

**Leadership Applied** is a unique leadership professional development process developed, trialled and evaluated by Transform Trust, that supports schools, leaders and all other members of a school community to embed FED and other leadership practices in a sustainable and impactful way.

## Introduction and Overview

**At Transform Teaching School Alliance we believe in the power of education to change lives.**

We know from research that highly effective teaching is especially significant for schools and children in challenging circumstances (Sutton Trust, 2011). It is the leaders in school who enable the teachers to be effective in the classroom by creating the culture, conditions and permission to be brilliant teachers.

We had been developing leadership practice since 2013 by deliberately enabling leaders across our teaching school alliance to explore, unpick and challenge their leadership approach through reading, facilitation, research and coaching. We knew our collective leadership was growing; we knew we needed to go to greater depth - but how? We chose to explore one model comprehensively for a year and study the impact – by creating a research study to measure impact on leadership development. We invited Steve Radcliffe (author of Leadership Plain and Simple) to partner with us as we set up a year-long programme of facilitated events, study groups, coaching and application that has become a product in our **Leadership Applied Suite**, focussing on FED practice.

Many programmes for schools are restrictive in terms of how they expect their materials to be used. One of the very special things about Leadership Applied has been the provision of clear tools for applying learning back in school, as well as the flexibility in how each school chooses to do this; applying the most relevant parts or applying it in a way that reflects and supports their culture.

Each of the 44 schools involved in the programme has embraced this approach differently. One of the things we have been particularly interested in studying is how leadership is developed at all levels, and how it is genuinely distributed. Mellers is a concrete example of a school which has embraced the opportunity to “lead at greater depth” and it has impacted their passion for leadership as well as how leadership has been distributed throughout school. Their leadership Applied journey is described on the following pages.

By foregrounding the “**Learn it, Live it, Legacy**” mantra, Leadership Applied has directed participating leaders through joint learning on leadership theory facilitated by leadership experts, practical activities and resources to support implementation in local contexts, and strategies to develop others to ensure embeddedness and sustainability. The evaluation of the Leadership Applied approach via surveys and interviews demonstrates impact and growth on three primary metrics: (1) leadership identity; (2) leadership behaviours and actions; (3) leadership confidence.

## Leadership Applied



## Priorities for the Programme:

- ☑ Co-create a shared, ambitious future
- ☑ Unpack, modify and develop the leadership practices of the leadership team
- ☑ Develop a shared way of working and common language of leadership to support leadership development of the whole community (including staff, governors, children, and parents)



"The language has changed. Being up to something ... so the children know what being up to something means, and parents understand what it means, and actually what we want is a community where are all up to something."

(Amanda Dawson, Headteacher – Mellers Primary)

## Background

Mellers Primary School in Radford, Nottingham is an inner-city school for children aged 3-11 years. In 2019-20 there were 376 children on roll in the school.

The school is situated in an area characterised by a diverse population. A large majority of children in the school come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, with over half the pupils speaking English as an additional language and, in total, well over twenty different home languages represented within the school.

The school is also situated in an area of high social deprivation. 20% of the households in Radford fall in the lowest 10% of households nationally for poverty. The rate of benefit claims (including work benefits) in Radford is more than 25% higher than the national average.

As a result, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is well above average (the pupil premium is funding provide to schools to support looked after children and those known to be eligible for free school meals). The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs in the school is above the national average.

Mellers is a school that achieves good results, enabling its children to successfully transition to secondary school and set ambitious targets for their own lives.



*"Mellers is a school at the heart of its community and one that is also shaping how the community develops."*

## Mellers Senior Leadership Team



Amanda Dawson  
Headteacher



Laura Patel  
Deputy Headteacher



Lorna Dermody  
Assistant Headteacher



Joy Buttress  
Assistant Headteacher

## Leadership Applied at Mellers Primary School



### Learn It

Shared  
Understanding &  
Knowledge

From the beginning, the Mellers team approached the Leadership Applied programme in a unique way. In 2013 Mellers Primary School was graded by Ofsted as a school 'Requiring Improvement'. By 2015 the school had improved to 'Good' and this was confirmed again in 2019. Despite this positive journey, the headteacher recognised that to become an 'Outstanding' school it required stronger leadership from the entire leadership team. So, when the **Leadership Applied** programme was offered, Amanda committed to enrolling the entire senior leadership team (comprising one deputy headteacher – Laura Patel, and two assistant headteachers – Lorna Dermody and Joy Buttress). This signalled a whole-hearted commitment to the development of the leadership team and leadership culture in the school given the disruption caused by having all senior leaders out of school at the same time.

