

School Improvement Planning Framework in action

Cumbria County Council – integrating the framework into the school improvement strategy

Summary

Cumbria County Council is recommending the TDA's School Improvement Planning Framework to all its schools. The council has already run four introductory workshops for delegates from 150 schools and has plans for at least two further events. The council is developing an ongoing support offer for individual schools and clusters. In addition, Cumbria has amended its own school improvement guidance to include cross references to different elements of the framework.

Using the framework

- The local authority (LA) is recommending the framework to all its schools
- The LA's school improvement guidance has been amended to include cross references to the framework

- The LA's continuing professional development (CPD) offer will include a training day on the framework as a management development tool.

Outcomes

- Some 150 schools have taken part in workshops, with further events planned to reach 100 more
- Schools responded positively, with large numbers proposing to use the framework immediately
- Ongoing support offer is being developed for individual schools and clusters.

Highlights

- Close working between school improvement and extended schools teams
- The framework is aligned with the LA's approach to school improvement and complementary to its school improvement strategy.

Background

Cumbria is the second-largest county in England by area, and there is great diversity in its schools' settings – ranging from urban centres to very remote and rural areas, encompassing advantaged areas as well as those with high deprivation. Cumbria has 300 primary schools, many of which are very small, 40 secondaries and a handful of nurseries and special schools.

Cumbria was one of 63 local authorities to take part in the four-month pilot of the TDA's School Improvement Planning Framework in 2007. A small rural secondary, John Ruskin School in Coniston, was selected to try the framework with support from the LA and a TDA trainer.

Assessing the framework

In November 2007, a team from Cumbria attended a TDA engagement event on use of the framework for local authorities. Cumbria then ran its own workshop for the school improvement and extended services teams. "It was attended by some 50 council officers," says Mervyn Hull, Lead School Improvement Officer. "The workshop was designed to raise awareness in the teams and to kick off the roll-out of use of the framework in the county."

In 2005, Cumbria integrated its social care and education service into a single 'children's services' division. "Promoting cross-agency working is a top priority for Cumbria," Mervyn Hull explains.

"The School Improvement Planning Framework supports and encourages schools to engage with a wider range of partners – so we see the framework as being aligned with our own strategy."

Mervyn Hull, Lead School Improvement Officer

Cumbria is amending its school improvement guidance to include the framework. Mervyn Hull explains: "We see the framework as being complementary to our school improvement materials, and we have built some cross references to the TDA's School Improvement Planning Framework into these materials. Our guidance is essentially a way of recording school improvement planning and the framework is more about the process of doing that."

Events for schools

Cumbria decided to recommend the framework to all its schools. The school improvement and extended schools teams jointly organised four introductory workshops for delegates from 200 schools. Mervyn Hull explains: "The workshops were led by myself and TDA trainers and facilitated by officers from the school improvement and extended schools teams."

The events made use of the framework's tools to focus the delegates' thinking. "We started with the Every Child Matters card-sort exercise to raise awareness of what we think school improvement planning should focus on," he adds.

At the events, the video testimony of some of the pilot schools was used "as a helpful way of whetting people's appetite about the framework's potential". The headteacher of Cumbria's own pilot school, John Ruskin, attended several of the events to describe the school's own experience and answer questions. (The school's findings and experience were presented by the event team on those occasions when the headteacher could not attend).

The participants were guided through the different aspects of planning that the framework covers – from preparing and engaging with the relevant stakeholders through to measuring and demonstrating the impact of the provision.

The school delegates took part in a brown-paper exercise on 'learning potential', analysing what made successful learners and the 'blockers and enablers' to success. The participants then looked at how school provision could promote the enablers and remove the blockers.

"Doing this exercise helped the schools see the practical potential for using the framework in their own schools," says Mervyn Hull.

"The response from the schools taking part was very positive, with large numbers of the delegates saying they would use the framework immediately."

Mervyn Hull, Lead School Improvement Officer

Next steps

The next steps for Cumbria are to maintain the roll-out of the framework through two further events in June 2008. This will reach a further 100 schools.

Cumbria is also going to build the framework into the CPD training offered to schools. "One strand of our CPD offer is about management development, with a core part of that being around school improvement planning," says Mervyn Hull. "Alongside the school improvement training, we are going to offer a day's course built around the framework. This day would be about awareness, modelling some of the tools and explaining how the framework could be used."

The LA plans to offer support during 2008, with a focus on local solutions, to individual schools identified from workshop evaluations. Also under consideration is ongoing support for several clusters of schools, where the cluster managers are already keen and committed.

Cumbria believes that many schools will be able to use the framework without support. "On the whole, our thinking was that schools could work on it independently, but equally some groups may need more support," says Mervyn Hull. "For schools where there is mature practice in school improvement planning, they most probably would just use bits of it. For schools with new headteachers, they may want to work all the way through the framework."

Outcomes

- Close working between school improvement and extended schools teams
- The LA's school improvement guidance amended to include cross references to the framework
- The LA is recommending the framework to all its schools
- Some 200 schools have taken part in workshops, and further events are planned to reach 100 more
- A very positive response from the schools that have taken part
- Ongoing support offer is being developed for individual schools and clusters
- The LA's CPD to include a training day on the framework as a management development tool.