

## Case Study 6: Motivation through Display

Forfar Academy, Forfar, Angus

**This case study describes the development of a strategy to display and celebrate pupils' creativity and achievements and its impact on pupil motivation and interest.**

Forfar Academy is a large comprehensive school with a wide catchment area that includes the town of Forfar and the surrounding hinterland. In all, some 1140 pupils attend the school, which is characterised by enthusiastic approaches to coursework and pupil involvement.

The school is committed to celebrating achievement and encouraging positive attitudes to participation and attainment on the part of pupils, staff and the community. As an element of its overall strategy to further such encouragement the school devised a three-year Challenge Fund scheme to promote effective display as a means of motivating and recognising pupil and departmental successes. The SMT decided to:

- make an analysis of how well departments promoted the achievements of pupils and the activities in which they engaged
- explore new ways of broadcasting pupil achievements to the community of the school
- explore the use of photography and corridor decoration as tools to promote a more focused approach to display.

Using the new funding, a member of the art department was seconded and some hardware and software were acquired to make photography an important element in the new display strategy.

The seconded teacher, Isabel Chapman, had first floated the idea of developing such work a few years earlier during a promoted post interview. She believed there was a need for the school to think strategically about display and to consider carefully the quality of the school environment for promoting pupils' creativity and achievements. The idea was retained by the headteacher and developed when the extra resources became available. Senior staff agreed with the need for such development and to its inclusion as a priority in the school development plan.

*It was important that the priority of the project was built into the school development plan at the outset and this has been reaffirmed by our subsequent evaluation of progress to date. It has been vital that senior staff have given me such tangible support.*

Isabel Chapman

There was firm support for the teacher who as a long-serving and enthusiastic member of staff knew well the pupils, staff and the wider community of the school.

*Although I have my allocation of time it is no use being precious about*

*having it in nice neat blocks. There has to be flexibility to allow me to be available when things are actually happening. I also find myself using break times and after-school time to meet my own deadlines. However, management have made the time available and they are flexible about how I use it. It is good to break out of the rigidity of the timetable and I think the results are worth it.*

Isabol Chapman

A number of issues were identified.

- The school building had many similar, narrow corridors that lacked colour and dedicated display space.
- The daily 'traffic' in a secondary school is not conducive to maintaining display because of damage to displays by school bags and occasional vandalism.
- Regular maintenance and change of display is essential to sustain interest and participation.
- Equipment required to be obtained to establish high-quality displays including dedicated digital camera equipment, appropriate software and reprographic equipment. In addition wall-mounted display frame/cases were needed that would protect displays from damage.
- Challenge funding was finite (three-year period) and any strategies developed had to be capable of being sustained thereafter by departmental staff. This had educational and staff-development implications.

Two main planks of the emerging strategy were agreed for immediate implementation.

- Painting and general cheering up of departmental areas with a particular focus on the immediately external corridor space.
- Photographic recording and display of the work of departments across all aspects, including the social, curricular and personal achievements of pupils and staff.

There was staff debate on the importance of promoting positive images on the part of pupils, staff and the general school environment.

*The boss asked me to consider colour schemes for corridors as part of a drive to enliven the school environment. I consulted colleagues and whilst most of the women were enthusiastic and considered carefully, male colleagues were less forthcoming. I have to confess that some of the men have changed their views since we got into this discussion of image projection and you can tell this by the way they have now considered colour in their personal dress and how important they now consider display of pupil's work to be.*

Isabol Chapman

A decision was taken to confront the issue of blandness of the corridor environment and confusion for new pupils that the décor caused by

considering the school as a number of zones. Each departments was given a colour in keeping with the image they wanted to project, and entry and exit points were designed into the wall display through the use of large intermingling shapes so that pupils were aware that they were not only leaving a zone but entering another department. Pupils and staff responded positively to the changes and together with other display initiatives a growing awareness and pride in surroundings began to develop.

*We used to have displays put up by the Art department in different parts of the school. They were very effective but were promoting only art. I felt we needed to do more to promote other subjects and to celebrate the success of the young people.*

Isabol Chapman

Discussion on using displays of pupils' achievements and departmental activity ran in parallel with the discussion regarding corridor space. It was agreed that focus on pupils would help raise their self-esteem and enhance participation and attainment.

*I knew we needed to develop a system which would allow us to turn round displays quickly but one which was also gave us effective and exciting results. We got the best available digital camera at the time. Costs were important – we used ordinary paper at A3 size. We laminate these and this protects pictures from the wear and tear of corridor display as well as enhancing their appearance. We costed lamination services and a new A2 laminator and we negotiated a deal for a machine which has more than paid for itself over the year.*

Isabol Chapman

Pupils and some staff needed a little more convincing about the possibilities of the strategy.

