

The courage to be outstanding

Collaborative professional
development

Transformation

Inclusive leadership

Student aspiration
and progress

Personalising learning

Rapid improvement



Five SSAT Leading Edge schools share their strategies for becoming outstanding - in every sense of the word

The inspiring, creative and innovative work of more than 50 schools will be on display at the SSAT Achievement Show 2014. **Sue Williamson** explains more

One of my favourite events in the academic year is SSAT's Achievement Show. It is a privilege to listen to so many practitioners describing their journeys and the success of their students. The sharing of good practice is now a very natural process, and SSAT has been at the forefront of promoting collaboration and the profession leading the educational agenda.

SSAT's Redesigning Schooling initiative inspires and challenges school leaders to seize the change agenda and be bold and thoughtful in exploring new directions.

If you rely on the media, you would think that schools are hot beds of unrest and poor behaviour. In my role as chief executive at SSAT, I visit many schools and I am inspired by the quality of the work that is going on.

Students are challenged and provided with enjoyable opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills. I see students showing real leadership in the life of their school.

In all the plethora of new initiatives it is essential that we remember that developing students is at the heart of everything we do. Young people achieve success in different ways – of course exam success is important, but so is participating in sport, creative arts and charity work.

Our work in redesigning schooling reinforces that employers want young people who are: "Determined, optimistic and



‘The more we show our professionalism, the more all stakeholders will be prepared to listen’

emotionally intelligent. And if young people are to develop these characteristics for themselves, then we need an education system which focuses on helping them to be rigorous, rounded and grounded.” (John Cridland, director general, Confederation of British Industry.)

Today's students will live and work in a very different world and face challenges that we cannot predict. Schools have to equip learners with the dispositions they need to thrive throughout their lives in an uncertain world.

“The Learner” is the theme of our National Conference, being held on December 4 and 5 in Manchester. Speakers include Dr Pasi Sahlberg, who will use examples from the Finnish system to demonstrate how schools can help the development of young people. Dr Tony Wagner

will stress the importance of students being innovators and David McQueen will look at the skills needed to be an entrepreneur.

Professor Sugatra Mitra will share his work on the inspirational “School in the Cloud” project. Professor Eric Mazur will demonstrate how to do flipped learning on a shoestring.

There will also be school workshops, and throughout the conference, students themselves will provide dynamic contributions to inspire your plans for your future-orientated school.

Last year's conference focused on professional capital and the continued importance of developing the profession. A high-quality teaching force is essential for the success of our young people, and I cannot say enough how impressed I am by the quality of the teachers

I meet. They are dedicated, determined, creative and passionate.

All of these qualities are very evident when you attend the Achievement Show, which this year is being held on Thursday, June 26, at Twickenham Stadium in London.

There will be more than 100 practitioners, representing more than 50 schools, presenting in 11 zones – including the five schools sharing their outstanding practice in this supplement.

The show is a wonderful national platform for practitioners to lead. If England is to have a world-class schooling system – which is where I believe we should be aiming – it needs to further develop these outstanding practitioners who are keen to collaborate and are committed to lifelong learning. The more we show our professionalism, the more all stakeholders will be prepared to listen.

This is an extraordinary time of change in our system. I believe that all the current policy initiatives require even greater focus on young people and doing what is right for them. At SSAT's Annual Lecture, the CBI's John Cridland, said: “The best schools are already putting inspiration and ambition at the heart of what they do – led by heads and teachers who feel like rebels within the system. They follow their gut, do what they know is best, and avoid what the system motivates them to do when it conflicts with the interests of the young people in their schools. That takes confidence, and quality.”

I hope SSAT can provide school leaders and teachers with the support and stimulus to do what is right for their students. As a profession we need to be relentless in the focus to improve our practice and knowledge.

The case studies in this supplement are only a small sample of the good work that is going on in schools – we could provide many more. They illustrate the innovation in schools, the development of teachers, and that schools are putting students first.

If we remain a profession devoted to meeting the needs of our students, we will thrive – and so will they.

• Sue Williamson is the chief executive of SSAT.

SSAT Achievement Show 2014

See the best and next practice nationally.

Meet the five schools featured in this supplement in the Inspiring Schools Zone.

