

May 2018

East Sussex Secondary Schools

E: Pupil Premium Reviews

10 Lessons Learned and 1 Key Issue

The Background

Just under two years ago, East Sussex, concerned by the PP gaps within schools, commissioned The London Leadership Strategy, who had developed a model for PP reviews in London and Gloucester, to undertake trial reviews at Beacon Academy and Willingdon Community School. Based on feedback and evaluation of the trials, we have developed our own model which was piloted with Robertsbridge Community School and Ratton Academy last summer.

This newsletter describes the process and gives initial feedback on what is working well in some schools and shares some of the common areas for improvement we have identified from the reviews so far.

We hope you find it of use and if you wish to participate in a review in the future then please talk with your Consultant Head.

The Review Model

In brief, the model partners schools in reviews which are led and supported by their respective Consultant Headteachers. Much of the strength of the model is in the fact that two staff from the reviewer school joins the review of their partner school. The process is then reversed with staff from the school to be reviewed first joining the return review of the other school.

Each review entails a brief self-review by the receiving school which identifies their key PP strategies. This then determines the shape of the review day with the team assessing the effectiveness of the identified strategies.

Following an extended morning of investigation, including learning walks, interviews with leaders, teachers, support staff, pupils and governors the team produce a draft report, presented to the Headteacher at the end of the day. The final report includes an assessment of the school's identified strategies plus any other issues identified during the review and finally suggest a range of actions for the school to consider in order to strengthen their approach to closing gaps. It is suggested, at this point, the school produces an updated action plan of their own.

However, the process does not stop there as we believe the greatest strength of the model is the on-going partnership between the two schools. We suggest the two staff from each of the partner schools, sometimes supported by the relevant Consultant Headteacher, visit each other on at least two occasions over the following year to explore how the school is securing impact and how they have adapted their plans. It is the involvement of the staff, of whom one is invariably the school's PP lead, which has been found to be most valuable because of the learning involved but also because it gives the process an on-going momentum.

At the end of the first year both schools are invited, with each other's support, to produce a further revised action plan and to maintain the contacts between the two schools.

Currently, the Local Authority is subsidising 50% of the cost of the reviews. The subsidised cost to each school is £750.

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Reviews So Far

As well as the initial trial at **Beacon Academy** and **Willingdon Community School** and then the pilot of the partnership model at **Robertsbridge Community School** and **Ratton Academy**, we have undertaken 3 other partnered PP Reviews. They have been with **Kings Academy Ringmer** and **Seahaven Academy**; **Claverham Community College** and **Seaford Head School**; and **Chailey School** and **St Richard's Catholic College**. A further two schools, **Uckfield College** and **Peacehaven Community School** are participating in Terms 5 and 6. **A total of 12 East Sussex secondary schools**. We are currently evaluating the model but so far the feedback has been very positive with the staff involved being particularly positive about the opportunity to look at what another school is doing and developing a relationship with staff who are facing many of the same issues. Headteachers have also found them valuable in that they have either identified concerns of which they were unaware or have added strength to their arm where the review has confirmed a Head's own perception of what may be happening.

Pupil Premium – Ten Lessons Learned

The ultimate measure of good practice is whether or not it is having impact. The evidence seen in the reviews has not always been conclusive but we have identified a number of strategies which are having some impact or, we believe, will have impact in time. What has become clear is that all strategies need to be constantly reviewed and often changed or adapted as the nature of cohorts change or the stage of development of the school as a whole alters.

Key to all the schools visited was a focus on quality first teaching which included varying degrees of sharpened focus on PP students. As you will note below, where this was done consistently well it had impact but too often there was a lack of consistency which undermined the impact. The issue of consistency/variability became something of a theme in many of the reviews. It might be too obvious to say that good initiatives done consistently well, worked well, but done inconsistently, did not work well. However, **if there is a single message to take away from the reviews it is that whatever the strategy or initiative it needs to be pursued doggedly and applied consistently by all involved**. We will identify some of the factors which contribute to achieving this consistency although they are no more than the key elements of the good leadership of any initiative.

