

How can an effective coaching culture be established across different schools in an Alliance?

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Context

The Portswood Teaching School Alliance (PTSA) is a Cohort 1 Teaching School and is a collegiate professional Alliance that is open to all schools. Current members are primarily from Southampton and have the aim of developing cross phase learning from nursery to university. In the first year of being a Teaching School much work was done to build High Social Capital (Hargreaves, 2012) and provide a range of support that would cater for local priorities. The organisation of the Alliance was therefore not based upon the 'Big 6' but instead upon local need. Hence the Alliance is split into seven subgroups; namely: Assessment, Curriculum, Early Years, Inclusion, Professional Development of Teaching and Learning, School Improvement and Secondary.

Each group is comprised of leaders and practitioners and feeds into a steering group which acts as the strategic lead for the alliance. The Local Authority is an active participant in the Alliance resulting in school to school support being at the forefront of alliance work. This includes deployment of NLEs, SLEs and our own Lead Practitioner role which provides teacher to teacher support much as the former AST model did. The Alliance runs its own School Direct programme, has over 80 teachers on its NQTs programme and also runs a second year teacher programme. ITP and OTP courses are delivered termly and a number of twilight support groups also run including to support the new curriculum. Support is provided for Research work with the intention of developing more of a research based culture in the schools.

What did the project set out to achieve?

The PTSA is using the development of coaching as a key lever for school improvement. The success of Portswood Primary School in using coaching for improvements in teaching and learning has been shared across the city for a number of years. This was centred upon having a lead coach in the school who concentrated upon creating an ethos where coaching was the foundation for high quality teaching. In 2010 during the initial NSS work HMI observed:

The role of the Professional Tutor within your own school, and with the partner school, brings a relentless focus on maintaining and improving the quality of T & L. In both schools I observed outstanding lessons taught by teachers who, evidence demonstrates, have improved their teaching under his tutelage

HMI, June 2010

The question was, could this success also work in other schools? Through NSS work the coaching model was introduced into three schools and, along with other interventions, had significant impact upon standards in supported schools (average rise of 19% at L4+ across the three main supported schools).

In each of these cases the Portswood lead coach was prominent in the supported schools so the question remained, *could it work across a number of schools where the culture would need to be developed by the staff and leaders of the school itself?*

In this project Portswood provided a package of coaching training for fourteen primaries and one secondary school in Southampton (leading to the coaching of in excess of 100 teachers) and over the past three years the creation of coaching roles has increased rapidly within the city, particularly at assistant head level. This research sought to capture the impact of these initiatives and also analyse how the coaching model evolved. All schools received launch training from Portswood and a programme of support to embed the coaching culture (see appendix A). The schools were working on different time frames with some having received support from Portswood as a part of NSS work four years ago while others joined the research project soon after it began, aware of the success of the model and actively requesting the training. Data was collected through questionnaires completed by the lead coaches and the heads of the school (Appendix B) as well as through interviews, coaching support group meetings and increasingly through Ofsted and LA reports on the impact of the coaching.

A key aspect of the impact has been the use of 'Parrot on the Shoulder' in-class coaching that provides real time feedback during the session. At times this feedback may be 'directing', particularly if the teacher lacks experience. For more skilled and experienced teachers the feedback is more questioning based and helps the teacher reflect. This borrows from the work of Schon (1983). Teachers are normally encouraged to reflect on action – after the lesson. In these coaching sessions the teachers reflect in action – during the lesson.

'Parrot on the shoulder' is precise and dynamic and can also be supported by the use of video recording which can be used in the lesson to provide immediate feedback and also after the lesson for further reflection. This method is embedded in a coaching culture. It is not a 'Tips for Teachers' approach because the success of real-time feedback is based upon the trusting relationship between teacher and coach.

Impact on schools

All of the schools in the project were able to evidence impact upon teaching. For some schools this related to the improvement in teaching of one or more teachers but for most there was a clear cultural shift such as a junior school where Ofsted reported:

'The programme of coaching for teachers is starting to improve the Quality of Teaching. One significant initiative has been the appointment of a member of staff to act as a coach, supported through the local school alliance, to make possible the professional development of other teachers. The improvement is beginning to have a positive impact'

Ofsted March 12

One head, who transformed his school and was one of the first to request the coaching training, analysed the impact of the coaching in his school by writing:

It has been the development of a coaching culture that continues to be much more active in and accepting of the process and how it has built, developed and diversified across the school. There is now a strong culture of understanding relating to the need for consistent and constant improvement and development in teaching and learning. As such the staff as a whole are much more proactive and focused in their approach to their own development and belief in the need to be part of a continual cycle of reflection – informed by coaching (and to some degree mentoring).

