



Leadership coaching in schools

what are the benefits?

**A case study on Cravenwood Primary
Academy in Manchester**

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1. Executive summary

The purpose of this case study research project was to explore how leadership coaching can contribute to school success. The study was based on interviews with seven senior leaders at Cravenwood Primary Academy in Manchester, a school that is operating under challenging circumstances but in recent years has shown marked improvements, to the extent of moving from being rated Inadequate to Good by Ofsted. Feedback from the school was that implementing leadership coaching has had a positive impact; this was worthy of further investigation.

To use leadership coaching to facilitate school improvements, coaches need to be able to coach leadership well; to do this, coaches need strong leadership and coaching skills. Therefore, the study investigated two stages: first, how the school leaders have benefitted from leadership coaching training, and second, how leadership coaching has been used in and benefitted the school.

The findings showed that participants have an increased awareness of the importance and nuances of listening and questioning as a result of taking part in leadership coaching training, and this has led to improvements in practising these two skills within the school and to having higher-quality conversations. In addition, they have changed their leadership perspective and practice and therefore their leadership style, balancing the conventional, hierarchical style of leadership typical of schools with now using coaching to develop and increase their staff's leadership responsibilities and autonomy. Participants have experienced personal benefits from changing their leadership style, such as reduced stress and pressure, increased job enjoyment, and new perspectives on work-related issues.

Participants have implemented coaching in the school primarily through using a coaching approach in everyday conversations and meetings with each other, their staff and the children. This has created a coaching culture and mindset that has spread throughout all levels of the school. The school's values, such as self-responsibility and self-determination, reflect and reinforce its coaching culture and its emphasis on the importance of personal leadership, and there is a proactive attitude to making decisions and resolving issues for all members of the school community. Leadership coaching is successfully used to improve the professional development and leadership of teachers, and in the classroom to improve the social and emotional skills and behaviour of the children. Both of these improvements, as well as improved quality of leadership, are in themselves examples of school success; furthermore, they have extensive research showing their influence on academic achievement, perhaps the main way that school success is judged.

2. Introduction

The purpose of this case study research project is to explore how leadership coaching can contribute to school success. As stated by Nieuwerburgh and Barr (2016:13), “one of the best pieces of ‘evidence’ about the difference that coaching is making in these institutions will be the stories of learners, educators, educational leaders and the organisations through which they flourish”. Independent Coaching (IC) has had an informal partnership with Cravenwood Primary Academy in Manchester for the last seven years, providing leadership coaching, training and development. The school is operating under challenging circumstances – a high proportion of the children are from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the student population is highly transient with many arriving at the school with poor or no English language skills – and it has a history of poor academic performance and behavioural problems. There have in recent years been marked improvements, however, and the school has moved from being rated Inadequate to Good by Ofsted. Feedback from the school's leaders was that leadership coaching has had a positive impact; IC therefore approached Cravenwood with the idea of collaborating on a case study to investigate this further. The results should be of value not just for Cravenwood and IC but also for other schools interested in how leadership coaching could be worthwhile for them.

3. Leadership coaching

Although there are variations in definitions of coaching given by authors, one of the core characteristics of all definitions is that coaching involves helping the client to find his or her own answers and solutions. (The terms ‘coach-coachee’ are often used by authors, but IC prefers to define the relationship as coach-client because it is the client, ideally, who chooses their coach, and the client has a co-active role and responsibility in working with the coach.)

A succinct definition of coaching is given by Whitmore (1992:5): “coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance”. Coaching is not a “cosy chat” but a supportive yet challenging form of dialogue (Lindon, 2011). More specifically, the coaching process can be broken down into five main stages (Creasy & Paterson, 2005:14):

- establishing rapport and trust
- listening for meaning
- questioning for understanding
- prompting action, reflection and learning
- developing confidence and celebrating success

Coaching is fundamentally a conversation, and quality of conversations is essential for the effectiveness of any organisation including schools (Campbell, 2016). Conversations

happen at numerous levels throughout a school, such as between headteacher and leaders, leaders and teachers, teachers and teachers, teachers and children, and leaders and leaders. Campbell (2016:132) remarks that “when viewed in this context, it is not surprising that coaching has emerged as a significant methodology for development in schools”.

