

# CLASS OF 2010: A SEVEN YEAR STUDY OF A COASTAL ACADEMY IN ENGLAND



*SUMMARY REPORT*  
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## 1. Acknowledgements

We would first like to express our gratitude to the academy leaders and governors for their support throughout the course of this project.

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Finally we would like to thank the wonderful young people, the students of the Class of 2010, who talked with us each year that they attended the academy; we couldn't have done it without you!

## 2. Executive summary

### Project context

The context for this research was the UK Labour government's (1997-2010) policy to tackle persistent underperformance in the most challenging urban secondary school settings. The policy aim was to create autonomous 'academies' that were independent of the local authority (local educational administration) and managed by a team of independent co-sponsors. The belief was that these structural changes would lead to substantial improvement in educational standards through a change in school culture.

At the time of conversion, the secondary school participating in this research was included in the 'National Challenge' categorisation (DCSF, 2008) of under 30 per cent of students passing five GCSEs A\*-C including English and maths, and produced the lowest examination results in the local authority. Other challenges included strong competition from other high-performing schools; decreasing numbers of potential secondary students; students entering the academy with low levels of attainment; and few local employment prospects in a coastal area of high socioeconomic deprivation. The school found it difficult to recruit new teachers, and teachers found it difficult to engage many parents with their children's education. The new academy leaders believed that the conversion offered a unique opportunity to enhance educational provision in their area, and set themselves the target of raising students' levels of attainment at GCSE level within three years.

### Project aims

The aims of the study were to explore the impact of the change to academy status over seven years. Research methods included an annual visit to the school in the summer term in which we:

- interviewed the principal and/or a senior leader to understand strategic priorities, challenges and successes
- interviewed a sample of four teachers to gain access to a wide range of views on the impact of the measures undertaken each year and on perceptions of the academy's potential progress towards reaching its aims.
- interviewed a sample of 15 Year 7 students to investigate their experiences, perceptions, successes and challenges of each year of attendance
- collected the anonymised cohort data on levels of progress and attainment
- examined academy documentation
- scrutinised publically available data.

The senior leadership fully endorsed what Woods et al (2007) described as the key objectives of these first-wave academies, which were to:

- challenge the culture of educational under-attainment
- produce improvements in students' examination performance, thereby helping to break the cycle of underachievement in areas of social and economic deprivation
- play a key part in the regeneration of communities by sharing their expertise and facilities with other schools and the wider community (Woods et al, 2007, p.239).

### The first four years

Leadership made four fundamental changes in the first year: to the curriculum, to the length of the school day and lesson length with the aim of engaging students more effectively with their studies. School staffing was restructured, and teachers were offered regular continuing professional development to support their shift towards a culture of high achievement. These changes were broadly well-received by teachers and students.

Challenges in this first year included raising staff performance; raising teacher and student expectations of examination performance levels; creating a coherent approach to raising standards; behaviour; and engaging parents with their children's learning.

The next three years were a period of consolidation and improvement. Academy results improved markedly and there were two successful Ofsted inspections. Leaders instigated plans for a new school building and the foundation of a primary free school, with the aim of raising standards and engaging more community members with the academy; both initiatives were regarded as successful by both staff and teachers. During this time a new principal was appointed.

Challenges continued to centre around teacher recruitment, engaging students with their learning, and developing relationships with the community. Shrinking budgets added pressure, and there were reductions in staffing levels. Poor examination results in 2014, prompted in part by a shift in examination demands, were a disappointment to all staff and provided an opportunity to re-think the academy approach.

Interviewed teachers and students were broadly satisfied with the academy's development through this time, and the new principal's appointment was welcomed.

### Years five to seven

Years five to seven of the project were challenging for the academy, partly because of the rapid shift in policy relating to a new curriculum, new assessment methods, new measure of student performance and the replacement of modular examinations with linear. Our wider research into coastal academies shows that staff in schools in areas of high and sustained deprivation believed that the combination of higher expectations and the short timeframe for adjustment was particularly challenging.

Students were broadly positive about their GCSE examinations, sensing the pressure that teachers were under. They were appreciative of teachers' efforts to support them, and most reported that their families were supportive. Career ambitions included child care, youth work, the police, accountancy, teaching, physiotherapy and music performance. Teachers, again, were broadly satisfied with their work.

In the final two years of the research the process of continuous change, linked to the regular introduction of new systems, divided staff views more sharply. Although they were pleased

with the return to 60 minute lessons and horizontal tutor groups, they reported three major issues: student behaviour, poor communication between staff members and the absence of an academy community. Nonetheless, interviewees reported regularly on the high proportion of *'caring'* teachers, who were prepared to go the extra mile for their students.

Five students completed their studies at the academy. All spoke of times at which they had wanted to give up their studies but had been supported by academy teachers to continue; all were proud that they were close to completing their Level 5 studies at the time of interview. Four took vocational course and one took A levels; all had plans for the future that included university, a higher level apprenticeship or employment.

### Reflections

The socioeconomic position of the community in which this coastal school is located clearly has an impact on senior leaders, teachers, students and parents. Senior leaders have responded to student need, academic and pastoral, through structural changes to policy and processes; teachers have used these changes to support the students; students have responded to teachers and senior leaders in ways learned before entering the school and amended these as their journey in the school continued. Parents have largely failed to engage, partly because of their own experience in the school and/or because, in the light of local employment prospects, they felt that education offered little value for their children's generation.

Leaders' investment in the school, through the new building and the 'free school' primary, enabled teachers and students to feel an increased sense of pride in their school, which was reflected in a changing school culture. This cultural shift towards behaviour for learning came under challenge with rapid education policy changes that re-focused the school curriculum away from vocational qualifications toward a traditional academic, externally assessed education. The academy had invested in resources to support a rich vocational curriculum offer, which had supported an increase in student attainment and school performance, and which did not continue following government changes to performance measures.

In line with national trends, the school found it difficult to recruit new teachers (particularly in maths and English) and middle leaders and experienced a lack of teacher 'churn', meaning teachers stayed employed in the school for long periods of time. Teacher recruitment was reported by the Principal to have improved in the last year of the study; however senior leaders were also taking on head of department responsibilities when appropriately qualified middle leaders could not be recruited in time.

