

## Remodelling in Swindon - A Case Study

### Covingham Park Infant School

'Workforce remodeling' is a new name given to a process, which we have been engaged in since I became head teacher seven years ago.

It is a useful term however because it concerns some key issues of school improvement and allows them to be considered in a more holistic way.

But it is not new, I'm sure, to any school.

The following story precedes the opening paragraph on Emotional Health and Physical Well - Being in our H.S.A. File:

#### Frog Story

A group of frogs were traveling through the woods, and two of them fell into a deep pit. All the other frogs gathered around the pit.

When they saw how deep the pit was, they told the two frogs that they were as good as dead.

The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump up out of the pit with all of their might.

The other frogs kept telling them to stop, that they were as good as dead.

Finally, one of the frogs took heed to what the frogs were saying and gave up. He fell down and died.

The other frog continued to jump as hard as he could. Once again, the crowd of frogs yelled at him to stop the pain and just die.

He jumped even harder and finally made it out.

When he got out, the other frogs said, 'Did you not hear us?'

The Frog explained to them that he was deaf.

He thought they were encouraging him the entire time.

And the moral of this story?

1. There is power of life and death in the tongue. An encouraging word to someone who is down can lift them up and help them through the day.
2. A destructive word to someone who is down can be what it takes to kill them.

Be careful of what you say. Speak life to those who cross your path.



The power of words.... It is sometimes hard to understand that an encouraging word can go such a long way.

Anyone can speak words that can rob another of the spirit to continue in difficult times.

It is the head teacher's view that academic success, pupil behavior, and the indoor and outdoor learning environment depends for its success on how well adults working in the school relate to each other.

It is a pointless exercise to try to improve pupil behaviour or indeed any other aspect of school life if staff are unhappy.

Scrupulous attention should be paid to recognition and praise.

Initiative, recognizing it and celebrating it are essential to progress.

It can make a good idea become a great one.

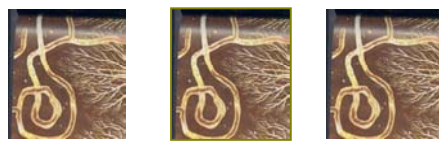
It inspires others.

It broadens minds.

In its absence the school becomes, at best 'ok'.

The following case study is an imperfect retrospective of how staff were given the freedom to use their initiative in tackling 'Workforce Remodeling and the Reduction of Stress in the Workplace

### Phase 1 - July 2001-December 2003



The head teacher undertook a 'Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers', otherwise known as 'LPSH'.

Staff completed a confidential questionnaire on the school and the performance of the head teacher, which was sent for professional data analysis.

Both the HSA preparatory audit and the data produced for LPSH revealed that the weakest area, in fact the only real weakness, was in the differing

perceptions about 'Recognition' and Praise' held by the Head teacher and those held by the staff. This was the area in which most work needed to be done.

We have always prided ourselves in being a "good" school. Academic standards are consistently high. Standards of behaviour are excellent.

What the audit revealed however, was that only 30% of the staff questioned felt that the school consciously worked towards reducing staff stress. Only 50% felt that they were given the recognition for the work they did.

We used this data as the starting point for much work in this area.

A series of staff meetings explored the ways in which life could be made less stressful. The stress inducing aspects discussed ranged from the trivial yet significant, to central, cultural issues associated with stress and 'work pressure'.

The fact that all staff were so committed to their work was we felt a double edged sword. Even when staff felt they were 'drowning' they never compromised on standards and they never complained. The head didn't really know how 'emotionally healthy' her staff were. Absenteeism was minimal.

### Action Planning



The following is the second draft of a list that we intended to implement following discussions at staff meetings. It formed the basis of an action plan.

(It has not been checked for stylistic or syntactical consistency! Sometimes there is repetition of a point because more than one member of staff reiterates it.)

I think that the list illustrates that staff felt unimpeded once given the opportunity, to talk freely about concerns, **including** those relating to the head teacher's style of management.

