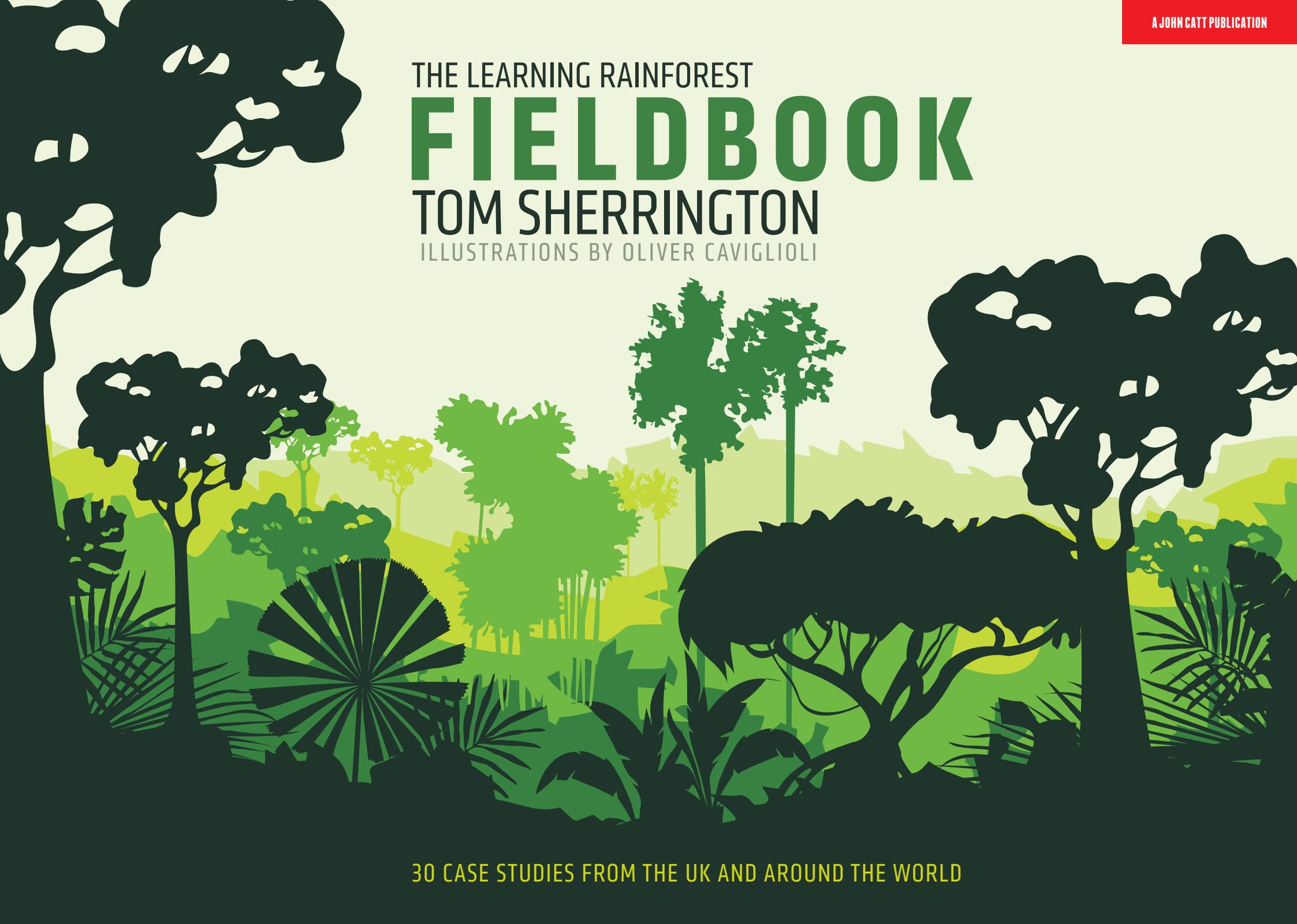


THE LEARNING RAINFOREST

# FIELDBOOK

TOM SHERRINGTON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY OLIVER CAVIGLIOLI

