

A Journey Towards Success

A Report by Darran Lee Executive Principal

The Mills Hill story is one that has taken six years to evolve. It is one that uncovers actions aimed at improving the learning experience and outcomes for all of its children through a determined focus on the key areas of children's engagement in their learning, largely through Kagan's Cooperative Learning model.

'Before you just sat there and you didn't know what was going on and you were frightened to ask, but now you can ask your friends, or ask your team, you're not on your own, learning's great'

Mills Hill School pupil reflecting on the impact of cooperatively learning

Mills Hill School is a UK Primary school with 450 children aged 4 to 11 years old. The school serves a wide culturally diverse community and has a strong commitment to embracing community cohesion and preparing children as inclusively minded citizens.



The journey to cooperative learning commenced in 2003 and over the last six years the school has effectively led the development of Kagan Cooperative Learning, resulting in significant impacts on learners' social skills and achievements. This was highlighted in the school's recent school inspection. The school inspection Report graded the school 'Outstanding in all areas' commenting: *'Success in developing social skills is the basis for excellent learning that pupils experience when they learn together in small groups.'* The school adopts a consistent approach to learning cooperatively that not only benefits pupils academically but also socially'

Why Cooperative Learning?

An earlier inspection report that identified areas for development related to learners' social, behavioural skill with a requirement to raise the levels of achievement across the school alongside a newly appointed headteacher acted as a catalyst for change.

'Learning was chalk and talk, hand out, worksheets, put your hand up teacher selects, staff were like post people delivering a package of work – learning was not our agenda- school was a dull place'

Darran Lee, Headteacher to Mills Hill School

Self evaluation sessions with learners and staff highlighted over a quarter of learners who were not actively engaging in their learning with significant behaviour issues across school and low levels of aspiration and achievement. As a result the leadership Team established a school focus around the development of an agenda for 'learning'.

During this development stage members of the leadership team attended a range of conferences with various initiatives tried within the school. Impact was often time limited with a lack of consistency.

During a day visit to a Secondary school and Primary school within the UK the headteacher experienced Kagan Cooperative Learning in action. (Contact Gavin.Clowes@T2TUK.co.uk if you would like to visit a school in the UK using Kagan Cooperative Learning.) The use of the same structures were used to explore learning with learners from 4 year olds up to 16 years old. The headteacher described learning about Kagan Cooperative Learning as ‘a light bulb moment’ and how this was to be the launch pad for the schools future success and development.

Developing Learning with ‘Structures for Engagement’

Two members of the school staff attended the Kagan Summer Academy to train and explore the benefits of cooperative learning.

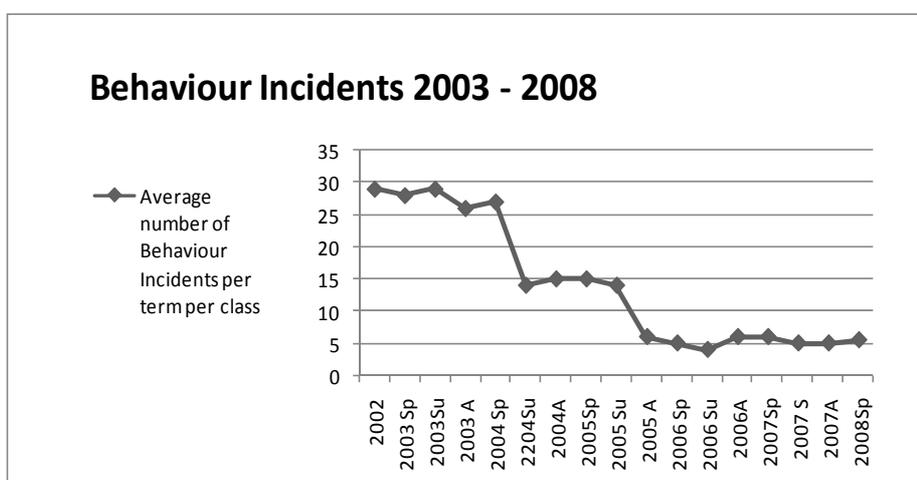
‘I’ve never been so eager to get back to school as I wanted to try things out and develop cooperative learning in my class’ J Garratt-Simpson , Deputy Headteacher Mills Hill School ,reflecting on the experience of attending the Kagan summer academy.

