

# New School at West Heath

## The use of Neuro Linguistic Programming to support learning and achievement



### **An Excellence Gateway Case Study**

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This case study was produced by David Perridge, Director of Learning – Upper School, The New School at West Heath, on behalf of the Excellence Gateway.

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### **The New School at West Heath**

The New School at West Heath is a Specialist Independent School catering for a diverse range of needs for boys and girls age 10- 19, many of whom have emotional and social communication difficulties. Prior to coming to us, some of our students will have been excluded from mainstream education for a period of time. Here they find a strong therapeutic approach to learning and all students, when they arrive with us, spend time in HEART, our health, education, assessment and revitalising therapy unit, where we can fully establish the strengths and needs of each individual child. The work of the school was recognised when we were awarded “Outstanding Special Needs School of the Year” by the Times Educational Supplement 2011 / 12.

### **The Challenge**

The challenge we face in engaging and motivating young people, many of whom reach us with engrained negative patterns of thought and behaviour, is not unique to us. Similarly, the challenge of balancing the need to support our students, with that of getting them to increasingly accept responsibility for their own lives, is one faced by everyone working with young people. However, the nature of our student body, and the difficult, even traumatic experiences that so many of them have faced, means these challenges can be particularly difficult to meet. All too frequently staff work with students who have a fixed view of themselves as incapable of learning and succeeding, as people destined to repeat the mistakes of the past, while others, frequently see themselves as people who deserve no more. There is a sense for many that they have no choice, and that a life of failure and underachievement is somehow preordained. All power and control over the student’s life is placed outside them so that it’s always someone else’s “fault”, and there’s nothing they can do about it.

Our challenge has, and continues to be, to demonstrate that as people we are capable of managing our own experience of the world far more than we may have believed possible. Furthermore, we aim to help students discover for themselves how they can learn how to take

responsibility for becoming the person they want to be, and for building the life that they want for themselves. In doing so we will teach them skills and ways of thinking that will serve them well throughout their lives.

### The Activity

Over the course of the past two and a half years we have been engaged in a process of training staff in the basics of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). In essence NLP assists people understand the processes by which we make sense of the world and equips them with the skills and attitudes necessary to release much more of the positive potential that they possess.

At this moment in time we have some 80 staff trained to Diploma level, with 16 qualified to Practitioner level, with 8 of these in the process of studying at Master Practitioner level. The intention has been to equip staff with skills and ways of thinking that they are able to use to positive and practical effect when working with students. By focusing on staff first we have been able to develop an “NLP culture” around the school whereby there is an increasingly shared language and way of working. It also means that as students are more and more directly involved they are doing so within a context in which NLP is seen to be valuable and valued across all contexts.

The training programme is implemented throughout the year with approximately 8 staff at a time involved. The courses run over 4 weeks with training taking place one day per week. To be able to have such an ambitious programme it is necessary to rely on the support of colleagues who cover those involved in the training. The fact that staff are overwhelmingly happy to cover each other is a testament to their belief in the value of the training, which many say has had a powerful and lasting impact on the quality of their teaching and work with young people. The aim of the Diploma courses is to give staff a sound introduction to the basics of NLP in a way that is firmly grounded in our roles as teachers, teaching assistants, and managers. To this end each element of the course is examined in terms of potential implications for improved practice within the school. Inevitably however the benefits are frequently experienced by staff beyond their roles as professionals, and this commitment to providing for their personal as well as professional development is something that staff value highly.

In terms of content, training covers a number of areas, highlighting the potential applications of each while demonstrating that it is by bringing them all together in a coherent and consistent manner that the greatest benefit is to be achieved. Some of the aspects of NLP that are covered include;

- Basic frames such as Cause and Effect, Perception is Projection, Conscious / Unconscious, Mind / Body – ways of thinking that encourage people to take responsibility for themselves in ways that are empowering.
- Learning States – assisting young people have an attitude that is conducive to learning.
- Presuppositions - ways of thinking that support effective communication.
- Sensory Acuity – increasing people’s awareness of the sensory information available to them.
- Representational Systems – how people have a preferred system, be it Visual, Auditory, or Kinaesthetic, and how we can use this information to improve communication.
- Rapport – skills in building positive connections with others.
- Perceptual Positions – how to develop and benefit from the wisdom of multiple perspectives.

- Anchoring – using positive experiences from one aspect of a person’s life to support them achieve success in another.
- Satir Categories – how our physiology often communicates more than the words we use.
- Meta Model and Milton Model – how we can use our language to empower both others and ourselves.

Having got to a position whereby a significant number of staff had completed Diploma and Practitioner level training we were in a position to begin the process of educating students in aspects of NLP. This then has been taking place since September of 2011 when as part of our Self Science programme all students in years 7 – 11 have had weekly lessons which have begun to introduce them to the skills and attitudes inherent in NLP.

### **The Outcome**

A culture has been established in the school in which the language, attitudes and practices of NLP are increasingly apparent. Both staff, and increasingly students, are applying aspects of what they have learned in ways that are empowering themselves and others.

### **Staff**

Staff from all areas of the school have been involved, with teaching colleagues being joined in training by teaching assistants and administrative colleagues as well as by an increasing number of boarding staff. The training has been viewed as being overwhelmingly positive, with colleagues commenting very favourably in their feedback both written and verbal.

### **Students**

Students have been very positive in their response to the teaching that has taken place so far. While the term NLP isn’t generally used, after all it’s rather off putting for adults never mind for young people, a number are increasingly familiar with it. Indeed a small number have already asked if they too can take the full Diploma training. Meanwhile staff report on numerous instances whereby students have been seen to apply, to positive effect, elements of what they’ve learned.

### **The Impact**

The impact has already been significant and can be witnessed on a daily basis in the work of staff throughout the school. The number of serious incidents in school, along with figures for staff absence have both fallen, while staff comments reflect a growing confidence in people’s ability to manage themselves increasingly effectively. We are also beginning to see the start of a process whereby others beyond the school are expressing an interest in what we’re doing and themselves wanting to become involved.

### **The use of Neuro Linguistic Programming to support learning and achievement**

Both staff and students are continuing to benefit from teaching that has enhanced their ability to use the resources at their disposal more and more effectively. They are able to manage their mind sets so that learning is better able to take place, and are using a range of techniques and strategies that are bringing a growth in confidence through increasing competence. As a result of a developing programme of staff training, and the teaching of students, a culture has become embedded within the school that encourages greater achievement and personal responsibility. This is impacting positively in many areas including, student behaviour, staff attendance and student’s readiness to learn.

For further information and supportive material please log on to the following website <http://www.westheathschool.com/nlp-video-resources> and click on the links for 'NLP – Teacher Discussion 1 and 2' where teachers discuss the positive impact the application of NLP has had on both their teaching and student's engagement and learning. They also briefly consider the impact it has had on them personally.