

CASE STUDY: CRANMER PRIMARY SCHOOL



Empowering staff using strengths based approaches

Cranmer Primary School is a large three form entry primary school located in the London Borough of Merton. The organisation has approximately 100 staff members and 710 pupils. I have been the Headteacher of this large primary school since September 2015.

The aim of this case study is to encapsulate the approaches I am taking to move the school forwards. It provides useful examples of staff empowerment and engagement that can be used and developed by other organisations.

Appreciative Inquiry

“... the co-operative co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organisations, and the world around them..... it involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential” - Cooperider, Whitney, Stavros, and Fry, 2008

When an organisation is in need of improvement it can be tempting to provide a quick fix, troubleshooting approach in which staff are given a mandate or directive.

As the newly appointed Headteacher of Cranmer Primary school I decided to use a very different approach - Appreciative Inquiry - to set the direction for my leadership of Cranmer.

The essence of an Appreciative Inquiry approach is that it focuses on highlighting existing strengths within an organisation; even when, to all intents and purposes, outcomes are poor.

The development day at Cranmer primary school consisted of using both an Appreciative Inquiry and World Café approach to enable staff to talk and listen to each other about their desired outcomes and future for the organisation. During the day I facilitated discussion of a series of questions, and reflections on our conversations. I organised the training space in a relaxed and convivial way so that staff felt at ease discussing and sharing their differing perspectives. This spirit of inquiry was the beginning of a journey in which staff views and perspectives were given value across the organisation. The approach I took gave a clear message to staff that as a leader I was going to listen to them and value their contributions. This was fundamental towards reinvigorating the morale of the staff team. I have continued to embed this conversational approach over the past two years. Opportunities for conversation and reflection are purposely planned for. Staff have many opportunities to ‘imagine’ (the ‘Dream’ stage of AI) the school operating at its very best. The belief that the school can be outstanding and is on a journey permeates the organisation.



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Vision and Values

“Great leaders have a vision, and the ability to manifest it. Defining your own vision begins with looking and listening. You look and listen to the situation around you, but you also look and listen inside.” Deepak Chopra

Cranmer’s vision: Creating a community of collaborative, caring, creative and critical thinkers.

Values: Trust, Respect and Resilience

A well-crafted vision and clear values are fundamental for all organisations. Even more important is developing this so that all stakeholders ‘live and breathe’ the vision and the values. In my current organisation the school vision and values underpin everything that we do as a school.

Cranmer’s vision and values have been developed and refined with all stakeholders using an inquiry approach. Time and space is purposefully planned to discuss the whole school vision and values as part of a regular cycle of staff meetings to reflect on how our vision is developing and how we can embed it further. As a result, we have developed a collegiate culture of collaborative teamwork.

It is important to plan in strategic opportunities to embed our vision and values on an on-going basis. Not only does this reinforce key messages but involves all stakeholders in assessing progress towards the vision.

Leadership development days are planned within all layers of the organisation allowing staff to reflect upon and consider the progress of key targets and priorities against the school vision.

“Without exception [100%] staff understand what they are trying to achieve as a school. Most staff [96%] feel that senior leaders ensure a clarity of purpose, vision and school improvement priorities and the majority of staff believe that the school has clear values.”

- An external staff survey conducted in 2017

Everything that we do as a school reflects the vision and values. Our vision and values underpin our curriculum; they inform our school development plan and performance management. They are incorporated into assemblies and are reflected in our learning environments. Visitors to school will encounter them in the displays they see on the walls and the conversations they have with the two pupils assigned to meet and greet them on arrival. They will see children developing critical thinking skills, for example, through collective enquiries. Using a stimulus such as a video, an object, a piece of music, an image, and a concept such as love, or beauty, children create an enquiry by asking different types of questions. Our aim is to equip our children, whatever their background, to be



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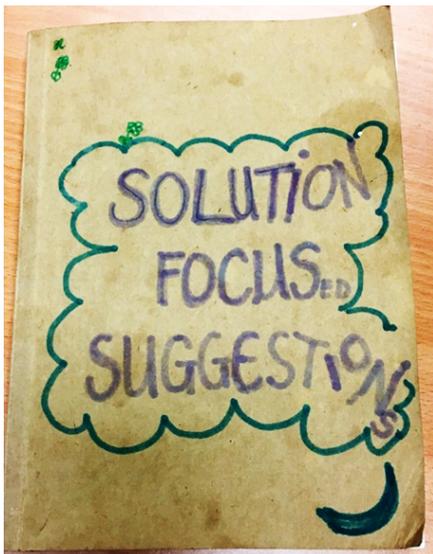
able to think for themselves, ask questions, reason, debate and argue logically, developing self confidence and resilience, strengthening their mental and emotional wellbeing, and protecting them against, for example, radicalisation.