“Coaching has emerged as a significant methodology for development in schools”

There are many different types of coaching; IC's work focuses on *leadership* coaching, and it is leadership coaching that is the focus of this project. School leadership is a key factor influencing school success, for instance academic achievement, and is particularly influential in low-performing schools (Hitt et al., 2018; Hitt & Meyers, 2017; Lewithwood et al., 2008). IC works with school leaders to develop their leadership and coaching skills; this enables them to then use coaching to develop the leadership of others within their schools.

Leadership is a broad concept covering not just leadership of other people and of organisations but also *personal* leadership – leadership over oneself, such as emotional intelligence and self-responsibility. IC's work progresses from a focus on person-centred leadership to a focus on the wider context of leadership of other people and organisations, with a particular emphasis on the values and ethics that operate at all levels of professional practice. This is all grounded in the strong belief it is learning itself that is the core purpose of schools. Indeed, it is accurate to say that “coaching and education share the same purpose: helping people to learn, grow, and develop” (Campbell & van Nieuwerburgh, 2017).

4. Methodology

The study was based on interviews with seven senior Cravenwood leaders who had taken part in the IC Leadership Coaching Skills Programme:

- **Jancie:** Principal.
- **Courtney:** Associate Principal.
- **John:** Vice Principal (Inclusion) and Special Educational Needs Coordinator.
- **Karen:** Vice Principal and Consultant Head of Teaching and Learning.
- **Hester:** Key Stage 1 Team Leader.
- **Kate:** School Business Manager.
- **Helen:** Early Years Lead and Nursery Teacher.

The study involved two research questions, covering the benefits of leadership coaching training for school leaders, and then the subsequent use of and benefits of leadership coaching within the school:

1. How have school leaders benefitted from leadership coaching training?
2. How has leadership coaching been used in and benefitted the school?

Interviews were semi-structured, lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and were conducted via phone or Zoom. The interviews were approached through an evaluation framework familiar to participants from the IC programme:

Activity	<i>What have we done?</i>
Learning	<i>What have we learned?</i>
Professional practice	<i>How have we changed our practice?</i>
Outcomes	<i>What have been the outcomes?</i>
Values	<i>Are these outcomes in line with our values?</i>

Covering these five basic questions in each interview ensured there was some degree of standardisation between the interviews, but there was also considerable flexibility in how each interview naturally developed. Prior to the finalisation of the report, participants were provided with a draft copy for them to check that their interview data had not been misinterpreted, and that there were no factual errors about the school.

The intention of the study was to focus primarily on the *benefits* of leadership coaching training and leadership coaching in schools. Nonetheless, IC did not want to ignore any negatives participants might want to express about these topics, and such negative feedback would indeed be of value to know. It was therefore emphasised to participants that negative feedback is welcome. Despite this, however, participants were overwhelmingly positive in their interviews.

5. How have school leaders benefitted from leadership coaching training?

5.1 Developed understanding of what coaching really is

Most participants were not aware or fully aware of what coaching is until they took part in leadership coaching training. Kate, for instance, said “no, I didn’t have a clue, no idea”. John said “I had an idea what it was, but my idea wasn’t spot on”. Helen gave the example of Jancie in the past asking her to come for a coaching session and at first

feeling intimidated because “if you don't know what's going on, you feel like this person's got an agenda and they've got all the answers and they're just trying to trip me up, like what do you want me to say?”. Hester explained that “it wasn't until Jancie put me on the coaching course that I really knew what coaching was. I probably would have thought it was somebody telling you what to do”. Furthermore, Jancie believes that people unfamiliar with coaching might think it is “this airy-fairy thing, and it's all a bit happy clappy”, and said this was her own view previously. Karen and Jancie suggested that misconceptions about coaching, and/or having had poor quality coaching training, could prevent it being adopted and invested in by others.

