

# update



Leading Learning through  
Action-led Research and Innovation

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE LAUREL TRUST

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## Merry Christmas



### A Message from the Chair

The Trustees send their good wishes for the festive season. We continue to recognise all the hard work that has taken place during these unprecedented times both with new projects and existing ones. We hope that you manage to have a very enjoyable break from professional activities.

Bill Goddard  
Chair of Trustees

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Christmas is a time of celebrating and The Laurel Trust wish to 'showcase' and celebrate the quality and range of our newest research projects which are just beginning. We are confident that these projects will impact positively on the lives of children and their families and build the confidence, knowledge and skills of the teachers involved. Our Trustees and I wish them all every success. *Maggie Roger, Consultant Director*

# Closing the Gap



Barking and Dagenham is a rapidly growing outer London borough. It has seen a rate of growth in its pupil population that is three times the national average and twice the average rate for London. Grafton Primary School is an outstanding local authority school within the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

**By Louise Harding, Research Lead and Martin Nicholson, Headteacher.**

**Grafton Primary school serves a diverse community. Our pupils come from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The majority of pupils are White British, while others come from a range of minority ethnic groups, Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian and other White backgrounds.**

The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is well above that found nationally and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language and pupils with SEND is above that found nationally.

After the first Covid lock down some of our children were at risk of making limited progress in their reading. The nature of children's needs was disparate and resistant to whole class approaches.

Therefore, missed learning opportunities due to disruption required intensive small group intervention for children to close the gap.

Grafton Primary School devised a small group reading intervention to respond to this need. Teaching Assistants were trained and the intervention started in September 2020 onwards. It was very successful and the children made accelerated gains in their reading, thereby closing the gap. This approach has proved durable. Despite further lockdowns and isolations, the children all continued to make rapid progress in reading and caught up with their peers. We are hoping that by working with the Laurel Trust Charity we can roll out



this intervention in other year groups and other schools and, in addition, run workshops for the parents to help them support their children's reading at home.

# Power to the Hub



What is the impact of dialogic teaching, including a range of oracy teaching and learning strategies, on the spoken communication, reading and writing skills of children in Reception and Year 4?

**By Nicole Gurdivi and Nicky Pear**

**Two years ago, we launched the Tower Hamlets Oracy Hub, a network of primary schools working collaboratively with the ambition to raise the profile, and improve the teaching, of oracy across our borough.**

We share the belief that spoken communication skills are the missing link holding many children in Tower Hamlets back from fulfilling their potential.

Our research project with the Laurel Trust is studying the impact that dialogic methods of teaching and a range

of oracy strategies can have on the progress that children make in their spoken communication, reading and writing skills. We are working across six primary schools with a focus on children in Year 4 and Reception classes.

We are collaborating on the project with author and former president of the UK Literacy Association, David Reedy, whose recent publication 'Talk for Teaching and Learning' underpins much of our research. We are incredibly excited to be working with the Laurel

Trust and look forward to the sustained impact that our research project can have in Tower Hamlets.



# Train of Thought



The two Dales Schools are specialist primary schools based in Blyth and Ashington, located in South-East Northumberland, which is an area of significant economic deprivation, with a long history of multi-generational unemployment and associated social issues.

**By Elaine O'Connor and James Groundwater.**

**Children have a wide range of additional needs including ASD, ADHD, social and behavioural issues and cognitive learning difficulties.**

The Blythdale Learning Train was created after two pacer train carriages were donated by Porterbrook and Network Rail installed a track ready for the carriage installation in July 2021. The carriages are currently being refurbished, and will include a range of innovative and creative virtual resources to aid learning. One carriage will be a formal technical environment with virtual and other technical learning resources with a focus on STEM related learning, whilst the second carriage will be a library and parental learning space where we will also offer a range of training opportunities. The focus will be to encourage an enjoyment of reading and improve reading skills and also to further engage parents in their child's learning.

The aim of the project overall is to provide

an innovative and creative learning environment utilising the 2 train carriages, aiming to inspire the learning of children with additional needs and to ensure engagement of their parents and carers, assuring greater learning outcomes for all involved. We aim to research the impact of engagement in the train based learning on pupil learning outcomes and also on their enthusiasm and motivation for learning. We will measure levels of ability and enthusiasm at the start of the project and ongoing throughout pupil involvement in the curriculum.

