

Summary Report – ‘Closing the Gap’ work flow, Secondary Schools.

Introduction

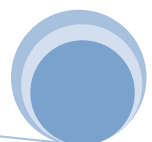
The consultant was approached by Warwickshire Local Authority and asked to facilitate peer reviews focussing on the achievement of disadvantaged students across six secondary schools. Each school volunteered to take part. The reviews were conducted following the methodology developed by the Teaching Schools Alliance. This methodology is the same as that used by NLE’s when schools are required by Ofsted to put in place an external review of the pupil premium.

Each review was conducted with one of the headteachers from the participating schools. A reciprocal review also took place. The reviews took place between February and June 2015. At the time of writing, follow up visits are taking place to establish the progress that each school is making since the review.

Prior to the onsite reviews an analysis of available data was produced using the latest RAISE report, the school website and any information supplied by the school. The analysis was discussed by all parties prior to the review day so that trails and areas of focus could be agreed. While different activities took place in each school, the following were often common features of the approach taken which was very much ‘Ofsted facing’ in terms of been ‘evidence based’:

- Discussions with groups of disadvantaged students, often precisely targeted at a particular level of prior attainment.
- Learning walks around core subjects and sometimes foundation subjects.
- Work scrutiny comparing the achievement of disadvantaged students with others of similar prior attainment.
- Meetings with core subject leaders and senior leaders, including those responsible for behaviour and attendance.
- Meetings with the most relevant governor.
- Observations of small group intervention activities.
- Data analysis and scrutiny of documentation supplied by the school when onsite.

While the reviews were primarily designed to support schools in further improving outcomes for disadvantaged students, there was also a strong focus on professional development for the headteachers involved as well as sharing good practice and resources. The appendix to this document is a summary of the review meeting held at the local authority in June 2015. These notes highlight the very positive comments made by all the headteachers involved.





From speaking with some of the headteachers involved in the project, it is evident that Year 11 outcomes for disadvantaged students appear to have improved, compared to those in 2014 in several of the schools involved.

Each school was encouraged to produce an action plan, following the format recommended by the Teaching School's Alliance.

Key Outcomes

The key areas of focus in each review were related to teaching and leadership and management. However, each school received feedback in the form of an 'executive summary' which covered each of the key Ofsted areas. A set of recommendations were offered for each school to consider.

During the reviews it was evident that each school has many strengths in terms of its work with disadvantaged students. Indeed several of the schools regularly achieve outcomes for these students which are well above average. However, in the spirit of continuous improvement, the following are key characteristics of where the schools in the project could improve further.

Teaching, learning and assessment

Close monitoring, support and challenge in lessons – an important reason why some disadvantaged students were achieving less well than others was because work was sometimes incomplete, lacked depth or was incomplete. None of the schools had whole school expectations for providing students with regular assessment and support during lessons. Often, disadvantaged students who are not making enough progress require frequent visits from the teacher. While it is up to schools to manage teaching how they see fit, it would be helpful if schools considered strategic, whole school approaches to this aspect of pedagogy. This key point links with what the Sutton Trust stated was the most effective and cost effective strategy in its tool kit – effective feedback.

Marking – this aspect links with the above point. For some disadvantaged students who were underachieving there was evidence in books that written feedback is sometimes not regular and precise enough for students. In addition, sometimes this feedback had limited impact because students' work was not always checked well enough to establish if the student had acted on the advice given. This applies to all students, of course, but it is was also one important reason why some disadvantaged students were underachieving.

Catch-up strategies – in line with the national picture, some disadvantaged students have higher absence than others in some of the schools. Strategies for improving attendance were usually well thought through and managed by most of the schools, though the fact remains that many disadvantaged students miss more





lessons than other students. Schools did not have particularly effective strategies for catching up. Often, disadvantaged students will not attend after school sessions, for example. The challenge is to establish best practice across each school for ensuring that missed work is caught up. This should go beyond simply copying from a peer as this makes little contribution to depth of understanding, for example.

