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Innovation in teaching and learning: Eastleigh College

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Brief description

Eastleigh College has successfully developed a culture where teachers are encouraged and supported to innovate and take creative risks to improve teaching and learning, contributing to an outstanding overall effectiveness judgment at their inspection in 2012.

Overview – the college’s message

‘We embarked on a deliberate strategy to raise the quality of teaching and learning, and recognised that to achieve this, we needed to change our practice and embrace new ideas and technologies. It’s not enough to focus on eradicating grade 4 lessons, but crucial to drive towards good and excellent practice right across the college. Rather than merely reacting to the inspection framework, or trying to second guess what inspectors might think, we focused on what we believed to be really important for learners, and how we could maximise everybody’s potential.



Rigorous, but supportive, approaches to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, helped us to identify and share existing good practice. Critically, it also helped us to be honest with ourselves about where practice was less than good.

Our focus is on supporting teachers to be the best they can. Teachers are learners too, so high-quality training and development opportunities to meet their specific needs were central to our strategy. It was very important to promote a positive model of support and continuing

development, rather than the deficit model of performance management; which is our last, rather than first resort.

While a few teachers have found the change challenging, the vast majority have responded positively. We're succeeding in creating a culture where supported development and creative risk taking is widespread. This has improved learners' experience on all our programmes and the overall outcomes for our learners, as reflected in our recent [inspection report](#) and outstanding overall effectiveness grade.'

Tony Lau-Walker, Principal

The good practice in detail

Managers acknowledge that there is no single 'magic bullet' which will improve the quality of teaching and learning, but they have implemented a comprehensive and well-integrated set of improvement strategies, which are bringing about a profound change in how teachers work across the college.

Rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning

The college has regularly revised its approach to internal lesson observations to ensure that it provides an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning across the college.

- Managers have promoted lesson observation and the rigorous moderation of judgments as a developmental tool.
- Teachers value the detailed verbal and written feedback they receive following a formal graded observation, as this helps them know specifically what they need to do to improve.
- Advanced practitioners, who support staff development and training, also receive detailed information on the agreed improvement points, so that they can support individuals effectively with targeted development work or coaching.



The focus of lesson observations has moved away from the teacher's performance to judging the impact of teaching on learning. Learners' feedback is therefore used to reinforce the observer's judgements that are recorded as strengths and areas for development.

The lesson observation process also acts as a catalyst for self-reflection to encourage teachers to consider what they might do better and to take responsibility for their own development as a practitioner; rather than simply responding to what a manager tells them to do. This is why the process includes the teacher's self-evaluation of the lesson observed.

Supported staff development – 'teaching squares'

Over the last few years, staff from all departments have formed 'teaching squares', set up to provide peer observation and feedback. This idea originated with two curriculum teams - hair and beauty and health and social care - working together on strategies to support

foundation-level learners and improve their outcomes. The teams discovered that, despite some obvious differences in curriculum content and structure, their areas shared many similar characteristics. Working together enabled the teams to develop collaborative solutions to the problems or challenges they faced, and teachers found they could support each other through joint working and sharing ideas and resources.

The success of this collaboration encouraged the development of other 'teaching squares' across the college, sometimes with staff within the same curriculum area, but frequently with teachers from very different subject areas. And teachers are very positive about the benefits of working with colleagues across the college, which included:

- peer observation within the 'teaching squares' created a supportive and non-judgemental climate where colleagues could provide constructive feedback and aid each other's development
- observing colleagues in different subject areas encouraged teachers to try new approaches; while some teachers were initially unsure about receiving feedback from a colleague who did not share their subject expertise, many found that this provided a new and refreshing perspective and helped them to think differently about how they could develop their own practice
- communication across the college improved with better sharing of resources and equipment to support learning, and the development of a common language to articulate and share ideas about what makes great teaching and learning
- learners commented positively on how teachers use varied methods to engage their interest and help them learn in different ways, in both practical and theory sessions.