26 June 2014 . Twickenham Stadium . London

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#SSATACH14



Achieving outstanding through collaborative CPD

CPD at Wade Deacon High School stands for 'collaborative professional development', where every single member of the teaching staff has someone to coach and support them

The principal aim of the SSAT's Redesigning Schooling campaign is to ensure that the future of education is shaped by high-quality practice and research across the profession.

Staff at Wade Deacon High School in Widnes concur, firmly believing that staff development is one of the most effective ways to drive improvement.

To achieve this goal, they have launched Better Together, a programme that puts performance management right at the heart of staff training.

The school provides personalised learning opportunities for all of its 200 staff and has created a culture in which everyone is supported and guided to help students achieve.

Wade Deacon, which was judged to be outstanding by Ofsted in 2011, has also set up its own Innovation Enterprise Alliance – to share good practice, enhance collaboration and provide wider opportunities for professional development in partnership with other schools.

Over the last three years, Wade Deacon has made a point of prioritising CPD (or collaborative professional development as they call it) because, as executive principal Pam Wright explained: "We feel that training is the most important thing for everyone."

She continued: "We want everyone in the school to have access to quality training that meets their own professional development needs for the benefit of our pupils.

"It's about making people more efficient, slicker and better equipped to do their role. Training raises people's confidence levels and aspirations and makes them feel much better about themselves. There is that feeling of wellbeing that comes when you are ahead of the game."

The 11 to 16 school, which has more than 1,500 students on its roll, encourages its staff to undertake further study too. Many have done Master's degrees at the University of Chester and Liverpool Hope University, while others have taken NPQH, NPQSL and

‘Everyone has someone to coach them or support them. It doesn't matter whether you are the executive head or an NQT – the support programme incorporates everybody’

NPQML qualifications through the Outstanding Leaders Partnership.

Nik Harper, Wade Deacon's assistant vice principal, helped to set up the Better Together programme and believes that it has created "an outstanding culture of learning for our pupils and staff".

She explained: "It is about everybody wanting to get better. Even if you have been a teacher for 10 years there are still new strategies to discover and different ways to handle different people and different pupils."

As part of the programme, every member of staff is either a coach or a coachee. They work together to identify specific training needs and are directed to personalised CPD sessions within school.

"Everyone has someone to coach them or support them," said Ms Harper. "It doesn't matter whether you are the executive head or an NQT – the support programme incorporates everybody."

As well as standard performance management three times a year, Wade Deacon's emphasis is very much on day-to-day practice in the classroom.

A range of internal CPD sessions are held every Thursday (after school, but within the core

working day), with good practice being shared by all staff.

Typical sessions include training for teaching assistants or administrative staff, advice for middle leaders who want to become senior leaders, and guidance for senior leaders on aspects like coaching, Ofsted criteria and the government's curriculum changes.

Others might focus on pedagogy and improving elements of teaching or on the use of questioning in the classroom.

Each department at Wade Deacon also holds collaborative planning sessions on Tuesday afternoons, when staff discuss how they can improve in their own subject areas.

"One of the key words you keep hearing here is collaborative," said Brian Fisher, the school's HR and administration director.

"We have a culture of working together and these sessions open the door to the fact that we have all got areas for development and nobody needs to feel ashamed or inadequate in

any way because there is something they need to develop."

Students and governors take part in the Better Together programme too. Governors attend sessions on topics like child protection training and the Ofsted framework, while pupils across all age ranges and abilities have helped to create a grading system on attitudes to learning.

