

Evaluation of Year 6 Academic Coaching 2007/08 and proposals for its development in 08/09 within Transforming Leicester's Learning Action Plan

This paper has been written by the Y6 Academic Coaching scheme leaders, Pete Chilvers and Liz Lambert, working closely with pupils, coaches and headteachers who have been involved this year. This document has been specifically informed by a process of pupil evaluation and two development meetings with 35 coaches and 30 headteachers.

Opening position statement

The introduction of Academic Coaching during 2007/08 has been a positive development for Leicester primary schools. It has introduced processes, skills and tools that have added something worthwhile for targeted Year 6 pupils. Schools are now requesting funding for a second year to develop and embed the approach. Even though this initiative has been introduced quite belatedly in the pupils' primary career, it has added a distinct strand of support that has been universally well received. Positive impacts have been recorded in pupil attitude, motivation and rates of progress.

The name of the scheme, Academic Coaching, has been very popular with schools. It provides a non-judgemental sense of purpose and implies nothing about failure or special needs, in fact some pupils have taken pride in their status as 'academic'!

Starting from an explanation and evaluation of this year's arrangements, **this paper presents the case for continuing support during 2008/09 with a shift of emphasis that leads to embedding good practice that can be sustained by schools thereafter.**

Understandably, this paper is broadly qualitative in its evaluation as KS2 SATs results are not yet known. Nevertheless, **many schools report good pupil progress** within their teacher assessment judgements. The Local Authority Assessment Adviser comments, *"I cannot yet be convinced as to the difference academic coaching has made to pupil's learning as we need to wait for results. However the last set of internal school based assessments in schools showed children hitting FFTD predictions on the whole. On a micro level - I know pupils can do things they didn't understand before because of the input"*

I would like to say that the Academic Coaching scheme has been excellent, was impressively speedily delivered and, as far as I can see, has run smoothly. The children have certainly benefited, which I am sure will be verified when the KS2 SATs results come through. I would love to see this coaching scheme continue next year. It is probably the best 'initiative' that the city has seen.

(Primary headteacher)

The schools

This year's arrangements

All schools with Y6 pupils have had full opportunity to be involved, irrespective of standards within school, as their involvement was based solely upon pupil needs. All schools except three took part, - these either had something very similar already in operation or such a small Year 6 cohort that they opted not to participate, but made use of the Learning Logs.

Evaluation

It has been appropriate to base the scheme on pupil, not school, need. Across the city, it has been important to get the work underway in all schools to support the development of coaching skills and work towards these methods becoming embedded.

Suggestions for 2008/09

Maintain the scheme for all schools with Y6 for 2008/09, once again based on pupil identification, not school category. Look into how these pupils might be supported in Y7.

Some pupils use the coaching session to air their communication difficulties within school. The one-to-one is invaluable for many pupils as many are too timid to say they don't understand in class. (A coach)

The pupils

This year's arrangements

Over 1,000 Year 6 pupils have received coaching since Dec/Jan. The initial criteria was 'ought to achieve level 4', ie FFT D estimate 3.5 – 4.5, filtered with a second criteria 'might not achieve level 4 despite all support work' and the third criteria, 'would be well suited and likely to respond well to the kind of support available from academic coaching'.

Evaluation

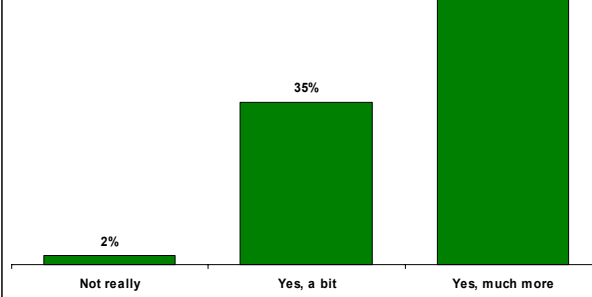
Generally these criteria identified appropriate pupils but there has been a clear need to retain some flexibility in order to bring pupils in and out of the coaching sessions where appropriate. In one or two cases pupils with FFT estimates ~4, working in Jan at upper level 2, have made rapid progress. Pupil selection is as much to do with pupil attitude and motivation (willing to engage and desire to learn) as with progress indicators. The general methodology of academic coaching could/should be embedded within schools across a wider age range with more staff involved, but the distinct nature of intensive support for Y6 should be continued.