Greater numbers of students are applying to come to the academy, but this must be seen in the context of the national overall rise in secondary student numbers. The new building that the school now occupies is in a commanding geographical position and looks good. The primary school has also done exceedingly well, achieving 'Outstanding' in its first Ofsted inspection and has had increasing numbers of application since opening. The academy is

collaborating with local schools to 'pool' resources in order to extend the offer for post-16 students so that students can access a wide range of subjects at Level 3, despite funding changes leading to a reduced budget. The school building, the all-through approach and developing collaboration with neighbouring schools is being used to move the school forward.

The school has established staff that have benefitted from an internal promotion system, with middle leaders moving to senior leadership and teachers moving into leadership positions. There have been greater numbers of applicants for advertised positions in the last couple of years of the study, which has resulted in optimism about the schools' reputation both locally and nationally. Teacher dedication is high, with teachers going the extra mile for their students. Our findings suggest that teachers and leaders in the school are investing in their students' futures and are trying to find ways to support them in the face of complex and sustained political, social, economic and geographic issues. The Class of 2010 research findings shows that clear, energetic leadership, with a focus on teaching, learning and behaviour, can change school culture.

Teachers in schools in similar circumstances can consider the approaches summarised here when considering how to improve opportunities for their students in the wake of squeezed budgets, a narrowing curriculum and increased expectations for student performance. There was a clear message in our findings that leadership is challenging. It takes time to change a schools' culture, and following the journeys of the coastal academies in our comparative study (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2015), our research suggests that principals appointed to lead schools through the change to academy status from national challenge circumstances typically do not stay in that role for longer than three to four years. The change of principal in a school that is developing a culture change towards student success can rock the boat.

### 3. Context for the research

The context for this research was the UK Labour government's (1997-2010) policy to tackle persistent underperformance in the most challenging urban secondary school settings. The policy aim was to create autonomous 'academies' that were independent of the local authority (local educational administration), that were managed by a team of independent co-sponsors, and had the freedom to generate the kind of entrepreneurial leadership that was more usually associated with private sector business. The belief was that these structural changes would lead to substantial improvement in educational standards through a change in school culture.

At the time of conversion, the secondary school participating in this research was included in the 'National Challenge' categorisation (DCSF, 2008) of under 30 per cent of students passing five GCSEs A\*-C including English and maths. It produced the lowest examination results in the local authority. When combined with strong competition from other high-performing schools and a local demographic trend of decreasing numbers of potential secondary students, this meant that it was often the school of last resort. Students arrived from primary education with low levels of attainment by national benchmarks and left with few local employment prospects in a coastal area of high socioeconomic deprivation. In line with national trends, the school found it difficult to recruit new teachers, particularly in maths and English; teachers also found it difficult to engage many parents with their children's education, partly because of parents' own experience in the school and/or because, in the light of local employment prospects, they felt that education offered little value for their children's generation. The new academy leaders believed that the conversion offered a unique opportunity to enhance educational provision in their area, and they set themselves the target of raising students' levels of attainment at GCSE level within three years.

Please note that in this report the Class of 2010 refers to the academic year 2010/2011. All quotations are taken from the year of interview at the end of each academic year; quotations from 2011 are from the academic year 2010/11.

## 4. The research project

*'It doesn't matter how good your strategies are or how good your planning and your evidence for something; if you haven't got the culture right it will just bleed to death. It will just fall on its feet straightaway'* (Principal, 2014).

The researchers identified that the new structure of the school, together with the wide-reaching ambitions of the academy leaders and the coastal location offered a unique opportunity to document and explore the impact of the relatively new policy. How would the new academy develop? What challenges would the new leaders face? How would changes be received and experienced by teachers and students? Would the academy achieve its early aims?

Academy leaders and sponsors agreed to a seven year longitudinal study that would include exploring the educational experience of the Year 7 cohort; the youngest students who entered the academy at the time of the school conversion to academy status and whom we named the Class of 2010. These students were legally obliged to attend school until the age of 16, and then to attend either school or a training establishment from the ages of 16-18 in line with the new Education and Skills Act, 2008. The hope of the school was that the majority of students would remain at the academy for their 16-18 education. The aims of the study were to:

- explore the senior leadership aims and priorities, and how these might change and develop over time.
- investigate teachers' perceptions of the teaching and learning methods employed by the academy.
- monitor the academic progress of the student cohort that entered the academy in Year 7 (the first year of secondary school) in the year of conversion to academy status.
- understand the educational journey of a sample of 15 Year 7 students.

The study methods were an annual school visit during the summer term that included:

- interviewing the principal and/or a senior leader to understand strategic priorities, challenges and successes
- interviewing a sample of four teachers to gain access to a wide range of views on the impact of the measures undertaken each year and on perceptions of the academy's potential progress towards reaching its aims.
- interviewing the sample of 15 Year 7 students to investigate their experiences, perceptions, successes and challenges of each year of attendance
- collecting the anonymised cohort data on levels of progress and attainment.

In addition we studied the academy's publicly-available data to provide context for the annual research visit, and examined academy documentation such as the Improvement Plan, organisational structure, and relevant policies. We anticipated that the Class of 2010 project would yield detailed understanding of the development of the academy as a new

institution, of the progress and outcomes for this cohort of students, and of teachers and student views on the impact of the education offered by the academy. Annual reporting of this information to the academy was provided and would help to raise the profile of the student voice, offer the opportunity for feedback on different strategies and developments, and findings could be used to shape internal decisions within the Academy. In addition, we intended that national and international dissemination of the findings could help to influence other coastal academies and schools with their strategic and/or operational decisions.

Something we did not anticipate, however, was that fundamental changes within the academy would coincide with far-reaching and rapid changes to education policy. Two different government administrations and a series of policy directives placed new pressures on the academy at a time in which leaders were already implementing extensive changes aimed at the primary measure of school accountability – student performance in formal examinations. This makes the study particularly valuable as a means of illustrating policy impacts at a challenging time in English secondary education.

## 5. Setting up the academy

The research school converted to academy status in 2010. A new Principal and senior leadership team was established from outset, along with new policies and processes. The new leaders expressed strong ambitions both for its students' education and for the contribution that it could make to the local economy and community. The senior leadership fully endorsed what Woods et al (2007) described as the key objectives of these first-wave academies, which were to:

- challenge the culture of educational under-attainment
- produce improvements in students' examination performance, thereby helping to break the cycle of underachievement in areas of social and economic deprivation
- play a key part in the regeneration of communities by sharing their expertise and facilities with other schools and the wider community (Woods et al, 2007, p.239).

