

Is positive feedback distributed fairly?

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About Seymour Park CPS

Seymour Park Community Primary School stands in the heart of Old Trafford. It is a 3 form entry school in which 74% of children do not have English as their first language. The pupil population use 23 different languages and consist of 33 different ethnicities.

As part of its core values, Seymour Park Community Primary School promotes "Growth Mind Set". This incorporates aiming high, rewarding effort and doing one's best. The use of specific feedback and language for learning, which has been developed specifically to suit the school, is used throughout.

As the subject of our research we wanted to look into the ways positive feedback is distributed in SPCPS. We wanted to hear from the children, staff members and parents. We gathered their thoughts about positive feedback and then looked specifically into its distribution. We wanted to find out which strategies were in place to ensure an inclusive approach to encouraging each individual to achieve his or her full potential.

"Sometimes if you are wobbling and you need some help from the teacher and you still carry on and keep going even though you are wobbling, you can get put in the golden book for effort because it's better if you wobble and learn than wobble and do not say anything and don't ask for teacher help and just sit there not knowing what to do."

Quote from a child in SPCPS

"We should praise wisely, praise the processes, strategies, effort, perseverance, application of skills, focus, developing sustained periods of concentration. Not the score, end result, intelligence or ability." Carol Dweck, as quoted by Tony Rae (headteacher)

"It is fair for them because they are trying to improve their learning. We don't need to improve our learning very much. They get a treat for that, we get a different kind of treat so it's fair" A child's thoughts about different types and fairness of positive feedback.

What we did and Why we did it

Parents

Pilot parent questionnaire trialled in SSC – from this trial we changed the layout of the questions, and identified early themes.

Parents Questionnaire – We sent out 400 questionnaires out, we decided on this rather than interviews due to time limitations.

"The teachers have to choose two people who were fantastic, incredible, extraordinary, amazing in their learning." Child's thoughts about The Golden Book

Golden Book

We planned to look at dojo points and star of the week however we focused on the Golden book because it was the one consistent reward system across KS1 and KS2 and we wanted to look for emerging themes.

Teacher views of house points

"It creates a sense of teamwork, and is a positive reinforcement for working alongside others."
"It can be unfair on individual children who never get house points because of other people's actions."

Staff

Staff Questionnaire – to save on staff time and also provide anonymity. We asked teachers to specify key stage but not class or year. Lots of staff volunteered to be interviewed but due to time constraints and the amount of data this would produce we were unable to do this.

"Verbal feedback is the most genuine and spontaneous" A quote from a staff questionnaire

Observations

These were carried out across all Key Stages to observe the different types of praise given in the classroom. We did this to see if it triangulated with the other findings.

Focus groups

We carried out 2 focus groups, one from KS1 and one from KS2. The same member of staff ran both groups for consistency. The children came from the same classes that the observations were carried out in, with the purpose of exploring the different perceptions of feedback within the class. The groups consisted of 4 children in KS1, 6 children in KS2.

What did we find out? What did the data tell us?

Once we had gathered all our data we started to look for emerging themes.

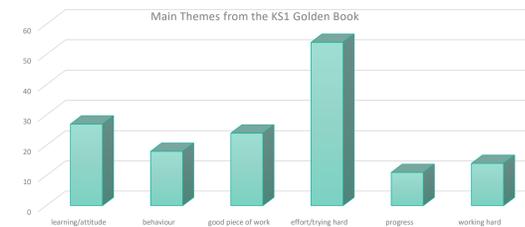
Reasons for positive feedback recorded from the staff and parent questionnaires and focus groups.

Sitting Nicely
Good Learning
Improvement
Doing Everything Good
Always Child Helping
Phonics Well Behaved
Good Work Maths Effort Lining Up
Tidying Up Tidying Tables Good Choices
On Task
Good Handwriting
Reading Book
Putting Hand Up
Fantastic Listening
Attitude To Learning

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Restrictions for positive feedback being distributed fairly taken from the staff questionnaires.

Some children are more demanding of the teacher's time and attention
Quiet pupils don't always receive the same amount of positive feedback
Children who need extra support
Teacher to pupil ratio
Different behaviour expectations
Ensuring balance to create resilience
Time



Limitations

Time: We had so many ideas of things we wanted to do but found we didn't have time and we were in danger of having too much data. We had to consider other people's time as well as our own.

Gathering representative data: Small focus groups
Questionnaires from parents - 400 sent out 16 were returned.

Our own bias with working within the school: The wording of the questions - ensuring the question was not emotive or leading.

The wording of questionnaires and focus groups.

Summary

- A vast amount of different types of positive feedback are used in SPCPS. The Golden Book and verbal feedback were consistent methods of positive praise used throughout the school.
- Some reward systems, such as team points, although often found useful, raised divided opinions about their fairness.

Parents view on house points "Her team has not won the house points the last two terms and now it is very difficult explaining to a 5 year old that although she has done her very best it was not good enough in this instance."

"They encourage children to work together – they make children accountable as a member of a team"

- Parents were not aware of all the reward systems used in school but were happy with the amount of praise their children were given.
- Children were aware of the limitations for completely fair feedback, such as time and the element of luck, but felt that teachers generally distributed it fairly.

"With the dojo points, sometimes the teacher gives them out for answering a question correctly and the only thing I think is not fair about that is if lots of people have their hand up then it's just about the teacher choosing who says the answer."

- The themes that emerged from the data generally correlated with the policies and ethos of SPCPS – some themes that didn't show up as often were behaviour and team work and friendship. Is this because behaviour and team work generally are very good throughout the school?
- From the analysis of the KS1 Golden Book it was clear that effort and positive attitude to learning were rewarded. Most of the themes were linked to performance in Maths and English.
- There was a shift from the children valuing stickers and other physical rewards in KS1 to KS2 children being motivated by the recognition by peers and staff. Do the teachers' opinions of what the children in their class value match to the views of the children?

Next steps

- To look at a similar research project in a different setting, to see if our outcomes are unique to Seymour Park CPS.
- To establish clearer links between our findings and the culture and policies embedded in the school.
- To take our findings to the school council and hear their opinions.



Focus Groups

Restrictions for positive feedback being distributed fairly

- Time restrictions
- Element of luck
- Cheating or perceived cheating by other children
- Logistics

Reason for Feedback

Questionnaires (Staff)

Restrictions

- Behaviour
- Some children are more demanding of the teacher's time and attention
- Ensuring you don't give individual children too much positive feedback - not creating resilience.

Reasons

- Tidying up
- Team work

Variations

- Dojos
- Warm fuzzy jar

Parents

Restrictions

Time for teachers to feedback to parents
Communication about reward systems

Reasons

- Hard work
- Being helpful
- Good work
- Impressing the teachers
- Improvement
- Being an 'all rounder'
- Reading book
- Phonics
- Putting their hand up
- Behaviour
- English work