Coaching

“A one –to –one conversation focused on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate.” -

Van Nieuwerburgh – 2012

As a leader I am passionate about creating a culture in which staff are empowered and listened to. I use coaching as a means to facilitate this.



The implementation of a coaching culture to support the school in raising standards and moving forward is a key priority of our school development plan. The aim is to empower staff by facilitating self-directed learning, personal growth and improved performance.

The strategy I am using to develop this is by training interested individuals within the school to coach others across the organisation using the GROW model. I believe that this has more impact than deploying external coaches. It allows individuals to develop another suite of skills, through two days of training, with an intervening period to practise coaching skills and write them up as case studies.

These and the learning achieved are validated through an external qualification. This motivates those seeking to develop themselves more broadly, and allows coaching across our school cluster group, thereby disseminating the new learning and approach more widely and increasing its impact.

Once trained these coaches are available for any staff who wish to be coached. Newly qualified teachers are automatically assigned a coach to support them through their first year of teaching. All coaching sessions are confidential. The impact of this has been the creation of a solutions focused culture in which staff feel listened to and empowered to come up with their own solutions. This has increased the effectiveness of our middle management team, who now run their own meetings to sort out many of the day-to-day issues that arise in running a school, leaving the senior leadership team to focus on the strategic thinking



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and direction of the school. A further benefit has been a reduction, against the national trend, of NQTs leaving, disillusioned and feel unsupported and unable to cope.

“My NQT mentor has supported me every step of the way and without the backing of Cranmer’s friendly, experienced and down to earth staff I would have not have made it through my NQT year. This is a school I want to continue to learn from as I am proud of the teacher I have become.”

- A recently newly qualified teacher at Cranmer

Staff Well-being

Teacher well-being is fundamental to the success of schools. Many studies highlight the impact that teacher workload has upon stress levels.

At Cranmer staff well-being is considered paramount. Staff well-being days are held bi-annually, and all new staff have a well-being session as part of our induction programme.

An example of what is on offer during our well-being days is illustrated here. Reiki and mindfulness are offered to staff on an on-going basis.



Cranmer Wellbeing Day!
Thursday 30th March

Healthy Breakfast
Come and join us from 8am in the Court Hall to kick start your day with a healthy breakfast!

Forever Living
Have a relaxing hand massage or facial massage using the very best products from Forever Living—the largest grower, manufacturer and distributor of Aloe Vera products in the world.

Life Coaching
The coaching process addresses specific personal projects, business successes, general conditions and transitions in the client's personal life, relationships or profession by examining what is going on right now, discovering what your obstacles or challenges might be, and choosing a course of action to make your life be what you want it to be.

Work-Life Balance
Learn how to combat the cumulative effect of increased working hours and a busy home life, with a talk in the Court Hall after school. These daily struggles have an important effect on the lifestyle of a huge number of people, which is likely to prove damaging to their mental well-being.

Zumba
Join our taster class at lunchtime in the Crescent Main Hall. It's a total workout, combining all elements of fitness: cardio, muscle conditioning, balance and flexibility, boosted energy and a serious dose of awesome each time you leave class. Please bring appropriate clothing/footwear and water.

Reiki
Reiki is a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing. If one's "life force energy" is low, then we are more likely to get sick or feel stress, and if it is high, we are more capable of being happy and healthy.

Henna
Enjoy the intricate designs of traditional Henna on your hands and arms. Originally from ancient Egypt and India, this form of temporary tattoo was used for religious ceremonies, weddings and festivals.

Chill Out Room
Just need a break? Head to the Library for a stress free, work free safe haven! We will even play some relaxing music. How's that for chill?!

Cake Decorating
Fancy yourself a dab hand in everything frosting? Rita will be holding a sugar craft workshop in the Sunstone room after school. Please bring a container to take your goodies home in!

Tai Chi
Unwind with our taster Tai Chi class after school in the Studio Hall. A gentle and calming way to exercise and increase longevity.

Energy Management & Relaxation
Understand how to best utilise your time and energy and how to relax after a busy day, with Nicole Barron.

**** Forever Living, Life Coaching, Henna, Reiki, Energy Management and Relaxation will be occurring throughout the school day and will be based in more private locations. Each will have a 20 minute session. Please email your preferences and I will allocate you a slot.**



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Cranmer is currently involved in an innovative project in which six teachers have been trained to Reiki Level 1; with six more teachers being trained in 2018. Reiki is a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing.

This is another approach which has had a key impact on the retention of staff, in a climate where teacher recruitment is a National issue.

Conclusion

Together, the whole staff team is turning this school into a great place to learn and develop, whether a pupil or a member of staff. Employee voice has been key to developing our strategic narrative, our vision, and developing a values-based and values-driven, collaborative, inclusive, solution-focussed culture that empowers our management teams to take the initiative and give of their best each and every day, so our pupils leave school with the best chance of reaching their potential.

“The teachers let you believe then you achieve.”

- A Year 10 pupil at Cranmer

