

Headteacher's Blog

The value of 'TEAMS' (not just the Microsoft type!)



It was about a year ago that I heard mention of Microsoft Teams – I suspect I was possibly late to the party. Little did I know that it would feature so heavily in my daily life (and that of my children, friends and work colleagues) over the next year! Many schools moved to Teams over the course of the spring and summer term in 2020 and it, along with other platforms, helped schools to provide ‘live’ contact between our pupils and teachers. It has now taken on such significance in my school life that when I hear the word ‘team’, I have to stop and check that I’m not supposed to be logged in!

However, the concept ‘teamwork’ is nothing new in schools. In my view, ‘team-working’ should always be the modus operandi. There are a myriad of teams within a school - leadership, academic, pastoral, facilities and site, finance and administrative teams – all linked through an intricate web of connections. We continually work together as educators, with parents and pupils, to create positive communities and collaborative learning experiences. When it comes to teamwork, one might say that schools have it mastered – we live it, we nurture it, we teach it because we can see the value in the classroom and beyond. But the pandemic has caused us, schools included, to reconsider and re-evaluate our appreciation of teamwork.

When the first lock down happened in March 2020 and schools went online for most pupils, the strength of school teams was put under unprecedented, huge and immediate pressure. As our systems and practices were forced to change, new teams emerged and the old hierarchies of relative importance between old teams shifted. How could the pastoral team now work with the attendance team when most people were at home? How did the school leadership team work with their middle leaders when the routines were thrown out of kilter? In most secondary schools the IT team grew in importance overnight as they implemented the rapid adoption of remote learning platforms and trained up all the staff (and pupils and parents) on the way. Who’d have thought only 12 months ago that we would now have teams supervising Lateral Flow Tests?

Whilst the lockdown experience has undoubtedly been a very isolating one, it is true to say that teams have become even more important in schools. It has taught us to value (and re-evaluate) and nurture them. We have learnt from other teachers across the nation in a way that might have been local or piecemeal before. We have helped each other with technology. Teachers have worked together re-writing schemes of learning to suit the remote platforms. We have collaborated and talked more about the traditional systems and practices of the school – how do we run remote parents’ evenings and how do we offer valuable work experience? We have worked in a new way with parents, supporting them with the challenges of home learning, and relied on them to support us. We have worked together to record assemblies and virtual open evenings. Leadership teams have worked differently.

Starting a new school during lockdown has required me to simultaneously join new teams as well as build my own team. I have recently joined the New Schools Network - it inspires me and is a fantastic sounding board of ideas. A particularly useful session run by Seb Chapleau (founding Headteacher of La Fontaine Academy) required us to consider the 10 characteristics of great teams in a new school. Unsurprisingly, the attributes of integrity, commitment, empathy, drive and clear communication were frequently discussed. All the qualities we’d hope to develop in our pupils!

So whatever your opinion of Microsoft Teams, the silver lining of our current situation is that we are now much more cognizant of the value of team working. To me, it seems a pretty positive legacy from a very challenging time in school leadership!

Helen Wood, Headteacher

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References and further reading

For further reading about the value of teamwork in the classroom:

1. Education Endowment Foundation (2018) Teaching and learning toolkit – collaborative learning. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/collaborative-learning>
2. Nokes-Malach TJ, Richey JE and Gadgil S (2015) When is it better to learn together? Insights from research on collaborative learning. *Educational Psychology Review* 27(4): 645–656.
3. Slavin RE (2010) Co-operative learning: What makes group-work work? I: Dumont H, Istance D and Benavides F (eds) *The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice*. Paris: OECD Publishing, pp. 161–178.
4. Stephen Walker, The Chartered College of Teaching *INSIGHT Making Learning Captivation: Collaborative work as part of a varied learning diet* (2019)