Reducing teachers' unnecessary workload: the promise of collaborative planning

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1. Research Topic

Helping teachers to manage their workload is not a new challenge. The latest government reports[1] [2]continue to show that successfully tackling teachers' workload challenges is key to improving the attractiveness of the teaching profession, and also, to retaining a committed and effective teaching workforce.

The overall aim of this research project was to investigate how Collaborative Planning Year Group Networks may help to improve the quality of planning and reduce teachers' unnecessary workload. More specifically, the project had three purposes:

- To investigate whether and how existing year group networks within the Transform Trust may be used as a platform to help teachers to plan collaboratively.
- To assess teachers' planning experience of working in year group networks and its perceived impact on the quality of planning.
- To identify whether and how such collaborative planning has enabled teachers to manage their workload around planning and teaching resources more effectively.

1.1. Review Group Recommendations

Our research used the following recommendations from 'Eliminating unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources':

For Senior Leadership Team (SLT):

- *SLT should ensure that the highest quality resources are available, valuing professionally produced resources as much as those created in-house.*
- *SLT should consider aggregating PPA into units of time that allow for substantial planning.*

Creating 'buy-in' from head teachers across our Trust was a crucial first step in undertaking the project and in organising the planning events. It was vital for our school and Trust leaders not only to see the value in collaboration but, from an operational perspective, to also see the value in allocating a whole day for staff allowing for 'substantial planning'. Without SLT buy-in, staff would not have been supported to attend the days and to use the resources back in school. The majority of leaders valued the project and therefore teacher attendance at the planning events was generally high. We also developed our approach to investigate how we could enhance the value of professionally produced resources, such as 'Maths No Problem', that had already been invested in by leaders.

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[1] House of Commons (2017) Recruitment and Retention of Teachers: Fifth Report of Session 2016-17. London: The House of Commons, Education Committee.

[2] Higton, J., Leonardi, S., Richards, N., Choudhoury, A., Sofroniou, N., and Owen, D. (2017) Teacher Workload Survey 2016: Research Report. London: Department for Education.

For teachers:

- *Teachers should engage in collaborative planning to develop their skills and knowledge, to share their expertise, and to benefit from the expertise of their peers.*
- *Teachers should consider the use of externally produced and quality assured resources, such as textbooks or teacher guides.*

The first recommendation was the primary focus for our research. We wanted to investigate whether we could add value to existing networks by using them as a platform to plan. We were also aware that many of our schools had undertaken a substantial financial commitment to new schemes such as 'Maths No Problem' and therefore we chose to incorporate ways to enhance and personalise these schemes for individuals and classes into our collaborative approach.

1.2.   Approaches to reducing workload

1.2.1. What approaches did you develop based on the recommendations in the review group report?

- *Assuring quality* – in line with the review group recommendation for SLT to ensure the highest quality of resources are available, our collaborative planning days built in expertise from Subject Leaders of Education (SLEs) to quality assure the plans and resources produced by teachers. Such experts were used both to facilitate and quality assure the planning and ensure the highest standards of teaching and learning for the children in our Trust schools.
- *Using existing networks* – as we already had the infrastructure in place whereby teachers from each year group met termly to discuss good practice and pedagogy, we used these networks as our primary, organisational approach for getting staff together to plan.
- *Allocating a day* – as a review group recommendation to SLT was around aggregating PPA into units of time, we extended our existing networks from half a day to a whole day in order to maximise time spent collaborating on planning and resources.

1.2.2. What evidence formed the basis for developing each approach?

Using evidence from baseline teacher surveys and focus group interviews enabled us to develop each of our approaches further so that:

- *Using SLEs* – our baseline surveys and interviews led us to understand that many teachers who were working in schools that had bought into commercial schemes wanted some planning support with how to personalise and develop these schemes for their individual classes and children. We therefore developed our initial sessions so that our second round of planning days included Maths SLEs who had specific

knowledge of the commercial schemes of work that had been invested in by our schools.

- *Working together* – almost all teachers who had taken part in the first round of collaborative planning reported that they had benefited from working collaboratively so we developed this approach further to combine some year groups and therefore have more delegates and more flexibility within groups.
- *Providing dedicated time* – Staff interviewed in the baseline focus group reported that the dedicated time (and being outside of their own school environment) gave them the time to think in more depth about their planning and what it included. For example, for some, this was about providing more detail on the sequence of a lesson within the planning, which is a level of detail that may not have been covered previously.

1.2.3. How did you expect each approach to make a difference?

- *Using SLEs* – we expected that this would impact on both the quality of planning and also the pedagogical awareness of staff when planning. This approach was developed over the course of the project so that SLEs had more of a brief around challenging delegates at the second round of days.
- *Working together* – we expected this to particularly impact on the quality and efficiency of planning that could be produced in the sessions as staff would be able to engage in professional dialogue and conversation related to the planning process and in relation to wider teaching challenges and issues.
- *Allocating time* – we expected an impact on the quality of planning as initial teacher surveys and interviews reported that the usual 10% allocation of PPA time was often rushed, taken up with other jobs and that teachers lacked the time and space to be as creative as possible and to support children's engagement in their learning.

1.2.4. How did you investigate the effectiveness of each approach?

The research surveys and focus group questionnaires were designed with measuring the impact of each of these approaches in mind. At the end of each planning session, all attendees were required to complete a survey using an online survey platform. The survey was designed to incorporate questions regarding the effectiveness of SLEs as facilitators, the impact of working with other colleagues to plan, and the impact of the discrete and distinct allocation of time to plan with colleagues.

Because the project has so far only ran for 2 terms and many of the units that have been planned are to be taught in the Autumn Term, it is too early to draw any direct causal relationship between this intervention and change in pupil attainment. However, we conducted pupil attitude surveys and were able to measure how children viewed the quality of their learning and the extent to which they found teaching interesting and motivating (see appendix). We plan to look at the impact on attainment as we move into the next academic year by moderating work samples from the planning at future network events.

2. Research Projects

2.1. Rationale

A multi-perspective mixed methods research approach was used to investigate the extent to which Collaborative Planning Year Group Networks across Trust schools were able to reduce teachers' unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources.

The project used three **M**s[3] to guide the organisation of network activities: **meaningful** (i.e. meeting teachers' professional needs and improving their practices), **manageable** (i.e. improving the time-effectiveness of planning), and **motivational** (i.e. motivating teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning). The three Ms were also used to measure the impact of network activities on teachers' workload around planning.

Therefore, the purpose of the collaborative planning sessions was not necessarily to *mechanically* reduce the number of hours that teachers spend on lesson planning. Rather, the focus of attention was to help teachers **improve the efficiency and quality of lesson planning**, and also to **create professional learning communities** in which teachers were encouraged to capitalise on their experiences and expertise, share resources and best practice, and through this, engage in a sustained professional dialogue about pedagogy, curriculum and learning. It was anticipated that these collaborative planning networks became opportunities of professional learning which, facilitated by SLEs, offer intellectual and emotional support for the improvement of participating teachers' professional practice and the growth of their professionalism.

