



Learning Locally

London's
education
partnerships

AEPA

Area based Education Partnerships Association

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Introduction



Over the last few years, initiatives have been developed to create local education partnerships to support schools and help drive improvements in outcomes for children and young people. Many of these have arisen in London. Sometimes led by local authorities, sometimes by schools, these area-based partnerships are new models for local improvement. They aim to minimise the dangers of fragmentation and isolation by being inclusive and by generating energy and purpose. They act as an engine of improvement, brokering connections and initiatives across schools. In many areas, they assume responsibility for strategic oversight of education in the local area.

Schools are not being compelled to join these local partnerships but are willingly choosing to do so and, indeed, in many cases, paying to do so. They see themselves as not only contributing to the partnership but also as gaining from it too, particularly in terms of school improvement. The partnerships are open to all schools in an area, be they maintained, voluntary aided or controlled schools, academies and free schools, or groups of schools such as federations or multi-academy trusts (MATs).

Involvement in an area-based education partnership is frequently likened by those who participate to family or club membership. The focus for members' activity is simply the place or local area. Many schools describe their commitment to their local partnership as stemming from pride in and a sense of belonging to a place, as well as shared moral purpose to do the best for all the children and young people in the local community.

Membership of an area-based partnership is not exclusive. Members can belong to a number of other networks, some temporary, for a range of different purposes, but there is invariably an overriding commitment to place and community in the larger local network.

This booklet looks at the emerging picture in some partnerships in London. It sets out the context, purpose and sustainability of partnerships and considers practice within a number of them that meet regularly to share ideas and practice.

Christine Gilbert
Chair, London Education
Partnerships

Context

Purpose and scope

Across London, local education partnerships are developing in very different ways and taking different forms. Each has been shaped not only by the factors behind its own particular genesis but also by the size and context of its area. They are therefore emerging with many similarities but also distinct characteristics that stem from the local context. The establishment of most partnerships is rooted in a shared moral purpose that is well articulated and emphasises place and community. Generally, purpose is expressed in terms of making a difference, often an ambitious difference, to the lives of children and young people in the area. It places schools at the forefront of driving that change.

In most of these London partnerships we see schools themselves taking on greater responsibility, and even accountability, for ensuring that every school has the support it needs to improve and achieve well. Partnership and collaboration across schools are key elements of this approach.

This booklet illustrates the potential of successful area-based partnerships as drivers of change. They strengthen the current system by:

- Bringing schools together to improve learning and education locally, thereby reducing the risks of fragmentation and isolation
- Building professional and social capital, and so system capability and capacity, by energising schools, motivating teachers and growing their self-efficacy
- Providing leadership to promote equity and to nurture the educational growth of people and places, including individual and collective wellbeing.

Almost all these London partnerships enjoy good support from their local authority. An enabling and supportive LA can – and often does – make an important contribution to the leadership of the partnership. They have invested in the development of the local partnership but nevertheless respect its independence. Several use partnerships to tackle local issues of quality and equity which cannot easily be tackled by individual schools or MATs working alone. They do this through commissioning work from partnerships, often focused on more disadvantaged pupils, but also through collaboration and influence.

This blend of democratic accountability with the professional and moral accountabilities of schools, which is the foundation of most local education partnerships, gives powerful legitimacy to their work.

Partnerships and improvement

Every partnership in this booklet has school improvement as its core purpose. This focus has two closely related strands. The first is to promote school improvement in the local area and even, in some instances, to take responsibility for it, and the second is to ensure the sustainable delivery of a range of school improvement activities. Each partnership must therefore have a deep understanding of their schools and the local area, including the specific improvement challenges and what needs to be done to address them. Some activities are designed to help schools that need additional support but others bring staff from schools together to learn and grow professionally. Partnerships strengthen connections across schools, enabling them to work together in various ways. They are building a culture focused on learning and professional ownership by schools. This not only motivates and inspires teachers and staff in schools but also incentivises system-wide collaboration.

Successful partnerships create opportunities for teachers to plan, work and learn together, sometimes within schools and sometimes across schools. These include targeted support programmes, continuing professional development (CPD), or a range of networking opportunities. When teachers work together to develop practice, not only do they benefit professionally, they also begin to feel pride in, and responsibility for, the local system. Many partnerships are working hard, with considerable success, to create strong professional communities, where peer learning is central and dialogue is focused on the detail of practice and pedagogy. This can challenge thinking and form a crucial element in changing practice. Teachers in many areas speak with enthusiasm about the creativity of working collaboratively to create better practice. It is this sort of collaboration that is likely to build individual and collective capacity to create a better and more equitable system.

Collaboration in local partnerships is not just about the strong supporting the weak nor is it about a finite number of designated system leaders. All schools all have something to offer. By being involved in initiatives such as peer review, practice improvement and in providing CPD, staff in schools start to feel commitment to each other, to the partnership and most important of all, to children beyond their own schools.

Collaborative practice requires organisational investment. Partnerships are finding inventive ways of resourcing opportunities for teachers to work together. Growing confidence and expertise in using technology to support distance learning and virtual meetings during the pandemic has helped too. It has generated interesting examples of teachers thinking and planning together across schools, flexibly and cost-effectively. However, some headteachers and governors continue to worry that such collaborative work could stretch their within-school capacity and damage them within the public accountability system. If partnerships are to use more practitioners from schools so that a school-led improvement system thrives, more ways need to be found of creating additional capacity.

