

PERSONALISATION: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL APPROACH AND
METHOD FOR SCHOOLS

FINDINGS FROM A TRIAL PROJECT 2005/2006



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Introduction

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Personalised Learning has been at the heart of the strategic plan at Samuel Ward over the last three years. We have made progress in many areas: broadening the curriculum, introducing individual learning plans, mentoring and tracking achievement on a regular and individual basis, and using ICT to support learning. However, some of the systems and processes we have developed are not fully embedded into the culture of the school or have not been fully developed. One area that required greater development was the issue of students discussing their learning on a regular basis with teachers. Students lacked the language to establish their views, a formal framework and the mechanism for de-personalising their responses. This Personalised Learning project offered all these ingredients and that is why we got involved.

The project has been very successful because it has enabled a formal dialogue to develop between staff and pupils about teaching and learning in a non-threatening and constructive way. It has had three positive practical outcomes. First, it has begun to shape the teaching and learning process in the Sixth Form, which is a key priority focus area for us. The didactic and traditional nature of some of the Sixth Form teaching has begun to give way to a greater variety and more independent styles of learning. Second, it has had a powerful effect on a member of staff in long-term difficulties in terms of his teaching. A significant number of interventions had not really turned things round but the PLiP mechanism enabled him to understand for the first time what the issues were. Third, the project has enabled the school to develop a cadre of students who have a clear understanding of teaching and learning processes. They in turn are being used by a range of teachers to observe, reflect and communicate on teaching within the school. The result has been to liberate a number of teachers who have in the past felt insecure.

In the future PLiP will be used as a tool to continue to improve teaching and learning in our Sixth Form. It will also be used by a group of lower school pupils in partnership with teaching staff. Eventually we are trying to extend the process into the pupils individual learning plans and use it as a basis for monitoring the pupils and teachers learning and teaching on a more regular basis.

Summary

The PLiP (Personalised Learning in Practice) trial project involved four schools working together with Edison Schools during 2005-2006 to test and develop Edison's proposed methodology for implementing personalised learning.

Introducing personalised learning is a challenge for schools but a good implementation has the potential to improve the effectiveness of teaching and raise pupils' achievement levels. The PLiP programme tested and developed in this trial project is designed to provide methods, resources and technological aids in an adaptable package that will enable schools to make personalisation a relatively easy issue to address effectively.

The methods used in the PLiP trial project were found to have benefited pupils at all levels of attainment; children of all abilities took part in the project. Staff considered the detailed feedback on their teaching helpful in raising their effectiveness, and the information gave teachers and managers a useful guide to opportunities for further professional development.

The methods and techniques involved pupils in a dialogue with teaching staff in which it was possible for pupils to express their feelings about teaching methods in an objective, non-confrontational way. During this process, pupils and staff improved their ability to communicate about the learning process by developing a shared understanding of the language used to describe it.

Pupils subsequently communicated their feedback on classroom sessions using a software program developed as part of the PLiP toolset. The style of response given through this program enabled a constructive dialogue between teacher and pupil, and gave the teachers a verifiable guide to the effectiveness of their teaching techniques, lesson by lesson. By looking at collated data from pupils' feedback, it was possible for teachers and managers to see trends and adjust teaching style and content accordingly.

Pupils were very keen to be involved in the project and for its findings to be incorporated into their school's teaching. During the PLiP project, staff saw a rise in self-esteem especially among the more challenging pupils, which improved their response to teaching in the classes. Moderate and high achievers also benefited from the consideration of appropriate teaching methods for them.

Staff involved in the project were volunteers and were keen to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching against the pupils' feedback. Despite some initial reservations about inviting pupils to express their view of their experience in the classroom, staff in fact found the process useful and stimulating. The shared understanding between pupils and teachers of the language of teaching and learning was seen as an immediate benefit that should bring tangible improvements in pupil achievement.

One of the aims of the project was to explore ways of adapting the PLiP framework to different types of schools, with their own needs and ways of working. The schools worked as a group with Edison, sharing and comparing practice. Each school found things in common, and there was also some divergence in the schools' planning for the next stage of implementation; some schools wanting to push ahead quickly with a fuller implementation, while others favoured a more gradual approach, in accordance with the availability of resources.