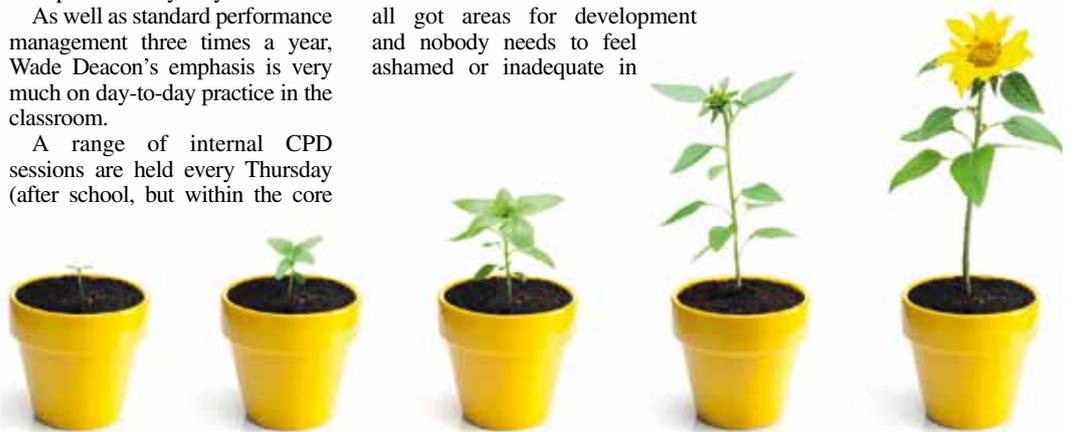
The school's approach has clearly paid dividends. Wade Deacon is top of the local league tables and in 2013 77 per cent of pupils achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and maths.

"Our student outcomes are very good," said Ms Wright. "The children are confident, articulate, friendly and welcoming – probably because of our Better Together culture."

Wade Deacon has been a member of the SSAT since 1997 and staff attend workshops and courses and keep up-to-date with new research, technology and pedagogy. The school will be sending a team of nine to the Achievement Show.

"SSAT ensures we are an outward-facing school, constantly learning from the best schools, best teachers and best practice," Ms Wright added.

"We are focused upon exceptional teaching and learning, exceptional achievement for all and exceptional training opportunities for all – to grow an outstanding learning organisation."



Good to outstanding by focusing on three key areas

The strategy for moving from good to outstanding at Sidney Stringer Academy was centred on three main areas – the curriculum, teaching and learning, and student support

Teaching and learning are “the focus of everything” as far as Sidney Stringer Academy in Coventry is concerned. The 1,300-pupil school, located in one of the country’s most disadvantaged areas, is in the top two per cent of schools nationally for progress.

Indeed, SSAT chief executive Sue Williamson recently said of it: “They have proved themselves to be leading the field in improving GCSE outcomes for their students. There is so much good practice that this school could share.”

Asked how the school arrived at its strategy for achieving its outstanding status, associate headteacher Claire Turpin said that the team had concentrated on three key areas – the curriculum, teaching and learning, and student support.

“The school has always been good,” she said. “It’s just that we have gone from good to great. Inclusion, pastoral care of the students and overcoming barriers to learning were things that the school already did well – and we built on that.”

In terms of the curriculum, the school personalises students’ learning so effectively that depending on their ability, different pupils get different amounts of time for different subjects. In years

‘ **The school personalises students’ learning so effectively that depending on their ability, pupils get different amounts of time for different subjects** ’

7 and 8, for example, some pupils might do six hours of English and four hours of maths, while others might do four hours of English and six hours of maths.

In year 11, everyone does eight subjects. Some students do more though, while others take a mix of BTECs and GCSEs. Pupils are entered for exams in years 9, 10 and 11 – in other words, when the school thinks they are ready.

“Ofsted said that it was the most personalised learning they had ever seen,” said Ms Turpin, who writes the timetable herself. “It is really down to the individual. With good information, guidance and data collection we can personalise the pathway that students need to be on. It’s not a one size fits all.”

For teaching and learning, the school used a mix of strategies to achieve its outstanding status. It hired Cambridge Education to

train its middle leaders on how to observe lessons to Ofsted standard and appointed a teaching and learning consultant in each faculty to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

“The teaching and learning consultants support staff whose lessons aren’t thought to be good enough,” said Ms Turpin, who has been at the school for 11 years.

“Instead of sending teachers out on a day’s course to learn how to be better we use our best teachers and they coach, observe, team-teach, do demonstration lessons, plan and lead INSET.

“I use the quote that you wouldn’t want to go to a satisfactory doctor. You’d want to go to a good doctor. Good has to be the minimum and people have strived and worked towards being good.

“In fact, Ofsted found 95 per cent

of lessons good or outstanding and 49 per cent of them outstanding.