### 5.1 The new approach

The new Principal spoke of the belief that there was *'a very basic priority which underpins everything, and that is that we have to improve the life chances of every child with whom we come into contact ... I'm a huge believer in education unlocking life chances ... Our task is to develop the highest level of education at [this academy] which will allow the greatest number of children to enjoy those experiences and move forward in life'* (2011).

In practice this involved four fundamental changes, all of which were aimed at improving the quality of learning and teaching and recognising that tackling behaviour was essential for this to happen. The **first** was to *'take the curriculum apart and put in its place a curriculum which we felt offered relevance, offered engagement, offered excitement, and offered a much greater likelihood of success. Because I do think that all children, but particularly those in danger of becoming disaffected, all children need to see that what they're learning is relevant [to their lives]'* (senior leader, 2010). Senior leaders expressed the intention to develop an enhanced curriculum named Community Active Service, in which students could get involved with, for instance, public services, sport, Duke of Edinburgh, cadet forces, both in the Air Force and the Army, and volunteering; the aim was to ensure that students could access these activities voluntarily but also through the curriculum, *'so the lines become blurred and ... students are given the opportunity to learn how to be active citizens'* (senior leader, 2011). Further ambitions included the plan to develop links with local partners and business community members so that students could become involved in work placements and apprenticeships to develop their employability.

The **second** was to change the standardised length of the school day to ones of variable length, sometimes finishing at 3pm, at others 4.30pm and on Friday all lessons finishing at 12.30pm. The aim here was to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning by participating in the enhanced curricular activities, and to encourage new friendships through enabling students to walk home with different people. The long-term aim was to encourage students to see the academy buildings as somewhere they *'would like to be'* (senior leader, 2011) which, in turn, would contribute to the academy becoming a vibrant centre for

community activity. Lesson length was increased from 60 to 100 minutes, with the aim of allowing time for students' deeper learning, skills development and the capacity to become reflective learners.

The **third** was to underpin and support higher expectations of teachers' performance with regular and high-quality teacher continuing professional development (CPD). Finishing lessons early on Friday was part of this plan, as it offered teachers time to attend training sessions. In the first year, CPD focused to a large extent on teaching in the extended lesson length, but plans were made for teachers to be actively engaged in research as a contractual requirement. The intention here was that all teachers would be *'part of the pedagogical debate which will drive forward the standards at this academy'* (senior leader, 2011). Teachers were also encouraged to engage in Master's level study, and to draw on the expertise of the academy's sponsors and partners to develop areas of the curriculum and offer different experiences outside the classroom.

The **fourth** fundamental change was to restructure the academy's teachers to *'realign the priorities'* (senior leader, 2011) towards high-quality learning and teaching, with careful monitoring of impact on student outcomes. This took time; at the end of the first year, one senior leader commented that *'restructuring has taken a full year and we are now at a position where we have a newly configured senior leadership team which I believe is fully aware of those priorities and how we are to move forward'* (senior leader, 2011).

These measures were intended to raise students' levels of examination success; to help them believe that they have a positive future that could realistically include a number of different options; to engage teachers fully in supporting this success; and to encourage local community members of all ages to participate in academy activities. In this context the ambition was for the academy to become the *'hub of this community; to be active, vibrant, buzzing, visibly providing every age within the community with the ability to access something that adds to their lives'* (senior leader, 2011).

## 5.2 Challenges

School leaders at the new academy believed that in addition (and related) to the substantial task of raising the standard of learning and teaching to improve student outcomes, their principal challenges at this time were:

- Leading the academy through a difficult time in which expectations of teachers' performance were raised and teachers were being made redundant. Two *'big staffing reviews'* took place in the first year of opening:  
*'It's difficult because suddenly the level of the bar has been raised amongst the staff ... Numbers have been quite reduced'* (senior leader, 2011).
- Raising teachers' and students' expectations of examination performance levels:  
*'The students are very needy in terms of the difficulties they face in the community sometimes and with their home lives. By coming into a place*

*where they get routines, they get looked after, where they get cared for, I think that's a real strength and that's something that we've, we're obviously trying to build on but also maintain. Allied to that was an acceptance that because of that, then we really don't expect great things of you ... We need to have high expectations of the students regardless of what is going on'* (senior leader, 2011).

- Restructuring the leadership teams and creating a coherent, coordinated approach to raising standards:

*'We inherited a top-heavy structure with a lot of senior leaders who worked, I think, without process and without policy ... They relied very much on their ability to be able to do things and make things happen, and they responded to the data without. But ... [there] was the lack of that coherent decision-making and planning which comes about from a good knowledge [of the school]'* (senior leader, 2011).

- Primary school pupils' level of achievement when they entered the academy:

*'There are students here who may be doing well at primary school in this area, within this catchment, but if they succeed at primary school their aspiration is not necessarily to go on to the local secondary school and succeed there. The aspiration is to go either to the grammars or to another one of the more successful leafy comprehensives and be educated there'* (senior leader, 2011).

Teachers reported the main challenges as:

- Behaviour. One teacher, at the end of the first year commented that she appreciated:  
*'the spotlight on behaviour ... just maintaining behaviour, and dress, the uniform, it's really positive. And I think it's had a really positive effect on ... their [pupils'] attitude to learning'* (teacher, 2011).
- Lower-ability students' levels of self-esteem:  
*'The bottom set in the classroom, to raise their self-esteem and their self-confidence is really hard. And that has been a challenge because it's challenging their ideas of themselves, what their parents have told them, and that's a really big, big challenge'* (teacher, 2011).
- Engaging parents with their children's learning:  
*'I think is one of the biggest things here is some kids go to school because they have to ... The impression I get is that some parents ... don't see the value in it [education]'* (teacher, 2011).

### 5.3 Teacher and student views

**Teachers interviewed** at the end of the first year personally appreciated and were keen to take advantage of the opportunities offered by structural changes in the academy, but recognised the challenges of improving standards in a school that had, for a long time, been registering poor examination results. Interviewees felt that there was a new energy within the academy, and that the ethos was shifting in a positive direction. One teacher commented that the changes introduced over the year, including the introduction of a new school uniform, were:

*'starting to promote an excellence and ... raising aspirations: [the attitude has changed from] 'Yeah, we go to school because we have to' to 'We go to school because we want to, because we're going to get something out of it' (teacher, 2011).*

They reported two main changes that had affected their working lives. The first was an holistic approach to assessment for learning (AfL), which teachers suggested was helping students to develop their learning skills and teachers to evaluate the extent to which students were becoming effective and independent learners. One teacher also commented on how the emphasis on behaviour – particularly the 'no shouting out' rule in class – had helped to promote an atmosphere of calm and purposeful learning.