Context and participants in the project

The PLiP Project

Edison's PLiP (Personalised Learning in Practice) has been created in collaboration with four secondary schools. It is a programme based around several processes for delivering personalisation in the classroom and has also led to the development of an innovative online tool for driving learning conversations between students and teachers. This paper describes the trail project in which PLiP principles and methods were tested and developed.

Collaborating schools and Edison co-ordinator

Four schools co-operated in the project with Edison. Their role has been to test the concept, gauge reaction to the proposed model, and help develop and focus the content, before running the embryonic version of PLiP as a pilot to research aspects of practical implementation. In each school, a project leader was appointed from the participating staff to co-ordinate and oversee the project in their school. The schools and project leaders were:

Mayflower High School, Billericay. Project leader Denice Halpin

Samuel Ward Upper School and Technology College, Haverhill. Project leader Lee Phillips

Gable Hall School, Thurrock. Project leader Horaine Goff

The King John School, Benfleet. Project leader Clare Neaves

Co-ordinating the project for Edison was Kevin Crossley.

Edison Schools

Edison Schools provides consultancy and school improvement services in partnership with schools in Britain. This is delivered in the main through Edison's Design for School Improvement, a holistic programme for raising the quality and effectiveness of schools by addressing performance in a systemic, all-encompassing way. Edison incorporates cutting-edge educational research into its design, and runs discrete research initiatives, of which the PLiP pilot programme was one.

Aims of the project

The project was initiated in order to develop through testing a process and method for implementing a practical approach to personalised learning. Central to the success of an effective approach to personalised learning was a framework in which obstacles to learning could be identified, discussed and dealt with in a non-confrontational way. The method and software tool proposed and tested in the project are designed to provide this framework.

In the course of the project schools and their students had the tasks of defining the content that set the terms and language with which conversations about learning could take place without confrontations arising, and testing the process of initiating and developing these conversations, both between staff, and between staff and students. In the final phase of the project, the schools implemented PLiP as a pilot in order to test practical issues of logistics.

On completion of the project the results and findings have been incorporated into PLiP (Personalised Learning in Practice), a package comprising training, support and software that will enable any school to implement an effective personalised learning approach. PLiP will be offered to schools as part of Edison's Design for School Improvement, or as a discrete service.

Project structure

The conceptual basis and outline method for PLiP was developed in Britain by Edison Schools during 2004-2005. Edison staff drew on a body of educational research, and experience gathered through Edison's work with schools in Britain and the USA.

Phases of the project

The project ran between September 2005 and July 2006. The project phases were:

Initial briefing with heads and selected project leaders from each school

Seminars with student volunteers; working with learners to identify and define the variety of their requirements and responses to learning opportunities and approaches. School staff were not present at these seminars

Presentation by students to staff of results from seminars

Working with teachers to develop their understanding of, and methods for, personalisation

Collating and analysing the information gathered in the project and formulating practical programmes for implementing personalised learning

Nature of the project sessions

An important aim of the project was to develop a series of dialogues in which participants would feel free to express their needs and perceptions without feeling constrained by personal factors or relationships of authority. In the early discussions with students, the aim was not to encourage them to challenge personalities or the authority of their teachers, but to allow effective and thoroughgoing communication of obstacles to learning in a neutral environment, before working to find language in which these could be discussed with staff and resolved without confrontation. In the early phases therefore, students discussed their learning with Edison consultants, without the presence of their own school staff. Students were introduced in these sessions to the idea that it was possible to address obstacles to their learning by having discussions with teachers and mentors that were framed in language designed to allow a positive result, and that it was part of their responsibility to help facilitate this.

Likewise, staff were introduced in separate sessions to a framework for conversation which would help them negotiate discussions about learning in a positive manner.