The Leadership Applied sessions provided the Mellers leadership team with the motivation and opportunity to start to learn a shared leadership language and shared understanding of leadership behaviours and actions. Following expert input and FED knowledge and practice sessions around the core text *Leadership Plain and Simple*, the Mellers team would (re)read sections of the book between sessions and devote a portion of each leadership meeting to discuss and reflect on core leadership ideas, behaviours and actions – what the leadership team refer to as 'Transformational Conversations'. This process of collaborative and joint leadership learning continues to be a priority in the leadership team, expanding to other leadership texts. This 'Learn it' activity has been, and continues to be, a key stimulus for defining the leadership culture, expectations and activities of this group.

*"We've all read the FED (Leadership Plain & Simple) book and considered at the start of every SLT what is it for us and then what is it for us as a team. The language and reflection have been really powerful for us as a whole team and enabled us to really create the Future vision – I feel like we have made so much progress in less than a year."*

*"We've just started Legacy by James Kerr as a leadership team and discussed the first chapter in today's meeting. Our physical energies are all critically low, and it was so refreshing to a) meet as a team (it's my safe place) and b) discuss this fabulous book. We decided that we need to find a way of letting the rest of the team share in some of this good feeling."*

Learning together in this way provided some revelations for Amanda and the rest of her leadership team about their personal and organisational **leadership identity**:

*"I thought I had a strong vision for the future and I did, but I assumed that because I had a strong vision for the future, then everyone else was on board the bus. But what I realised very quickly was that after the FED time and the leadership at all levels work – that it wasn't quite what I thought it was."*



The leadership team also recognised that their **leadership behaviours and actions** afforded limited development opportunities for the wider staff.



*"We are delivering by setting people up to follow. We are creating people pleasers like us. We have a cultural dependence. We think that staff see 'Leaders' as us. They don't see themselves as leaders or as creators of the vision. They see people in pigeon-holed roles." ... "We don't prepare people to be a leader" ... "We are making a distinction between those who are delivering to be compliant to the vision (please) or delivering and driving the next step. The latter is where we need to go next."*

These realisations prompted the school leadership team to prioritise two key areas of leadership growth and improvement for the entire school community:

- 1 To establish a strong and communal leadership identity by facilitating the co-creation of a shared, ambitious and attainable future vision that has the backing of ALL members of the school community (including staff, children, parents and governors). This vision is centred around what the school community deeply care about.

*"Our vision is about children and the future. Longevity of children and staff – they will come back and they can come back."*

- 2 To help all staff – and to give them permission – to develop and grow their personal leadership identity and **leadership confidence**:

*"The bigger plan is – how do you enable all staff to think of themselves as leaders; being proactive about this rather than just copying the SLT; tapping into their own purpose in life and the things that they care about and are motivated by." ... "We want to develop leadership at all levels over the next few years. I'm beginning to really understand what that means. It's not marching round with a clipboard and ticking things off. This is about everyone, wherever you are, taking responsibility and being proactive about your role according to the vision of the school."*



These priorities for more strategic leadership, clarity of vision, development of others, and renewed energy and confidence in leadership, are in keeping with wider evaluation findings of the **Leadership Applied** programme. Most involved organisations experienced impact on all or some of these same areas.