Literacy – some disadvantaged students were underachieving because their written English was inaccurate. Consistent application of literacy policies, including spelling, punctuation and grammar, should be an important consideration for all students, but those who are disadvantaged and falling behind, in particular.

Homework – sometimes it became evident that some disadvantaged students were either not writing down their homework, not doing it or doing it superficially. Support for students to complete homework was a common feature across schools, often after school or at lunch time. However, attendance by disadvantaged students is too variable, overall.

Accuracy and presentation – sometimes teachers' expectations with respect to presentation and accurate work were not always high enough for those disadvantaged students who were not achieving as well as they could. Some students had books which were difficult to read and this is a significant factor when it comes to revision, for example.

Leadership and management

Targeting and evaluating the impact of additional resources - it is advisable that the various strategies used by schools to improve achievement are reviewed more frequently than they appear to be at present. Most of the schools did not have an ongoing and frequent approach to evaluating the impact of their various chosen strategies. In addition, strategies which are funded from the additional funding but involve all students requiring additional support could be considered by some parties to be inappropriate because the argument could be that eligible students are not benefitting as fully as they could. Overall, evaluation of the impact of strategies was weak across the schools. This fundamentally means that, potentially, schools are not securing good value for money if disadvantaged students are underachieving.

Mentoring programmes – many of the schools have these programmes in place. However, there was limited evidence of how schools are monitoring and evaluating their impact on the achievement, behaviour or attendance of disadvantaged students. Schools do not always know if the mentors have the right skills for the role. In addition, where students are set targets through mentoring, there is not always a 'joined up' approach so that class teachers know the targets and can support students in achieving them. Some schools were using 'student voice' to evaluate the effectiveness of mentoring but, overall, this kind of qualitative data





collection was underdeveloped across many of the schools. Those schools delivering mentoring may wish to consider peer mentoring – the second most effective and cost effective strategy identified by the Sutton Trust in its tool kit.

Behaviour and attendance – some of the schools were not analysing and evaluating these areas in sufficient detail, including sub groups, rewards and sanctions and any disproportionality between disadvantaged students and others. As a result, leaders were not always working as ‘smartly’ as they could be and so improvements were not as rapid as they might be. Engagement with parents was not always as ‘tenacious’ as it could be with respect to these areas in some of the schools.

Target setting, improvement planning and governance – only one of the schools had a specific action plan for disadvantaged students. Even in this school, it did not incorporate all year groups. All schools have appropriate references in their SEF’s and overall school improvement plans, but the process of rigorous target setting, key milestones across the year and frequent monitoring, review and evaluation were not strong, overall. As a result, most of the governors who were spoken to could not robustly hold the school to account as well as they might for the impact of the additional funds across all year groups.

School websites – almost all were non-compliant at the time of the reviews. Typically, pupil premium statements did not cover two years and did not show the impact on attainment across all year groups. Although not statutory, many did not indicate what the anticipated impact was of current strategies. Government regulation 10 (school websites) states that, “The amount of the school’s allocation from the Pupil Premium Grant in respect of the current academic year; details of how it is intended that the allocation will be spent; details of how the previous academic year’s allocation was spent, and the effect of this expenditure on the educational attainment on those pupils at the school in respect of whom grant funding was allocated”.

Joined up approaches - some schools have what is effectively a PP task group, or similar. Such groups bring together all key stake holders so that strategic responses to the underachievement of any disadvantaged students can be implemented. Where this doesn’t happen, strategies are sometimes disjointed and uncoordinated. As a result, the full benefits of the funding are not always realised.

The impact of middle leadership - middle leader monitoring with respect to disadvantaged students’ achievement was underdeveloped – there was no real ‘forensic’ approach to helping leaders and teachers diagnose any characteristics of under achievement, for example. As a result, few specific strategies exist for improving or ‘tweaking’ teaching for disadvantaged students who are falling behind. This also relates to lesson observation and work scrutiny at all levels.





