Case Study
Penkridge Middle School

Marsh Lane,
Penkridge,
Stafford
ST19 5BW

9-13 Middle School
Semi-rural location

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The Issue

In 2016, PMS were looking for a new approach to Teaching and Learning, one that would improve outcomes for students. Previous leadership teams had introduced a range of initiatives and September 2016 represented a time to develop a consistent approach for all. The school had a reputation for good behaviour and this was supported by previous Ofsted inspections. Student voice from Autumn 2016 showed that learners recognised behaviours for learning when asked 'what makes a good learner?' Furthermore, book monitoring would often show a range of time demanding marking strategies that didn't always have the greatest impact on learning. On the other hand, monitoring also highlighted areas where meaningful feedback was not provided on a regular basis and therefore its impact was limited. Teachers were planning and setting Learning Intentions for each lesson, however they didn't clearly relate to success criteria; success was often related to completion of the activity. The impact for students was inconsistent.

Analysis of the issue

Autumn term lesson monitoring and student voice had identified a tendency to teach to the test as an issue. Evaluation of this, and of previous monitoring, showed that students were not being provided with opportunities to be active participants in their learning; instead learning was merely something that happened to them.

The drive for exam success was driven by our middle school structure. Students only join Penkridge in year 5 and often need time to adapt to the transition. This had resulted in increased pressure to cover content for SATS exams and address any gaps in knowledge, all within the two-year period of Years 5 and 6. As a consequence we had adopted a 'teach to the test' mentality. This approach did result in some improvements, however, the overall picture across cohorts was still one that could be described as mixed.

Our unique position as a Middle School also meant that, although access to specialist subject teaching in KS2 has great advantages, the downside is that students often fail to see the links between the different subjects. Therefore, need to increase awareness of how learning is linked and how skills should be transferable across different subjects was also identified.

As a result, we sought to find a new evidence based approach that would upskill our staff and engage students in their own learning. Across the school best practice was observed in 'pockets'. The challenge would be to adopt an approach that would allow these 'pockets' of good practice to become the norm across the school and in turn give all students the same enriching learning experiences, no matter what the lesson. We also firmly believed that the process of learning should be made overt to the students. In doing so, students would be shown that successful learning followed a similar process across all subjects and should enable them to make much better links between different subject areas and increasingly see skills as transferable from one lesson to another.

It was the responsibility of the leadership team throughout the school to buy in to this new Visible Learning approach and ensure it was effectively adopted by all staff.

The leadership team's desire to adopt a new evidence based approach led us to seek advice from our feeder high school who had previously begun their Visible Learning Journey. As a result of the progress made by the high school and our own research into the Hattie Visible Learning books we arranged for Craig Parkinson to deliver an INSET day to introduce Visible Learning to the whole staff. This excited everyone across the school and led to countless meetings to complete the Visible Learning matrix and evaluate our current position.

Before we introduced any new initiatives it was important for us to establish the current position of the school. To do this we conducted a student voice with the head teacher and a whole school survey undertaken by both staff and students. The results of this demonstrated a difference between the staff and student perceptions, for example 70% of staff believed students were provided with clear learning goals, however only 44% of our students agreed with this.

Additionally, 46% of students believed it was okay to make a mistake in learning compared with 85% of staff. From this we were keen to develop Visible Learning in our school to ensure staff and students were pulling in the same direction. It was here that our Visible Learning Journey began; we remained determined to place the students at the heart of all our Teaching and Learning strategies.

Development of the plan

Our plan to become a Visible Learning school started with investment in staff training. This resulted in Craig Parkinson delivering INSET days to the whole staff and further sessions for Middle Leaders. Staff were also provided with the opportunity to read the 'blue' Hattie book and senior leaders also read the 'white' Hattie book.

Visible Learning also became an integral part of our appraisal process. Staff performance management targets included 'To know thy impact' and 'To develop assessment capable learners'. We decided to focus our attention on 'Knowing thy impact' as there were many examples of indifferent teaching practice throughout the school, the challenge here was to get staff to focus the impact of the strategies they were using in the classroom and to consider whether it was having a significant impact on all learners.

