

# Tips when engaging with teachers

**Feedback from a seminar organised by the Targeted Initiative on Science and Mathematics Education (TISME) offers some tips on what needs to be considered when engaging with teachers and schools.**

## Positive impacts for teachers

- **Personal and professional development** – all of the teachers found their involvement in the project a valuable part of their continuing education and professional development (CPD). Some felt that this should have been sold to senior management as a way of addressing CPD targets without a cost to the school and some of the teachers reported that their inclusion on the project had motivated them to undertake their own research and had started part-time masters.
- **Confidence of teachers** – the teachers reported that they were more confident in seeking out research to inform their practice and understood more of the 'jargon and technical language used by academics'.
- **Confidence of students** – working with researchers seemed to give a lot of the children more confidence as they felt 'special' and 'valued' and they enjoyed the outsider input.
- **Networks and contacts** – before the project started several of the teachers reported feeling 'like an island' and not well connected to other teachers. They felt being involved with the research made them part of a network and they had colleagues they could now contact to ask for advice. They all highlighted how helpful the academics had been and how invaluable these relationships were.
- **Length of time** – all of the teachers felt the length of the project improved the relationships developed. Being involved in projects which lasted for three years really allowed time for the culture of research and reflection to develop and embed.



## Challenges reported by the teachers

- **Time** – this was the main issue brought up by every teacher. Some schools will not provide cover to allow teachers to work with researchers or for CPD beyond in-house training. Some of the projects covered the teacher's salary so the school could pay a supply/cover teacher but even this incentive was not enough for all. Many of the teachers felt they had to complete other work in their own time and so were reluctant to engage.
- **Space/venue is important** – this needs to be agreed with the teachers and flexibility is needed by the researchers. Some teachers felt that researchers coming into schools would be the only way they could fit the work into their timetable as it would be relatively easy to free up an hour. Others disagreed and said they felt they could concentrate and engage better if they went to the University or another venue as this offered a 'different headspace' where they could forget about the pressures of work and engage with teachers from other schools.
- **Observation** – when academics were in the classroom many of the teachers reported feeling uncomfortable being observed and possibly criticised or viewed negatively. This diminished as the project progressed but could be a barrier for some teachers.
- **Sharing best practice after the project** – all of the teachers felt they had learnt considerably from the experience but noted they still had difficulties sharing this with colleagues and more widely. Nearly all teachers agreed that just sharing resources and materials was not effective. Other non-project teachers assumed they would be able to pick up the lesson plans and teach directly from them and when this did not work they became disengaged. Others reported that non-project teachers didn't even look at the materials. The majority felt the only way to effectively share the best practice was through active discussion and training from the researchers – this was the most important part of the experience.
- **Sharing findings with students** - a general lack of confidence affected whether or not they were able to share research findings with students.
- **Finding information** – many of the teachers reported that beyond reading the Times Education Supplement, they did not have access to any external resources. They all reported that they did not have the time or money to access journal articles and that they had difficulty translating academic literature into something practical. They were also unsure which online repositories they should use – there was an element of trust and risk with online resources as people were unsure if these were 'good' or 'right'.
- **Terminology/language** – there was quite a lot of discussion about the term research. Many teachers felt that they were excluded from 'proper research' if they didn't understand the methodology and theoretical background, and some felt the term 'inquiry' was less threatening and more inclusive.