The other important change was the opportunity to involve the academy's sponsors and partners with student learning. This was seen to be beneficial because it offered students a variety of approaches that were potentially facilitating greater understanding while helping to prevent learning from becoming predictable. It also allowed teachers to draw on others' greater expertise in particular areas, such as chemistry and maths.

The **students interviewed** were largely happy with their choice of secondary school, and the majority felt that they were offered the opportunity of a *'good education'* (student, 2011) at the academy. That is not to say that they reported everything as perfect, but most reported that they were happy, believed that they could achieve, and that the teaching was generally enjoyable. Although most agreed that the new uniform was smart and presented a positive image, there was a strong feeling that the blazers that were too hot in the summer term. There was also some disagreement between student interviewees over their feelings on the length of lessons and the working day; most agreed that they found the long days tiring, although they enjoyed finishing at 12.30 on Fridays, and some students reported finding the 100 minute lessons too long. There were reports of some bullying, and most interviewees were aware of some students' disengagement from learning. Nonetheless there was a sense of optimism in most of the student interviews about their future at the academy; students were happy to relate the different activities that they undertook and were aware of different opportunities open to them while they attended the academy.

## 6. The next three years: changing school culture

*'It has been a really difficult time for staff to move from one culture which asked very little of them to another which asks enormous amounts from them'* (Principal, 2012).

The next three years were a period of consolidation and improvement in which academy leaders further embedded the changes begun in the first year with the aim of generating a high-expectation, high-attainment culture among teachers and students. To support this, the leadership priorities remained the same, focused around raising the quality of learning and teaching with the aim of raising students' educational performance as a means of enabling them to make informed and active choices about their future:

*'It's about lifting the whole staff/student body, and the community, and to drive up standards. So working out how we can do that as quickly as possible in order to have impact so we're not wasting any student's time. The priorities for the academy remain skilling up the staff, skilling up the students, and ensuring that policies, processes, and systems are stringent, rigorous, and highly visible'* (senior leader, 2012).

Academy results improved markedly in the next two years and there were two successful Ofsted inspections, all of which helped to maintain the energy of the first year and improve teachers' morale. One inspection was within the new framework introduced in September 2012, which removed the category of 'satisfactory', thereby reducing the overall number of categories to from five to four, and introduced the category of 'requires improvement' (Ofsted, 2013). The academy's favourable result prompted a senior leader to comment that:

*'it was a very good Ofsted report and we were delighted with it. I have to be very honest with you and say slightly surprised, in as much as the odds were stacked against us ... [with the] new framework'* (senior leader, 2013).

### 6.1 New plans and developments

Given these encouraging indicators of significant improvement, academy leaders felt it was appropriate to continue with two major new plans that were to be realised within these three years. Having secured funding from the government, the first was an ambitious new build for the school that would include such features as a recording studio, music practice rooms, technology suite, gym, dance studio, theatre, professional kitchen and hair and beauty salon. The second was to establish a free primary school to provide an 'all through education' for the local community. The rationale for these decisions were related to the overall academy aims of challenging the culture of underachievement, raising educational performance and playing a part in community regeneration; the new build was designed to be a community resource, accessible to all, which would be *'lit up throughout the day with learning and throughout the night with lights and learning'* (senior leader, 2012). The extra facilities offered by the new build would offer students new opportunities for their learning and

encourage local community members to engage in learning, cultural and vocational activities.

The primary school was seen to be first, a route to raising the levels of attainment for entrants into Year 7 at the academy and secondly, an integral part of supporting and engaging more successfully with the local community:

*'I know that [the primary school] is what will have the greatest social impact on our whole community. Our ability to interact with parents and interact with children from 0 - 19, that will allow us to develop in our children a sense of who they are and what they are and give them the tools to then become the people that they want to become. We, at this moment in time, having children come to us at 11, are firefighting their previous experiences. We are firefighting their literacy and numeracy levels. We want to be able to develop in our students all of their skills long before 11'* (senior leader, 2012).

Both initiatives were deemed a success by our research participants. The pride shown by students in the new building was seen by senior leaders as a sign of pride in the academy and as a manifestation of a new, developing culture of high standards:

*'I very well recall when I came on interview to the predecessor school being shocked and depressed by the litter underfoot in the corridors, the graffiti on the walls, the state of distress of the decoration. We've moved into the Phase 1 of the new build ... and I can tell you there isn't one piece of graffiti, there isn't one broken this, that or the other and the litter is miniscule. And that is about the children!'* (senior leader, 2013).

This view was reiterated by reports from teacher research participants that student behaviour had improved across the academy, and that a greater percentage of students were engaging productively with their studies. Teachers commented favourably on the new build:

*'The biggest success for [the academy] is getting the, the new build. [It's a] massive kind of time investment and ... because obviously [the academy is] changing their vision and ... they're moving forward, I think having a symbol through the building is a really important thing ... It's brilliant, it's really exciting'* (teacher, 2013).

Most believed that transition period during the process of building was well-managed, and that both teachers and students were doing the best they could under difficult circumstances; the concern was that these conditions were draining and increased levels of irritability. Students, however, tended to look on the bright side:

*'Because with all the like, moving around, I think it's making the kids more aggravated. So it's stressing the teachers out a bit. Like, in my maths class ... all the building work's going right outside of us, that's all that you hear in that lesson ... There's some days where she [teacher] usually gets the talking done and out of the way before it comes. It's like she's got a magic mind!'* (student, 2013).

The primary school was regarded by a senior leader as a *'genius stroke'* because of the resulting capacity to bring teachers from the primary and secondary sectors together to develop strategies, ideas and practices; to bring together a *'critical mass'* of teaching assistants and higher level teaching assistants from both schools for CPD; to provide continuity in provision for pupils with SEND between primary and secondary; to *'smooth the transition'* from primary to secondary as Year 7 students would be familiar with the learning and teaching methods when they entered the academy. This senior leader also reiterated a point made earlier; that the primary school offered the potential to develop stronger relationships with parents and carers through their greater involvement with primary school children's education.

Teachers in the academy commented little on the primary school, but students enjoyed the opportunities offered by peer teaching, in which the secondary students carried out teaching roles in subjects such as science, English, maths and PE. All the students interviewed appeared to have enjoyed this role and saw the value to themselves as well as to the younger children:

*'...so I think if you wanted to become a teacher, then you've got that experience; to teach the primary school [children]'* (student, 2014).