Suggestions for 2008/09

Introduce the methodology more widely to schools but support/fund an intensive scheme in Year 6 only. Use similar criteria to this year, permitting certain flexibility. Ask schools to identify most likely pupils at the end of this school year while pupils are still in Year 5 (using a moderation of FFT D, and end of Year 5 teacher assessment/optional SATs) and undertake some sample sessions to check aptitude.

It takes me a little bit further about what we usually do in the lessons. It helps me to understand more clearly about the subjects and I can learn more. (Y6 pupil)

Is coaching giving you more confidence in Maths?



The coaches

This year's arrangements

The group of coaches have included a number of personnel. All are qualified primary teachers – Year 6 teachers, teachers in other year groups with an expertise of knowing next steps to move a children working within level 3 to level 4, local authority consultants, supply teachers and other members of staff that schools have self-selected including Deputies and Heads. SDSA acted as the recruitment agency, securing sufficient staff and matching them with schools as required. One or two schools used the funds to secure other services to free up Year 6 teachers to do their own coaching.

Evaluation

The deployment of coaches has worked well. As a general rule it has worked best when a school has had time and capacity to develop their own approach. Some schools report major benefits of having external personnel, others similarly prefer the use of their own staff. With greater lead-in time schools should be more able to secure their preferred arrangements and take greater ownership of the coach deployment. Schools who adopted a more flexible approach obtained better value for money than those who paid staff directly or where staff were employed externally. Teacher status is not necessarily essential – the critical factor is an understanding of detailed progress in maths, reading and writing from level 2/3 into level 4.

Suggestions for 2008/09

Give schools longer lead-in time to enable them to source their preferred coaching arrangements. However, if more flexibility is permitted, safeguard funding to ensure schools only use money to support coaching work so that the impact of the scheme is not diluted. Where a school is receiving significant support from an LA consultant as part of the Supporting School Improvement Strategy, then these schools might be offered support from this person as their coach, otherwise LA consultants should not be used as coaches. SDSA should recruit a 'pool' of available external coaches should schools require them.

All children loved the special time that coaching provided and gave very positive comments, "It became very clear after today". 100% came along enthusiastically to every session and were really involved with their own needs. I find that when children know what is required, then they are so much more likely to deliver. Isn't this what our job is all about? (Coach)

The arrangements for coaching and nature of the sessions

This year's arrangements

Sessions have been based upon 15 minutes per pupil per week. Some sessions have involved groups of 2 or 3 pupils with time allocations adjusted accordingly. The Learning Logs have been central to the sessions. The 'academic' focus has been on maths, reading and writing. Fronter VLE (virtual learning environment) has been used to complement the coaching work through providing online activities for the pupils to undertake and access to resources for coaches. Some schools actively engaged parents in the process.

Evaluation

The timing guidance of 15 minutes was about right, although flexibility is essential. Learning Logs are very worthwhile. The use of Fronter VLE platform is worthwhile to support this work and needs further development. Parental involvement has been varied, from a vital supporting component to non-existent. The critical success factors (appended) provide further information about what has worked well this year.

Thank you for the support you are giving to my child through this coaching work. It is also helping me know what best to support him with.
(Parent of a Y6 pupil)

Suggestions for 2008/09

That schools commit to following the critical success factors below as a condition of grant.

Critical success factors for Academic Coaching

Within the school

1. Clear internal communications about the coaching work with other staff to get whole-school commitment to the concept and an understanding of what it is for.
2. Integrating it as one of several kinds of intervention support, targeted for those pupils identified as likely to benefit from it most.
3. Clarity of criteria for selecting pupils to receive coaching.
4. Strong links between the coaching focus and other lessons.
5. Designated regular time and undisturbed space.
6. Regular update meetings between the coach and the class teacher.
7. Other staff 'coming alongside' from time to time to develop their skills.
8. Timetabling it to complement other lessons and not withdraw from other essential activities.