The partnerships in this booklet are led by those who are invested in the locality and committed to the partnership's purpose and vision. Leaders focus closely on effective pedagogy, learning and ambitious outcomes, and the links between them, but leadership of place goes beyond that. In building a sense of place, some partnerships are providing leadership to promote equity, which includes nurturing individual and collective wellbeing. Increasingly, partnerships are commissioned by a range of public services and organisations to support health and wellbeing. In some parts of London, they are seen increasingly to have a role in building community cohesion.

They can also provide a space to join up the broader aspects of children's social, emotional and even cultural development, and many are beginning to do that.

Partnerships can inject energy locally that builds professional and community capital to support learning and achievement. No better example exists than the way in which many partnerships worked with schools, parents, councils and their local communities during the pandemic in 2020. They supported schools individually and collectively in managing the challenges of the crisis but, on their behalf, they also connected with other agencies and stakeholders, both internally and externally. Using the expertise in local schools, they led the design of initiatives to support 'recovery and renewal', particularly for the most disadvantaged children and young people.

Governance

In terms of governance, the majority of the partnerships in this booklet have established themselves as a legal entity, usually a company limited by guarantee, with schools demonstrating commitment by becoming legal members. As members, schools are also able to act as a check on the powers of the company's board. In most partnerships, the local council is represented on the company board in the role of one or more directors, which gives it influence in the new system.

All local education partnerships, whether legal entity or not, have a degree of independence from the local council including some form of overarching board which leads and oversees its work. This has a less formal, but still important, direct accountability to its schools.

Resourcing and sustaining partnerships

Partnerships draw their funds from five major areas:

- Income from schools
- Traded services
- Local authority commissions
- Other commissions
- Grant funding and awards

In the vast majority of cases, partnerships depend heavily on income from schools for their funding. This might be in the form of subscriptions, often at different levels for a different range of improvement services, or of schools buying an individual service or a package of services, perhaps through a service-level agreement. In addition to providing a range of services, a few partnerships also sell products such as online materials.

In most cases, the local council also commissions the partnership to provide services to schools on its behalf, in particular for statutory school improvement services, although exactly what these include differs slightly in different areas. The range of commissions is wide and varied.

For example, in addition to school improvement services, some councils are contracting partnerships to manage their SEND and Inclusion Services or deliver part of their statutory responsibilities for the Prevent strategy or for public health.

Some partnerships have secured commissions from other organisations, such as those in the health sector, to deliver services, including trading beyond the local area to generate income.

A few partnerships have managed to attract grant funding or awards. However, until there is greater understanding of the role and potential of partnerships, this is likely to prove difficult. A number of partnerships express concern about being excluded from applying for major government grants or initiatives as applications are often restricted to teaching schools, MATs and local authorities.

Creating a sustainable funding model is a major task for most partnerships, particularly for those established without any form of subscription or service level agreement charging schools for their services.

Through a range of collaborative activities, resource sharing and procurement, partnerships are able to secure efficiency savings for schools. However, resource pressures and the need to generate income are constant preoccupations.

Although many partnerships received support in money or kind from local authorities to establish themselves, most expect to have to become self-sufficient over time. In some areas, partnerships' focus on trading and generating income from activities, services and products runs the risk of diverting attention from developing a more innovative, school-led approach to improvement; the emphasis becomes, instead, on providing more traditional professional development, including courses, conferences and other activities that might generate income. Creating a sustainable business model is critical if the partnership is to survive.

In terms of longer-term sustainability, the risk is that local partnerships will make little progress as a large-scale educational reform unless they have at least some form of political support nationally as well as widespread professional engagement in developing or delivering them. Some recognition from central government, even at the level of engagement or evaluation, would support progress towards sustainability.



Barking and Dagenham School Improvement Partnership

Origins

Relationships between schools and the council in Barking and Dagenham have historically been very close. But as local authorities' role in supporting schools diminished nationally, the need to preserve and build on these relationships became more apparent. It was also recognised that, while relationships were good, the quality of services offered by the council to schools was not always consistent and needed to be professionalised. Over 12 months, schools and the council explored options, ultimately deciding to create a school support company.

Barking and Dagenham School Improvement Partnership (BDSIP) launched on 1 April 2018. It is a not-for-profit social enterprise, 81% owned by 56 local schools with the council retaining the remaining 19% stake. The schools include all phases (primary, secondary, special and all-through) and types – maintained, academy and diocesan. Just four schools in the borough are not members. The school-led nature of the partnership is reflected in the board, which includes six headteachers and a governor – over half the total – the remainder being three independent non-executive directors, two council directors and the chief executive.

What does the partnership do and how?

It provides a broad range of professional support services to schools, spanning school improvement, non-statutory inclusion support, CPD and NQT services, careers, work experience, and governor services. The partnership also brokers system-led improvement activity locally, working closely with local teaching schools and a growing range of external partners.

Annual turnover is just under £3 million, almost £2 million of which comes from services sold directly to schools. The remainder consists of a council contract worth £600,000 a year, plus £300,000 from the central DSG allocation (which will reduce to £0 over the next four years).

Impact

As a school-led company, BDSIP can be highly agile in responding to emerging school needs. During the Covid-19 crisis, for example, it has led the development and co-ordination of online teaching resources and support (see box).

As a private company with schools-led governance, BDSIP can also design and quickly introduce new services.

Last year it put in place counselling and speech and language (SALT) services, allowing schools to buy quality support, often at prices significantly below current market rates. Services are delivered directly, or via partnerships where others are best placed. For counselling, the partnership recruited a pool of qualified counsellors whose time is bought by the day, scaling up or down to meet demand. For SALT, an innovative partnership was formed with Words First, a leading provider of services across London and beyond.