*'The only thing that I've done particularly with the little people is in PE. And I do a leadership course which, every six weeks they come up and we just teach them a lesson. We've done all gymnastics ... with them and they really enjoy it as well!'* (student, 2014).

The final new development within this time was the appointment of a new Principal, following the decision of the first academy Principal to retire. This provided the opportunity to re-visit the academy's core values and to respond to impending changes in the educational policy landscape. Once again the academy was restructured, with the new Principal balancing teachers' *'transformational fatigue'* with the perceived need to adjust to the circumstances that related to future changes to the curriculum, stronger accountability measures, the current demographics in which there was a falling number of students, and a reduced budget. This restructuring included reducing the size of the senior leadership team, giving middle leaders greater responsibility, and introducing a new teacher appraisal system that was linked to performance-related pay.

## 6.2 Challenges

Challenges reported during these three years included:

- The increasing speed of change within the educational environment and the consequent increasing difficulty of school leadership:  
*'Leadership and management in secondary school is such shifting sands, the need to be politically astute as well as good ... is essential'* (senior leader, 2013).
- Teacher recruitment, despite the fact that the academy was attracting a higher calibre of potential recruits when it advertised for new teachers:  
*'Nationally recruitment of staff is an absolute worry for every school. It fills the Principal forums ... the discussion amongst head teachers is, 'We can't get teachers to move' and obviously that has echoes of the economic situation and also of a sense of trepidation, I think, of moving from the familiar. And I think it echoes the, the sense of upheaval and turbulence within the profession at this moment in time. So all schools are finding it difficult to recruit maths teachers, all schools are finding it difficult to recruit very good English teachers, very good science teachers'* (senior leader, 2013).
- Shrinking budgets. The reduction in overall school funding through austerity measures started to feel its effect during this time, and contributed to decisions to reduce / restructure staffing levels.
- The system for pastoral care. Although this was regarded as a strength in the predecessor school, it was found to be less operationally effective than first believed. Academy leaders struggled to appoint a leader for this area, and it was regarded as *'the slowest area of the school to transform'* (senior leader, 2013). Teachers reported that the economic situation of a sustained period of austerity was putting pressure on local families, which led to *'a range of social issues which tend to surface in school'* (senior leader, 2013), suggesting that pastoral care in the academy could be increasingly important as the effects of austerity became more deeply embedded.
- Engaging lower-ability students with learning. Teachers reported some students:  
*'just not wanting, not, not caring, not seeing the relevance... they don't care ... A lot of that I think stems from failure avoidance, like they don't, they don't want to realise they can't understand it so they just don't even try ... I think a lot of them genuinely don't feel like it's going to affect their life whether they know [a subject] or not'* (teacher, 2013).

- Developing relationships with the community. This continued to be regarded as a *'huge challenge'* by both senior leaders and teachers, many of whom who found it difficult to engage with parents and carers. Development of the Community Active Service curriculum stalled, and ongoing relationships with local businesses were seen as less successful than initially hoped.

### 6.3 Teacher and student views

**Teachers** commented positively on the regular and supportive CPD that they received during this time, with some mentioning the Master's study as a motivator for working at the academy. One particular aspect that teachers liked was the consistency of the CPD that led to a consistency of approach throughout the school:

*'I think it's [CPD] very consistent...we have the Tools for Improvement sheet, when I say sheet that sounds silly but [it's] sort of expectations if you like, which embeds at the bottom of everything. We've got like, Session Plans to ensure that we are addressing the right areas, you know to make sure we've got AfL in there, key questions, differentiation ... I think they're well-structured ecause it's making you think about how you're going to teach. Everybody in the whole school has got the same lesson pro forma'* (teacher, 2013).

The new Principal was viewed as a positive appointment, with interviewees regarding the change of leadership as an opportunity to integrate a more collective and inclusive approach with higher levels of teacher accountability:

*'There has to be that accountability, so I think that's a huge strength. And then... it's that collective approach ... really recognising that everybody is trying to move things. Everyone's got the same values - and that will be concrete from September - but we're all trying to achieve the same things. We want our students to be successful and we've all got to work together'* (teacher, 2014).

A few interviewees argued that the latest reduction in staffing levels had led to a lack of middle management in some areas, with some gaps in the chain of communication between senior leaders and teaching staff. One important point of agreement, however, was teachers' expectations of high teaching standards:

*'There is pressure but I don't feel intimidated by it or dampened by it. It's like, 'Okay, I know what I've got to do and I'll do the utmost I can'* (teacher, 2014).

**Students** reported growing confidence in their studies together with an increasing awareness of the importance of the external examinations they were about to face. Some had an idea of the type of employment they might like in the future:

*'I think my attitude has changed, because in Year 7 I didn't care; 'it's only levels'. But then in Year 8 I've matured because if I just do stupid stuff I just won't have a job when I older. It will affect my life for longer'* (student, 2012).

*'I'm learning a lot more than I used to because last year I didn't really stay in my science; I was kicked out because of it because I was a naughty girl. I used to sit there and not listen. Used to be disruptive to the lesson, running around, doing anything I can because I was bored and I didn't like science. But this year's totally changed ever since I found out what a zoologist is and what they do and having a day of doing it. I thought that's what I want to be, 100 per cent, and I've had my eye on that for ages'* (student, 2014).

Students reported that, on the whole, they felt safe and secure at the academy, although a few said they felt isolated at times. Bullying decreased over this time, as students either learned to deal with it with support from teachers, changed friendship groups or became friends with the former bullies. All approved of the new Principal's appointment, of the way he knew their names and his high visibility around the academy. One persistent complaint during these years, however, was that there weren't enough trips or experiential learning activities:

*'I'd prefer to go out on more trips because ... in my opinion I think that's the best way to learn. Taking students out on trips, showing them different ways of like, what works, different things work, and how things happen, instead of like being in a classroom and saying, 'Oh that's how that works, like, write it down'. You can go out and actually like, experience it'* (student, 2014).

#### 6.4 Postscript

The one major disappointment during this time was the academy's poor GCSE results in the summer of 2014. A policy shift towards the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), together with new performance measures that reduced the value of vocational examinations in GCSE equivalence and removed multiple examination entry, had brought rapid change to a system that, for schools such as this academy, been strongly focused on vocational examinations. Our wider research into coastal academies (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2015) shows that all our participating schools were highly concerned about these changes; all suffered a dip in results, demonstrating that rapid implementation of this policy gave both teachers and

students insufficient time to adjust to the new approach to teaching and learning before the examinations in the academic year 2013/14.