In the sessions that followed, involving both students and staff, the framework allowed appraisal and discussion on both sides in a structured and constructive way. On both sides, the framework helped promote the idea of learning as a collaboration between student and teacher. (See *Developing a common language for the learning partnership*, page 6)

Consulting the student voice

Taking the student voice into account was essential to the the nature of the project, but it was also viewed by the participating schools as an important element in the shaping of future planning. In this respect, the project and the implementation of PLiP in the longer term came to be seen as facilitators of more general school improvements. Denice Halpin: 'Personalisation is a huge part of our school improvement plan and this project was a way of taking it forward not just from the point of view of the way staff think about personalisation and the implications in the classroom, but to get the other side and hear from the students, so that we have a more rounded view of future planning, rather than basing plans on a one-sided view of what we think is good for the children. We could have introduced personalisation without consulting students, and met the criteria, but I'm not confident it would have been effective in the long run. This was a unique opportunity to bring the student voice on board, to share the experience with other successful schools, to have a wider forum and debate.'

The student voice is also seen as a contributor to effective self-evaluation. Clare Neaves: 'The traditional view is that staff have always been controlling the destiny of the pupils in the school and with the development of the SEF and the way in which we now have to take into account the pupils' view, PLiP gives us another tool to add to the ways in which we look at their perspective.'

PLiP is expected to provide a way of moving consultation of the student voice on from its early implementation by integrating it into conversations about academic activity, thereby bringing the benefits to bear on achievement levels. Lee Phillips: 'At Samuel Ward, use of the student voice was an issue for us, partly because we have a tendency for it to reach a certain level and then go no higher. Students' immediate concerns tend to focus on the physical environment rather than on educational matters. We wanted to set their education as the main item on the agenda in school council meetings and so on. But also for us we feel we've reached a plateau in terms of results; we want to find a way of breaking through that and we think one of the ways might be to involve students in a whole range of different ways, in terms of how we structure their learning.'

Choosing a representative sample

In order to make the most meaningful evaluation of the PLiP concept and method, the schools set out to work with students of varying abilities and attitudes to learning. As it was for staff, student participation in the project was voluntary, but project leaders and participating teachers aimed deliberately to recruit some able children, some with middling results, and some at the lower end of the achievement scale. The sample therefore included children who were obviously in need of extra help, as well as those who would be considered to be doing 'well enough' in many schools, and who would therefore not usually receive special attention.

Lee Phillips: 'With five or six teachers and a variety of classes, we've involved children with different abilities, behaviours and needs. We deliberately targeted disaffected boys in particular as an area of concern. We've also done it with very able students and it works very well with them because they are very able to articulate their thoughts about education. These are the children that will get on, generally speaking; and because they do have the articulacy, they can speak not for all students, but for a certain group of students who are well motivated and are not listened to because they don't need to be listened to. What's valuable about this is that we are hearing from our easiest students what their issues are when teaching doesn't meet their needs.'

Horaine Goff: 'Those are sometimes the ones that need to be challenged too if schools want to take the next step forward, they are the ones that need to be pushed up, but we as teachers sometimes don't know how to do it.'

Students' enthusiasm for participation in the project was high throughout. Students in the more challenged range were as eager to take part as relatively high-achievers. Clare Neaves: 'Challenging students have got so much to

say about their experience, so they were very keen to volunteer.’ Kevin Crossley: ‘Here was the opportunity for the disaffected ones to say how it could be better, and most of them took that with both hands.’

As well as selecting students from across the achievement range, the schools also considered differing types of personality and styles of behaviour. Horaine Goff: ‘We included one from each band of the spectrum, so I had the high-achiever, the jack-the-lad, the quiet one, the sporty one, and so on.’

The number of students involved varied between the participating schools, and during the progress of the project, as at Mayflower High School. Denice Halpin: ‘I had a cohort of 7 or 8 students who have been with me since the start of the project, but at various times we’ve brought on other groups of students so the effects have been quite wide-ranging: probably about 150 students have been involved.’

