

## **Closing the gap for disadvantaged white boys through writing in Leicestershire and Rutland**

### **Overview**

Pupil performance data demonstrates that across all phases and key stages white boys perform poorly, especially those receiving free school meals or from traditionally working-class communities where levels of aspiration are low. This project aimed to address this issue with a specific focus on improving the boys' writing across the curriculum and at all ages from EYFS to KS4.

The project was delivered to 30 schools across Leicestershire and Rutland, targeting all pupils from EYFS to KS4, with individual schools deciding where best to focus the activity.

The project was delivered over 5 terms from October 2017 to March 2019, giving schools an opportunity to try evidence-based approaches, test their effectiveness locally, and adjust the focus according to outcomes. Schools met in the same location 5 times to receive high quality CPD, learn from peers, be updated on project wide progress, and plan their activity in the next period. The schools also met within their clusters several times a year to collaborate on their approach and share learning through a lesson study model.

The overarching long-term aim of the project was to significantly improve the outcomes of the target group as measured by the relevant end of key stage assessment.

### **Good practice to share with others interested in running school improvement projects to ensure projects deliver the intended outcome.**

- The CPD was fundamental to the project. We were careful to source CPD that had a clear link to the evidence-based research that was used for the project.
- Practitioners were provided with the opportunity and time to reflect on their own practice, providing resources and takeaway ideas that could be implemented as soon as they got back into school and did not involve spending further time on research and resource making to implement their learning. This approach was well received by the delegates and feedback was always extremely positive.
- The cluster model that we used for the project and was effective. Each cluster was made up of up to 6 schools with an assigned SLE. The clusters met on a termly basis to reflect and review the project in their schools. These clusters enabled networks and relationships to form between professionals that will last beyond the end of the project. This model also ensured good value for money as the SLE had the opportunity to impact on up to 6 schools. Although school visits were timely, they provided an in-depth insight into how the project had been embedded in the schools and the impact it was having on the staff and pupils. It also provided the project leads in schools and the SLT to have a professional dialogue with the SLE/project manager about the activities and impact and future plans.

### **What the project may do differently in the future**

- Ensure that the project has a clear timeline and activities are planned in-advance with enough notice for all schools to attend. To keep in line with the original project plan, the timing of the launch date meant that planning and preparation time was squeezed and as a result, not all CPD events were scheduled prior to the start of the programme.
- Having flexibility to move and add CPD as required to react to a school's changing need(s) was beneficial.
- Having buy in from the headteacher of each school from the beginning is key to ensuring that the project leads are able to drive the project forward.
- Having a clear memorandum of understanding that all headteachers and project leads agree to and sign.

### **Sustainability measures taken by projects to ensure improvement are sustained beyond the funding period.**

For the last term of the project and beyond we have made a concerted effort to pull together local partner Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) and Local Authorities to tackle the issue of project legacy and sustainability.

From the beginning the aim was to create a central hub of support for English that could be accessed by all schools to improve life chances for our children through reading and writing. We have developed a consistent and motivated working group who share the same vision and are working together to drive forward the work of an English Research Partnership.

We are in the process of developing a structure and support function to support local schools, complement local development in the area and join up and enhance current work. We are now meeting every 3 weeks as a group of TSAs and partners from the LAs. We have utilised the knowledge and skills of local project managers to help us develop the rationale and vision and colleagues from local TSAs are also being released to support project developments. We are confident that we can gain local stakeholder buy in to formally launch for January 2020, but we are being flexible with timescales to ensure we launch our development correctly.

In terms of sharing resources and outcomes from this project, we are in the process of compiling useful research and resources which will be available as an online resource. This will be a free and open resource which will be accessible to all classroom practitioners and leaders. We have also scheduled to rerun some of the CPD that was so well received during the project.