Local engineering companies including TEXO and the Port of Blyth have contributed to the cost and building of the capital developments and they will also be involved in the future to help provide employment and training opportunities for children and their parents/carers.

The Laurel Trust will support the development and implementation of the



curriculum. This will focus on improving reading skills and developing an interest and knowledge of STEM related subjects. The carriages will also be used to engage pupils positively in the learning process, developing their social and emotional skills and enhancing their wellbeing. Initially, the curriculum will be delivered to Dales School pupils and over time the aim is to promote the Blythdale Learning Train with other school partners, engaging their pupils in the learning process, further enhancing their enthusiasm for learning and impacting on their reading and STEM skills.

# The Great Outdoors



The Winton, Eccles & Barton cluster's project is aimed at giving our pupils the best possible start in life by working on the vocabulary gap from a young age through outdoor learning. Our cluster has historically high levels of deprivation amongst our pupils and families and the pandemic has contributed a significant additional impact.

**By Rachel Gallagher, Headteacher, Clarendon Road Primary School.**

**We strongly believe that our pupils do not chose the life they have been born into and we want to be able to give them the best start in education, but with funding cuts and additional pressures we are losing the battle.**

By getting our pupils outdoors and providing them with hands on experiences that they would not otherwise have access to, we plan to help them expand their vocabulary, build their resilience and independence and increase their social skills.



Through our collaborative approach with ten schools, our lead staff will then disseminate their learning and outcomes throughout the school and into the wider community of parents and private early years settings so pupils across the authority can benefit from this outdoors approach to closing the vocabulary gap.

# Chat, Play, Read



A joint project with Templars Primary, Alderman's Green Primary and Courthouse Green Primary. Through monthly parent partnership sessions we aim to increase the level of language acquisition for the children in our reception year group.

**By Sarah Malam, Executive Head, Courthouse Green Primary School.**

**Our approach will be to host parent, child workshops, led by class teachers, based around a book where school staff model the development of language to parents which we hope that parents will then copy when at home with their child.**

Parents will leave the session with a free gift of a book and follow up activities and weekly audio bedtime stories recorded by class teachers, all of which promote language and talk. All children's language levels are assessed at the start of the year.



**Headteacher Researchers**  
l-r: Jenny Tegerdine, Corinne Biddell, Sarah Malam

We chose this as our focus because we believe the acquisition of language is the key to learning to read, to understanding the spoken word and being an effective communicator and many of our children start school with limited levels of language.

Through partnership (between the staff in schools, the children and their families) we believe that we can learn from one another, reflect on and develop our practice, hone our skills as practitioners so that we have maximum impact on children's outcomes.

# Embracing Technology



In Sheffield our project is looking at the use of assistive technology and how it can support SEND learners to learn more ease, motivation and ultimately success.

**By Fiona Rigby, Headteacher, St Catherine's Catholic Primary School.**

**Many of our children can find recording their ideas difficult. This can be for a number of reasons including:**

- Gross and fine motor difficulties with or without a diagnosis of Developmental Coordination Difficulty (DCD)
- Autism / Dyslexia/ ADHD/ General Learning Needs/ Speech and Language Needs with or without co-occurring motor difficulties.

From our initial research we found the use of technology for these learners currently is ad hoc, depending on the school and professionals involved, with the following being quoted as challenges:

- Knowing what technology is available and the needs it meets

- Training staff so they are confident using technology with their learners
- Cost

The project has 9 participating schools and we are working alongside Occupational Therapy from the Sheffield's Children's Hospital and Educational Psychology.

So far we have identified the children taking part in the study and we have gathered their parents/carers and teachers/TAs views in a questionnaire along with a sample of their work for a pre measure. The OT team has created online training and we are meeting in the next few weeks for a live Q&A. Following this we will start matching technology to learners, we will review the progress with ongoing project



review meetings and the lead team attending SEND termly reviews.

# Focus Group



To what extent can peer review be used to develop and sustain effective classroom practice that promotes pupils' social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing and develops teachers' skills and confidence across a collaboration of schools?