As demand for the counselling service has increased during the pandemic, so capacity to support staff and pupils has been rapidly scaled up, with a pool of 13 counsellors now in place. School improvement, too, has been rapidly diversified with the help of a range of improvement partners, enabling support to be tailored to the needs of each school in a way which wasn't possible in the council. Consequently, a growing number of schools are choosing to buy this service. The range of subject specific support has also grown, bringing in new expertise from leading practitioners across London and local teaching schools, all blended with the partnership's in-house capacity.

The strength of the approach is reflected in the feedback: 94% of headteachers rated the quality of professional support provided by the partnership as good or better.

Key challenges and priorities for 2021

The partnership's ambition, set out in its three-year strategy, is to be the trusted partner for all the borough's schools. Responding successfully to Covid-19 has required innovative and digital solutions, together with increased provision of wellbeing services such as counselling. Over time, this challenge has progressed to supporting effective blended learning and the recovery curriculum.

The key challenge in 2022 will be sustaining the same level of innovation, continuing to adapt the partnership's offer to respond to the evolving needs of our schools and young people, ensuring a renewed focus on excellence beyond Covid recovery. More generally, the challenge is to continue working with schools to help raise the aspirations of all young people in a borough.

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In response to the pandemic, we rapidly developed an innovative online CPD offer. Initially it focused on inclusion and wellbeing support. Over time we have built on this, expanding the offer to encompass curriculum, school improvement and e-learning. By delivering digitally we have been able to build partnerships with speakers and organisations who are national and international leaders in their fields, including nasen, Studio 3, Diane Rochford, Try This Teaching and Whole School Send. Our online programme is reaching far more delegates, from a broader range of schools, and is allowing us to deliver on a modular basis, building practice and sustainable improvement over time.

Online delivery makes it easy for teachers to attend, with over 65 teachers at some sessions – far more than would have been possible using traditional, classroom-based delivery. The strength of this approach is reflected not just in the high attendance, but also in the outstanding evaluation, with over 90% of delegates agreeing or strongly agreeing that the training they've attended has usefully informed their future classroom practice.



Camden Learning

Origins

The initial decision to form a school-led partnership was made in 2015. The proposals were then developed in response to possible government changes to local authorities' statutory role for improvement and responsibilities for schools. Camden Council had a radical vision for Camden Learning and saw it as part of its drive to move public services into the 21st century. It invested heavily in the development of the partnership – and continues to do so – but respects its independence too.

To ensure the long-term stability and effectiveness of Camden Learning, its partners recognised that it would have to be established as a legal entity, a company limited by guarantee, and they recruited an independent chair. After a formal consultation with headteachers, governors and key partner organisations, Camden Learning came into being in September 2017 and was formally launched in January 2018 at the Crick Institute. All schools demonstrated their commitment by becoming members of the company. The local authority has two seats on the company's board.

Camden Learning is a local partnership, a joint enterprise set up between Camden schools and Camden Council for the benefit of teachers and students. It brings together headteachers, teachers and other education practitioners to share expertise, drive improvement and develop excellent practice.

Camden's state schools are some of the most diverse in any council area in England. Almost half are voluntary aided. Then there are community schools, special schools, free schools, academies, Pupil Referral Units, and hospital schools. They all commit and contribute to Camden Learning.

What does the partnership do and how?

Camden Learning has created a powerful platform to enable schools to work together, share expertise and drive success. Its inspiring practitioner-led professional development, for instance, has had a profound impact both within and between schools. This has injected energy locally and built professional and community capital to support learning and achievement. It has also proved an important factor in retaining and recruiting staff.

Initially, Camden Learning was commissioned by the council to run its core school improvement services but each successive year, it has taken on more. It now runs a range of services: school improvement; governors; health and wellbeing; the Camden Learning Centre (for computing); Music; STEAM (an initiative relating to science, technology, engineering, arts and maths); attendance; inclusion; SENDIASS and the quality of SEND. It is also the single point of contact for other services that schools buy from the Council.

Collaboration underpins the way in which Camden Learning works. During the pandemic, it worked very closely with schools, including governors, parents, young people and local communities. It met with headteachers weekly and governors frequently. But it also connected, on their behalf, with other agencies and stakeholders. Using the leadership expertise in local schools, Camden Learning led the design of initiatives to support schools as they returned to full-time education. The collaboration evident within and across schools during the pandemic, including mobilising strong ties with parents and communities, has been very positive in building support, confidence and solidarity.

Impact

The borough's schools made good progress last year, building on already strong academic and wellbeing outcomes – all are good or outstanding, and have been since December 2019, compared to 86% nationally. Camden Learning is the glue that binds them together locally, with a shared focus on Camden as a place and its communities.

Over five years, Camden Learning Hubs – a practice-focused model that harnesses the expertise of local practitioners – have connected teachers to help accelerate improvement (see box).

The Growing Great Teachers initiative for newly qualified teachers, run by Eleanor Palmer, Parliament Hill and Swiss Cottage schools, is a weekly training

programme for new entrants in primary and secondary schools. Programmes are consistently rated as outstanding by new teachers.

The partnership also offers a central CPD programme, which since the summer term has been delivered online. It has been a great success, with increased engagement and take-up.

Key challenges and priorities for 2021

The big challenge for 2021 is to ensure schools come back stronger from the impact of the pandemic. We are seeking to do that by thinking optimistically about the opportunities for better education presented over the last year.