5.2 Improved listening and questioning skills

Participants talked positively when asked what skills they learnt from their leadership coaching training. Hester described it as “like a lightbulb moment because you suddenly realise all the conversations you were having weren't as useful as you thought they were”. Moreover, Courtney stated “I think the way it's helped us develop as leaders is really strong in terms of how we approach conversations, or skills we had to develop to be better within those conversations”. She also commented that “the level one coaching [course] was a really good understanding of two things: one, it put a lot of focus on my skills, and that I wasn't really a very great listener. And not only did it show I wasn't a great listener, it showed the skills I needed to improve on to be a better coach myself”.

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Listening was indeed the main skill participants said they had developed, and this was often linked to being able to ask better questions. The quality of questions asked in a coaching conversation is important given that “questions can lead dialogue in many directions and can liberate speakers to take their thinking to deeper levels, or constrain them in superficial discussion” (Creasy & Patterson, 2005:27). Jancie noted that “the biggest change in me from the training was I used to worry about needing to make sure I'm asking the right question and thinking about what question should I ask. And I'd be so preoccupied with being a good coach and about asking the right question”, but she has now had “the realisation that just listen and the questions will come”. John said something similar: “to be a good coach, you don't necessarily have to say a lot. And it doesn't necessarily need to be anything profound. But I think that from good listening, you can formulate a good question to help someone move on, move their thinking on”. In addition, Kate remarked “now I have the ability to listen but to shorten the conversation by asking different questions to help them get there quicker”.

5.3 Changed their leadership style

Participants emphasised that their leadership coaching training has changed their leadership perspective and practice. Repeated words came up in the interviews such as accountability, ownership, empowering and autonomy to describe how they use coaching to develop the leadership of their staff and now feel comfortable giving them more responsibility. Hester, for instance, said that incorporating coaching into her leadership “gave people a lot more ownership over what they were doing, and it wasn’t me being kind of dictator, [telling them] this is what you need do, go do it now [laughs]”. Karen also made the point about coaching not being dictatorial: “it’s more an empowering model than a completely dictatorial model”. Jancie stated that as a result of the leadership coaching training her thinking “massively changed in that way, that feeling of having to be in control of everything”. Indeed, John said he was “micromanaged to high heaven” by the principal in his previous school, and he contrasted that to how things are with Jancie.

“People learn a lot more from coming up with the answers themselves, being empowered. They’ve got it all within them; it’s just the unlocking it”

The word ‘themselves’ was used by each participant, emphasising how the coaching process focuses on the client’s actions and initiative. Hester, for example, said of coaching, “I just think it’s a really useful tool, for having conversations with staff, and people, and helping people develop themselves, and not me being the fount of all knowledge and taking on all the work. This is a shared responsibility”. And Jancie believes that “people learn a lot more from coming up with the answers themselves, being empowered. They’ve got it all within them; it’s just the unlocking it”. John also thinks that people learn more when they are encouraged to find answers for themselves “rather than having someone coming in as a fixer and giving you a quick answer and you’re not necessarily learning anything”. He remarked that with coaching, “people are getting to those solutions themselves rather than being told”.

5.4 Experienced personal benefits

Leadership coaching training has made participants feel more comfortable about not having all the answers and solutions to every problem, and this has had personal benefits such as reduced stress and pressure. Helen, for example, commented that “in the past I’d be panicked that I don’t have the answers, or I’d be jumping straight away to go and do something. I definitely wouldn’t do that anymore. And I know to reflect”. Furthermore, Karen noted that incorporating coaching into her leadership has “made my world easier to live in because I’m not now about giving the answers; I’m about unlocking the answers with people. And that takes a lot of pressure off me”.

