



Developing and sharing practice

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School
and Pontrhydyfen Primary School

Context

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School is located in Bridgend and serves a large community across the town. Pontrhydyfen Primary School is a small village school in the Afan Valley. In 2012, Estyn inspected Pontrhydyfen Primary School and identified the need to improve key skills (especially reading, writing and handwriting), curriculum planning (to ensure continuity and progression in learning across the school) and to address the shortcomings in teaching and assessment. Estyn also recommended developing the role of governors so that they were more accountable and better able to set the school's strategic direction. In September 2014, Pontrhydyfen Primary School was judged by Estyn to have made sufficient progress and was removed from the list of schools requiring significant improvement.

Impact

Although it is not possible to attribute improvements in results directly to any one programme or initiative, the percentage of learners achieving Outcome 5 in the Foundation Phase in Pontrhydyfen Primary School has increased from 73 per cent in 2012 to 100 per cent in 2014. The percentage achieving the core subject indicator (CSI) has increased from 40 per cent to 100 per cent in the same period.

New practices are now ingrained in the approaches of both schools.

The partnership work has helped to raise the profile of reading among learners. The outcomes of a study undertaken with Year 2 learners in May 2014 (a year after a baseline was set when the cohort were in Year 1) indicated that, on average, reading ages had progressed 28 months during the year with some individual learners making even greater progress. This included progress by learners with additional learning needs (ALN) and English as an additional language (EAL).

The school intends to conduct a further study in May 2015 to measure whether the progress has been sustained. Emerging qualitative evidence suggests that this will be the case.

Focus

One of Estyn's recommendations referred to the need for a more structured approach to learning and teaching in Pontrhydyfen Primary School, specifically in terms of reading, writing, and handwriting. St Mary's RC Primary School had done a great deal of work around reading as part of its work as a Building Learning Power school, recognising that reading skills were the foundations for learning. Although Pontrhydyfen Primary School had a sound policy for reading, its implementation lacked consistency. Pontrhydyfen Primary School was therefore looking to develop an approach to reading which had a clear purpose and was free of ambiguities around implementation.

What they did

An evidence-based approach to setting priorities

Both headteachers worked together to identify current best practice in reading and how that could influence their approaches. Working on the basis of research evidence, including Ofsted's *Reading at Six* report, they concluded that, although

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staff had a sound understanding of what needed to be done, there were issues to be addressed in terms of the way strategies were implemented.

In addition, the headteachers identified the need for a common approach to learning and teaching in reading across the school, empirical evidence to measure progress and impact, additional staff training to develop capacity, consistency in implementation, and high-quality feedback to parents/carers.

Outcomes

These initial activities helped to build a positive relationship between the two schools and enabled both schools' leaders to identify existing strengths and areas for development.

The two headteachers developed a firm, research-based understanding of what needed to be addressed which was articulated in a clear plan of action.

Establishing a baseline

The partnership focused on developing capacity to deliver sustained improvement through a programme of collaborative activity which was designed to identify and demonstrate good practice.

Initially, staff from Pontrhydyfen Primary School visited St Mary's RC Primary School to get to know the school and its working practices. Foundation Phase teachers from St Mary's RC Primary School undertook a reciprocal visit to Pontrhydyfen Primary School.

This was followed by joint work focusing on the key messages from the *Reading at Six* report on how the schools identified by Ofsted were achieving progress in reading, a programme of lesson observations, joint planning sessions, and joint teaching, including team teaching.

Outcome

Through close collaboration with peers from St Mary's RC Primary School, staff from Pontrhydyfen Primary School gained a sound understanding of what excellent teaching practice looked like and began to develop the skills and knowledge to replicate it.

Using remote learning

The partnership developed remote learning through the use of video links, which allowed them to release staff from Pontrhydyfen Primary School to work with the Reception Year teachers at St Mary's RC Primary School to plan lessons collaboratively and compare the outcomes.

As part of this approach, a teacher from St Mary's RC Primary School led a lesson via video link to learners at Pontrhydyfen Primary School. The lesson was then seen simultaneously at Pontrhydyfen Primary School and at St Mary's RC Primary School. Teachers at Pontrhydyfen Primary School worked in a support role, taking responsibility for the class, managing behaviour, and supporting learners working in small groups as part of the lesson being delivered from St Mary's RC Primary School.

This approach required careful planning as it involved staff at both schools working together as well as the use of video technology. Staff then took the time to reflect together on the lessons, identifying their strengths and areas for improvement.

Outcomes

Staff at Pontrhydyfen Primary School adapted their practice based on evidence of what worked elsewhere. Staff expertise was shared across the two schools without teachers having to move between sites.

Lessons were enlivened through the use of the video link.

Staff at Pontrhydyfen Primary School were able to focus on working with groups of learners while the lesson was being delivered remotely.

Changes to pedagogy

The Jolly Phonics programme was identified by the two headteachers as something which offered a way of providing a structure to follow, consisting of daily sessions with a set format that assured consistency and familiarised learners with teachers' expectations of them. As part of the programme, guided reading books were introduced in the Foundation Phase classes in Pontrhydyfen Primary School. Teachers and teaching assistants were involved in its delivery. Children worked in groups depending on their reading age.

Working together, the headteachers undertook a baseline study of Year 1 learners in May 2013 and identified those who might be falling behind and require additional support in reading.

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They also arranged joint in-service training involving all staff at Pontrhydyfen Primary School, which was led by an experienced consultant. Staff from Pontrhydyfen Primary School observed the consultant delivering an intervention lesson with a group of Year 2 learners.

Afterwards, a member of the Senior Leadership Team at Pontrhydyfen Primary School who led the Reception Class was given responsibility for implementing the Jolly Phonics programme throughout the school.

Outcomes

The baseline study confirmed the level that learners had reached which informed the subsequent delivery of the programme.

Both headteachers were able to measure the programme's impact based on firm quantitative evidence.

Involving both teachers and teaching assistants fostered a whole-staff understanding of the issues and the principles involved.

Booster sessions to assist learners to develop their reading skills facilitated differentiation.

Deploying programmes to suit learners

Although the use of Jolly Phonics was developed primarily with teachers in the Foundation Phase at Pontrhydyfen Primary School, Key Stage 2 teachers had also participated in the training. They identified individual learners in Key Stage 2 who could benefit from the type of approach promoted by the Jolly Phonics programme.

At the same time, teachers used the programme as a springboard to take forward the school's work in reading comprehension. This included implementing teaching techniques which had been successful at St Mary's RC Primary School, such as small group teaching.

Outcome

Pontrhydyfen Primary School increased the amount of small group teaching that was undertaken in Key Stage 2, having seen this approach being used successfully at St Mary's RC Primary School.

Why it worked

- St Mary's RC Primary School decided to be involved in the partnership to share its expertise. It had a clear understanding of its own aims in terms of school improvement and was able to assist Pontrhydyfen Primary School to analyse and begin to meet their own needs.
- Both schools established a positive relationship from the outset and placed an emphasis on working together, recognising the value of mutual learning. St Mary's RC Primary School's approach developed capacity for improvement at Pontrhydyfen Primary School.
- Both schools' headteachers used research evidence of effective practice to shape the partnership's approach. This was linked to their analysis of their schools' development needs.
- The use of video links enabled practice to be modelled and shared between the two schools. The partnership ensured that they had the necessary ICT infrastructure in place to achieve this.
- The partnership adopted a whole-staff approach which ensured that teachers and teaching assistants understood its key principles and were sufficiently skilled to participate in a meaningful way.

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