

Mutual BENEFITS

SHARING IDEAS, RESOURCES AND BEST PRACTICE AMONGST THEMSELVES IS PROVING TO BE INVALUABLE FOR THE PROGRESS OF A GROUP OF VERY DIFFERENT SCHOOLS ACROSS THE NORTH WEST – TS TAKES A LOOK AT WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON...

Bright Futures Educational Trust was set up in 2011 to offer a quality education that opens up real choices for young people across the North West. Made up of three secondary schools, a special educational needs school, two primaries and a sixth form college, the Trust is bringing together experts from each of the schools to drive up standards and to collaborate on innovative teaching practices.

At the head of the Trust is Dame Dana Ross-Wawrzynski DBE – CEO and driver of the collaboration, and also executive headteacher of the Trust's lead school, Altrincham Grammar School for Girls, which is one of the top five state schools in the country. Awarded a DBE earlier this year for her passion and achievement in education, Dana's vision is to bring more schools into the Trust to be part of an organisation that offers quality education that guarantees choices for every child. "We are constantly pioneering new classroom techniques in collaboration with top universities," she explains, "as well as up-to-date training for our teachers across the schools. We work with a number of organisations, as well as each other, to improve our practice and see how we can improve what we do."

"All staff, not just teachers but secretarial and support staff, are offered continuing professional development. We have a real sense of pride that whatever we do, we want to be at the top of our profession, and we want to help those that feel the same."

Safety in numbers

Mathematics is a key focus for the Trust this academic year. Simon Mazumder, Specialist Leader of Education, is head of mathematics at Altrincham Grammar School for Girls and has brought his expertise and experience to Cedar Mount Academy – another Trust member school based in East Manchester. Both Simon and the Trust believe that no matter what the young person's ability or social background is, every child has the ability and potential to achieve, as Simon explains:

"There is a challenge faced by teachers in that some young people often find mathematics abstract, and difficult to grasp. This doesn't



mean necessarily that they are unable to do it, I believe everyone has the ability to achieve, but that we need to find different ways of approaching teaching and learning to ensure children see meaning within what is a very conceptual subject.

"There is a common misconception with maths that there is just 'one answer' to the question. We need to prove that maths isn't just about right or wrong, that there are various ways around each problem – and we can only do this by making sure we are using simple language, using graphics and taking more of a holistic approach."

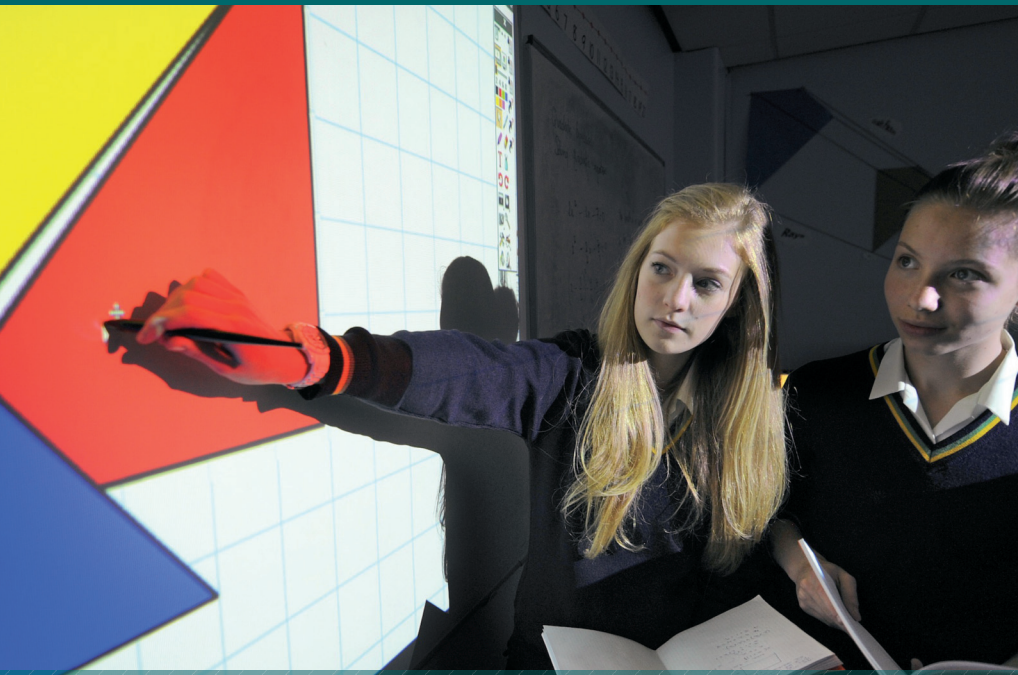
"What has worked extremely well within Bright Futures is collaboration across the schools, sharing ideas and working on our approach to teaching together. We work on collaborative lesson planning, going into each other's lessons to look at structure and method. We then do a follow up session, which involves reflection and evaluation on how we can improve, progress, and ultimately improve attainment in the young people we are teaching."