We shall be leading on the development of a new 10-year education strategy for Camden. This will focus on:

- Anchoring development in a place-based model of change, very much rooted in community
- Ensuring those children most at risk have the resources they need to learn and thrive
- Harnessing the power of technology and the learning gained this past year
- Re-imagining what a broad, inclusive and more relevant education for all might look like
- Strengthening capacity through collaboration.

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Eleanor Palmer Primary School organises and leads the Camden Primary Maths Hub, in which 24 local schools work together to lead, develop and celebrate good practice.

Although results are very strong, the gap in the rate of progress between disadvantaged and 'non-disadvantaged' pupils has remained a persistent concern. This initiative, using funding from the Richard Reeves Foundation, was aimed at disadvantaged Year 2 children and involved teachers and Teaching Assistants (TAs) working together for much of the school year.

The Hub developed and piloted a 'games playing' approach in Year 2. The hypothesis was that structuring games playing around maths would help to strengthen fluency, understanding and reasoning.

The result was a dramatic progress boost in outcomes for some of our most disadvantaged pupils. While none of the targeted Year 2 children was at expected levels at the start of the project, 43% of them had reached expected levels at the end. Many of those who 'failed' to reach the 'expected level' were actually very close to it and benefited from the approach.

The enjoyment and confidence of the children in being able to do maths – and the confidence of the teaching and support staff to teach it – improved markedly. They became more confident in teaching maths and in using questions and games to boost attainment. Feedback from the teachers and TAs involved was exclusively positive. It was the time planning and working together in CPD, and the in-school visits across the group, that boosted their commitment and motivation.



Ealing Learning Partnership

Origins

With a mission to ensure 'no learner left behind: no school left behind', Ealing Learning Partnership (ELP) was established as a council-led partnership with 88 state-funded schools in 2017. It aims to promote educational excellence through collaboration and innovation, to foster shared responsibility to achieve the best outcomes for children, and to reduce the financial vulnerability of schools.

What does the partnership do and how?

Overseeing the organisation is a partnership board of eight school leaders and four senior officers, which is led by an elected serving headteacher. It achieves its strategic aims through six co-led committees and a two-year planning cycle:

- Learning and Achievement aims to secure consistently high standards of teaching and learning and to be among the best in London through skilful and sustainable collaboration
- Safeguarding and Wellbeing is tasked with anticipating and responding intelligently to safeguarding needs to ensure the highest standards of care through strong collaboration between schools and children's services

- SEN and Inclusion looks to improve educational attainment and life chances for our most vulnerable children and young people
- Progression and Pathways to Employment ensures that every young person is on a route to sustainable employment wherever possible
- Recruitment and Retention aims to attract and retain the very best workforce
- Building Sustainable Schools is charged with encouraging schools to spend well for less and driving efficiency through creative solutions

The partnership is funded by school subscriptions and a matched-funded council contribution. The board makes direct decisions on resource allocations to support the work of the six committees, including direct commissioning of school-to-school support programmes. The board also has a voice and influence in relation to the council's statutory functions and its wider commitments to children.

In addition to its 'core offer' for member schools, the partnership is able to offer a small number of fully traded services. It has also been able to use the partnership to attract other sources of external funding from charities for specific projects over the past two years.

Impact

The success of the partnership is judged by a simple metric – the degree to which the engagement and behaviours of 88 schools, working with the council can achieve more for the children and young people they serve than they could do as individual organisations.

An evaluation framework was constructed in 2019 to measure the impact of this collective endeavour. It assesses engagement – the extent to which all partners commit to the partnership's vision; behaviours – identifying ways of working that will best realise the partnership's aims; impact – the effect it's had on improving educational outcomes, wellbeing, inclusion and progression to adulthood and employment; sustainability – how the partnership delivers value for money and reduces financial pressures across the system (see box).

There have been several notable successes to date, not least a centralised and quality assured peer review framework embedded across primary schools as well as access, across all phases, to high quality and wide-ranging professional development. Pupil outcomes have also improved strongly – with all key measures in primary and secondary schools now well above London and national averages.

Ealing secondary schools rank first in the country for Progress 8 and are among the top ten London boroughs for outcomes at KS4 and KS5.

Disadvantaged pupils make positive progress in all subjects, putting Ealing schools in the top ten nationally on this measure. 63% of pupil premium pupils achieved a standard pass in English and maths 2019. Schools can see ELP's membership offer at: www.egfl.org.uk/elp-leadership

Key challenges and priorities for 2021

The partnership is dependent on the council's financial contribution to be sustainable at a time when budgets are under extreme pressure. Two-year funding agreements make it difficult to recruit to substantive posts or build infrastructure.

Nevertheless, ELP has a number of priorities, including improving outcomes and experiences of Black Caribbean and White disadvantaged pupils, developing a fresh approach and a strong and integrated leadership in EYFS, reducing variation in the quality and leadership of reading in primary schools, improving the range and breadth of pathways for learners post-16 working below level 3 and developing partnership governance.

Since the pandemic, the partnership is also determined to tackle the widening gaps resulting from lockdown and the disproportionate impacts on BAME and vulnerable pupils, develop the resilience of schools for contingency planning and "distance pedagogy" and intensify the scrutiny of equalities practices across all areas of our work in the wake of Black Lives Matter.

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Achieving economies of scale for our schools is a key priority for the partnership and the local authority. To this end, the council recently approved two initiatives that would help achieve this aim.