## 7. Years five to seven: carving waves

*'The one thing I would say ... to any head teacher is: Do not take your eyes off the horizon, because coming over the horizon is trouble ... Never be surprised by what's on the horizon. Always be excited by it. Just don't look down'* (Principal, 2013).

Over the next three years, the policy changes implemented by the Coalition government began to make themselves felt. The academic year 2014/15 was particularly challenging as it included the following radical changes:

- A new curriculum in each subject.
- Each school having autonomy in their methods of assessing students' progress. This replaced the established system used by all schools of 'levels' of progress.
- The introduction of new measures of student performance over two years, with schools voluntarily adopting the new method in 2014/15 and obliged to do so in 2015/16. These consisted of first, measuring the progress made by students across eight subjects to assess schools' value added (Progress 8) and secondly, measuring students' achievements across eight subjects (Attainment 8). These subjects should include maths, English, three further qualifications that counted in the EBacc measure, and three further qualifications that counted in the EBacc or that were from the Department for Education approved list (DfE, 2017, p.5).
- The introduction of linear or synoptic examinations at the end of the academic year. These replaced than modular examinations that could be taken at different times during the year.

The shift towards a more academic curriculum with one examination point, together with the introduction of a controversial new curriculum in a very short timeframe (Adams, 2013), meant that pressures on and expectations of teachers' performance were raised further within all schools. As our wider coastal academy research shows (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2015, pp.18-20), it was anticipated by participating academies that these changes would have a fundamental impact on both content and processes within the classroom as teachers changed the way they taught and assessed in order to support learners in these new examinations on the new curriculum. Some saw the new performance measures as potentially more positive, enabling schools in areas of high deprivation that gave considerable added value – despite remaining below government student attainment targets – a chance to demonstrate their success. All, however, saw the other planned performance measure changes as unhelpful in terms of demotivating students in areas with historically low achievement levels; participants argued that the combination of higher expectations and short timeframe for adjustment was particularly challenging for these schools.

Nonetheless, teachers in this research academy did their best to hide their concerns from the Class of 2010, who sat their GCSE examinations in the summer of 2015. In the next section, we report on these students' views of this important year.

## 7.1 Coping with the GCSE examinations

In 2015, due to students leaving the academy or withdrawing from the research, we interviewed eight students rather than the original fifteen. Sample attrition is common in longitudinal research (Farrell et al, 2016) and, although the sample in this year had a high proportion of females, we were fortunate that it still represented a broad range of abilities and interests, with these students offering valuable thoughts and comments on their experiences. They were nervous about the impending results:

*'It's just the fact that you know that in August that one bit of paper is going to change your life and that's really scary'* (student, 2015).

Two students claimed to be relaxed about the examinations, while others reported to be feeling different degrees of anxiety or stress. Acknowledging their own part in the process, students reported that this had a number of possible causes:

- absence due to illness or other considerations meant work had not been covered
- competing priorities such as theatre productions had shifted focus in the short-term away from GCSE work
- a large assignment workload because of earlier non-engagement: *'I was a bit of a naughty one. And then come to Year 11 and I've got so much coursework to catch up on and I'm like, 'Why didn't I do it?!''* (student, 2015).

Students sensed the pressure that their teachers were under to achieve high GCSE results, with some showing sympathy for their position. Students also expressed appreciation for the levels of support they were receiving:

*'I think our teachers are more stressed out about our exams than we are to be fair ... I'd hate to be them'* (student, 2015).

*'It's just every lesson you go to, they [teachers] think they're the most important ones and they knuckle down at you. And you're just like, 'I get this from every other class and I just want time to just do it at my pace', but because there's exams next Tuesday they're all like, 'You've got to do this, you've got to do this, you've got to do this!' And you're just there like, 'Stressed out! Don't talk to me!' But it's just really hard. Really hard'* (student, 2015).

*'I've got a first GCSE next week and so all the teachers, even if they're not your teacher, they're all trying to support you and get you that C grade that you need. They just do their every little thing to help you'* (student, 2015).

Most students reported that family and friends were important sources of external support at this time: *'they talk to me and like, calm me down'*. Family also provided important motivation

for some students who had managed to turn things around by working hard and preparing seriously for exams:

*'I know that some of my family took it for granted when they was in school and just didn't do anything. And my dad, he says he doesn't want me being him. He wants me to do well ... and then I just want to make him proud. And like my mum and my little sister. And I want to make sure my little sister has someone to look up to, not just someone who don't care. So I just have to try, really'* (student, 2015).

All had chosen what they wanted to do once GCSEs had finished, and most felt that they on course to achieve the qualifications they needed for that stage; career ambitions included child care, youth work, the police, accountancy, teaching, physiotherapy and music performance. Most said that they were glad they had come to the academy and felt that they had learned valuable lessons for life. Some were leaving, and their reflections on their time at the academy included:

- *'My maths teacher, she's been great to me. She's helped me through all the tough times'*.
- *'You've just got to make every little moment count because with the support you get now, you're never going to get it again in your life'*.
- *[The last five years] have changed me and moulded me in to what I am and I'm glad I came to [the academy] definitely. It was great!*
- *'I think it's been a massive rollercoaster. Obviously starting in Year 7, being a little nugget, trying to get used to it, in the swing of how a secondary school ... works. Obviously the rollercoaster goes up, you have your positive moments. Obviously having your good marks, good grades, even in Year 7 it gives you a massive smile. And then at times you can go down. You're negative, you don't really want to be doing it all. You see there's no point. But coming into these last few years, it's been more focused and it's been really positive in my opinion, these last few years'*.

## 7.2 The pressure begins to show

Poor examination results in 2014 were seen in the staff interviews during the following summer as an opportunity for improvement:

*'... to really have a good clear look at ourselves. And the big thing that I've talked about this year with all the leadership is about truth, and actually being open and honest about our approach, and that we don't want any surprises. Because it came as a surprise, the results last year'* (Principal, 2016).

