

Birkenhead Sixth Form College

LSIS case study: Regional Coaching Workshops



“(I find coaching) empowering. Each week, meeting and setting targets that I feel are valuable has changed my outlook on the way that I wish to move forward in teaching. I feel in control of my role at college and am not afraid to ask for what I feel is necessary for me and my team to do our jobs well. “

Summary

Birkenhead Sixth Form College is using coaching to raise standards. It is offered to all staff, and is having tangible impacts, from improved lesson observation grades to increased motivation and confidence among staff. The regional coaching workshops have offered an opportunity to learn, share good practice and take away tools that can be used straight away in sessions.

About Birkenhead Sixth Form College

The mission of Birkenhead Sixth Form College is “to provide high quality education for all” which is underpinned by core values that embrace a drive to raise aspirations and standards. The College has established a clear vision to become an outstanding college. In order to work towards this goal there has been a sustained focus on strategies to raise achievement. There are around 161 staff and 1189 full time learners on roll in 2011/12 studying an extensive range of academic and vocational options. The college also has adult part time learners, and as well as evening classes on 2 nights a week, the college runs daytime Outreach courses in some centres, attracting a diverse range of recruits.

The Challenge

The move to have a coach within the College arose out of work already being done with heads of subjects to raise achievements. Liz Bones had always had a role to reflect on performance and this became more formal through training locally as a coach. Coaching is offered to all staff now with support staff included in the second year, always on a voluntary basis. It is central to its success that no one is forced to have coaching; it is also completely separate from performance management to encourage people to take part. To date about 12 people have received coaching. Regular evaluation is done after each group of sessions, including a questionnaire.

The outcomes reported from using coaching

- Increasing confidence among staff who have had coaching to do their jobs effectively
- Staff feeling more positive and motivated at work
- Improvement in their work relationships
- Improved observation grades – particularly in areas where coaching had been concentrating which were then reported as strengths.

“In one case a learning walk led to them being asked to share an idea with the whole team.”

- Improved performance of some students – in one subject area there were improved results in January 2011 and the teacher felt it was because they'd been reflecting, in coaching, on the way they were delivering.

Liz puts this down to the space provided, in a non-judgemental and affirming environment. Liz also reports that coaching has made a difference to her and how she works. Her next step now, alongside group coaching, is how to get students involved in coaching, and encourage their thinking. Quotes from teachers reflect the benefits:

“I feel that it has changed my views on what makes a good teacher and it has started to shape my teaching whereby the lessons feel more student-centred.”

“It has forced me to reflect on what I do, how I do it and have a more positive outlook too.”

“Excellent, very positive and would certainly recommend as a tool for recognising strengths and weaknesses, and learning how to adapt to situations that are not always in one's control.”

“I think I have now begun to explore ways in which I can develop my role, and the team I work in, as well as establish boundaries and expectations.”

“It has helped with all the groups I teach. It gave me some time to think about the way I teach and I was asked very pertinent questions that made me think about aspects of teaching that I have not considered before.”

Why an LSIS regional coaching workshop?

Liz wanted to develop coaching more formally and had worked with LSIS for years, including for improving performance following inspections, so the LSIS workshops seemed a fit. Liz feels the Regional coaching workshops are appealing with the mix of training in the morning and networking in the afternoon. She values the connections within the Network as it gives those attending a chance to

“discuss with others what they are doing, how they are doing it and how it's going, to hear what other people are doing elsewhere and learn from each other.”

Liz also values the facilitation by her regional coaching ambassador who elicits what development the group might like in the future, with the network

“having a say in the direction that it might take, not just being told, but making suggestions that will benefit us as a group to do that.”

She highly recommends the workshops to others.

“It’s a really important opportunity to get some mutual support and share good practice. It is back to this thing about working in a bubble in our own institution and it’s invigorating to find out what other people are doing.”

The activity

In the morning the regional workshops have training activities. For example they have looked at solutions-focus coaching and the OSKAR model (Outcome, Scaling, Know-How, Affirm and Action and Review), and at group coaching. Liz believes that the session on group coaching was really interesting and could be powerful when working with subject teams, which is one of her targets for the coming year. She sees coaching as a good catalyst, helping members ensure that they are working to the same goals, with the team working together, rather than a subject Head needing to be in control. The LSIS regional coaching ambassador has also shared access with Oldham’s MOODLE area which had relevant materials.



Coaching compared to other change interventions

The College sees coaching as a very positive intervention, mainly because it is non-judgemental and supportive and the person being coached leads the process. Alongside that is the understanding that if it is done properly it offers positive challenge in a supportive framework and is not just “touchy-feely”. Liz says:

“The really key thing is that coaching is positive and helps someone move forward but in a way where the person has control over it.”

Lessons learned

1) If you are going to use coaching, then you have to give it sufficient time.

“You can’t expect people to coach without giving them the time to coach. It’s very time consuming, so I have remission.”

2) Time for the coachee may also be an issue.

“It can sometimes be hard to persuade the coachee that they have time, but once they start they realise it is hugely valuable.”

3) Liz also points to the support of senior management being key:

“They were very keen to develop coaching as an intervention.”

4) Finally Liz also thinks it is crucial that people are offered a choice about coaching and that it is used for people who are performing really well as well as those who may have performance challenges.