



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Stoke-on-Trent: Collaborative Leadership Programme

Since 2012, The University of Worcester School Improvement Team have provided a range of extensive support for school leaders to develop systems leadership through the growth of effective collaborations and collegial problem solving in areas where pupil outcomes are below expectations. For example, until recently the University has been working with 12 cohorts (55 schools) in Stoke-on-Trent where collaborative practice has become one of the main mechanisms for improving pupil outcomes at Key Stage 2.

Schools working with us follow a programme informed by the latest national and international research, with a focus on facilitation and self-sufficiency at the heart. This establishes school led school improvement which builds capacity within school to school networks.

The Stoke programme started in 2015 with seven cohorts and then increased by a further five cohorts in 2016 following a Leadership Conference that celebrated year one and shared best practice. This stimulated further demand from Stoke schools, some of whom were previously reluctant to join the programme.

Critically, the process in Stoke started by focusing on building and securing trust and developing confidence between school leaders. This in turn results in a dynamic where there is a real commitment to all the children of Stoke as leaders build and secure a shared sense of purpose and shared values, giving them the opportunity to think systematically and recognise that collaboration can transform pupil outcomes across an area.

Leaders also refer to the neutrality and impartiality the University of Worcester Facilitators bring to the programme, that this is refreshing and allows for honesty and openness in a sector where accountability and unprecedented policy change has create competition and vulnerability. Expert facilitators scaffold the process and develop high quality relationships between the schools – they skilfully guide the process and participants towards their personal and organisational goals and help the group achieve identified outcomes in a professional way that is greater than the sum of the energies of all of the individuals involved. Facilitators have no prior knowledge of Stoke, they bring new eyes, are non-judgemental and this has allowed trust and partnerships to quickly establish.

The Local Authority have confirmed that there are no primary schools in an Ofsted category and that there is clear evidence of strong and stable leadership in the schools working with the University.

The programme has taken place during unprecedented change in the education system and any attempt to attribute improvements in pupils' progress and attainment to an individual programme of support is not possible. However, the recent evaluation of the programme, Key Stage 2 results and recent Ofsted reports all indicate that KS2 pupil outcomes are improving in Stoke as is the Leadership and Management of the schools involved in this programme.

In 2016, Stoke-on-Trent KS2 progress in reading was in line with national, writing +0.2 and maths +0.4, above West Midlands and statistical neighbours.

In the City 23% of primary pupils are eligible for FSM compared to 14.5% nationally. 2016 Progress for disadvantaged pupils -0.2 Reading (national -0.7); Writing -0.1 (national -0.3); maths 0.1 (national -0.5). In 2016, disadvantaged pupils in Stoke achieved higher than disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Since 2015, 16 schools have received the following Ofsted judgements: 12% Outstanding, 76% Good, 12% Requires Improvement. In one of the two Requires Improvement schools leadership and management was 'Good'.

Ofsted provided positive feedback on strength of partnership work:

Forest Park Primary (Seven Stars), Stoke-on-Trent March 2017 inspection:

The local authority works with the school to identify strengths and any areas of development. The school's adviser has effectively supported leaders through a time of change. New leaders have worked with the local authority and within 'The Seven Stars Collaborative Network' to moderate their work and continually assess the impact they are having on learning. Leaders have benefited considerably from their joint working with other schools and the local authority. Leaders have capacity to secure further improvements and are an impressive team of forward-thinking committed professionals.

Etruscan (Seven Stars) Stoke-on-Trent, May 2017 Inspection:

Senior leaders have developed a collaborative and ambitious team spirit throughout the school. This ensures that the school is meeting its aim to 'Reach for the stars'. <http://www.etruscan.stoke.sch.uk/about-us/seven-stars> This values framework is the product of the leadership work undertaken by Worcester University School Improvement Team.

Abbey Hulton Primary School (Seven Stars), February 2016 Inspection:

The school has received good support from the local authority to identify potential partner schools with outstanding practice. It now uses its Seven Stars partnership to help it to check on its standards and to share best practice.

Special measures monitoring inspection of Milton Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent 4–5 May 2016

The school has received and commissioned extensive external support. Leaders have also accessed funding to receive support from the teaching school alliance, local schools' Compass Group and nationally approved consultants. Leaders and staff visit other settings to seek and gather ideas and 9 examples of good or outstanding practice. The external support received is making a good contribution to the progress the school is making.

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures. The school may appoint two newly qualified teachers, one in key stage 1 and one in key stage 2, before the next monitoring inspection.

Alexandra Junior School, Stoke, Feb 2017

*Overall effectiveness: Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management: Good*

Leaders benefit from working with colleagues at other schools within the ESPRIT network and from strong support from the local authority. For example, the accuracy of assessments carried out by the school is assured and teaching gains from sharing best practice.

There is an outward-facing culture within the governing body and governors are supportive of decisions to further develop the school's relationship with the ESPRIT network.

Alexandra Infants' School, Stoke, July 2016

*Overall effectiveness: Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management: Good (2014 L&M RI)*

Leaders have chosen wisely about selecting the right external support to help them to improve the school's effectiveness. For example, they have made good use of help provided by the local authority to improve the teaching of writing and help develop the role of middle leaders. Through an effective partnership with a local schools' collaboration, leaders have made good use of help to improve teaching, check on the accuracy of teachers' judgements about the standards and to help recruit new staff and governors.

Short Inspection Watermill School, October 2017

This school continues to be good.

You are also a member of a cooperative trust with three other special schools. You pool your work and expertise to moderate the judgements you make about pupils' achievement and the impact that teaching is having on learning.

The school is focused on developing its workforce. Staff have opportunities to undertake their own research in areas of interest. The skills of leaders at all levels have been developed since the last inspection. As a result, you have a highly capable workforce.

It is evident from talking to Head Teachers and from the initial research findings that leaders have found that knowledge about effective practice is more widely available in this system and that this approach promotes professional aspiration at all levels. Working together has generated commitment to all the children in Stoke and to each other's schools. The collegiality and strength of partnerships provides a healthy space for new and experienced leaders and many refer to being braver when they return to their own schools.

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