Head, School E

The responses of the heads often included a reference to 'culture'. Another Junior school head wrote:

The culture of support has grown at a fast pace this year as a result of the Deputy Headteacher having a full time coaching role. He has spent a great deal of time gathering information about different coaching models and worked with the 'coaching support' network facilitated by the teaching alliance and utilised the information to design a coaching plan, based on individual needs.

Head, School G

This relates to depth rather than a series of unconnected coaching events. It cannot be claimed that the improvements in these schools can be solely attributed to coaching developments but the feedback from heads, coaches and teachers paints a picture of the coaching contributing significantly to improvements in the quality of teaching. Figure 1 provides a model to represent this in the form of an 'onion'. The 'onion' represents the different layers at which the coaching model has worked beginning at the centre with the teacher, represented in the diagram by a quote from a teacher on the impact of coaching on her work:

"Coaching, and particularly 'Parrot on the Shoulder', has enabled me to pinpoint the exact area of my teaching I want to improve and to be able to address it there and then rather than dealing with it retrospectively."

The diagram goes on to give examples for subsequent layers: coach, school and LA/Ofsted. This feedback from external agencies such as Ofsted and the LA mean a variety of voices are recognising the impact. (See appendix C for vignette of the experience of a coach to her training).

Diagram 1 - Feedback from a variety of Voices

"Coaching, and particularly 'Parrot on the Shoulder', has enabled me to pinpoint the exact area of my teaching I want to improve and to be able to address it there and then rather than dealing with it retrospectively

"As a coach I am committed to the belief that the coachee can be successful. I am not there to provide the answers but to ask the questions."

"Coaching builds the confidence amongst staff that we can resolve our own teaching and learning issues."

"One significant initiative has been the appointment of a member of staff to act as a coach... to make possible the professional development of other teachers."



Within the project there was only one school where the coaching support 'failed'. The word failure is in inverted commas because some of the teachers in the supported school did improve as teachers and in this sense there were individual coaching successes. However, in terms of building a culture then this support could be said to have failed. The primary reasons for this were the lack of understanding of the headteacher and deputy headteacher of in-class coaching. Rather than be based upon developing the trust of the person being coached the coaching became another form of monitoring with teachers feeling threatened and not supported in the process. The leadership lacked the necessary understanding of the coaching process and the inter-personal skills that are needed to lead to improvement. In this school there was only superficial change. Social continuity was sadly lacking and by the end of the year the head and deputy left the school. The learning here is that for coaching to be embedded there needs to be both the understanding and the commitment of the SLT. As Whitmore (2010) has warned, 'Coaching is not merely a technique to be wheeled out'.

Another key impact of the project has been the capacity building across the PTSA including the creation of a support network group for coaches. One coach summarised the impact of the group thus:

The coaching group is useful because it gives coaches the chance to discuss with each other strategies for different situations. We can share successes and things that did not go so well and learn from each other. Also, there are times where we look at research or articles that help us focus on a particular area of coaching. We discuss this and link to the work that we do, thinking about how it could develop our practice. We then take this away to share with others in our school. The meetings also help our Alliance to develop a consistent approach to coaching across the schools.

The group therefore aided the development of a coaching culture.

Impact on the Alliance

In terms of the impact upon the leadership of the project the building of high social capital has again been vital and we have seen the need to spend time making the coaching package clear, emphasising the depth and complexity of the model and also the need to ensure schools have mechanisms for monitoring the impact. If heads see coaching in a 'bubble' away from a deep cultural understanding it can be mal-administered and can impact negatively. Another aspect of key learning has been the notion of a 'Tipping point'. Developing a coaching culture has not been about 'high sale' techniques and touting for business, It has been a grass roots emergence linked to a word of mouth recommendation based upon the credibility of the success at Portswood over a number of years and, more recently, the success when developed in other Southampton schools.