The first is council approval for the School Sustainability committee to tender for a managed service for supply staff. At present, our partner schools fill temporary staffing requirements independently, which results in a high number of agencies being used, limited consistency and wide variations in price. Moreover, the terms are not always transparent or favourable to schools and can include costly hidden fees. ELP estimates that supplier fees alone account for 30% of schools' total spend on temporary staff. Pooling spending across the partnership will ensure consistency of supply, transparent pricing and terms and conditions and deliver an average saving of 7%.

The second is a brand new recruitment website, instigated by the Recruitment and Retention committee, which will ensure schools can upload vacancies quickly and cheaply and access opportunities across the partnership.

Both initiatives are examples of longer-term responses to the needs of schools and in line with ELP's overall aim to use resources efficiently and to maximise value for money for children and young people.

Haringey Education Partnership

Origins

Haringey Education Partnership (HEP) was established as a company by local schools in partnership with the council in December 2017. Its creation was driven by three things: the existing local authority service was financially unsustainable with the end of the Education Services Grant; the government's White Paper of 2016 advocating academisation for all schools raised fears that the system locally would become more fragmented; and the realisation that further improvement in the education of all Haringey's children would be best accomplished through a schools-led model.

Local headteachers worked with the council to design HEP, a board was established chaired by the Lead Member for Children's Services and it became fully operational in September in 2018.

What does the partnership do and how?

HEP works with 92 member schools – 79 in Haringey and 13 in Enfield – including nursery, primary, secondary and special schools as well as one large FE college.

The partnership operates a membership model, with member schools paying £19 per pupil annually for a 'core offer' of support. Some of our work is offered on a traded basis at additional cost.

HEP delivers school improvement, CPD, governor services and statutory services – including moderation and monitoring – and supports SEND and safeguarding practice. The organisation also works to advance collaborative working between schools, engaging with heads groups and Networked Learning Communities, as well as taking the lead on strategic priorities such as BAME achievement, STEM and Post-16. HEP doesn't deliver operational functions like HR, finance or legal support, or admissions, place planning and Early Years.

Impact

HEP's school improvement team has improved dramatically and is arguably one of the best available. Improvement partners are either serving or ex-headteachers with highly successful track records. With a mix of an employed core team and over 10 consultants, we have a huge range of experience to draw on. Feedback from headteachers and governors has been extremely positive. The partnership's support has been evidenced in Ofsted inspections and has helped turn around schools in challenging circumstances.

HEP is in the process of developing one of the most exciting curriculum offers available nationally (see box).

The partnership has also developed a strategy, pledge and set of resources, which are freely available to download, to address the achievement gap for BAME students in Haringey. HEP has hosted three conferences for school leaders and developed networks of SLT champions and lead governors for BAME achievement.

Key challenges and priorities for 2021

Funding and sustainability are key challenges. HEP has been very successful in having schools sign up for membership (including expanding into neighbouring Enfield) and delivering traded services. However, there are still DfE funding streams that are precarious and that, if ended, would leave a large hole in the budget. In response, the partnership is growing with more member schools and increasing its traded service offer, though this will take time.

The organisation aims to develop our offer for secondary and special schools as well as MATs so that HEP is as highly valued by them as by our primary schools. Primary schools provide the majority of our income. They are generally the most open to support and the readiest to operate collaboratively – both in Haringey and Enfield. While we have very strong feedback from our member secondary and special schools, we need to develop an equally compelling offer.

Next year HEP's priorities are to support schools through the pandemic with excellent CPD, recovery curriculum programmes and remote learning expertise.

It also aims to continue to help schools address the achievement gap for their BAME students, in particular through a strong parent and community engagement as well as additional targeted support for the most vulnerable learners. Finally, the partnership is planning to develop its curriculum offer across KS2 more widely (the next priority is to add science) and to develop the same engagement and offer at KS3.

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Following Ofsted's emphasis on a broad, rigorous, sequenced and coherent curriculum, primary schools were keen to review their offer at Key Stage 2. Rather than provide a checklist or framework, HEP has partnered with Christine Counsell, one of the leading curriculum experts in the country, to develop what it believes will be the best curriculum resources available anywhere nationally.

Beginning with history, geography and religion, the partnership developed a carefully sequenced curriculum map and resources to support each half-termly topic. The resources include a booklet for each topic, six PowerPoints for teachers to edit and use in class, and a key vocabulary list to ensure mastery of the material. We have added extensive training for school leaders and every teacher from Year 3 to Year 6 across all our schools.

Looking ahead, HEP will add science and other subjects to the offer. The resources have already had a big impact on the quality of children's learning and engagement, which has fed through into teachers' greater enjoyment in delivering the curriculum. Over time, it's expected that the cumulative impact, year on year, as children master the content in each year group will be significant at Key Stage 2 and beyond.

Hounslow Education Partnership

Origins

Hounslow Education Partnership is a company owned and governed by local schools to provide services to support school improvement and meet the needs of vulnerable pupils. It was founded in 2018 against a background of continuing financial pressures nationally on school funding and the potential fragmentation of the well-established school-to-school partnerships in the borough.

HEP enables schools to deliver the best possible educational experiences and outcomes for all the children and young people of Hounslow and drives collective responsibility and ambition for their achievements.

The approach is collaborative and inclusive and promotes a rigorous culture of review, reflection, challenge and support drawing on the skills and expertise in our schools and beyond. It is summed up in the promise – ‘Come together, keep together, work together’.

What does the partnership do and how?

HEP builds and supports partnerships between schools that promote collective responsibility and shared accountability for the educational outcomes of children and young people in Hounslow through programmes such as Peer Challenge in primary schools and Fair Access in secondary schools.