2.2. Research methods

2.2.1. Teacher baseline and follow-up surveys

Two teacher surveys were conducted to *baseline* and *track* participating teachers' experience in the Year Group Collaborative Planning Networks and to assess their perceptions of the impact of their involvement in the following areas: **teaching practice and pedagogy, subject knowledge,** and **planning practice**. Research evidence shows that improvement in the first two areas is closely associated with effective teaching – which were thus included in the survey to assess the extent to which the collaborative planning sessions had helped to make planning more professionally *meaningful* and *motivational* for participating teachers. The third area was included to assess whether these sessions had helped to improve the *manageability* of planning.

The baseline survey (Appendix 1) was set up online and distributed to participating teachers towards the end of their first session in the spring term of 2017. The same survey

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[3] Independent Teacher Workload Review Group (2016) Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking. London: Department for Education.

was then repeated in the summer term to identify the extent of perceived change in relation to the effectiveness and impact of the collaborative planning sessions on teachers' workload around planning. Year 1-5 teachers from all Transform Trust schools were invited to participate in these sessions.

Seventy-two teachers fully or partially completed the baseline survey and 40 teachers fully or partially completed the follow-up survey. The difference in the number of responses should be taken into account when considering the observed changes between the two surveys. The answers provided in each survey have been compared to understand in more detail the 'distance travelled' for the teachers involved.

2.2.2. Teacher focus group interviews

We selected two focus groups (Year 1 and Year 5 teachers) and conducted baseline and follow-up interviews (interviews questions in Appendix 2) in the spring term and summer term respectively. The purpose of collecting this **qualitative evidence** was to identify *how* and *why* collaborative planning in Year Group Networks may help teachers to improve the quality of their planning and also to manage their workload around planning more effectively. The interviews also placed focus on identifying leadership support and organisation conditions that are required to facilitate and sustain the effectiveness and impact of collaborative planning.

2.2.3. Pupil survey

Pupil surveys (Appendix 3) were completed by **123** Year 5 pupils across three Transform Trust schools towards the end of the project in June 2017. The purpose of the survey was to identify the extent to which pupils of the teachers who participated in Year Group Networks enjoyed teaching and learning in class. The selection of the three Trust schools took into account the aggregated mean scores of the teacher surveys. Schools that had the highest and lowest scores were selected for the pupil survey.

3. Research Findings

3.1. Planning as a major workload issue

The follow-up survey asked respondents about their views as to why planning has been a major workload issue for teachers. Almost all (with the exception of three) gave a response to this question. Five reasons were cited, pointing to the importance of improving the *efficiency* and *meaningfulness* of <u>what</u> they plan and <u>how</u> they plan their lessons. This issue appears to be particularly acute for teachers working in one-form entry schools.

3.1.1. Time consuming

Many of the teachers reported that the planning has been a major workload issue because producing high quality lessons requires time and concentration – which are difficult to find during a busy school day. As a result, the planning has to take over holidays and personal time.

> *"Time consuming at home as not enough time to plan in schools and too much to plan. PPA time often used for admin, data and emails."*

> *"Too time consuming especially in a single form entry school."*

> *"Because they are only given half a day to plan and resource 20 odd hours of lessons singlehandedly."*

> *"Not enough hours in the day – overworked and overtired!"*

> *"Time to do it with quality amongst other time consuming tasks such as marking and assessment."*

> *"Planning has meant I have spent a lot of time at the weekends or in the school holidays planning lessons rather than doing things outside of school. It can mean that it becomes very stressful both in and out of school with the pressure of what is expected of you."*

> *"2.5 hours PPA time does not even begin to cover the amount of time required for high quality planning, since gathering resources and (often) evidencing the planning can be what takes a huge amount of time."*

Lesson planning as a huge time-consuming task was also emphasised by teachers at the focus group interviews. A particular challenge around planning is that it has often been **carried out in isolation**. A lot of time is spent on searching for resources – especially when teachers are unfamiliar with the topics.

Often the half-day PPT time is not used effectively for planning. There are different reasons for this. It could be because teachers have to deal with marking and/or other urgent matters from the school, and/or because their mind is tired from a busy day and therefore find it difficult to focus or produce quality work. Also, it could be because they do not necessarily have designated space to undertake the planning, which can impact on

concentration/ability to produce quality work. As a result, in order to have some focussed quality time to plan lessons, they do it at weekends or on holidays.

> *"You need a headspace that is conducive to producing good quality planning."*

> *"I know a lot about certain subjects, but can't always visualise how to get it into a classroom, so talking to other teachers is very, very useful for me."*

> *"If you went into planning and you needed a text but didn't know any books that had anything to do with Vikings, you could spend ages and eventually you'd find a book and you'd still then think I actually don't know anything about what's in this book. So having people on the level where they know texts and they understand the texts you've already skipped hours of potential worry and misconceptions".*

3.1.2. A lot to cover

Many teachers mentioned that there was a lot to cover in planning, and a lot of detail required. This can be linked to planning being time consuming (the previous point), but these teachers placed more emphasis on the amount of work required – especially some prescribed tasks which do not seem to serve much educational purpose – as being an issue.

> *"The responsibility of planning combined with in-depth marking, data and other increasing responsibilities snowballs and becomes a major workload issue."*

> *"There's a lot to plan, resource and get ready for each lesson each week."*

> *"Jumping through hoops - putting things down that you don't look at again. Having to write a plan as well as create a smart."*

> *"There is too much of it to complete in too little time."*

> *"Due to the fact that many hours are spent typing up what you are going to do. Having to think a day/week/term/year ahead to identify what is going to be taught."*

> *"There is just so much planning and resourcing to be done. If you are working alone in a year group, then you are responsible for all of this and with other things needing attention (e.g. an area to co-ordinate) it can become overwhelming."*

3.1.3. Planning systems are repetitive and complicated

Quite a lot of teachers commented on how the planning format was often repetitive, too detailed, unnecessary or complicated. The quotes below illustrate why some teachers felt that planning time has been unnecessarily spent on managing tasks that appear to be excessively concerned with the administration of planning outputs. Such comments again raise wider issues about the expectations for planning prescribed by schools: **are all requirements necessary in that teachers understand the educational benefits of** *what* **they do and** *why* **they need to do it in certain ways (i.e. the meaningfulness of their actions and outputs)?**

> *"Too much time filling in often unnecessary columns."*

"Repeating plans across a plan, a SMART and worksheets/ resources."

"Continually changing planning grids."

"No common planning format - expectations different for different school. The perceptions that planning has to be "new" every time it is delivered."

"The different ways you need to complete it e.g. What is on my planning is not really much different to what's on my resources and SMART files."

3.1.4. Demanding expectations of school or Ofsted

Some teachers mentioned that they felt pressure from their school or Ofsted with planning. Planning would have failed to serve a real educational purpose if it had been reduced to become a box-ticking activity.

Such perceptions, once again, point to wider issues concerning the expectations for planning by schools, and **how Ofsted requirements for planning are interpreted, enacted and communicated to teachers by individual schools**. Some teachers' reported experience that they were required to satisfy specific administrative demands around planning appears to contradict Ofsted's intention to dispel myths around planning that can result in unnecessary workloads in schools: 'Ofsted does not specify how planning should be set out, the length of time it should take or the amount of detail it should contain. Inspectors are interested in the effectiveness of planning rather than the form it takes.'[4]

"The pressure to produce 20 high quality lessons per week is immense."

"Schools demanding planning in specific format. Changing planning formats too often. Changes in priorities."

"Expectations too high from Ofsted."

"The amount of "red-tape" linked to planning - tick box exercise and box filling for the sake of it."