Participating staff, being volunteers, were by nature a self-selecting group committed to the project, but as with the students, the sample included staff of varying ability, personality and teaching style, in so far as was possible. Staff in participating schools who were sceptical or entrenched in their ideas about teaching did not volunteer, and in the next stage of implementation, some of these teachers will become involved, as the implementation is scaled up. (See *Beyond the project: initial implementations*, page 11)

Developing a common language for the learning partnership

A consistent theme arising from the project has been the importance of a common language between students and staff and among staff. Sharing terminology and concepts underpinning the learning process allows staff and students to have an effective dialogue, in which objectives and needs are clearly communicated. The terminology allows students to become aware of the process of their own learning, and to gain both a sense of objectivity in assessing their own progress, and a greater degree of involvement in, and sense of control over, their learning experience.

Students and staff found that this mutual understanding of concepts and terminology came about as a result of participation in the project, and was seen as an important contributor to a successful dialogue between staff and students.

A crucial factor here was that the language should communicate requirements and goals effectively in the context of personal relationships between student and staff – that it should allow constructive dialogue, raising a sense of collaboration and reducing or eliminating the antagonism between teacher and student that is often one of the causes of disappointment on both sides. Lee Phillips: ‘The message students often get from teachers is negative; ‘you haven’t done this work, I’m not happy with the standard’, and so on, and targets thereby turn into punishments rather than a means to succeed. We have to open up a dialogue with those kids – that’s not easy and not all teachers have the skills to do it, but you have to try. The problem is that the language we use as teachers is very often the language that turns students off in the first place because it’s the language of achievement and expectation. We are saying ‘look what you *were* like and what you’re like now, and look at the differential between the two’. That kind of language can create a problem for children, but really the choice of language is teacher’s problem.’

Denice Halpin: ‘We’ve started to share a common language with the children when we talk about learning. Even with those members of staff that I thought were particularly good in the classroom on assessment for learning, you very often found that what they wrote in exercise books and what students took away from it were two very different things. I think what is starting to happen is that the vocabulary is beginning to be shared so that phrases mean the same things to different people.’

A shared understanding and approach also developed in discussions between staff. The opportunities for non-confrontational discussion of teaching practice afforded by the methods and data generated by the software was

useful to project leaders and participating teachers. Clare Neaves: 'It's not just about the pupil's learning, it's also about the teacher's learning, and this is probably the first tool that allows all spectrums of teachers to look at what's happening in the classroom and to move it forward. Whether they are an excellent teacher or not, with the feedback they get from this, they can move forward in ensuring that all their pupils achieve.'

Teachers themselves can find some terminology restricting, and PLiP was seen as offering a means of breaking down some of these obstacles to positive relationships between teachers and learners. Lee Phillips: 'Another way of looking at 'disaffected kids' is as students who have, in some circumstances, learned not to learn. We are learning machines as humans but at some point some of us get that switch turned off. I don't think they turn it off themselves, something happens to them. We've got disaffected kids in our school and some teachers have a great time with them in some lessons, and other times they are completely fed up with them. But you *can* reach them – it's not impossible. I think PLiP might tool teachers up to be able to reach them.'

The deliberately depersonalised nature of the framework PLiP creates for discussions between staff and staff and students is not seen as impeding clear communication in situations where requirements are not being met. Lee Phillips: 'The tool attempts to depersonalise things so that it frames the discussion in terms of work and outcomes rather than feelings about individuals, although a teacher would have to be pretty insensitive not to pick up the message – it can come through clearly! That opens up the big issue about using this as an evaluation tool for staff because it does point to a whole series of issues that most teachers in the school are familiar with; management could probably target those teachers in the school who do have problems with their response to children in the classroom. But PLiP gives us the most effective way of dealing with it, because it allows us to say to a teacher: unfortunately, children in your class aren't learning as effectively as they should be. And they can't argue with the data.'

The data and discussions between staff based on it can be a stabilising element in a struggling teacher's efforts to develop. Lee Phillips: 'PLiP allowed me to open up dialogue with a teacher who has long-term difficulty with students about where he goes wrong, and this has been the only effective method. He's reasonably satisfactory, but when he's offered coaching or advice he'll do something for a week then decide it isn't working and then try something else next week. He's finally started to realise that isn't a solution. It's only really through PLiP, and seeing what his students are saying to him, that he's made that jump.'