Whilst the focus of the reviews was on disadvantaged students, it became clear that much of what applied to them also applied to SEND students, not just those who fell in to both categories. It would therefore be possible to apply some of what we learned to address the needs of SEND students.

The 10 Key issues:

1. Raising awareness across all staff of the importance of addressing the specific needs of PP students. This was often stated by schools but the evidence on the ground was that awareness was inconsistent and the associated and expected responses, particularly regarding quality first teaching (e.g. marking strategies, differentiation, targeting PP students), were not being universally applied.

The best examples, where it was very clear that every member of staff accepted the importance of focusing on PP students and knew what the expectations on them were to support them, were where every leader, both senior and middle, had a responsibility for ensuring that their team members were following through on agreed practice. This included very clear and hard-nosed accountability systems at tracking points, line management meetings, team meetings and performance management. Performance management played a key role in this.

Where schools had established this full and genuine buy-in from their staff, the associated strategies were delivered with a much greater degree of consistency and impact.

2. The use of teaching and learning, class folders, for all teachers, was a common feature in many of the schools visited. Most were in some form of hard copy but some were held electronically on programs such as “Class Charts”. These contained a range of class information, including seating plans which identified PP and SEND students, assessment data, marking and feedback information and more specific information about PP and SEND students.

We witnessed some outstanding practice in the use of these folders where teachers kept them up to date and used them as a living document to support their planning for the learning of all students but specifically for the vulnerable and disadvantaged. However, whilst there was evidence in some schools of the widespread use of the folders (rarely 100%), the use of them to help direct and enhance the progress of PP students was rare. Too often they were used more passively, at best merely a record keeping document and at worst something that sat in a drawer. The schools where they were used best were those that had established clear monitoring systems which regularly tracked their use, including on daily learning walks.

3. Information sheets on PP and SEND students produced by the PP lead or equivalent and the SENCo featured in varying forms in most of the schools. These were sometimes held in hard copy in the T&L folders (see above) or linked electronically through a SIMS data spreadsheet.

The best examples were very detailed, including background, prior and current attainment and personal information related to their learning needs. These also included detailed T&L support strategies which were likely to help the student make progress. They were labour intensive documents but provided teachers with invaluable information to help them plan for the teaching of these students. Their impact related entirely to how well and how widely they were used.

We saw some outstanding examples of teachers using this level of information to very specifically plan their lessons and to track the impact of what they were doing. However, the use of this type of information was hugely variable and quite often ignored. Evidence indicated that information held electronically was less well/regularly used than hard copy.

4. Marking and feedback was often cited as a key instrument for supporting PP students. Strategies included the marking of their books first, feedback which related specifically to their particular needs, regular informal feedback in each lesson and regular feedback to parents on how their child was doing. A number of the schools visited had variations on a 3 point marking system which required teacher feedback on the work, next steps to improvement and a student response.

Without doubt, feedback was the most variable and inconsistent of the strategies both in terms of its quality and regularity, with the student response aspect of the approach being the weakest.

Practice did not always reflect school policy. We witnessed outstanding examples of regular marking and feedback which students, including PP students, found helpful and with which they engaged actively. The best examples were where teachers had clearly taken on-board information provided to them by the PP Lead or SENCo, and were giving feedback which related to that information. This was not always just seen in the physical marking of books but also in oral, in-class feedback.

There was little evidence that marking PP books first was having any impact, although this was often used as a way of highlighting the significance of these students. Where student responses to feedback were asked for consistently, there was evidence that this helped students understand how to make better progress. There was some evidence that the involvement of parents in trying to understand the feedback their children were receiving was helpful for some students.

Good, regular and consistent feedback (not necessarily always written) that addressed the specific needs of these students had a significant impact on their progress. The issue for schools is ensuring that practice is consistently applied at all times by all staff. It tended to be stronger where schools had rigorous monitoring systems which included regular monitoring on a weekly basis.