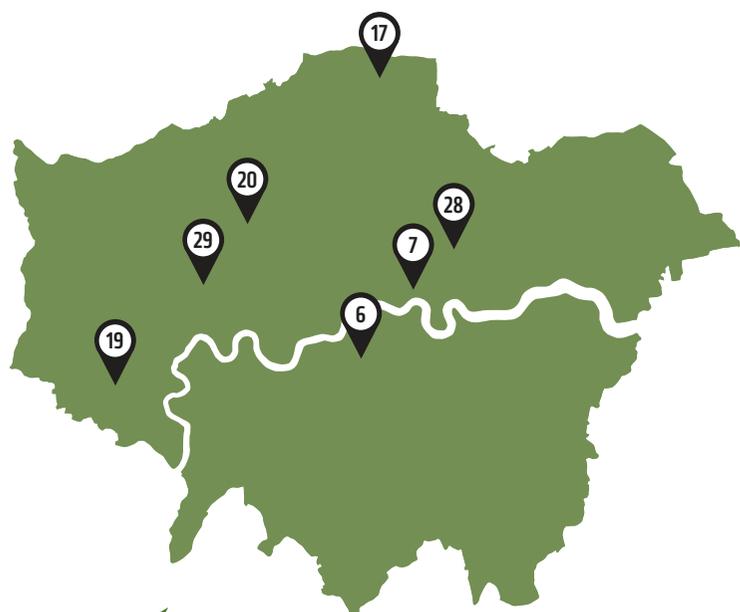


30 CASE STUDIES FROM THE UK AND AROUND THE WORLD

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# BRUNE PARK SCHOOL, GOSPORT

## INTRODUCTION

I have known Kirstie Andrew-Power and Ian Potter for a long time, personally and professionally, and I've been a great admirer of their work at Bay House School, a very successful, popular school in Gosport on England's south coast. I was, therefore, very excited to be asked to provide some additional 'capacity-building' support when, in 2017, rather bravely and boldly, they took on Brune Park School into their MAT when it was in a very challenging situation – as they describe below. I honestly don't think I've ever met a more resilient, more courageous group of school leaders – and it is certainly rare to meet people with such strong philosophical, principled views on school leadership, resolute in their determination to take the long-term path rather than the short-term fix, even when this feels counter-intuitive to outsiders.

Every term for the last two years I have visited Brune Park on a number of occasions, working closely with subject leaders in certain departments and their senior leader colleagues around aspects of teaching practice and curriculum design. It's fair to say the school has changed more than any other in the *Fieldbook* during that time. Every success has been hard won; the setbacks have often been significant but the pay-off is clear to see with every visit I make. The philosophy at Brune Park is about as far from 'plantation thinking' as you can get in leadership terms and their commitment to staff empowerment and to what I call 'rainforest thinking' is profound – although they don't use the term directly.

In many ways, the journey has just begun, but the culture shift I've already witnessed is palpable and I'm extremely proud to present this insight into that journey as told by David, Kirstie and Ian and their students Frances and Joseph.

## PROFILE

**Institution Name:** Brune Park Community School

Gosport and Fareham Multi Academy Trust

**Location:** Gosport, Hampshire, UK

**Type of Institution:** Mixed Comprehensive

**Roll/Age Range:** 1500, aged 11–16

**Year Founded:** 1965

**Motto:** 'Toujours Pret'

**House Names:** Gielgud, Lennon, Fontane, Hepburn

**Quote:** From a Year 11 student to a teacher:

'I can never put into words how thankful I am to have been one of your students in the last year. Thank you for teaching us to love English. Thank you for always giving me guidance when things got super tough; you have always taught me that anything is possible and even if I don't think I can get somewhere you've always told me to believe and never give up. You took me on feeling under-confident, fragile, not believing I could achieve. I finally feel that I can now move on and blossom into what I want and aim to do. I will never forget your humour and kindness and treating the whole class as individual people. If you remember only one thing about the 'class of 2019' I hope it is the lasting impact you made on me and on every individual in our class; you never once didn't believe in us and for a little old cohort like ours that from a teacher is something we'll never forget. Now I'm moving on I feel so much more confident in my academic ability across the subjects (even grown to love them!) but more importantly, I feel confident in myself as a person and you Sir have been a huge influence on that. Thank you for a year of laughter, tears and T3C!'

