

HMYOI Lancaster Farms - Developing strategies to improve support given to tutors working in the establishment

Summary of how this case study can be used

This case study examines how the management at HMYOI Lancaster Farms developed strategies to improve its support of tutors working at the establishment. Their key focus was to provide tutors with the skills and support to enable them to successfully manage challenging behaviour in the classroom.

The Establishment

HMYOI Lancaster Farms holds young male offenders aged between 15 and 17 and young male adults aged between 18 and 21. It has an operational capacity of 527 (as of December 2007). The offenders are predominantly remanded with some of the convicted serving Detention and Training Orders.

Background

Lancaster and Morecombe College provides education at HMYOI Lancaster Farms for both young offenders and adults. The juveniles have to carry out a mandatory number of hours of education per week whilst the adults can voluntarily access a range of education and training courses.

The teachers deal with some of the most challenging offenders. Many of the juvenile population missed out on education and have negative experiences that they carry with them impacting on their attitudes and behaviours. Teachers are recruited often with limited knowledge and experience of behaviour management of young challenging offenders.

In 2005 Lancaster and Morecombe College was awarded the OLASS contract and carried out an internal quality audit across all its prisons. At Lancaster Farms, it identified some significant quality improvement issues with respect to teaching and learning. One of the major issues was the lack of quality and support systems in place to help teachers improve their practice and develop effective strategies to engage young offenders.

Approach taken

The education management team worked with the college's Quality Manager to produce a Teaching and Learning Strategy and then worked with the teaching and support team on site. The team worked with teaching and prison staff to:

- Identify methods of providing support for new and existing teachers
- identify methods of sharing best practice
- review and develop policies and procedures that are meaningful and support the teacher's role
- introduce the new support structure.

Once the changes had been made, they were evaluated via a new self assessment process. As staff turnover stabilised and the standard of teaching and learning began to improve, the college was able to introduce continuous evaluation of teaching and learning to drive quality improvement.

Timescales

The need for quality and support systems to help teachers was identified during an internal quality audit by Lancaster and Morecombe College when they won the OLASS contract in 2005.

The development and introduction of the new support system took over a year. The self assessment process continues to be refined as part of the ongoing drive for quality improvement.

Processes followed and developed

All teachers new to the prison are given extensive systematic support before they are put in front of a class regardless of their level of experience.

They are given a handbook to help them settle into their roles within the prison context. This handbook provides a general overview of working in a prison and provides the background information. The prison induction includes a description of relevant policies and procedures. It also includes successful strategies for good classroom management and behaviour management.

After the prison induction new teachers are allocated mentors who give one to one support formally and informally. All mentors are experienced, highly competent teachers who have the skills to support their development. Support is bespoke and differentiated and can be delivered at any time. New teachers are given the opportunity to observe a range of teaching across different subject areas and to take part in team teaching. New teachers do not take responsibility for their own class until they are ready.

All teachers have on going support from their mentor. This helps them rationalise their experiences, focus on the real issues and develop strategies to improve.

All teachers are encouraged to take a break at least every 6-8 weeks to avoid suffering from burn out.

Partnership and collaborative working

Involving all staff in decision making and ensuring management messages were well communicated was crucially important. In addition, there was a need to encourage and secure staff 'buy in' to quality systems and procedures. Both of these activities ensured that the change was managed well and that there was a continuous flow of information.

Relationships between college and prison staff have improved and this has been a significant contributing factor to the ability of college staff to manage the behaviour of the offenders.

Communication between officers has also improved as have the links between residential and education areas.

Further collaboration has seen Prison staff being invited to deliver taster sessions in learning and skills activities.

Impact

The focus on supporting tutors managing challenging behaviour has been successful.

The quality of teaching and learning has risen significantly. At a recent round of observations carried out by external consultants the following commentary was made:

“Even the most challenging learners are managed in such a way that they conform and cooperate. There is much good and some outstanding teaching and learning, characterised by good classroom management.”

Improving staff support and development has led to an improvement in staff retention. Previously staff turnover stood at 55% and now it is negligible. The Education Manager said she could not remember when she last lost a member of staff.

The improved stability within the staff team has been most beneficial for the learners.

“The biggest challenge has been changing the culture, instilling an ethos of quality and giving the best possible service that we can to our learners”

Lessons learnt – why introduce a support system for teachers who work in prisons?

- Giving staff the support to develop the skills they need can have a positive impact on staff retention and the quality of teaching and learning
- Asking staff to teach offenders when they have not yet developed sufficient behaviour management skills can be detrimental to the motivation of the teacher and the experience of the offender
- Effective management of the introduction of a support system can lead to improved relationships between teachers and prison staff.

Lessons learnt – what support do teachers in prisons need?

- Genuine desire by senior managers to develop a system that effectively supports staff and develops their skills
- Thorough and detailed induction to effectively prepare new staff for working in a prison
- Insistence that all new staff attend induction to get a shared understanding of the issues, solutions and support available
- Experienced and trained mentors to deliver bespoke support and make a real difference to the ability of staff to manage behaviour
- Team teaching to support tutors struggling with offenders' challenging behaviour
- A culture where it is seen as good practice to recognise problems, seek support and implement solutions
- Strong partnership working with prison staff to enable sharing of good practice which has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

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