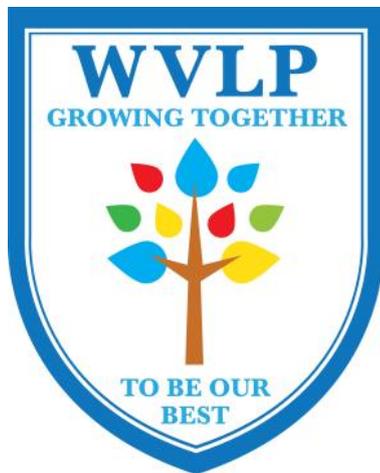


Autumn 2018

WVLP UPDATE

WHARFE VALLEY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

2017 - 18



What is the Wharfe Valley Learning Partnership?

The schools in this area have a long established practice of working closely together within the Elmete Partnership of Schools (EPoS) Family of Schools. Nine of these schools:

- ◆ Bardsey Primary School,
- ◆ Boston Spa Academy,
- ◆ Collingham Lady Elizabeth Hastings' CE Primary School,
- ◆ Deighton Gates Primary School,
- ◆ Harewood CE Primary School,
- ◆ Lady Elizabeth Hastings' CE VA Primary School Thorp Arch,
- ◆ Primrose Lane Primary School,
- ◆ St Mary's CE Primary School,
- ◆ and St John's School for the Deaf

took this collaboration further in January 2014 by setting up the Wharfe Valley Learning Partnership. The Partnership enables each school to keep its unique identity and autonomy, whilst simultaneously working closely together to secure the best outcomes for our children and young people.

The Governing Bodies of these schools believe that a partnership of this kind is the best way to ensure the long term, sustainable collaboration that is required to meet our common aims.

Message from the Chair

Dear Parents and Friends of the WVLP,

2017-18 has definitely been a time of leadership change and evolution for our learning partnership.

We said goodbye to three of our founding headteachers, Briony Robertson at Collingham, Suzanne Ulyett at Lady Elizabeth Hastings Thorp Arch and Jan Alexander Crawley at St Mary's. They had been instrumental in laying the foundations of the WVLP, which continues to go from strength to strength at the beginning of our fifth year working together.

Additional pressures and further reductions in school finances can mean that a change of leadership can be a huge challenge to a school. We have been delighted to warmly welcome and support Paul Cook, Michele O'Donnell and Su Cloke into their new roles. School to school support and mentoring have eased transition for pupils and staff and helped to maintain levels of collaboration through the changes of leadership.

Through honest and open dialogue and joint projects, staff continue to sustain high quality collaborative teaching and learning across the partnership, benefitting children in each and every school. We are able to share ideas, work together to innovate and to approach new initiatives in cost and time efficient ways. Our successes are now being commended by Ofsted in the schools that have been inspected this year.

Together we are stronger and better as I am sure you will see from the round up of opportunities and events that we have shared with you in this update.

With best wishes for another year of success and achievement in 2018-19.

Claire Harrison
Head Teacher
Deighton Gates Primary School
Chair of the Trust Board WVLP

Developments across the partnership

Pupil Voice

Within the trust we value pupil voice wholeheartedly. Plans for this coming academic year are for the pupils to mirror the school to school support already established within the partnership. The aim is for each school to decide on a specific area that they would like the visiting pupils to focus on. This might, for example, be an aspect of lunchtime that needs improving, or the school's work on anti-bullying that needs reviewing. The pupils of both schools will discuss the focus and possibly carry out a series of observations, before the visiting pupils then deliver a report of their findings and suggestions.

This has proved to be a highly successful and supportive way of improving school performance for the Headteachers, so now it's the children's turn to apply their skills as critical friends.

To kick start this new initiative, we involved Peter Marsh, who was our School Improvement Adviser last year, to work with the new WVLP Pupil Ambassadors - typically the new school councillors from Year 5. The session provided them with an insight as to how to be supportive partners to each other. The children were taught to make effective judgements and deliver constructive feedback. They were also taught how to view the whole process as a positive one and how to feedback effectively the results of the visit to their own School Council and school staff.