**Our MAT Ethos:** Brune Park is part of a local Multi-Academy Trust – Gosport and Fareham MAT or GFM (one of the first nationally) – focused on raising aspirations and outcomes for learners across the Town of Gosport; it comprises five schools working collectively locally to support each other on their improvement journey; not in competition but in co-operation for ambition for all young people in Gosport.



**Kirstie Andrew-Power**  
Headteacher



**Ian Potter**  
CEO GFM

1. T3C means 'Thesis, 3 supporting statements, conclusion' – a framework for writing essays.

## CASE STUDY: CREATING AND SECURING THE CLIMATE, CONDITIONS AND COMMITMENT TO 'BETTERMENT FOR ALL'

**General Area:** Leadership

**Authors:** **Kirstie Andrew-Power**, Headteacher, and **Ian Potter**, CEO

Brune Park is a vibrant and energising place to be; a school community united by positivity and belief – in each other and in the potential of the school to be truly great.

We are also honest about where we are. The school has been 'in challenge' for 20 years (as the school's inspection history demonstrates – if that is a measure you draw from ...) We know we are making progress but it can still often feel very, very tough (we describe this as falling down seven times but still getting up eight times!) We are restless in wanting to hasten to where we want and need to be; we want everyone in the Brune Park community to be proud to be 'Brune Park' and that with that pride comes success – both academic and personal.

As a staff we are positive, motivated and driven; honest in our reflections, honest about the challenges we face and strive to embrace them head on. In an educational world where much is challenging, and much can be negative as a staff and school, we are resolute in being positive, having relentlessly high expectations of ourselves and each other, focusing on collective endeavour, and togetherness and we believe this is how we can transform the school for good (not just to get a 'Good' inspection rating.)

Our leadership focus has unashamedly been that the impact of anything we do as school leaders should be evaluated in terms of the young people's experience. And we know that the quality of provision they receive is mainly, if not perhaps wholly, facilitated by their teacher. It is the teacher who creates the climate for their learning; is excited by the agendas they chose to set; is thoroughly motivated by the content they impart because they have understood the difference it can make to the students; and thinks carefully about the method and design of a selected mode of delivery, presentation, activity or guided discovery. We contend what David has written exemplifies this espousal.

Obviously, the responsibility cannot be placed entirely with the teacher. Others have their responsibility, including the learner. For example, however hard an enabler enables, the impact of what they do is reduced if the disposition of the learner 'blocks' the efforts of the teacher. In much the same way, the endeavours of a manager are reduced if those being managed choose a negative attitude towards it. Whilst the approaches taken by a teacher or manager will support creating a positive response to their intentions, if someone's disposition is so poor it is an awful challenge. This is especially so when they are unprepared to listen, to reflect and be open to a different way of being. Therefore, if they reject the offer to be the best they can be, a leader needs to illuminate this to them.

It was this process of illumination that we took as leaders in a school that was in denial about its culture. We do not blame the school; it was the product of the way it had been treated by a system that was about blame and retribution. Thus, the leadership had to enable a different process of school improvement. It had to give permission for people to 'look-to-thyself' and evaluate their own disposition. Colleagues in the school had to feel safe enough to be honest with themselves and recognise cognitive dissonance when it happened. We, with positional leadership authority, needed to support staff build the confidence to entertain changing how they felt about themselves, and therefore each other, the school and, of course, the young people.

Hence, the reflective practitioner is absolutely at the heart of what we are about. An absolute priority for professional learning is continually signalled. Reflecting on what are the barriers to improvement and assessing the motivation levels to want to overcome them becomes the mantra. Choosing one's disposition and admitting that how each of us opted to behave influenced the culture of the whole school, making the decision to change oneself would have a positive benefit for all. It was a matter of realising that the locus-of-control rests with each of us rather than external to us. It was an active choice to contribute to the collective endeavour for the good.