"It is important to promote dialogue with colleagues – no man is an island and working together, talking about what works well and what doesn't, can encourage new ideas and ensure we are taking a more holistic approach to teaching."



Shared communication

As part of Simon's role as a national Specialist Leader of Education, he is striving to bring together other SLEs from across the North West and Yorkshire once or twice a year to hold workshops. "These workshops will be focused on what does not work for us as well as what does," he observes. "We want to be really open,



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“It’s about speaking to colleagues to find ways of allowing children to understand, fine tuning our teaching skills and ultimately raising their skills in the subject. Encouraging dialogue with each other is extremely important.”

This method also applies to practice across the Bright Futures Educational Trust, where INSET days are a key part of sharing best practice amongst Trust staff across all the schools. Teachers from each of the seven schools meet termly to talk about improving teaching and learning.

Altrincham Grammar School for Girls is also one of the first Teaching Schools in the country, leading in improvement of teaching and learning, subject knowledge and pedagogy. Simon often leads the Trust INSET days and believes they are a useful tool to spark conversation about what is working well, and what might need to be improved:

“The INSET days we run are fascinating – we get so much out of them and each time we meet we discover something different. I talk to my colleagues about how we facilitate effective teaching and how we get our students to understand the physiology of learning.

“A lot of what I see in our young people is that they feel uncomfortable when they don’t know the answer, and this can cause a barrier between them and achieving their potential. I encourage our staff to take the child on a journey, not just talk about the journey, and to say to them ‘you might not be able to do it now, but you will be able to eventually.’ Everyone will achieve and attain in some way, and this is a

concept I take with me across the schools I work with, no matter what the child’s background or learning difficulties.”

Unlocking enthusiasm

During Simon’s time at Altrincham Grammar School for Girls, six girls went on to do a maths degree at top universities. Results also went up from 98% A*-C and 68% A*-A six years ago, to a 100% success rate and 93% A*-A for the school’s current year group. He puts this down to simply making lessons enjoyable.

“I think it’s important to focus less on floor targets and the pressure from OFSTED,” he states. “It’s about the individual and making their experience of mathematics a positive one. It just goes to show that three girls who went on to study maths at university were actually originally going to study other subjects but changed to maths due to their enjoyment of the subject.

“Ultimately I believe that everyone is ambitious for their future, we all intrinsically want to be happy and once young people realise their potential they will be open to learning and achieving their best.”

Simon uses a variety of engagement strategies from coaching, mentoring, modelling and working with large groups of Year 10 and 11 students. His current strategy at Cedar Mount Academy involves working with the maths department to restructure and collaborate with the team to boost results.

“Whilst there are many children at the academy who come from a much more diverse background than those at the girls’ school, I’ve seen the same barriers to learning in both environments,” he points out. “Every child deserves a good quality education and that’s what we’re striving to achieve here at the Trust.”

Simon is also working with primary schools on a mathematics tool kit as well as providing training and guidance and enabling parents to work with their children on numeracy. He is currently developing maths subject knowledge and personal development for primary colleagues and working on a research project on lesson study with Manchester University. Simon has also implemented a new maths A-level course in a partnership school including the curriculum, teaching and learning requirements.

“For me, it’s about developing relationships with people,” he concludes. “You can’t work with a head of department for over a year and not develop that relationship. I make sure that I keep in touch with them – there will be telephone calls, emails, perhaps even a meeting over a pint. You need to make sure the legacy lasts.”

and admit that at times we’ve made a mistake – it’s good to embrace failure and learn from negative experiences. Critical guidance from our peers, although it may be tough, is key to our own professional development and will ultimately ensure we are doing the best job we can. Although of course it’s good to celebrate success too.



IF YOU COULD ONLY DO 3 THINGS...

1

Collaborate, discuss ideas with colleagues

2

Make your lessons as enjoyable as possible for your students

3

Don’t go it alone; there are people who can help you if you’re in need of advice