



**Can the use of aphorisms within a school's professional
development programme help to embed a culture of
high expectations among teaching staff?**

EMMA-MARIA ROBERTSON

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABSTRACT	5
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 TEACHER EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENT OUTCOMES	12
2.2 COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY	13
2.3 SCHOOL CULTURE AND SHARED LANGUAGE	14
2.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER MINDSET	15
2.5 LEADERSHIP AND CULTURAL CHANGE	17
2.6 RESEARCH GAP	18
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN	19
3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES	19
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN	20
3.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS	21
3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS	22
3.5 RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY	23
3.6 DATA ANALYSIS	24
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	25
3.8 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS	25
CHAPTER 4 - PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	27
CHAPTER 5 - RESULTS	30
5.1 OVERVIEW OF DATA	30
5.2 BASELINE FINDINGS (INSET)	30
5.3 POST- INTERVENTION QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS	32
5.4 POST- INTERVENTION QUALITATIVE FINDINGS	38
5.5 OBSERVATIONAL EVIDENCE	40
5.6 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS	41
CHAPTER 6 - DISCUSSION	43
6.1 APHORISMS AS CULTURAL ARTEFACTS AND LEADERSHIP TOOLS	44
6.2 DEPARTMENTAL CONTEXT, EXPERIENCE AND CONDITIONS FOR ADOPTION	46
6.3 STUDENT-FOCUSED VS TEACHER-FOCUSED UPTAKE	46
6.4 ALIGNMENT, PRACTICE AND COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY	47
6.5 IMPLEMENTATION, TIMING AND LEADERSHIP DESIGN	49
6.6 LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS	50
6.7 LIMITATIONS OF FINDINGS	51
6.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP AND PRACTICE	52

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	53
7.1 LEADERSHIP IMPLICATIONS	54
7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE	55
7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WIDER EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE.....	57
7.4 FUTURE RESEARCH.....	57
7.5 PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION	58
REFERENCES:	60
APPENDICES:	63
APPENDIX A – POST-INTERVENTION STAFF SURVEY	63
APPENDIX B – BASELINE INSET STAFF SURVEY	70
APPENDIX C – EXAMPLE CPD HANDOUT	72
APPENDIX D – PRE-INTERVENTION QUANTITATIVE SURVEY DATA	74
APPENDIX E – BASELINE GROUPED RESPONSES AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS...	76
APPENDIX F – POST-INTERVENTION QUANTITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE DATA (RAW RESPONSES).....	79
APPENDIX G – POST-INTERVENTION QUALITATIVE DATA – THEMATIC OVERVIEW.....	83
APPENDIX H – OBSERVATIONAL EVIDENCE SUMMARY (LEARNING WALKS AND INFORMAL OBSERVATIONS)	84
APPENDIX N – OBSERVATIONAL EVIDENCE OF APHORISMS IN CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS	85

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ABSTRACT

This study explores whether the deliberate use of aphorisms within a school's professional development programme can support the development of a shared culture of high expectations among teaching staff. Conducted in a small school in Spain undergoing significant organisational change, the research responds to a leadership challenge of creating greater alignment within a diverse and, at times, divided teaching team.

Drawing on literature relating to teacher cognition (Borg, 2003), collective teacher efficacy (Hattie, 2012) and effective professional development (Desimone, 2009), alongside work on heuristics (Kahneman, 2011) and organisational culture (Schein, 2010), the study examines the role of concise, shared language as a potential mechanism for shaping professional thinking and practice. Aphorisms were introduced sequentially through CPD sessions and reinforced through leadership practice over the course of approximately one academic term.

Adopting an interpretivist approach, data were collected through staff surveys, observations and professional reflections, allowing for an exploration of both perceived and observable impact. The findings suggest that aphorisms can contribute to greater alignment in professional language and, in some cases, influence teacher thinking and classroom practice. However, their impact was uneven and dependent on factors including staff engagement, clarity of understanding and consistency of reinforcement.

The study concludes that while aphorisms can act as effective heuristics supporting decision-making and shared expectations, they are not sufficient in isolation. Their effectiveness depends on how they are embedded within wider systems of professional practice and supported through sustained leadership. The findings highlight the importance of alignment between language, belief and behaviour, and offer implications for the design of CPD and leadership approaches aimed at cultural change. In doing so, the study contributes to understanding how shared language may function as a practical tool for influencing teacher cognition and supporting cultural alignment in complex school contexts.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

As Head of School in a British international school overseas, I have spent the past fifteen years working across administrative, operational and academic leadership roles. During this time, I have led my current school through a number of significant challenges, most notably the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the financial pressures that followed. This period of instability coincided with a phase of significant organisational transformation, which introduced further disruption to both day-to-day operations and longer-term strategic planning. In addition, the impact of Brexit contributed to increased staff turnover, resulting in a significant shift in the composition of the teaching team and, consequently, in the underlying professional culture. Around the same time, wider global events, including the escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, led to changes in the student body, with an increase in EAL learners joining higher year groups, alongside greater variation in prior attainment and pastoral needs. This further increased the complexity of the classroom environment, and the demands placed on teachers' professional judgement.

While these events tested systems and structures, a significant leadership focus remained on maintaining academic standards, which the school was able to uphold successfully. However, this period also brought into sharper focus the underlying professional beliefs and patterns of practice that mediated how individuals responded to these challenges and influenced the functioning of the organisation. In particular, they highlighted the extent to which staff attitudes, beliefs and responses to challenge can either strengthen or fragment a school community.

Over the past few years, I have found myself leading a team that, despite its relatively small size, is notably divided in its professional outlook. On one hand, there are teachers who are reflective,

engaged in continuous professional development (CPD) and committed to improving their practice. On the other, there are colleagues who demonstrate resistance to change, attribute challenges primarily to external factors and engage in CPD only when required. This division is not uncommon in educational settings, yet within a small team it becomes more visible and, at times, more consequential. It raises important questions about how school leaders can create alignment, not only in practice, but in the underlying beliefs and attitudes that shape practice.

My own professional identity is rooted in reflection, curiosity and a strong commitment to ongoing development. Alongside my interest in teaching and leadership, I have increasingly engaged with psychology, particularly across educational and organisational domains, seeking to better understand how students learn and how teachers interpret and respond to that learning. This dual interest has led me to consider how the principles of psychology might be applied not only in the classroom, but also at the level of organisational culture. In particular, I have become interested in the role of language as a tool for shaping thinking, guiding behaviour and creating shared understanding.

The initial inspiration for this project emerged from outside the field of education. In *Unreasonable Hospitality*, Guidara (2022) described how carefully crafted phrases, or “isms”, were used within a high-performing restaurant to guide staff behaviour and maintain consistency under pressure. These short, memorable statements acted as heuristics, enabling staff to make decisions aligned with the organisation’s values in fast-paced and complex situations. This prompted me to consider whether a similar approach could be applied within a school context. If teachers were equipped with a shared set of concise, meaningful phrases, could these act as anchors, shaping professional judgement and reinforcing a culture of high expectations?

The idea of using language in this way is not new. Historically, aphorisms have been used as tools for guiding thought and behaviour. Epicurus, for example, encouraged his followers to memorise short statements in order to manage disruptive thinking and maintain philosophical clarity (Brown, 2016). In contemporary education, schools such as Michaela Community School have adopted similar approaches, using repeated phrases to reinforce expectations around behaviour and effort (Birbalsingh, 2020). More broadly, research into teacher cognition suggests that much of what teachers do in classrooms is shaped by implicit beliefs and mental shortcuts rather than deliberate, analytical decision-making (Borg, 2003). From this perspective, the use of aphorisms may offer a way of influencing these underlying cognitive processes in a subtle but potentially powerful way.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that language alone does not change behaviour. Simply introducing a set of phrases is unlikely to have a meaningful impact unless those phrases are understood, internalised and embedded within everyday practice. This aligns with wider research on effective CPD, which emphasises the importance of sustained engagement, reflection and alignment with existing systems (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). It also reflects the concept of collective teacher efficacy (CTE), identified by Hattie (2012) as one of the most significant factors influencing student outcomes. If teachers are to work collectively towards high expectations, they must share not only practices, but also a common language through which those practices are interpreted and enacted.

This study is therefore situated at the intersection of leadership, professional development and teacher cognition. It explores whether the deliberate introduction of aphorisms within a CPD programme can support the development of a shared professional language and, in turn, contribute to a culture of high expectations. The focus is not simply on whether teachers can recall or repeat

these phrases, but on whether they influence how teachers think, speak and act within the classroom and the wider school environment.

The project was conducted within my current school context, a culturally diverse international setting with a high proportion of students for whom English is an additional language. This context brings both opportunities and challenges, requiring clarity and consistency in communication while also highlighting the importance of shared understanding across linguistic and cultural differences. Within such an environment, the role of concise, accessible language becomes particularly significant.

The teaching team itself is similarly diverse, comprising staff from a range of national, professional and training backgrounds, including both early-career teachers and those with extensive experience across different educational systems. While this diversity enriches professional dialogue and brings a breadth of perspectives, it can also make it more difficult to achieve consistency in expectations, interpretation and practice.

In addition to the internal context, this study is also shaped by broader policy and accountability frameworks. Within this setting, expectations are influenced by inspection processes, performance measures and alignment with the National Curriculum for England. These frameworks place a strong emphasis on outcomes, progress and quality of teaching, often requiring schools to demonstrate consistent standards across classrooms. However, while such measures provide important benchmarks, they do not in themselves address the underlying cultural and cognitive factors that influence teacher practice. This creates a space for leadership approaches that focus on culture, language and shared meaning, rather than solely on compliance or procedural change.

The rationale for this study is therefore both practical and conceptual. Practically, it responds to a specific leadership challenge: how to create greater alignment within a divided team and foster a more consistent culture of high expectations. Conceptually, it seeks to contribute to a growing body of research exploring how language functions within professional settings and how it may be used as a tool for influencing thought and behaviour.

At the time of the study, both the school and my own professional role were approaching a further period of transition, as I prepared to take a temporary career break for maternity leave. As responsibility for leadership was to be assumed by another member of the Senior Leadership Team, this project was also shaped by a desire to support greater alignment and cohesion within the teaching team during this transition. In this sense, the study is situated not only within a period of organisational change, but also within a moment requiring continuity, shared understanding and collective ownership of practice.

The research is guided by the following question:

Can the use of aphorisms within a school's professional development programme help to embed a culture of high expectations among teaching staff?

In addressing the research question, the study adopts an interpretivist approach, recognising that teacher perceptions, beliefs and experiences are central to understanding how such an intervention is received and enacted. Data is drawn from a combination of staff reflections, surveys and observations, allowing for a nuanced exploration of both individual and collective responses.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 TEACHER EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

The influence of teacher expectations on student outcomes has been widely explored within educational research. Early work by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) demonstrated what has become known as the Pygmalion Effect, whereby students randomly identified as having higher potential made greater academic progress, largely as a result of changes in teacher behaviour. This suggests that expectations do not simply reflect ability but actively shape it. Subsequent research indicates that teachers are more likely to provide greater challenge, feedback and support to students they perceive as capable, thereby reinforcing achievement through differential interaction (Jussim et al., 1992). Large-scale syntheses further support the significance of expectations. John Hattie (2009) identified teacher expectations as a key influence on student achievement, while Carol Dweck (2006) highlighted the role of belief systems in fostering resilience and persistence. Together, these studies suggest that expectations influence both teacher behaviour and student outcomes, shaping the level of challenge, support and opportunity present within the classroom.

However, these findings should be interpreted with caution. The Pygmalion study has been criticised for methodological limitations, including issues of sample size and generalisability (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Similarly, meta-analyses such as Hattie's risk obscuring contextual variation by aggregating diverse studies (Biesta, 2007). This raises questions about how expectations operate within specific school contexts, particularly where organisational culture and teacher interpretation may mediate their impact. While the importance of expectations is well established, less is known about how these beliefs are consistently translated into everyday classroom practice.