There was a text we used as a 'go-to' to keep reminding us of the purpose for promoting this sort of discourse. We sought opportunities to share it. It is:

*'I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the school. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instruction of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanised.'*  
Haim G. Ginott

### Link to Learning Rainforest:

The rationale for this perspective on leadership is that 'top-down' reform is a less sustainable way to transform a school. We can always make ourselves feel good as managers and achieve quick wins that demonstrate 'impact'. Any gains are so often short term. It is understandable that, in a targets-driven environment, we can find ourselves behaving like this. It can incentivise competitive behaviours that lead to results in a shorter time frame being a more important outcome than longer term sustainability. The product should be organisational climates that grow people rather than the potentially toxic relationships and pressures that short termism can lead to. At worst, it results in 'good' people doing things they would not normally do, particularly if they are sensing a need to survive. Therefore, the leadership challenge is to enable those we lead to feel safe enough to be honest with themselves and have the skill set to do this in a way that does not compromise on a direction-of-travel of improvement and betterment. The young people we serve deserve the aspiration that they experience the best quality teaching that we can enable for them.

Our strategy for attempting to achieve this is illustrated in the messages we shared with colleagues at our first meeting together. As well as the slide shared in David's entry above, we shared the following:

#### The Plan:

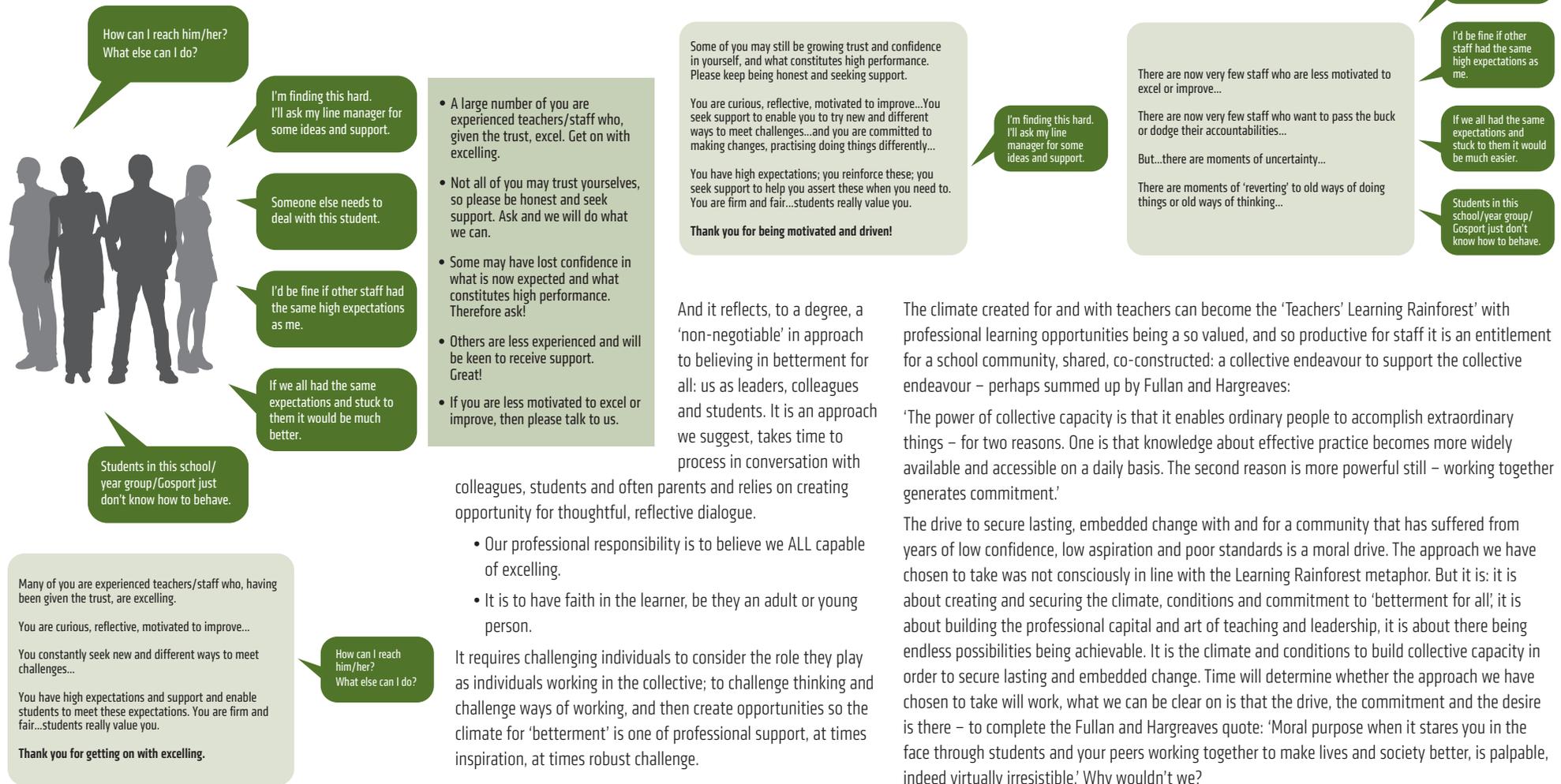
- To support you to be the best you choose to be.
- It is a choice that reveals your disposition – we choose our attitude!