In practice this involved developing middle leaders further by involving them in strategic planning and introducing a new system of data analytics; the intention was that middle leaders' decisions could be more evidence-based through use of the analytics, and they could then focus on applying change within the academy. Restructuring staffing levels and changes in systems and processes to support students and to monitor teacher and student performance continued over the remaining research period; budgetary constraints led to a reduction in the number of student trips and a greater emphasis on funding for the pastoral care and student mental health. The levels of teacher CPD were reduced. The change to synoptic examinations prompted a return to 60-minute lessons in order to give more flexibility to the curriculum and to offer students two lessons per week for option subject areas such as history (rather than one, which they might miss through illness) and the length of the school day was returned to five days of equal length, partly in response to requests from primary school teachers and parents. In line with the demands of the EBacc, fewer vocational courses were offered to fewer students at GCSE level, and plans were made to work with other schools to share costs for Level 5 vocational courses, but had not come in existence by the time the research ended.

Successes during academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17 included a one-year rise in students' GCSE examination performance, and an increase in numbers applying to come to the academy: *'that [demographic] bulge from the primaries is now coming through to the secondaries, so we're no longer struggling in terms of pupil numbers at Year 7'* (senior leader, 2017). Greater numbers of teachers were applying for jobs at the academy, and the increase in the number of students entering higher level apprenticeships and higher education from the academy was seen as a major achievement. In a point picked up in the press this year (e.g. Fazackerley, 2017), however, teachers reported the difficulty of teaching students who had received university unconditional offers because:

*'They've gone into ... 'I don't need to try now' [mode]. And I think that's really, really hard from a teaching point of view, when they get given that. Because it's almost like a green light for them to then chill out ... And that's probably the biggest challenge with the Year 13s. And the biggest success as well because they obviously succeeded'* (teacher, 2017).

And a thread that continued throughout the research and was mentioned by a high number of teacher interviewees was the dedication that teachers showed towards their students:

*'The teachers care. They really care and they have a lot of time for the students outside of school as well. A lot of extra time is put in and they do try and make it work ... Staff are willing to go that extra mile overall and I think that is a strength'* (teacher, 2017).

Overall challenges continued to be raising the level of student examination performance, parental and community engagement, and the high levels of socioeconomic deprivation in the area:

*'All the socio-economic issues that there are in this community and they seem to, certainly during the time of recession, I felt that they worsened. I've been on this site now for [a long time] and ... I've seen certain issues increase, for example suicide in this community. I don't really know what the statistics are, it's difficult because maybe I'm being anecdotal, but certainly I've had much more contact with young people who have direct experience with suicide ... So, a lot of our students are experiencing a lot of trauma that's possibly a by-product of deprivation, and that remains our challenge'* (teacher, 2017).

### 7.3 Teacher and student views

**Teachers** generally regarded the move to 60-minute lessons as positive because it *'reduced some of that tension in terms of the behaviour because you get to that hour and then the kids can go. Having the 100 minutes I think exacerbated some things; students can't hold attention for more than 20 minutes'* (teacher, 2017)

They reported that the change from vertical to horizontal tutor groups was helpful because they could *'tailor what we deliver to the year group'* (teacher, 2017). But continuous change and the regular introduction of new systems within the academy divided teachers' interview responses more sharply than in the first five years, and a greater number made critical comments during their interviews in the final two years of the research. There were three major issues:

- Student behaviour. The system of behaviour management was seen as increasingly ineffective as senior leadership, who were called to deal with classroom incidents so that teachers could focus on teaching, were increasingly stretched to reach all incidents quickly and had insufficient time to find out the full story. The result was that teachers had little control over the behaviour incident and students experienced few or no consequences for poor behaviour:

*'I think ... the students control the situation not the teacher ... Once it goes beyond the classroom teacher they [pupils] get talked down ... If someone has just stood there and told me to eff off as a classroom teacher because I asked them to put their coat on the rack because we are doing a practical, for then Leadership ... to turn up and talk them down and tell them, 'It's all alright. Let's go here' takes away that ownership for the classroom teacher ... Because they [leaders] are so manic, they will come to pick up a student, they won't find out from the teacher what has actually happened ... and [later] the students are like, 'I am sat here now. I have an hour free' ...*

*You need to put that ownership back on the classroom teacher (teacher, 2017).*

- The absence of communication between different levels of teachers. Although some leaders received praise from the teachers interviewed, and other interviewees stated that communication was 'good', increasing numbers reported that communication between leaders and teachers was inadequate, particularly in relation to student behaviour. Teachers also reported that they felt they had little input into decisions: the '[senior leadership team] *will listen to people but won't act on it*' (teacher, 2017), and increasing numbers of teachers said that they had little or no understanding of the leadership's vision for the academy.
- Related to those two points was the feeling among some teachers interviewed that there was no sense of an academy community:  
*'My big bugbear when I came here was that there was no staff room ... I feel that we are so fragmented around the school that there is no opportunity for staff to be able to use each other as a sounding board. And in a school like this where it's so tough, it's by far the toughest school I've ever worked at and I think it probably is one of the most challenging schools to work at in the country, probably we need that ... We have no staff community here which firstly, is I think a failing of the school because I think actually we've got some really brilliant staff. And if we were all allowed to get together in a communal area ... and actually make use of it, it would be so much better'* (teacher, 2017).

In the final two years of the research, five **students** from the original fifteen had selected to continue their studies at the academy, four took vocational courses at Level 3 and one opted for GCE Advanced levels. They reported that they appreciated the more relaxed atmosphere in the sixth form, in which teachers *'don't shout at you or have you in detention ... they're just like, if you're choosing not to do it, then you're choosing to let yourself down'* (student, 2016), although the pressure tended to intensify close to examination or coursework submission times. Alongside their studies, most busied themselves with learning to drive, taking a part-time job and contributing to the academy through activities such as organising charity fund-raising events and PE coaching. All spoke of times at which they had wanted to give up their studies, but had been supported by teachers to find a way through their difficulties and were proud that they were so close to finishing their compulsory schooling successfully. Destinations included university, an apprenticeship and immediate employment. Those who planned to go to university, however, felt that they had received plenty of support for this decision from teachers, while those who did not were either given the wrong advice for the qualifications needed for their next step or had little discussion with teachers about their future, suggesting that the careers information at the academy was weighted towards higher education.

#### 7.4 Postscript

Examination results for the final year of the research showed that GCE Advanced level results improved, but that the results for the Level 3 vocational qualification had dipped. We do not have the individual results for these students, but hope they did well and wish them all the best for the future.

## 8. Reflecting on the ebb and flow of a coastal school that became an academy

In this final section of our summary report on the Class of 2010, we reflect on our findings from the seven years of research with our coastal school. These reflections provide an opportunity to focus on the overall challenges, success and ways forward for our research school and others like it.