Jancie explained that as principal she had previously felt intense pressure because “you’re being paid all this money to be the ultimate person and have the ultimate

responsibility, and you should have the answers and to every single question". Kate said something similar: "it's changed the way I react to staff, or colleagues in general. It's given me quite a relief that I'm a school business manager but that doesn't mean I have to solve every problem. I've now got the tools to bounce things back to other people". Kate also made the point that giving her staff more responsibility has in turn benefitted her wellbeing and stress. Additionally, she believes coaching can be an effective way to develop one's own personal leadership: "since the training, I've been able to help myself, coach myself, in a way".

"I think they [coaching and being coached] both work for your self-esteem. It's made me more open, more accepting, more thoughtful, more knowledgeable"

Karen talked about the positive personal changes that have happened since she started coaching and being coached: "I think they both work for your self-esteem. It's made me more open, more accepting, more thoughtful, more knowledgeable". She also said her job is more fun "because you're working with people, not pushing people all the time", and that "it used to be a hard battle uphill every day". People also find her more approachable. Moreover, John noted that the coaching role is gratifying when being able to help other people and see positive results, and that it also has benefits for the coach of making him or her aware of other perspectives and ways of thinking about work-related issues.

6. How has leadership coaching been used in and benefitted the school?

6.1 A coaching culture

"A coaching culture exists in an organisation", writes Hawkins (2012:21), "when a coaching approach is a key aspect of how the leaders, managers, and staff engage and develop all their people and engage their stakeholders, in ways that create increased individual, team and organisational performance and shared value for all stakeholders". Participants in this study believe that coaching is very much part of the culture of Cravenwood. Hester, for instance, asserted that coaching is "really embedded within our school practice". Helen stated "it's like a mindset. It's just how we approach everything". Karen also used the word mindset: "it's a mindset as well, especially the IC stuff. It is a culture; it is more than the sum of its part. It's a way of thinking and acting and processing the world". As did John, referring to the school mindset of "you're going to help somebody get to the answer they want themselves rather than you just giving it to them".

Karen stated of coaching, "a lot of people here have been trained in it, and it's what we do. It's part of our culture; it's what we do here". Karen believes that even for those within the school who have not done leadership coaching training, being coached and having coaching conversations is part of their "lived experience" in the school, and they therefore naturally adopt the same types of methods in the way they speak to others. John suggested that there might be places where people have had good leadership coaching training but are "in an organisation where they're coaching into a vacuum" and therefore its impact is going to be limited, in contrast to Cravenwood where "it's made such a difference here because it is the culture of the school". This is aided by the attitude of United Learning, the trust of which Cravenwood is a part: Jancie commented that United Learning "actively encourages" senior leaders to develop their leadership coaching skills as a part of their continuing professional development.

"If you were a fly on the wall, you'd see coaching happening every day, but it's not necessarily dressed up as that or done in a formal manner"

The main way that participants have implemented a coaching culture in the school is by using a coaching approach in everyday conversations and meetings. Holmes' (2003:5) research on headteachers' use of coaching concluded that "opportunities to deploy coaching approaches (consciously or unconsciously) tended to emerge in the day-to-day business of getting things done". This is similar to how things are at Cravenwood. John, for example, said that "if you were a fly on the wall, you'd see coaching happening every day, but it's not necessarily dressed up as that or done in a formal manner". Furthermore, Jancie stated that "generally the coaching tends to be more coaching conversations all the time. So in the corridors. That has been everything in the development of this school". ('Corridor coaching' is in fact a recognised term [Grant, 2010]). Karen said "I don't do a lot of sitting down and coaching people; I do an awful lot of having coaching conversations and conversations where I use the tools of coaching". Similarly, Courtney pointed out that "we don't have, necessarily, coaching relationships with members of our team, but when we're speaking with our team or doing things with our team, we use aspects of coaching. Or again, if someone comes to us with something".