#### The Rationale

- It is less about 'top-down' initiatives; instead, it is to expect everyone to want to maximise their own performance.
- It is a message we regularly revisit:



## CASE STUDY: CREATING AND SECURING THE CLIMATE, CONDITIONS AND COMMITMENT TO 'BETTERMENT FOR ALL'



- A large number of you are experienced teachers/staff who, given the trust, excel. Get on with excelling.
- Not all of you may trust yourselves, so please be honest and seek support. Ask and we will do what we can.
- Some may have lost confidence in what is now expected and what constitutes high performance. Therefore ask!
- Others are less experienced and will be keen to receive support. Great!
- If you are less motivated to excel or improve, then please talk to us.

And it reflects, to a degree, a 'non-negotiable' in approach to believing in betterment for all: us as leaders, colleagues and students. It is an approach we suggest, takes time to process in conversation with colleagues, students and often parents and relies on creating opportunity for thoughtful, reflective dialogue.

- Our professional responsibility is to believe we ALL capable of excelling.
- It is to have faith in the learner, be they an adult or young person.

It requires challenging individuals to consider the role they play as individuals working in the collective; to challenge thinking and challenge ways of working, and then create opportunities so the climate for 'betterment' is one of professional support, at times inspiration, at times robust challenge.

The climate created for and with teachers can become the 'Teachers' Learning Rainforest' with professional learning opportunities being a so valued, and so productive for staff it is an entitlement for a school community, shared, co-constructed: a collective endeavour to support the collective endeavour – perhaps summed up by Fullan and Hargreaves:

'The power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things – for two reasons. One is that knowledge about effective practice becomes more widely available and accessible on a daily basis. The second reason is more powerful still – working together generates commitment.'

The drive to secure lasting, embedded change with and for a community that has suffered from years of low confidence, low aspiration and poor standards is a moral drive. The approach we have chosen to take was not consciously in line with the Learning Rainforest metaphor. But it is: it is about creating and securing the climate, conditions and commitment to 'betterment for all', it is about building the professional capital and art of teaching and leadership, it is about there being endless possibilities being achievable. It is the climate and conditions to build collective capacity in order to secure lasting and embedded change. Time will determine whether the approach we have chosen to take will work, what we can be clear on is that the drive, the commitment and the desire is there – to complete the Fullan and Hargreaves quote: 'Moral purpose when it stares you in the face through students and your peers working together to make lives and society better, is palpable, indeed virtually irresistible! Why wouldn't we?



## STUDENT: FRANCES WESTON

**Age and Year Group:** 16, Year 11

**House:** Lennon

**Most recent:**

**School Trip:** Disneyland Paris, February 2019

**Extra-curricular activity:** Singing lessons, Student leadership activities

**Book/Play studied in English Literature:** *Macbeth*

**History topic:** Super power relations and the Cold War

**Arts project:** GCSE Music Coursework

**Learning:**

**Subjects Studied:** English Language; English Literature, Mathematics; Combined Science; History, Music, BTEC Business Studies, Certificate in Financial Education, GCSE Citizenship

**Recent learning highlight:** Over the past year, the course of Business Studies grasped me in ways I didn't think was imaginable. Learning the exam unit made me come to a realisation of how to work in the 'real world' and showed my strengths within the course.

