esteem and limited interest in reading and writing.

### Action taken

There had always been setting in Year 6 for English and mathematics, but this took grouping one step further.

This year (2011/12), there are two single-sex literacy groups in Year 6 (26 girls, 23 boys). To keep the two groups about the same size and because the current Year 6 cohort is girl-heavy, the boys’ group has a much wider spread of ability: anything from Level 2A to 5B. A third, much smaller, mixed-sex group of four boys and eight girls is working at around Levels 1B to 2A. The children chose the names of authors for their groups: Anthony Horowitz for the boys; Jacqueline Wilson for the girls; Roald Dahl for the mixed group.

The curriculum was designed to motivate the boys, improve their attitudes and raise expectations about what they could achieve. Although it is not the only thing that engages them, sport has a high priority and Manchester United has featured regularly. One year, for instance, the school borrowed hand-held devices with the phone function removed and the boys used these as cameras. They toured Manchester United’s grounds, made a video-recording of themselves, and developed their speaking and listening skills in the process. In sessions at Manchester’s City Learning Centre, they used their photographs and video material, together with text they had written, to create their own website which was then linked to the school’s website.

The boys were also finding narrative writing very difficult, not least the challenge posed by lengthy transcription. Using technology helped the boys to focus on the important aspects of composition, especially structure and sequence. Commercial software provided a visual way in, helping them to build up frames for each part of a story that they could then fill in with text on screen.

Differences in planning for the two single-sex groups lie more in tailoring the content to meet needs. For instance, a few years ago, when the Manchester boxer, Amir Khan, was young but already very well-known, writing his biography motivated the boys, although they wrote about fictional characters, too. More recently, the boys were hooked by a father's descriptions of his schooling in Somalia, including family life, the climate and walking barefoot.

## **Evaluating impact**

An unexpected outcome of the boys-only group was the support that they gave each other. 'We started to see them in a different light,' said Shaghafta. 'Friends did not seem to matter, as long as it was a boy they were helping.' One boy put it like this: 'As a group we have got to know each other better. We used to have fights but now we help each other.' This team spirit was fuelled by a strong competitive element – to be better than the girls – and the boys gave up time, at lunchtimes and before school, to help each other.

In the following year's tests (2008), the proportion of boys achieving Level 4+ rose dramatically from 65% in 2007 to 91%. Not only was this 14% points above the national figure for boys at Level 4+, but was also above that of the girls in the school (82%). This was the case again in 2009: the boys' attainment of 85% at Level 4+ was above that of the girls (73%) and also 10% points above that of boys nationally.

The arrangements also had a positive impact on the boys' behaviour. It was no longer distracting them from learning and they settled to work more quickly. In the words of one boy: 'If girls were there, it's always a problem who to sit next to; it wastes time'; 'We spend more time arguing with girls and less time working'. They enjoyed being with one another, too: 'Working with boys gives me confidence,' said one; 'Boys correct each other without laughing'. They grew in confidence without the girls: 'We read stories and spoke confidently and did drama to Year 3 – wouldn't have done this with girls'; 'I feel more confident to speak when girls aren't there.' The girls, however, also benefited: 'pupil voice' surveys revealed that they liked a classroom without boys.

In 2011, girls' attainment at Level 4+ (90%) was better than that of the boys (68%). At Level 5, the performance of both boys (26%) and girls (45%) was better than the national figures (23%, 35%). In terms of progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, 90% of the boys and 91% of the girls in the 2011 cohort made the 'expected progress' compared to 81% of boys and 86% of girls nationally.

## **Parents' views**

Parents were positive about the single-sex arrangements – and particularly when they saw the progress their sons were making. The school also invited in the parents of boys who might benefit from having an adult in the classroom. In 2010, for example, one of the boys started Year 6 at Level 3a in reading. He was not particularly motivated. His father sat in on a few lessons and could see how his son was getting on. With support from home, the boy gained Level 5 at the end of the year.

The school was keen to point out to parents, however, that the single-sex arrangements were not about reflecting Islamic culture, a real possibility in a school where the majority of the children were Muslim.

## **Building on success**

The school monitors outcomes closely to make sure that the boys are achieving as well as they possibly can. Just occasionally, single-sex groups have been used in Year 4 or Year 5 if the data has rung alarm bells about boys' performance.

When the single-sex experiment began, Shaghafta was asked to teach the boys' literacy group. Summing up the school's approach to teaching boys, she said: 'Find out what they want, set clear boundaries and high expectations.'

