



## The Mulberry Bush Outreach

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# The Mulberry Bush Peer Review Case Study. 03



St. Nicholas School Canterbury

## The Mulberry Bush Peer Review

is a quality improvement network of schools, creating a supportive group of leaders who collaborate in non-judgemental ways, with the aim of providing the best possible outcomes for children. The peer review is a visit to a school by two colleagues from a similar type of school. They spend a day looking at agreed areas of policy and practice at the host school's request. It is an opportunity to network between schools, to share practice, learn from others and build on what works well. It provides a great chance to share professional expertise and improve provision.

This model has been run by The Mulberry Bush for the last seven years, and has involved over sixty schools.

**“The peer review reaches the improvement parts that other processes fail to reach...”**

Daniel Lewis is head teacher at St Nicholas, a special school for pupils aged 4-19 with severe, profound and complex learning needs maintained by Kent County Council. With a group of local special school head teachers, they formed a 'professional learning community', based on The Mulberry Bush Peer Review Model. The aim was to develop a system of much needed support during a period of

reducing input from the local authority, and pressure to increase pupil numbers and meet a broader range of pupil needs. Daniel has now completed three cycles of the peer review process.

## Peer Review

In the first year Daniel used his peer review to evaluate the quality of Key Stage 5 provision. The school knew that radical change was needed, and although things were beginning to gradually change, more needed to be done. The two head teachers carrying out the review spent time observing teaching, looking at curriculum documents, and interviewing key staff. They identified some very clear development lines for the school to follow. Good use was made of these resulting in significant improvement made by the end of the following year.

Daniel took part in reviews at Milestone and Abbey Court schools, looking at Personal Social and Health Education and PE respectively. As well as providing feedback on these specific curriculum areas the reviews promoted reflection on broader leadership issues related to the way in which management roles were organised, and how the curriculum was structured. Daniel was particularly interested in how curriculum specialist teachers were used.

The following year the review at St Nicholas focused on the management role in Key Stage 2, how effectively senior leaders supported this role, and how the role fitted into the overall school leadership structure. The outcome of this was a recognition that middle leaders needed a different meeting structure, should have time to work together without the direct involvement of senior leaders, and have regular time allocated for development work.

The review at Oakley that Daniel was involved in looked at how the strengths observed in curriculum enrichment areas such as forest school and art therapy could benefit the teaching in other subjects. At Five Acres the school used their review to evaluate the impact of work related learning in Key Stage 5 on pupils' growth in independence skills. Whilst recognising the strength of the provision the review team were able to suggest some next steps to support further progress.

For his review this year Daniel decided to ask the visiting head teachers to look at the areas for improvement identified at the school's last inspection to see how much progress had been made. Although the reviewers noted strengths in the quality of teaching in these specific areas, they suggested that pupils could be too reliant on staff. As a result they might not be learning as much as they were capable of.

At Milestones the focus was on how playtimes and lunchtimes were organised. The well-resourced play areas were fully used, with staff engaging pupils appropriately. However the review identified those activities could be planned to increase opportunities for learning, which would entail giving more able pupils greater levels of challenge. The Ifield review looked at how well the speech and language therapy team were working across the school. It found high quality practice and suggested ways in which those skills could be further shared and developed. It also considered how recent curriculum changes for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in Key Stage 5 had incorporated ideas from staff. This confirmed the skills of the staff, and how well leaders used their ideas in curriculum developments.

## Impact

Daniel has found taking part in the peer review process really helpful. In every review he values seeing how other leaders think about particular issues and challenges. He continuously notices different leadership styles, and the structures and systems used to manage specific aspects of schools' work.

He uses all of this to reflect on his own leadership. This in turn affects his approach to management and leadership, and has had positive impacts on his ability to improve his own school. He sees all of this as evidence of the professional learning community in action.

**“The peer review experience is all about developing my leadership.”**

