



"I did it my way"

Uma Pandya – Head teacher - shares some thoughts about her school

From the start of my teaching career in 1982 with teacher training in Bradford followed by supply teaching in ILEA - Hackney, I have been a very aware and passionate educator. I have always had opinions and views which I have aired with firm conviction. However, the consequences haven't always been easy to bear. Being ostracised, isolated and by - passed by others, are just some of the behaviour patterns I have had to get used to. I am a strong believer in doing things which I firmly believe in, but you still need to be stronger in order to withstand negativity from the authorities. Through sheer hard work, perhaps luck and support from few very close friends and colleagues I have succeed in climbing up my career path which interestingly, I hadn't set out to do.

In my present position, as a head teacher of a merged school since January 2000, I set out, with my team to improve standards and raise the profile of my school which had been battered over the years. There was only one way out for the school with a looming Ofsted, and that was UP!

Reflecting on the journey over the 4 years specifically, these are the strategies I have used which I feel have been paramount of our "success".

There is a strong listening culture throughout the school, from pupils, parents to staff and governors. However, I will add that although I listen very carefully to all the stakeholders at the school. I am not very good at listening to some of the dictates from authorities regarding issues about target setting and league tables..I search for creative thinkers and doers within the school, including those that show initiative and common sense. Experience has shown that these two skills, although simple, are sometimes at a premium! I take what I and my Senior Level Team (SLT) feel is the most relevant focus for my school, I see this alongside what the DFES and Ofsted tell us and strike a happy medium. The school is developing a strong sense of accountability that is linked to Professional Development as its Performance Management Policy.

I am personally and professionally very resolute about tackling the most difficult, sensitive, unfair and unjust issues head on, for example, from the issue of league tables, I tacked with Stephen Twigg MP recently at his Head teacher meetings on the Primary Strategy regarding the weak performance by some staff. I firmly believe that pupils under my care have one chance and one chance only! As such, they deserve the best the state education system

has to offer: teaching, specialist music, art, sport, drama etc. I have learnt that there are occasions when you have to challenge policies or views so that you are not always giving in to what someone else wants you to do. The school staff are the best people to make decisions for the school.

Another feature that every visitor, including Ofsted, remarks favourably about our pupils is the discipline. With 706 pupils aged 3 - 11 years: over 30% with refugee status, 70% EAL (30% beginners), 26 languages spoken, 40% mobility, 42% FSM, 24% SEN, our Values and Discipline are uniformly addressed with amazing results. In addition, I am not a Head teacher who will always entirely blame staff for pupils' underachievement. As mentioned earlier, I will tackle underperforming staff (6 in the last 5 years), but will also challenge pupils and parents to take their share of responsibilities. I have no hesitation in excluding pupils when all strategies are exhausted and if the pupil falls foul of the very transparent discipline policy as well as excluding parents who persistently flout the school values and rules. I have had to do this with a handful of our parents.! In educating such a varied and challenging intake, my staff are committed in providing good teaching (for example, with EAL pupils, providing stimulating key visuals, using varied ICT software, a great deal of outdoor experience, modelling good spoken language etc.). Our intake show that our pupils are well below on entry and yet last year with the VALUE ADDED attainment data published nationally, our school was in the top 5% of schools Nationally!

These are some of the key strategies I have used to raise the profile and most importantly standards at my school.

Uma Pandya

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