## Action points

- Although you will know about the *achievement and attainment* of boys and girls in your school, what about boys' attitudes to and confidence in reading and writing? Consider conducting separate boy/girl attitudinal analyses.
- Take a 'boys-only' sample of English/literacy books and look at the marking. Is it: precise about what has been done well; clear about what needs to be done better; does it give them clear, focused targets or objectives for the next piece of work?
- Observe and record the interactions between boys and girls in Years 5 and 6 over the course of a few English lessons. Think about giving this task to a trainee teacher or a governor and asking them to report back to you.
- Do you often try deliberately to have mixed-sex groups in the classroom? For a change, consider what opportunities there are for boys to work in pairs, groups or a team together.
- Experiment with single-sex groupings (see above) – you don't need to do this all the time. You could ask children to evaluate this as an activity. ('Evaluating' is in the programmes of study for speaking and listening at Key Stage 2.) Ask a male and a female governor to lead the discussions with separate groups of boys and girls and appoint a pupil as a note-taker for each group. Ask the two note-takers to report back to their group and then to the whole class.
- What is the balance of male and female visitors/speakers at Key Stage 2? If men are under-represented, could you invite more? Ask the boys (in the attitudinal analysis) whom they would like to listen to (within reason!).

# Thomas Jones Primary School

## Teaching, assessment and intervention in maths

Thomas Jones Primary School in the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea is a one-form entry school with its own nursery. Eligibility for free school meals is 52% and around 80% of the children are learning English as an additional language.

The first example here shows how the school makes the best use of teaching time and homework, and how assessment, support and interventions really make a difference.

### The environment

Walking into Thomas Jones Primary, words such as *calm, light, safe and peaceful* immediately come to mind. The playground whistle – ‘too much like a prison yard,’ says the headteacher, David Sellens – has been replaced by an old-fashioned Victorian hand-bell. The environment gives a sense that teaching and learning in such a school must be easy. It’s difficult to believe that 235 children are learning here, over 95% of whom come from the high-density housing of Ladbroke West, just yards away.

### Making the most of teaching time

Maximising the effectiveness of teaching time is fundamental at Thomas Jones. It is there to be used, for the teacher and the children to be engaged together. James Clements, one of the school’s two assistant headteachers, is emphatic that ‘every child has to learn everything’ and that the way to high standards is to find out ‘what the child does not know and teach it. ... If we don’t teach it to them, they won’t learn it.’

The focus in mathematics is on accuracy and depth rather than coverage: ‘learn a few things but actually learn them’ – so, less an emphasis on steady improvement and more on being sure that every child has mastered key learning before moving on. The teaching distinguishes between what has to be learnt now (a sense of division, for instance) and what can reasonably be left until later (how to measure a pencil).

Maths lessons ‘are not used for working through a page of sums’. Once the teacher is confident that the children understand what has been taught, they might do two or three problems in the lesson and complete the rest at home. Judicious groupings allow strugglers to catch up, whether that is three or four children or half the class. Planning is done for just two days ahead, so that teaching can be adjusted quickly. The three-part structure recommended by the National Strategies – ‘starter, main course and dessert,’ as James describes it – is replaced by ‘sushi teaching’, that is, a menu of small, motivating items, presented so that the children want to learn.

The school’s ‘Thomas Jones pupil trackers’ record, in detail, what every single child really does and doesn’t know. Although based on the QCDA’s Assessing Pupils’ Progress materials, the school has made the trackers its own. (There are also trackers for reading and writing.) In ‘handling data’ at Level 1, for example, a child has to ‘respond to questions about how they have sorted objects and why each object belongs in a set’, ‘talk about which set has most, for example “most children stayed at school for lunch”’ and ‘talk about how they have represented their work’. A statement on the tracker is highlighted as ‘achieved’ only when the child can demonstrate mastery in

three different ways: in the abstract, through applying the learning, and 'as if in a test'. The trackers are carefully moderated. The key thing is that tracking is not used to 'produce' a level for monitoring purposes – it works the other way around: the levels are used to pin down what children can and cannot do and then the right teaching follows.

## Intervention and support

Interventions and other support are vital, whether they're for an individual with severe special needs or for anyone who needs additional support. In Year 6 – and sometimes in Year 5 – small after-school booster classes (no more than four children in the class) run for those who need 'a prod and a push' – in English as well as in maths. There's a drink, fruit and a chat before work begins. One-hour optional booster classes run in Year 6: the topic is announced on the Monday for the following Wednesday. Out of the 30 Year 6 pupils, around 26 or 27 attend every week. For five days during the Easter holiday, the headteacher and James Clements run booster classes from 8.30am to 1.30pm. The children don't wear uniform and the teachers wear casual clothes. All this provision sends out a serious message: in giving up holiday time, the teachers want the children to succeed.

For younger children, there's one-to-one support and intervention. For instance, Edi (not his real name) was learning English as an additional language. By the end of Year 1, he had a statement of special educational needs for his learning and behaviour and was still working towards Level 1 in maths. Break-times, lunch-times and other curriculum time, when it was needed, were all used to make sure he was learning. He left Year 6 at Level 5 in maths.