The tension between established findings and methodological critique highlights an important limitation within the existing literature. Much of the research on teacher expectations focuses on identifying their impact rather than examining how these expectations are operationalised and sustained in everyday classroom practice. In particular, there is limited attention given to the mechanisms through which expectations are communicated, reinforced and internalised by both teachers and students.

2.2 COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY

While individual teacher expectations are important, research increasingly highlights the significance of Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE) in influencing student outcomes. Rooted in Bandura's (1997) theory of social cognition, collective efficacy refers to a group's shared belief in its capacity to achieve desired outcomes. Hattie (2012) identified CTE as one of the most powerful influences on student achievement, suggesting that shared belief systems may be more impactful than individual teacher practices alone. Donohoo (2017) further argues that collective efficacy develops through shared experiences, collaboration and a common understanding of expectations. Together, these perspectives shift the focus from individual beliefs to the broader professional culture within which those beliefs are enacted.

This aligns with organisational research, which emphasises the role of shared assumptions and values in shaping behaviour (Schein, 2010). From this perspective, expectations are not simply held by individuals but are embedded within the collective norms of the organisation. However, while the relationship between CTE and student outcomes is well established, there is less clarity regarding the mechanisms through which this shared belief is developed and sustained. In particular, variation in teacher beliefs and practices within schools may limit the extent to which

collective efficacy is fully realised. This highlights an important area for further exploration. If collective efficacy is dependent on shared understanding and alignment, then the role of language as a mechanism for reinforcing these shared beliefs warrants greater attention.

2.3 SCHOOL CULTURE AND SHARED LANGUAGE

School culture is widely recognised as a significant factor influencing teacher practice and student outcomes. Schein (2010) defines organisational culture as a pattern of shared assumptions, values and beliefs that shape behaviour. Within schools, this culture is reflected not only in formal policies, but also in the everyday interactions and professional norms. Leadership research similarly highlights the role of leaders in shaping and reinforcing these norms (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011).

Language plays a central role in shaping this process. The way ideas are communicated and reinforced influences how individuals interpret expectations and respond to challenges (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). Research on persuasion suggests that concise and repeatable messages are more likely to influence behaviour (Cialdini, 2007), while Bandura's (1977) social learning theory highlights the importance of modelling and reinforcement in establishing norms. Similarly, Heath and Heath (2007) argue that ideas are more likely to be retained and acted upon when they are simple, memorable and consistently reinforced. Together, these perspectives suggest that language may act as a mechanism through which cultural norms are transmitted and sustained.

Organisational research further supports the importance of shared language in aligning teams. Sinek (2009) argues that clarity of purpose supports consistency in behaviour, while Connors and

Smith (2011) highlight the role of shared principles in shaping accountability. However, within schools, much of this language remains abstract, often taking the form of mission statements or policy documents that may not translate easily into daily practice.

This creates a significant gap between stated values and enacted practice within educational settings, where expectations must be translated into consistent day-to-day interactions. While mission statements and policy documents articulate intended culture, they often lack the immediacy and accessibility required to influence decision-making in practice. This raises the possibility that more concise and actionable forms of language, such as aphorisms, may provide a more effective bridge between abstract values and everyday practice.

At a deeper level, the role of language extends beyond communication to the shaping of professional cognition. This suggests that language may function not merely as a communicative tool, but as a mechanism for shaping professional cognition, influencing how teachers interpret situations, make decisions and enact expectations in real time. However, this remains an underdeveloped area within educational research.

2.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER MINDSET

Continuing professional development is widely recognised as a key mechanism for improving teacher practice. Research in cognitive science highlights the importance of aligning teaching with how learning and memory operate (Willingham, 2009), while Desimone (2009) identified core features of effective CPD, including coherence, active engagement and sustained duration. Further research emphasises that CPD must address underlying beliefs as well as instructional strategies. Timperley (2008) argued that professional learning is most effective when it challenges existing

assumptions of practice. This aligns with Dweck's (2006) work on mindset, which highlights the role of beliefs in shaping behaviour.

Within this context, the role of language becomes particularly relevant. If professional development is intended to influence how teachers think as well as what they do, then the way ideas are communicated may affect the extent to which they are internalised and applied. Repeated exposure to clear and memorable concepts may support retention and application, particularly in complex classroom environments where teachers must make rapid decisions.

Motivation theory also provides insight into this process. Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory suggests that individuals are more likely to engage with new practices when they perceive them as both achievable and valuable. Similarly, Rotter's (1966) concept of locus of control highlights the importance of perceived agency in influencing behaviour. Together, these perspectives suggest that clarity and accessibility of key ideas may influence both understanding and motivation.

This highlights a limitation within traditional models of professional development. While teachers may engage with new ideas during CPD sessions, these ideas may not be consistently retained or applied without mechanisms to support recall and reinforcement. The complexity of educational theory, combined with the cognitive demands of classroom practice, may limit the extent to which key concepts are embedded over time. This raises a fundamental challenge for professional development: even when teachers engage with complex theoretical ideas, these are unlikely to influence practice unless they are translated into forms that are cognitively accessible and easily retrievable in the moment.

2.5 LEADERSHIP AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Leadership plays a central role in sharing school culture and influencing teacher expectations. Transformational leadership theory emphasises the importance of vision, inspiration and shared purpose in driving organisational change (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), while instructional leadership focuses on aligning professional development and classroom practice with organisational goals. Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) highlight the impact of leadership practices that focus directly on teaching and learning, reinforcing the importance of leadership approaches that prioritise classroom practice.

A key challenge for leaders is ensuring consistency. While policies and vision statements may articulate expectations, these do not always translate into consistent practice across classrooms. This variability may undermine efforts to establish a coherent culture of high expectations. From a leadership perspective, this suggests that cultural change requires not only the articulation of vision but also the provision of practical tools that support its enactment. However, these models often assume that shared vision alone is sufficient to drive consistency, overlooking the practical challenge of how such vision is enacted at the level of everyday teacher decision-making. Leaders must consider not only what is communicated, but how it is reinforced and enacted over time. This includes the potential role of language in shaping shared understanding and guiding professional behaviour.

Language may provide a potential mechanism for addressing this challenge. Shared phrases or principles can act as reference points, supporting consistency in professional dialogue and decision-making. However, while concepts such as shared vision and organisational narratives are well established, there is limited empirical research exploring the use of concise, repeatable

language as a deliberate leadership tool. This suggests a potential gap between existing theories of cultural alignment and the practical mechanisms through which this alignment is achieved.

2.6 RESEARCH GAP

The existing literature clearly demonstrates that teacher expectations, collective efficacy and school culture influence student outcomes. There is also a well-established body of research highlighting the importance of professional development and leadership in shaping these factors. However, while these areas are well documented, there is limited research examining how language itself may act as a mechanism for cultural change. In particular, the role of structured, concise and repeatable language, such as aphorisms, in shaping professional thinking and practice remains underexplored. While research acknowledges the influence of language on behaviour, there is limited exploration of how deliberately structured linguistic tools can be used to shape professional thinking and align practice at scale.

This study therefore seeks to address this gap by exploring whether the deliberate use of aphorisms within professional development can influence teachers' perceptions, professional dialogue and understanding of expectations. In doing so, it aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how leadership can utilise language as a tool for shaping school culture.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES

This study aimed to examine whether the deliberate introduction of aphorisms within professional development could contribute to strengthening a culture of high expectations among teaching staff. The research explored whether concise, memorable statements embedded within school discourse could influence teachers' perception, professional mindset and classroom practice.

The central research question was:

Can the use of aphorisms within a school's professional development programme help to embed a culture of high expectations among teaching staff?

Given the inclusion of quantitative survey data aimed at identifying shifts in teacher perceptions, both null and alternative hypotheses were formulated:

Null hypothesis (H_0):

The introduction of aphorisms within professional development has no measurable impact on teachers' perceptions of expectations or professional culture.

Alternative hypothesis (H_1):

The introduction of aphorisms within professional development positively influences teachers' perceptions of expectations and contributes to the development of a culture of high expectations.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm, informed by a constructivist epistemological stance. It assumes that teachers' understanding of expectations and professional practice is not fixed or objective, but socially and contextually constructed through experience and interaction with the school environment. From this perspective, professional knowledge is actively interpreted and applied by teachers, rather than passively acquired. This positioning aligns with the study's focus on exploring how shared language, in the form of aphorisms, is understood, internalised and enacted in practice, rather than seeking to establish causal relationships.

The study adopted an action research approach within a single school context. Action research was appropriate as it enables practitioners to investigate and improve their own professional practice while generating knowledge that is directly relevant to their organisational context (McNiff & Whitehead, 2020). This approach also reflects the iterative nature of professional learning, allowing for ongoing reflection and adaptation throughout the research process. In this sense, the methodology supported not only the investigation of practice but also its ongoing development within a real-world setting.

A mixed-methods case study design was employed, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative responses and observational evidence. This approach enabled the identification of patterns in teacher perceptions while also exploring how aphorisms were interpreted and applied in practice. Quantitative data provided an overview of trends across the teaching team, while qualitative responses offered deeper insight into staff experiences. The integration of multiple data sources supported triangulation, strengthening the credibility of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design was particularly appropriate given the study's focus on both perception and

practice. Cultural change is complex and cannot be fully captured through numerical measures alone; therefore, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data supported a more comprehensive understanding of how aphorisms functioned within the professional environment.

Alternative research designs were considered during the planning phase. A purely qualitative approach may have provided insight into teacher perspectives but would have limited the ability to identify broader patterns across staff. A purely quantitative approach would have enabled comparison of responses but would not have captured how teachers interpreted or enacted aphorisms. The mixed-methods approach was therefore most appropriate, as it enabled both breadth and depth of analysis while remaining aligned with the study's aims.

This methodological approach was therefore well aligned with the research question. By combining quantitative measures of teacher perception with qualitative insight into interpretation and practice, the study was able to explore not only whether aphorisms influenced expectations, but also how and why this influence was experienced within the school context.

3.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

The research was conducted within a British international school in Spain, with a population that consisted of approximately 20 members of the teaching team. Eleven staff members voluntarily participated in the study, with nine providing complete and useable data. Participants represented a range of phases and subject areas, including Early Years, Primary, Secondary and Sixth Form.

Participation was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously to encourage honest reflection. While this supported ethical integrity, it may have contributed to a low response rate and potential self-selection bias. As a single-school study with a small sample, findings are

inherently context-specific and are not intended to be generalisable. However, this aligns with the principles of action research, which prioritise insight that is directly relevant to the context in which the research is conducted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data were collected using a combination of questionnaires and observational evidence.

3.4.1 QUESTIONNAIRE

An anonymous questionnaire (Appendix A) was used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from participants. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items designed to measure teachers' perceptions of expectations, professional culture and the influence of shared language, alongside open-ended questions that allowed participants to elaborate on their own experiences. Questionnaires were selected due to their efficiency and ability to collect comparable data across participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). While questionnaires can result in superficial responses or misinterpretation, these limitations were mitigated through careful design and the use of multiple data sources.

The Likert-scale items were designed to measure participants' levels of agreement with statements relating to expectations, professional culture and classroom practice. These items enabled comparison across participants and supported the identification of changes in perception following the intervention. Open-ended questions provided participants with the opportunity to explain their responses and to capture aspects of experience that could not be fully represented through fixed-response items.

The questionnaire was administered electronically following the intervention, ensuring consistency in delivery and response format. Questions were designed to be clear and accessible, reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation and supporting reliability across responses. This approach also enabled efficient data collection across participants working in different phases across the school.

