

Success Story No.7 – Adapting

May 2020

I had the pleasure of speaking with Shani from a primary school in Enfield and she shared the school's success in adapting to the current situation.

What is your school context?

We are a two-form entry school, I teach year 6.

What has been the biggest challenge?

Communicating with my children, our headteacher has asked teachers to call the pupils and it's been good to speak to them. This was a new experience, and I needed to break the ice initially with parents who weren't used to me calling to speak to their children.

Secondly, gauging how much work my children are completing is difficult. One of the biggest challenges for me being a year 6 teacher has been seeing the work dip, we've been pushing the students working towards SATs and now lots of them aren't doing nearly as much. Also, not being able to say bye has been hard. When schools closed we didn't want to panic the children, we wanted it to seem normal and at that point we didn't know it was going to be for a long time.

Can you share your success with how your school has adapted?

The leadership team have adapted well, it's not been easy for them. That's been really great to see. My teaching has had to adapt, I've had to think of creative ways to engage my children when we're not in school, I feel like I've learnt quite a lot. I've tapped into online resources that I haven't used before. I've stepped out of my comfort zone and I've also had to trust my children are getting on with the activities.

It's given me an opportunity to be dynamic; initially there was a rush about creating packs to go home. At that time, I was thinking about what resources I could give them, so they could still revise for their SATs. I didn't want to think about them not having SATs, especially knowing how hard they have worked.

Our school had already invested in different online programmes, so as time moved on, I began to get my head round them. We sent lots of log-ins home to children, but it took a while for me to work out what I could give them and how I presented it.

Purple mash has been the main platform we've used. Children can email through this, they can email me, or other teachers, as well as their friends. Also, all subjects can be set through this platform. We can set them activities to do, and they appear in each child's 'to do' list, then we get a notification and we can give feedback with text or audio. We also use

Mathletics for maths, and Scholastic for reading, there's other platforms, but they're the 3 we're using most. There is lots out there but if you're not aware it's difficult to know what there is and how to use it.

We also had to adapt our long-term plan and began to follow the work outlined by BBC Daily Lessons. This helped our parents address any misconceptions as the BBC daily lessons have videos to support learning.

What has engagement been like?

Very mixed, initially when I was making my calls I got through to all of them, but the momentum of engaging with work has reduced recently.

A lot of our children don't have access to computers so it's hard because their access is very limited. Every week we print off packs, probably 20 a class and then parents can come and collect. Now when I call home, I'm focussing much more on their wellbeing, I'm asking if they're having fun. This has been really important; asking what they've done that they've enjoyed. Checking they're safe as well as engaged, their general wellbeing.

What are you thinking about next?

I am thinking about what we'll be doing as we return to school and the wellbeing of children. We've completed some training about pupil and staff wellbeing.

Outcomes and the plugging any gaps are very important but when the children do come back to school, they need the love and support. I want to be ready to take care of the children's mental wellbeing as well as their educational needs. I know I'm going to think about how I navigate these children and let go of some of the routines and the plans I would have had. My approach to behaviour management will need to adapt.

We don't know what's going to happen regarding how year 6 leave, but ensuring they have a good departure is paramount.

Any final thoughts?

I think teaching as we know it has definitely changed for the future and it's really important to be dynamic and flexible. The system and the needs of these children has changed for a long time.

In September we can't consider that we're going back to what we thought of as normal.

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