3.1.5. Changes to curriculum

Some teachers mentioned changes to the curriculum, and changes to priorities as being an issue for planning.

"Because it takes so long to do, particularly having to start from scratch for new curriculum topics."

"There is a mysterious habit of shifting requirements so that planning cannot be used from one year to the next. Many systems (providing annotated plans, copying

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[4] Ofsted (2017) Ofsted Inspections: Myths. [Link to Ofsted inspections mythbusting document](#)

and pasting planning from websites onto documents etc...) are a strange use of time for an already overworked set of workers."

3.2.   Effective organisation of the planning events

Overall teachers valued the time spent at the Year Group Network events. In both surveys, almost all (with the exception of one teacher) agreed that it was time well spent to plan lessons together with peers from other Trust schools, and that they would like the collaborative planning events to continue in the future.

The reasons are twofold. First, participating teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the organisation of these collaborative planning events. Such positive feedback is itself testament to the commitment, dedication and success of the Trust leaders who have worked hard to ensure that the network events serve a real purpose to help teachers effectively reduce unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources. Second, the vast majority of the participating teachers were also highly positive about the professional benefits that they have gained from attending these events (i.e. *impact* that will be elaborated in 3.3).

During the focus group interviews, both Year 1 and Year 5 teachers reported that the organisation of the event had improved over time. They appreciated that Trust leaders listened to their feedback on the first sessions, and felt that changes made for the second sessions had considerably improved the quality of their planning activities.

3.2.1. Greater preparation

Prior to the planning session was perceived by attendees to have improved the organisation and therefore the efficiency of the day. They particularly valued knowing what the focus of the planning was for the session and also having the opportunity to choose what topic they wanted to focus on at the session. Also, having access to the text prior to the session gave them the time to familiarise themselves with it and formulate ideas, saving time during the actual planning session. Teachers also welcomed the opportunity to choose between a literacy or numeracy topic prior to attending the session – which was arranged in response to their needs.

> *"I think compared to last time there's a better structure, because there was more planning put in beforehand. So last time was well organised, but this time because we had a text already and we had an idea of what we were going to do with that text… either fiction, non-fiction, or maths, it meant that we could come in and hit the ground quicker, we didn't have to spend time deciding what we were going to do with that text."*
>
> *"It was better because we knew what we were coming to this time. We knew what books and stuff so that was better."*
>
> *"People have brought in resources to fit in with what we're doing."*

3.2.2. Flexibility

The teachers also appreciated the **flexibility** in the arrangements for the planning sessions, and particularly having the opportunity to change groups or for dates to be rearranged if they were not convenient.

> *"We were allowed to sign up for what we wanted and check that that was what we wanted to do."*

3.2.3. Resourcing

The **resourcing** of the session had improved. Having access to the text on the day was reported to be helpful, as was the opportunity to take the resources away.

> *"Because the texts were provided today, it made accessing it that much easier. Whereas last time we were all working from one copy. The resourcing was better organised this time."*

> *"Having the resources to take away with us. I know I've got the book. I've got the planning. I can just do it."*

3.2.4. Facilitators

The teachers also valued the **role of the facilitators.** All facilitators were SLEs who played an important role in securing the quality of professional dialogue in planning activities. Having a Maths subject expert present at the event, for example, was felt to be invaluable in helping the group come up with ideas.

> *"Having an expert on hand, I feel that's why we managed to get so much done because she's full of ideas, she's been a great help."*

> *"Providing us with the expert people has been invaluable, absolutely."*

The facilitator's role in the Year Group Network was also highly valued and positively praised by the teachers in both baseline and follow-up surveys. Almost all (99% in the baseline survey (n=66) and 95% in the follow-up survey (n=38 out of 39) agreed that the facilitators:

- were skilful in facilitating the collaborative planning processes
- gave them new ideas to support their teaching
- ensured wide participation in decisions about lesson planning
- helped them clarify their goals for the lesson planning

The **skills and knowledge of the facilitators** was highly rated by the teachers in both surveys. In the follow-up survey, for example, 95% (n=38) agreed that the facilitators had the knowledge required to help them find solutions in lesson planning (58%, 'strongly agreed'). Furthermore, 55% (n=22) 'strongly agreed' that the facilitators knew how to improve the quality of their lesson planning and teaching (92%, n=38 'agreed').

3.3. Teachers' collaborative planning experience in the Year Group Networks

The results of both baseline and follow-up surveys suggest that almost all participating teachers felt that there was a strong feeling of collaboration within their networks (97% in both surveys), and that those who attended had similar values and understanding of what effective teaching looked like (97% in the baseline survey and 95% in the follow-up survey).

3.3.1. Higher quality planning

In the focus group interviews, the opportunity that planning collaboratively provided to engage in **professional dialogue and conversation** with colleagues was considered important for teachers. It was believed that having the focused time for planning and the ability to collaborate with colleagues had led to the production of **higher quality planning** and the reduction of their workload around planning and searching for teaching resources.

- The collaborative planning process facilitated professional discussions around planning and encouraged teachers to reflect on the planning process with one another. Specifically, they appreciated the **sharing of resources and texts** (which was perceived to be the most time-consuming task regarding planning), **bouncing off ideas** with peer colleagues who have different strengths and work in schools in different contexts, and **access to different expertise**. It has taken the pressure off the planning process, allowing the time for the **discussion of ideas**.

The survey evidence supports this observation. In the follow-up survey almost all teachers (with the exception of one teacher) reported that there were no tensions or conflicts in the lesson planning sessions. Rather, nearly three-quarters (73%, n=29) 'strongly agreed' that resources were being shared in the planning session (with an additional 23% in agreement). However, **views on whether the standards for academic performance could have been set higher were more mixed.** Nine out of the 40 respondents (23%) – mostly (n=8) with more than six years of experience in teaching – felt that the standards for academic performance could have been set higher in their year group network.

> *"Having a significant amount of time in a block is a real luxury and helps you to think about consistency and coherence across an entire unit. Whereas often you don't have that time and can be planning it more at a week at a time. I think it's helped in terms of joined up thinking about the flow of an entire unit."*

> *"It's quite nice to hear other people's ideas and come to a consensus about what it should look like."*

3.3.2. Wider discussions about teaching

In addition to the process facilitating professional discussions around the planning, and encouraging the sharing of ideas and expertise, the process was also felt to have facilitated **wider discussions about teaching** that were not always linked to the actual

planning process. For example, in terms of challenges that teachers were facing with teaching particular topics, or teaching approaches that other schools used that they had found to produce good results for pupils.

> *"It's having that critical ear and eye to know that based on someone's experience. That didn't work last time so let's make a change to that, let's make a tweak."*

> *"For me it's now about being able to take a chunk of planning and tweak it to suit the needs of my learners. It's about the quality of that planning that has been thoroughly discussed, has been tested before and you know it's based on a quality text or resource."*

> *"When we're having professional dialogue in general about what we're doing in Year 1 or what some of the difficult things are that's one of the really beneficial things for me. It's almost the incidentals that you talk about around it which are important as the planning. My colleagues here from {school name] do read write ink, and I don't do it, but they've told me how their phonics score shave got up from using it. It's the little things like that that normally when you're stuck in your own little school that you don't see or are aware of."*

3.3.3. Professional development

Moreover, Year 5 teachers in particular welcomed the focus of the session on **professional development** based on utilising the expertise of practising teachers, rather than external professional development sessions that sometimes took less account of this. External professional development sessions were viewed by some teachers as not always recognising their professional expertise and knowledge, instead creating forums for being "talked at". In contrast, the collaborative planning process made teachers feel valued and that their expertise was important and useful.