As the success of the coaching model was seen more schools approached the alliance for training and support. As this initiative and other PTSA work increased, schools became more open which again built further trust. Whole alliance meetings allowed success stories to be shared and other forums such as the Primary Heads Conference also provided the chance to share what was on offer. The close relationship with the LA also meant that the Alliance was invited onto Task Groups to provide school-to-school support and in some cases providing lead coaches to improve teaching as whole, not just individual teachers. Nevertheless there is still a long way to go to develop trust with all schools that may fear that the alliance work is an attempt to somehow 'clone' the Portswood methods.

Teaching School Alliance Leadership Learning

In addition to the research methods already identified Robert Hill, Educational consultant for NCTL, interviewed heads, coaches and a LA representative connected with the work in order to gain further insight into the leadership of cross-school pedagogy programmes. His findings are presented in the box below here in italics.

The Alliance operates in the context of the local authority (LA) being a key strategic partner with a high level of trust between the authority and the teaching school. The LA tracks the performance of schools, commissions packages of support from the Alliance for schools that need it and assesses progress and impact.

'There is also a good history of local primary schools in the Southampton area working together. The coaching leaders have built on this platform and avoided a sense that 'this is all about Portswood' by, for example, building a network of lead practitioner coaches drawn from schools across the Alliance and involving other schools in the selection of the lead practitioners.

These two factors have provided a clear and stable context for strategic leadership of the coaching programme. For example, when a task group is formed to co-ordinate improvement support for a particular school, the leaders of the coaching programme are often members of the task group and so can see the coaching contribution to a school's improvement journey in the context of the other interventions that may be commissioned at the same time.

At a more operational level key characteristics of the leadership of the programme have included:

- *'ensuring that the coaching model is organised and delivered systematically – this includes the process for selecting lead practitioner coaches (which involves two leaders observing their teaching practice , prior to them being interviewed) the provision of training, quality assurance and support via the coaching network'*
- *working with heads of individual schools that want to use the programme to build acceptance and understanding of coaching among their staff and how it is very different from being observed formally as part of a performance management process;*
- *adopting a responsive flexible approach to the requirements of schools and working lead practitioners to establish strong relationships with the head and lead coach in the school. The provision of coaching support is differentiated and tailored to match the needs of each school. By maintaining regular contact with heads the coaching leaders are able to vary the frequency or intensity of the visits, target particular year groups and address the personal development needs of particular members of staff. They are also able to adjust the focus of the programme to provide support for a school that wants to restructure its leadership team to support a coaching culture or appoint someone to lead the school's coaching team;*
- *encouraging coaches to identify positives within classroom – quick wins. This helps to build confidence and create a permissive climate for coaches to tackle harder challenges; and*
- *insisting on professional standards with reports from coaches on each session with a teacher*

being delivered to heads within 24 hours.

This leadership approach has created a culture of consistent quality that in turn has generated credibility for the coaching programme. As one headteacher that had used the Alliance-trained coaches put it:

“If a coach came or was sent to my school and I knew that they had been trained by Portswood I would accept them.”

A key leadership challenge has been how far to ‘let’ schools go in adapting the coaching programme to their own context – without it undermining the basic principles underpinning the model. The approach taken by the Portswood leaders has been to talk with schools about what they are aiming to achieve and then exercise a quality assurance function as they implement their own within-school coaching initiatives.

These characteristics would tend to suggest that leaders of cross-school improvement projects need to be able to:

- spot the potential of an initiative and put in place the systems that will enable its impact to be replicated*
- build consent and ownership among other heads and practitioners*
- champion projects and, where necessary, provide reassurance*
- demonstrate strong inter-personal skills*
- see their work alongside other drivers of school improvement; and*
- adapt to changing contexts as the programme develops*

The leadership of the programme has become more sustainable as the project has developed. The programme was initiated and has been led by the Director of Teaching and Learning at Portswood. 'But he quickly brought on board a leader from a partner school to support the research for the project, and she has since transferred on to the Portswood staff.' The leaders themselves are not sure whether the principles are as yet sufficiently embedded and the leadership sufficiently distributed to guarantee the sustainability of the programme in the event that either or both of them were to switch to a different role or school. However, significantly one of the Portswood-trained coaches from another school felt that:

“There were enough quality coaches in the schools to maintain the momentum and for someone to pick up the baton.”