PLiP software tool design aims and user experience

The PLiP project makes use of a software tool which enables constructive exchanges between students and staff, and provides data to assist the development of good personalised learning practices. The software allows students to offer their individual assessments of their own learning progress and obstacles to learning they may have encountered. Teachers can see this feedback collated in a number of ways; the software also prompts teachers with strategies for responding to difficulties students may have reported. Senior staff have access to an overview of the data in order to observe trends, plan training, and provide assistance where necessary. The data can be analysed in ways that allow small cohorts, classes, year groups, departments and other groupings to be tracked.

The user experience

The software tool is designed to be simple to use quickly, and accessible from any computer via web browser technology. This keeps installation issues to a minimum, and provides for possible use by staff who are outside the school premises. Access is limited according to the requirements of the school; students may log in at one level to complete their assessments; class teachers log in at a higher level to collate and observe their students' data; senior teachers and managers log in at a restricted higher level to obtain an overview.

Content of the PLiP tool

The PLiP tool reflects the findings of the project. In the early stages of the project, students were asked to select statements that best described their responses and requirements in a learning situation; questions based on these statements now form part of the content of the assessment section of the PLiP tool. In a similar way, the content available to teachers is partly derived and developed from experience gained during the project. (See Appendices, page 13, for example content).

Findings to date

Staff attitudes and experiences

The nature of the project, involving as it did a high degree of student participation with student evaluation of the effectiveness of classroom teaching, posed a potential challenge to staff. One of the aims of the project was therefore to develop the framework for such conversations to take place without confrontation. Horaine Goff: 'One of the things we'd all worried about was opening up conversations about what went on in the classroom; for many teachers it's quite threatening. It has not been done in this way before, and we wanted to find a process that would include teachers and help them see that this exercise is quite useful. We wanted to be able to structure it so that the feedback was professional and guided, and allowed a dialogue to take place. In all the schools, that's what's happened with the staff.'

Participating schools found that despite the perceived possibility of criticism, staff gave an attentive hearing to what the students said in their presentations. Lee Phillips: 'What was amazing was that staff at my school listened much more to the students than to another member of staff presenting! Even though they might feel threatened by this idea of student involvement, they did actually want to hear what was being said.'

Participating staff were volunteers and therefore committed to the success of the project; this meant they saw the Denice Halpin: 'Most of the teachers we've worked with so far have been confident and very able teachers and so when you get the youngsters saying 'I don't get it in your lesson' they don't take it personally, because they think twenty-nine other students do, and they can open up that conversation with the youngster and make it work for them as well. I think the acid test will come when we start to work with the kind of teacher who is not as competent or experienced, or they've been teaching for thirty years and they are difficult to change.'

By providing quantifiable data about the students' view of their classroom experience, the PLiP software aims to build confidence in less able teachers, and especially those with lower levels of the interpersonal skills necessary to bring about effective assessment for learning. Clare Neaves: 'It's equally important for those teachers who don't see the importance of the pupil input. With the PLiP data, they can't ignore the impact of the majority of the pupils telling them the same thing.' Consistent use of objective data from the PLiP tool helps overcome the inertia that may affect teachers in satisfactory schools. Denice Halpin: 'Teachers may say 'my results are fine – why do I need to change?' Not that they are not receptive or co-operative to the idea, but they need an awful lot of convincing that if they are going to change it will be worthwhile. They also have to accept that sometimes you go back before you go forward.'

Once the use of the PLiP tool was underway in the project, regular use for consultations had an immediate influence on the effectiveness of teaching. Horaine Goff: 'I saw the kids enjoyed some things in the classroom that I didn't think they'd enjoy, and some dynamic issues arose about how they felt at certain times of day, and I was able to adjust my lesson planning to take that into account. Their self-esteem rose as a direct result of that. The evaluations also looked at the learning environment and took in such factors as times of day, and how they felt at the beginning and end of the lessons. That was a way for me as a teacher to get to know my class on a higher level.'