About the coach

1. They do not necessarily need to be teachers – although precise understanding of the small steps of the learning journey between National Curriculum (sub) levels is absolutely essential as this is the primary purpose of the coaching.
2. The role is a blend of teaching and coaching – the focus on learning objectives is critical, but so are the coaching elements.
3. There is a need to be flexible and be able to respond to the issues that the pupils introduce within the session.
4. The most important behaviour/characteristics are those that build trust and confidence for the pupils and help them to develop greater personal responsibility for their own progress.
5. Good working relationships with the other school staff are the key.
6. Preparation time is important if coaching sessions are to be sufficiently pacy and focused.

About the pupils

1. Pupils need to be carefully selected for coaching - the criteria needs to include not just slow progress but also a desire and willingness to improve – this is too precious a resource and too short a time (within sessions) to use to address anything other than the 'learning journey'.
2. There needs to be a degree of flexibility about the criteria for selection as experience has shown that coaching has been the key to engaging some disaffected learners.
3. Coaching is most effective when pupils show a willingness to try out new skills/consolidate learning between sessions.
4. Pupils mustn't be over-stressed by this additional 'intervention'.

About the session

1. A rough planning guideline of 15 minutes per pupil per week is about right.
2. Up to 3 (max) pupils might come together to share a longer session but **only** when they share the same tightly-focussed learning needs.
3. The Learning Log provides a good focus for the work within and between coaching sessions.
4. Most features of the 2007/08 Learning Log are appropriate – a few revisions are suggested to make it less cumbersome.
5. There is not time to fetch pupils – they need to be prepared and supported to be ready and on time.

The Learning Logs

This year's arrangements

Individual Learning Logs have been supplied for all pupils. The log contains progress charts, carbonated record sheets for each session and detailed progress descriptors (APP). The log contains maths, reading and writing with progress descriptors of the 'learning journey' level 3 to level 4

Evaluation

Pupils really liked the Learning Logs as they provided a useful vehicle and status, although the carbonated pages became a little onerous over time. The progress charts need not be repeated on every page. There is a need to extend the range slightly beyond just L3 to L4. Coaching sessions were essentially so closely focussed that having all three (maths, reading and writing) together was not necessary. Also, not every child required coaching in all 3 areas.

Suggestions for 2008/09

Three separate logs should be produced for reading, writing and maths with the progress chart produced once at the front with a rolling/date aspect to indicate completion/coverage. The APP descriptors at the back should be retained and extended. A page per session is necessary (carbon not necessary) with spaces for date, objective/focus, a work space for notes/practice/task, and a feedback/sign off section. The logs should be made available electronically to all schools to adapt and modify for use with other pupils.

My coach tells everyone to believe in themselves which encourages me to do better – she is always guiding me.

I think it's good because it makes me feel like I'm not rubbish at maths. Without these coaching lessons I wouldn't get the level I hope for.

My coach helps me to improve and it is making me feel more confident for when I do my SATS.

Training and development for coaches

This year's arrangements

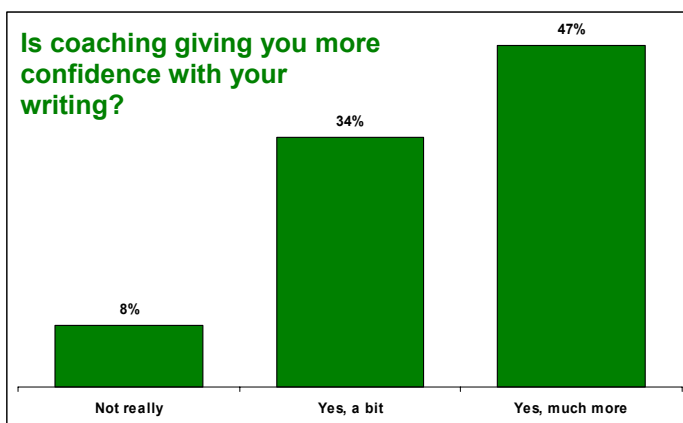
Liz Lambert and Pete Chilvers have centrally led a training programme that was fully funded (on attendance). The training blended the development of coaching skills and teaching strategies as well as dealing with administration issues. Resources from these sessions were distributed by email to all schools and saved onto Fronter for all coaches to access.