Key Leadership Learning

The key findings from the project can be summarised as follows:

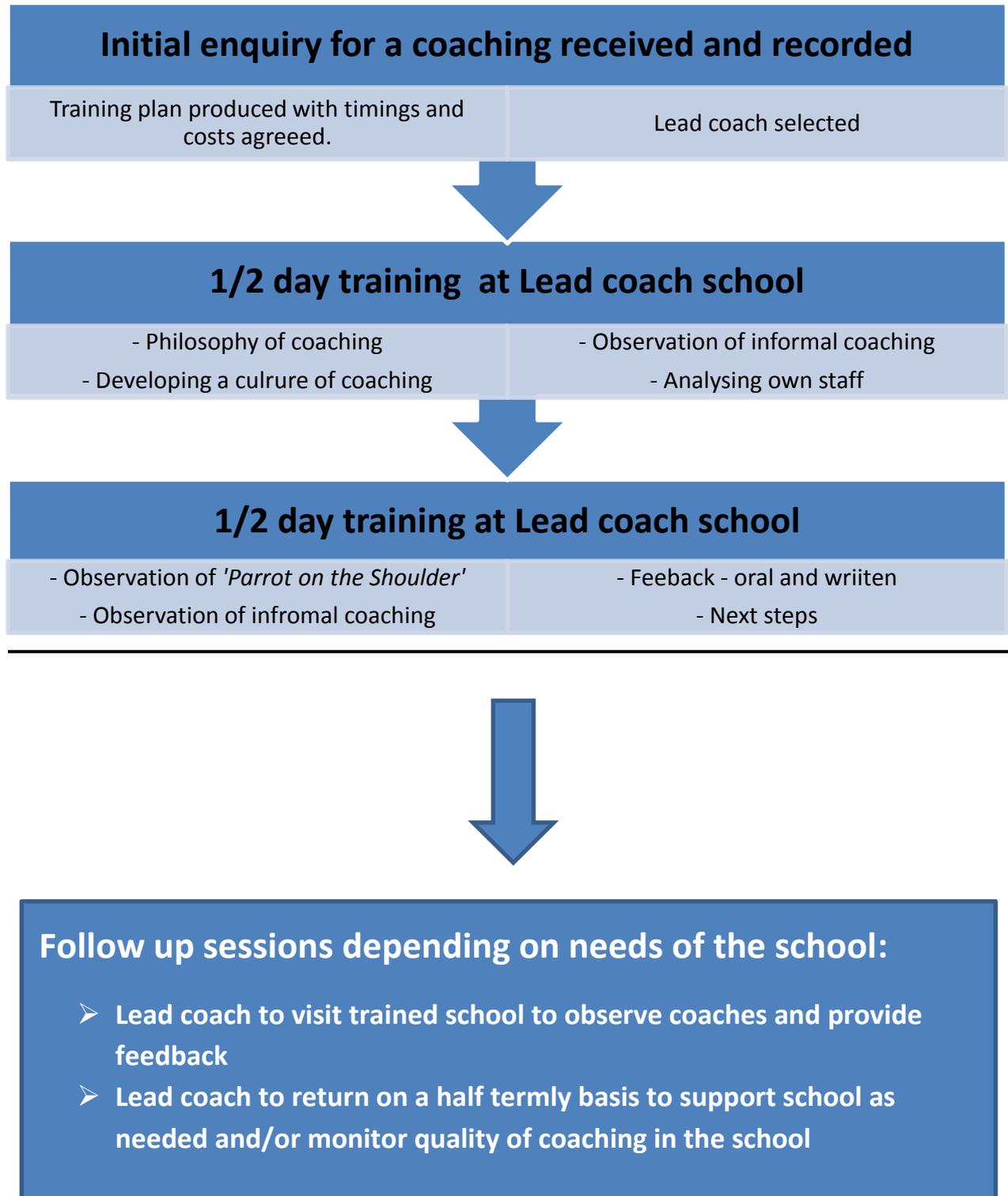
1. Where schools have seen a shift in culture it has been underpinned by a deeper understanding of coaching as a whole
2. Real-time feedback coaching (Parrot on the shoulder) has had significant impact upon improving teachers (See impact section) It does, however, run the risk of being applied at a simplistic level as a panacea for all teaching ills. The philosophy behind the effective PTSA coaching model could suffer a 'lethal mutation' if applied by schools who do not fully understand that a technique such as 'Parrot on the shoulder' should never operate superficially and is only a part of coaching as a whole. It is vital that initial training makes the theoretical basis for coaching clear and that on-going professional dialogue needs to be at the heart of effective coaching
3. The PTSA Coaching model has acted as a basis for innovation which has then been adapted and innovated in individual settings with new roles emerging in many schools
4. A range of coaching techniques that impact upon teaching, often rapidly, are attractive to headteachers and have been employed extensively with significant effect. This has also occurred in school to school support with Lead Practitioners coaching teachers in supported schools
5. A variety of ways in which schools could engage in coaching has emerged – training, school to school support, network group and hubs. This has helped the coaching culture become more embedded
6. Schools are increasingly creating specific roles for coaching, often at assistant head level
7. Although the project played a part in developing a supportive culture it benefitted from the other successful alliance initiatives that showed success and developed trust (NQTs, OTP, etc.)

