

Report on an Impact Assessment undertaken on behalf of The St Helens Teaching School Alliance (Draft)

Background

The St Helens Teaching School Alliance (TSA) wished to elicit the views of their Partners (TSA Strategic Partners) and Members (TSA Members) on the quality of the work undertaken by the Alliance, together with suggestions as to how this work could be improved. The TSA Board therefore commissioned Jill Baker, an independent Consultant, to undertake this work, to ensure that all of those taking part would feel free to express their honest opinions of the Alliance's work. The Consultant has extensive experience in this area, having worked with a large number of Teaching School Alliances over a five year period, including undertaking work on behalf of the National College for Teaching and Leadership.

Required Outcomes

- To determine a clear understanding of the benefits of being part of The St Helens TSA.
- To review the effectiveness of the work carried out so far.
- To evaluate and analyse the effectiveness of the alliance and its structures.
- To identify areas to be improved.

Methodology

The Consultant undertook semi-structured individual interviews with the Headteachers of fifteen schools which are either Members (5) or Partners (10) of the TSA. These took place in September 2017, each interview being based on questions that were agreed by the TSA Board. Where the presence of another member of staff from the school was thought to be helpful, in addition to the Headteacher, this was accommodated.

Notes from each interview were produced by the Consultant, who has written this report. These have been seen by the Kirsty Haw (Principal) and Lisa Bradshaw (Director of Teaching Schools).

A list of the Headteachers taking part in the impact assessment is attached at Appendix 1 and the questions used at Appendix 2.

Summary of Responses

Responses to the questions were overwhelmingly positive. Where appropriate verbatim responses are included below, in red.

1. The most common positives related to continuous professional development (CPD) and in particular Maths. Interviewees see the Alliance as keeping up with national trends whilst knowing local schools and what they need.
2. The quality of training provided by ECM was mentioned by many interviewees, although some felt that, sadly, it was no longer affordable.
3. Training for Newly Qualified Teachers is felt to be of high quality.
4. Early Years Foundation Stage training and support are highly valued.
5. Interviewees were positive about the Alliance's role in School Direct and training provision for National Professional Qualifications.
6. Interviewees welcomed the fact that CPD is provided for all staff and for governors too.
7. Membership of the TSA means that sometimes access is available to something that one school alone couldn't afford.

"Suddenly something becomes a possibility."

8. Some Headteachers felt that their ability to quickly implement school improvement in schools in difficulty had been largely due to support from the Alliance.

"It's really moved our school on."

"I'm really glad I joined. It was the best decision I made when I became a Headteacher."

9. The sharing of best practice among members and partners was seen to be one of the benefits of the TSA. This seems to be linked to the fact that Headteachers involved with the TSA are seen to be "...high calibre but also have humility."
10. A number of interviewees felt that their staff had benefited from helping others through the Alliance, either as Specialist Leaders of Education, Local Leaders of Education, trainers, or less formally.
"The TSA makes things happen and schools benefit."
11. There were numerous positive comments about Lisa Bradshaw, Kirsty Haw and Sarah Makin. These related to professionalism, responsiveness, clear communication and the quality of the relationships they have established.
12. There was a strong view that the Alliance is doing the right things for the right reasons, due to a clear vision promoted by Kirsty and Lisa.
"The TSA isn't waiting to be told what to do, they are driving school improvement."
13. A number of Headteachers pointed to the usefulness of Lisa's annual visits. They have helped them to feel listened to and valued as part of the Alliance.
"Lisa knows all the staff (in school) so she can talk confidently about them."
14. Headteachers could evidence positive effects of TSA membership with improved outcomes for children (supported by data), increased staff confidence, book scrutinies etc.
"St Helens TSA is just what a Teaching School should be about. It benefits the system, teaching and learning and children. I'm not sure that all TSAs do that."
15. Network meetings are highly valued by teachers.
16. Headteacher meetings are felt to be purposeful and a high level of trust and mutual cooperation have been established.

17. Headteachers felt that being part of the Alliance raises their awareness of important issues on the national agenda.

“Lisa is well networked so the Alliance is ahead of the game.”

“They are always at the front line of any agendas or initiatives that come out”

18. The TSA provides opportunities for leadership dialogue, especially for Headteachers. One Headteacher particularly valued this aspect in what can otherwise be seen as a lonely job.

19. TSA administration is seen as a strength, taking some pressure off schools.

20. The question on accountability wasn't answered well by many people. Many didn't seem to have thought about it before my visit. However, those who had thought about it were positive. One gave the following comments:

“The Board is very rigorous. The information I receive as a Board member is open and clear. There's a transparency about actions that have taken place. We can ask questions and challenge. The Board isn't dominated by Kirsty. There are positive, challenging discussions taking place. It feels like a very cohesive Board with a wide range of schools taking part.”

21. There seems to be some good working relationships developing between primary schools and the secondary school within the Alliance, which have benefited those involved and begun to break down barriers.

22. Reference was made by one interviewee to the fact that the two TSAs and the local authority in St Helens don't work together well.

23. A number of interviewees suggested that the TSA should now build on the success of CPD in Maths and English by moving into areas such as the arts, history, Special Educational Needs and PE.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the consideration of *****

1. It is clear that members and partners value highly the personal qualities, experience and expertise of the Director of Teaching Schools. Whilst this is obviously positive, consideration needs to be given to how the work of the TSA would continue if the current postholder were to leave or be unavailable for more than a short period of time.
2. Directors need to consider point 23 above and decide whether the Alliance is willing and able to broaden the area of CPD it provides and, if so, in which curriculum areas.
3. Consideration should be given to how best to use the information captured by the impact review to shape the future direction of the Alliance.
4. Possible case studies
5. Anything else?

Jill Baker

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Appendix 1

Headteachers taking part in the interviews

Patsy Wade	St Austin's RC Primary, St Helens
Ian Rimmer	Nutgrove Methodist Aided Primary, St Helens
Rebecca Wilkinson Laura Rynn	St Ann's CE Primary, St Helens
Jonathon Nichols	St Silas CE Primary, Liverpool
Simon Hanley	Plantation Primary, Knowsley
Melanie Ravenscroft	St Aidan's CE Primary, St Helens
Claire Roberts Michelle James	Holy Family RC Primary, Wigan
Phil Edge	Newfold Primary, Wigan
Jane Sweeney	Rectory Primary, St Helens
Kathy Hall	St Thomas of Canterbury Primary, St Helens
Justine Kellett	Queen's Park RUC Primary, St Helens
Ian Young	Rainford High School, St Helens
Sara Johnson	St Theresa's RC Primary, St Helens
Martin Bell	Willow Tree Primary, St Helens
Jan Holmes	St James' CE Primary, St Helens

Appendix 2

Questions used in the interviews

1. Name of School
2. Name of HT
3. Partner or Member
4. Length of time as Partner or Member
5. What do you feel are the key strengths of St Helens TSA?
6. What do you feel are the benefits to you and your school of being part of St Helens TSA.?
7. How effective do you feel is the work carried out by the Alliance so far?
8. How would you evaluate this effectiveness for your own school and for others?
9. Tell me about any specific projects that you believe to have been a success, including the impact that they have had.
10. How effective are the Alliance structures in ensuring appropriate outcomes and accountability?
11. What areas of the Alliance and its work could be improved?
12. Looking to the future, what developments would be helpful for the Alliance?
13. Any other comments?