Initially the idea was that there would be opportunity for the staff to co-develop this in their own classes for 12 months followed by evaluation and further staff training at the following year’s summer academy. However such was the impact and interest from other staff that the implementation approach required acceleration. This whole school implementation was and continues to be by:

- Whole school professional development with Kagan accredited UK trainers (Teacher to Teacher UK www.T2TUK.co.uk)
- School purchase of Kagan resources and publications
- Attendance at Brain Expo (America and UK) to attend Kagan session
- Further attendance by staff at subsequent Kagan academies
- Introduction of SAM (Structure a Month)club
- Induction to Structures for Engagement learning for new staff members



Impact of Kagan Cooperative Learning



Prior to the introduction of cooperative learning behaviour had been a significant challenge, within months the positive impact of team based learning, supported with class and team building sessions ,was having a significant impact in reducing the number of behaviour incidents across school.

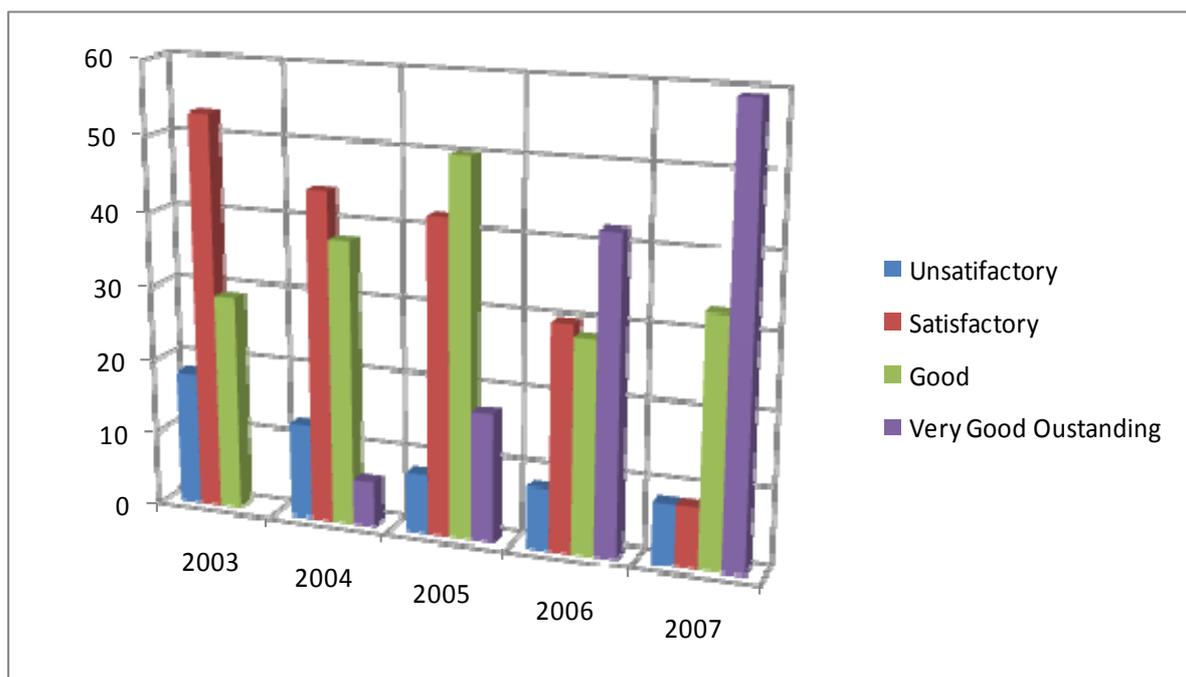
The graph illustrates the downward trend in the number of incidents. Analysis of the behaviour incidents at the onset of the use of cooperative structures showed that while overall numbers decreased there were 'new additions', who previously had had low or no behaviour incidents, who began to have recorded incidents. A significant number of these new additions were learners who in group work could have been classified as 'Hogs' controlling and taking up the greater proportion of the talk time. Intensive team and class building activities over a period of months saw these additions removed from the behaviour incidents with a further decrease in recorded incidents.



Teaching and learning lesson observation grades changed significantly over this period. Ofsted inspection in 2007 graded teaching and learning as outstanding.

