

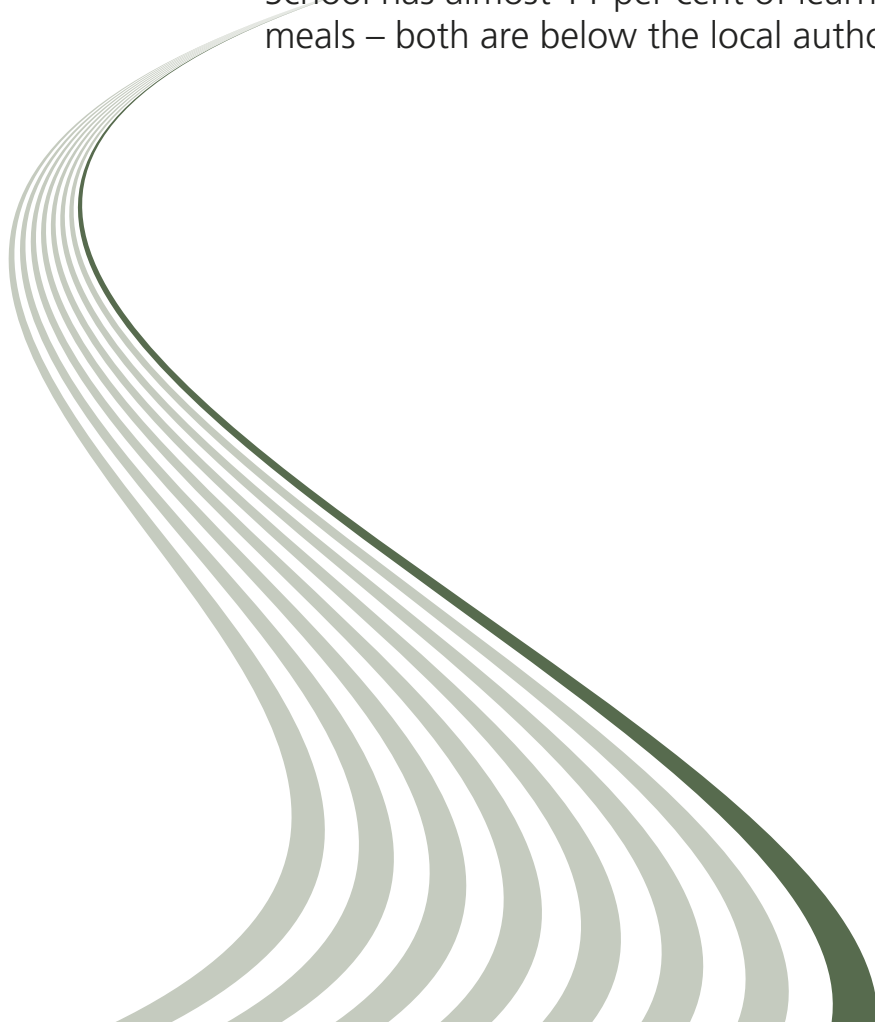


Developing and sharing practice

Rhydypenau Primary School
and Birchgrove Primary School

Context

Rhydypenau Primary School is a large primary school of over 500 learners in Cardiff. In 2011, Estyn judged standards at the school to be good. Birchgrove Primary School is also located in Cardiff and is slightly smaller with around 400 learners on roll. Rhydypenau Primary School has almost 3 per cent and Birchgrove Primary School has almost 11 per cent of learners entitled to free school meals – both are below the local authority and Wales average.



Impact

A whole-school review by a challenge adviser, the headteacher and inclusion officer in November 2014 showed that all lessons observed in Birchgrove Primary School were at least good.

Although it is not possible to attribute improvements in results directly to any one programme or initiative, in Birchgrove Primary School, Foundation Phase Indicators (FPIs) have risen by 11 percentage points since 2011–12. Key Stage 2 core subject indicators (CSIs) have risen by 10 percentage points since 2011–12.

During the same period, the percentage of learners achieving Outcome 6 in the Foundation Phase has increased by 15 per cent in Language, Literacy and Communication Skills and 7 per cent in Mathematical Development. In addition, those learners achieving Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2 has increased by 32 per cent in English and mathematics.

Focus

The partnership aimed to raise standards across Birchgrove Primary School to accelerate its progress in achieving excellence.

What they did

Developing a shared ethos

Both school leaders emphasised that the partnership was based on the schools' parallel journeys. As the headteacher at Rhydypenau Primary School commented: 'We didn't want this to be us imposing our ideas and practice in a school which has the capacity to improve, either with us or without us. Rather, we were seeking to support and accelerate their progress.' As a result, the partnership developed a shared ethos based on the principle that this was a collaborative endeavour. This approach meant that both schools' specific needs were addressed, thus enabling progress to be made in different ways and at different rates.

