

Research Thrives

Developing a devolved research group model to embed a sustainable research culture across differing enquiries in primary settings.

Abstract

This is the overarching report for a project which examines the efficacy of a model which has been designed to enable high quality research enquiries across a number of settings. The key findings across the schools involved were in the following areas: benefits to the school; impact on leadership; impact on pupils; teaching school alliance relationships.

Our title for the research project is Research Thrives: Developing a devolved research group model to embed a sustainable research culture across differing enquiries in primary settings. The model was developed initially through two teachers at Thrive Teaching School Alliance (TSA) who were studying for a Master's degree in Research Leadership at the University of Sussex. The programme involved the Teaching School Director participating in a steering group for the MA and working with a leader from the university who was acting as a critical friend in establishing a research culture within the school. It seemed possible that this model could be extended through the Teaching School Alliance and beyond into the Rother Education Improvement Partnership (established by the



Asking the key question

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local authority in 2014) in order to generate a sustainable culture of research.

The context of our alliance is of pockets of social and economic deprivation in a coastal challenge area, with nearby small rural primary schools being isolated from wider networks of collaboration and improvement through school-based research.

The emerging model of research-based school improvement is centered on growing in-school action researchers who then collaborate across the network to share and develop their learning. This model is practitioner-lead, supported by two teacher research leaders, in the construction of the research and its quality assurance by the HEI.

The lead secondary school is building a genuine research culture and has invested significantly in the two research leaders who have now



At the Celebration & Sharing Conference



A spot of exercise



Recording ideas to take back to school

completed an MA in Leading Research. The two leaders have led a research team to train other teachers in carrying out research accurately and ethically, in supporting the development of high quality research in other schools and settings. The pilot work for the research model was conducted across two primary schools and a secondary school in 2015-16. The secondary school teachers worked with the primary leads in English and Science in the two schools and the research leaders evaluated the results from this collaborative work. The results of this work have already been shared with partners via the Teaching School Newsletter and the Sussex University Conference as well as in the lead school and primary schools involved. We wished to build this model further in a sustainable way.

Conclusions and recommendations

Pragmatically all participants have recognised that setting up a research community requires considerable preparation. Although we set terms of reference and engagement at the beginning of the project and conducted several meetings with Headteachers, school leaders and participants it would have been even more beneficial to have a planning meeting that involved all participants to better enable them to understand the scope of the whole initiative once all had committed to the project. Further interim meetings for all participants would also have been beneficial although very challenging in terms of time. This would have enabled us to

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build social capital prior to the research activities commencing and thus enabled smoother flow of the research at some testing points in the academic year.

The university involvement has been a vital part of providing quality assurance and support during the lifetime of the project, although on reflection they have indicated that greater consultation in the research design would have been useful for the Research Team Leaders. This may have tightened the case study research but conversely it may also have impacted adversely on the confidence of the Research Leaders who felt that they were supported by being allowed freedom to develop their research team which they described as ‘collegial and synergistic’.

Finally, the focus of our project has been collaboration and we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Laurel Trust for providing the resources and collaborative support to enable the work to be successful. St Richard’s has benefitted hugely from the unwavering commitment, professionalism and skill of Maggie Roger. Thank you Maggie.