Several participants did, however, express a desire to implement more formal, regular coaching sessions in the future, including coaching pairs and triads, and explained that this has happened more in the past but has been hindered by time and resource constraints, and most recently by covid-19.

A prominent feature of the school's coaching culture is a proactive attitude to making decisions and resolving issues. Hester, for example, said of her staff, "I think they do feel like they own it more, and it's not sit back and wait for Hester to tell us to do something; it's more we need to be proactive ourselves". In addition, Kate commented "I think people are coming to me less to solve things for them. Maybe before it was a case of go and tell Kate; she'll sort it out". Kate noted that she herself used to do this with Jancie but

now feels more capable and confident to resolve issues herself. Indeed, Jancie explained that at headteacher meetings, other heads are regularly being interrupted by calls from their school staff, but she has used coaching to develop her staff's leadership and autonomy and they now feel comfortable making their own decisions rather than constantly needing to check with her. She contrasted this to how things were when she arrived at Cravenwood when staff "used to ask permission for everything. They just weren't used to not being told straight away what to do".

Coaching culture is so prevalent at Cravenwood that Jancie estimates 70% of conversations leaders have with staff include elements of coaching. Coaching culture does not just affect leader-staff relationships, however; it also affects how leaders communicate with each other. John, for instance, believes the coaching mindset is "very embedded in the culture here, certainly among the leadership team as well. I think naturally, the leadership team do take a coaching stance, and let you talk, let you work your way through it. And chip in with some questions to extend your thinking, where needs be". Furthermore, Kate explained that "if a senior leader is saying they've got a particular team member that's really not working well, the others will say what have you done or what have they done? And they'll help them get to the bottom of the issue".

Hester described how leaders and teachers also use a coaching approach with the children to develop their personal leadership and a proactive attitude, "rather than me stepping in solving the problem, which is, again, a lot to do with coaching, in terms of this is something you can manage yourself". John noted it is emphasised to the children that "there's nothing wrong with telling someone that you don't like something", and that coaching is used to give children "that language to say what they want someone to do next time". He pointed out that the older children tend to be better at doing this because "they've been used to that and they can solve those problems and work out their problems without it being facilitated by staff. They're coaching each other".

The school's values reflect its coaching culture and emphasis on personal leadership. Values that came up in the interviews were accountability, responsibility, respect, self-determination, resilience, self-responsibility, confidence, ownership, continuity, security, reflection, consistency, equality, aspiration, determination, ambition, tenacity, dedication and creativity. Several participants also stressed that these values apply to all levels of the school. Hester, for instance, said "you're determined too, as well as us telling the children that. We're all being determined here. We're all being confident. So we try to weave that through the whole culture of the school".

"We want everybody to be the best person that they can be, and the coaching can be part of how we action that: coaching will help you become the best person you can be"

Karen linked the school's values to coaching, asserting that "we want everybody to be the best person that they can be, and the coaching can be part of how we action that: coaching will help you become the best person you can be". Courtney emphasised the

school's value of self-responsibility and that you are the one in control of your life; she stated "and I think that is a lot what coaching is: someone's coaching you to really find that within yourself". In addition, Hester said of values, "we talk about them a lot in school, to the children; like, you were really determined when you did that, you kept on trying and working really hard, you were really resilient".

6.2 Coaching teachers

Coaching is well-established as an effective method for the professional development of teachers, and effective professional development of teachers has a positive impact on academic achievement (CUREE & Pearson School Improvement, 2012). Indeed, Van Nieuwerburgh (2018) reports that research shows a "clear link between the coaching of teachers and the achievement of their students", and states that "the evidence confirms a seemingly logical conclusion: if coaching can have a beneficial impact on teachers, there would be a subsequent positive effect on the learning experiences of students".