**The most stand-out/interesting/challenging topic you've studied at school:** When going through my GCSEs, studying music hasn't always proved to be easy. I enjoyed learning all the set-works despite some setbacks when things got hard.

**One of my favourite teachers:** I enjoyed my lessons with Mr Andrew-Power in English the most during the last 10 months. He always assured we had the best experience within the subject and gave me the ability to reach grades I didn't think were achievable for someone like me. (I'm the student that wrote the letter quoted at the beginning of our case study!)

**A favourite feature of the school:** Whilst attending Brune Park one of my favourite things about the school was the culture. The community vibe you get from day one leaves you truly believing you are welcome anywhere and have the ability to speak up at anytime.



## STUDENT: JOSEPH DAWSON

**Age and Year Group:** 16, Year 11

**House:** Gielgud

**Most recent:**

**School Trip:** UK Parliament

**Extra-curricular activity:** Student Leadership team and various student councils

**Science experiment:** Titrations

**Book/Play studied in English Literature:** *An Inspector Calls*

**Learning:**

**Subjects Studied:** BTEC Business Studies, BTEC Engineering, Geography, Separate Sciences, English Lit & Lang, Maths, Statistics, Certificate in Financial Education, Citizenship

**Recent learning highlight:** In Summer I'm taking part in a Model United Nations event. In English we were taught to look at texts through different conceptual lenses, so when we read a piece we look at it from many angles. I was reading the UN briefing, it mentioned they 'need new conceptual lenses' for managing global issues. And it showed how, although we're working towards an exam, the work we do in class ties into the real world. I emailed my teacher said: 'I'm reading documentation for a 'model UN' and it made me think of English and how the whole way I look at our pieces and my enjoyment from reading them changes with concepts and it showed that lenses also contain relevance to the UN. Effectively, I thought it was really cool what you were doing with us in class is also a thing the UN does. Thanks for being a fab teacher.'

**The most stand-out/interesting/challenging topic you've studied at school:** Engineering was, for me, the most interesting, learning the processes to make everyday items as well as the properties of different materials with a heavily coursework and practical based course kept the lessons constantly interesting as we moved through the units without having to focus on an exam deadline.

**One of my favourite teachers:** I enjoy lessons with Mrs Hillawi who teaches Chemistry because she makes sure we're challenged and adds real world context to everything we do (so we're not just trying to pass an exam).

**A favourite feature of the school:** One of my favourite features of Brune Park is the student voice, if we ever have a concern or wish our school allows us to directly query or act upon it, giving us ownership over Brune Park.



**I thought it was really cool that what you were doing with us in class is also a thing the UN does. Thanks for being a fab teacher.**

JOSEPH DAWSON



**Now I'm moving on I feel so much more confident in my academic ability across the subjects (even grown to love them!) but more importantly, I feel confident in myself as a person and you Sir have been a huge influence on that.**

FRANCES WESTON





## CASE STUDY: TRANSFORMING A SCHOOL FOR GOOD

**General Area:** Teaching and Learning/CPD/Leadership

**Author:** David Higginbottom, Assistant Headteacher, GFM's Institute of Education

As leaders we joined a school that was under confident and in many ways 'in crisis,' there were lots of actions that we could have taken, things we could have done and advice from external evaluation audits and visits that we could have followed. We decided on the approach we would take and committed to it: not 'top-down' and 'you will do X, Y and Z,' or one of rolling out whole school policies hoping they might 'stick'. We recognised that these approaches had been taken in the school for many years and had not secured sustainable, positive change. We committed to a strategy and approach to enable all to change their behaviours, to want to change as part of an improvement of self and others.

Our approach focuses on co-constructed and co-owned strategies and a commitment to a shared understanding of each of our accountabilities to secure the school we all want it to be. This approach is different in style to more 'traditional' models of the leadership and management of change, it is unorthodox, we did not start from a point of believing we were 'right' but recognised we needed to do something different to the models that had been in the school, or brought into the school over the past twelve years by different leaders. It may be 'right' it may not be, but it is the approach that we have committed to – a collectively improved and 'owned' school will be a collectively successful school. Why? Because we believe collective endeavour changes culture and through changing the culture of the school we will enable higher expectations, higher aspirations and self-belief in a community that needs and deserves more. We will bring about sustainable changes that will be long lasting.