The Ambassadors will hold this post for two years (throughout their time in Years 5 and 6) which will enable them to develop some highly useful life skills and prepare them extremely well for transition to High School. The pupils are highly motivated by these plans.

Governor Forum

Over the past year, governors from each of the nine schools in the partnership have once again enjoyed working together closely, continuing to build excellent relationships, and share experiences.

By running a programme of training activities for governors, we've built up our knowledge on topics including safeguarding, the role of a governor, and induction for new governors. (Sharing the costs of these events is a much better use of limited budgets, too!) We've also welcomed 'guest speakers' –



including representatives of the local authority – who've shared their own personal insights.

Of course, this activity builds relationships across the schools and a number of governors have taken advantage of informal contacts or calls for support when particular issues have arisen.

Our Governor Forum continues to meet each term and we've revamped this for 2018/19, opening it up to more participants. We're currently planning a programme of activities that will include more training and more opportunities to share experience, for example preparing for an Ofsted inspection.

Working together gives us an excellent opportunity to ensure our Governing Bodies are helping the WVLP to flourish.

Writing & assessment programme

Throughout the course of 2017-18, teachers within the WVLP have been engaged in a writing and assessment programme in conjunction with the local authority. Assessing writing has seen many changes and developments recently and this programme was an opportunity for teachers to share best practice, establish consistent expectations in all year groups across the partnership and to have opportunities to moderate examples of children's work with WVLP colleagues.

Members from the Leeds Assessment Team led sessions with a focus of clarifying the assessment process for writing and to provide teachers with a shared understanding of what writing should now look like, at both the expected standard and at greater depth in all year groups. Under their guidance, each year group was able to create a writing assessment tool that was similar to the statutory teacher assessment frameworks that are currently only available at the end of both key stage 1 and key stage 2.

Sessions then focused on highlighting the expectations for greater depth writing. Teachers shared examples of writing from their own schools and worked collaboratively to identify how each piece was meeting greater depth and what areas for development there might be. This gave schools a clear understanding in terms of what they were looking for in a piece of writing and provided confidence that accurate assessments were being made as a result. It ensured consistency in assessment across the trust and in readiness for the submission of teacher assessments at the end of the summer term.

School staff and governors working together

Training

This year there have been a number of training sessions that we have undertaken together. Below are two in particular that highlight how we work together.

The Scary Guy



In January school staff from a variety of roles came together for a very interesting and challenging day of training with 'The Scary Guy', who focused on the tools and techniques to help children become more emotionally resilient and to develop the positive behaviour habits that contribute to creating a great school community. By the end of the session staff were brimming with ideas and strategies to take back to their schools and adapt as appropriate for their individual settings.

Governors

Peter Marsh, our School Improvement Adviser, delivered a very well attended session for governors, on the role of collaboration in the changing education landscape. The session consolidated and affirmed some of the very good governance practices that already exist in our schools, whilst at the same time challenging and inspiring governors to develop. Further. It was also a great opportunity to keep collaboration between WVLP schools at the forefront of what we do, and for governors to establish relationships with partner schools.

School-to-School Support

From its inception, a key driver in setting up the WVLP was raising standards in all our schools, whilst maintaining each school's individual ethos. An important element of this has been school-to-school support where headteachers consult colleagues who then provide support for continuous school improvement within open and confidential discussions.

This year, we have worked in quartets rather than triads to enable our new headteacher colleagues to familiarise themselves with our ways of working and begin to formulate decisions about areas in their schools they would like to develop. Each school chooses a relevant area of teaching and learning to focus on. The host headteacher generates a hypothesis about the quality of an aspect of provision and uses data and observations from colleagues to triangulate evidence and provide an accurate evaluation. This focus is communicated to headteachers in the quartet along with an outline for the visit.