'Teachers are very confident in the way they approach the development of cooperative learning- It was a pleasure to see in one class both enthusiasm with which learners moved round to high five each other as part of their learning. It was just one piece of evidence of how well learners engage in learning.'
'Ofsted report 2007

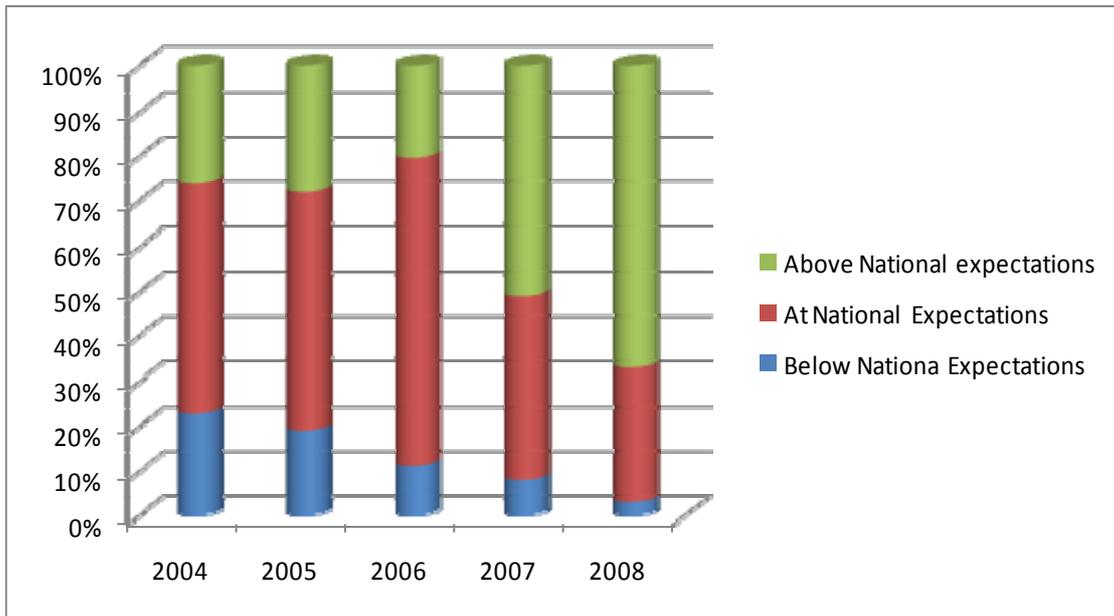
% Lesson Observation Grades 2003 to 2007



At the initial introduction the changes in teaching moved lessons from unsatisfactory and satisfactory to good, subsequent years there was a further shift from satisfactory and good to very good and outstanding.

Enhanced behaviour and improving quality of teaching and learning resulting in higher levels of attainment and achievements for all learners. Analysis of the proration of learners at and above national expectations for 7 to 11 year olds shows an increase for those above and a decrease for those below national expectations in attainment levels for combined English and Mathematics.

% Levels of Attainment for all Learners aged 7 to 11 years for 2004 - 2008



During the period 2004 to 2008 Mills Hill School alongside the majority of UK primary schools implemented the National Literacy and Numeracy lessons. This included the curriculum entitlement and an exploration of teaching and learning approaches. Could this then not be the lever for the changes in learner attainment? Head teacher Darran Lee thinks not:

‘The national strategies have had an impact for learners but Kagan Structures for Engagement has been the significant lever of change- in 2004 our school was in the top 30% of school nationally but our rate of improvement has been greater than that of other schools with the school one in the Top 6% of schools .This significant and rapid rate of progress I attribute to the high impact Kagan Structures for Engagement have had for our learners’ *Darran Lee Headteacher Mills Hill*

The next steps...

For the school the development of learning never ends.



‘I’ve always had a passion that every child should succeed and that there should be no glass ceilings and that is what drives me as a leader. For me its achievement within a context of social learning – your gain is my gain- the child needs to develop both socially and academically. Kagan Cooperative Learning has provided a process to achieve this goal’

D.C.Lee Headteacher

Staff professional development remains key in ensuring the ongoing successes; this is backed up with a rigorous monitoring system. In addition the school looks to supporting the wider system in the development of cooperative learning, speaking at conferences and allowing opportunities for other professionals to observe cooperative learning in action within a school setting

For Kagan Training & Coaching and Professional Development in the UK, please contact Gavin Clowes directly.

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