3.4.2 OBSERVATIONAL EVIDENCE

Observational evidence from learning walks, lesson observations and professional discussions was used to provide contextual insight into how aphorisms were reflected in practice. Observations focused on whether aphoristic language appeared within classroom interactions and professional dialogue. Although not collected using a formalised instrument, as some observations arose spontaneously during routine practice, they provided an additional perspective on the extent to which reported beliefs aligned with observable behaviour. This supported triangulation by allowing comparison across data sources.

Due to the potentially identifiable nature of observational data, detailed records were not included in the appendix in order to protect staff anonymity.

3.5 RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

As Head of School, I occupied an insider position within the research context. This provided valuable contextual understanding but also introduced potential risks relating to power dynamics and bias. To address this, participation was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously.

A reflexive approach was adopted throughout the research process, recognising the potential influence of the researcher's role on both data collection and interpretation (Bourke, 2014). While insider research offers contextual depth, it requires careful management of bias and power relationships (Holmes, 2020). Acknowledging this positionality was essential in ensuring transparency and strengthening the ethical integrity of the research.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data from Likert-scale items were analysed using descriptive statistics. Responses were coded numerically, and frequencies and percentage distributions were calculated to identify patterns across participants. These data were presented using tables and charts to support interpretation.

Qualitative responses were analysed using a reflexive thematic approach. Responses were reviewed to identify recurring ideas, which were then grouped into broader themes relating to expectations, professional language and cultural influence. The process of coding and theme development was iterative, with themes refined to ensure alignment with the data. While a reflexive thematic approach is inherently subjective, this process ensured that themes remained grounded in participants' responses rather than being shaped by researcher assumptions.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis enabled triangulation, allowing patterns in numerical data to be interpreted in relation staff perspectives. Where appropriate, findings were considered alongside responses to a pre-existing internal survey collected during an earlier INSET session (Appendix B). As this data was not originally designed for research purposes, it was used cautiously to provide contextual insight rather than direct comparison.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study adhered to the relevant institutional ethical guidelines and received formal approval before data collection began. Informed consent was obtained from participants. Participation was voluntary, with no incentives offered and no adverse consequences for non-participation, ensuring that consent was given freely.

Anonymity was maintained through the use of anonymous questionnaires and removal of identifying details. Data were stored securely and reported in a way that prevented identification of individuals. Baseline data from a prior INSET session were used as secondary data with school-level consent. As individual consent for this baseline data use in this study was not originally obtained, these data were fully anonymised and used only to provide contextual insight.

3.8 METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a single-school context with a small sample size, limiting generalisability. Self-reported data introduced the risk of response bias, including social desirability bias, particularly given the researcher's leadership role. The short duration of the study also restricted the ability to assess long-term impact on student outcomes. Discrepancies were observed between self-reported responses and observational evidence, suggesting that reported beliefs may not always align with enacted practice. Inconsistencies within survey responses also indicate variation in how participants interpreted questions. An additional limitation relates to the absence of fully aligned baseline measure specifically focused on shared language. While secondary data provided useful contextual insight,

differences in design and focus between pre- and post-intervention instruments reduce the reliability of direct comparison.

Findings should therefore be interpreted with appropriate caution, particularly in relation to generalisability and reliance on self-reported data. Despite these limitations, the methodology was appropriate for exploring how shared language and cultural artefacts influence professional thinking within a specific school context.

CHAPTER 4 - PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The project was implemented over a period of just over one academic term through the structured introduction of four aphorisms designed to promote a shared language of high expectations within the teaching team. These aphorisms were introduced sequentially at approximately monthly intervals: 'Believe', '...yet!', 'Don't add drama' and 'Excellence lives in the details'. The staged implementation was designed to support the gradual embedding of each concept within professional discourse before introducing the next. The sequencing of the aphorisms was intentional, with earlier concepts focused on belief and mindset, followed by those addressing professional conduct and consistency. This progression was designed to move from underlying principles to more visible aspects of practice, supporting a coherent approach to cultural development.

The intervention was delivered through a combination of staff meetings, CPD sessions and whole-school briefings. The mode of delivery was adapted depending on the nature of each aphorism and the context in which it was introduced, reflecting a flexible leadership style. Department-specific meetings were often used, in which core messages were shared across the organisation, while allowing for contextualised explanations and examples tailored to each department.

Each aphorism was introduced through either a CPD session or a whole-school briefing, depending on its focus, with each aligned to a specific aspect of professional practice. The first aphorism, 'Believe', was introduced through a CPD session focused on the role of teacher expectations in shaping student outcomes, establishing a shared understanding of belief in student potential and its influence on classroom practice. This was followed by '...yet!', introduced through a further

CPD session centred on growth mindset and the development of student resilience, focusing on how language can be used to reframe challenges and support persistence.

The third aphorism, 'Don't add drama', was introduced during a whole-school staff briefing in response to emerging tensions within the staff team. It was subsequently reinforced in departmental meetings to support a shared approach to managing professional interactions and maintaining a calm, solution-focused culture. The final aphorism, 'Excellence lives in the details', was introduced through a CPD session focused on consistency, routines and attention to detail. This emphasised the importance of small, everyday actions in contributing to a wider culture of high expectations and was selected in response to ongoing inconsistencies in routines across staff and students alike relating to punctuality, dress and preparedness for teaching and learning.

Across all sessions, supporting materials were provided to staff, including handouts (Appendix C) and access to relevant resources via the school's digital platform and, in some cases, related texts made available in the staff library. This provided ongoing opportunities for key messages to be revisited and reinforced over time.

In addition to formal CPD, the implementation relied on ongoing reinforcement through leadership practice. Members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) modelled the use of aphorisms in daily interactions with both staff and students to support their integration into professional discourse. The implementation was supported through reference to the aphorisms in routine leadership processes, including staff meetings and informal professional dialogue. This ensured that the language extended beyond initial CPD sessions into ongoing communication and decision-making. Opportunities were available for staff to engage with the aphorisms in context, including their use in classroom displays and interactions with students.

The implementation also included opportunities for data collection to support the research process. During an earlier INSET session, staff completed a paper-based questionnaire (Appendix B) exploring perceptions of expectations, professional culture and communication strategies. While responses were not formally anonymised at the point of collection, this secondary data was later anonymised and provided a baseline for understanding staff perceptions prior to the intervention. Following the introduction of the final aphorism, a questionnaire was distributed electronically via the school's digital platform (Appendix A). This survey was fully anonymous and designed to capture any changes in staff perceptions following the implementation of the intervention.

Alongside questionnaire data, observational evidence was gathered throughout the implementation period, including learning walks, formal lesson observations and general observations of professional interactions. These focused on identifying whether and how aphorisms were referenced or applied within classroom practice and professional dialogue, including verbal references, written feedback and visual displays.

Throughout the implementation, leadership approaches were adapted in response to context. A combination of instructional and adaptive leadership strategies was employed, with communication adjusted depending on the nature of the message. Some aphorisms required direct and immediate reinforcement, while others were developed through more reflective CPD processes. This supported the systematic introduction of the intervention, reinforcement through multiple channels and integration into both formal and informal aspects of school life.

CHAPTER 5 - RESULTS

5.1 OVERVIEW OF DATA

This section presents findings from baseline (pre-intervention) and post-intervention questionnaires, alongside observational evidence collected during the implementation period. Quantitative data are presented using descriptive statistics, primarily percentage distributions of Likert-scale responses, while qualitative responses are summarised through thematic patterns. For clarity, abbreviated questionnaire items are used in figures, with the full wording provided in Appendices A and B. Full quantitative datasets are provided in Appendices D, E and F, while Appendix G provides an overview of the qualitative themes. Selected research instruments and anonymised supporting materials may be made available upon reasonable request, subject to ethics, participant confidentiality and data-protection requirements.

Baseline data were collected from 17 respondents during an INSET session using a paper-based questionnaire (Appendix B). Of these, 11 participated in the study with nine providing complete and usable post-intervention data through the anonymous electronic questionnaire (Appendix A). The term “respondents” refers to baseline data, while “participants” refers to post-intervention responses.

5.2 BASELINE FINDINGS

Baseline data provide an overview of staff beliefs relating to intelligence, expectations and classroom practice. Quantitatively, responses in these areas showed consistently high levels of agreement, with the majority of responses falling within the ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ categories. These patterns indicate strong alignment with growth-oriented beliefs and high

expectations, alongside clear disagreement with fixed views of intelligence. The full baseline quantitative dataset is provided in Appendix D, with grouped response distributions shown in Appendix E.

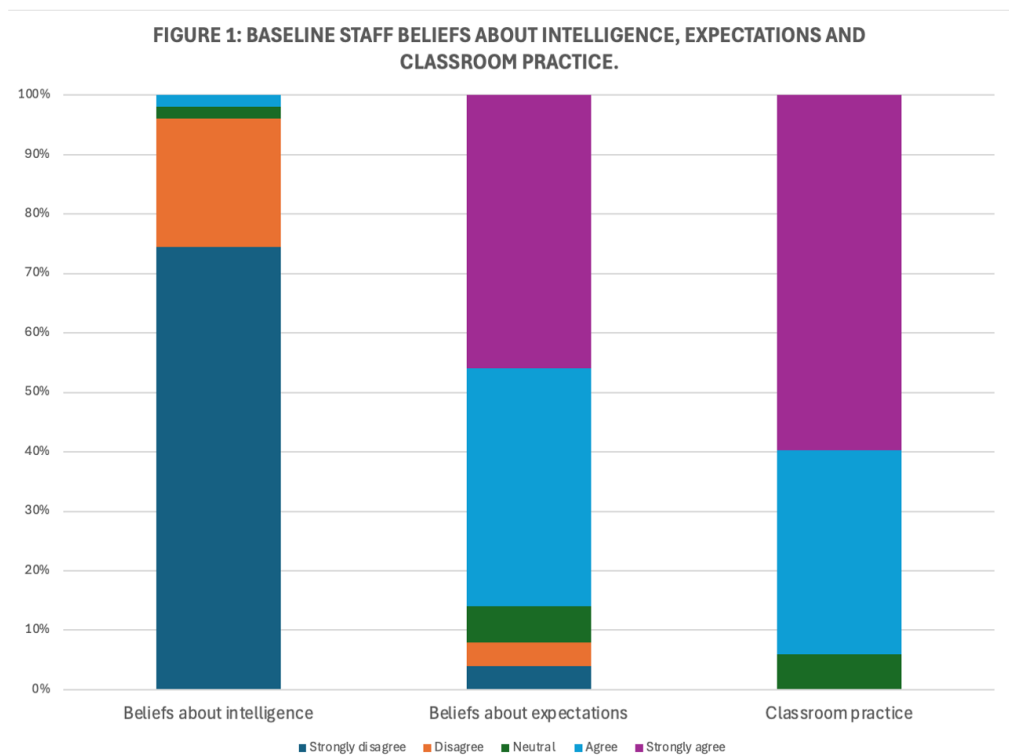


FIGURE 1 PRESENTS BASELINE RESPONSES TO LIKERT-SCALE ITEMS GROUPED INTO THREE CATEGORIES: BELIEFS ABOUT INTELLIGENCE, BELIEFS ABOUT EXPECTATIONS AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE. RESPONSES ARE SHOWN AS PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS ACROSS EACH CATEGORY.

Responses relating to classroom practice suggest that staff reported maintaining high expectations, adapting teaching strategies and providing feedback focused on effort and improvement. While the overall pattern was consistent, some variation was observed in responses relating to the application of expectations, with a small number of respondents indicating that expectations may require adjustment depending on context.

Qualitative baseline responses also reflected these patterns, with staff frequently referencing encouragement, differentiation and belief in student potential. At the same time, responses highlighted a perceived lack of consistency across staff, with several participants identifying the need for greater alignment and a more unified approach. Variation was also evident in how expectations were communicated in practice, ranging from general approaches to more specific strategies.