It is perhaps then no surprise that 93% (n=37) of the respondents to the follow-up survey agreed that the lesson planning sessions were **excellent opportunities for their professional development**.

> *"You can quite often go to training events where there's one person and you have to listen to them and learn from them. When actually, we're the people in the classroom every day, trying out things and actually you can take so much from that."*

- These discussions with colleagues were valuable in both providing reassurance and in having someone to be a critical friend for the ideas and planning produced. **Reassurance** was perceived by participating teachers as hugely important. As a result of the collaborative planning with colleagues in other schools, they felt more confident and reassured that they were doing things right in their own classrooms and in their own contexts. They also valued the opportunity it presented to hone in on concepts that pupils were struggling with across a number of the Trust schools and establishing how that could be addressed and resolved through the collaborative planning process.

3.3.4. Confidence in planning decisions

Moreover, they felt more willing to **take risks** in their planning. This was discussed to be in the context of trialling new approaches and new activities, or taking things further in the planning of lessons. It was felt that working collaboratively with colleagues helped to **strengthen confidence in planning decisions**, through having the reassurance from colleagues that decisions about approaches to teaching particular concepts or texts were correct.

> *"Also things that you really believe in. so if you're going to ask a child to do some writing about a text you really have to immerse them in that text, so having the reassurance of someone else saying no I don't think we don't need to do writing on that day because the plan is to immerse them therefore we're going to go outside and act it out, rather than showing this to Ofsted oh there's a sentence we wrote on that day isn't the purpose of what we're trying to do."*

- Having the **focused time** for planning and the ability to collaborate with colleagues led to the production of **higher quality planning.** There was a consensus that the planning produced in the sessions was of a much higher quality than what individuals would have produced independently. Having the focused time, outside of school and other distractions allowed teachers to fully focus on the planning. To be able to plan lessons for a six-week period (as oppose to every two weeks and in isolation) has also helped to improve their understanding of the curriculum.

> *"Having that time as well meant that what we planned was quality planning rather than trying to get things down in the short amount of time you've got."*

> *"Focusing.. because I spend a lot of time on the internet looking for resources and then I find something and I go along a false lead which wastes a lot of time"*

> *"I bounce some of the ideas off other people so you've got a group of least four teachers who are agreeing on something whereas usually if you're planning it's you and your partner, or you're on own your own. So it's quite nice to hear other people's ideas and extend them so you can come to a consensus of what it should look like!*

> *"This is time that has been set aside for just planning; whereas your PPA… although it is for planning and preparation you will often have your data to get done. So having this time means that we have got more time to things like that when we have our PPA".*

Evidence from the follow-up survey offers further support regarding the quality and usability of the planning that teachers had produced in the sessions. Almost all (97%, n=39) agreed that they were confident that the schemes of work supported effective teaching in class, that they always focused on what needed to be learned across a sequence of lessons in planning, and that the planning took into account subject demands and needs, as well as the resources required to support the use of the schemes in the classroom.

3.3.5. Reflecting on experience

Furthermore, the collaborative planning process encouraged most to **reflect on their experience** of teaching certain texts/topics, particularly valuing the opportunity to share ideas with colleagues and using the experience and ideas of others to inform their own practice. This was particularly pertinent for those in one-form entry schools who planned independently.

> *"The one thing we've done today, because we've had a focus on a particular text is to edit and change and we've made a lot of changes. We listened to the ideas we all came with originally, so if I was to teach that again next year then it would be a new set of planning."*

> *"It always helps to collaborate, when you're planning on your own you inevitably you stick to the things you're comfortable and familiar with. It's always good to bounce off other ideas whether you're going to do it or not. You're getting different opinions and you're realising there's other ways of doing things."*

Teachers defined **quality in planning**, as producing something that was **fully comprehensive**, in terms of structure, content and consideration of the differing abilities and needs of learners. It was felt that this level of detail was difficult to achieve in everyday practice, due to time.

> *"The kind of planning, where if I was doing a lesson tomorrow I could say there's my lesson and be ready to go with it. You know exactly how it's differentiated. How you're starting, the middle and ending it. How you're going to include all your learners. The resources are all there."*

> *"The quality of planning is knowing that you have thought about everything that you could have possibly thought about and that's what we've been doing today."*

It is perhaps then no surprise that for some teachers, the planning completed at the session would replace previous planning that they had already done on the subject/text.

> *"I've used the book before so I've got the planning from before, but I'll use todays planning next time I won't get back to my old planning. It's much better. It's more thorough and focused and clearly structured."*

- The dedicated time within the planning sessions had allowed teachers to focus more on *how* **children were learning**, rather than *what* **they were learning**. Some felt that time pressures around planning and workload generally often resulted in planning becoming repetitive and regimented. They valued the opportunity to talk with colleagues about **how to engage children in learning as part of the planning process,** which tended to be overlooked when planning was undertaken in isolation or within PPA time where there was more pressure on time. Working together with colleagues within a dedicated time period enabled them to challenge each other to reflect on what they wanted to achieve from their planning, and importantly, what this meant for the children's learning.

"We planned backwards, so how are we going to get them to the end point. So what do we want to plan in order for them to learn in the most effective way."

"A realistic fair view of how they learn. It's easy to become divorced from reality if you're going through things in a piecemeal and stressed out way. Whereas if you start from what they need to learn by this point, what's a realistic way of getting to record and remember this."

"I can get almost regimented in my planning when you're trying to get it done for the sake of getting it done, you start doing things in quite a repetitive way. Which can get boring for the children."

"Today it was really nice to come together and we were talking about engaging ways of getting the children hooked in and I think a lot of that I sometimes forget about because I'm like they need to have a learning objective, because the school care about the learning objective and how far the children go but it's also about thinking about well they won't achieve the learning objective if they're not engaged in the learning and not enjoying the learning".

3.3.6. Teaching effectively

At the follow-up focus groups, there were teachers who had implemented lessons based on planning they had produced in the previous session. They were very positive about the benefits on **children's learning**. This was in relation to both the engagement of the children in their learning and the outputs they had produced. This had motivated the teachers to come back to the second session.

"I used what we did last time, so I took it and after the half-term and ran with it for six weeks. It worked really well. It saved on time, it saved on planning. I adapted it a bit to suit my class, but the children were really enthused by it and were really engaged. It was the best piece of writing that we've got from them all year".

- Related to the focus on children's quality of learning was a widely shared perception that the time saved from undertaking collaborative planning had helped to contribute to an improvement in the **quality of teaching.** This was in the context of teachers feeling less stressed and therefore feeling they were a "better teacher". This is because time saved from searching for resources, for example, enabled participating teachers to be engaged in focussed and quality dialogue about *how to teach effectively* (thus better understanding of pedagogy as well as enhanced subject knowledge). Although they were only able to produce a framework or a basis for their six weeks' schemes of work, they were pleased with its quality and the process of exploring ideas regarding not only *what* to teach, but also *how* to teach.