Teachers valued the objective view of their teaching that the software tool provided via the students' assessments. This was equally valuable for skilled teachers as for less able ones. Horaine Goff: 'We all have ideas that we think are brilliant and it's fascinating to be teaching using an idea like that, and then to have the kids say in their evaluation that they didn't think it was as good as I thought it was. As teachers we should be aware that sometimes we teach as we would like to be taught and this is a way for the kids' voice to be heard and for us to make some changes. From my point of view, it's very clear how my relationship with pupils is improving. I know because the tool tells me how a particular pupil responds positively to something I do or say, and I keep that in mind and use it as part of my teaching of that pupil from then on. Often as teachers we guess which pupils like public praise in front of the classroom, and which like what I call sneaky praise, but we are guessing, and sometimes we put our foot in it. This way, we know.'

Reactions from the students

Given the deliberate involvement of students at all achievement levels and the targeting of challenging pupils, it might be expected that enthusiasm for the project would be patchy. In fact, participating staff reported that students responded without exception in a very positive way. Staff reported a beneficial effect on the self-esteem of challenging children in particular – an important step in helping them to improved achievement. Horaine Goff: 'There was one class I had known for some time, so I had an established relationship with them, but when a class like that comes into the school they know that they are on the bottom rung of the ladder, and the fact that their voice was being asked for raised their esteem straight away.'

Clare Neaves: 'The minute they think they've got a share in what is actually happening to them, they appreciate it and take it on board. I did the project with some less able year 11 students – E and F streams – who were close to leaving, and they so appreciated it. They were the ones that came round and asked what had happened to the stuff we did before and when do we see the results? They were very keen to have it taken on board. But it's more than just that – it's that the message was clear that we were going to use the findings, and their own involvement introduced the carrot, rather than just the stick there would have been if it had been imposed by the staff.'

Lee Phillips: 'None of the children were unenthusiastic about it. Some of them hated doing the first exercise (choosing 'I can' statements)¹ but other than that, they've seen it as really valuable because they know it will be listened to, and they believe in us as teachers who care about what they think.'

Commitment to the project increased as students came to see that their input was having some effect, and that the style and quality of their in-class experience was changing. Horaine Goff: 'We used the PLiP tool over a period of time and after a while the students suddenly began to realise that they were learning things, and their esteem rose. We both used the concepts and language – so for example, during a lesson I could be referring to the assessment and saying 'what are we learning and how are we learning it?' so rather than sitting there passively, they were thinking about the evaluation at the end and asking themselves what they have learned. Esteem-wise the performance went up as a result of this, because we were continually recognising moments of learning, what they did to learn and how they helped each other to learn. They came to recognise that this can include asking another student for advice or example, as well as asking the teacher. So at every lesson, every time they fill in the assessment, they are highlighting the steps to how they learned. As the project progressed, they were not only coming to see that they were learning, but they were also recognising *the way in which it happened*. So a student becomes aware that for example, in the last lesson I learnt by discussing with another student, and this recognition takes away the fear of asking questions and seeking help, because they see that it's an effective way for them.'

¹ This rather lengthy once-only exercise was part of the development project, and is now completed. The exercise required students to consider and select from a long list ten statements that best described the conditions which most assisted their learning. (See Appendix). Students at schools implementing PLiP will not need to repeat this exercise.

The project involved children in a range of year groups, but in general participating staff found that younger students committed to it more readily. Denice Halpin: 'I think it's probably easier to reach the younger ones in that they are more receptive and willing to take risks. You get to a certain age and things are more entrenched, in the way they behave in class and their attitudes to learning, and it can be more problematic to turn that around. But if you really are doing something different, they are responsive to that.'

Final stages in the development project

In the final stage of the development project during the second half of the summer term 2006, the participating schools ran a pilot implementation of PLiP to test practical issues in preparation for a roll-out in September 2006. This pilot phase helped schools assess factors such as how often assessments should take place, how to integrate the data into a regime of mentoring, how many students should be involved in a first stage of full implementation, and so on. Each school is likely to come to a somewhat different conclusion from its pilot, since each has different circumstances and requirements. The insights gained have helped Edison develop a range of implementation plans for schools approaching PLiP for the first time.