Furthermore, our decision to focus on creating 'assessment capable' learners centred around our desire to create resilient and independent learners who could draw on a number of different strategies before reaching for the teacher or giving up in the face of challenge. Teachers and students were encouraged to think about Hattie's 3 key questions; where am I going? How am I doing? Where to next?

Implementation of the plan

From our initial middle leader training through Osiris and completion of the whole school Visible Learning audit, it was decided that the first step in our Visible Learning journey was to sharpen our Learning Intentions, ensuring they made the learning as visible as possible, as well as integrating the consistent use of success criteria in all lessons. We were quick to establish that Learning Intentions should reflect the end product of the lesson(s) and the Success Criteria would represent the processes the students need to complete to achieve the Learning Intention. As a result of this focus teachers were encouraged to plan with the 'end' in mind. Visible Learning was the focus of our school Improvement plan and as a result became a permanent agenda item for all subject leaders and part of every staff member's appraisal process.

To ensure this new Visible Learning culture was to become a permanent feature of Penkridge, whole school assemblies, displays and a common language were used to develop consistency of practise across all classrooms and to communicate the benefits of Visible Learning to our students. The initial changes made the learning more visible to students, allowing them to refer to both success criteria and learning intentions as a measure of success, and also as a next step in learning. Following the implementation of Learning Intentions and Success Criteria, the idea of "The Learning Pit" was adopted into lesson, and used as a reflection tool for students to assess their own progress and think about their own next step to "escape the pit". This supported our ambition to develop more resilient learners who would tackle challenges and use strategies such as the 5Bs or enable station before asking a teacher.

To ensure these initiatives had been securely embedded into lesson routines, we had a monitoring focus which identified good usage of the Visible Learning initiatives. To further assess the impact of the initial changes we carried out student voice interviews, and feedback was positive overall, suggesting that where Visible learning strategies had been adopted consistently, they were improving lessons. Throughout the implemented plan, student voice has been used as feedback to gauge the success and impact of changes. The monitoring was also used to inform the content of a Visible Learning INSET day. Staff were given exposure to the good practice that was developing in classrooms and subject leaders shared with the whole school how they had embedded Visible Learning in their individual areas.

As the plan developed teachers then focused on questioning and feedback. Staff received training on how to question effectively, using open questions to elicit answers which displayed and developed deep learning. Feedback had been identified as an area for improvement through student voice, as many students saw feedback as something they received only from the teacher, usually through marking, and many felt it was ineffective at improving their work. To change their understanding, further assemblies were used to highlight to students the number of avenues available to receive feedback, such as, peer, self, success criteria, teachers and marking. Consequently, we introduced "Michaela Marking", where teachers addressed common misconceptions as a whole, and "Live Marking" to provide immediate feedback during lessons. A further source of feedback for our students is the current development of WAGOLL boards (What a good one looks like). WAGOLL displays are provided to show students what a quality piece of work looks like, this in turn provides feedback to the student to improve their own work.

Throughout our Visible Learning journey, we continue to evaluate our practice through regular student voice and meetings with other Visible learning schools. This ensures leaders made informed decisions based on evidence and experiences of the students.

Evaluation

Evaluation of our Visible Learning journey has been integral to the process, allowing us to assess the impact of initiatives, as well as telling us where we were on our journey and where we needed to go next. We have evaluated our progress by a number of means, with students as the focal point for many.

For example:

- Visible Learning student survey – A survey was designed from the school audit following the original Osiris training. This survey was designed to measure the attitude of students towards learning. This survey was then repeated a term later to measure the change in student's outlook. Whilst the original survey showed students identified a good learner as one who displayed behaviour for learning, they didn't perceive learning as a dynamic process in which they played an active role. This attitude had measurably shifted by the second survey, with students recognising their role in learning and how they receive feedback from multiple sources, not just the teacher. By the time we conducted student voice in July 2018 students often described Visible learners as those that engage with the success criteria in lessons and those that help themselves and others to overcome mistakes. A Y5 student commented at the end of their first year "it's okay to make mistakes, you can learn from them" another said "mistakes are used to inform the teacher so they can help you". This student voice also demonstrated the different ways students receive feedback including verbal and written strategies.