### Example 1: subject driven behaviour management

We recognised that where teachers felt a sense of ownership of their classroom, set themselves and students high expectations, had robust follow up to support students modify their behaviour, working with parents and effective subject leads – classroom conduct and engagement was very positive. In these classrooms, teachers were embracing opportunities to further develop their teaching, were actively involved in reimagining the curriculum and approaches to assessment and were instrumental in creating positive shifts in thinking for themselves and across their teams. Many of these colleagues were not in formal leadership positions, yet their leadership of change was and is significant. To bring in a 'top down' whole school behaviour policy would undermine the messages Ian and Kirstie describe above.

The cries for a whole school behaviour policy continued from those who were finding some classes or individual students tricky, who wanted to teach 'without them in the class' who didn't feel it was their responsibility to deal with the complexity of challenge around inclusion. We were and are empathetic – as leaders our classes do not necessarily run smoothly, we have and are having to work very hard using everything in our 'toolboxes' to support some students change and modify their behaviours.

Our resolve has been tested, and continues to be tested. We actually have a clear, co-constructed policy but what some colleagues want is a set of sanctions that can be applied if a child does not do as expected that, ideally, the class teacher does not have to see through; a punitive approach so students know if they step out of line X or Y will happen. As has often been the case, we have had to hold our nerve. To have responded with a 'top down' policy would compromise and potentially undermine the cultural shift that is taking place across teams and classrooms in the

school. It does not secure or embed changes in the climate where staff choose to attend professional learning or seek support and ideas from others to try in their own classrooms. It does not provide the staff most in need of support the opportunity to step out of their comfort zone, to try something new, to feel accountable and see the accountability through. It would not support staff who are learning how to work with students (and parents) in a positive way in order to secure changes in behaviour. It does not encourage or further build confidence in staff to self-reflect on their disposition as being a choice. To bring in a whole school policy would and will undermine the positive work of subject teams in 'owning' what high expectations of the classroom are, and how they can be achieved.

The focus has remained on creating frequent opportunities where colleagues come together to work on how to improve their teaching, sharing ways other manage the tricky class or individual, practising the 'tweaks' or new ideas, nurturing and growing the 'toolkit' of strategies.

And our greatest challenge, of course, is ensuring the positive progress continues and the improvement start to 'stick'. It is about being relentless in getting the 'wins' successes, positives and collective strategies to still be active and effective in two weeks, or four, six, even 10 weeks time.

### Example 2: Supporting positive improvement through co-planning:

To provide a structure that enabled regular professional learning, frequent opportunity for high quality professional dialogue, revisits, opportunity for reflection practice etc., we made a decision early on to think carefully about how we deployed directed time. We wanted to ensure staff had high quality,



**Establishing attitudes and habits for excellence and creating an ethos where professional learning, continued professional development and educational research is valued remains key to underpinning our school improvement ethos.**

DAVID HIGGINBOTTOM  
ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER,  
GFM'S INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

## CASE STUDY: TRANSFORMING A SCHOOL FOR GOOD

structured, organised and learning focused time together minded of course, for the challenging time demands on all staff. We planned how directed time could be well used to focus on professional learning throughout the school year

In September 2018, following a review and supported by Tom Sherrington, we established four focus areas for improving the quality of teaching and learning across Brune Park:

1. Behaviour and expectations – assertive and consistent reinforcement of expectations coupled with warm, positive relationships. Dealing effectively with major disruptions and tackling low-level disruption at its onset
2. Focus on knowledge – placing more emphasis on direct teaching in knowledge heavy subjects, based on Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction. More direct modelling and explanation. Further development and use of knowledge organisers in classrooms
3. Questioning – eliciting responses from all and retrieval practice. Embedding 'Cold Calling' and 'Checking for Understanding' to engage more students in the discourse in lessons
4. Curriculum planning and resourcing – designing high quality 'standard' resources for standard topics, to provide a secure knowledge base and references for students

