

Children and Young People Select Committee		
Title	Promoting Best Practice Between Schools	
Contributor	Scrutiny Manager	Item 6
Class	Part 1(open)	18 March 2015

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide members of the Committee with information on the Gold Club Scheme and the sharing of information and best practice between schools following visits to Gordonbrock and Rathfern Primary Schools.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Select Committee is asked to:

- Consider the evidence gathered from the visits to Gordonbrock and Rathfern Primary Schools on 26 and 27 February 2015 (attached at Appendix A and B).
- Invite Members of the Committee who attended the visits to feedback on their experience.
- Consider whether any additional scrutiny activity is required.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Committee has expressed an interest in looking at how best practice is shared between schools, with particular reference to the Gold Club scheme. The following key lines of enquiry were agreed in October 2014:

- How does the Gold Club support better sharing of best practice and how effective is this support?
- How are the impacts of best practice sharing being monitored in potential improvements in school results?
- How does Lewisham Council support the sharing of best practice and are there opportunities for this to be improved?

- 3.2 The Committee has indicated that it is particularly interested in best practice approaches surrounding the pupil premium and innovative uses of using IT to deliver learning.

4. The visits

- 4.1 A summary of the visits is attached in Appendix A and B. The visits provided an overview to Councillors of the schools involved and information on sharing best practice and on membership of the Gold Club Scheme. Committee members were taken on a tour of the schools followed by discussion sessions with the Heads and key members of staff.

5. Further Implications

- 5.1 At this stage there are no specific financial, legal, environmental or equalities implications to consider.

For further information please contact Katie Wood, Scrutiny Manager on 020 8314 9446.

Gordonbrock Primary School Visit – 26 February 2015

Present: Councillors: John Paschoud (Chair of CYP Select Committee), Councillor Brenda Dacres (Vice-Chair), Councillor Joan Reid, Councillor Luke Sorba, Councillor Alan Till and Monsignor N Rotheron (Church Representative).
Roger Raymond, Scrutiny Manager, Overview and Scrutiny Team

Councillors were taken on a tour of the school with Year 6 ambassadors, followed by a discussion with Kathy Palmer, Executive Head, Maria Gilmore, Head of School, Kerry Cowmey, Deputy Head and Shirley Finch, Resources Manager.

A summary of key points raised by Councillors and teachers during the tour and discussion:

- The school consists of 600 pupils, from Nursery to Year 6.
- Each Year group has a 'breakout area' which can be utilised when necessary for lessons etc.
- The school has 18 School Governors, with a Strategic Group consisting of the Chair, Vice-Chair and two governors which meets regularly.
- The school is focused on providing a strong grounding in English/literacy, writing skills, and maths. They focus on teaching the pupils the cursive form of writing from a young age. They have found that the pupils' writing skills are better when they are taught to write using the cursive technique, especially those with learning disabilities such as dyslexia. Teachers stated that using the cursive script has been proven to aid spelling and it is advocated by Lewisham's Learning Difficulties Team
- The school uses a teaching technique called "Talk for Writing"¹ to teach the pupils English and writing skills.
- The school also uses a technique called Kagan Cooperative Learning Strategies² to deliver cooperative learning in every classroom and ensure consistency.

¹ Talk for Writing is a teaching technique that enables children to imitate the key language they need for a particular topic orally before they try reading and analysing it. The technique was devised by Pie Corbett, a former teacher and educational writer. He developed a teaching technique that was a unique "storytelling approach" for children to remember stories with and results with improved literacy. The Talk for Writing website states that "schools that have adopted the approach have not only increased their children's progress but have found that children and teachers alike love it. It not only works throughout primary schools from the early years to Year 6 but also in secondary schools where it is key to making literacy across the curriculum really work."

² Kagan is a cooperative learning strategy developed in the US that claims to improve pupil achievement and social skills. It aims to organise classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences. Students must work in groups to complete tasks collectively toward academic goals. Kagan methodology claims that, unlike individual learning which can be competitive in nature, students learning cooperatively can capitalise on one another's resources and skills (asking one another for information, evaluating one another's ideas, monitoring one another's work, etc.) Furthermore, the teacher's role changes from giving information to facilitating students' learning.