Beyond the project: initial implementations

The schools participating in the project all planned to implement PLiP from September 2006. The scale of their implementation is likely to vary from school to school, and will depend partly on the insights gathered in the pilot phase in the latter stages of the project. Other factors such as staffing levels, planning priorities, and other initiatives the school is implementing, will influence the scale of implementation.

Denice Halpin: 'Staff in this school wanted to go back to a very fundamental level. We wanted to go back to the schemes of work and get differentiation much more documented than we have, and think about how we structure our lessons. All the things that teachers thought they were doing well, they began to question, and we found we hadn't got things structured in as dynamic a way as we thought. They perceived the need to go back to basics and anything else that has to happen at a more sophisticated level can only happen when the infrastructure has been put in place. PLiP will become instrumental for us; we do need to find different pathways through our key stages for different types of learners.'

PLiP is seen as a valuable part of initiatives designed to raise achievement. Denice Halpin: 'We'll probably find that the next stage, after the pilot has finished, will involve a roll-out in three faculties, giving most students access to it, and supporting innovations in the curriculum. PLiP will become a fairly fundamental part of how we work for next year in a number of directions. Our foreign language department is starting to teach GCSE from the beginning of year 9 next year and to have this as an integral part of their assessment process is going to be a key factor in whether they succeed in a very ambitious programme.'

All the participating schools stressed the need to pitch initial implementation at a level that would be practicable, so that the available infrastructure would be able to cope. Lee Phillips: 'It gives you too much information unless you know what you are looking for in the first place. All the variables the system offers are almost too much unless you have a clear idea of how you want to put it into operation. For us, our plan is suggested by our most recent OFSTED, in which the sixth form was rated as only satisfactory, so we will roll it out there. It gives us a way to look at what's different about the teaching there, and it gives us a defined implementation as the next stage, before going to a whole-school rollout.'

The possibility of targeting students in other ways than by year group or faculty also presented itself. Horaine Goff: 'I would like most of our teachers to use it, but in reality we'll target a group, and whether that's underachieving boys, or a year group, we're not sure yet.'

The contribution PLiP could make to self-evaluation was also important. Clare Neaves: 'We're coming at it from the measuring point of view to support the review process, so final discussions need to go ahead once we've seen how easy it is to use in the trial. But we are looking at implementing it by year groups, if not all years, so that we have extra mentoring information to feed into the reviews.' Lee Phillips: 'We have a system with review days and students have a procedure in their yearly planners for how they review their achievement so far, what their targets are and how they are going to get there. It's worked well up to a certain point, but it's only 15 minutes a term,

and 45 minutes overall for a year. That isn't really very much in the light of all the contact they have in school. So we want to address that more thoroughly – all the time in effect, so that it's there at least on a bi-weekly basis.'

Appendices

Material in these appendices was chosen and weighted for importance by the schools during the project, and forms part of the content in the software program ('the PLiP tool') used to assist the dialogue between teacher and learner.

Top 15 Learning Skills

Statements chosen by students during the first phase of the project, to express their requirements in learning

- I am able to understand what I need to do to produce a good piece of work
- I am supported to do my best in the school
- I am able to take responsibility for my own learning
- I am able to concentrate in lessons
- I can learn from my mistakes
- I feel capable
- I can accept feedback on what I have not done well and can act on it
- In the lesson, I am able to concentrate on a piece of work for a sustained period that allows me to complete a task
- I am able to express my opinions in class
- I feel relaxed and confident in lessons
- I understand how I am doing and what I need to do to improve
- I can use my preferred learning style to help me progress
- I am able to learn independently
- I feel valued and respected as an individual
- I am able to ask questions to help me understand better

Top 15 Learning Opportunities

Statements chosen jointly by students and staff at the end of the first phase. These learning opportunities appear in the PLiP software and students are able to identify which opportunities occurred during a classroom session.

