

Peer Review Case Study – Lawford Mead Primary & Nursery School

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Context of the Partnership/School

Lawford Mead is a member of The Tanglewood Partnership (TP), a cluster of nine infant, junior and primary schools and a nursery, as well as the Chelmsford Education Network, a growing partnership of 24 infant, junior and primary schools.

The school is also a member of the CTSA (Chelmsford Teaching Schools Alliance), a partnership of over 15 schools including primary, secondary and a special school, as well as the PLN (Professional Learning Network), a collaboration of over 30 primary and secondary schools.

Along with its partner school, Kings Road Primary, Lawford Mead is a founding member of the HERA Primary Academy Trust. The Head Of School post is a new leadership role and an Executive Headteacher/CEO manages both schools.

Key Issue/s that your partnership/school identified to overcome?

In Lawford Mead *Junior* School's final year before amalgamation (2014-15), I (as Deputy Head) organised our own 'Teaching and Learning Review' in the Autumn term. Senior and middle leaders from TP schools attended and they carried out lesson drop-ins, 'books looks' and pupil perception interviews. In Lawford Mead's first year as a *new, primary* school (2015-16), another, very similar review took place in the Spring term, with many of the same visitors/partners.

These two reviews were helpful in evaluating the Quality of T&L within the school before amalgamating, and then measuring the success of the feedback, *and* the implementation of several new initiatives since becoming a Primary. The outcome of the second review was extremely positive and a huge improvement on the first.

However, whilst these less formal reviews were helpful with gaining an overall 'snapshot' of T&L strengths and areas for development, a precise focus for improvement was lacking and the process was missing a structure for reporting and follow up. Also missing, was the guidance of an external review Lead and a neutral 'Improvement Champion' to help initiate follow up. No review was held in 2016-17.

After consistently meeting national expectations in previous years, Lawford Mead's KS2 Reading result in 2017 for children working at or above ARE was 52%, a -23% drop on the previous year's 75%. The APS for KS2 reading in 2017 was -2.2 compared to the previous year's -0.18. Through its School Improvement Plan (SIP) for 2017-18, Leaders at LMPS had already begun the Autumn term by implementing a whole class reading approach across the school, along with other strategies to raise standards in reading. LMPS chose January (2018) as the month for its Peer Review and chose reading as its focus so that progress towards the relevant SIP's objectives could be evaluated and the school could set next steps for further improvement and consistency.

What did the partnership learn from undertaking the peer review?

The review was led by an external advisor from outside any partnerships or networks. The Review Lead brought HMI experience to the process which provided neutral, invaluable insight, including feedback on the school's SEF and SIP. Other visitors included two Heads from TP schools but also Deputies from schools outside of the cluster, including the CTSA and a colleague with an Early Years specialism. Visitors and the Review Lead teamed up with members of the school's Senior Leadership Team to allow for paired collaboration and discussion at phase level as well as within the larger group. Teams took part in the following monitoring activities across phases within the school:

- Whole class reading lesson observations
- Literacy lesson drop-ins
- Book and planning scrutiny
- Pupil and staff interviews (visitors only, in order to gain an objective view)

At the end of the day, feedback from all visitors and Senior Leaders was collated by the Review Lead, who then presented an initial summary to all middle leaders, teaching staff and HLTA team leaders. Senior Leaders then provided more detailed feedback to teams within the school. The Improvement Champion (procured through the CEN) attended for this part of the day and then met with the Review Lead and myself (as Acting Headteacher) to begin planning the follow up staff meeting workshop that would develop an action plan.

The Review Lead submitted a report within a few days of the review and it was shared with staff in advance of the follow up staff meeting. Initially this was a celebration of the noted strengths. This helped in acknowledging the hard work of staff and to motivate them to engage positively and proactively in the coming staff meeting workshop.