### 8.1 Reflecting on the challenges

In common with other coastal schools, this academy is located in an area of high socioeconomic deprivation, with multi-generational low and/or unemployment, and local parents/carers who had often had poor experiences of education. There are very high levels of students recorded as pupil premium/ever 6 free school meals, demonstrating persistent disadvantage as the common denominator for students in the school. The socioeconomic position of the community in which this coastal school is located clearly has an impact on senior leaders, teachers, students and parents.

Senior leaders have responded to student need, academic and pastoral, through structural changes to policy and processes; teachers have used these changes to support the students; students have responded to teachers and senior leaders in ways learned before entering the school and amended these as their journey in the school continued. Parents have largely failed to engage, partly because of their own experience in the school and/or because, in the light of local employment prospects, they felt that education offered little value for their children's generation.

At the time of conversion to academy status in 2010, the school was categorised as 'National Challenge' and returned the lowest examination results in the local authority. When combined with strong competition from other high-performing schools and a local demographic trend of decreasing numbers of potential secondary students, this meant that it was often the school of last resort. Students arrived from primary education with low levels of attainment by national benchmarks and left with few local employment prospects.

Leaders' investment in the school, through the new building and the 'free school' primary, enabled teachers and students to feel an increased sense of pride in their school, which was reflected in a changing school culture. This cultural shift towards behaviour for learning came under challenge with rapid education policy changes that re-focused the school curriculum away from vocational qualifications toward a traditional academic, externally assessed education. The academy had invested in resources to support a rich vocational curriculum offer, which had supported an increase in student attainment and school performance, and which did not continue following government changes to performance measures.

In line with national trends, the school found it difficult to recruit new teachers (particularly in maths and English) and middle leaders and experienced a lack of teacher 'churn', meaning teachers stayed employed in the school for long periods of time. Teacher recruitment was

reported by the Principal to have improved in the last year of the study; however senior leaders were also taking on head of department responsibilities when appropriately qualified middle leaders could not be recruited in time.

Teacher retention and recruitment for schools in England is a challenge (NUT, 2017). There has also been reported a significant reduction in teacher trainee applications and acceptance over the same period (Helm et al, 2017). Latest figures report that 51 per cent of teachers leave the profession within three years of qualifying (Try teaching, 2017). The challenges faced by our coastal school in recruiting teachers may be similar to national issues in this area; however the economic, social and geographical positioning of the school brings additional problems for recruiting and keeping high quality teachers. Regional differences in England have been reported as a factor for student attainment and school performance (Ofsted, 2016), but they are also relevant to workforce supply in schools.

An experienced new Principal, new support from educational sponsors, and a focus on the community in which the school is located, were established as ways to raise the school's student performance levels and change the culture. A change in Principal from Year 4 offered a different approach for the school and coincided with a new building, which caused disruption to teaching and learning.

In the face of all these challenges the odds were stacked against them, as the Principal had noted in 2012. How could teachers raise student aspirations if the students' parents expected little or nothing from education? More importantly how would teachers support students in learning to 'know themselves' so that their aspirations were realistic and achievable?

Over the seven years of our study teachers appeared to interpret aspiration as performance in GCSEs and level 3 qualifications to support entry into university. While this is one way to think about raising aspirations, and arguably government policy changes to curriculum and student performance toward more academic outcomes make this appear the right choice, it could be argued that students could be offered a wide range of learning and extra-curricular opportunities that broaden their horizons and enable them to make their own choices about the future. This was the approach of the successful and now discontinued Aimhigher programme (Passy, 2012; Passy & Morris, 2010). However, it this approach has led to the following success in terms of greater numbers of students progressing to university.

### 8.3 Reflecting on the successes

Greater numbers of students are progressing to university in our research school and more students are talking at a younger age about their aspiration to go to university. Teachers in the school have predominantly come through a school, sixth form, university route to teaching and know how to share their experiences of this with the students. The academy has recruited a small number of teachers from their own ex-student body, which supports establishing university as a route to social mobility for the students. Ex-students also come

to the school to talk about their university experiences, and motivational speakers reinforce the aspirational message. The school has a university sponsor, which has become part of the schools' identity and experience, with a university visits, university staff leading professional development and student research groups. Greater numbers of students are also progressing to higher level apprenticeships.

Greater numbers of students are applying to come to the academy, but this must be seen in the context of the national overall rise in secondary student numbers. The new building that the school now occupies is in a commanding geographical position and looks good. The primary school has also done exceedingly well, achieving 'Outstanding' in its first Ofsted inspection and has had increasing numbers of application since opening. The academy is collaborating with local schools to 'pool' resources in order to extend the offer for post-16 students so that students can access a wide range of subjects at Level 3 (post-16) despite funding changes leading to a reduced budget. The school building, the all-through approach and developing collaboration with neighbouring schools is being used to move the school forward.

The school has established staff that have benefitted from an internal promotion system, with middle leaders moving to senior leadership and teachers moving into leadership positions. There have been greater numbers of applicants for advertised positions in the last couple of years of the study, which has resulted in optimism about the schools' reputation both locally and nationally. Teacher dedication is high, with teachers going the extra mile for their students. Our findings suggest that teachers and leaders in the school are investing in their students' futures and are trying to find ways to support them in the face of complex and sustained political, social, economic and geographic issues. The Class of 2010 research findings shows that clear, energetic leadership, with a focus on teaching, learning and behaviour, can change school culture.

### 8.3 Reflecting on ways forward for similar schools

Schools in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation, and that are isolated from cultural and leisure facilities, high quality employment opportunities and resources, will be feeling the impact of austerity measures in the same way as out Class of 2010 school. Being a school in a coastal region has amplified the challenges senior leaders have faced due to the disadvantages of location:

*'Britain's coastal communities are among the worst ranked parts of the country across a range of economic and social indicators, including earnings, employment, health and education – and the economic gap between coastal and non-coastal communities has grown' (SMF, 2017).*

Teachers in schools in similar circumstances can consider the approaches summarised here when considering how to improve opportunities for their students in the wake of squeezed budgets, narrowing curriculum and increased expectations for student performance. There

was a clear message in our findings that leadership is challenging. It takes time to change a schools' culture, and following the journeys of the coastal academies in our comparative study (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2015), our research suggests that principals appointed to lead schools through the change to academy status from national challenge circumstances typically do not stay in that role for longer than three to four years. The change of principal in a school that is developing a culture change towards student success can rock the boat.

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