To enable colleagues to focus on these four areas we recognised the need to provide professional learning time for professional dialogue, inputs, reflection time, time to practise etc. We built 'co-planning' sessions into our directed time calendar – calling it co-planning rather than 'meetings.' Co-planning meetings were divided into; Subject Team Co-planning, Leadership Co-planning and Tutor Co-planning. The rationale behind this approach was that subject teams, year teams and middle leadership

colleagues would have dedicated time to work collaboratively on; co-constructed behaviour strategies (both subject-led and year team-led), curriculum planning and resourcing – with a clearer focus on direct teaching for knowledge and on developing questioning strategies. Thus the accountability for driving improvements in the quality of teaching became and continues to be shared – a collectively improving and 'owned' school we expect will have greater scope to become a collectively successful school. Co-planning sessions also provide the space and time for colleagues to meet regularly in teams to engage in professional dialogue about their practice. Therefore the notion of being a reflective practitioner, which has become the core of what we are about, flourishes and is nurtured.

### Points of reflection

1. Awareness of assumptions. We have come to learn that we often make assumptions but we don't always know what we are assuming! For example; a co-planning session that is positive, energetic and energising, with everyone engaged and enthusiastic does not equate to changes in practice in the classroom that have been explored and discussed. X doesn't equal Y and we have needed to, and continue to have conversations where we focus on the desired outcome, and work back to see if we are making any assumptions along the way.
2. Taking actions and strategies to the point they are embedded or 'sticking'. People need motivation to 'get on board' and but morale can sometimes dip. As leaders we need to remain optimistic and positive and keep driving change while being resilient and not be put off ourselves by temporary dips before the benefits of change start to show green shoots. Driving some colleagues out of their comfort zone takes a

continued effort and we have needed to have patience with some in the early stages. 'Hurry up' traits can be damaging and however uncomfortable being in an 'unfrozen state' feels, we have needed to help people move away from keeping old strategies working whilst we have created new ones.

3. Feedback to colleagues leads to changes in classroom practices/improvements in the quality of teaching – we have learned again and again that we need in our 'toolbox' wide ranging strategies to deploy in order to feedback to colleagues about their teaching in ways that prompt reflection, thought and a desire or will to want to make changes. We are continuing to learn the need for us to do things differently to bring about changes in behaviour so that changes in teaching become habitual. Striking a balance is hard; open and honest conversations need to happen in order to bring about change but how do you achieve this without crushing staff confidence, particularly when staff are working really hard, are really committed to change but perhaps don't know how to change.
4. Schools are busy places. This makes it difficult at times to say 'we are not accepting second best'. We have to be relentless in our drive for continued improvements in the quality of teaching across the school and this can be exhausting at times. We have to rely on the leadership team to be together and supportively together as 'relentless.'



**It is about creating and securing the climate, conditions and commitment to 'betterment for all', it is about building the professional capital and art of teaching and leadership, it is about there being endless possibilities being achievable. It is the climate and conditions to build collective capacity in order to secure lasting and embedded change.**

KIRSTIE ANDREW-POWER  
HEADTEACHER  
AND  
IAN POTTER  
CEO

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# THE LEARNING RAINFOREST FIELDBOOK

Tom Sherrington's 2017 book *The Learning Rainforest* won rave reviews for its brilliant weaving of research evidence into a powerful vision of how education can transform lives, even in the most challenging settings. In this follow-up book, Tom explores how these ideas take shape in the real world of education, referencing the journeys that a range of schools and colleges have been on in recent years.

15% of revenue from the sales of *The Learning Rainforest Fieldbook* will go to St Stithians Thandulwazi Maths and Science programme, created in 2005 to improve the quality of Maths and Science teaching and learning in public high schools. The money raised will have a direct impact on the education of a great many children in Johannesburg.



*I love teaching; I love being a teacher; I love working in schools. It's the relationship between a love of teaching and the quest for great teaching that informs a lot of what I hope to convey through the idea of the Learning Rainforest.*



*By the end of this year I will have visited well over 200 schools, travelled to the many corners of the UK and the Channel Islands, and delivered training in 20 countries. It's been an incredible experience. I feel that I have been on a global adventure – I've seen the Learning Rainforest made real.*

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£16

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