*Pupils were a little wary at first about having photographs taken and I had to be alert to adolescent sensitivities about personal image as well as the whole business of child protection issues associated with photographs of youngsters. I do consult pupils before displaying individual shots and they have to be happy with them going up on the wall. However the wariness has gone and instead of a reluctance the pupils actively seek the recording of achievements and events. They are up for it and now they are enthusiastic about it.*

Isabol Chapman

These views were reflected by senior management.

*A good example of responding to the pupil's views would be the example of a boy who had his photograph taken as part of an activity in S5. In the intervening period he has been on a fitness and weight-loss campaign and is now much happier with his personal appearance and doesn't like the old images to go on display – it wouldn't be cool. I know Isabol has painted out the odd facial spot in some of the portraits!*

*However the serious thing is that we are promoting positive image and raising self-esteem.*

Janice Crow, AHT

As time went on some of the advantages began to become clear.

*Pupils are much happier about the unposed photographs now and these can be a very powerful reflection of the life and work of the school. They can give important messages in areas like gender where a photograph of boys involved a la TV-chef image in a home economics class can convey a positive message about the activity or subject.*

*Teachers are very supportive. A lot of people stop and look at the photographs not only pupils but visitors and parents too. If there is a child who is a bit of a problem in your class and you see a photograph of him winning a golf tournament it gives you something positive to speak about and this can motivate pupils to modify their behaviour.*

Janice Crow, AHT

The implications of this way of working and the character of the work involved began to show some impact.

*You have to turn things round quickly to keep interest alive. There is little point in taking pictures and waiting three weeks to display them. We had a group of visitors from Germany this morning so I had their pictures printed and on display by interval to alert the pupils and staff to their presence and to tell them a little about who they were and why they were here.*

Isabool Chapman

As well as ways of working new resource and equipment issues also surfaced.

*It isn't a question of simply pointing and shooting. Although I think I knew what a good photograph should be I needed time to learn about using the camera software and how to edit the images to get the best presentation. Now that we are up and running I realise that the printer is too slow and we will have to get a new laser machine out of this year's budget.*

Isabool Chapman

There is the realisation that the funding for the seconded member of staff will run out next year and efforts are being made to sustain the work by encouraging departments to do more of their own work and rely less on specialist help.

*The idea is that all departments will have their own camera – and they are coming down in price. We have a second camera now and this means that departments can borrow the second one and do their own*

*image capturing. The big issue is getting time to do the downloading and indeed to learn how to manipulate the software although probably this will also be developed to be easier. Of course many of the pupils have this technology at home and are skilled in its use. We will have to look more at utilising these skills and talents in this aspect of our work.*

Isabol Chapman

A range of different applications within the display strategy has begun to have real impact on the morale and self-image of the pupils. For example, pupils are willing to have witness-type photographic displays where they might make personal statements about drug or alcohol and smoking issues. Displays celebrate achievements and events and increasingly work within departments is given a higher profile. New directions are emerging.

*We are thinking about other ways of using the photographs, such as a school calendar. Teachers are starting to use the images as part of their record keeping or, for example, as part of a sequence for teaching as in a series of science experiments. When advertising things like the annual Insight to Business event we use the pictures of last year's one to illustrate what it will be like.*

Isabol Chapman

The display and décor initiatives at Forfar Academy help to create the climate in which young people and their teachers can flourish in terms of creative and innovative thinking. The motivation factor has been noted in both groups of pupils and in individuals and a feeling of a 'more together' school community has been created. Pupils' expectations that their work will be valued and recorded have increased and the comments of parents, pupils and staff on what they see in display reinforce the value of pupil contributions. The low levels of damage to displays is due as much to the value placed on them by pupils as it is to provision of customised display boards.

A number of specific considerations with regard to such a development also come to the fore.

- Clear leadership and support from senior management.
- The making available of dedicated staff time.
- Acquisition of equipment and time for staff to master this.
- Focused staff and departmental involvement and discussion.
- Sensitive involvement of the pupils including overcoming issues of sensitivity – privacy, maturity, child-protection.
- Ensuring frequent and regular change of display.
- Evaluation of developments to date and appropriate actions in the light of comment to ensure the initiative continues to develop and change in line with needs.
- Including not only mainstream curricular but also extra-curricular activities.