The first priority for the headteachers was to ensure that teachers from both schools shared a joint understanding of what constitutes excellence in terms of learning and teaching, especially around literacy and numeracy.

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Visitors felt that it was difficult to tell in which school staff worked and what their roles were when they came together for training. This illustrated the strong collaborative ethos which had developed early on in the partnership.

Outcomes

The schools' partnership helped to develop mutual ownership of the partnership and positive working relationships within it.

Both schools recognised that they could benefit from the partnership and perceived themselves as 'equals' in the partnership so that the work began and continued on a 'level playing field'.

Creating capacity to engage

All staff were involved in the partnership although the main focus was on eight Key Stage 2 teachers. Almost all of the funding was used to appoint a full-time teacher so that staff could be released to participate in the partnership activities. This member of staff was deployed in a way that enabled teachers to be released in both schools, to work on partnership targets through joint planning meetings and staff discussions. This model also gave teachers the opportunity to observe one another and plan collaboratively in one another's schools.

Outcomes

Staff of the two schools were able to engage more fully with the partnership activities because of the increased amount of non-contact time available to them. This meant that they had time to work together to undertake in-depth lesson planning and also to pay attention to underlying issues which required longer-term planning.

Appointing the additional teacher provided stability so that the standard of teaching in Rhydypenau Primary School was not compromised. Having the same member of staff to cover lessons also ensured consistency for learners.

Staff capacity to deliver training and to support other practitioners' professional development increased.

A whole-school approach to reflective practice

Both schools strongly emphasised engaging staff at every level with the partnership activities. An initial INSET day involving teachers from the two schools was used to develop a shared understanding of the aims of the partnership.

Both school leaders spoke at the event to clarify and embed the partnership ethos and to specify what was expected of staff going forward. Staff from both schools subsequently co-delivered training to their peers. The headteachers of both schools also spoke at governors' meetings to outline the value and meaning of the partnership for the school, its staff and its learners.

Staff worked in pairs to observe good teaching practice in Rhydypenau Primary School. Teachers of both schools planned and delivered lessons collaboratively, and provided constructive feedback. This helped teachers to reflect on the quality of their practice and to learn from each other.

The partnership used 'Continua' as a tool to encourage reflective practice at whole-school level. This provided inspiring examples and new material to support development.

Outcomes

Both schools developed their understanding of what 'excellent' teaching looked like, with an emphasis on aspects such as pace and use of plenaries.

Discussing excellence raised teachers' aspirations, provided model practice for them to emulate, and reinforced their confidence and self-belief.

There was a renewed focus on professional development, especially around evaluating pedagogical approaches.

This aspect of the partnership work developed further the skills and confidence of staff at Rhydypenau Primary School, with the result that they subsequently applied to become a specialist centre.

Rhydypenau Primary School identified key components of excellent lessons and disseminated this across the partnership. This helped to ensure that lessons were planned carefully and included engaging starts, exciting plenaries, and appropriate pace and differentiation.

Focus on learning and teaching

Both schools built on the opportunities to reflect on their practice to develop new approaches to delivering learning and teaching across the curriculum. At the same time, a consultant led a joint training day examining new ways of using ICT for learning, including using mobile devices in the classroom.

Outcomes

Both schools improved differentiation, especially for the more able.

The schools developed new approaches to the way ICT was used to deliver learning.

Strengthening middle leadership

The headteacher at Birchgrove Primary School made changes to middle leadership in the school which were implemented through a revision of the teaching and learning responsibilities (TLRs).

Outcome

This helped to improve scrutiny and accountability at each phase.

Why it worked

- The partnership was based on a whole-school approach which involved school governors as well as all staff across both schools.
- Dedicated funding enabled the appointment of a full-time member of staff. This allowed teachers to be released when necessary and enhanced consistency of provision for learners. It also provided stability so that the standard of teaching in Rhydypenau Primary School was not compromised.
- The partnership work was underpinned by a genuine partnership ethos rather than a 'deficit' model.
- Mutual respect and positivity existed between partners. This helped to foster good working relationships which promoted smooth and effective collaboration.
- All staff were willing and open to learning which was central to the progress and impact of the partnership.

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- Both schools understood each other's history and context. It was important for staff to understand the issues which the schools had faced in the past and how they had overcome them.
- The partnership's duration was long enough for the activities to make a demonstrable impact.
- The schools are geographically close which enabled staff to maximise the amount of time they spent engaging with partnership activities, rather than spending it on travelling between the partner schools.

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