About the school

Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College is a mixed comprehensive school and sixth form for students aged 11-18. The school is based in Hove (Sussex) and has 1,700 students and 110 teachers. The school has specialisms in performing arts, mathematics and computing, applied learning and gifted and talented, and received “Good” or “Outstanding” in all categories in their 2013 OFSTED inspection.

Why NTEN?

After hearing about NTEN, the school’s leadership team felt that joining the network would fit in well with their future CPD aims. Based in a comparatively small local authority and keen to build on their existing good practice, the school wanted to share their experiences and be inspired by other like-minded professionals around the country.

For the senior leadership team, there was another important reason to join the network. Gaining an independent view on their CPD meant really putting themselves to the test, to find out if what they were doing was actually cutting edge. This was a challenge that they embraced. “There was a really clear ethos behind NTEN which is all about accountability. For us, this meant sharing rigorously tested best practice and focusing on continuous improvement,” said Ashley Harrold, Deputy Head. Yet the appeal for him was the programme’s non-judgmental approach:

“...It adds another layer of thinking to the work that you are already doing and can give you a bit of inspiration.”

“...What’s great is that it isn’t agenda-led or pushed on teachers from the top down. It isn’t OFSTED. You have the freedom to tackle CPD in your own way, but at the same time you have guidance in measuring your effectiveness and how to do even better. We felt that this flexibility and lack of imposition would be appreciated by our excellent teachers as we look to support them in their own development.”

CPD Audit and Silver Award

For Ashley, the CPD audit process was “one of the best parts of our membership.” The school collaborated with Uplands Community College on the peer audit, with representatives from both schools given the opportunity to visit each other and discuss how they managed CPD in their school. Receiving the Silver Award gave Blatchington Mill great confidence in their CPD strategy.

The audit looks to provide an independent, non-judgmental assessment of both strengths and areas for development. For Blatchington, this meant re-examining evaluation of INSET days. Following the feedback in the audit, the school now has a post-course evaluation form, with a grading system for how the training will apply in teaching practice. This whole process is now linked back to the school appraisal system, and informs their assessment on improving teaching and learning. This means that staff are getting much more out of their internal and external courses, and the leadership team are more discerning about the INSET days that they endorse. This ensures that time spent away from teaching is beneficial for both teacher and student improvement.
The National Teacher Enquiry Network (NTEN) is a collaborative partnership of schools and colleges committed to innovation and improvement in staff professional development.

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Would you recommend NTEN to another school?

The school has already been promoting NTEN in their local area, and would be keen to see other schools come on board. “It adds another layer of thinking to the work that you are already doing, and can give you another bit of inspiration from someone who is working on the same problem or a fresh idea or approach,” explains Ashley Harrold. “The heart of it is that you need to review everything that you do and evaluate how things have worked. This is really how schools should be working, and NTEN really has been great in helping us do that.” Sue Pinnick agrees: “A Lesson study vision has huge potential in our school. We have been training new mentors and are excited about having much more emphasis next academic year on peer observations and coaching.”