"Even if they're the same quality as what we would have done at school the fact that we've spent today doing something we're going to do in the future. The amount of time that frees up to allow us to think about how we're going to teach it, not just

what we're going to teach. It means we can spend our planning time thinking of how we're going to teach which is going to make our teaching better."

"Lightening the workload means improving teacher and lessoning the stress. If you're spending your half a day frantically trying to gather something for the next week you're not going to be as good a teacher, even if you're at work for the same amount of time. You're able to think about your job a bit more."

Different ways of planning

The collaborative planning experience was particularly useful when thinking about **how best to teach difficult concepts** (e.g. grammar). It allowed teachers the time to think in more depth and more creatively about how best to introduce such concepts within a lesson, and particularly the best way of doing this to support children in their learning and in retaining that knowledge.

Moreover, it was felt that planning collaboratively enabled teachers to **gain knowledge of different ways of planning** in terms of structure and format. The differing approaches to planning across the Trust schools were important for them to consider in the planning process during the sessions. The pedagogical ideas and approaches shared at the event were perceived to be **transferable** to the teaching of multiple topics that were outside of those they had focussed on in the planning sessions. The opportunity that the event presented to discuss and find out more about how to meet the differing expectations for planning from the senior leadership team in the different Trust schools was therefore valued.

> *"So you're not quickly doing your planning where you can grab time, so you can take a step back and look at it more realistically and holistically. This is what they need to achieve, this is how I'm going to do it. There's more structure in your thinking."*

> *"Also from the planning you've shared some really good ideas that I can now use in a different book. So making a theatre and having a beginning, a middle and an end I can now use with a different book."*

> *"We did three different fairy tales and we linked it to the different cross-curricular… for example, Science, Jack & the beanstalk, linked it with science we've got a plants topic coming up in the summer term… growing.. seeds… we've got instructions for the literacy text we've got to do. It links in with both of those, it's cross-curricular."*

3.3.7. Connections and relationships

- Participating teachers valued the opportunity the sessions had presented to develop **longer-term connections and relationships** with colleagues from other schools in the Trust. Some discussed the potential to use these connections for future joint working and cross collaboration. Others emphasised the benefits of being able to draw on the experience of other teachers and having that support and expertise as a **valuable resource** going forward. The opportunity to discuss ideas with other

teachers and feedback on implementing specific lesson plans or concepts was felt to reduce research time, increase teacher's confidence and also act as a form of validation.

"If in the future someone's got a new idea or a new piece of planning they are an amazing group that would say actually I've done this, it's worth having a look at if you want to."

"It's a constant resource. If you need a little bit of a prompt on what someone's said, it's not somebody's name on google you're never going to meet. They're down the road and you can go and watch them in action. That's a resource that we perhaps don't utilise as effectively as we could."

- Related to the above point is the observation that producing planning in a forum with colleagues from other schools was particularly **welcomed by teachers from one-form entry schools**, who had limited or no opportunities to discuss planning with other colleagues in their school.

"The job is very insular, I probably talk to one other adult for six hours a day, but apart from that there's no-one else that you talk to."

"Particularly if you're in a one form entry like I am. It's just me in Year 1, so to get together with other Year 1 teachers is really valuable to share ideas."

"Coming from a single form entry school I think it's very useful. We managed to share ideas, get new ideas, bouncing ideas of each other and brainstorming ideas."

3.3.8. Resource bank

- Last but not least, teachers in the focus group interviews expressed their appreciation of the opportunity that the collaborative planning sessions provided in allowing them to produce **a bank of planning** that they could use in the future. All reported having planned for various numbers of weeks: some had planned for three weeks, and other groups had planned for a half-term period (around 7 weeks).

This bank of planning was seen as **a resource** that could be picked up and used in the next academic year when needed if it could not be used immediately. There was an appreciation that the planning produced did generally need to be tweaked or adapted to meet the needs of their learners and for the different systems and approaches used by the different schools in the Trust.

"It's just a bank of resources and planning that we don't have to spend time on next year. We can just pull from that bank and adapt it to suit our kids."

"Different systems have come up quite a bit in terms of the ways schools work independently on things like differentiation, phonics systems. Different schools use different schemes so there have been certain things that will need to be personalised to different schools. But generally, you get a skeleton which is then going to be tweaked by each school. So each school with either extend or condense to fit their children."
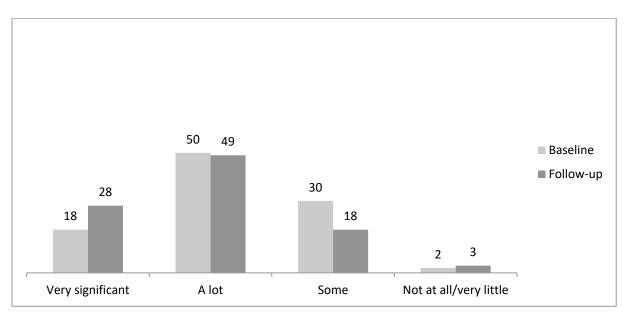
3.4. Perceptions of impact

3.4.1. Impact on practice and pedagogy

Involvement in the Year Group Network events had a significant impact on making teachers' lessons more interesting. In both the baseline and follow-up surveys, close to 80% of the teachers (79% in the baseline survey, 77% in the follow-up survey) reported that their planning experience in the network had 'very significant' or 'a lot' of impact on making their lessons more interesting.

- Such impact was especially appreciated by most with less than ten years' experience in teaching. Of those (n=30) that reported there had been a 'very significant' or 'a lot' of impact, 78% (7/9) had 1-2 years' experience; 86% (6/7) had 3-5 years' experience; 80% (8/10) had 6-10 years' experience and 67% (8/12) had had over ten years' experience.

The vast majority of the teachers in both surveys felt that their involvement in the Year Group Network events had a **positive impact on improving their professional judgement and experience in teaching**. Over a third (38% in the baseline survey and 36% in the follow-up survey) reported that involvement in the network had impacted on this 'very significantly.'
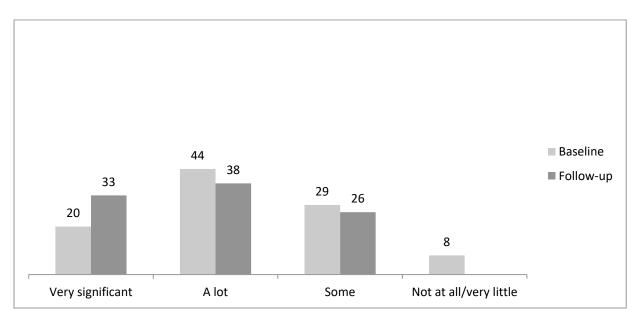
Ongoing involvement in the Year Group network **improved teachers' understanding of a more effective way of teaching the curriculum (see Figure 1)**. At the baseline survey, over two-thirds (68%, n=45) of teachers reported an impact on this area; this had increased to over three-quarters of teachers in the follow-up survey (77%, n=30). The number of teachers that felt the impact had been 'very significant' had also increased (18% at baseline, increasing to 28% at follow-up).

Teacher survey: To what extent do you feel that your planning experience in the Year Group Networks has led to positive changes in the following? Baseline=66 teachers; Follow-up=39 teachers

Teachers were becoming more self-reflective through their collaborative planning experience (see Figure 2). Less than two-thirds (64%, n=42) of teachers at the baseline felt that their involvement had led to them becoming more self-reflective. However, at the follow-up this had increased to nearly three-quarters (72%, n=28) of teachers. This supports the finding at both stages where nearly all teachers reported a positive impact of their involvement on the opportunity to have reflective dialogue on teaching and learning.

