



Developing and sharing practice

Glasllwch Primary School
and Deighton Primary School

Context

Deighton Primary School is a small primary school which is based on the outskirts of Tredegar. In 2014, there were 210 learners on roll and around 47 per cent of learners were eligible for free school meals. Deighton Primary School's headteacher has been in post since 2012, and since then, has worked with his staff to raise attainment in the core subjects and improve leadership, learning and teaching. Based in Newport, Glasllwch Primary School was judged as 'Excellent' in its most recent inspection (March 2014). In 2014, there were 209 learners on roll and around 1 per cent of learners were eligible for free school meals.

Impact

In Deighton Primary School, all observed lessons are now judged at least good, using the EAS Excellence in Teaching Framework.

The 2014 results in Deighton Primary School surpassed initial targets in English by 23.4 per cent at Level 4+ and by 16.1 per cent at Level 5. While it is not possible to attribute these improved results solely or specifically to the partnership, school leaders felt that it had definitely made a significant contribution.

The partnership has supported the continued journey of accelerated improvement in Deighton Primary School following the positive Estyn re-inspection of June 2013.

Focus

The partnership aimed to improve literacy, and to raise the standards of learning and teaching. In addition, the partnership supported the change in staffing structure at Deighton Primary School. This was particularly effective in supporting the middle tier to understand their role and increase effectiveness.

What they did

Setting the scene

At the beginning of the partnership the two headteachers spent time to develop an effective working relationship and agree priorities. As part of this they had an open discussion about Deighton Primary School's position and the areas which needed to be developed.

They conducted an evaluation of Deighton Primary School's capacity for improvement in literacy, including a joint moderation exercise. This included an assessment of the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders, consideration of Glasllwch Primary School's management structure and how it could be used as a model for change in Deighton Primary School.

Both headteachers agreed that progress would only be possible if they adopted a whole-school approach, which led them to create a centralised partnership plan which was used to monitor progress. They then communicated the need for, and aims of, the partnership to all staff, and to governors.

Outcome

They developed shared ownership of the partnership and positive working relationships, which facilitated the partnership's progress and impact. More staff in Deighton Primary School took responsibility for self-evaluation, which in the past had been undertaken solely by the headteacher.

Establishing effective partnership arrangements

An initial INSET day was held for staff from both schools at Glasllwch Primary School, during which both headteachers gave presentations that outlined the level of commitment to the partnership which was expected of all staff in order for it to have the intended impact.

Throughout the plan's lifetime, the two headteachers maintained informal, ad-hoc telephone and e-mail contact which provided a quick and effective way of offering information and support.

They delivered a presentation on the role of leadership and coordination based on their shared understanding of Deighton Primary School's strengths and areas for improvement. They emphasised the key message that the task was to implement sustainable, transformational changes in the way the school worked.

Outcome

The headteacher at Deighton Primary School felt that it was beneficial that this message had been reinforced by a headteacher from another school, outside the local authority, as it provided a fresh perspective, commenting 'It really helped to have Glasllwch Primary School's headteacher at the end of the phone as a critical friend'.

Organising learning and teaching

The two headteachers worked together to improve the way learning and teaching is managed, monitored and organised at Deighton Primary School. This was achieved through a programme of lesson observations, joint moderation exercises, and access to external training on the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF). Staff from both schools attended in pairs, using INSET sessions at Deighton Primary School to build elements of the partnership work into its school improvement plan (SIP), with a specific focus on self-evaluation.

Outcomes

Deighton Primary School implemented a new whole-school approach to moderation and marking.

It changed its curriculum to include more time for creative writing. This approach was akin to that which was already embedded at Glasllwch Primary School, who had found it to be successful in raising literacy standards.

All teachers now confidently and competently understand their accountability within subject areas. This enhances individual skill profiles and distributes responsibility for self-evaluation more equally among staff.

Strengthening practice

The headteachers reviewed the level of expectations of learners at Deighton Primary School and identified the need to change important aspects of the way the school approached learning and teaching.

They delivered training to staff on the use of assessment for formative as well as summative purposes.

They also focused on the need to improve literacy, especially extended writing, using Glasllwch Primary School's expectations as a benchmark.

The use of specific programmes was reviewed. For example, they introduced more creative writing and a standard marking system alongside a structured way of reviewing books.

Outcome

This facilitated their understanding of and support for the partnership and helped to develop a sense of shared ownership from the outset.

Adapting specific ways of working

An action research programme was undertaken incorporating staff exchanges between the partnership schools to look at one another's practice. In light of this, Deighton Primary School adopted elements of the 'Nessy'¹ spelling and reading scheme.

¹ www.nessy.com/uk

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Outcome

Deighton Primary School introduced the 'Nessy' spelling scheme and changed aspects of its teaching practice in response to this structured approach.

Reviewing staffing structure

Deighton Primary School has implemented a new staffing structure based on Glasllwch Primary School's model. The new structure promotes distributed leadership by increasing practitioners' responsibility through a commitment-based structure.

Subject leaders have been given guidelines to use when measuring performance. These are in addition to, or instead of, formal teaching and learning responsibilities (TLRs).

Outcomes

The new staffing model has increased accountability and clarity around teachers' roles and responsibilities, in particular subject leaders.

There is more structured work by subject leaders.

The role of higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) was developed to enable them to work at higher levels and develop their skills of working, e.g. with more able and talented children.

Encouraging reflection

The partnership provided an opportunity to demonstrate good practice and reflect on learning and teaching.

The headteacher of Glasllwch Primary School spent time at Deighton Primary School illustrating excellent practice in subject coordination and leadership.

A 'Freaky Friday' initiative was introduced at Deighton Primary School to develop and share good practice within the school. Teachers at each phase paired up and observed best practice in each other's lessons.

In addition, they held a collaborative learning session on using tablets for teaching and assessment attended by several local primary schools along with Glasllwch Primary School.

Outcomes

Staff were encouraged to view practical teaching from a fresh perspective.

The paired observation approach is now embedded in the SIP and the school plans to extend the model in future.

Staff from both schools met informally at lunchtimes and social events to exchange ideas which has nurtured positive working relationships and a shared ethos.

Why it worked

- The Partnership Plan's tight structure and clear links to both schools' SIP clearly set out targets (including actual and predicted Levels 4 and 5 data) and was updated regularly to document and track progress accurately and succinctly.
- Both schools were willing to share best practice, and had an open commitment to the partnership.
- Working together, the headteachers of both schools modelled the desired behaviours, ethos and attitude to staff from the partnership's outset.
- Whole-school engagement with and involvement in the partnership was important. Both headteachers used the partnership activities such as the joint INSET sessions and staff meetings to emphasise the importance of engaging fully in order to obtain maximum possible impact.
- The 18-month pathfinder provided the right time frame. School leaders felt that the partnership's time frame should be considered carefully so that it is sufficient to show impact but not so long that momentum is lost.

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