5.3 POST- INTERVENTION QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Post-intervention findings are presented through a series of figures illustrating staff responses to Likert-scale items relating to familiarity with aphorisms, shared language, professional practice and expectations. The full post-intervention quantitative dataset is provided in Appendix F.

Figures 2 and 3 show responses relating to familiarity with and understanding of the aphorisms introduced during the intervention.

Figure 2. Staff familiarity with aphorisms introduced during the intervention

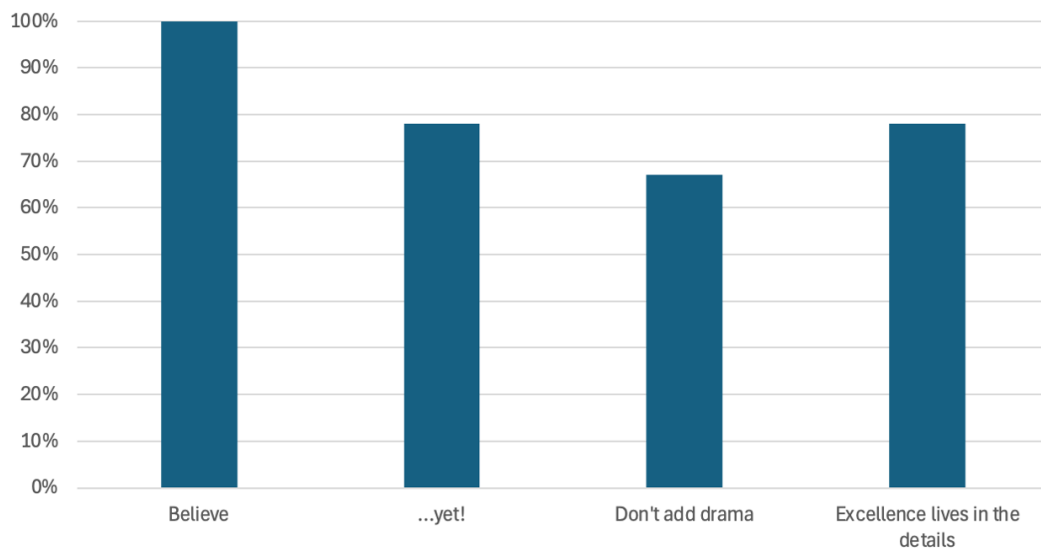


FIGURE 2 SHOWS THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES RELATING TO STAFF FAMILIARITY WITH EACH OF THE APHORISMS INTRODUCED AS PART OF THE INTERVENTION

Figure 3. Staff perceptions on the clarity of aphorisms

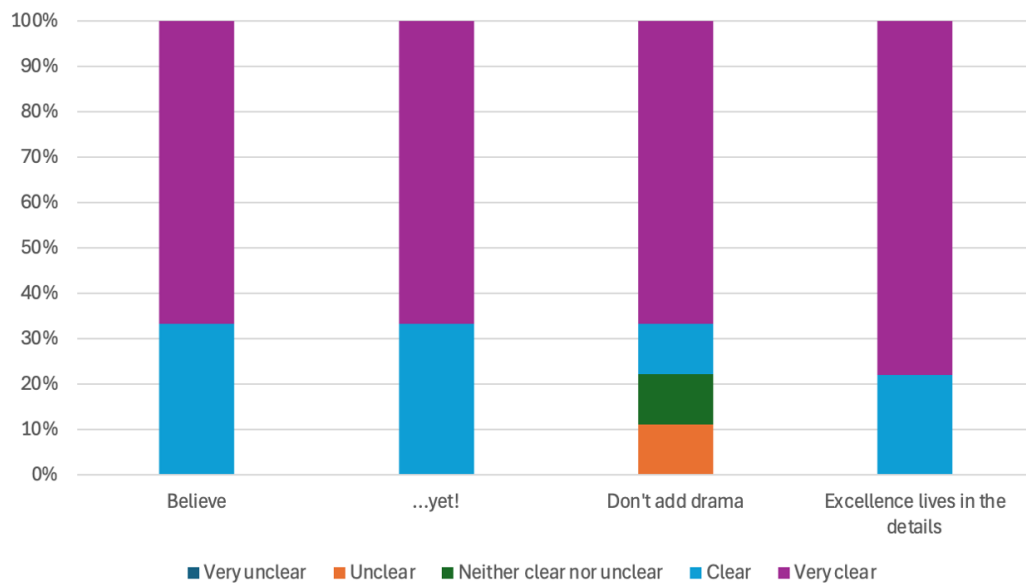


FIGURE 3 SHOWS THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES RELATING TO HOW CLEARLY STAFF REPORTED UNDERSTANDING EACH OF THE APHORISMS INTRODUCED DURING THE INTERVENTION

Across all aphorisms, the majority of participants reported familiarity and clarity of meaning, with full familiarity reported for 'Believe', while slightly lower levels were observed for '...yet!' and 'Excellence lives in the details'. The aphorism 'Don't add drama' showed comparatively lower levels of familiarity and clarity, with a small number of participants selecting neutral or unclear responses.

Figures 4 to 6 show responses relating to the influence of aphorisms and professional language.

Figure 4. Staff perceptions of the influence of professional language on practice and expectations

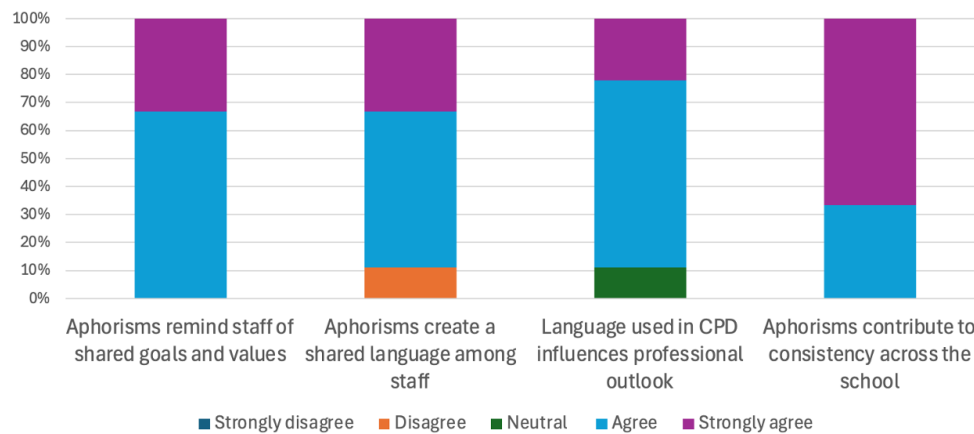


FIGURE 4 SHOWS THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO SELECTED QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS RELATING TO THE INFLUENCE OF PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE AND APHORISMS ON TEACHING PRACTICE, SHARED UNDERSTANDING AND CONSISTENCY.

Figure 5. Staff perceptions of the practical application of aphorisms in professional practice

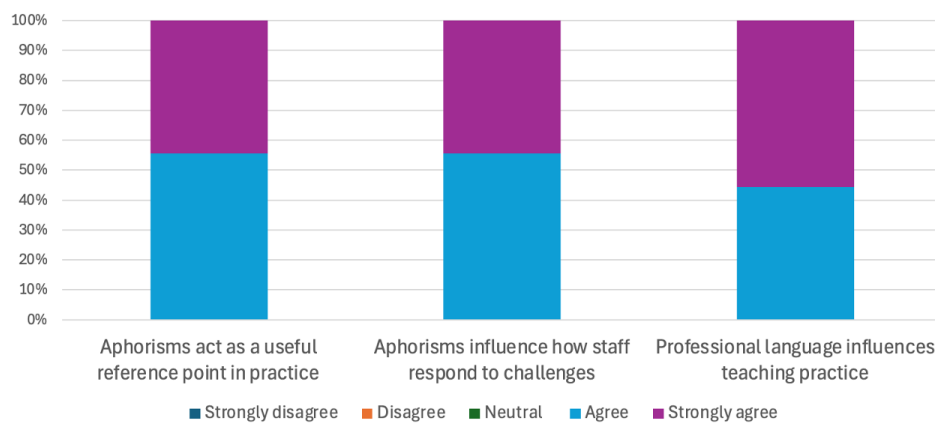


FIGURE 5 SHOWS THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS RELATING TO THE USE OF APHORISMS AS PRACTICAL TOOLS WITHIN TEACHING AND PROFESSIONAL INTERACTIONS

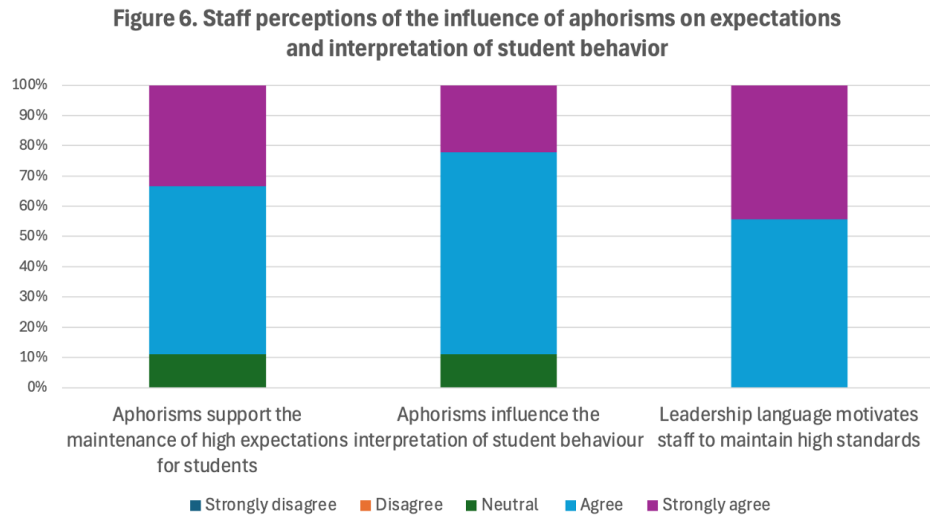


FIGURE 6 SHOWS THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS RELATING TO THE INFLUENCE OF APHORISMS ON TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS, INTERPRETATION OF BEHAVIOUR AND RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES

Across these items, responses were concentrated within the 'agree' and 'strongly agree' categories. All participants indicated agreement that aphorisms reinforce shared goals and values and contribute to consistency across the school. Similarly, all responses relating to the influence of professional language on teaching practice were within these categories. Responses relating to expectations and interpretation of student behaviour also showed a high level of agreement, with between 89% and 100% of responses recorded within the 'agree' and 'strongly agree' categories. No responses were recorded in the 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' categories.

Figures 7 and 8 present responses relating to frequency of use and perceived influence on classroom practice.