Extracts from the report

*Overall purpose of visit/intended outcomes –
To evaluate the impact of actions intended to:*

- *improve attainment and progress in reading*
- *provide consistently high-quality teaching of reading across the school.*

Strengths

- *There were excellent examples of teacher questioning observed in lessons which required pupils to engage with the text to develop a deeper understanding of writing techniques and vocabulary choices.*
- *Teachers displayed strong subject knowledge. This enabled them to give clear and precise explanations and demonstrations about how to use reading skills and ensures that they provide accurate models of sounds when teaching phonics.*
- *Classroom environments provided support for reading which was used by pupils. This included prompts for discussion about texts, key vocabulary and examples of words linked to the phonics focus.*
- *Pupils are motivated by the text choices used in each year group. Older pupils have a well-developed view about their favourite authors and the types of books they like to read.*
- *Pupils across the school have positive views about reading but key stage 2 pupils are particularly enthusiastic and become animated when talking about the books they enjoy.*

- *Almost all pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They are motivated and want to improve their reading skills. Pupils in each key stage could talk about their reading skills and areas for development at an age appropriate level.*
- *Almost all teachers are making strong links between the skills developed in reading lessons and writing. This included application of phonics when writing, use of more advanced vocabulary and the introduction of techniques such as using inference.*
- *Teachers are providing useful models when writing and using pupils to suggest alternatives to word and punctuation choices. This is enabling pupils to develop their skills in redrafting their work to make improvements.*
- *There is consistent delivery of learning across classes in almost all year groups. For example, in reception, teachers in both classes modelled sentence construction in speech.*
- *Teaching across the school takes place in a calm and stimulating learning environment. This creates a positive atmosphere where pupils are motivated to do well, particularly in key stage 2.*
- *The feedback pupils receive in lessons varies in impact, but most enables them to correct errors or improve their answers to questions.*

Recommendations

- *Build a more systematic approach to monitoring of reading to identify key strengths and areas for development so that variations in the quality of teaching and inconsistencies in expectations are identified and staff are supported to address them.*
- *Set clear expectations for each year group about:*
 - *the quality of work, and what should be included in books*
 - *the progression in the development of reading skills*
 - *the use of teaching and learning strategies at an age appropriate level*
 - *how learning will be differentiated to challenge the most able and support the least able pupils*
 - *how to make the most effective use of teaching assistants during reading activities, including phonics.*
- *Provide more frequent feedback for staff about their development of reading approaches so that they can continually improve their practice.*
- *Support some staff to develop a better understanding of the use of assessment so that teaching is even more sharply focussed on filling gaps in pupils reading skills.*
- *Use staff with the most effective practice to provide models for other staff in the school to follow and to set the expectation for the standard of teaching expected in the school.*
- *In the foundation stage, increase opportunities to use their reading skills in activities that promote the development of writing and pre-writing skills.*

What were the impact and benefits?

The Improvement Champion and Acting Headteacher continued to collaborate (using the report) on plans for a staff meeting workshop that took place two weeks after the review. The staff meeting included a sequence of evaluative and target setting activities where staff could collaborate in teams to reflect on the review's findings, share good practice and agree on non-negotiables to ensure consistency of practice across the school. Three school governors attended as part of their Improvement Plan monitoring. The governors' involvement was a highly effective and informative form of monitoring.

Monitoring across the school by senior and middle leaders continued during the Spring and Summer term, to ensure targets and expectations set by the review and workshop were embedded. 2018 KS2 reading results were dramatically improved. 79% of children were working at or above ARE in reading at the end of KS2, a +27% increase on 2017 and a +4% increase on 2016. The school also achieved a +40% increase of children working above ARE in reading (57% cf to 17%). APS in reading improved to +3.7 (provisional), compared to -2.2 in 2017 and -0.18 in 2016.

The school is also due an Ofsted Inspection and the Peer Review process has built staff resilience and team spirit. Staff confidence also increases when colleagues receive positive feedback from external, neutral visitors.

What is your partnership going to do next based on the learning/impact of the Peer Review?

We are looking forward to our next review. Whilst continuing to embed and sustain improvements in reading in 2018-19 and beyond, *writing* is now a key focus in LMPS's Improvement Plan for 2018-19 and the school has already planned a February 2019 Peer Review, with a focus on writing. This will be carried out in a very similar fashion to the 2018 review due to its success and impact. A new external Review Lead has been appointed and the same Improvement Champion from the 2018 review will be involved again. Visitors have been confirmed from the CEN, CTSA and HERA Trust. The process and outcome of writing this case study itself has also been very helpful as, alongside the Peer Review Reports, it provides essential documentation of the process and impact.

Thank you.

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