Demand for coaching support is constantly increasing and is now extending beyond Southampton and also into Secondary schools and includes the emergence of a new hub of schools who requested facilitation for their own in-school coaching development. These schools are another example of taking the initiative based upon the Portswood model but adapting to their own contexts. The impact of the development of ever increasing in-school coaches and the work of Lead Practitioners going into schools coaching individual teachers has been clear at alliance level but equally important has been the impact for individual teachers encapsulated by a recent email from a teacher, coached through this model, which read;

'I just wanted to say a big thank you for all your help, coaching and support over the year. I was observed by the Lead Inspector yesterday morning for maths. I had my feedback after school and got an 'Outstanding'! So a massive thank you.'

Such recognition was common place in the research and marks a shift in culture leading to an improvement in teaching across these Southampton schools.

Flow chart for providing a PTSA coaching package



Appendix B

Coaching Questionnaire for Heads

Head: Jimmy Gallagher School D Autumn 2012

Question	Response
What were the reasons for appointing someone into a coaching role?	<p>To build capacity for leadership in learning</p> <p>To ensure that strengths in teaching were shared across the school.</p> <p>To ensure greater consistency in the standard of teaching across the school.</p>
How was coaching explained to the staff?	<p>Staff were initially asked for an area that they would like to develop – taking into account recent observation targets and whole school areas for development.</p> <p>This meant that everyone felt that their own needs were being met through the coaching. This has now moved and everyone is now coached and expects to be coached.</p> <p>It was also introduced as a way to make sure we have a consistent teaching profile across the school that reinforces the termly Raising Attainment Plan.</p>
What did you hope to achieve through coaching?	<p>I hoped to achieve a consistently good profile of teaching and the impact of teaching across the school. I also hoped to create a culture where open professional discussion through informal and planned coaching takes place between all teachers daily.</p>
What are the specific areas of pedagogy you hope to improve through coaching?	<p>Our focus in Spring 2012 was developing effective guided groups. This linked with less teacher talk, lapping, and a variety of AfL to be able to structure flexible guided groups.</p> <p>Another focus was developing mental maths strategies and this has been an area my maths leader has developed through the project.</p> <p>A current focus of all coaching is making sure SEN/ FSM make at least good progress in all lessons.</p>
What impact have you seen?	<p>The teaching across the school is now much more consistent and this is evidenced through lesson observations last half term. Learning walks by SLT are referred to maths/ literacy team leaders for addressing through coaching.</p> <p>Initial barriers to coaching with a minority of staff have been overcome.</p> <p>Every teacher now expects coaching linked to their PM objectives. Staff are asking to be coached. I am very pleased with the capacity to improve teaching that my coaching leader has developed. Other staff who were initially coached are now coaching others and the coaching expertise has widened to other members of staff. Confidence in these staff has increased significantly and they are far more confident in recognising good features of lessons.</p> <p>Staff are more reflective on what they have done to support the learning and</p>

	when being coached are thinking about the learning in order to pre-empt the coach.
How have you monitored the impact of the coaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through regular reports from external supporting coach - Discussions with staff about what they see to be the impact on their own professional development and in turn impact on pupil outcomes. - Impact seen through usual monitoring activities- learning walks, lesson obs, work sampling, pupil conferencing, data analysis. - Meeting with coaching leader- focussing on the overview of roles and accountabilities for developing coaching. <p>A further observation would be that setting appraisal targets this year was far easier as staff really had a deeper understanding about what they have to do to improve. They also clearly understood that coaching would be a part in achieving targets for this year.</p>

Graded as 1 highest to 5 lowest

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
The school has a coaching culture		x			
Staff reflect upon their teaching and seek to improve		x			
Staff are comfortable being coached in class		x			
Systems for monitoring effectiveness of coaching are effective		x			
The coaching skills of the lead coach are very good	x				

Other comments

“The grading above reflect the fact that all teaching staff understand coaching and have experience of being coached. We have established coaching across the school since March 2012 as part of the project and when plotted against the gradings at the start show good progress over time. Our next step is to develop coaching for support staff. TA coaching primarily but I would also like to work with my Business Manager to look at how a coaching approach could be used for the admin team.”