Evaluation

The training has been very worthwhile. The blend was appropriate and should be retained on a central basis, enabling coaches to meet others doing the work to share and develop best practice. All Year 6 teachers, whether they are coaches or not, should be included/invited. The email communications were good.

Suggestions for 2008/09

Roll forward a similar model as this year but front-load introductory training, running it in July and September for a wider range of staff. Hold half-termly sessions for those actually doing the coaching.



The children have grown in confidence and become more able to verbalise their strengths and next steps. The impact on their capacity to improve cannot be under-estimated. I whole-heartedly recommend academic coaching. (Coach)

Co-ordinating the scheme and financial arrangements

This year's arrangements

SDSA has co-ordinated the scheme. Support has been provided by the Primary Strategy Officer (Learning Services) to collate data and pupil questionnaire responses.

Pupil achievement data has been collected and will be monitored for NC impact once SATs results are known. Pupil attitudes and engagement has been evaluated and the critical success factors have been identified. Monthly financial claim forms have triggered payments on actual hours of coaching delivered.

Evaluation

A contractual grant arrangement may be more appropriate, providing a balance that permits flexibility and secures provision and accountability.

Suggestions for 2008/09

SDSA to continue as co-ordinators/leaders, especially as Liz Lambert has taken a school-based post. A contract with schools should be developed to provide ring-fenced grant funding, calculated on a needs-led formula, requiring the following in return from schools:

- Money must be used to secure Academic Coaching for identified pupils
- Pupil progress data tracking on inception and then termly
- A commitment to follow the critical success guidance (appended)
- Monitor and report the impact of coaching on pupil achievement
- Wider Year 6 staff to attend one September introductory session
- Coaches to attend half-termly training and development sessions (twilight preferred)

The grant may be used either directly to fund the coaching or indirectly, as some schools have done this year, to fund some other activity, eg sports, drama that released existing Year 6 staff to provide the coaching. Payment should be made on an instalment basis to secure contract compliance, ie no compliance, no money!

Dear Academic Coaching Group, I am writing to tell you about the improvement in my English work, thanks to your wonderful device of your coaching sessions. I feel that I have improved in many departments of my learning. I have much more confidence than I did at the start of Year 6. I have improved in my use of sentences and commas. I am much better at writing letters than at the start of the year. I still am struggling a bit in writing stories, creating emphasis and using question and exclamation marks. Apart from that, I feel far more confident. I can improve on my handwriting and make an effort to use more rhetorical questions, adverbial phrases and adjectival clauses. I believe that I could create more emphasis, aim for 3 points in handwriting and improve my paragraph structure.
(Y6 pupil)

I have been impressed with the tenacity of the leadership team. They have made academic coaching not only a reality but a success in terms of pupils' attitudes to their learning and teachers' attitudes towards their pupils. (Headteacher)

The model, when linked with ongoing AfL provides a powerful driver for school improvement. £ for £ it is probably one of the most effective interventions. (Headteacher)

Data for the pupils coached this year

Data collection has been compounded by the lack of a coherent system within the local authority. Nevertheless some has been collected for almost all of the pupils being coached and analysis provides the following approximations:

	Average FFT:D	Average NC Dec 08	Uplift required in 6 months
Maths	4.237	3.314	0.923 level
English (where subject overall data provided)	4.155	3.394	0.761 level
Reading	4.265	3.573	0.692 level
Writing	3.974	3.408	0.566 level