Its main strategic priorities are to raise standards through continued school improvement, to address the needs of the most vulnerable children, to build and promote school connections and partnerships and to invest in support for high quality teaching and leadership. And it will continue to deliver its core offering through school partnership groups, peer review, subject networks and local authority liaison.

Key challenges and priorities for 2021

The main focus for HEP next year will be to maintain its ongoing school improvement projects:

- Primary foundation subject leaders’ programme
- Joint Practice Development – new primary priorities each year resulting from Peer Challenge
- Develop your A level Teaching programme
- Subject Leader development – primary
- Knife and violent crime reduction programme – cross phase
- Student Wellbeing network – cross phase
- Senior Business Professional network – cross phase
- Attendance Officer network – cross phase

There will also be a number of new projects focused on support for vulnerable pupils, including a transition programme, a project aimed at reducing exclusion and violence, partnerships with the Metropolitan Police and career schemes.

For more information, contact:

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An introduction to HEP



Hounslow
Education
Partnership

HEP is about delivering excellence in all we do for all the children and young people of Hounslow. We work with great energy to encourage our members' shared responsibility, collective moral purpose and vision. Achieved through a collaborative and inclusive school-led improvement partnership, we draw on the skills and expertise in our schools and beyond, promoting a rigorous culture of:

Review / Reflection / Challenge / Support

Together we will grow our success.

Supporting you - our priorities



To raise standards through continued school improvement



By building and promoting beneficial connections and partnerships, within and outside HEP



Through identifying and meeting the needs of our most vulnerable children and young people



By investing in support for high quality teaching and inspirational school leadership

HEP Membership offer

From school-led improvement partnerships to supporting vulnerable pupils, our commitment to providing opportunities for collaborating, networking, sharing and supporting is at the core of HEP's membership offer.

By schools, for schools

HEP Meetings

Partnership meetings and the associated working groups, led by Headteachers are the driving force of HEP's work and set the strategic direction for HEP activity.

HEP Training

HEP supports high quality teaching, learning and leadership through its training programmes by identifying needs and building capacity in the school-led system.

HEP New Projects

In response to schools' emerging needs from across the partnership, HEP is committed to growing its services with the support of member schools, the local authority and external funders.

HEP Resources

From curriculum resources and handbooks to excellent training partners, HEP shares members' ambition to improve the quality of education for every child and young person.

The unique strength of the partnership lies in the engagement of schools as both members and contributors.



Hounslow
Education
Partnership

Find out more
hounsloweducationpartnership.co.uk

Contact us
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Lewisham Learning

Origins

Lewisham Learning is unusual in the way it was created. Unlike most school-led partnerships it hasn't evolved organically over time from the bottom up. It was created by the local authority in the wake of an earlier education commission, which had identified a number of advantages to setting up a school-led partnership in Lewisham. It was set up as an informal partnership in 2018-19, hosted by the local authority and with a budget of around £1 million a year agreed to August 2021. Included in this funding was a service-level agreement to deliver monitoring and brokering services for Lewisham council and an amount delegated by schools to provide school improvement services. All 86 schools in Lewisham are members. In September 2019 an Independent Chair and Director were appointed.

What does the partnership do and how?

The purpose of the partnership is to improve school performance among its members by delivering services previously provided by the local authority, including monitoring, brokering and intervening in line with the agreed school improvement framework; creating an annual programme of school improvement activities to meet the needs of partnership schools; and building a committed membership of school leaders and other stakeholders.

Impact

During the last academic year, Lewisham Learning has maintained and improved the effectiveness of the service commissioned by the local authority to monitor schools and intervened in those causing concern. Almost all schools that were of concern have shown improvement against the agreed priorities and systems and processes are clearer and better understood.

The partnership has also improved the capacity to analyse data for school improvement through training and the use of school profile reports and FFT resources. Four school hubs were established to encourage innovation in art, humanities, race equality and mental health. School leadership has improved as leaders have developed new skills and undertaken new roles to support one another.

Key challenges and priorities for 2021

The partnership's priorities for next year are to;

- Support schools to recover from the pandemic
- Raise achievement, especially in the secondary sector
- Develop peer challenge and evaluation
- Agree a sustainable funding model from 2021 onwards

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Attain (Merton)

Origins

Attain, the partnership of Merton schools, only started in 2018, but it was built on a strong tradition of collaboration going back many years between clusters of schools and a strong secondary partnership. This structure has remained as heads across the borough continue to meet and support each other regularly, and now feed into the Attain board to ensure that local priorities are addressed strategically.

In working towards its vision, Attain holds true to the following principles: everyone has an equal right to a high-quality education; all children and young people should be guided to grow into honest, kind and socially responsible citizens, regardless of their background or specific educational needs; diversity and different learning pathways should always be supported and celebrated; our schools should aim to prepare children and young people for their next life stage, whatever that may be and strong partnership working enhances every aspect of school life through sharing the highest ambitions and good practice among reflective professionals working alongside our children and young people.

The partnership believes that trust and common purpose are the foundation for effective collaboration and that the sharing of best practice is the way to achieve high quality teaching and learning. It seeks to develop school leaders who demonstrate integrity and commitment to the common good and to nurture ambition and professional growth within the wider school workforce.

What does the partnership do and how?

Schools in Merton are committed to working in partnership through Attain, which directs strategic improvement through an elected board of headteachers and governors alongside board members from the local authority. Member schools and their staff contribute to the planning and delivery of projects that address mutually agreed priorities. Attain's main partner organisations are the Merton Special Teaching Alliance and Teach Wimbledon both of which provide Initial Teacher Training and CPD.