## Live It

Deliberate  
Application &  
Practice

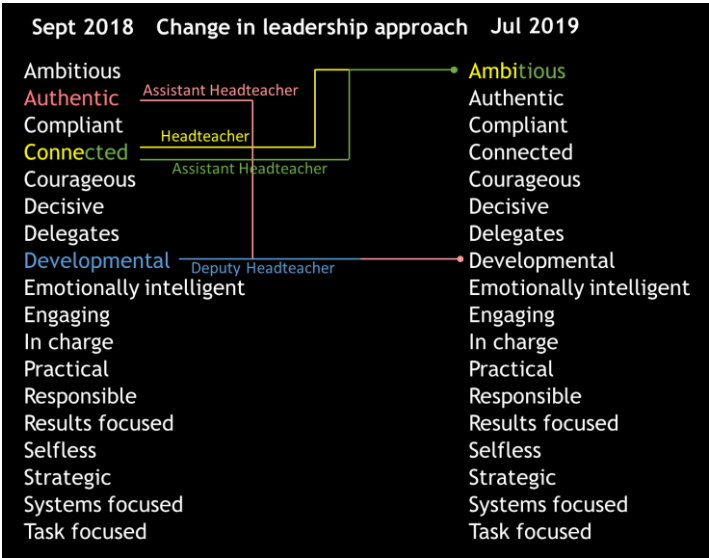
The leadership team at Mellers recognised early on that they needed to secure and develop their personal and team **leadership identity, behaviours and confidence** to be in the best position to influence and impact the whole organisation. Participation at **Leadership Applied** sessions, together with follow-up learning from the shared reading and reflection on leadership texts, provided the initial source for this. The immediate impact of these activities has been to provide every senior leader with clarity and confidence in their personal and organisational vision, in their identity as a leader, and the behaviours needed for effective leadership.



These sessions also provided the leadership team with awareness of each member's leadership preferences and characteristics, and with an understanding of how best to maximise differences in leadership strengths. This honest, personal sharing has strengthened relationships and trust further to allow the frustrations and niggles that often exist in teams, and which get in the way of progress, to be aired and dealt with:

*"And also communication within the SLT – we have been really open and honest with each other. We have today shared our most limiting beliefs – that would never have happened before! The language has been very helpful. The ideas that have been repeated have really helped it stick ('sticky learning'). We've been introduced to different ways of learning, different concepts, different ways of looking at things. We're talking about these things in all of the stuff that we are doing. FED is running it right through. Real importance of repeated concepts, enabling learning."*

The evaluation tools used by the Transform Team reveal the precise shifts below in the approach of the Mellers leadership team as they prioritised more ambitious leadership for personal and whole-community development.



The Mellers leadership team have cascaded their learning to the whole staff team to better understand the strengths and possible areas for development of individual staff members:

*“As a leadership team we’ve mapped out our school team in terms of their levels of engagement, and used this to inform CPD and coaching. We understand that relationships are the bedrock of all our work, and we’ve scrutinised how we establish and maintain them. We reward people who are ‘up to something’ by acknowledging it with them and with the team.”*



This has given the senior leadership team more awareness of the needs of individual staff members and how best to support staff – *“We are tuned into what people are like when they are not at their best; when they have lost their mojo.”*



The leadership team have also moved to operationalise the agreed leadership language, behaviours and actions through school processes and policies. For example, the Assistant Headteacher said:

*“We did an audit of the kinds of things we had been discussing at leadership, and we found out that about 75% of it was operational. So, we’ve changed it, we’ve flipped it, so any meetings we’re having with people... we want to be strategic, we want to make sure we are having those meetings in leader mode.”*

‘Future’, ‘Engage’ and ‘Deliver’ is framing development plans at all levels of the school and specify a clear plan to engage members of the community in co-creation of a vision of the future.

### The impact?

More confident leaders, with clarity of personal and organisational vision and identity, and a thorough understanding of the leadership actions and behaviour needed to forge a path towards outstanding provision:

*“As a leadership team, our effectiveness and reflectiveness have shifted up 3 gears.”*



## Legacy

Developing &  
Enabling Others

The Transform Team asked “What do you want this programme to do for you and the school?”

*“A staff team who are doing things for the right reasons; doing their own things not what we tell them.” ... “Everyone is owning leadership.” ... “Empowering everyone to be a leader.” ... “How do you enable all staff to think of themselves as leaders; ... tapping into their own purpose in life and the things that they care about and are motivated by.”*



Having established the beginnings of a shared leadership language and understanding of effective leadership behaviours and actions, the Mellers senior leadership team set their sights on developing and enabling other staff and wider members of the school community to ‘be at their best’.

Initially, a series of twilight staff meetings for teachers and teaching assistants - supported by the Transform Experts - introduced key FED leadership principles and language. Topics on ‘Being at your best’, ‘Limiting beliefs’ and ‘The shadow that you cast’ took centre stage to empower staff to recognise their own leadership potential, establish a leadership identity, and to give permission to lead.