Participants talked about how they use coaching to develop the leadership and teaching skills of the teachers they manage. Karen, for example, said she uses coaching for training NQTs, with one now vice principal and one soon to be. She credits coaching with playing a huge part in getting them to that level of leadership and professionalism, and she believes this also applies to the professional development of others in the school: "we've got a lot of really, really good people here and it's coaching that's helped get them there". Jancie explained that there have been many teachers who came to Cravenwood who saw it as their "last ditch attempt" to make it in the profession, and the school's leaders "nurtured them, developed them, coached them, and now they're flying".

Hester commented that "rather than having sat-down coaching meetings, it's part of our practice to ask teachers what is it you want to get out of this, what do you want the children to learn? What is your ideal, essentially? If you want that out of the children, how are you going to get there? She emphasised "I definitely know that's been really beneficial for my team". Hester believes that coaching has "broken that cycle" for teachers of simply going through the motions and has instead helped them to reflect and think creatively about how things could be done in a better way to help the children progress.

"It's part of our practice to ask teachers what is it you want to get out of this, what do you want the children to learn? What is your ideal, essentially? If you want that out of the children, how are you going to get there?"

Courtney made similar comments to Hester's, stating that "if somebody has a big problem, or it's something within a year group or something, we won't say come in for a coaching session, but myself and the other senior leaders will always use our coaching skills to coach them through the problem. You know, 'what's your reality right now? What

do you want your ideal to be?" She uses coaching to assist teachers with how to manage their year groups, how to work effectively with people, and how to improve children's learning. Helen said she has progress meetings with teachers where they discuss issues they are having, and "it's through those kinds of meetings that we wouldn't be giving answers, we would be coaching them through what they think would be best".

Courtney also noted that coaching has been implemented into feedback given to teachers, with positive results, and gave the example of the way she now approaches appraisals: "so it's actually not, it's not necessarily about me getting the most out of it but the person I'm doing the appraisal; it's them getting what they want out of it as well". Courtney gave another example of coaching being implemented in the school as the curriculum lead having one-to-one coaching sessions with teachers to help them develop their curriculum.

6.3 Coaching and children's behaviour

Improving children's behaviour is another key factor that improves academic achievement (Angus & Nelson, 2019; Gerbino et al., 2018; Wentzel, 1993). Karen noted that in the past, staff would regularly have to use physical interventions to prevent being physically assaulted, but around five years ago this notably decreased, and she thinks coaching has played an important role in changing this behaviour: "because we've done all the coaching and because of the sort of conversations that we have, and because of how we approach people; we're not in a power play between us and the kids". Furthermore, Jancie emphasised "the way that everybody treats everybody in the same way; there's not different rules. We don't speak to children in a different way than we talk to our colleagues. We treat them with the same respect as you would an adult". She contrasted this to some schools where there is a strict attitude of "I'm an adult so you respect me".

As well as coaching, another significant and distinctive part of Cravenwood school culture – and one particularly relevant to behaviour and personal leadership – is a social and emotional learning programme called conscious discipline. Helen explained that she has been at Cravenwood for eleven years and that the school used to have considerable behavioural problems, but this improved significantly after Jancie arrived at the school seven years ago and implemented conscious discipline. Hester also believes conscious discipline has improved the children's behaviour because "it's teaching them how to self-regulate, how to manage stressful situations, how to manage themselves, and be kind and nice, and all those other things that come with being a person".

"The behaviour policy we use is conscious discipline, so the whole idea behind that is the fact that you are responsible for yourself. And that's on the children but it's on the staff as well. And I think the coaching we've implemented has almost reinforced that idea"

Jancie commented that she frequently notices times where conscious discipline and coaching overlap, for instance that with both “we don’t just go in and solve the problem; we want to give them skills to solve their own problems”. Courtney also pointed out the connection: “the behaviour policy we use is conscious discipline, so the whole idea behind that is the fact that you are responsible for yourself. And that’s on the children but it’s on the staff as well. And I think the coaching we’ve implemented has almost reinforced that idea”. Furthermore, Hester said there are similarities in that with both “it’s about rather than me telling a child this is how you’re meant to be, it’s really come on, this is in your hands, you can handle this, you can solve this yourself”.