One school used colleagues to scrutinise the school's self-evaluation form (SEF) to judge its performance against Ofsted criteria and examine the relevance of the school improvement plans that flowed from this. Another school of a religious character chose to consult colleagues about preparation for a forthcoming Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS).

Other headteachers raised different questions:

Does the way we review pupil progress and present data succinctly describe where a pupil's learning is good, as well as where interventions should be introduced?



Does the organisation of lunchtimes impact positively on the development of social skills, healthy eating and wellbeing?

Are resources and displays in classrooms contributing to independent enquiry based learning?

Are the strategies we use to improve progress in maths having a measurable impact on the quality of learning for more able pupils?

From the point of view of an individual headteacher, it can be challenging to open up your school to scrutiny. All the heads agree that each school-to-school visit raises feelings of apprehension, and its success relies on trust within the group to be both honest and confidential - discussions do not extend beyond the quartet of schools. However, whilst issues are discussed openly, the help and support we give to each other is very practical and the focus is to assist colleagues to achieve better outcomes quickly and effectively.

When we reviewed the effects of our school visits on our headteacher development day in June, all colleagues felt they were very valuable to both host and visiting schools. The impact for each school was positive and achieved in a very timely way.



The positive impact of our partnership



New Headteachers

The first year of headship is without doubt the beginning of a great adventure, although not without its tribulations! Michele O'Donnell, headteacher at LEH Thorp Arch since January 2018, and Su Cloke, who took up the headship at St Mary's in February this year, describe their early experiences of the WVLP.

“As new headteachers, joining the WVLP has been a warm and welcoming experience. The strength of this professional collaboration with colleagues, has enabled us to familiarise ourselves with the demands of a new leadership role in a new local authority.

High quality school to school support allows us to work together in small groups of professional ‘critical friends’ to ensure robust school improvement. As new headteachers, the advice and guidance of more experienced colleagues ensures our judgements are accurate and consistent.

The Learning Partnership has been invaluable in ensuring that both of us have had a positive experience of, and smooth transition into, primary school leadership. The support and advice of experienced colleagues has been a huge advantage to us, our staff and our pupils. We feel very lucky to have joined, not only our wonderful new schools, but also such a fantastic partnership.”

The WVLP – a view from the outside looking in

by Peter Marsh
(Associate School Improvement Partner for Leeds Learning)

“For a number of years I have had the pleasure of working with WVLP headteachers. From day one it was clear that each headteacher had a vision to secure the best possible outcomes for the children in their care (and I don't mean just test outcomes) and were already working together to promote best practice.

In 2015 when the Authority decreed that rather than working with schools individually, advisors would be required to build school to school alliance partnerships, there was no better place for me to start than with the Wharfe Valley where trust between schools had already been established. The WVLP swiftly embraced the alliance approach.



For me as an advisor, it was about moving away from meetings around tables, useful as some of these were, and shifting to a model of visits to each others schools where actions that reap success could be observed first hand. Likewise, the headteachers were bold enough to ask questions such as, ‘Why might your results in a particular area be stronger than ours and what can we learn from your approach?’

The WVLP alliance working now, extends beyond the headteachers to deputies, subject leaders and in 2018/19 a new group of children will be elected as WVLP Ambassadors to begin sharing elements of what they think makes their schools great, and then learning from others.

In short, the WVLP Alliance continues to go from strength to strength. So successful is the partnership, the WVLP group are now a beacon from which fledgling alliances can learn and follow. For me, the commitment of the group has made my work easy and it is wonderful to observe from the outside how the group have more than replaced my individual school visits.”

Ofsted commendation of our partnership



“Since the previous inspection, you have worked tirelessly to build leadership at all levels. Middle leaders are accountable and feel well supported in their role. Staff morale is high. Staff appreciate the high quality professional development they receive. They talk very positively about the work they do with the Wharfe Valley Learning Partnership (a group of nine local schools who work together). This provides additional opportunities for wider professional development and moderation of pupils’ work. Staff regularly share ideas and work together to refine and develop the quality of teaching, learning and assessment further.”

Deighton Gates Ofsted report,
November 2017