A termly publication, *'The Innovative Teacher'*, promotes good practice observed in lessons and the different strategies explored through the 'teaching squares' initiative. It also includes findings from research projects carried out by trainee teachers as part of their initial teacher education programme.

A culture of genuine innovation – 'supported experiments'

'Supported experiments' are designed to help teachers develop more creative approaches to their practice. This strategy is based on the idea that teachers must experiment to improve, but also that teachers need support while they experiment. The college is keen to move beyond the 'grade 2 mind-set' to a culture of genuine innovation. Teachers were invited to submit expressions of interest and 24 individual supported experiments have been agreed for the current academic year (2012/13). The advanced practitioner team will support teachers in setting up their experiments and providing feedback through the year.

Developing the expert learner

As well as using the usual learner satisfaction surveys and other forms of feedback on the quality and impact of teaching, the college has begun to engage learners more directly in steering further improvements in provision.

For example, several groups of learners worked directly alongside teachers and learning support assistants during a professional development day, on the theme of 'developing the expert learner'. The session focused on what makes an expert learner, and how to give learners greater control and responsibility for their own learning. Teachers and learners worked on joint tasks, with a focus on creative use of digital technology, including laptops, digital cameras and mobile telephones, to enhance learning.

Some teachers acknowledged that letting learners go can present quite a challenge to usual ways of working, but found during the exercise, that learners were often very capable of taking a lead. Indeed many were much more comfortable with, and accomplished in, the use of digital technology than their teachers, so that learners taught the teachers, and solved the technical hitches that sometimes occur when using this technology.

In other cases, teachers have created opportunities for learners to take control of learning, often developing useful employment-related skills at the same time. For example:

- in catering lessons, a student taking on the role of sous-chef takes responsibility not only for their own work, but that of the catering team to ensure that the food prepared for service is of high quality and ready on time
- hair and beauty learners take on the role of salon manager, developing their leadership and management skills as well as practical skills.



Following the sharing of this good practice, more teachers across the college are adapting this approach to their own curriculum area. In addition, curriculum managers are exploring various strategies to increase learners' involvement in curriculum design, for example, using learner feedback on each course unit, and discussing course content and teaching strategies with focus groups.

Harnessing new technology and digital media

Considerable investment in information and learning technology (ILT) equipment and software, coupled with an extensive training programme for teachers, has led to increasingly effective and creative use of ILT in lessons. Over the last year, teachers in several curriculum areas piloted the use of tablet computers to support and enhance learning in different vocational contexts.

- In hospitality and catering, teachers recorded videos showing the different stages of jointing a chicken. Following a demonstration by the teacher, learners used the video on the tablet computer to remind them of the correct sequence of activities, or to review a particular task, enabling them all to make good progress, while the teacher gave additional individual support where needed.
- In sport, learners recorded their own performance on tablet computers, enabling them to review and evaluate specific aspects of their work. They discussed their views with their peers to identify specific points for improvement.
- In health and social care, learners analysed footage of real-life practice in care homes and



discuss particular strengths or areas which could be improved.

Following the success of these pilots, the college has increased the number of tablet computers available and more teachers are using these in lessons. Learners enjoy the interactive nature of this approach, and value the way it increases their understanding of their vocational sector and helps them to analyse their own performance.

Industrial secondments for teachers

Given the vocational nature of the college's curriculum, managers place a great deal of emphasis on how teachers maintain current industrial and commercial knowledge of their vocational sector. All teachers are expected to undertake a relevant industrial or vocational placement at least every other year - in fact many do so every year - and this is built in to their continuing professional development plan. There have been over 200 staff industrial secondments in the past two years.

The college's background



Eastleigh College is a medium-sized general further education college, specialising in vocational education and training. The college serves south Hampshire and Southampton, and the whole of England through a national work-based learning network. The college has substantial provision in 12 subject areas. The largest subject areas are construction, preparation for working life, care, retail and commercial enterprise, and engineering.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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