- However, teachers with more than 10 years' experience were less likely to report an impact in this area: 78% (7/9) of teachers with 1-2 years' experience, 71% (5/7) of those with 3-5 years' experience, and 80% (8/10) of those with 6-10 years' experience, compared to only 58% (7/12) of those with over 10 years' experience, reported an impact in this area.

Teacher survey: To what extent do you feel that your planning experience in the Year Group Networks has led to positive changes in the following? Baseline=66 teachers; Follow-up=39 teachers
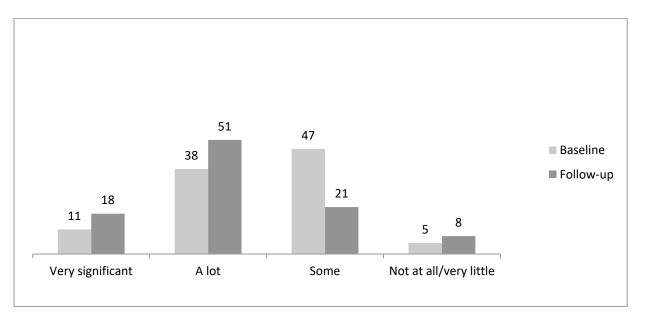
Figure 2: Percentage of teachers at baseline and follow-up – "Being self-reflective"

Teachers' ability to meet the demands of subjects had strengthened through their involvement in the collaborative planning events. 62% (n=41) of teachers at the baseline reported an impact (very significant/a lot) of their involvement on their ability to meet the demands of their particular subject. At the follow-up this had increased slightly to 66% of teachers (n=26). However, there was more movement in relation to the proportion of teachers who reported a 'very significant' impact in this area (26% baseline vs. 33% follow-up).

Teachers' reported ability to meet the learning needs of their pupils had improved considerably through their involvement in the year group network (see Figure 3). Whereas around half of teachers (49%, n=32) reported an impact (very significant/a lot) at the baseline, this increased to around two-thirds of teachers' at the follow-up (69%, n=27).

The majority of the teachers that reported an impact in this area were classroom teachers: 78% (21/27) of classroom teachers, compared to 60% (6/10) of teachers with middle/senior leadership responsibility in the follow-up survey.
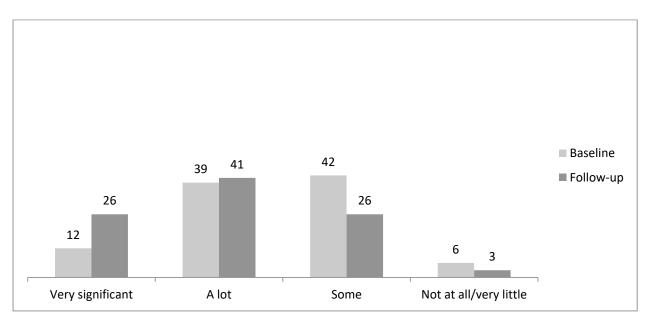

Teacher survey: To what extent do you feel that your planning experience in the Year Group Networks has led to positive changes in the following? Baseline=66 teachers; Follow-up=39 teachers

Figure 3: Percentage of teachers at baseline and follow-up – "Meeting the particular demands of the learning needs of my pupils"

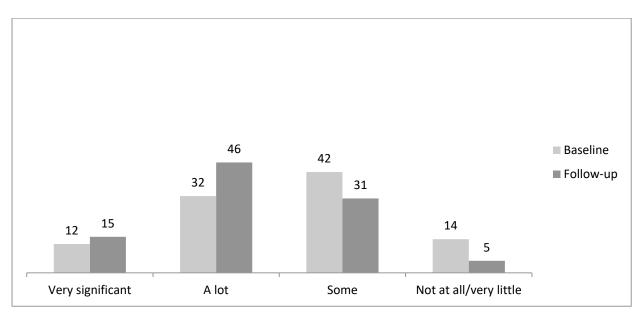**Understanding of the evidence of pupil learning and progress had improved through teachers' involvement in the year group networks (see Figure 4).** Two-thirds of teachers (67%, n=26) at the follow-up stated that their involvement had led to an impact (very significant/a lot) on their understanding of pupil learning and progress; an increase of 16% from the baseline survey (51%, n=34).

Teacher survey: To what extent do you feel that your planning experience in the Year Group Networks has led to positive changes in the following? Baseline=66 teachers; Follow-up=39 teachers

3.4.2. Impact on subject knowledge

Teachers' subject knowledge had improved (see Figure 5). At the baseline, there were 12% (n=8) of teachers who reported a 'very significant' impact of their involvement on subject knowledge, and 31% (n=21) reported 'a lot' of impact in this area. At the follow-up three-fifths of teachers (61%, n=24) reported an impact (very significant or a lot). This suggests that the year group networks can play an instrumental role in enhancing teachers' subject knowledge.
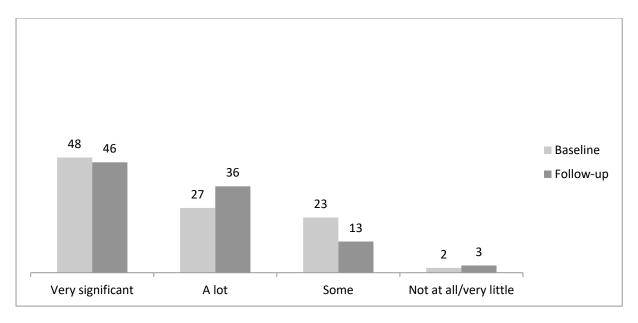

Teacher survey: To what extent do you feel that your planning experience in the Year Group Networks has led to positive changes in the following? Baseline=66 teachers; Follow-up=39 teachers

Figure 5: Percentage of teachers at baseline and follow-up – "Subject knowledge"

In both surveys nearly three-quarters of teachers (73%, n=48 in the baseline; 72%, n=28 in the follow-up survey) reported that their involvement in the Year Group Network events had a positive impact on their **understanding of a more effective way to teach their subject.** In the follow-up survey 41% (n=16), compared to 24% in the baseline survey, felt that such impact was 'very significant'.

3.4.3. Impact on planning practice

The collaborative planning experience was making teachers' workload around planning more manageable (see Figure 6). Even at the end of the first session, three-quarters of teachers (75%, n=49) reported an impact (very significant/a lot) in this area; this had increased slightly at the follow-up (82%, n=32).

Very significant — Baseline 48, Follow-up 46
A lot — Baseline 27, Follow-up 36
Some — Baseline 23, Follow-up 13
Not at all/very little — Baseline 2, Follow-up 3

Teacher survey: To what extent do you feel that your planning experience in the Year Group Networks has led to positive changes in the following? Baseline=66 teachers; Follow-up=39 teachers

Figure 6: Percentage of teachers at baseline and follow-up – "Making the workload around planning more manageable"

Evidence from the focus group interviews also supports this survey observation. Almost all teachers spoke positively about the benefits of collaborative planning on reducing their workload. Having the opportunity to produce 3-7 weeks of planning in the session was felt to have reduced planning time elsewhere (e.g. PPA, weekends). **Although teachers found it difficult to quantify the time they felt they had saved, it was particularly felt to have saved time around thinking of ideas and in having to find and produce resources**. One teacher gave the example of being able to produce three weeks of planning on the day had saved at least 12 hours of planning time.