Stress inducing aspects of my job	Some possible remedies or means to counterbalance stress:
Parent Consultations	<p>H T to take the children in the hall from 2 - 2.30 p.m. onwards, thereby allowing prep time.</p> <p>A.O. to work later on these days to distribute tea and smiles.</p>
<p>Pressure/workload on myself and Children Aspect: The sometimes unrealistic expectations that are placed on some children.</p>	<p>Low level days Low level periods within the day Pupils to be given individual interest time Year 6 children involved? Or Year 5?</p>
<p>Communication within the school Aspect: Channels of communication not always clear. Some people know things and not others. This sometimes happens when we discuss things informally at playtime/lunchtime.</p>	<p>Events/visitors at school would appreciate clarity on what to expect and what to prepare - if at all possible.</p> <p>White board in staff room as a diary. Changes more easily rectified. Needs to be ready before 8.55 am each morning. Hall timetable. Make sure all staff know if hall is needed by a visitor.</p> <p>Ok as long as everything is written on the diary.</p>
Paper and/or information overload	<p>Reduce number of newsletters done! Is it possible for information to be presented/summarized into bullet points, with a section to <u>action</u>?</p> <p>More time needs to be allowed for staff to fill in forms, questionnaires etc. H.T <b>not</b> to leave in drawer on Friday and expect it done by Monday - w/e plans can be already made!</p> <p>Don't overload us with too much information during staff meetings. Not expecting us to complete a report/review in a weekend - (i.e. Being told on Friday for Monday).</p> <p>Clear, detailed lists/info next to diary (e.g. those provided for story-telling day) is good. They also avoid next problem! - Paper &amp; info overload.</p>
Report Writing	<p>Ensure that Summer half term is <u>event</u> free to concentrate on the reports! E.g. no late social/or presentation sessions.</p> <p>Major change last year to 'Report Assist' caused stress and much waste of</p>

<p>Aspect:  Much improved since put on computer.  It is just a task that has to be done.  Gathering data assessments in preparation for report writing.</p>	<p>time. Do <u>not</u> change again for a few years!</p> <p>A non-contact morning or afternoon for each member of staff during first half term of the summer term. I know I could get 2 or 3 foundation subjects done in this time.</p> <p>Reception teachers would benefit from a non-contact sessions before Easter to plan how best to implement new Profile (including changes to ex Listing assessment, parent consultations etc). This would avoid lengthy extra after-school planning when already tired!</p>
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**Whilst some of the above concerns are unique to Covingham Park Infant School and the management style of the head, some issues raised by staff must feature, or have done so, on the ‘stress inducing aspects list’ aka ‘what DO they expect next .... list’ voiced, or worse, silently endured, by committed teachers in staff rooms up and down the land.**

**The action was swift and fairly effortlessly implemented. There were neither financial implications nor major organizational changes needed. Addressing a list albeit a fairly minor one, of irritations, promptly, had an extremely positive effect on moral. Staff felt empowered. Standards of teaching were uncompromised. We had the bit between our teeth.**

**We met the Investors in People Award standards for leadership and management and have recently had this renewed.**

**Phase 2 - January 03-July 04**



Reducing stress and workload became a termly item on the staff meeting agenda.

Many more suggestions were put into effect, in response to specific areas of stress related tasks, machinery and resources, organization and communication.

### 1. Teaching Assistants

Teaching Assistants meet as a group once every half term.

Our senior Teaching Assistant requests items for the agenda prior to the meeting and then chairs the meeting. She reports to the Head and Teaching Assistant Coordinator and staff if they need to act upon any item.

Many, many useful initiatives have resulted from this. The greatest of these is that Teaching Assistants have a professional culture and standing and a voice to implement decision making in the school.

### **2. ICT**

The photocopier kept on breaking down. A small inconvenience or a major set back?

This depends on whether ones day's planning became redundant and ones pulse started racing before the children even arrived.

A new photocopier was ordered which is 'state of the art'. It means that staff can use the photocopier from their classrooms using their laptops. It is wirelesslyed.

Although all teacher and teaching assistant lap tops are networked I am not unhappy about the reluctance, especially on the part of the head teacher, to use this mode of communication.

Staff Files however have transformed admin, planning and record keeping.

Our newsletter is now an open document for all staff, teaching and non teaching to write in, within guidelines.

Each term we produce an Eco Newsletter, compiled mainly by the eco/science coordinators. The children make contributions. We produce a Healthy School newsletter in the same way.

A new Duplo was ordered for the admin staff for all newsletters etc so that the photocopier was never engaged for any length of time.

### **3. Tea on Tap**

A new 'permanent boiling water' machine was purchased because the staff were queuing up at break time, when time for relaxing was so precious. This has had a very positive effect on the staff.

#### **4. Staff Meeting Agenda**

The Head teacher consults the staff before making the terms agenda.

#### **5. Low level days**

mean 'catching up time' and leaving early time. This was something entirely new to the staff and it has taken some getting used to!

#### **6. Aroma Therapy Visualization and other Holistic Remedies**

Stress councilors were researched and booked for each term. Sessions focus on meditation by visualization, A sychologist who specialized in Cognitive Behaviour was booked, especially to address perceptions about stress and work/life balance. Partners were also invited..

#### **7. Hot and Cold Extremes**

New windows and heating: Staff were cold in winter and hot in summer, too hot to be effective in fact. New windows reflect the sun away. New, quality blinds were ordered at some cost, and fans for every room.