Figure 7. Frequency of aphorism use in professional thinking, decision-making and interactions

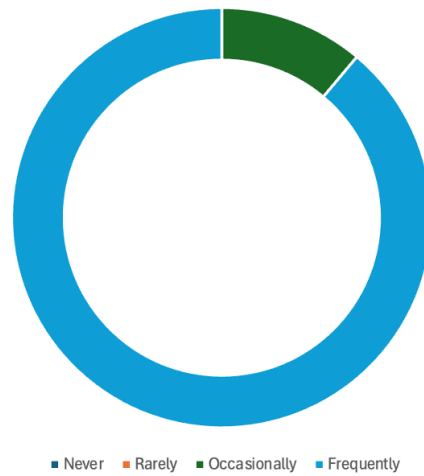


FIGURE 7 SHOWS THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES RELATING TO HOW FREQUENTLY STAFF REPORTED USING THE APHORISMS IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL THINKING, DECISION-MAKING AND INTERACTIONS

Figure 8. Perceived impact of aphorisms on classroom practice

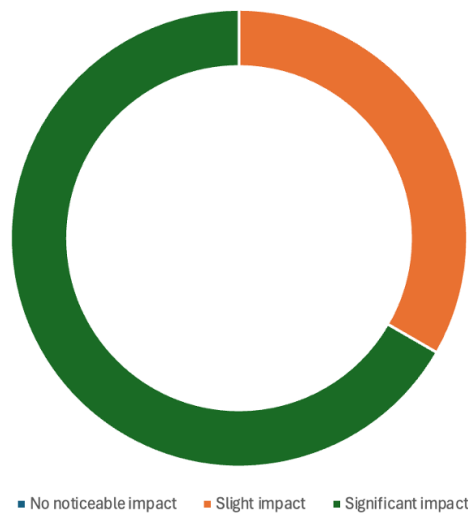


FIGURE 8 SHOWS THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES RELATING TO THE EXTENT TO WHICH STAFF REPORTED THAT APHORISMS HAD INFLUENCED THEIR CLASSROOM PRACTICE.

Most participants (89%) reported using aphorisms frequently in their professional thinking and interactions, with the remaining participants indicating occasional use. No participants reported rarely or never using aphorisms. In terms of perceived influence, 67% of participants reported that aphorisms had significantly influenced their classroom practice, while 33% reported a slight influence, with no participants reporting no influence.

5.4 POST- INTERVENTION QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Qualitative responses from the post-intervention questionnaire were analysed thematically using a reflexive thematic approach, resulting in six overarching themes, which are summarised in Appendix G.

Across responses, themes relating to shared language and cultural alignment were most frequently referenced, with participants describing how aphorisms supported consistency and a unified approach across staff. A second prominent theme focused on belief and growth-oriented thinking, with participants describing the use of aphorisms to communicate confidence in students' abilities and encourage persistence. Participants also highlighted the translation of aphorisms into classroom practice, including their use in feedback, routines and classroom dialogue.

Further responses indicated evidence of student uptake, with participants reporting that students had begun to use aphorisms in peer interactions and classroom discussions. Factors that could further support embedding were also identified, including repetition, visual displays, modelling and ongoing discussion. Alongside these themes, participants identified challenges in implementation, particularly in relation to variability in staff uptake and the need for further clarification and contextualisation of aphorisms. While these challenges were noted, they were

mentioned less frequently than the themes relating to shared language, belief and classroom application.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF THEMES
IDENTIFIED IN QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Shared language and cultural alignment	Aphorisms were described as contributing to a shared professional language, reinforcing common values, consistency and collective goals across the teaching team.
Belief, confidence and growth-oriented thinking	Responses highlighted the role of aphorisms in promoting belief in students, building confidence and supporting perseverance through a growth-oriented approach to challenge.
Translation into classroom practice	Aphorisms were used in a range of classroom contexts, including routines, feedback and dialogue, particularly in supporting students when responding to difficulty.
Student uptake and peer reinforcement	Several participants reported that students began to adopt and use aphorisms themselves, encouraging peers and contributing to shared habits and classroom culture.
Embedding through consistency and professional practice	Responses emphasised the importance of visibility, repetition, collaboration, CPD and role modelling in embedding aphorisms within everyday professional practice.
Implementation challenges and limitations	Participants identified challenges including inconsistent staff update, the need for explanation, oversimplification and the risk of aphorisms losing meaning in complex real-world contexts.

NOTE. THEMES WERE DERIVED FROM OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES USING A REFLEXIVE-THEMATIC ANALYSIS APPROACH.

5.5 OBSERVATIONAL EVIDENCE

Observational evidence was used to identify the presence and use of aphorisms in practice across classrooms and professional interactions. A summary of observational evidence is provided in Appendix H, while Appendix I presents photographic evidence of aphorisms in use.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONAL EVIDENCE.

Focus point	Frequency
Presence of aphorisms in classroom displays	III (4)
Use of aphorisms in teacher language	IIIIII (6)
Use of aphorisms in student language	III (4)
Presence of aphorisms in written feedback	(0)
Presence of aphorisms in posts on school's digital platform	IIII (5)

Displays featuring aphorisms were observed in four out of ten classrooms observed during a focused learning walk, spanning both Primary and Secondary settings. In classrooms where aphorisms were displayed, both teachers and students were observed referencing them during interactions. Students were also observed using phrases such as ‘Believe’ and ‘...yet!’ in classroom dialogue and in response to challenges, with some instances of students referring directly to classroom displays when using these terms. Variation was observed across the school, particularly between phases. More frequent reference to aphorisms were observed in Primary settings compared to Secondary classrooms. In some classrooms, there was limited or no visible reference to aphorisms, and a review of student work did not identify evidence of their use in written feedback.

Evidence from the school's digital platform indicated limited use of aphorisms in written communication, with references identified in a small number of posts and primarily in the period

immediately following their introduction. Lesson observations reflected similar variation, with greater use observed in Lower and Middle Primary compared to Secondary. The aphorisms ‘Don’t add drama’ and ‘Excellence lives in the details’ were not observed in classroom interactions, displays or written feedback during the observation period, despite instances relating to punctuality, uniform and organisation being observed.

5.6 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This section compares baseline findings and post-intervention data in order to identify patterns in staff beliefs, reported classroom practice and engagement with aphorisms. Baseline data from the INSET questionnaire (Appendices B, D and E) are considered alongside post-intervention questionnaire and observational findings (Appendices F – I).

Baseline data indicated strong growth-oriented beliefs and high expectations among staff, with 86% of responses relating to expectations recorded as ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’. Post-intervention responses similarly indicated high levels of agreement across comparable items. While baseline responses showed some variation across items, post-intervention responses were more consistently distributed within the ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ categories. This was particularly evidence in responses relating to shared language and consistency across staff, where all participants selected either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’.

In relation to classroom practice, both baseline and post-intervention quantitative data indicated high levels of reported practice. However, post-intervention responses showed a greater concentration within the ‘strongly agree’ category for items relating to the influence of professional language and the use of aphorisms as reference points. Post-intervention data also indicated high levels of familiarity and engagement with aphorisms, with most participants

reporting frequent use and all participants reporting some level of influence on classroom practice.

No areas of decreased agreement were identified between baseline and post-intervention responses.

Overall, the comparison indicates continuity in underlying beliefs alongside greater consistency in reported responses and engagement with shared language across the teaching team.

CHAPTER 6 - DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the extent to which the deliberate use of aphorisms as a shared language could influence teacher beliefs, expectations and classroom practice. The findings suggest that while aphorisms were, to some extent, understood, valued and adopted by staff, their impact was uneven and dependent on a range of contextual and leadership-related factors. Overall, the findings provide partial support for the alternative hypothesis, indicating that aphorisms can positively influence teachers' perceptions and contribute to the development of a culture of high expectations, although this impact was not consistent across all participants.

In relation to the research question, the findings indicate that aphorisms did contribute to shaping professional language and, in some cases, influenced teacher thinking and classroom practice. However, this influence was neither uniform nor consistently embedded across the school. While shared language appeared to support alignment in certain contexts, its effectiveness was contingent upon how it was introduced, reinforced and enacted within practice. This suggests that aphorisms may function as a supporting mechanism for cultural alignment, rather than as a standalone driver of change.

This also highlights the distinction between language as representation and language as enactment. While aphorisms appeared to influence how teachers articulated expectations, the extent to which this translated into consistent changes in classroom practice varied. This suggests that shared language may support alignment at the level of discourse, but it requires additional structures and reinforcement to influence behaviour. From a leadership perspective, this reinforces the importance of ensuring that initiatives extend beyond communication and are embedded within everyday practice.

6.1 APHORISMS AS CULTURAL ARTEFACTS AND LEADERSHIP TOOLS

The aphorisms introduced in this study can be understood as cultural artefacts (Schein, 2010), making abstract values visible and actionable within everyday practice. Rather than functioning as slogans, they were intended to act as cognitive heuristics – concise mental prompts that supported rapid decision-making in complex and dynamic situations (Kahneman, 2011). In this sense, they operate at the intersection of culture and cognition, bridging the gap between espoused values and enacted behaviour.

This reflects Schein's (2010) model of organisational culture, in which artefacts represent the visible manifestations of deeper underlying values and assumptions. However, the variability in uptake suggests that while artefacts can signal intended culture, they do not in themselves guarantee alignment at the level of belief. The presence of shared language did not automatically translate into consistent practice, reinforcing the idea that cultural change requires sustained reinforcement and shared interpretation rather than the introduction of symbolic tools alone.

The distinction between visible artefacts and underlying assumptions is particularly significant in educational contexts, where alignment between belief and practice is often assumed rather than evidenced. The findings suggest that while aphorisms were adopted at the level of language, this did not always correspond to consistent changes in behaviour. This reflects a broader challenge within school improvement, where initiatives may be embraced conceptually without being fully integrated into daily practice. In this sense, aphorisms may contribute to cultural signalling but require additional mechanisms to support deeper transformation.

This also raises questions about the extent to which language alone can influence underlying assumptions. While aphorisms may shape how teachers articulate expectations, shifting deeply

embedded beliefs appears to require more sustained engagement. There is therefore a risk that aphorisms become part of the visible culture of the organisation without influencing the underlying decision-making processes that shape practice. In this sense, they may function as an entry point into cultural change, but not as a mechanism for transformation in isolation.

The simplicity and memorability of aphorisms such as ‘Believe’ and ‘...yet!’ appeared to reduce cognitive load, enabling teachers to access and apply key principles more readily in real time (Willingham, 2009). This may explain why these aphorisms were both more clearly understood and more frequently used across the sample. In this sense, aphorisms can be understood as cognitive heuristics, simplifying complex pedagogical principles into accessible and memorable prompts. In classroom contexts, where decisions are made quickly and often under pressure, the use of concise, repeatable language may support more consistent responses.

However, not all aphorisms functioned equally effectively. Those that were student-facing, immediately actionably and emotionally resonant were more widely adopted. In contrast, aphorisms requiring reflection on teacher behaviour or mindset appeared less consistently embedded. This suggests that while shared language can support surface-level alignment, influencing deeper professional habits requires more sustained and reflective engagement.

This can also be understood through the lens of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006), which emphasises the importance of shared ownership in the enactment of organisational change. While the introduction of aphorisms was initially leader-driven, their effectiveness depended on the extent to which they were adopted and enacted by teachers within their own practice. Leadership influence, in this sense, was mediated through others rather than enacted solely through direction.

6.2 DEPARTMENTAL CONTEXT, EXPERIENCE AND CONDITIONS FOR ADOPTION

Analysis of post-intervention data revealed identifiable patterns in relation to both departmental context and teaching experience. Participants working in EYFS and Primary phases demonstrated greater familiarity with the aphorisms, higher levels of clarity in their understanding and more frequent reported use in practice. These participants also tended to report a greater perceived impact on classroom practice, which is supported by observational evidence. A similar trend emerged in relation to the experience, with less experienced teachers more likely to report frequent use and stronger perceived impact. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as these participants were largely situated within the EYFS and Primary contexts. It is therefore difficult to isolate the influence of experience from that of departmental culture.

These patterns may instead reflect differences in pedagogical approach. EYFS and Primary settings typically place greater emphasis on modelling, repetition and the explicit use of language, reflecting socio-cultural perspectives on learning in which language and interaction play a central role (Vygotsky, 1978). These conditions may make such environments more conducive to the integration of aphorisms into daily practice. This suggests that the effectiveness of such interventions depends not only on the clarity of the message itself, but also on the context into which they are introduced. In environments where modelling and explicit language are already embedded within practice, aphorisms may be more readily adopted. In other contexts, additional support and reinforcement may be required to achieve similar levels of uptake.