Impact

One of the partnership's biggest successes has been leadership development (see box). Attain has also worked hard to help schools improve sixth-form outcomes. Working with heads of sixth form across Merton, the partnership created three new subject examiners in each school, implemented at least one 'best practice action' from an outstanding sixth form and provided all teachers with new opportunities for professional development. Over 50 teachers were able to engage with the project through attending chief examiner sessions, joining professional associations or being released for subject examination. Four schools also organised visits to outstanding sixth forms. Following this work, A level outcomes across Merton improved.

Recruitment and retention is another priority area for the partnership. It has helped Merton schools meet this challenge by establishing a workload and wellbeing project group, advertising job opportunities and attending NQT recruitment fairs.

Key challenges and priorities for 2021

Although there is good buy in from schools, the partnership is relatively young and is working hard to increase its presence across Merton and beyond. To that end, Attain has launched a new website and increased its Twitter and LinkedIn output to boost its online profile. Funding, too, threatens to be a problem. Schools contribute to become Attain partners. But as financial pressures for all schools increase, their contributions are coming under pressure from competing priorities.

Nevertheless, the partnership is determined to address its priorities for next year. These include early career development, the Black Lives Matter and equalities agenda and investment in quality remote learning, both as a possible contingency should schools need to close again and to use the lessons learnt the lockdown to enhance learning in the long run.

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Leadership development has been one of Attain's most effective programmes. Key to its success was funding for an NPQML course and the development of a new leadership progression framework. The framework sign-posted leaders at different stages to the range of programmes available. Early leadership skills were developed through funded primary and secondary focused NQT+1 programmes. Middle leaders were able to participate and benefit from a number of focused projects as diverse as primary English and Sixth Form Examiner sessions.

Whole school leadership was supported through such projects as the Thrive Practitioner course and the SENCo National Award, delivered in partnership with the Merton Special Teaching Alliance and Roehampton. Teachers in Merton have also been successful in accessing other locally delivered programmes, including Aspiring Headship, Women Leaders and Diverse Leaders. As a result, a number of school leaders from across the partnership have gone on to more senior leadership roles.



Redbridge Education Partnership

Origins

Redbridge has always had strong local school communities. But the government's policy agenda over the last few years – giving more autonomy to schools, reducing local authority funding and increasing academisation – led a group of headteachers and council officers to consider how the borough should respond to meet those challenges. Following these discussions, the Redbridge Headteachers Association (a collaboration of 45 schools that had been working together since 2014) decided to become a more formal school-led partnership just over three years ago.

The Redbridge Education Partnership (REP) is a membership organisation, open to maintained schools and academies, with an annual subscription based on the size of school. Its motto – *Ambitious Leaders, Stronger Together* – reflects the ethos of the organisation. It's an ethos that reflects our belief in working together with shared values and being able to speak with one voice while supporting and recognising the autonomy of individual schools.

All partners are committed to collaboration in order to provide and promote excellence through school-to-school support, challenge and accountability. The partnership consists of maintained schools and academies with 51 primary schools and four special schools as full members and nine secondary and two primary schools as associate members.

What does the partnership do and how?

Much of the work of the organisation is conducted through its five locality-based School Partnership Groups (SPGs), each of which has between eight and ten schools that meet half termly (see box). The strategic board is the partnership's core decision-making body. It represents all members, coordinates the work of the partnership and is responsible for ensuring the appropriate use of funds. It has an independent chair and secretary and holds termly membership meetings, which focus on specific themes, and an annual conference.

Alongside the SPGs and the board are various groups and forums devoted to specific tasks. The Procurement Group, for example, seeks to ensure best value for money, while ensuring legal procurement arrangements are followed. The group acts on behalf of all members and provides options and outcomes to schools.

All schools have the opportunity to access peer review through REP. It is part-funded by the partnership and evaluated annually. Feedback in the first year has been extremely positive. There is, too, the School Review Forum, a bespoke model of school support that has been formulated by a group of headteachers for an annual health check using outside providers. This is being implemented this year and will be evaluated in 2021.

The CPD working party also coordinates provision across the borough – identifying high quality providers, providing access to appropriate websites and developing bespoke curriculum training using SLEs and specialist staff and teaching school colleagues.

Impact

The SPGs have proved particularly successful at developing relationships with school leaders that offer challenge and support. Leadership skills have been shared at all levels with minimal cost to schools, which has contributed to almost all schools being judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted.

The Procurement Group has secured a number of significant savings for all schools across a range of services including HR and insurance on very favourable terms and without compromising quality.

Finally, the CPD curriculum working party has facilitated a rolling programme of support and training linked to priorities identified through the SPGs. Initial evaluation shows increased staff confidence and a determination to sustain and extend knowledge across the partnership.

Key challenges and priorities for 2021

As an organisation separate from the local authority, there can be tensions around statutory support funded by the council and school-to-school support sourced by individual schools. Nevertheless, the partnership is working closely with the local authority to clarify roles and responsibilities.

Our priorities for next year are to assess the impact of the school review process and amend and develop as necessary, to work with the local authority to develop clearer SEND pathways for the most disadvantaged pupils, to continue to support headteachers as schools recover from the pandemic and to develop and coordinate Redbridge's response to the Black Lives Matter agenda.

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The successful School Partnership Groups (SPGs) provide a conduit for greater collaboration and sharing across their schools. Each group is chaired by headteachers and has clear terms of reference. The key function of each SPG is to analyse data and to review a school's self-evaluation process, all within the context of the individual school and its development plan. This is the primary mechanism for identifying and sharing best practice, providing school-to-school support and challenge, celebrating local achievements and identifying common needs based on data analysis. The SPG formulates an evaluated action plan annually, which is costed and shared with REP's strategic board.