A far more collegiate style of interaction and management both formal and informal is now in operation. This increases efficiency and improves moral,

A section in our HSA File on The Way Forward reads:

We need to improve and refine the methods we use for measuring the effectiveness of Well Being Promoters and Stress Reducers. We need to share what we have done with other schools and learn from best practice currently used in other establishments - not just in schools. How? We'll have to find a way.

A more systematic approach is needed to find the most appropriate training and development for **all** our staff: a training programme that both addresses our school improvement programme, but equally one that creates an

aspirational culture within the school, especially among the non teaching staff. The benefits of adult learning will bring enormous benefits to the children we serve.

A list of courses, qualifications and requirements needs to be very comprehensive, actively and frequently promoted, financed, and made part of 'Career Path Possibilities' target sheets for **all** staff.

### Phase 3 July 2004 - present



A degree of objectivity is useful when analyzing such an insidious, seasonally related and nebulous issue like stress, But as with the electricity bill, if you don't know the reading you can't aim to reduce it.

The following section is taken from our HS File.

#### **Results**

A recent survey showed that staff now feel that the school is much more proactive in its approach to reducing stress.

We reused the same assessment proformas. Hence we asked staff the same questions regarding the school's attitude towards reducing stress and recognizing achievement

People know that we mind how valued we feel and that new ways of reducing stress or disharmony are greatly valued. It has become part of the hidden agenda as well as an item every half term on the staff minutes.

## Staff Training and Development

All Teaching Assistants and non teaching Staff have a Qualifications/Training Portfolio.

Teaching Assistants:

Three have begun NVQ Level Three

One is undertaking the Foundation Year of a four year Early Years teaching degree

One has begun the first year of a teaching degree at Oxford Brookes

One has chosen to do Working With Dyslexic Children, an accredited day release course, in March.

Two have completed the first term of a Free to Learn EDL ICT course. They receive seven paid hours training every week. The course covers all aspects of Basic English and office computer skills. This has been invaluable in the office. One of these teaching assistants now works part time as an admin assistant.

## MDSAS

One is doing NVQ Level 2 Early Years

With the exception of one all other MDSA's are also TA's

## Office Staff

Senior Admin Officer doing NVQ Level 4 and is in charge of the performance management of her team of two. She has established efficient working practices that the head and all staff adhere to.

## **Teaching Assistant Performance Management and Culture and how this has enabled our school to realize the requirements of PPA teaching time**

Teaching Assistant training often coincides with that of teachers.

Staff Meeting time and training day time is paid for.

Examples:

Teachers and Assistants recently went to the National Gallery in London for the day.

The head and two teaching assistants recently attend Drama Workshops at Reading University.

Both our trainee teachers are assigned to the Senior Management's classrooms. They take a 'Partnership' role in teaching with their mentors.

Our Senior TA has taught dance for many years with all age groups from 4 to 65years.

She takes all classes in the hall for dance and now drama too.

All TA's have taken away all administration duties from classroom teachers.

The head teacher takes the children in the hall for an hour on Friday afternoons for storytelling, drama, Froseth's Developing Rhythm in Confined Spaces and singing. The children are tired and this is the best use of this time. The staff plan with year group teachers and TA's

Teaching Assistant Performance Reviews used to be undertaken by the class teacher and coordinated by the TA Coordinator.

It was felt that consistency and objectivity were better served by ensuring that the TA Coordinator do all observation and review meetings. It was also decided that this would happen at the end of each term. A PM Progress proforma was designed to record all of the many extra discretionary actions, such as taking work home, exciting art projects, ingenuity and above all initiative. Otherwise these are forgotten about by the time the summer review meeting comes around.

This also means that TA's can give an excellent account of their work and their value to the children and the teacher.

Our non teaching staff have become intrinsic to the quality of education and the culture and ethos at our school. Further, they have helped to define and establish their own unique role within the school. Whereas once they were 'the helpers' they are now the partners in the education process. Financing of PPA is possible because of their professional expertise and initiative

Our supply budget is consistently under spent. We prefer to organize cover with our own staff.

## Conclusion



Peter Hall, when appointed to run the National Opera, said

'If you are running an organization, get someone who's better than you to do the job'.

As a head you have to find people who are good enough, who have initiative and ideas, and then give them the mandate to do just that. Development opportunities arrive at school through the post, on a daily basis. Controlled and selective, careful delegation is fundamental.

There is a great deal more to report on this issue, such as the improvements to the physical environment.

There is also a great deal more to do. And the head teacher still needs watching.

However we have progressed in the right direction and at the right time to prepare ourselves for the challenges that 'Workforce Remodeling' have presented.