6.3 STUDENT-FOCUSED VS TEACHER-FOCUSED UPTAKE

An additional pattern emerging from the qualitative data suggests that teachers were more willing to engage with aphorisms that were perceived to directly influence student behaviour and attitudes,

rather than those requiring reflection on their own practice. When asked which aphorisms had the greatest impact, responses frequently focused on student outcomes, such as increased confidence or peer encouragement. Similarly, when describing changes in classroom practice, participants often framed their responses in terms of how students had responded, rather than changes in teacher behaviour.

This suggests that aphorisms were more readily adopted when their impact was visible, immediate and student-facing. Where teachers could observe a direct effect on student engagement or behaviour, the value of the aphorism appeared more tangible. In contrast, those requiring teachers to critically reflect on their own responses or habitual practices were less consistently embedded. This aligns with the broader challenge identified in the literature, whereby teachers' espoused beliefs do not always translate into enacted practice (Argyris & Schön, 1974). While staff may conceptually agree with principles relating to expectations or behaviour, translating these into consistent changes in professional practice requires deeper engagement and sustained support (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

6.4 ALIGNMENT, PRACTICE AND COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY

A key aim of the intervention was to contribute to the development of a shared belief system among staff, aligning expectations and responses across the school. This aligns closely with the concept of Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE) (Hattie, 2012), which emphasises the importance of shared belief in influencing student outcomes.

The findings provide partial support for this. In some contexts, aphorisms contributed to a shared language, with both teachers and students beginning to use the same phrases to frame expectations and responses. This suggests that aphorisms can support alignment at the level of discourse,

providing a common reference point for professional dialogue. However, this alignment was not consistent across the whole staff, and variation remained in the extent to which aphorisms were understood, applied and embedded within practice.

Participants who reported greater familiarity and clarity also tended to report more frequent use and greater perceived impact. This suggests that understanding, engagement and application are closely interconnected. Where aphorisms were not fully understood or internalised, their impact was correspondingly limited. This reinforces the idea that CTE is not established through agreement alone, but through consistent, aligned action. Shared language may act as a starting point, but it must be embedded within practice to have meaningful impact.

This also highlights the distinction between perceived and enacted alignment. While staff may report agreement with shared principles, this does not necessarily translate into consistent behaviour. The discrepancy between self-reported data and observational evidence suggests that alignment at the level of language may precede alignment at the level of practice. This reinforces the importance of considering multiple sources of evidence when evaluating cultural change, rather than relying solely on self-reported perceptions.

Furthermore, this finding points to the importance of collective sense-making. For shared language to contribute to collective efficacy, it must be interpreted consistently across the team. This requires opportunities for discussion, clarification and shared reflection, allowing teachers to develop a common understanding of how key ideas apply within their own contexts. Without this, there is a risk that aphorisms are interpreted differently by individuals, limiting their potential to support alignment.

Overall, the intervention can therefore be considered partially successful. While it contributed to increased consistency in language and alignment in some areas, it did not result in full coherence across the teaching team. Aphorisms appear to function as a catalyst rather than a complete solution, requiring broader systems and sustained leadership practice to achieve full alignment.

6.5 IMPLEMENTATION, TIMING AND LEADERSHIP DESIGN

One of the most significant findings relates to the way in which aphorisms were introduced. Those introduced through structured CPD sessions, supported by research, discussion and practical examples, were more clearly understood and more widely adopted. In contrast, aphorisms introduced in less focused contexts, or later in the academic year, appeared to have less impact. This highlights the importance of implementation design. Effective professional development is not defined solely by content, but by coherence, duration and opportunities for active engagement (Desimone, 2009). The findings suggest that where aphorisms were introduced with clear rationale, opportunities for discussion and practical application, they were more likely to be understood and embedded. In contrast, where these elements were less present, uptake was more limited.

The findings also point to the role of sequencing. Introducing multiple ideas in relatively quick succession may limit the extent to which each is fully understood and embedded, particularly within busy school environments where cognitive load is already high. A more sustained focus on fewer concepts may therefore support deeper integration, allowing time for reflection, discussion and application within practice. The findings also suggest that reinforcement over time is critical. Where aphorisms were revisited, referenced and modelled through leadership practice, they were more likely to become part of everyday professional discourse. In contrast, where reinforcement

was less consistent, their impact appeared to diminish. This suggests that implementation is not a one-off event, but an ongoing process requiring sustained attention and alignment with wider systems and practices within the school.

From a leadership perspective, this reinforces the importance of designing not only the message, but the conditions in which it is introduced and sustained. Timing, clarity and reinforcement are not peripheral considerations; they are central to the success of cultural change initiatives.

6.6 LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

This study highlights several important leadership insights. While the introduction of aphorisms was leader-driven, their impact depended on the extent to which they were internalised and enacted by the wider team. This reflects the significance of an architectural approach to leadership, in which leaders deliberately shape organisational culture through systems, structures and shared practices, including the use of language, rather than leaving it to develop organically (Hill et al., 2016).

However, the findings suggest that design alone is insufficient. For cultural change to be sustained, ownership must shift from the leader to the wider team. Where aphorisms remained at the level of introduction, their impact was limited. When they were adopted, adapted and embedded by teachers, they became part of the lived experience of the classroom. This highlights the importance of professional agency in sustaining change.

This also brings into focus a key leadership tension between direction and autonomy. While leaders play a critical role in establishing vision and introducing frameworks, overly prescriptive approaches may limit the extent to which teachers feel ownership over new ideas. Conversely, a

lack of clarity may result in inconsistency and fragmentation. The findings suggest that aphorisms were more effective when they provided a shared framework within which professional judgement could be exercised, rather than acting as rigid directives. This also reflects the importance of trust within professional cultures. For teachers to engage meaningfully with new ideas, they must feel able to interpret and apply them within their own contexts without fear of judgement (William, 2016). This requires leadership approaches that balance accountability with autonomy, creating an environment in which reflection and adaptation are supported.

The findings also highlight the importance of system-level alignment. For aphorisms to become embedded within practice, they must be reinforced through consistent routines, feedback mechanisms and shared expectations. Without this, they risk remaining peripheral rather than becoming integral to the school's culture. This reinforces the role of leadership in designing coherent systems that support consistency, rather than relying solely on individual interpretation or voluntary adoption.

6.7 LIMITATIONS OF FINDINGS

While the findings indicate that aphorisms can influence language, thinking and, to some extent, classroom practice, their impact was not uniformly embedded across the school. Variation between departments and individual participants suggest that the intervention did not achieve full alignment, and that contextual factors played a significant role in shaping uptake. The relatively short duration of the study may have limited the extent to which aphorisms became fully integrated into daily practice, particularly in contexts where initial engagement was lower. Cultural change is inherently gradual, and it is possible that longer-term implementation would result in greater consistency over time.

In addition, the reliance on self-reported data introduces further limitations. While participants reported high levels of agreement and perceived impact, observational evidence suggested variability in the extent to which aphorisms were consistently enacted. This discrepancy highlights the challenges associated with measuring changes in professional practice and suggests that reported perceptions may not always align with observed behaviour.

The findings also raise important questions regarding sustainability. While aphorisms appear to act as effective entry points for cultural change, their long-term impact is likely to depend on continued reinforcement and integration into wider systems of professional practice. Without this, there is a risk that initial engagement diminishes over time, particularly in contexts where competing priorities limit ongoing focus. Sustained impact therefore requires not only the initial introduction of ideas, but their deliberate and consistent embedding within the structures and routines of the school.

6.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP AND PRACTICE

Overall, the findings suggest that aphorisms can act as effective tools for shaping professional language and signalling cultural expectations, but their impact is mediated by contextual, cognitive and leadership-related factors. They appear to function most effectively when embedded within coherent systems of practice, supported by sustained reinforcement and shared understanding. This highlights the role of leadership not only in introducing ideas, but in designing the conditions through which those ideas are enacted, interpreted and sustained over time. In this sense, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how language can function as a mechanism for cultural alignment, while also highlighting the limitations of relying on symbolic tools in isolation.

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, this study suggests that the deliberate use of shared language can act as a mechanism for shaping school culture, influencing both professional thinking and classroom practice. However, its effectiveness is not inherent to the language itself, but depends on how it is embedded, reinforced and sustained over time.

In relation to the research question, the findings indicate that aphorisms can contribute to the development of a culture of high expectations by providing a shared framework through which teachers interpret and respond to classroom situations. They support alignment in professional language and, in some cases, influence teacher thinking and behaviour. However, this influence was not uniform, suggesting that while shared language can support cultural alignment, it cannot guarantee it. Its impact is mediated by contextual factors including departmental norms, teacher experience and the conditions of implementation

The study therefore highlights a distinction between language as a cultural signal and as a mechanism for change. While aphorisms can make expectations visible, their influence depends on how far they are understood, internalised and enacted. Cultural change requires alignment between belief and behaviour, supported by systems, routines and professional dialogue. The introduction of aphorisms was partially successful in developing a shared language of high expectations, but variation in understanding and use reinforces the importance of focusing not only on introduction, but on sustained embedding.

7.1 LEADERSHIP IMPLICATIONS

These findings have important implications for leadership practice. They reinforce the relevance of intentional design in cultural change. Shared language can provide a powerful tool for alignment, but only when it is introduced as part of a coherent and sustained strategy. Leaders must therefore consider not only the content of what is communicated, but the conditions under which it is introduced, including opportunities for discussion, reflection and application.

The findings also highlight the importance of reinforcement over time. Aphorisms were most effective when they were revisited, modelled and embedded within everyday professional interactions, suggesting that leadership must move beyond one-off interventions and focus on sustained implementation. At the same time, their impact depended on professional agency. While leader-driven, aphorisms were interpreted and applied by teachers within their own contexts, suggesting that effective leadership involves creating a shared framework while allowing space for professional judgement. The study also emphasises the importance of system-level alignment. For shared language to influence practice, it must be reinforced through wider structures, including feedback processes, professional dialogue and expectations for teaching and learning. Without this alignment, aphorisms risk remaining at the level of language rather than becoming embodied within practice.

Variation in engagement across the teaching team also emerged as a key consideration. Participation in the project involved just over half of staff, which may reflect differing levels of openness to change and engagement with professional development within the school context. Those who engaged more fully with the project were more likely to report meaningful use of the aphorisms in their practice, where they appeared to function as practical heuristics, supporting

decision-making and shared understanding with students. In contrast, more limited engagement was associated with lower levels of impact. While not unexpected, this highlights a challenge in cultural change, where initiatives are most readily adopted by those already inclined towards reflection and development. Aphorisms alone are therefore unlikely to challenge entrenched beliefs, without sustained exposure, modelling and professional dialogue.

Furthermore, variation across departments suggests that cultural initiatives are not interpreted uniformly, and that existing practices shape how new ideas are received. This reinforces the importance of adaptive leadership, where approaches are responsive to context rather than applied uniformly. Leadership modelling also played a critical role, signalling what is values within the organisation and reinforcing the connection between language and practice. Finally, the findings highlight the importance of monitoring and revisiting initiatives over time, recognising that cultural change is not a linear process and requires ongoing refinement.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made for implementation within the school context. Aphorisms should be more explicitly integrated into professional development programmes, with structured CPD sessions that provide a clear rationale, practical examples and opportunities for discussion. This will support deeper understanding and consistent application. Additionally, greater emphasis should be placed on sustained reinforcement. Aphorisms should be consistently referenced within lesson observations, feedback, staff meetings and professional dialogue, ensuring they remain visible and relevant over time. This visibility could be strengthened through the physical environment, including displays in classrooms and shared spaces, which may act as constant prompts and reinforce familiarity. Over time, such exposure may support the

normalisation of aphorisms within everyday discourse, although this alone is unlikely to ensure depth of understanding without accompanying professional dialogue.