> *"If I was at home on my own I wouldn't have been able to plan 7 weeks in one day, so having lots of people putting ideas in and having the set time to do it with no interruptions it's nice to be offsite as well."*
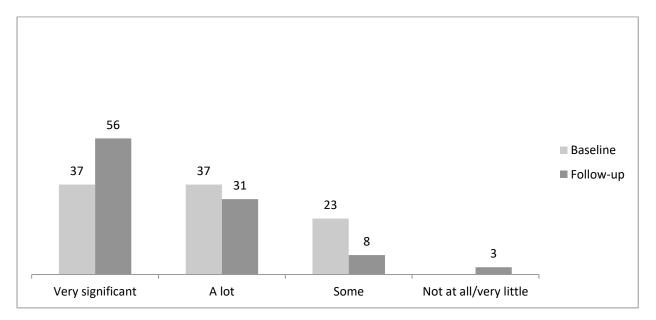
> *"I think it just saves thinking about ideas, which saved quite a bit of time in school as the resources were already there I didn't have to make my own."*

> *"By planning in this week, we know that across however many schools, we've got a quality-assured piece of planning that might be delivered in a slightly different way, but has been quality assured. So in terms of moderation and perhaps even if we could develop that in terms of assessment we've got a strong case across the Trust a strong case to say look we've got quality planning, assessment and resources"*

> *"It gives you a brilliant starting point that you only have to tweak. You haven't got to do all of the thinking, because the sequence of lessons is already there. So it's saving our holidays and our Sundays."*

Similarly, there was evidence that the collaborative planning process was **helping to reduce the complexity of planning**. 74% (n=48) of teachers in the baseline survey reported an impact in this areas, increasing to 79% (n=31) of teachers at the follow-up.
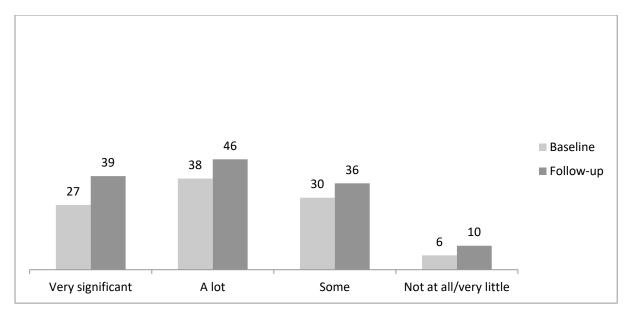
There was strong evidence that the Year Group networks **gave teachers the time to think about the quality of their teaching;** supporting the earlier survey and interview finding that teachers were becoming more self-reflective through their involvement – in that they were encouraged to think about how they were using their time to plan more efficiently and quickly, whilst ensuring quality. In the baseline survey, 74% (n=48) of teachers felt that their involvement had an impact (very significant/a lot) on the time they had to think about the quality of the teaching, with 37% reporting a 'very significant' impact. At the follow-up this had increased to 87% (n=34) of teachers; with over half (56%, n=22) reporting that the impact had been 'very significant'.

Teacher survey: To what extent do you feel that your planning experience in the Year Group Networks has led to positive changes in the following? Baseline=66 teachers; Follow-up=39 teachers

Figure 7: Percentage of teachers at baseline and follow-up – "Enabling me to have time to think more about how to improve the quality of teaching"

For the vast majority of the teachers in both surveys, **the collaborative planning events had enabled them to access high quality texts and books**: 64% (n=41) in the baseline survey, compared to 82% (n=32) in the follow-up survey, reported a positive impact in this area.

Teacher survey: To what extent do you feel that your planning experience in the Year Group Networks has led to positive changes in the following? Baseline=64 teachers; Follow-up=39 teachers

Figure 8: % of teachers at baseline and follow-up – "Accessing high quality texts and books"

In addition, involvement in the network events **had also considerably reduced the time teachers spent on looking for resources and materials**. Whereas 64% (n=41) of teachers in the baseline survey reported an impact of their involvement on saving time in terms of looking for resources and materials, this had increased to over four-fifths (83%, n=33) of teachers in the follow-up survey.

Moreover, evidence from the follow-up survey also suggests that involvement in the collaborative planning events had made the process of lesson planning **more intellectually enjoyable**. All but one teacher reported positively about this impact, with more than a third (38%, n=15) reporting that the impact had been 'very significant' in this area.

3.5. Pupils' engagement in lessons

A total of 123 Year 5 pupils completed the pupil survey across three Trust schools. Three-fifths (59%, n=73) of pupils who completed the survey were girls; the remaining two-fifths (41%, n=50) were boys.

3.5.1. Pupils' views on lessons and receiving feedback

Views on the quality of teaching amongst pupils were high. Nine-tenths of pupils (90%, n=108) reported that their teacher was good at teaching, although this was lower amongst boys (83% boys vs. 94% girls). Over four-fifths of pupils (81.5%, n=91) reported that **their teacher made their lessons interesting.** However, there were around a fifth of pupils (18.5%, n=22) who disagreed with this. Moreover, **the teacher's ability to manage classroom behaviour was an issue for 16% of pupils (n=19).** Whereas over four-fifths of pupils (84%, n=100) felt that their teacher was able to get their class to behave well, 16% did not feel this was the case.

Pupils felt they were encouraged to work hard and that they were praised for doing so. Over nine-tenths of pupils (92%, n=110) felt that their teacher made sure they worked hard in lessons. Nearly all pupils (96%, n=117) believed their teacher was pleased when they worked hard. Pupils were also positive about the praise they received for good work; over nine-tenths (93%; n=110) reported that their teacher told them when they had done good work. A similar proportion felt that their teacher was good at explaining if they had made mistakes in their work (90%, n=108).

Pupils generally felt cared for by their teachers. 86% (n=101) felt that the teachers in their school cared for them. Boys were overall less positive about feeling cared for by their teachers (20% disagreed, compared to 11% of girls). Not surprisingly, **most pupils liked their teachers, with 85% (n=100) reporting that this was the case**. Of the 15% that reported not liking their teachers, this was also more likely to be boys (21% boys vs. 11% girls).

3.5.2. Pupils' views on lesson focus

The majority of pupils were positive about the way their teacher taught them (83%, n=101). Boys were slightly less positive than girls; 19% (n=9) of boys did not like the way their teacher taught them, compared to 15% (n=11) of girls.

Pupils' views were mixed as to whether the work they were given in lessons was too easy. Over half (56%, n=66) of pupils felt they often found the work in class too easy; with a fifth (21%, n=25) of these strongly agreeing that this was the case. Conversely, 45% (n=53) disagreed that they found the work too easy (13% strongly disagreed). Views were consistent across the three schools.

Moreover, **some pupils did not feel that they had the opportunity to do different things in lessons.** Although four-fifths (80%, n=98) felt that they had the opportunity to lots of different things in lessons; a fifth of pupils (20%, n=24) did feel that this was the case.

3.5.3. Pupils' engagement in learning

Interest in learning was high and the majority of pupils felt they were learning at school. Nearly all pupils (94%, n=115) reported learning a lot at school and nearly nine-tenths (87%, n=106) reported being interested in learning.