“The Ofsted inspector told us that we had a teaching workforce he had never seen before. The quality was just phenomenal.”

The school has a teaching and learning room, where teachers can drop in and ask for advice, and a teaching and learning blog. It holds WOW (Watch our Work) weeks and teaching ideas are posted on the backs of the doors in the staff toilets.

Trios of teachers have also been set up – groups who decide to work on something together, observe each other’s teaching and carry out research. Areas that trios are currently focusing on include strategies for Assessment for Learning, whether marking in different colours has an impact, and the effectiveness of flipped learning.

For student support, the school introduced a mixed-age house system in 2010, the year it became an academy, as well as vertical tutor groups.

Sidney Stringer has also made a point of ensuring that it has good systems and structures in place. A Referral and Monitoring Group oversees inclusion for the whole school.

It monitors the progress of individual students and ensures that staff are supporting youngsters in removing barriers to their learning and enabling them to access the curriculum.

Not surprisingly, the school is proud of what it has achieved: “The school was good before and it’s now outstanding, but what we have got now is students who are better engaged,” said Ms Turpin.

“Students want to be at school. Their aspirations are higher and the new building and new uniform have lifted them.

They could see that they were achieving and once they started to achieve they felt good about themselves and they felt good about the school. And after all, if you feel good, you behave better, you work better and you are happier.”



No more heroes: Inclusive approaches to leadership

The stereotype of the hero head, going it alone, is no longer appropriate in 21st century education. At Bentley Wood High, leadership is shared by everybody – even the students

One of the key aims of the Achievement Show is to show how whole-school performance is underpinned by a strong culture of innovation, self-review and determination in order to support student progress and achievement.

Bentley Wood High School for Girls in Stanmore, Middlesex, demonstrates all these attributes and more, particularly in the way that it has used inclusive leadership to engage staff right across the school.

The 1,020-student school began developing its approach in 2007, after an Ofsted inspection identified middle leadership as an area for improvement. Three months later, after a serious fire, the school's senior leaders agreed that "the notion of the hero head who turns the school around" was not appropriate and that middle leaders had a crucial role to play in whole-school improvement too.

With this in mind, the school developed a range of leadership initiatives – involving everyone from teaching and support staff to the students themselves.

Senior and middle leaders worked together to identify areas of improvement and School Improvement Groups were set up for literacy, numeracy, differentiation, behaviour for learning, innovative teaching and learning, data/systems, and the 6th form.

The school, which was judged to be outstanding by Ofsted in 2012, then introduced a range of leadership layers. Each School Improvement Group is co-led by a senior leader and a strategic leader (a head of year, head of subject or second in subject), with all teaching staff joining one of the groups. Satellite groups have also been launched, comprising both teaching and support staff and focusing on areas like attendance, environment and staff wellbeing.

"Strategic leaders take on whole-school responsibilities and jointly run the School Improvement Groups with a senior leader,"

explained headteacher Janice Howkins, who is researching middle leaders' perceptions of contributing to whole-school improvement as part of her PhD.

Bentley Wood has also introduced annual honorariums, which enable any member of the school's teaching or support staff to carry out action research on any of the key areas of whole-school improvement.

"Any member of the support or teaching staff can make an application to do a piece of action research," said Ms Howkins. "They get paid £1,500 and share their findings at the end of the year.

"This year we have got 15 people doing action research. A cover supervisor did a piece of research on the quality of cover, for example, and an art teacher who is now a head of year looked at literacy through display."

The school's inclusive leadership strategy has been

extended to the students too. Groups of digital leaders have been appointed – year 8, 9 and 10 students who are highly skilled at using iPads, apps and other digital technology.

"They trained the staff on their iPads," said Ms Howkins. "They have their own room called the Genius Bar and any member of staff can go in at lunchtime and ask the digital leaders about the latest apps or advice on how to do something."

The digital leaders' latest project involves video-conferencing with schools in Hong Kong and Australia.

"We thought it would be a really good idea for our digital leaders to do some research," said Ms Howkins. "One idea is for them to research the use of technology in schools and then compare it with what is happening in Hong Kong."

The school has also appointed student learning leaders, who contribute to school improvement by observing lessons and interviewing job applicants. On the day we spoke to Ms Howkins, a team of student leaders were

busy interviewing prospective assistant headteachers.