- Student voice – Over a number of terms, we have built a bank of evidence which showcases the change within our school through student voice. A cross section of students were recorded giving their thoughts on visible learning, and these have been vital in assessing progress and setting new goals. Notably we conducted a "Diary Room" day, where students and staff were invited into a room with a camera to record their thoughts on visible learning. This was a great success and captured some of the enthusiasm for our new approach.

- Monitoring – Visible learning foci were given in all monitoring, allowing good practice to be shared and celebrated. Subject leaders and class teachers were invited to conduct peer observations to further spread good practice. Learning walks focused on "Pit" displays and their use in lessons and book trawls focused on feedback and use of learning intentions.

- External Observers – Both Ofsted and County observers have commented positively on the impact of Visible Learning to lessons and the school in general.

- GL Tests – Positive GL results show good attainment results for KS3 students who have experienced two years of Visible Learning. The summer 2018, externally marked GL Tests showed Y8 leavers achieved the following results in maths and English; In both areas a significant number of students achieved beyond the expected standard. This is compared with the national results of 77% of students at expected or above.
  - 2018 Maths - 89% of all students have made expected with 35% making higher than expected.
  - 2018 English - 81% of all students have made expected with 24% making higher than expected.

Furthermore, 2018 results show improvement in attainment when compared with 2015 GL results. The 2015 results represent the attainment of a previous cohort of students who had not experienced Visible Learning.

- 2015 Maths - 82% of all students have made expected with 38% making higher than expected.
- 2015 English - 50% of all students have made expected with 23% making higher than expected.

Our continuing evaluation has helped us to adopt a Visible Learning ethos rapidly throughout the school, creating a good level of consistency across classrooms and providing a familiar but effective framework for learners.

Where to next?

Our Visible Learning journey is now two years old and we eagerly begin our third year knowing our students are truly at the heart of every teacher's decision making to create an enriching and positive learning experience for all. We continue to strive to do better. Our journey is one which will never end as teachers continue to evaluate the impact of their teaching on students and students continue to reflect on their progress through regular success criteria.

Great progress has been made in teachers seeing learning through the eyes of the students and some progress has been made in students seeing themselves as their own teachers.

The next stage of our journey is to ensure feedback offered is regular, robust and meaningful to ensure it has maximum impact. To support with this goal, we intend to further develop, and place greater emphasis on, live and "Michaela" marking systems. The challenge is for our school to adapt a consistent approach to these new methods of formative assessment to ensure it is effective for all learners.

Furthermore, it is our responsibility to continue to develop assessment capable learners who are confident at offering meaningful feedback relating to work produced by peers and themselves. To support this, for this academic year, we have removed setting from our core timetable so all students have Visible Learning role models to support their peers in every classroom.

Our second aim for the next stage is to improve the skill of modelling and ensure consistently high standards in modelling across all staff and in all subject areas. To support this aim, we will be focusing on the use of WAGOLL (What A Good One Looks Like) in both lessons and the setting of homework tasks. Monitoring of the use of WAGOLL, used alongside Success Criteria, will form part of lesson observations. Furthermore, through increased collective efficacy across all subject areas, we hope that these changes will ensure outcomes for those in Key Stage 2 rise.

We are now part of a PVAT (Penk Valley Academy Trust) of schools from first through to high school who have all adopted the Visible Learning principles. The belief is that the PVAT (Penk Valley Academy Trust) will promote and instil our consistent Visible Learning messages to all children that pass through and this will strengthen students use and understanding of Visible Learning year-on-year.

We strongly believe that Visible Learning provides an improved way of learning for our students, therefore, as a school and PVAT (Penk Valley Academy Trust) it is our desire to be Judged by all external visitors by our Visible Learning philosophy.