5. Target setting, assessment and tracking were key features of the PP strategy for all the schools visited.

Target setting varied, with the majority of schools setting targets for PP students on the same basis as all students. There is a move in some schools to setting more challenging targets for PP students in order to speed up their progress and close the gap on their peers. For example, all PP students being set FFT5 targets rather than FFT20. This information was not always shared with staff. The evidence of how effective this is in enhancing progress is, so far, limited but there are some signs that it may be an effective strategy.

Tracking of student progress tended to be based around 3, 4 and, in some cases, 6 assessment points during the year. In most schools there was an emphasis at each assessment point on noting and analysing the specific progress of PP students. As a general rule, where departments/faculties were firmly accountable for tracking, the emphasis on PP students was more widespread and embedded across the staff and staff were more aware of their accountability for PP outcomes. Where tracking points were analysed more centrally, this was less obvious.

Whilst tracking was key in all year groups there was a tendency for it to become more high profile and intense in Y11, with tracking “war-boards” evident in staffrooms etc. and, in some cases, student versions in the classrooms. This enhanced intensity sometimes spread into Y10 but by no means in every case and was even less intense in KS3. Schools should consider versions of this level of intensity or high visibility tracking in all year groups, to allay the need to “catch-up” in a rush at the end of KS4 and to even out the rate of progress over the earlier years. Some schools focused more on the work habits of students in KS3 rather than very specific grades/levels as they considered there was a greater sense of reliability about these and they would ultimately lead to improved grades which could be more reliably tracked in KS4.

5. Interventions of varying kinds (e.g. additional classes before during and after school and in the holidays) were common to all the schools but, as above, they tended to focus on Y11 and, to a lesser extent, Y10. Many of these concentrated on English and maths and included targeted PP students. The use of trial exams and PIXL strategies were used in a similar fashion. KS3 interventions were less prevalent but should be more widely considered by schools.

1:1 support featured in some schools. The nature of this support varied between the use of support staff or qualified teachers. Some support staff had developed a high degree of specialist knowledge which significantly enhanced their impact. The best examples of 1:1 were where specialist teachers had daily 1:1 sessions (usually maths) with targeted PP students in Y11. A very expensive model but one that was having significant impact.

“Special units” for more challenging students, invariably PP, where a range of support mechanisms were in place to engage or re-engage students had varying degrees of success. The work in these units was often of a very high quality but was expensive and only impacted on a small number of students, often outliers, and there was not always evidence of impact.

6. Literacy support for PP students was a common feature in all the schools visited. Much of this was targeted in Y7 and 8 with some extending into Y9. Support was provided by a range of different mechanisms including TA withdrawal sessions, reading support from older students, small group work with specialist teachers and the use of programs like Accelerated Reader and Lexia. Where this was tracked closely and the specifics of the literacy needs were being addressed more widely there was evidence that it was having an impact on literacy levels. Just running the programmes per se did not necessarily produce results.

7. Homework support was an aspect that was quite variable in its quality and hard to measure for its impact. These tended to be lunchtime or after school sessions, largely for Y11.

Quality support and information given to students about their homework and how to do it, particularly for the more vulnerable, was seen as being more effective than general sessions and could be targeted at all the appropriate students. Where feedback on homework was regular, not always formal, students valued the homework more and completion rates were better. In one school, work with the parents of disadvantaged students in KS3 to help them understand what their child was learning and how it was assessed, was proving to be very effective in helping students develop good work habits, including approaches to homework.

8. CEIAG did not feature extensively as part of schools' strategies to improve the progress of PP students but there were examples of where it was used well to enhance their aspirations and to support them in making appropriate course choices for KS4 and onto post 16. The use of IAG in KS3 to encourage PP students to aspire to higher grades and to consider long term progression to L3 courses post 16 was seen as a good example. Links with Universities, University visits and the Brilliant Club programme all featured as effective initiatives to raise the aspirations of higher ability PP students.

