



PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY TAKING THE LEAD

The Future Leaders ethos is all about exceptional and inspirational leadership which makes a fundamental difference to the lives of children; and for Paul Stone, now Associate Headteacher at Holloway School in North London, it was exposure to this kind of leadership that gave him the drive and determination to pursue a headship of his own, and in turn make a huge impact on attainment for hundreds of children.

Paul joined the Future Leaders programme in 2007 because he wanted to work in challenging urban secondary schools. He was placed in Woodlands school in Essex for his first year – known as the residency year – which wasn't initially the typical urban school he was expecting in that their challenges weren't obviously visible.

However the experience proved to be invaluable. "It was through working and talking with the Headteacher, Andy White, where I gained the most that year. The way he dealt with things and his ethos and philosophy about education had a profound effect on me; Andy always put the students first. There are trends in education to bring in new and various initiatives, and they are not always right for the context of the school. Andy had the confidence and conviction to say no to things and the ability to know what was right; he has a view about education and he applies it rigorously to his school – his focus is absolute."



Paul Stone, Future Leaders Cohort '06,
Associate Headteacher, Holloway School

"It's easy to get pulled along with new ideas, and his approach was to always consider: 'If it was my children in that situation, would I want them to be doing that?' While other schools were pursuing any 5 A*–Cs to make the league tables, Andy was all about them getting good GCSEs, including English and Maths. It was always about what's best for the children and he kept that clarity of vision, and made decisions based on their wellbeing."

The Big City

Not only did the experience at Woodlands expose Paul to exemplary leadership and vision, but it also led to his current role. Rather fortuitously, Andy White had links with Holloway School, meaning Paul was able to spend a day at the school each week during his residency year to improve Key Stage 3. Two years ago, when a Deputy Head position became available he applied for it and was successful.

Now he could really start having an impact and making a difference in an area that he would find challenging. Holloway School is in a deprived area with 50 per cent of students on Free School Meals. Originally a boys school, with only a 1/3 of the population being girls, the school has massively turned its fortunes around and in the last couple of years has seen results dramatically improve; though there is still a lot to do, allowing Paul a lot of scope to make a difference.

From the outset Paul's main focus was on developing exemplary Learning and Teaching, which over the course of two years has had a significant impact on improving English and Maths A*-C grades by over 20 per cent...

“That first year I was line managing two core departments that weren't doing as well as they could, as well as focusing on the standards of teaching. The Headteacher Bob Hamlyn was keen that we should develop an established whole school vision of what's expected of teachers in the classroom, which was all about raising standards.”

Paul's approach was to firstly look in depth at how children learn, and then work with teachers to improve and develop the kinds of lessons they were delivering. The school is now what Paul calls a 'learner-focused', as opposed to 'teacher-focused', school.”, I want pupils to be involved in their own learning, I don't want them just to listen, we need to give them reasons to learn, which involves a real step change in the way we've been teaching. It's been a journey, and of course it's been challenging, but the teaching here has improved and it's significantly contributed to the improvement in results.”

Ways to Learn

Part of this improvement has been raising the expectations of teachers and teaching standards, something that comes in part from the Future Leaders training.

“The key point is about raising expectations of what we can achieve, and what we can empower the students to achieve. And I've changed my opinion here, but the school has also changed my own views, and my goals have got even higher!”

Getting staff on board to change the way they teach is obviously a huge process, and at times a challenging one, so shortly after starting at the school Paul organised INSET days, where teachers worked together to look at Learning and Teaching models, and how they could improve. “A lot of people think that teaching is telling, and learning is listening; but we want to work on a model of learning that's about pupils constructing their own learning, they need to be active in it, and really know it, not just try to remember it.”



Paul Stone, Associate Headteacher with some of Holloway School's pupils

Part of this process involved a real commitment to 'Assessment for Learning' (AfL), ensuring teachers were constantly assessing what level of understanding the students had, but even more importantly, how they were learning. "With AfL we do a lot of interactive work, hearing the kids talk, and what they understand. We often challenge their views, and try to make their learning and understanding more profound. Commonly, lessons have three phases – start, end and information giving. Our lessons have a fourth dimension where the pupils are encouraged to internalise the information." Paul worked with the teaching staff to develop a lesson structure which included an element of giving students time to answer a question, and problem solving, questioning and talking activities.

To ensure this structure remains effective, Paul has worked to improve lesson observations; initially bringing in independent external teams to ensure standards were consistently high. "We've started from scratch to agree what we think is an outstanding lesson, and I'm working on a coaching programme with teachers, where they can

proactively identify work they need to do and what needs improving, rather than just being told."