*“The realisation that everyone at Mellers, whoever we are and whatever we do, is involved in the same thing: building a cathedral. This has been a strong analogy for us.”*

*“Energy for everybody – one of our 5 Rocks is emotional health and wellbeing. So, the energy thing for everyone is something to look at. Renewed energy and how to manage energies. How do the 4 energies impact each other? Managing my own energy appropriately. And helping others to do the same.”*

These meetings also provided the opportunity to use **Leadership Applied** principles to gauge staff engagement with and co-create vision (see the poster below), and to give all staff ‘permission’ to lead, with a clear focus on enabling and equipping staff with the right knowledge, language and tools to be at their best.

Follow-up FED ‘drops-ins’ encouraged all staff to explore FED principles and practices further, to ask questions, and to be supported to realise their leadership potential. Middle leaders have been supported to use FED principles to inform their leadership practices and the development of visions and actionable plans for their leadership areas, and a ‘leadership discussion group’ offers all members of the Mellers community the opportunity for in-depth discussions around leadership practices and priorities.

Informal opportunities have also been used to reinforce this new ‘everyone a leader’ leadership language and culture. For example, at a staff twilight meeting focused on a big tidy up in the school grounds, all staff – including administration and support staff – were allocated to work groups and asked to consider: “What do you care about?” and “What do you care about making happen in Mellers?”



To further support and encourage staff to take more leadership responsibility, all teaching staff have now been tasked to run a research-informed Action Research Group in their year group looking at *dialogic teaching* in their year group.



*“Every teacher has to develop their own strategies rather than formulaic ways of working. We [senior leaders] took ourselves out of the meetings this year to give more autonomy. Some people then stepped up or show us what they were capable of. It’s gone from being an operational target for the group (e.g. ‘we have to produce a poster’) to really learning about teaching.”*

**Governors** have also been trained in FED language and principles to ensure that all leaders at every level of the organisation share, understand and use the same leadership language, priorities and practices.

Finally, **children** are exposed to FED language during assemblies, are included in conversations about the school vision, and are encouraged to 'be up to something'.



### An example of leadership learning shared with colleagues:

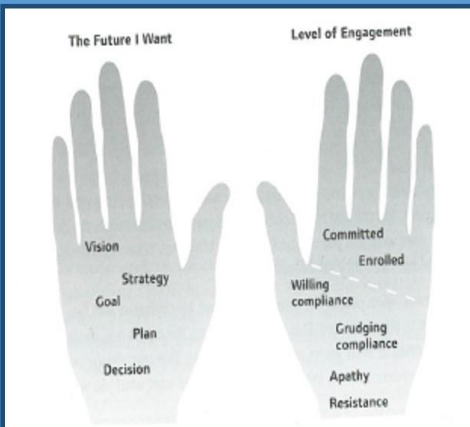
#### Levels of Engagement – Laura Patel

**What is this?**

Adapted from the work of Peter Senge, this model is to help you think about **where others might be in relation to the future you want**.

This is an engagement tool; page 50 – 53 Leadership, plain and simple.

Use this for reflection. If you have communicated / shared your vision, how engaged are people with this? What is this like?



**Mellers case study**

The leadership team used the level of engagement tool to consider individual staff members. The process was completed before sharing the vision and without linking their work to it. I noted a colleague being apathetic and described their behaviours. I didn't consider my own actions and their influence. I was wrong.

When matching the two things together, the colleague was more "willing compliance". I paid attention to their verbal messages not body language. I noted the tasks they completed that supported the vision, not study the things they were unsure about / resistant to – these I changed by the way I communicated with the colleague.

**The biggest change was moving from "my vision" or "your vision" towards "our vision".**

I used this tool again with middle leaders. After capturing what they cared about, this was placed next to the level of engagement. The questions on page 52 were used for group coaching. Colleagues were given counters, instead of names, to place on the level of engagement and asked "what do you do to influence this?"