The impact in a relatively short time is significant for the teachers who coach, those that are coached and in turn better outcomes for pupils. Coaching has given us the structure and expertise to address inconsistencies in teaching quickly. We place a high value on the external support commissioned through PTSA. Governors are fully informed about the development of coaching. We believe we have achieved excellent value for money from the support. Thank you!

Appendix C

Case study of coach's reflections on what training meant at her school

BC – coaching support received from Dr Keith Watson

18th September 2013 at Portswood

I visited Portswood to meet Dr Keith Watson, who helped me understand the background and theory to coaching. Whilst walking around the school with Keith, I observed him having a number of professional conversations with different teachers, including an NQT and noticed how Keith made every conversation a coaching one. It was apparent from walking around the school that everybody, including the children, was used to Keith popping in and out of the classrooms. Everyone was open to coaching and this open policy was embedded throughout the school. From this visit it was agreed that I would return to Portswood and observe Keith conducting the 'parrot on the shoulder' coaching technique, which I was very keen to see in action as it was a method of coaching I was unfamiliar with. I also felt it was a method of coaching that would be useful to develop back at my school.

25th September 2013 at Portswood

I visited Portswood to observe Keith using the 'parrot on the shoulder' method of coaching with one of the year 5 teachers. It was clear that the year 5 teacher involved was very used and open to coaching. I found it useful to see when Keith took the opportunity to coach the teacher during the lesson so as not to inhibit the flow of the lesson.

Keith modelled to me, during the session, the kinds of open questions and prompts that could be used in a lesson to make the teacher think about what was happening in the lesson, where it was going next, how they were going to do something. These questions really made the teacher think and enabled him to react immediately within the lesson. I really liked the immediate impact this style of coaching had and the reflection that was happening throughout the lesson by the teacher.

Afterwards Keith and I discussed the lesson and he showed me how to write up a session. Keith then asked me to give the teacher feedback, which made me nervous, but we walked this through first which put me more at ease. I really enjoyed this session with Keith and could see the advantage of real-time feedback during a lesson. I was keen to try this type of coaching, build relationships with staff at my school to allow this to happen and develop written feedback. These are the targets that I set with Keith for the next session.

9th October 2013 at Client school

Keith visited my school to observe and coach me coaching a year 1 member of staff. I felt nervous before the session as 'parrot on the shoulder' coaching was something I had never done before. I had talked to the year 1 teacher involved before the session and she was very open and willing to take part – this was all very new to her. To put the teacher at ease, I took Keith to meet her before the session. During the session, Keith talked me through and helped me to formulate open questions and discussed techniques to ensure I didn't stop the flow of the session (e.g. Give the children a question to discuss if I want to talk to the teacher). We also discussed how to ensure that note taking was effective and how the coaching session could be different if it was an NQT that was being coached.

After the session, I fed back to the teacher verbally and produced written feedback in a simple format as modelled by Keith at the previous session. The teacher concerned was very positive about the coaching session and felt that it had benefitted her greatly. She has asked for further coaching and support to continue to develop her practice.

I found the session very useful because it made me think about how to phrase open questions to prompt, provoke thought and impact on the teaching and learning happening in the classroom at the time. I also learnt that it is important to choose your moments carefully when coaching so as not to hinder the flow or pace of the lesson, as well as the importance that the coaching session should be focused for greatest impact. I am very keen to continue to develop this coaching style both with more experienced staff as well as NQTs. I would also like to open staff up to the idea of using video for coaching purposes and I have already discussed this possibility with one of my NQTs as he is a visual learner, although this may need to be a longer term target with some staff.

I now need to share my learning with my fellow coach at my school. I am keen to attend the coaching network meetings and build up relationships with coaches from other schools in the city to share good practice and continue to develop my skills. I need to discuss with my head teacher how I would like to continue to develop my coaching skills and how we can develop coaching within my school. Finally, I would welcome more support from Keith at a later date.