## Impact

Along with others, the school boycotted the 2010 national tests, but its teacher assessments showed that all children, including those with special educational needs, had gained Level 4 in maths, and 47% gained Level 5. This was repeated in the tests in 2011: 100% Level 4 and 57% Level 5. All the children also gained Level 4 in English, with 40% at Level 5.

## Action points

- Review your planning in the light of the work described here. What scope is there for adjustments that genuinely reflect assessments made during the week?
- Ofsted's evaluation schedule refers to leaders' and managers' 'accurate monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance [and] a secure understanding of the individual skills and attributes of pupils and staff.' Select a small number of children who are shown on your tracking data to be making too little progress in maths. Find out from their class teacher(s) each child's specific difficulties in maths. What do you put in place for any child who is struggling so that the foundations for maths are absolutely secure?
- Download Ofsted's primary booklet on maths: *Understanding the score* (080283), published in 2009. Use the descriptions of good and satisfactory maths teaching on pages 5 and 6 to support some closely-focused observation.
- Alternatively, start by presenting those pages (pages 5 and 6) at a staff meeting with most of the descriptions in the 'good' column blanked out. (Leave in one or two as examples.) Ask staff to write their own descriptions and then compare them with the originals.

- Are you clear – for all children – about what learning might reasonably be left until later and what needs to be taught because it underpins the next step(s) in learning?
- Be clear about your policy and practice on homework. Remember that Ofsted’s evaluation schedule refers to homework in the context of ‘enabl[ing] pupils to develop the skills to learn for themselves, where appropriate, including setting appropriate homework to develop their understanding’. Plan to use a staff meeting to consider what role you really want homework to play. Also, review what your website and prospectus say about it.
- Take a sample of lesson observations that senior leaders have done over the last few months, not just in maths. How many of them mention homework being used?
- How well does teaching genuinely build on homework, so that children think it is worthwhile to do it?

Most of these action points could be applied to English, too.

## Developing vocabulary

This second example looks at building children’s vocabulary.

The curriculum at Thomas Jones Primary was re-planned about four years ago: ‘We wanted the rigour of subjects with the contextualisation of themes,’ says the head, ‘a desire that children learn things properly.’

Developing vocabulary has a very strong focus. ‘Most of the children don’t speak English at home,’ the head explains, ‘and even if they do, it’s Ladbroke Grove English, not Standard English. So, we teach them the best possible words.’ Key words are ‘hammered across lots of different contexts’ and incorporated explicitly and precisely into every topic that’s planned. A unit of work on the Victorians for Years 5 and 6 lists the following key vocabulary that is to be learnt:

### ***Key vocabulary***

boarding schools, monitors, logbooks, slates, inkwell, Acts of Parliament, factory report, law, politician, House of Lords, factories, mines, supervisor, inspector, machinery, era, stencil print, stippling, block print, roller, printing ink, calico, hessian, geometric shapes, space, symmetry, identical, reflective, rotate, translation, pattern, repeat, motif

The planning shows that history, art and geography are the principal National Curriculum subjects in this unit. Notice vocabulary that is relevant for maths and also for printing in art is being ‘hammered across’. Virtually all the words in the list are phonically regular, so that children can apply their phonic knowledge to reading and spelling them – although ‘Parliament’ is always going to be a challenge.

Key vocabulary is not just for the children, either; it’s also for the teachers, in essence, giving the message: ‘This is the level you should be working at with these children.’

Key teaching and assessment activities are built in. Visits to Linley Sambourne House Museum, the William Morris Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, The Ragged Schools Museum, The Dickens House Museum and the Museum of London provided ample opportunities for children to gather information for their speaking and

listening assessment: 'To research, plan and deliver a presentation to an audience on one aspect of Victorian life.' These visits also massively extended children's knowledge of where they lived and provided opportunities for talk. Since over half the children are eligible for free schools meals, the school is playing a role that, in more affluent areas, might be played by families.

What the example shows is that narrowing the gap is about intervention in its widest sense: the school's very direct actions to make a difference where children need help. Since 80% of the children do not speak English as their first language and many do not speak English at home, building up their vocabulary gradually and very deliberately is a fundamental job for the school.

Vocabulary-building starts in the Nursery. For example, at lunchtimes, around six children sit at each table, with an adult. Their teacher, one of the two assistant heads, is one of them. The tables have gingham tablecloths, knives, forks and spoons, and proper plates. There are glasses and jugs of water. Almost all the children eat a school meal. The school's chef sends the food to the Nursery in containers so that the adults can serve the children, ask them what they'd like and talk about the various foods. They explain that Yorkshire pudding is not a cake and needs to be eaten with a knife and fork. Conversation is encouraged; 'please' and 'thank you' are emphasised. This is how behaviour and vocabulary are taught and learnt.

The headteacher, talking about his school for this report, said, 'When children come through the gate, they're not Somali children or Pakistani children; they're Thomas Jones children'. He continued, 'There isn't a ceiling; there's only the ceiling we impose.'