Opportunities for collaborative reflection should also be embedded, including structured discussions, peer observations and departmental meetings focused on interpretation and application. Consideration should also be given to the sequencing and pacing of implementation, with fewer aphorisms introduced over a longer period of time to allow for deeper engagement. Furthermore, greater alignment with existing systems and routines is also important. Aphorisms should be reflected in expectations for teaching, behaviour and professional conduct, with clear examples of how they can be enacted in classroom practice. This alignment reinforces their relevance across different aspects of school life and supports consistency in practice.

Consideration should also be given to how aphorisms are introduced to students. Where students began to adopt the same language, this appeared to reinforce its use within the classroom, creating a shared understanding between teachers and leaders. This suggests extending the use of aphorisms beyond staff to include students may strengthen their impact and support alignment across the wider school community. In this study, the introduction of aphorisms to students was largely mediated through teachers, which may have contributed to variation in how they were communicated and understood. A more direct and consistent introduction at whole-school level may support greater coherence, reducing variation in interpretation and supporting shared ownership of language.

Finally, it may be beneficial to establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation, such as periodic staff surveys, focus groups or structured reflection activities, allowing leaders to monitor how aphorisms are being used and to identify areas where further support may be required. This could

be further strengthened by incorporating student voice, for example through surveys or discussions, providing insight into how aphorisms are understood and experienced from the learner perspective. Such approaches would ensure that the initiative remains responsive and continues to evolve over time.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WIDER EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Beyond the immediate school context, this study offers broader insights for educational leadership. Shared language can act as a valuable tool for cultural alignment, particularly in complex environments where teachers must make rapid decisions. The use of concise, memorable language may support consistency in interpretation and response when reinforced through collective use.

However, the study also highlights the limitations of relying on language alone. Cultural change requires alignment between belief, language and practice, supported by systems and structures that reinforce shared expectations. Approaches focusing solely on messaging or slogans are unlikely to produce sustained impact without corresponding changes in professional practice and organisational systems. The study therefore contributes to a growing body of literature emphasising the importance of coherence in school improvement, highlighting the need for alignment between leadership, professional development and classroom practice.

7.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

This study also highlights several areas for further research. One of the key limitations is its relatively short duration. Cultural change is inherently gradual, and the time frame of the project may not have been sufficient to capture the full extent of this impact. A longitudinal study conducted over a longer period of time would provide greater insight into how aphorisms are

embedded within practice and whether their influence is sustained over time. Such research could examine how initial engagement develops, whether variation across departments decreases and the extent to which shared language becomes normalised within professional discourse.

A longer-term study would also allow for a more detailed exploration of the relationship between language and behaviour over time, examining whether changes in professional discourse are followed by measurable changes in classroom practice and student outcomes. Further research could also explore the relationship between shared language and student outcomes more directly, as this study focused primarily on teacher perceptions and professional practice. In addition, future studies could investigate how aphorisms are interpreted and applied across different educational contexts, including schools with varying structures, cultures and leadership approaches, helping to identify the conditions under which such interventions are more effective.

It may also be valuable to explore the extent to which shared language influences teacher attitudes towards professional development and critical reflection, particularly in relation to openness to change and engagement with ongoing learning. Further research could examine how aphorisms shape broader aspects of professional culture, including collaboration, feedback and teacher identity, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how language functions within educational settings and its potential role in supporting sustained improvement.

7.5 PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION

Ultimately, this study suggests that while shared language can act as a powerful tool for shaping school culture, it is not sufficient in isolation. Its effectiveness depends on how it is introduced, interpreted and sustained within practice. Through this research, I have come to recognise that

leadership plays a critical role – not only in introducing ideas, but in designing the conditions through which those ideas are embedded and enacted over time.

In reflecting on the central question of this study – whether the use of aphorisms within a school's professional development programme can help to embed a culture of high expectations – the findings suggest that they can play a meaningful role. When engaged with, aphorisms appear to function as heuristics, supporting both teacher decision-making and shared expectations within the classroom. However, their impact is influenced by staff engagement, reinforcing the importance of a broader culture of reflection and professional growth.

From a professional perspective, I continue to see value in the use of aphorisms as part of a wider leadership approach. This research has strengthened my understanding of how they can be used as practical tools rather than slogans. As a result, I intend to continue refining and embedding their use, while placing greater emphasis on the conditions that support meaningful engagement and sustained impact. This will increase visibility within the school environment, alongside continued use within professional dialogue. Although this project has formally concluded, I will continue to monitor and evaluate their impact over time, recognising that cultural change requires ongoing attention rather than finite intervention.

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APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A – POST-INTERVENTION STAFF SURVEY

An anonymous online survey distributed to all participants following the implementation of the intervention. The survey included Likert-scale and open-ended questions designed to capture participants' understanding, use and perceived impact of the aphorisms.

Study on the impact of the use of aphorisms on school culture

Thank you for taking part in this short anonymous questionnaire, which forms part of a school-based action research project exploring how the use of aphorisms (short, memorable statements) might help embed a culture of belief and high expectations among teaching staff.

Participation is voluntary. All responses are anonymous and will be used for research purposes only. Completing the survey indicates your consent to participate. You may exit the form at any time before submission.

When you submit this form, it will not automatically collect your details like name and email address unless you provide it yourself.

1. I confirm that I have read the information above and consent to take part in this anonymous survey.



☐ I confirm

Next

Background



The following questions are designed to provide general background information to support data analysis. No identifying details are requested, and all responses will remain completely anonymous. The information collected in this section will be used only to help identify patterns and trends across the teaching team, not to link responses to any individual. Please answer honestly and select the option that best reflects your experience.

2. How many years have you worked in education?

- ☐ Less than 2 years
- ☐ 2-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16 + years

3. What Stages have you taught most often?

- ☐ Early Years Foundation Stage/Lower Primary
- ☐ Middle/Upper Primary
- ☐ Lower Secondary
- ☐ Upper Secondary/Advanced Level
- ☐ Whole School/Other

Back

Next

Study on the impact of the use of aphorisms on school culture

Our aphorisms



4. Which of the following aphorisms are you familiar with?

- ☐ Believe
- ☐ ...yet
- ☐ Don't add drama
- ☐ Excellence lives in the details

5. How would you describe your understanding of these aphorisms?

	Very unclear	Unclear	Neither clear nor unclear	Clear	Very clear
Believe	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...yet	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Don't add drama	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Excellence lives in the details	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. In your view, what is the purpose of introducing these phrases within the school?



Enter your answer

7. Have you used any of these aphorisms in your thinking, decision-making, or interactions 

☐ Frequently

☐ Occasionally

☐ Rarely

☐ Never

8. If yes, can you give an example of when or how you have used one? 

Enter your answer

Back

Next

Study on the impact of the use of aphorisms on school culture

Professional Perceptions and School Culture



The following statements relate to your experiences of professional culture, communication, and the use of aphorisms within the school. Your honest responses are valued and will help identify overall patterns and areas for development within our professional culture. There are no right or wrong answers, and all responses are anonymous. Individual answers will not be identifiable in any reports or discussions - only aggregated data will be used for analysis.

9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.



	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str
The professional language we use influences our daily practice.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Aphorisms or short statements help remind me of shared goals and values.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The use of positive language during CPD has influenced my outlook on teaching and learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Aphorisms help create a shared language among staff.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
These phrases act as useful reference points in day-to-day situations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The language used by leaders motivates me to maintain high standards.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
These aphorisms influence how I interpret student behaviour.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
These phrases encourage me to maintain high expectations for students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
They influence how I respond to challenges in the classroom.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
These phrases contribute to greater consistency in staff responses and expectations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Back

Next

Study on the impact of the use of aphorisms on school culture

Reflections and Professional Insight



The following questions invite you to share your personal reflections on the use of aphorisms and the wider culture of belief and high expectations within the school. Please respond as openly and honestly as you wish - there are no right or wrong answers. Your feedback will provide valuable context and depth to the survey results and will help identify ways to strengthen our shared professional culture. All responses are anonymous, and individual comments will not be attributed to any person in reporting or discussion.

10. Have these aphorisms influenced your classroom practice?



- ☐ Yes, significantly
- ☐ Yes, slightly
- ☐ No noticeable impact

11. If yes, in what ways? 

Enter your answer

12. Can you recall an example of how one of these statements affected your response to a challenge or decision?



Enter your answer

13. Which aphorism has had the greatest impact on you, and why?



Enter your answer

14. In your view, how do the school's aphorisms or shared statements influence staff attitudes and behaviours?



Enter your answer

15. Are there any challenges or limitations to using aphorisms in this way?



Enter your answer

16. What would help embed these ideas more effectively in practice?



Enter your answer

17. Any other comments about the use of language, communication, or professional culture in schools?



Enter your answer

Back

Submit



Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will remain anonymous and will help inform future professional development and leadership practice within the school.

[Submit another response](#)

APPENDIX B – BASELINE INSET STAFF SURVEY

Paper-based questionnaire completed by members of the teaching team during an INSET session prior to the intervention. The data were subsequently used as secondary baseline data for this study, with school-level consent. The survey included Likert-scale and open-ended questions exploring beliefs relating to intelligence, expectations and classroom practice.

INSET 25-26

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Intelligence is something about students that cannot be changed very much.					
No matter how much ability students have, they can always change it quite a bit.					
Students have a certain amount of talent, and they can't really do much to change it.					
With the right teaching and effort, all students can improve significantly.					
When a student struggles, I believe it shows they are not naturally talented.					
My expectations of students have a strong impact on their progress.					
Students tend to rise to the level of expectation set for them.					
High expectations only help the most able students.					
If I set the bar too high, some students will disengage completely.					
Believing in students' potential can influence their actual performance.					
I communicate high expectations to <i>all</i> my students, regardless of their current attainment.					
I adapt my teaching strategies to ensure that struggling students can still reach ambitious goals.					

I give feedback that emphasises effort and strategies, not just results.					
I sometimes lower my expectations for certain students because I think they won't achieve otherwise.					
I provide opportunities for students to reflect on how they can grow and improve over time.					

Describe a time when your expectations (positive or negative) had a noticeable effect on a student's learning or motivation.

What strategies do you use to communicate high expectations while still supporting students with different needs?

What support would help you strengthen a growth mindset culture in your classroom?

APPENDIX C – EXAMPLE CPD HANDOUT

An example of a CPD handout used during CPD sessions as part of the intervention. These handouts were typically accompanied by supporting materials, including excerpts from relevant books and journal articles, links to videos or external resources and a digital summary shared via the school's digital platform.

Excellence Lives in the Details

This session draws on key research including the Pygmalion Effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson), Collective Teacher Efficacy (Hattie), Michaela's 'sweat the small stuff' philosophy (Birbalsingh), cognitive load theory (Willingham), habit formation (James Clear), scripted routines (Heath brothers), and Will Guidara's belief that 'excellence lives in the details'.

The Core Idea

- Excellence is not created by big, dramatic moments but by the small routines we perform every day.
- Uniform, punctuality, equipment, transitions and language expectations are not 'add-ons' - they are the foundation of a strong school culture.

The Pygmalion Effect

- High expectations communicated through small actions raise achievement.
- The reverse is also true: ignoring lateness, incorrect uniform or missing materials signals lower expectations.
- Message: If we expect excellence, we get excellence. If we expect less, we get less.

Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE)

- CTE is the strongest predictor of student achievement.
- It is built when ALL staff act consistently in the small things.
- Consistency in routines = consistency in belief.

'Sweat the Small Stuff'

- Michaela Community School demonstrates how high expectations + consistent routines = remarkable outcomes.
- 'We sweat the small stuff because the small stuff becomes the big stuff.'

Scripting the Critical Moves

- People don't resist change - they resist ambiguity.
- Clear routines remove uncertainty for students and staff.
- 'Scripted' routines make the right behaviour the easy behaviour.