Colleagues then began to discuss where / why there was a mismatch between the vision and behaviours. More importantly – **how are you going to impact on this to make change happen?**

**What might the level of engagement sound like?**

**Committed:** "I'm on it!"

**Enrolled:** "I'd like to do that."

**Willing compliance:** "I'll get on with it."

**Grudging compliance:** "If I have to."

**Apathy:** "Don't care."

**Resistance:** "No."

### The impact?

*"We have a clear purpose for why we are working together. We have worked to get everyone engaged in the vision and being part of making it. Everyone now understands their part in where we are going as a school and our big ambition for this community."*



"The main thing is to continue the journey. We know that there is more to do - more embedding and more distribution to get more staff in both Mellers and the other schools that they work with to think like leaders. We know that repetition is good – we know it works when we teach children, but it has been really good for the leaders in school too. To hear messages again, to be asked to retrieve and recall concepts and ideas has really helped us to question whether we are also applying them – so we will shamelessly be repeating some of things we have already covered with the same and with more people. A specific goal for Mellers is about managing, renewing and understanding the way our energy impacts on others across the school community."

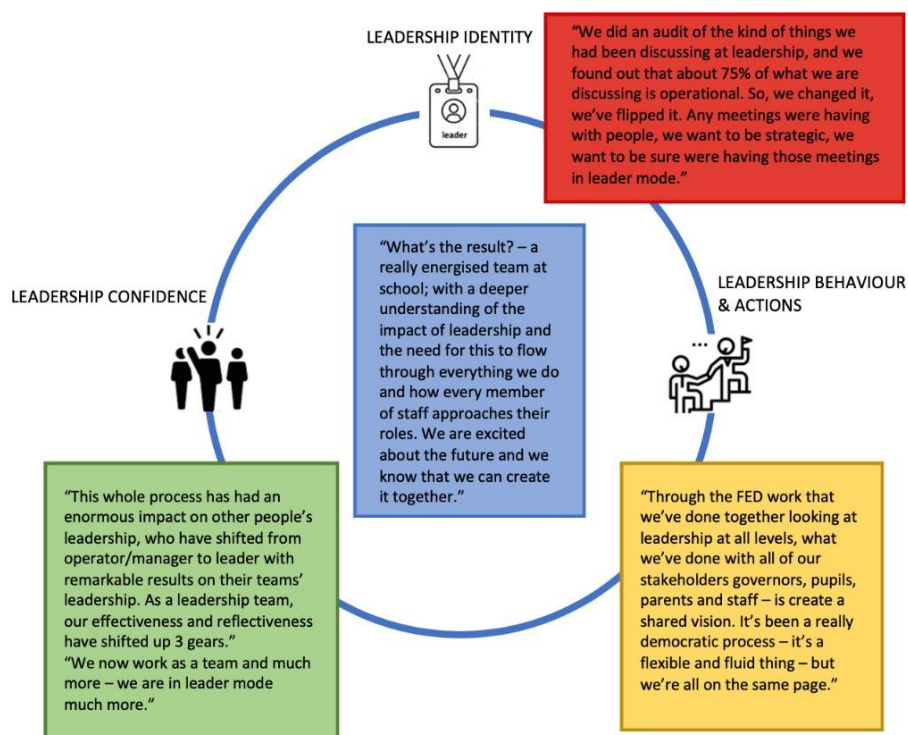
## Impact

Leadership Applied has been the single most transformational thing for me as a leader, a leadership team and us as a school. (Amanda Dawson, Headteacher –



The deliberate **Leadership Applied** actions taken by the Mellers team has impacted significantly on:

- their **identity** as individual leaders, as a school, and as a wider community → the
- ☑ school community and its leaders are more strategic and ambitious about the future vision;
- how they **behave and act** as leaders → all staff and the wider community are
- ☑ deliberately engaged and included in co-creation of the school's future vision, and are encouraged, supported and expected to develop and contribute as leaders in their own right;
- confidence** in their own and others' leadership capabilities and potential → leaders
- ☑ are more energised about their leadership responsibilities, more inspired to lead and develop others to their full potential, and ambitious for the entire community.



### Whole Programme Impact

These impact demonstrated by the Mellers Team of increased strategic leadership, clarity of vision, development of others, and renewed energy and confidence in leadership, are in keeping with wider evaluation findings of the **Leadership Applied** programme. To read the report in full and see other case studies go to:

[www.transformapplied.co.uk](http://www.transformapplied.co.uk)

### What's next for you?



If reading this case study has prompted you to consider your leadership or leadership in your organisation, there are a number of ways Transform can support you:

Join the conversation @trnsfrmapped

Access our leadership training or bespoke leadership coaching [www.transformapplied.co.uk/webinars](http://www.transformapplied.co.uk/webinars)