- Teachers are approachable, show they respect and like students and want to help them learn
- Activities are designed to make learning fun and motivate/engage students
- Students are made to feel capable and confident
- Mistakes are OK and help everyone to learn from them
- Students are helped to know not only what to improve, but how to improve
- Students who do not progress as expected are noticed quickly and given support to improve
- Students are able to contribute to lessons
- Students have regular and meaningful written and verbal feedback
- Teachers know the strengths and interests of students and build on them
- Students have the opportunity to work in (and extend) their preferred learning styles
- Students are rewarded for good behaviour and work
- Opportunity is given to work individually, in pairs and in groups
- Students are given the opportunity to understand the requirements for different levels/grades of work
- Lessons have a good structure, with a clear introduction, a variety of activities and opportunity to demonstrate learning
- Students have the opportunity to know how well they are doing and what they need to improve to do better

Teaching characteristics to influence student learning

- Teachers treat all pupils with respect
- Questions from students are welcomed and encouraged
- Mistakes are dealt with positively and seen as learning opportunities
- Students are given the success criteria for all work and have regular access to NC levels/GCSE grade criteria
- Students are taught how to use marking criteria to peer mark and peer marking is then encouraged to develop student understanding and skills
- Teachers set clear and specific targets and make sure that students actually understand how they are meant to get better
- Teachers give regular feedback, both verbal and written. Written work is marked promptly
- Teachers really know their classes and take a real interest in students including their interests both in and out of school
- Teachers reward good behaviour, success and/or effort in ways that are valued by students
- Students are shown and taught the skills required to work effectively in groups or pairs
- Teachers know the preferred learning styles of the students they teach
- Classwork/homework is differentiated for individuals/groups of students
- Teachers plan and prepare all lessons informed by their knowledge of their groups' skills, learning styles and interests
- Teachers involve students in lesson planning and target setting
- Teachers involve students in deciding the criteria for assessment

Things the school can do

- Change the timetable so that teachers get some regular time to give individuals in their class verbal feedback and jointly set targets
- Teachers should have to assess the learning styles of all their classes. This should be policy for the whole school
- Lessons should be provided at the beginning of the year (or at the start of key stages) on learning skills and group skills, so that pupils have the necessary skills and devices at the start of their course
- Pupils could be given independent lessons, in which they work independently on a research project. This would teach them independence and give an increased sense of responsibility for their learning

Learning statements

These are the statements about learning that resulted from the initial discussion phase with students participating in the project. These statements formed the core of the presentation students gave to staff.

I learn slowly when...

- I am copying (no thought required)
- I am distracted by movement or other people
- It is too quiet
- I am not allowed to talk to others
- I have to concentrate for too long

I learn quickly when...

- I have had good sleep and something to eat
- I can get involved in the activity
- I can get quiet thinking time to think of smart ideas
- The learning is broken up into bits
- There are examples and then activity
- There are games or a fun element

Learning is easy/enjoyable when...

- I can talk about work in groups
- I can do role play/active work
- The teacher is relaxed
- The teacher is clear and specific
- Things are well explained
- There is some 1-1 explanation
- There is space to work
- There is some music in the background...great in creative subjects

Learning is hard when...

- Someone just expects you to know it
- There is too much teacher talk
- The language is too complex
- Explanation is too fast

There are lots of distractions
Work is boring, repetitive or just from books

Learning in groups is...

Good if there is more than one teacher to visit all the groups
Good as it is more understandable when you get ideas from others
Good as it sinks in when you can discuss it with friends
Good if there are rules and the group stick to them
Hard when people are of different abilities
Bad if people mess around

Learning from books is...

Really hard especially if there are no diagrams
Good for some subjects but they need to be relevant
Good if pictures help you to imagine it in real life
Good if there are examples to follow
Boring if that is all you do

I learn well from someone who...

Is a bit strict or pushes you in a good way but show they care about you as a person not just good marks
I am close to ... often friends and family
Understands what they are doing
Is easy going with a sense of humour
Is not patronising and has patience
Is enthusiastic and motivating
Does not make me feel stupid
Has control of the class but deals with relevant behaviour not every little thing