9. Additional funding to support special activities, trips, uniform, resources, revision guides etc. for PP students was a common feature of all schools. The evidence to support the value of this in terms of enhancing progress was limited but the value in terms of enriching the educational experience for PP students and improving their engagement was more convincing. This could amount to quite extensive expenditure without any sense of knowing precisely what it was achieving. It is acknowledged that sometimes the value is hard to evaluate other than knowing it was the right thing to do. Schools should, however, establish more rigorous analysis of this type of expenditure to ensure it secures impact for pupils and is money well spent.

10. Attendance strategies were, as a general rule, being well developed in most schools. As well as the need to address the attendance of PP students there was a general need to improve overall attendance and to reduce Persistent Absence. **As a result we will report on this in a separate paper.**

However, what became very evident is that the key to improving the attendance of all, including PP students, is a whole school, dogged, persistent and high profile strategy which involves all staff and engages all students. It needs to become embedded in the culture of the school and its community. We saw a number of good strategies which were having some significant impact on small groups of students but without having dramatic impact on the overall figures. We believe that once embedded over time, the culture of high expectations on attendance will produce significant improvements.

One Key Issue

Without wishing to state the obvious, there is one clear message from all we have seen. In all the schools visited there has been a stated intent to address and close the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. Schools have introduced a varying range of strategies to attempt to close that gap. Many of those strategies are of a good quality and are having some impact but the gap in attainment, progress, attendance and exclusions is not significantly closing in East Sussex. There is no definable trend other than it goes up and down from year to year which is also generally reflected on a school by school basis. The gap in East Sussex also remains consistently wider than the gap nationally.

The key issue is the quality and depth of the commitment which invariably reflected the quality and depth of the monitoring and evaluation. This broke down into two key components:

1. Too often the stated intent, commitment and values, usually expressed clearly by the Headteacher, was not followed through with the rigour required to ensure that expectations on practice were uniformly applied. Good policies/strategies were undermined by not being applied consistently. Rarely were there strong monitoring systems that ensured that expectations and policy/strategy were being rigorously driven at all levels and at all times. Leaders, both senior and middle, were not being firmly held to account or holding others to account for the delivery of the PP strategies, hence the drive to close the gaps lost momentum or became haphazard and/or patchy.
2. Clearly linked to 1. was the quality of the evaluation of strategies. Without wishing to over characterise the approaches, too many were a collection of different strategies, all very reasonable and possibly appropriate things to try but there was little evidence of systematic measuring of their impact. There was evidence of schools evaluating the quality of what they were doing but this did not always link to whether it was having an impact or was good value for money. Schools could point to some outstanding practice which was valued by the students and achieved a number of positive, soft outcomes but was having limited impact on key performance indicators. There was not a systematic evaluation of the PP Strategy based on impact, which was likely to lead to schools continuing to do the same thing regardless of how successful it was. This is something that **governors** were not particularly strong at challenging.

In short, schools have adopted a range of different, sometimes innovative and often good strategies to drive their approach to closing the gap but the drive too often lacks rigour and consistency, with accountability systems lacking the sharpness applied to other areas of provision, all of which tends to lead to a loss of momentum.

Hampshire Disadvantaged Learners Report

Hampshire County Council have recently completed a review of how to address the needs of disadvantaged learners entitled, "Improving Outcomes for Disadvantaged Learners". The report highlights, in a very readable fashion, the key components of such a strategy and then provides a number of school based case studies. I would recommend having a look at it and include the link here: <https://marcrowland.wordpress.com/2018/04/08/hampshire-disadvantaged-learners-report/>

The report echoes some of our own findings, particularly around leadership, monitoring, evaluation and accountability but includes much more, including the case studies which I think all have value.

The report identifies the 5 key "Active Ingredients" to a successful strategy, which are: Leadership, Culture and Values; High Expectations; Understanding Barriers and Targeted Evidence Based Activities; Monitoring and Evaluation; and, Securing Accountability.

Well worth a read.