Karen also noted strong similarities between the two, and that they have both been effective in improving social and emotional skills. She stated “and you do coach the kids, you do coach them. It’s the quality of conversations you have with them that brings out their understanding, academically but a lot of the time emotionally and socially within”. Karen believes this is similar to conscious discipline in that with both “it’s really helping kids to be savvy and understand themselves and to understand their responses and how it feels for other people, and be able to empathise and think things through”. She added that children sometimes know something is wrong or difficult “but they have a real difficulty saying it or getting it or communicating it. So using our coaching technique really helps them”. In addition, Jancie said “we practise skills with them [the children] and get them to use their big voices, and train them how to articulate things and what actually is it that you want to happen. So that’s coaching”.

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John made the point that the school’s “approach to coaching and the benefits of coaching go hand in hand with the behavioural ethos of the school”. He also thinks the school’s coaching culture has led to teacher and teaching assistant interactions and relationships being more professional and harmonious than they used to be, and subsequently children could be picking up on this positive classroom climate and imitating the behaviour they see.

7. Conclusion

Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh’s (2014:95) review of the literature concluded “there are some clear benefits for training employees to become internal coaches. It can provide a sustainable model to improve performance as well as delivering benefits for both the organisation and the individuals concerned”. That correlates with the findings of this study. As a result of their leadership coaching training, participants have an increased awareness of the importance and nuances of listening and questioning, and this has led to improvements in practising these two skills within the school and to having higher-

quality conversations. In addition, they have changed their leadership perspective and practice and therefore their leadership style, balancing the conventional, hierarchical style of leadership typical of schools with now using coaching to develop and increase their staff's leadership responsibilities and autonomy. Participants have experienced personal benefits from changing their leadership style, such as reduced stress and pressure, increased job enjoyment, and new perspectives on work-related issues.

Participants have implemented coaching in the school primarily through using a coaching approach in everyday conversations and meetings with each other, their staff and the children. This has created a coaching culture and mindset that has spread throughout all levels of the school. The school's values, such as self-responsibility and self-determination, reflect and reinforce its coaching culture and its emphasis on the importance of personal leadership, and there is a proactive attitude to making decisions and resolving issues for all members of the school community. Leadership coaching is successfully used to improve the professional development of teachers, and in the classroom to improve the social and emotional skills and behaviour of the children. Both of these improvements, as well as improved quality of leadership, are in themselves examples of school success; furthermore, they have extensive research showing their influence on academic achievement, perhaps the main way that school success is judged.

When asked to summarise what has led to the marked improvements at Cravenwood, the principal stated "the coaching, the conscious discipline, and a lot of work around teaching and learning and what high-quality teaching and learning was". She believes it took four years from her arrival seven years ago to fully establish the improvements: "at first you could do quick fixes, but to make sure that you've got really solid foundations, and you can scratch below the surface and everything stacks up, that took a good four years to get that point".

Invited to reflect on what leadership coaching is really about, she referred to tight-loose systems, systems that combine the presence of both structure and flexibility:

"It's about giving autonomy within a framework. It is about the people, the culture and the values. Leadership coaching is about the conversations we have. It's about what happens when staff come to you; that's a key turning point, rather than 'I need to have a coaching conversation with you'. It's about the number of staff seeking coaching and discussion on something. It's also about the intention we go into these conversations with"

She also stressed the importance of learning "being central to leadership" and that "learning is going to happen. It's not about punishing or belittling, not about blame. If something has gone wrong, it's how do we make sure this isn't going to happen again? We want them to learn, just as with the children. It's the same thing: we're in an educational context, specialising in learning".

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