

Robert Ferguson Primary School

Community Primary School, Carlisle

About the school

Robert Ferguson Primary School is a mixed primary school for pupils aged 3-11. The school has 350 students and 15 teachers. In the 2012 OFSTED inspection, the school achieved 'Good' in all categories. Teachers feel that one of the best things about the school is the strong sense of 'team' amongst their colleagues, who dedicate their time to continually improving their teaching and give their pupils the best start to their education. Head Teacher, Graham Frost is passionate about educational research, and ambitious to see the teaching profession setting high standards for teaching and learning, leading the way with pedagogy.

Why NTEN?

Last year, teachers used their whole school CPD time to examine the question *"What constitutes outstanding and best practice in the classroom?"* Reflective discussions on this subject put the school in an excellent position to see how they measured up to the ideal standard, and make plans for the new academic year based on this knowledge.

Despite having a strong foundation of CPD already in place, there were many advantages for the school in belonging to the national network. Joining NTEN felt like *"a good way to formalise the school's commitment to delivering what is objectively the best CPD,"* said Graham Frost. *"We want to encourage and support our hard-working teachers in their development, and also demonstrate to parents that we are determined to deliver the highest quality teaching for their children."*



Graham Frost—Head Teacher

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Researching New Interventions

NTEN gave teachers access to leading educational publications and journals, which meant that they had the opportunity to research new, evidence-based interventions to try with their classes.

One such intervention was 'Wave 2 – A Chance to Talk' which aims to help pupils improve their speaking and listening skills. Key Stage One teachers ran a series of activities to teach students how to tell stories in a structured way and improve communication with their peers and adults. Using the NTEN Lesson Study resources, which helped teachers to collaboratively plan and observe the lessons, staff were able to evaluate how well the intervention worked with pupils.

Lesson Study experience

A scientific approach to the study meant that the school could attempt to measure exactly if the intervention was effective. Firstly, they identified one year one class (half the year group) to do the Wave intervention, while the other year one class did not. Teachers observed the class over ten weeks of the intervention and evaluated the children's response to the activities on a scale of 0-5 (with 0 being least confident and 5 being most confident) at the beginning and end. They also conducted student interviews, and noticed a remarkable difference in the group who had had the intervention compared to the other students.

Teachers noticed that the intervention class became more enthused about telling a story. They were able to structure the flow of their narrative much more clearly and *"brought the story to life"* in a way that the other class could not. *"There was also a big difference in confidence within the group, the way that they were using the language had changed and their vocabulary had really improved, in contrast to the comparison group,"* said Sophia Craig, the class teacher. Teachers observing also noticed many of the techniques that Sophia had taught being used by the students, and saw that pupils had really absorbed the information. *"The intervention had some really good ideas which are now embedded in our classroom practice,"* said Niamh O'Brien, Year 1 teacher. The second class is now working through the intervention.

What teachers said about Lesson Study

Despite some timetabling clashes, the school was determined to make lesson study work, bringing in senior leadership to support and offer cover where needed. This was very much appreciated by the teachers, who found the lesson study experience very motivating:

"Planning a lesson together and then observing that lesson was very beneficial. In a primary school, you don't often get the chance to spend time in other people's classrooms on a weekly basis, and it was nice to see the good practice going on elsewhere in the school - not only within the lesson taking place but also in the classroom management and behaviour techniques. We all found some really good elements in each other's teaching that we could learn from," said Carrie Cannon, Year 2 teacher.



Lesson Study triad (L-R) Sophia Craig, Niamh O'Brien, Carrie Cannon.

"It really made you assess your own practice and ask yourself if you are doing those good things," added Niamh. *"It is really important as teachers to keep asking ourselves this, to constantly raise our own standards and not get stuck doing the same things each year."*

Would you recommend NTEN to another school?

"We would very much hope that other schools get involved," says Graham Frost. *"Our experience has been positive, and the idea of being part of a national network of like-minded schools is something that we feel would be really beneficial for us and many others. As early-adopters of NTEN, we are excited to see the network grow in the future."*