



The effect of implementing simplified and reduced internal school communication on teacher's perception of workload and wellbeing.

Ann Leech, Hilltop Junior School.
a.leech@heartsacademy.uk

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Reducing teacher workload, and in turn improve teacher well-being, is a high priority (Department for Education (2018b); Geiger and Pivovarov (2018); Foster (2019)).

We recently conducted a teacher workload survey at Hilltop Junior School (June 2019), which was adapted from a survey from the DfE materials (Department for Education, 2018a). The results showed that 61.5 % of teachers and senior leaders considered that general administrative work, including communication and paperwork was a key trigger to increasing teacher workload. Workload and well-being are key areas for development within the HEARTS Academy Trust and the trust has prioritised this by forming a workload and well-being group to improve workload across the trust. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to see how an improvement in communication would have an impact on teachers' workload and wellbeing.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

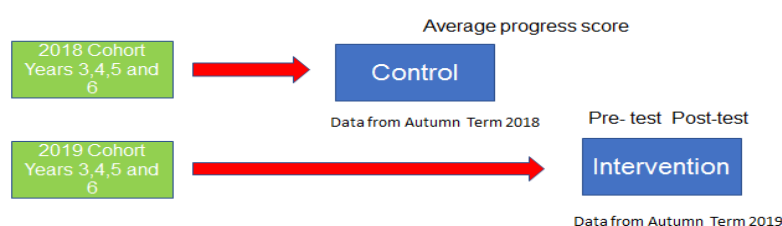
To evaluate the effect of changing communication approaches across the school during the workload reduction intervention period, a quantitative analysis was used to compare the data from two groups of children: current cohorts compared to last year's pupils. The analysis compared data from:

- Control group – number of children on or off track in reading, writing and maths for Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 collected at the end of Autumn term 2018.
- Intervention group – number of children on or off track in reading, writing and maths for Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 collected at the end of Autumn term 2019.

The control group and intervention group experienced the following conditions:

- Control group – (IV Level 1) previous communication approaches through email and paper, office based diary.
- Intervention group – (IV Level 2) simplified and reduced school communication through reintroduction of online school calendar and developing a weekly information sheet.

Figure 1: Research design



The design allowed for the testing of the following hypotheses:

- H1 – Pupil attainment as measured by number of children on or off track will not be negatively affected by improving communication.
- H2 – Teacher's perceptions of workload will improve as a result of improving communication.
- H3 – Teachers will spend less time responding/ checking emails and asking for further clarification.

LIMITATIONS

A randomised control trial was not possible because the whole school conducted the interventions simultaneously, therefore the results might be limited by the fact that the data used as a control was from a previous year. In addition, it was unlikely that changing communication would have a direct effect on pupil attainment. However, we felt it important to check that no negative effects had occurred as a result of what were substantial shifts in teacher behaviour during the intervention period.

METHODS

Participants and sample size

Hilltop Junior is a mixed ability school in a small Essex town, with affluent areas but also with pockets of deprivation. It has 322 on roll - 7% SEND and 11% pupil premium.

There were 329 pupils in the control group (Autumn 2018) and 322 (166 boys and 156 girls) in the intervention group (Autumn 2019).

Procedures

From Autumn 2019, we developed the role of Year group leads/middle leaders. SLT ensured that key messages, upcoming events and timetabling changes were shared with year group leaders. The online calendar was reintroduced ensuring that all staff can access it. During weekly staff meetings, which now take place at the start of the week, information is discussed on upcoming events. Training was given to middle leaders to help them to develop their leadership skills; this was provided and delivered within the trust.

We trialled this throughout the Autumn Term and we asked all teachers to report the number of minutes per week they spend reading and responding to emails, checking the online calendar, asking for clarification about timetables or arranging cover/covering for another member of staff. The pre-test survey was completed at the end of Summer 2 (July), with the post-test survey completed in the final week of Autumn 2 (Dec).

Materials (and apparatus)

- Workload survey pre- and post-test
- Data collection at Autumn 2, 2018 and 2019
- Time use collection sheet – weekly
- Online calendar (Microsoft Outlook)
- Weekly information sheet

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Overwhelmingly, pupil progress was maintained or improved during the intervention period with the exception of one area (Y6 writing). Staff expected the group to make less progress in writing because this particular group has less stamina for writing than other groups. Effect sizes ranged from a small negative to a large positive effect.

Although teachers reported spending more time communicating, their perception of workload improved during the intervention period.

Therefore, it seems unlikely that there were any negative effects as a result of improving communication strategies within school.

RESULTS

In order to assess pupil progress and attainment during the intervention period, separate 2x2 Chi-squared tests of independence compared pupils who were off track or on track at the end of the Autumn Term 2019 with the same year groups at the end of the Autumn Term 2018 (see tables below)

Table 1. Reading in years 3-6 2019 compared to 2018.

READING	Effect size (d)	CI (95%)	P-Value	W
Year 3	0.255	-0.059-0.569	0.111	0.128
Year 4	0.123	0.498-1.953	<0.001	0.613
Year 5	0.234	-0.069-0.538	0.130	0.117
Year 6	0.346	0.041-0.651	0.026	0.173

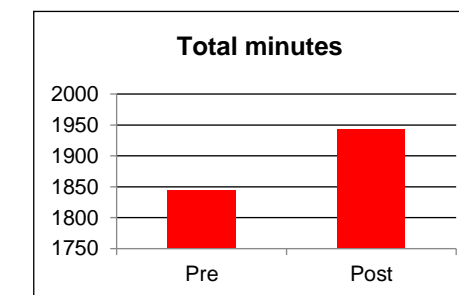
Table 2 Writing in Years 3-6 2019 compared to 2018.

WRITING	Effect size (d)	CI (95%)	P-Value	W
Year 3	0.615	0.250-0.979	<0.001	0.307
Year 4	0.716	0.291-1.141	<0.001	0.358
Year 5	0.461	0.158-0.764	0.003	0.230
Year 6	-0.280	-0.024-0.585	0.071	0.140

Table 3. Maths in Years3-6 2019 compared to 2018.

MATHS	Effect size (d)	CI (95%)	P-Value	W
Year 3	0.469	0.156-0.783	0.003	0.235
Year 4	0.640	0.260-1.019	<0.001	0.320
Year 5	0.066	-0.225-0.357	0.670	0.033
Year 6	0.155	-0.147-0.456	0.319	0.077

Figure 2. Intervention teacher time communicating pre- and post-.



The total number of minutes spent on communication in school (Figure 2) was collated both pre- and post-intervention, which show an overall small increase of 5%. However, a staff perception questionnaire showed that teachers were more positive about communication in 4 out of 5 areas: wasting time, being kept informed, replying to emails outside of work and sufficient notice of change. There was no change in terms of teacher's efficiency.

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