



Teacher Learning
Academy

At the cutting edge Percy Hedley School

The school

Percy Hedley School is an independent special school in Newcastle with 165 pupils, aged three to 19, who have cerebral palsy or speech, language and communication disorders. Last summer, the school achieved specialist school status for physical and sensory education. Gill Wilson is deputy head of the school's primary site, with overall responsibility for professional development across the whole school.

The rationale

"We first became involved in the TLA in 2008 as it fitted with the long-term aims for our school development, particularly its focus on action research. We were keen to be part of the pilot because this echoes our school's philosophy of innovation and of being at the cutting edge of new developments. We believe that our school's real expertise lies in our staff – and that's what we want to continue to invest in."

The approach

"One of the real advantages of the TLA is that it is based on what teachers are already doing in their classrooms, but it provides an added opportunity to reflect on their practice and analyse it much more closely. The TLA also provides a very useful framework, helping to structure teachers' thoughts.

"As a special school, our students have very complex learning difficulties. The TLA stretches us to think about ways that we can develop our teaching to continually

enhance students' learning. It's a very straightforward process that clearly demonstrates the impact of action research – something that we're very passionate about at our school."

The results

"Of 16 teachers here that are eligible to take part in the TLA, so far half have submitted projects. We've incorporated the TLA into our performance management work as we wanted to give it a level of importance to our staff. We also wanted to ensure that staff understood the senior management team's commitment to the TLA programme. All of our school improvement work is linked to the school's performance management cycle.

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“Projects to date have been very varied, reflecting our teachers differing roles and experience. For example, one newly qualified teacher looked at multi-professional working. Our school employs a team of 47 speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists to support the students’ needs. The teacher explored how these relationships have influenced her teaching and what she has been able to learn from them.

“Another project by a more experienced teacher looked at team teaching. This gave the teaching staff the opportunity to plan and deliver lessons together, reflecting on and evaluating their learning and developing professional collaboration. In essence, the project reinforced the sense that while all of the students have very different education and therapy needs, we’re all part of one community.

“Building on what we’ve achieved so far, we now want to roll out the TLA to the rest of our staff, while those who have already

taken part are looking at the next stage. And while we’re currently a TLA School, we’re talking to two other local special schools with a view to working together to become a TLA Centre.”

The benefits

“I think there’s an immediate impact for pupils, as the standards of teaching are being raised, with staff continually seeking improvements. It’s really important that staff see themselves as learners too and it’s clear that they have a huge willingness to develop their practice.

“Ultimately it is helping us to raise our game, putting our school at the forefront of research that is looking at what children need to thrive. If you ask me about the future, I can only see that the TLA will go from strength to strength here.”



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Contact the TLA:

Phone: 0330 1239121

E-mail: enquiries@teacherlearningacademy.org.uk