Always Improving

Having put in place processes that support improvements in Learning and Teaching, which has in turn contributed to improved results, Paul is now working with teachers across departments to ensure that students are getting at least the same minimum in English and Maths. "Bob and I firmly believe that if you are good at one, there is no reason why you shouldn't get the same grade in the other – and this all comes back to the right kind of teaching. Not telling a child that they have a creative brain so can't do maths, or vice versa. We look at what's happening in English and Maths and how we can improve these grades for pupils."

In addition to this Paul has been looking at how the school monitors students to make sure that they're actually making a real difference for them, and that they're getting the best from the school. He's also

looked at behaviour – leading a team to establish consistent classroom routines; developing a new policy on assessment; working with governors dealing with exclusions; and undertaken all the roles required as an Associate Headteacher, including attending the school’s project board, dealing with borough representatives, and always being crucially involved in strategic decisions at the highest level.

“Working closely with Bob has been excellent. We’re very likeminded, and believe that the students’ learning is paramount. We want standards to be high – we say No Excuses, and we really believe that.”

“One of the things I’ve really engaged with is the way Bob talks about ‘toxic assumptions’ – which is basically people referring to our students as ‘these kids’ – with an expectation that they can’t achieve what children from a more privileged background can. We’re trying to eradicate that from the school which opens up so many possibilities for all our students.”

“Having a belief that their background does not determine their achievement is vital.”

“In that sense we’re very closely aligned.”

Bob Hamlyn agrees: “Paul has access to, and uses, a wide range of knowledge and experience, and it was something I wanted to bring in to Holloway School; as I work very hands on here, so I don’t have a chance to go away from school much. Paul brought in new ideas, outside influences and ways of working that have really complemented us.

Future Leaders is a powerful organisation with the latest thinking on issues and leadership, and he’s really had an impact across the school.”

A Profound Impact

While it’s clear from talking to Paul and Bob that Paul has made a deep and lasting impact throughout school, the improvement in results alone speaks volumes.

A–Cs English and Maths:

2005/06: 17%

2007/08: 26%

2008/09: 37%

Of all schools that were under the 30% mark in London, Holloway was the second most improved in London this year; as well as being in the top six per cent nationally for contextual value added results. The school is consistently seeing a ten percent increase year on year for A-Cs at English and Maths.

“Paul’s impact has been huge, and the results are the proof of much that Paul has done,” says Bob.

“Learning and Teaching has improved dramatically over the last two years, he’s really accelerated that improvement, and got the system to how it should be, making Learning and Teaching a priority for the school. His experience with Future Leaders has also given him the credibility to speak about and lead this development. The improvement of grades was a key part of Paul’s success here.”

A Solid Basis

Looking back at the last couple of years and the impact he's made at Holloway School, Paul says that he can really see the influence that Future Leaders has had on him and his career. While a commitment to raising standards has been a feature of Paul's career ever since he entered education, his route to associate headship took some time.

Having started off in a private school, he left to pursue a PGCE, because he felt that he wanted to make a difference to the lives of ordinary children.

“I just knew I wasn't helping the right people; after my PGCE I started working in more challenging areas, but it was when I applied to Future Leaders that I came to understand the real challenges of schools serving deprived communities. I knew then where I wanted to be; I wanted to work with children who had potential, but who weren't realising it, usually as a result of their backgrounds being an obstacle to progression.”

Two years on and he has developed a clear leadership philosophy. “A good leader needs to have clarity of vision, backed by a dedication to the kids, thinking always about their futures. You also need to be challenging assumptions all the time, having hugely high expectations, and a belief that all the kids can succeed; coupled with resilience, intelligent optimism, and the courage to take calculated risks.”

Preparing for the Future

At Holloway the benefits of having the Future Leaders' training behind him provided a solid ground and an unshakeable belief that things could be better.

“There was a period here when it was very challenging, and working in these kinds of communities with all of the complex problems that poverty and deprivation bring can often be hard and sometimes you can't see the end of the road; but having the belief in your vision and in the process, and keeping your head down when it is so hard, coupled with your experience that things will change is vital. I can go from here to a new school knowing now that things will change; so even when it's hard, I know things will get better, and they can improve, whatever the obstacles might be.”

For Paul the experience has also given him a huge amount personally. “I found my voice at Future Leaders. In interviews I could speak honestly about my beliefs and goals for the school and the students; and it's so refreshing to be clear about what you want. In my interview for Holloway I was very clear about my vision for the school, and Bob was able to appoint me knowing what I wanted to deliver. As a consequence of our work together, the results have gone up substantially.”

Bob adds: “Paul made the right choice with Holloway, and so did I in appointing him, it's important to get it right, especially with someone so high up in the school, and the clarity Paul shared in his interviews and his background at Future Leaders, made me confident that he could and would deliver all he promised, and that we'd be able to work well together. And I wasn't wrong; when he moves on to his own headship, he'll leave an incredible legacy; a much more learning-focused school, with outstanding teaching.”