Case Study
Merllyn County Primary School

visible learning plus

Foel Gron, Bagillt, CH6 6BB Wales	4–11 Primary School Semi-rural location	Key contact: Headteacher Tracy Jones

The Issue

At Ysgol Merllyn, our monitoring had shown inconsistencies in approach to teaching across the school. There was a mixture of quite direct teaching and some teachers were attempting to develop independence in the learners, particularly in Foundation Phase. However, discussions had shown that what this actually meant was unclear. In Wales, education reforms were moving towards a more skills based curriculum and schools having freedom to decide on content.

We began implementing Visible Learning in October 2014.

Analysis of the issue

When we had our School Capability Assessment in October 2014, our aspirations were high for Inspired and Passionate teachers but we lacked the understanding to develop Visible Learners, lacked a shared language of learning and although we were quite strong at measuring progress, we had weaker understanding of measuring the impact of teaching. Initially, we wanted to understand the learners and teaching staff's understanding of what makes a good learner and how the learners can then become more responsible for their learning.

We filmed learners from Reception to Year 6 and completed questionnaires with all teaching and support staff. On analysis, it was very clear that there was a real lack of understanding of what effective learners do. Most learners talked about behaviour and compliance and what they thought the teachers might want to hear. The teaching and support staff found it difficult to articulate characteristics of effective learners.

With regards to Effective Feedback, as a school we believed this area was strong and we had assessment for learning activities embedded. However, when we assessed through a learning walk whether our learners had a very clear learning intentions and success criteria in the first place, it was identified that how they were presented to the learners was inconsistent. Also, we did not have any understanding of instructional feedback.

As a staff we also completed the online matrix to assess where we were and what evidence we had. This informed our next planning stage for our impact teams In conclusion, our learners were not active with their learning, they were weak at self-regulation, our teaching staff, although had high aspirations, needed guidance and training on effective evidence based practice.

Development of the plan

Our Capability Assessment did show that there was very good and effective practice embedded and we wanted to build upon that. After our Evidence Into Action day 1, a senior teacher each took on one of the four Visible Learning areas and we devised the following plan.

• Ensuring that the learners had a good understanding of what makes a good learner. Initially, we decided on learner dispositions but then moved onto use Shirley Clarke Learning Powers consistently throughout the school. All the powers were introduced and one was focused on each week. Initially our reward system was based on using the Learning Powers but we then removed these comparative rewards and replaced with praise for effort.

• Introduced a shared language of learning. Policies were reviewed and approved. All classes implemented a Learning Pit and used it as an analogy for struggle and cognitive conflict. Each child had an individual learning pit and group Learning Pits. Learners were encouraged to use the language of being stuck and strategies such as 'Three Before Me' to get out of the pit. Solo taxonomy symbols and actions were introduced and embedded across the school so the learners understood whether their learning was 'surface' or 'deep'.

• Learning Intentions and Success Criteria became much clearer. Co-construction of Success Criteria became much more commonplace. At first, all teachers used 'Learning tickets' identifying the learning and self reflection and after time these were then used whole class as the learners were able to self-regulate better.

• Learning Zones and talk partners were introduced as

opposed to 'ability groups' This allowed the learners to self-differentiate and ensured higher quality 'talk' in the classrooms.

•   Developed Inspired and Passionate Teachers by having triad Impact Cycles. Teaching teams were given protected time to develop an area that was pertinent to them. For example, one team developed the use of feedback by trialling James Nottingham's Challenging Learning Through Feedback seven steps.

•   Started using effect sizes in maths. Each maths unit had a review at the end. The teachers began doing the review at the beginning as a pre-assessment then repeating the review at the end. This then generated an effect size. The teachers could then analyse effectiveness of their teaching. Over the course of the year, the maths leader could then analyse which areas of maths were the weakest and planning could be changed accordingly.

Each of the above was led initially by a senior member of staff then after the Impact Coaching training, they then led on different areas. Each year, the teachers feedback to governors what they have been developing that year.

Implementation of the plan

The plans were all implemented using the Visible Learning action plan. Initially a senior teacher led on each of the four strands. This kept it as a high profile. All INSET days were dedicated to Visible Learning and staff meetings were planned out to review progress. One feature that was very important and successful was the use of pupil voice and them being included in driving the changes.

In summary:

The school improvement plan and visible learning plan were merged.

•   We appointed an Education Ministry who championed and promoted Visible Learning throughout the school. On our last Visible Learning open day, the ministry led the visit and a Q and A session for 30 visitors

•   We changed Parents' Evening to Learner Led Conferences so the learners understood their role and responsibilities in their learning

•   Teachers introduced strategies for measuring their impact. The teachers began using Solo Taxonomy for planning topics and RE. The learners had their own Solo Progression plan

•   When reviewing our school improvement plan, any new interventions have Visible Learning central. For example, we introduced a new concrete, pictorial, abstract pedagogy in maths. All four strands of Visible Learning

strands are addressed. We ask ourselves, for example, how do we develop assessment capable visible mathematicians? How do we inspire our teachers? How do we measure progress and the effectiveness of teaching? How do we give effective feedback and feed forward?

Evaluation

The evidence gathering tools we used were pupil interviews and questionnaires. We also used questionnaires with all staff. The plan became the focus of school improvement.

In November 2016, an audit was completed using Google Forms for the teaching staff to measure impact, the results were:

• 77% of teachers had implemented an agreed language of learning and this was displayed and embedded
• 77% of teachers had learning Toolkits readily accessible to learners
• 100% of learners knew what the learning intention was for that particular lesson and where it was displayed to refer to
• 100% of learners had learning tickets in their books and the learners could articulate the information on them
• Only the upper key stage 2 pupils were regularly assessing their own work and setting next steps
• 66% of pupils were peer assessing regularly
• All classes had learning pits displayed and all learners asked could explain the concept
• 22% of pupils could articulate their next steps in learning accurately

The plan had some success however, we soon realised that this shift was going to take time so during our regular reviews we learnt that certain aspects needed more priority and some actions needed implementing at a later date. For example, we wanted the learners to understand what a good learner was. Initially we had great success but the learners only understood this on a surface level. We then researched how to give it more depth. We looked at Claxton's Building Learning Power and Clarke's Learning Powers. Both give more depth and understanding and decided to go with Learning Powers.

Is there evidence that developing a visible learning approach has been successful?

Our development of 'Know Thy Impact' has been very successful. All learning across the school has impact gathering built in. In maths we use pre and post assessments, Solo Taxonomy is used to gather pre teaching information. The gathering of pre teaching information is embedded.

Feedback across the school has greatly improved, not just the quality of feedback but the attitudes to receiving

feedback. The culture of welcoming errors is embedded.

We had regular reviews and walkthroughs to gather evidence. We filmed the learners a second time and asked them the same questions about being a good learner. The answers the second time were much improved and they talked about learning behaviours and attitudes.

Overall, attainment and achievement has improved over the last four years.

Where to next?
In September 2018, we plan to begin our fourth cycle of Visible Learning. This will include revisiting the matrix and identifying strengths and next steps to further embed Visible Learning.
We are looking to implement Direct Instruction more effectively. Learner progressions are an area
we still want to improve on so learners are clear on their next steps.