Cognitive Load

- Struggling learners have less working-memory capacity.
- Predictability reduces cognitive load and protects learning.
- Routine is academic support.

Atomic Habits

- Small habits lead to identity change.
- Consistent routines help students internalise: 'I am the kind of person who is ready to learn.'

Excellence Lives in the Details

- Excellence comes from attention to detail, consistency and care.
- In schools, excellence is built through calm corridors, punctuality, uniform standards, equipment readiness and predictable routines.

Key Takeaways

- Consistency is kindness.
- Routines protect learning.
- Details build culture.
- Culture shapes identity.
- Identity drives behaviour.
- Every small action is a message about belief.

APPENDIX D – PRE-INTERVENTION QUANTITATIVE SURVEY DATA

Raw quantitative data collected from the baseline INSET survey, presented as individual Likert-scale responses for each statement. Responses are organised by question group (Statements 1-15) and recorded using a five-point scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’.

These data were used to generate descriptive statistics presented in the baseline findings section.

EXTENT OF AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS 1-5					
Id	Intelligence is something about students that cannot be changed very much	No matter how much ability students have, they can always change quite a bit	Students have a certain amount of talent, and they can't really do much to change it	With the right teaching and effort, all students can improve significantly	When a student struggles, I believe it shows they are not naturally talented.
Respondent 1	DISGAREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 2	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 3	DISGAREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 4	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 5	DISGAREE	AGREE	DISGAREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 6	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 7	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 8	STRONGLY DISAGREE	N/A	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 9	STRONGLY DISAGREE	N/A	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 10	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 11	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE
Respondent 12	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 13	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 14	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 15	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 16	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE
Respondent 17	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE
DISGAREE
NEUTRAL
AGREE
STRONGLY AGREE

EXTENT OF AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS 6-10					
Id	My expectations of students have a strong impact on their progress.	Students tend to rise to the level of expectation set to them.	High expectations only help the most able students.	If I set the bar too high, some students will disengage completely.	Believing in students' potential can influence their actual performance.
Respondent 1	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 2	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 3	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AGREE	AGREE
Respondent 4	STRONGLY AGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 5	AGREE	AGREE	DISGAREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 6	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 7	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 8	DISGAREE	AGREE	DISGAREE	AGREE	AGREE
Respondent 9	AGREE	N/A	DISGAREE	N/A	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Respondent 10	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 11	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISGAREE	AGREE
Respondent 12	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISGAREE	AGREE
Respondent 13	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 14	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 15	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISGAREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 16	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE
Respondent 17	DISGAREE	NEUTRAL	DISGAREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE
DISGAREE
NEUTRAL
AGREE
STRONGLY AGREE

EXTENT OF AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS 11-15					
Id	I communicate high expectations to all my students, regardless of their current attainment.	I adapt my teaching strategies to ensure that struggling students can still reach ambitious goals.	I give feedback that emphasises effort and strategies, not just results.	I sometimes lower my expectations for certain students because I think they won't achieve otherwise.	I provide opportunities for students to reflect on how they can grow and improve over time.
Respondent 1	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 2	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	AGREE
Respondent 3	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE	AGREE
Respondent 4	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
Respondent 5	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE
Respondent 6	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 7	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 8	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	N/A	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 9	N/A	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 10	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 11	STRONGLY AGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE	DISGAREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 12	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 13	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 14	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 15	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Respondent 16	AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	AGREE
Respondent 17	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	STRONGLY AGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE
DISGAREE
NEUTRAL
AGREE
STRONGLY AGREE

APPENDIX E – BASELINE GROUPED RESPONSES AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS

Grouped quantitative data derived from the baseline INSET survey, presenting aggregated response patterns across key categories: beliefs about intelligence, beliefs about expectations and classroom practice. Responses are shown as percentage distributions across the Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). These data were used to support the descriptive statistical analysis and identify overall trends in staff beliefs prior to the intervention.

Beliefs about expectations					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My expectations of students have a strong impact on their progress	0	2	1	5	9
Students tend to rise to the level of expectation set to them	1	0	2	9	4
Believing in students' potential can influence their actual performance	1	0	0	6	10

Beliefs about intelligence					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Intelligence is something about students that cannot be changed very much	11	5	1	0	0
Students have a certain amount of talent, and they can't really do much to change it	12	4		1	0
When a student struggles, I believe it shows they are not naturally talented.	15	2	0	0	0

Classroom practice					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I communicate high expectations to all my students, regardless of their current attainment	0	0	0	7	9
I adapt my teaching strategies to ensure that struggling students can still reach ambitious goals	0	0	1	8	8
I give feedback that emphasises effort and strategies, not just results	0	0	2	4	11
I provide opportunities for students to reflect on how they can grow and improve over time	0	0	1	4	12

BASELINE FINDINGS					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Beliefs about intelligence	75%	22%	2%	2%	0%
Beliefs about expectations	4%	4%	6%	40%	46%
Classroom practice	0%	0%	6%	34%	60%

APPENDIX F – POST-INTERVENTION QUANTITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE DATA (RAW RESPONSES)

Full quantitative data collected from the post-intervention questionnaire. Responses are presented in raw form, including Likert-scale items, familiarity, frequency of use, perceived impact and participant background information. These data underpin the quantitative analysis presented in the findings section.

F1 – Participant background

PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND		
Id	Years in education	Department
Participant 1	11-15	Secondary / Advanced
Participant 2	6-10	EYFS / Lower Primary
Participant 3	> 16	EYFS / Lower Primary
Participant 4	> 16	Secondary / Advanced
Participant 5	2-5	EYFS / Lower Primary
Participant 6	11-15	Middle / Upper Primary
Participant 7	> 16	Secondary / Advanced
Participant 8	11-15	Secondary / Advanced
Participant 9	< 2	EYFS / Lower Primary

F2 – Familiarity with aphorisms

FAMILIARITY WITH APHORISMS				
Id	"Believe"	"...yet!"	"Don't add drama"	"Excellence lives in the details"
Participant 1	YES	YES	YES	YES
Participant 2	YES	NO	NO	NO
Participant 3	YES	NO	NO	NO
Participant 4	YES	YES	YES	YES
Participant 5	YES	YES	YES	YES
Participant 6	YES	YES	YES	YES
Participant 7	YES	YES	NO	YES
Participant 8	YES	YES	YES	YES
Participant 9	YES	YES	YES	YES

F3 – Understanding of aphorisms

UNDERSTANDING OF APHORISMS				
Id	"Believe"	"...yet!"	"Don't add drama"	"Excellence lives in the details"
Participant 1	CLEAR	CLEAR	NEITHER	CLEAR
Participant 2	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR
Participant 3	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR
Participant 4	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR
Participant 5	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR
Participant 6	CLEAR	CLEAR	CLEAR	CLEAR
Participant 7	VERY CLEAR	CLEAR	UNCLEAR	VERY CLEAR
Participant 8	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR
Participant 9	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR	VERY CLEAR

VERY UNCLEAR
UNCLEAR
NEITHER CLEAR NOR UNCLEAR
CLEAR
VERY CLEAR

F4 – Frequency of aphorism use

FREQUENCY OF APHORISM USE IN THINKING, DECISION-MAKING	
Id	RESPONSE
Participant 1	OCCASIONALLY
Participant 2	FREQUENTLY
Participant 3	FREQUENTLY
Participant 4	FREQUENTLY
Participant 5	FREQUENTLY
Participant 6	FREQUENTLY
Participant 7	FREQUENTLY
Participant 8	FREQUENTLY
Participant 9	FREQUENTLY

NEVER
RARELY
OCCASIONALLY
FREQUENTLY

F5 – Perceived impact on classroom practice

EXTENT OF INFLUENCE ON CLASSROOM PRACTICE	
Id	RESPONSE
Participant 1	SLIGHT
Participant 2	SLIGHT
Participant 3	SIGNIFICANT
Participant 4	SIGNIFICANT
Participant 5	SIGNIFICANT
Participant 6	SIGNIFICANT
Participant 7	SIGNIFICANT
Participant 8	SIGNIFICANT
Participant 9	SLIGHT

NO NOTICEABLE IMPACT
SLIGHT IMPACT
SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

F6 – Extent of agreement with questionnaire statements 1-5

EXTENT OF AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS 1-5					
Id	The professional language we use influences our daily practice.	Aphorisms or short statements help remind me of shared goals and values.	The use of positive language during CPD has influenced my outlook on teaching and learning.	Aphorisms help create a shared language among staff.	These phrases act as useful reference points in day-to-day situations.
Participant 1	AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISGAREE	AGREE
Participant 2	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE
Participant 3	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE
Participant 4	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Participant 5	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Participant 6	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Participant 7	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE
Participant 8	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Participant 9	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE
DISGAREE
NEUTRAL
AGREE
STRONGLY AGREE

F7 – Extent of agreement with questionnaire statements 6-10

EXTENT OF AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS 6-10					
Id	The language used by leaders motivates me to maintain high standards.	These aphorisms influence how I interpret student behaviour.	These phrases encourage me to maintain high expectations for students.	They influence how I respond to challenges in the classroom.	These phrases contribute to greater consistency in staff responses and expectations.
Participant 1	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE
Participant 2	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE
Participant 3	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE
Participant 4	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Participant 5	STRONGLY AGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Participant 6	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Participant 7	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Participant 8	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Participant 9	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE
DISGAREE
NEUTRAL
AGREE
STRONGLY AGREE

APPENDIX G – POST-INTERVENTION QUALITATIVE DATA – THEMATIC OVERVIEW

Six overarching themes identified throughout the thematic analysis of post-intervention qualitative survey data. Each theme represents a recurring pattern across participant responses, with associated sub-themes illustrating specific aspects of staff perceptions, classroom practice and implementation. These themes informed the qualitative findings and subsequent discussion.

Theme 1: Shared language and cultural alignment			
Community/Culture building	Common values	Shared goals	Consistency

Theme 2: Belief, confidence and growth-oriented thinking				
Belief in students	Building confidence	Perseverance	Reframing challenge	Growth mindset

Theme 3: Translation into classroom practice			
Responding to difficulty	Use in routines	Use in feedback	Use in classroom dialogue

Theme 4: Student uptake and peer reinforcement		
Shared student habits	Students using phrases	Peer encouragement

Theme 5: Embedding through consistency and professional practice					
Displays/Visibility	Need for consistency	Collaboration	Repetition	CPD and discussion	Role modelling

Theme 6: Implementation challenges and limitations			
Real-world complexity	Inconsistent staff uptake	Mindset dependence	
Need for explanation	Resistance	Lack of support	Oversimplification

APPENDIX H – OBSERVATIONAL EVIDENCE SUMMARY (LEARNING WALKS AND INFORMAL OBSERVATIONS)

Summary of observational data collected during a focused learning walk and informal observation following the intervention. The table presents the frequency of observed instance of aphorism use across different aspects of classroom and school practice, providing supporting evidence of the extent to which aphorisms were embedded within the school environment.

Focus point	Frequency
Presence of aphorisms in classroom displays	IIII (4)
Use of aphorisms in teacher language	IIIIII (6)
Use of aphorisms in student language	IIII (4)
Presence of aphorisms in written feedback	(0)
Presence of aphorisms in posts on school's digital platform	IIII (5)

Note. Frequencies represent instances observed across classrooms during learning walks and informal observations. As these observations were not recorded using a formalised or standardised instrument, findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than comprehensive.

APPENDIX N – OBSERVATIONAL EVIDENCE OF APHORISMS IN CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

Photographic evidence illustrating the presence of aphorisms displayed within classroom environments following the intervention. Images have been selected to demonstrate examples of how aphorisms were visibly embedded into practice. Any identifying features have been removed to preserve anonymity.