Another innovation is in Bentley Wood's SEN provision ("although we call it Inclusion and Innovation").

The school has appointed a raft of innovative leaders who are all outstanding teachers, known for "differentiating really well". These leaders have then each taken responsibility for a particular area of SEN.

The school's head of ICT, for instance, has focused on physical impairment and with that in mind has developed resources for visually impaired pupils.

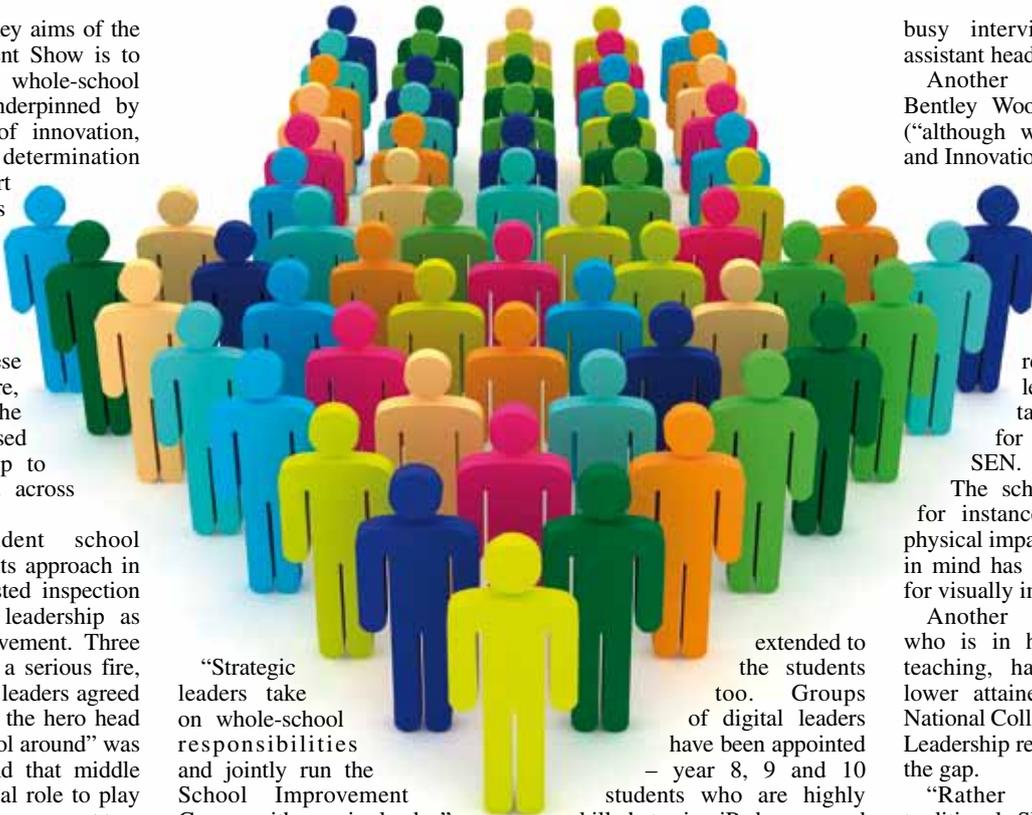
Another innovative leader, who is in his second year of teaching, has concentrated on lower attainers and is trialling National College for Teaching and Leadership research on narrowing the gap.

"Rather than having a traditional SEN department we say 'can you learn about an area of special educational needs and then share it across the school?'" Ms Howkins explained.

The impact of inclusive leadership at Bentley Wood has been impressive. The school's value-added score has risen steadily over the last three years, a record 77 per cent of pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at A* to C last year (2013) and the school recently won an SSAT Educational Outcomes Award for outstanding student progress.

"We believe very much in professional development and supportively developing people so there is a culture of going and looking at each other's lessons," said Ms Howkins.

"We hold a WOW – Watch our Work – week in July where teachers sign up to go and see each other teach. It's like a showcase. People are very engaged and motivated about their teaching and learning here."