**By Carolyn Wilkinson, Interim Headteacher, St John's Gosport Primary School.**

**Development of children's self-regulation, self-awareness, and social skills by the age of ten are predictors of a range of adult outcomes. Evidence shows that children's skills can be improved over time through focussed school-based teaching.**

As Interim Head teacher at St John's Gosport Primary School I have witnessed a dramatic increase in children's social and emotional difficulties since the March 2021 return to school. I am delighted to be leading a professional development project focused on the implementation of peer review across a collaboration of six schools in Fareham and Gosport. Our aims are twofold; I believe that the project will enable the schools to diminish the cycle of underachievement for these children

and develop teachers' skills and confidence around supporting these children's needs.

The focus pupils in this project are working below age related expectations in core subjects and present with social, emotional, mental health needs (SEMH) which manifest as barriers to learning and participation, prohibit other children from learning and teachers from teaching.

School leaders have identified a need for all teachers to understand how day to day interaction and personalised intervention can improve children's enjoyment of learning and halt the development of entrenched special educational needs that become more difficult to overcome as children move through the school system. This project will seek to develop professional



curiosity and personal efficacy through the implementation of a robust peer review model.

# All-round Wellbeing



Wellbeing is at the heart of School 21, based in Stratford, whose curriculum encompasses Heart, as well as Head and Hand. With a sophisticated curriculum of coaching, emotional regulation, and annual wellbeing surveys for staff and families, the school hopes this research project will supplement and enhance their focus on wellbeing. This is particularly important in Newham, where families often live in challenging circumstances. **By Sarah Seleznyov and Nicola Mason.**

**Our project explores the question: What is the impact on learning outcomes of children with SEMH if we support teachers to undertake research into their learning and wellbeing needs?**

Rather than offering a pre-planned intervention, this project aims to empower schools to design, implement and measure the impact of an intervention that directly meets their own context and SEMH pupils' social and learning needs. Building on the success of the UCL Institute of Education Research Learning Communities project, our research



involves senior leaders, who can access resources and give the research project a high profile, and class teachers, who can attest to the impact of the intervention on their pupils, giving the practice credibility.

Through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis and with the support of Sarah Seleznyov's expertise in leading teacher research projects and SEMH experts - Dr Jean Gross and Dr John Ivens, we hope to positively impact schools, teachers, and pupils with SEMH in the Newham area.

# The Missing Link



**Habits4Health: Every Interaction Matters.** The Habits4Health program was born out of the increasing awareness of the importance of student mental health and wellbeing following the COVID-19 pandemic. We were finding that upon their return, our students were not able to recognise the link between their everyday choices and their wellbeing. **By Ben Chester-Brown, Research Lead and Sarah Kenrick, Headteacher, Caludon Castle School.**

**The program aims to improve the social and emotional intelligence, increase resilience and self-esteem of our students; by giving them the tools to support themselves in the future.**

Within the lead and partnership schools, we will be taking a triangular approach to this aim, involving students, parents, and staff. Year 5 and year 8 students will take part in the Habits4Health program, this involves: self assessment of life styles choices that impact wellbeing; working towards a target goal; completing a journal of their journey towards their target

and how this impacts how they are feeling. Both parents and staff will be offered CPD on recognising signs of poor mental health, how to support the wellbeing choices of children, and where further support can be found. Each area of the triangulation will be measured across the year using: stress, resilience, and wellbeing scales; staff voice; and parent voice.

We are extremely excited for our collaboration with the Laurel Trust on this project and for the impact it will have on our students and our community.



*Please note: the pictures of children used in this newsletter are mainly stock images.*

# PUZZLING PETS

It is often said we start to look like our dogs! So for a touch of whimsy and Christmas fun we would like you to correctly match The Laurel Trust team with their own dogs. There is a special mystery dog which does not belong to a Trustee at all! But which one is it?

Answers on page 4



**Pat**  
Trustee



**Becky**  
Trustee



**Steve**  
Designer



**Maggie**  
Consultant Director



**Polo**



**Dogger**



**Conker**



**Tiggy**



**Badger**