Pupils' views on their enjoyment of lessons and school overall was somewhat mixed. Over three-quarters of pupils (77%, n=94) stated that they really enjoyed school most of the time; however nearly a quarter disagreed (23%, n=28). Furthermore, although four-fifths (81%, n=99) reported liking most of their lessons, around a fifth did not (19%, n=23). **Boys were less positive about lessons and school overall.** 28% (n=14) of boys reported not liking most of their lessons, compared to 12% (n=9) of girls. Similarly, 30% (n=15) of boys stated that they did not enjoy school most of the time, compared to 18% (n=13) of girls.

Nearly all pupils were pleased with the progress they were making. 94% (n=115) reported that they were pleased with the progress they were making in most lessons. Nearly all pupils felt that their teacher was preparing them well for tests at the end of the school year (97%. n=117). **Awareness of learning targets amongst pupils was high and pupils were generally encouraged to set their own targets and goals.** 86% (n=105) of pupils knew the learning targets they were working towards. Furthermore, 85% (n=104) of pupils felt that their teachers encouraged them to set their own targets/goals at school. Not surprisingly, then, **over four-fifths of pupils (83%, n=101) were confident that they would be successful at school.** 17% (n=21) of pupils however were less confident that they would be successful at school (increasing to 26% of boys).

Understanding of class work was good, although confidence in working independently was challenging for some. Nine-tenths (90%, n=110) of pupils felt that they were able to understand most of the work they did in class. However, over a fifth of pupils (22%, n=27) highlighted having difficulties in knowing exactly what to do when working independently in class. Boys in particular found working independently more challenging (31% boys vs. 16% girls).

3.6. Areas for future improvement

On reflection, we have identified the following areas for improvement for the Trust that we believe would help to enhance both the effectiveness and the impact of collaborative planning on teachers' workload concerns:

- How to align the focus and timing of the planning events with individual schools' curriculum priorities more effectively so that the planning events are not an 'add-on', but are able to support schools' curriculum development and enable teachers to use their plans with clear targets and time scales;
- How to secure headteachers' buy-in *and* understanding of the benefits of the planning events, so that teachers are able to share and embed their planning and learning experience as well as outputs in their own schools;
- How foster the 'collaborative learning' benefit of the planning events, challenging teachers to focus at greater depth on *how to teach* and *how to learn* (by, for example, enhancing the role of facilitators, challenging their existing teaching beliefs and behaviours) so that all teachers, including those from multiple form entry schools, find the experience *intellectually 'meaningful'* and its impact on their professional development enduring;
- How to use these planning events as opportunities to nurture talent and future curriculum leaders for the Trust.

4. School Culture

4.1. What cultural barriers may exist to prevent take up of new initiatives to reduce workload?

As many of our schools were in Ofsted categories prior to academisation, this can sometimes cause a barrier in implementing workload-reducing initiatives.   Some senior leaders in these schools feel a greater level of accountability for showing extensive detail in planning and marking due to theirs school's Ofsted grading. This can prevent take up of workload-reducing initiatives.

For one of our schools, there is a culture of SLT resistance to releasing staff to attend CPD events, meaning that staff from this school are not always able to participate in the days. Although all staff can access the plans via our electronic platform, implementing and understanding the planning might not be as effective when staff have not been involved in the planning process.

4.1.1. What specific issues may reduce the effectiveness of the approaches you have developed?

- SLEs – financial issues could impact on the use of SLEs in the future. Their work to facilitate and quality assure the planning was invaluable and we were able to invest in their expertise, having been allocated specific funding. The financial implications of using SLEs may impact on future sessions that could in turn impact on the quality of the plans if there is no expert quality assurance.

- Working together and allocating time – the effectiveness of such an approach relies on senior leaders agreeing to their staff being given the time away from their classes in order to engage in collaborative planning. The effectiveness of this therefore could be significantly reduced if senior leaders do not allow release from schools.

4.1.2. What steps could be taken to reduce these cultural barriers?

The impact of the planning sessions can clearly be seen in both the pupil and teacher surveys and questionnaires. Using the results of these to drive any future discussions around workload with head teachers will only serve to strengthen the recommendations of the reviews and the argument for teachers to engage in collaborative planning.

In order to keep momentum, we have also taken the step of allocating a Trust-wide INSET day to collaborative planning, thus reducing the barrier of granting and covering staff release time. This will run alongside our plans for curriculum development.

Workload will continue to remain high on our agenda as a Trust and we have used our research to write a 'Transform Response to the Workload Challenge' – this will be adapted by all existing and future schools in the Trust.

5. Conclusion

Results of both the teacher focus group interviews and online surveys show that our approaches to planning were highly effective in a number of areas. We can conclude that teachers valued the time and opportunity to collaborate with colleagues working in the same year group and also the investment at Trust and school-level to reducing their workload.

Moreover, teachers valued the dedicated time given to the planning events and felt that they could produce more high quality planning as a result, leading us to the conclusion that allocating whole and specific days to partake in collaborative planning has a positive impact on both **teacher workload** (i.e. *manageable*) and, as importantly, **quality of teaching** (i.e. *meaningful* and *motivational*).

We would like to highlight two important factors that have led to teachers' positive experiences of collaborative planning networks. First, the Trust team organising and leading the networks invested a lot of time and effort to ensure that producing lesson plans or schemes of work was not the only goal of the network sessions. Rather, professional learning and development should also be an important goal and outcome of the sessions. Particular attention therefore was paid to providing necessary resources, conditions and expertise to improve the **quality of dialogue** in the planning process. In order for our collaborative approach to be effective and intellectually challenging, it has required a financial investment in SLEs to work with groups of teachers to maintain high standards in planning. We have also invested in copies of high quality texts so that the availability of books for teaching each unit from could not be a barrier for our schools. Staff release time amounted to each teacher being released for one day per term in order to attend the planning events.

Second, participating **teachers' strong professionalism** has also contributed to the success of the network events. What shone through the interviews with them was a strong commitment and dedication to improve their knowledge and practice through working with their fellow colleagues. There is clear evidence from both surveys and interviews that the collaborative planning experience has made teachers' workload around planning more manageable. However, what was appreciated and celebrated most by them was not necessarily the actual number of hours or days that they had saved from planning in isolation. Rather, they valued the access to different expertise, ideas and resources and the opportunity to be engaged in **professional dialogue** with colleagues in the same year group, which enabled them to think reflectively about how children learn and questions that are seen as more fundamental to becoming an effective classroom teacher.

As yet, we cannot draw any firm conclusions about the impact of the planning on pupil outcomes as many of the units planned are to be taught in the Autumn Term. From the pupil surveys, we can conclude that teachers are planning engaging and exciting learning, as pupil interest in learning was high and the majority of pupils felt they were learning at school. Nearly all pupils reported learning a lot at school and nearly nine-tenths reported being interested in learning.

5.1.   Recommendations

- Use existing partnerships within MATs and Teaching School Alliances to facilitate planning and working together
- Invest in, or create, high quality schemes of work that can then be personalised by teachers for their individual contexts
- In creating your own high quality schemes of work, use experts to facilitate and quality assure the content of these
- Provide staff with dedicated time (approx. once per term) to collaborate with other colleagues
- Invest in high quality texts to drive your English curriculum
- Enhance any commercial schemes with time to discuss and personalise these to meet your school's and classes' needs