SPGs have given senior leaders opportunities to hone their skills in a different school environment while increasing leadership capacity in the host school with minimal financial implications. They have also helped build subject and school networks, which have been particularly successful for EYFS and SENCO networks. The SPG enables smaller bespoke opportunities that if successful can then be shared across the partnership.

The recent challenges of managing the pandemic have further highlighted the importance and success of SPGs. The support offered through these groups has meant that no school has felt isolated, regular contact has been maintained and decisions can be quickly shared because of the trusting relationships that have been established.



Tower Hamlets Education Partnership

Origins

The government's 2016 White Paper proposing to academise all schools provided the trigger for the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP). While some schools did choose to convert to become academies, there was also a desire to develop a local, collective response that built on the borough's rich legacy of working collaboratively to raise standards.

The very strong sense of place, the complex landscape of existing networks and partnerships and a history of successfully raising educational standards provided a shared sense of moral purpose and a good foundation for setting up THEP. Initially, there was no membership fee but having successfully tackled the challenge of providing 'proof of concept', 97 out of 104 schools chose to be full members, including those schools that had converted to academies.

What does the partnership do and how?

The partnership's strapline, 'Improving Schools Together', captures what it is about – leading and building a truly collaborative, evidence-based partnership of schools for the benefit of the whole school community. The model is very much focused on building capacity in the local education system to secure future sustainability. It seeks to connect schools with each other across different networks (independent of personal relationships), and to build the confidence to ask for help and to share best practice.

The focus of the partnership's work is explicitly school improvement and professional learning. It has been commissioned by the local authority to carry out its statutory function in relation to school improvement and complements that with a core offer to member schools. The partnership has developed a strengths-based model but provides support and intervention where required.

Impact

What has resonated most strongly is the palpable sense of a learning community underpinned by genuine collaboration. THEP acts as the glue in the system – bringing together schools and networks and exploiting the sense of place to help schools navigate the de-centralisation of the system. This has been all the more evident during the coronavirus pandemic, where the community of schools has pulled together, collaborated, shared and gone above and beyond to support those most in need.

Although still in its first year, and thwarted somewhat by the pandemic, a notable success has been the work on peer review (see box). Central to the partnership's work is its leadership development programme. A suite of programmes for middle leaders through to executive headteachers has been developed, underpinned by a coaching model and centred on a leadership curriculum that forms part of a recruitment and retention strategy. The Future Headteacher Programme supports aspiring headteachers with a personal coach (a current headteacher from Tower Hamlets) and shadowing experience in another school. Over a quarter of participants gained promotion in the first year of the programme, with the majority remaining in Tower Hamlets.

THEP has also gone beyond the education sector for leadership lessons. Its High-Performance Leadership programme brings together a wide range of renowned speakers and organisations to share their experiences of high-performance cultures from education as well as the world of business, elite sport and the arts. Participants are given a set of competencies and face-to-face sessions that are complemented by study visits to well-regarded organisations.

The feedback has been extremely positive. In the words of one headteacher: “The excitement is back in Tower Hamlets. We lost it for a number of years, so it feels great again to work here’.

Key challenges and priorities for 2021

- How do we develop trust and professional capital in a high-stakes accountability system and in a borough like Tower Hamlets that has falling rolls? Both can have a significant impact on how schools work together. More agile models of leadership, more financial acumen and different models of staffing will be required if morale and standards are to be sustained and significant change managed.
- How do we get real challenge into the peer review process and school-led accountability? For peer review to work it must move beyond what Christine Gilbert calls ‘the world of nice’.
- And how do we measure impact beyond the obvious KPIs, especially in relation to our professional learning offer?

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The peer review model developed by school leaders is a bespoke model that works in the context of Tower Hamlets and is built on the principles of trust, collaboration and school improvement. The aim is to create a culture of support and challenge where colleagues can share and learn from each other in cross phase clusters where all school leaders take a role as a lead reviewer or team member.

The model aims to provide schools with an annual review, professional challenge within a high-trust environment, fresh perspectives on strengths and weaknesses, and an opportunity for joint problem-solving, collaboration, network-building and the chance to identify common themes across the borough.

The schools work in small clusters over a two-year period to carry out an annual review of each school, identifying their strengths and areas for improvement.

Area-based Education Partnership Association (AEPA)

Education Partnerships are school-led, local organisations that include all types of schools but with the central purpose of raising standards. They:

- Take responsibility for the quality of education in a local area of schools and help to drive improvements in outcomes for children and young people
- Bridge the divide between different types of schools and provide a framework to enable schools to work together
- Act as an engine of improvement locally, brokering connections and initiatives across schools, and stimulating innovation

What is the association and who are we for?

The Association of Education Partnerships (AEPA) is led by a national steering group, which is co-chaired by Baroness Estelle Morris and Christine Gilbert CBE.

Our full membership includes over 30 partnerships across England – from established organisations to groups that are still developing.

Our aim is to share experiences and ideas. Our hope is that by doing so we will expand the conversation to other parts of the education system.

We are not exclusive. We are open to new members and to participation in our meetings, debates and events. We want to complement not duplicate, and to work with all those who believe that a strong and healthy school system requires an open, collaborative, accountable and ambitious culture that listens to, and works for, the benefit of all.

Sign up now at info@aepa.org.uk if you would like more information or simply to express support for our core beliefs.



