

Spotlight on Holy Trinity CoE Academy

Holy Trinity CoE Academy, a primary school in Halifax, Yorkshire, was the winner of the Communication Commitment Award at the 2015 Shine a Light Awards. The school has shown immense commitment to both staff and pupils in making sure that communication is a part of everyday practice and made a priority not just in school life, but also as part of the wider community.

Back in 2013, the school introduced the Communication Commitment – developed by The Communication Trust and sponsored by Pearson. The commitment was developed with teachers, speech and language therapists and expert advisors to help schools prioritise communication in a way that will work best for them.

It has remained a priority, with specific whole-school training days and staff meetings dedicated to the five priorities of the commitment (school leadership, workforce development, communication, supporting pupils with SLCN and engagement with parents, families or employers). At the beginning of the process, all staff had to complete a questionnaire on SLCN and complete the same questionnaire at the end of the school year to assess the success – the results, a 50% raise in confidence!

Communication Commitment is now part of the school development plan with all teachers, including teaching assistants, having Communication Commitment as a target for their performance management.

The Senior Leadership Team decided that all classes must have a visual timetable, that teachers should provide regular top tips for communication that should be displayed in their classroom and have ensured that all teachers implement the 10-second rule where teachers leave 10 seconds after asking a question before choosing someone to respond or before giving extra information to encourage a response.

Teachers have also been given resources, such as posters, on SLCN tips and adult child interaction, while the Communication Commitment remains as an agenda item at staff meetings. Training has been given to all staff and parent workshops and coffee mornings with a SLCN focus are held.

Early identification is seen as crucial for pupil progress at Holy Trinity and all Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) staff screen pupils on entry and from there are monitored in communication and language development, using checks to talk to parents about SLCN.

For Key Stage 2 pupils, there is a high priority in planning; key vocabulary is identified and language ladders (a resource that encompasses one function of language and includes several ways in which the function can be expressed ranging from formal to less formal or even visual) are used for technical vocabulary in maths and science.

For pupils, the school decided to introduce more memorable experiences such as going on more visits, baking lessons in all classes and inviting storytellers, poets and musicians into classes to help develop and increase children's vocabulary and become confident speakers, and eventually confident writers. The school also empowers year six pupils to make links with the local elderly care home, which the children now visit weekly, to talk to residents.

Holy Trinity's Communication Commitment has resulted in staff confidence growing immensely, with teachers now equipped with the tools and knowledge to identify, and set, key performance indicators to enable pupils throughout the whole school, including those with SLCN, to reach their potential. Staff have the confidence to talk to parents about their child's SLCN and use the resources the school has created and made available via the school website to plan next steps.

All this has resulted in the pupils at Holy Trinity accelerating in their learning, with SEND pupils in the last school year achieving average points progress of 4.05 in reading and 3.31 in writing.