- Alongside the teacher, every class has a Teaching Assistant, and has access to a computer, printer and camera. They also have access to laptops in class for timetabled computing lessons.
- The school employs a number of Schools Direct³ teachers and has been successful in recruiting quality candidates who have remained teachers at Gordonbrock once their training programme ended.
- The senior leadership meet regularly to track the progress of pupils and plan any intervention necessary to engage with struggling pupils and accelerate learning.
- The school has ability group sets in Years 5 for Maths and Year 6 for English. This is varied when necessary depending on the needs of the children and the most recent progress data. Teachers stated that they are very explicit with children about why they are in a particular group, what the child's next steps would be and that the groups were in no way fixed.
- The school employs two Learning Mentors to aid all vulnerable children, Pupil Premium children in particular. They assist the children and their families in a number of ways to ensure the children can attend school regularly and focus on learning and ultimately close the attainment gap.
- All children have a language assessment in Reception, and their progress is tracked and measured again at the end of Year 2. Between Reception and Year 2, pupils may be in in-house speech and language intervention groups and/or referred for specialist support if necessary.
- Teachers stated that they see clearly the impact of pupil peer assessment.
- Progress is measured from pupils' starting points, with no ceiling; Level 5 is the aim for pupils at the end of Year 6 and this is built into the schools progress expectations – referred to as “school ambition” measures.
- The Gold Club Scheme is providing some support to aid a Gold Club Seminar that Gordonbrock Primary School is hosting in March. This will attract teachers from across London. However most of the planning and organisation of the event has been delivered in-house at the school. The Gold Club scheme has offered some support with training and the seminar is advertised on the Gold Club Scheme website.
- The Gold Club scheme is a good networking tool to learn from other like-minded schools on what they are doing to improve the school results of their pupils, especially those on Pupil Premium.
- The school has shared best practice through its federation and has also been working with the Oakbridge Federation which includes Rangefield Primary school.

³ School Direct is an approach to initial teacher training (ITT) that gives schools more influence over the ways teachers are trained. It is run as a partnership between a lead school, other schools and an accredited teacher training provider. School Direct enables schools to: select and recruit their own trainees – with an expectation that trainees will be employed by the school or partnership of schools once they are qualified; choose a teacher training provider with which to work; agree the content and focus of the training programme depending on the needs of both the trainees and the school; decide how funding will be split between the school and the training provider. Training places are allocated to the lead school on behalf of the partnership, usually for 1 year. The lead school has overall responsibility for requesting places from the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) and ensuring that the criteria for School Direct are met.

- The school has a detailed monitoring and evaluation programme to assess all the teachers in the school to ensure that they are able to perform to a high standard to deliver the teaching in the school. 95% of its teachers are assessed by Ofsted as being “Good” or better.
- The school has a tracking system that monitors pupils from nursery to Year 6 to assess their progress throughout their time at the school ensuring maximum improvement for each pupil.
- The school has been looking at research into Pupil Premium children and what makes them successful students. The need for a ‘Safe Adult’ that a child can rely on is seen to be an important factor in childrens’ success. Gordonbrock is trying to ensure that its pupils have a ‘Safe Adult’ such as a Learning Mentors, a teacher, or a member of support staff.
- Gordonbrock teachers liaise with secondary schools to assess how well their pupils are progressing in the first year of their secondary. They always receive positive feedback about the preparedness of Gordonbrock pupils to adapt to secondary school and the extent that Gordonbrock pupils need to be ‘stretched’ due to the grounding they have received at primary.
- Lewisham Council’s senior officers have been very supportive in helping to develop the federation of Gordonbrock and Elliot Bank. This has enabled the school to flourish. The Council has always supported the goals and ethos at the school.

Rathfern Primary School Visit – Friday 27th February 2015

Re: Goldclubs and promoting best practice between schools

Present: Cllr John Paschoud, Chair of CYP Select Committee; Cllr Chris Barham; Cllr Luke Sorba; Cllr Liz Franklin-Johnson; Monsignor Nick Rothern.
Katie Wood, Scrutiny Manager,

Councillors were taken on a tour of the school followed by a discussion with Naheeda Maharasingham, Headteacher at Rathfern, and members of her management team.

A summary of key points raised by Councillors and teachers during the tour and discussion:

- Best practice sharing and dissemination is complex and needs to be considered in context.
- There can be an element of competition between schools and tensions around the philosophies of collaboration vs competition. The Performance focus can create tensions around sharing best practice. This can be most acute in situations where a school is sharing ideas/methods before they have received accreditation for them themselves (for example through an Ofsted Outstanding rating).
- There can exist a political or hierarchical dimension as to which schools choose to collaborate with criteria such as; Ofsted rating; results; or Gold Club membership being incentives or barriers.
- Collaborations at Rathfern take many forms and include: STEM consultancy teacher; partnership with Forest Hill Boys; partnership with Sedgehill which previously taught Year 6 Science; partnership with St Dunstons which offered scholarships and mentoring; Gold Club participation.
- Gold Club schools can benefit from a professional development focus and this is where there is a match with Rathfern as the school has a strong emphasis on teacher development and continual professional development.
- Rathfern's approach is based on a "learning attributes" approach where children take control of their own learning. The school believes very strongly that ability is not fixed by demographics and no children should be limited or achievement stifled by their background.
- Rathfern is mindful about not judging its community and pupils and believes that historically, institutional attitudes have been partly to blame for poor achievement by certain socio-economic groups and creating a culture of low expectations.
- The school believes in fostering a powerful learning atmosphere with emphasis on all areas of educational development.
- The Pupil Premium is used in part to fund small group teaching with an emphasis on "pre-teaching" for pupils who are struggling with subjects or concepts. In addition to this 1:1 reading and writing sessions are run every day. Rathfern use the Fischer

Family Trust methodology adapted specifically for themselves to develop ambitious, challenging targets for pupils.

- The Head believes that one of the keys to being successful in improving overall attainment, is by focussing much of the Pupil Premium on Early Years in order to close the attainment gap. For example, Rathfern uses it to provide an extra adult in each class in nursery, reception and Year 1.
- Teaching Assistants have made a key difference here and the Head strongly emphasised the importance of the teaching assistants and continual development for them as professionals as well as the teachers.
- Members of the Committee were informed about the importance of PHASE team leaders with part of the rationale being to distribute leadership within the school. This also fed into the ethos of continual teacher development and consensual methods of teaching between staff. The Head felt that part of the strength of an effective school was in the breadth of its leadership.
- An EMAS (Ethnic Minority Achievement Service) Team provided additional dedicated support including: a home-learning club; peer support; one to one attention for pupils; and “precision teaching” (ie looking holistically at the whole child’s development). This team liaises with all PHASE teachers to develop the best approach for the child.
- The school faced challenges such as Year 1 students with no previous schooling and high levels of mobility in some years.
- In terms of approaches involving the pupil premium and improving use of IT, the Head felt this was not a key emphasis for the school as often some of the most disadvantaged children had the most IT and screen-time at home. Therefore, Rathfern preferred the approach of focussing on talking and conversation.
- There was, however, a coding club at school which was run by Morgan Stanley as part of their corporate social responsibility.
- The Head explained that having high numbers of EAL pupils (English as an additional language) was not necessarily a problem and could be a huge advantage if dealt with properly. The EAL pupils often displayed a greater commitment and drive to learning overall.
- Teachers expressed the idea that sharing training with other schools could be shallow and un-meaningful if not done effectively. It was important to have a mutualistic relationship between the schools involved as it could be patronising or irrelevant if not done appropriately. It could also be perceived as a risk to a school to share its ideas and learning methods if it had not been formally accredited for them.
- The Head felt it was important schools were given time to change as putting in new processes and changing the culture and attitudes took time to produce results.
- Rathfern had a positive relationship with the Local Authority (LA) overall but a risk to future partnership working could be the severe cuts to the LA.
- The Head expressed that another barrier to partnership working between schools was an ideology that secondary schools could not learn from primary schools. The transition to secondary was a challenging one for many pupils and it was felt that increased collaboration between secondary and primary schools could improve this.

primary schools could learn from the subject expertise available in secondary schools, and secondary schools could learn from the pedagogical experience of primary teachers at school. The Head expressed that a perception of a hierarchy amongst schools was a barrier to mutual learning and best-practice sharing.

- The Head felt support with careers advice for Year 6 pupils would be useful. It could be beneficial to hear from young people in the Young Mayor's programme to help support and inspire pupils. This could be something facilitated by the Local Authority. Alternatively, hearing from students in Year 11-13 of local schools could also help to inspire Year 6 pupils.
- The Gold Club was one of many accreditation schemes and at present did not seem to offer a lot of benefits for participants.
- The Gold Club Scheme did not appear to have sufficient publicity in place either about the scheme overall or about events being held as part of it.
- Rathfern had run a seminar as part of the Gold club scheme but not many local schools had attended.
- Gold Clubs were a poor substitute for the central guidance through Professional Development Centres.
- The Head expressed that a possible improvement to mutual learning could be that Lewisham Council facilitate more of a coaching model in training sessions and director's briefings. Increased emphasis on consensus and mutual beneficial partnerships could improve collaborative working. The sessions would need to be individualised and personalised for the schools attending.
- It could be useful if Ofsted or the LA had greater responsibility for pairing schools with relevant strengths and weaknesses and it would be important that this could include the pairing of primary and secondary schools. Strategically thought-out and planned opportunities for work between secondary and primary schools was key to overall school improvement.