

Collaboration between Crossdale Drive Primary and Keyworth Primary and Nursery Schools – An Interim Review

Introduction

In Summer 2015, our two schools decided to collaborate under the leadership of a single Head Teacher (HT), Peter Cresswell, working across both schools. The Collaboration started in September 2015. A Joint Executive Committee (JEC) of Governors from both schools was established to oversee and monitor the Collaboration and report back regularly to the individual Governing Bodies.

This Interim Review looks at what has been achieved during the first full year of working together and tries to give some indication of how things may progress in the second year. The review has considered a number of different aspects of school life and the results are briefly summarised below.

At the end of the second year, Governors of both schools will have to decide whether or not to make collaborative working a permanent arrangement or to revert to operating as individual schools.

1. Pupil Numbers

Total numbers are shown in the table below:

	Summer 2015	Summer 2016	Autumn 2016
Crossdale	197	191	186
KPNS	121	122	113
Total	318	313	299

On the face of it the numbers across both schools are slightly disappointing as we would hope that working together we would make both schools more attractive to parents. The totals are, however, distorted by the Year 6 and Reception numbers. In both schools the Year 6 class leaving was comparatively large and the Reception numbers for this year were smaller than usual. This reflects an abnormally low intake across Keyworth as a whole, with Crossdale's intake remaining the highest of the three schools. This impact is expected to be reversed next year as small current Year 6 classes are replaced by larger Reception classes in Autumn 2018.

Overall: The numbers for both schools are above our initial expectations for Autumn 2016. Early projections for KPNS had been as low as 100. However, KPNS has been particularly successful in attracting new children at a higher rate than previously and this has had no significant negative impact upon Crossdale which is also still regularly attracting children from new families to the village.

Outlook: We are expecting total numbers to recover and we will continue to monitor the impact on both schools during the year.

2. Leadership

Significant effort has been made to build effective leadership which has relied on the HT and key members of staff working in a manner which is unsustainable in the long term but which has proved highly beneficial in short term. With Peter Cresswell already well established at Crossdale, it was always more likely that the impact of a change in leadership style and approach would be more visible at KPNS.

In the short term this has been borne out in practice and it is much easier to identify KPNS operating to different standards as Peter has imposed his own style. A distributed leadership model has allowed KPNS to embrace the change in leadership which has been as strong internally as it has in the external perception of the school.

At Crossdale the impact is less apparent. The short term gap in leadership – losing half a HT at the same time as the Deputy left – was very well managed with no discernible drop in focus. A new Deputy Head Teacher has been allowed to establish her role and influence and a number of other staff are taking more enhanced leadership roles.

Overall: There has been a positive impact at KPNS and standards of leadership have not been negatively impacted at Crossdale.

Outlook: The steady pace of change in developing the leadership structure at Crossdale is expected to bring dividends in 2016/17. The implementation of a School Head role, supported by other staff and all under the overall direction of the HT will hopefully give the school a stronger and more dynamic leadership structure. At KPNS, the impact of a number of key people taking maternity leave at the same time will provide challenges. In addition, the legacy staff structure at the school is unsustainable for the size of school. However, plans are in place to mitigate both these issues and to establish an effective structure during 2016/17 which will deliver long term stability for the school.

3. Staff Attitude

The impact has been generally positive, with the majority of staff in both schools recognising the opportunities and welcoming the chance to work more closely together. The change imposed by Collaboration has, to some extent, been overshadowed by the prospect of a move to academy status within a Multi Academy trust (MAT). At Crossdale, two of the senior teachers saw this as an appropriate time to retire, or leave teaching. While the loss of their skills will be a potential issue, the recruitment of suitable replacements and a new leadership restructure should minimise the overall impact.

Despite sustained morale, one of the key concerns for the JEC has been the staff work/life balance, particularly at KPNS. Several staff have been working at an unsustainable level to make a success of the new arrangements. This needs to be monitored to ensure new arrangements start to tackle this

Overall: Although this has been a period of significant change, with the government imposed changes in curriculum and assessment running alongside all the governance

and structural changes, staff morale has generally been maintained, with a considerable improvement being seen at KPNS.

Outlook: Further change within the MAT is anticipated for 2016/17 and both schools will have to adapt to internal structural changes while taking advantage of the opportunities available. This will be another challenging year.

4. Curriculum Benefits

Collaboration between the two schools has slowly developed throughout the year. This is not something that can be achieved by step change but by slowly building on opportunities that present themselves. Joint working in a number of areas has been established including a comprehensive shared Maths CPD programme which was particularly successful. Also in some highly visible aspects, particularly sporting activity, there has been a high level of integration across the schools. This has led to a greater level of contact between the children which can only be of benefit to general community cohesion.

Overall: Collaborative working has increased over the year as staff at each school have faced similar challenges. Best practice has moved across school boundaries with both schools benefiting.

