

SCHOOLS' FUNDING FORUM

SUBJECT:	Collaboratives
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SUMMARY OF REPORT:

Qualitative report on the progress to date of the collaboratives.

1. Introduction

Collaboration has so many benefits – I'm just disappointed it has taken so long to get to this point – when the obvious benefits that come with collaboration have been staring me in the face!!!!

***We would like to transform this into school to school support at its finest.
(Quotes from Headteachers)***

1.1 The collaboration development began in June 2013 following the allocation of £5.2 million from the School Funding Forum. All schools were then advised of this development through meetings and the e-bulletin. The School Improvement team has expended a great deal of effort in facilitating and brokering the formation of the collaboratives. Some of them are based on historical partnerships whilst others are newly formed. There are some encouraging examples of primary, secondary and special schools coming together into these school to school improvement structures.

2. Financial Implications

2.1 Once formed the collaboratives were advised of the availability of funding. This was conditional on an acceptable action plan that illustrated the differences that would be made to pupil outcomes as a result of joint activity.

2.2 58 Action Plans have been received, which reflects 436 schools and a total of £2,978,326 has been distributed.

3. The Report

3.1 In February a letter was sent to all lead schools requesting a qualitative report on the progress to date of the collaboratives against their action plan. A second quantitative report has been requested for the end of September following the national tests in summer 2013.

3.2 The qualitative report requested by March 31st asked the following questions:

1. What activity have you undertaken to date?
2. What progress do you feel you have made against your priorities?
3. Strengths so far?

4. Areas for further development as a collaborative?

5. Additional Comments

3.3 Q1.What activity have you undertaken to date?

This collaboration would not have happened without the funding and support of KCC. We have worked together for several years but not worked strategically to collaborate on ensuring attainment.

Appendix 1 attached to this report captures all the activity undertaken by the collaboratives so far. The range of activity is impressive and reflects exciting and creative programmes clearly designed to raise standards for all pupils and all are aligned to the priorities outlined in Bold Steps for Education.

The difference in the range and scale of the activity between some collaborations reflects whether they are newly formed or more established. It is also clear that activity is being differentiated to need. Not all schools in the collaboration engage in all planned activity, but, as one would expect, activity is tailored to groups of schools differentiated needs. In the report in September the collaborations will be asked to identify which activities made the most significant contribution to pupil outcomes.

3.4 Q2.What progress do you feel you have made against your priorities?

This work is strategic rather than focussed on “quick wins” to ensure sustainability.

Appendix 2 attached to this report captures all the comments received from collaboratives on the progress to date. All the collaboratives feel that they are making progress on variety of fronts including:

- Developing leadership at all levels
- Improving the percentage of good and outstanding teaching
- Developing best practice in all areas of the curriculum with particular focus on Literacy and Numeracy
- Sharing best practice across their school through learning walks, joint lesson observations and other forms of peer review
- Many schools getting together for shared development days
- Joint conferences around reading, writing and mathematics
- Improving Governance

Many of the collaboratives are describing activity where they are learning how to work together, develop trust and relationships, share good practice and support and challenge each other to continually improve.

3.5 Q3. Strengths so far as a collaborative:

Since the formation of the hub, two schools in the partnership, Vale View and Capel-le-Ferne, have been subject to Ofsted inspections. Both schools were judged to have moved upwards from their previous inspections.

Appendix 3 is attached with the full breakdown of the comments received from the collaboratives. However, typical comments from Collaboratives have included:

- It has given Headteachers a genuine reason to work collaboratively on locally identified priorities
- The collaborative has provided a forum for mutual support and understanding
- Since the collaborative was formed relationships have strengthened within the group and the sense of openness and trust has empowered heads to discuss a wide range of topics impacting on standards within their schools
- Competition has given way to collaboration. We share data openly and we share our strengths and areas for development without fear of censure, and in the spirit of mutual support and improvement.
- Support for small rural primary schools – economies of scale mean we can provide high quality professional development and school improvement activities which individual schools would not be able to manage.
- Joint procurement of services – we already share the services of an Educational Psychologist and are now looking at joint procurement of Personnel services and the joint employment of a Foreign Language Assistant.

Different sets of words, but on the whole all collaboratives are commenting on areas such as the above as clear indications of the strengths of the developing relationships within the partnerships.

3.6 Q4. Areas for further development as a collaborative? (Appendix 4)

It is encouraging to see that collaboratives are already monitoring and evaluating their work and looking at how they make their partnerships even more successful from a good beginning. Areas for development have included:

- Pace of improvement
- Finances
- Joint Training Days
- More opportunities for teachers to work together across the collaborative
- Further consideration of activities likely to make significant impact e.g. Achievement for All
- Further opportunities for joining around a number of issues including members of staff e.g. business managers
- Urgency to develop Governing Bodies

3.7 Q5. Additional Comments (Appendix 5)

The collaboratives were asked to add any additional comments that they felt to be appropriate. As you can see from some of the below and from all the comments in the attached appendix, some common themes have emerged.

a) Many of the responses have reflected the positive impact of working in a collaboration:

After 6 months schools are beginning to see how this collaboration can impact positively on their situation

We very much value the opportunities this has created for our collaboration. We are a group of quite diverse schools (a real mixture) who might not have worked together if this collaborative project had not come about. The diversity of our schools is proving to be extremely beneficial in terms of what we are learning from one another & the very different experiences we bring.

We have already seen benefits to all the schools involved in the Alliance. Staff, Governors and pupils have enjoyed their joint activities and evaluation from these events has been overwhelmingly positive. We are committed to working together in the future and we are excited about the possibilities which are developing as we embed the collaborative approach into our planning.

HT agreed this collaboration has been a really positive experience and has had a marked impact on staff morale and on standards within the schools.

We are honoured to be part of this. We have not asked for a lot of money from KCC & are proud of all our achievements.

We are proud of what we have collectively achieved for our children within the locality, through our strong, supportive hub based around school improvement.

Firstly, a great bunch of colleagues with bags of experience; trust, help and support at every turn; invaluable I don't think I could have achieved what we have at Elham without their help.

As a new head in a new district there were few familiar faces/ friends at the Shepway heads' meetings until I was part of the hub. The support of fellow heads during a very turbulent first few terms with regard to budget issues and subsequent restructure, along with challenges related to the governing body have only been manageable due to the trust and support of the hub.

b) Many are describing additional benefits of collaboration that are emerging from the original action plan:

We are developing a portfolio of collaborative work to evidence our work & good practice in addition to the data we will be providing in our summative report in September.

c) Thoughts on the Future

The funding from the LA has enabled us to provide the necessary release time to facilitate joint workshop activities and to provide high quality training events. We hope to see this funding continue if we are to maintain the momentum already gained through our work over the last 18 months.

The benefits of collaboration are being realised each day at Oakfield and Temple Hill, and have certainly secured a positive future for Temple Hill, whilst improving provision even further at Oakfield.

We have started to look at our 'buying power' as a collaboration – e.g. staff absence insurance

Further training needed on how to keep the focus tight enough; the work has been more achievable than we anticipated. We intend to maintain the focus on accountability. The funding ensures we do check on best value from each school.

4. Recommendations

The School Funding Forum are asked to:
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- Note the commentary from Headteachers contained in the Appendices
- Endorse the qualitative progress reflected in this summary report