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Class intervention plans - some schools use class intervention plans for identified students who are under achieving. These were generally not precise enough as they lacked clear impact indicators and timelines, for example. Consequently, subject leaders are not always able to monitor the impact for disadvantaged students, in particular.

In line with the Education Endowment Fund organisation, schools may wish to implement in-school research work which will help them to establish even more precisely what is working and what more needs to be done in their own unique circumstances. I would recommend this in tandem with the action plans which they have been encouraged to produce as part of this process.

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Appendix

Closing the Gap – Secondary Peer Reviews

Initial Feedback following Peer reviews

Notes of meeting, 1st June 2015

Present: Claudia Wade Steve Pendleton Sophie Thompson Paul Hyde
Neil Wallace Phil Kelly Mark Feldman Ranjit Samra

Apologies: Simon Cotton

Welcome Claudia welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the purpose was to capture initial views on the peer review process.

Richard

- The process was taken very seriously
- Dialogue beforehand was helpful and led to shared focus for a schools review
- All schools talked about KPIs and the impact of actions. There is a need for hard achievement indicators
- Middle leaders are adapting and refining monitoring processes
- All schools used student voice which was powerful and best approached by non-school based staff eg governors or external consultants
- Undertaking a review provides powerful evidence for Ofsted judgements on leadership and performance. It is important that demonstration of the impact of the review/follow up is undertaken

Southam

- Visit to the partner school was invaluable, a good CPD exercise
- There is extra work involved in preparation for the day, not just data prep but planning for the visit. However it is a good run through exercise for an Ofsted visit.
- The preparation makes you reflect and forces completion of plans
- It is a rigorous day
- It is an opportunity to show off good practice and provides recognition of staffs good work
- Overall it was a very positive exercise and put Pupil Premium back on top of the agenda
- Taking time to reflect on the action plan and not sharing straight away with staff. Will plan actions into next year's agenda
- Quality first teaching will lead to the right interventions, eg sitting PP pupils in centre of classroom
- It was helpful to share book trawls with leaders





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- There were some surprises eg sixth formers were reading with year 7 but had not been given any training

Higham Lane

- The process was very clear and helpful
- Preparing for the review was very useful and allowed the school to suggest trails for evidence
- The process raised awareness of the PP children within the school and their particular characteristics. This led to some practical actions that were implemented to support those children
- The PP co-ordinator in post was anxious about the review
- The action plan has not been shared with staff yet but is in the new development plan which will ensure best impact
- Phil queried which staff to bring into the review. On reflection he would have brought in the Heads of English and maths, whereas Neil reported he involved staff below head of subject level to save their already heavy workloads.

Alcester

- There is no broad brush solution, the need is to get 'under the skin' of the individuals
- It made the school define the purpose of mentoring, ensuring everyone involved was aware of the mentoring targets and impact measures
- Issues were picked up with individual staff
- Leader of achievement was not effective and has now been changed
- An improvement plan is being written for next year and the summer term is being used to develop a strategy and test mentoring of pupil premium pupils in year 7-11. Mentoring will be timetabled during form time rather than during class time
- Attendance lead now emails daily lists of pupils who are absent, this ensures missed work is emailed to the pupils to ensure there are no gaps in learning
- Summed up it was a brilliant process that led the school to honing all areas of work around supporting PP pupils

Stratford

- The introduction of new levels made it difficult
- Good CPD and kept organisation 'on its toes'
- The review helped to broaden ownership and understanding of the issues for PP pupils changing the culture throughout the school
- Lesson observations and the checking of books were particularly illuminating. There was a culture shift away from watching 'a show' to looking at books.

Campion





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- It was helpful to start the review by questioning staffs understanding of the reasons for underachievement of PP pupils.

General characteristics of PP pupils

- Work not done to enough depth
- Work not completed
- Work missed
- Work untidy
- Homework not done regularly
- Don't respond to marking
- Lack of basic organisational skills