Outlook: It is anticipated that the foundations built last year will form the basis for an increasing level of collaboration between staff. Current firm plans include collaboration in areas such as assessment of writing, marking and feedback presentation policies. Also in planning for RE, PE, Maths, English, British Values and SMSC. This is an area in which we expect some real impact in the second year of collaboration. It is also one which should be further enhanced as the schools enter the MAT. A joint approach to MAT working is anticipated to ensure that both schools gain the maximum benefit from this initiative.

5. Parents

Neither school has received any major negative response from parents on the principle or the application of Collaboration. There was more opportunity than ever for parents to express their views as each school went through a formal consultation process in relation to the move to academy status, but, again, there was very little negative comment.

The PTAs of both schools have begun working closely together which is an area of collaboration which we did not envisage when we started out, but which, again, could bring a greater level of cohesion within the village.

6. Attainment

The overriding judgement on Collaboration should be made on the educational impact on the children. Numerous pieces of anecdotal evidence suggest that the standards of education should benefit from the closer working between the two schools. However, the difficulty facing us when trying to assess the educational impact has been how to identify what is due to collaboration and what is due to external elements. We have no base line to assess against.

This year has posed even more challenges than anticipated in our ability to identify the impacts of collaboration. Changes in SATs, in measurement of progress, in expected levels of attainment, in curriculum content, all introduced at the same time have made year-on-year and, indeed, single year progress almost impossible to analyse. The impact of these changes has been overwhelmingly greater than that of Collaboration in its first, formative year.

On the face of it, at KPNS Key Stage 2 attainment is good by historical standards and at Crossdale is poor. Neither Governing Body is able to isolate the impact of Collaboration on these results. At Crossdale, however, more detailed understanding of the causes and interpretation of the results is needed. Nevertheless, regular reviews of progress and monitoring of activity during the year suggest that the school had never been better prepared for SATs and a second year of work within the new system is needed to make any substantive evaluation.

Overall: We had hoped to be able to see some evidence of the Collaboration in our results. The scale of external change during the year has, however, made this impossible.

Outlook: With other schools in the MAT facing equally confusing results, there is the hope a joint MAT approach will help us establish acceptable results across both schools.

7. Governance

The formation of the JEC has proved successful in bringing the two Governing Bodies closer together at Chair and Vice Chair level. The discussions we have had have shown that our objectives for our individual schools are very much the same and we have been able to establish excellent working relations. The debates each school had on the subject of Collaboration in 2015 also prepared both Governing Bodies well for considering whether or not to join the MAT.

Outlook: As we prepare to make our final decision at the end of the coming academic year, it is important we try to work more closely together as Governing Bodies to understand how we could be effective if we make the Collaboration permanent. Equally, it will allow us to identify any issues ahead of actually making that decision.

8. Financials

The immediate financial saving in both schools was half the cost of a Head Teacher. At Crossdale, this has been used to successfully strengthen the leadership structure and at KPNS it has allowed the school to gain the valuable services of an experienced and successful Head Teacher which they wouldn't otherwise have been able to afford or potentially attract. Once KPNS can successfully move to a new leadership model, both schools should have a far better structure for leadership and management of the school, which neither would have been able to fund as independent schools.

Several additional areas of saving have been identified including caretaking services and using speciality expertise within the two schools rather than bringing in from outside.

Overall: Both schools we have gained enhanced leadership and a number of improved services for the same cost.

Outlook: Where we expected to deliver greater financial savings in year two of the collaboration, the impact of joint procurement across the MAT is expected to supersede our original plans.

Recommendation

In our review of the first year of Collaboration between the two schools, we have identified many areas where the groundwork undertaken could potentially have a beneficial impact during the second year. Some areas of progress are greater than others but, overall, there have been positive impacts on both schools and no immediately identifiable negative impacts. It is highly unfortunate that a review of academic performance to help evaluate the impact of Collaboration has been rendered virtually impossible.

As the JEC we recommend to both Governing Bodies that we continue with the Collaboration into its second year and assess whether or not we wish to proceed further at the end of the 2016/17 academic year. In the meantime, we should work more closely together as Governing Bodies to ensure we understand the potential impacts of that decision on our own working. As we do this we should also prioritise our focus on the staff work/life balance to ensure that any new structures that are put in place deliver long term sustainability for both our schools.

Collaboration in practice

A few practical examples of how our schools are working together to improve outcomes for our children:

- Teachers are sharing expertise to devise writing assessments that will allow children to be appropriately tracked and monitored against the expectations of the new National Curriculum.
- Training for teachers in safeguarding children and H&S is being shared, saving both schools time and money.
- Strategies are being jointly devised to share success criteria with children and then provide them with helpful feedback.
- Sports events are being jointly planned, planning shared and staff mentored across schools. A 'sports week' was jointly planned and delivered.

- Site management and cleaning is being jointly delivered across both schools, saving time and money, and allowing access to greater expertise that is improving the fabric of our buildings.
- Expertise in Special Educational Needs (SEN) is being shared, leading to our bids for extra money that supports our SEN children being of the highest quality.
- Training for teachers and initiatives to develop our teaching of mathematics are being jointly delivered and monitored.
- Two joint music performances have taken place, one in each school that featured children from both schools.