Departing from the map

Many people visit Bethnal Green Academy looking for the secret to its remarkable turnaround. But there isn't any stardust – just hard work, excellent learning and excellent teaching

Bethnal Green Academy in London's Tower Hamlets has changed beyond all recognition over the last seven years.

At the start of 2007 it was a dysfunctional and under-performing school that had been placed in special measures in 2005.

Fast forward to today, however, and BGA, as it is known, is a vibrant and exciting place to be.

Ofsted judged it to be "outstanding" in all categories in 2012, describing students' achievement at key stage 3 and 4 as "remarkable" and commenting that "the standards they reach overall at the end of year 11 are higher than those of other students in the country, even though the majority start at the academy with attainment that is below the national average".

Seventy-four per cent of students achieved five GCSEs at A* to C including English and maths in 2013, and this summer the school's first cohort of 6th-formers will be taking their A levels.

"These are the kids who were at the school when it was in special measures and experienced the dislocation, interruption and under-performance," said principal Mark Keary, who was appointed to his post after the school went into special measures.

"They have been part of the significant change and shift that has seen the school completely alter its outcomes and they have a real sense of ownership. I will really miss them when they have gone."

The school, which has nearly 900 year 7 to 11 pupils on roll and 120 students in the 6th form, is former PE teacher Mr Keary's second headship. He previously led Rokeby School in Newham, east London, out of special measures – but while that was "a methodical, analytical process", the transformation at Bethnal Green has been "far more organic".

quality of learning and teaching "in a very direct way", as well as creating a culture for achievement, meeting the needs of students through coaching and mentoring, and building the skills of teachers.

The school banned the phrase "low ability" and started with the assumption that every pupil was capable of achieving a minimum of five GCSEs at A* to C including

staff as its "most valuable resource". Many teachers are in their mid to late 20s and new to the profession, but like their more experienced counterparts are encouraged "to take risks and to be creative and imaginative".

At the same time, they are supported in their teaching via a host of professional learning opportunities.

"We give them three years to become their own teacher – someone who uses the data incisively and personalises the learning," said Mr Keary.

"After three years, if teachers are not consistently good or outstanding, they are put on a coaching plan until they are. Everyone is learning new skills every day, working with new technology to find new and better ways of making the school a better place."

Keen to look outwards, the school's staff also make a point of sharing ideas and perspectives with other SSAT schools. Mr Keary is adamant, however, that there isn't a quick fix to take a school from mediocre to outstanding.

"We have a whole stream of people from around the world coming to see what has made the difference here," he said.

"They all see a lot of good things in terms of structure and the quality of learning and teaching, but they all seem to leave with a rather bemused expression on their faces. It's as if they've been looking for stardust, a magic strategy. But there isn't any stardust – just hard work, excellent learning and teaching, and the importance of everyone buying-in to what we are trying to achieve."

Part of being a head is knowing your school – and knowing when to depart from the route map and cut, metaphorically speaking, across country. You need to deploy your instincts, backed up by data

"I've heard so many different perspectives about 'the journey to outstanding' and the journey to get into the top one per cent of attainment, which is what our English department has achieved in the last three years for progress," he said.

"But part of being a head is knowing your school – and knowing when to depart from the route map and cut, metaphorically speaking, across country. You need to deploy your instincts, backed up by data, and do what needs to be done."

At Bethnal Green Academy this meant focusing on improving the

English and maths – an approach that "ignited" the teaching staff.

Expectations were high across the board and everyone delivered. For example, four students with a significant history of disaffection who arrived in the school's learning support centre in years 10 and 11 all achieved five GCSEs at A* to C including English and maths, last year.

"The ethos worked its way right through the school," said Mr Keary. "Our SENCO came in with exactly the same expectations of students' performance as the head of English and the head of maths."

The school regards the teaching

Four steps to outstanding – changing a school's culture

When headteacher Jason Ashley arrived at Redbridge Community School, he faced problems with behaviour and a 'poverty of aspiration'. Step-by-step, the culture has been transformed

Visitors to the head's office at Redbridge Community School in Southampton often ask why he has a cardboard box filled with stones on his desk.

"They are a reminder of how far we have come," explained Jason Ashley, who has been headteacher at the school since 2011.

When he arrived at Redbridge, which serves the most disadvantaged part of Southampton and has more than 1,000 students on its roll, the behaviour of some youngsters was poor, with a number of students suffering from "a poverty of aspiration".

There was also "a gang culture" in the local vicinity, fights regularly broke out, and Mr Ashley regularly had stones thrown at him (hence the box).

"I remember having this golden moment where I was standing

“If a teacher has an idea, we tend to say ‘yes’”

looking into the quad watching 1,000 students jumping on top of each other and messing around, and thinking 'I've just wrecked my career by coming here,'" said Mr Ashley, a former history teacher who also served in the Territorial Army for three years.

"But then I thought 'I can't leave. I've just got to toughen up and get on with it'."

Two years later, however, Ofsted judged the school to be outstanding and commented that the head had

“What I have learned about school improvement is that it takes five to six years – and you are going to take some knocks along the way”

achieved "a staggering amount". They highlighted the "improved achievement, improved teaching, better behaviour and more effective engagement with parents and carers", and said that the school was "improving the life chances of every one of its students".

Attendance has gone up, persistent absenteeism has fallen and results have steadily improved. Students' aspirations have been raised and pupils consistently outperform expectations.

At this year's Achievement Show, Mr Ashley will be detailing the four key ways in which his school has worked its way to achieving outstanding status.

First of all, the culture of the school had to be transformed.

"My view was that I couldn't focus on the teaching and learning until we had a steady ship," said Mr Ashley.

"It was important that we changed people's perceptions of the school, as well as its reputation in the community."

Students who were caught throwing stones were excluded, the timetable was rewritten (bringing back history, geography, drama, music and dance), setting

was introduced and the school was rebranded. The head was also adamant that there should be a cultural shift from "can't" to "can": "One of the things I have always believed in is saying 'yes' more than 'no'. So if a teacher has an idea, we tend to say 'yes.' Similarly, we say that we need to find the solution that works for each student and be prepared to fund that."

Behaviour was next on the agenda – although Mr Ashley loathes the word because it sounds "very negative". The school opened a behaviour centre, to which "the tough characters" were removed, and members of the senior management patrolled allotted zones every day to monitor what was going on.

The staff focused more on positive behaviour and "the 99 per cent of kids who do a fantastic job here". Interestingly, when the head asks students whether they like school these days, many tell him that "since you sorted out the behaviour this is a far better school".

The Redbridge team then turned to teaching and learning, focusing on the amount of

progress students should be making each year. Nurture groups were introduced in years 7, 8 and 9 for emotionally vulnerable children, teaching assistants were developed and trained, guided learning was introduced across the curriculum, and expectations of pupils were made very clear.

The fourth step of the improvement strategy was staff CPD.

Mr Ashley said: "We had people working exceptionally hard – but not working on the things that we needed."

Despite the many successes at Redbridge Community School, Mr Ashley and his team know full well that there is still work to do. Although the numbers of students achieving five GCSEs at

A* to C including English and maths rose from 44 per cent in 2011 to 52 per cent in 2012, they remained steady at 52 per cent in 2013.

"What I have learned about school improvement is that it takes five to six years – and you are going to take some knocks along the way," said Mr Ashley.

"We have had a cracking start here, but the reality is that going to a completely academic curriculum is going to hit us in the short-term.

"I have the highest level of expectation in my school. Everything we do is to get our students to a better place in life and break this cycle of dependency and poverty of aspiration for some of our students. Only the very best will suffice here."



'Everyone has someone to coach them or support them. It doesn't matter whether you are the executive head or an NQT – the support programme incorporates everybody.'

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'Part of being a head is knowing your school – and knowing when to depart from the route map and cut, metaphorically speaking, across country. You need to deploy your instincts, backed up by data.'

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'The school personalises students' learning so effectively that depending on their ability, pupils get different amounts of time for different subjects.'

Sidney Stringer Academy - page 4

'If a teacher has an idea, we tend to say "yes".'

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'The more we show our professionalism, the more all stakeholders will be prepared to listen.'

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'We believe very much in professional development and supportively developing people so there is a culture of going and looking at each other's lessons.'

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'What I have learned about school improvement is that it takes five to six years – and you are going to take some knocks along the way.'

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