An Evaluation of Sunderland LEA Literacy Transition Project

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Literacy Transition Project: Background information

To provide a broader context for the situation in Sunderland, there has been a long-standing concern on both national and local levels about pupil regression during transfer from primary to secondary school at Key Stage 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum. Schools and their LEAs have tried different methods of ensuring that transfer is managed efficiently and in the best interests of the pupils concerned. Over the past twenty years the emphasis has tended to be on the administrative procedures of transferring information from schools in one phase to the next and on the pastoral care of pupils during this period of change. More recently, the academic progress of children has been identified as an issue in the light of evidence showing a ‘dip’ or hiatus in pupil progress in the year immediately following transfer. Hargreaves and Galton (1999), for example, found that two out of every five pupils fail to make the expected progress in the year after transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. The literature offers several possible explanations for this lack of progress. Explanations include difficulties adjusting to the new routine (although these are usually short-lived), the impact of the long summer break, repetition of previous work, new work that underestimates the capabilities of pupils, and organisational structures that give pupils a negative sense of themselves as learners.

Sunderland LEA identified a number of problems that were impacting on pupil transfer at Key Stages 2 and 3. These include, perceptions about reading skills at the start of Key Stage 3, lack of parental involvement and low levels of adult literacy. Furthermore, statistical data show that the percentages of children in the cluster schools achieving level 4 or higher were in some cases considerably below the Sunderland and National averages. All of these issues taken as a whole, prompted Sunderland LEA to develop a programme of activities to address the problems encountered in the cluster area of Pennywell specifically. The aims and objectives of the Sunderland LEA Literacy Transition Project (LTP) as presented in the original project appraisal document were:

1. To support a school-based partnership to develop a programme of activities which will enhance attainment in KS2/3;

2. To encourage individual schools to identify, develop and implement activities, which address the needs of their pupils;

3. To implement a number of activities in 2000/2004 at cluster and at school level

4. To complement the activities in the SRB 3 Quality Time Project, SRB post 16 project and the EAZ action plan.

Evaluation Aims and Objectives

The Department of Education at Newcastle University was commissioned by Sunderland LEA to provide an interim evaluation of its Literacy Transition Project. The key aims and objectives of the interim evaluation were:
• To examine the progress and achievements of the Project; and to compare these with the original project appraisal and expectations as set out in the delivery/implementation plan.

• To explore qualitative issues relating to the impact on the pupils

• To make recommendations for improving delivery.

We have also adopted the following research questions:

• What lessons does the Project yield in terms of good practice?

• What lessons have been learnt and what are the areas of improvement for the Project’s future activity?

• Can the project, or elements of this, be used as a model for others?

**Methodology**

Essentially the evaluation is in the form of an in-depth qualitative study underpinned by an examination of quantitative monitoring data. The methodologies we have employed were therefore a combination of desk-based and fieldwork techniques. Data collection and analysis has taken the following forms:

**Documentary Analysis**

Part of the evaluation has been dedicated to an analysis of the various documentation made available by the Project. This included the original appraisal document, which provided a great deal of useful information regarding the origins and the need for the project. Documents were also collected from SRB Coordinators, which outlined the projects they had created and developed, including outcome information in the form of test results. Project planning documents were also collected. These were quite useful in clarifying what the Project’s aims and objectives were.

**Project Case study**

The Literacy Transition Project case study has used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative data we have collected has been that which is readily available within the Project and/or from the SRB Programme. The qualitative data relates to processes within the Literacy Transition Project, and all 'sub-projects' within it (and related projects, for instance Summing It Up, and individual school projects, etc.) relevant to the evaluation aims set out above. Such data has been generated from interviews with a variety of stakeholders and participants.
Data collection

All schools involved in the Literacy Transition Programme have now been visited and Interviews have been conducted with:

- Head Teachers
- SRB Co-ordinators
- Groups of children in each of the schools
- Members of SRB Management

These semi-structured discussions were essentially used to explore the views of the various stakeholders of the Project and how the project is being delivered and managed.

SRB co-ordinators provided evidence of pupil progression through formal assessments, but also in the form of teacher observation of improvements in pupil motivation, confidence and self-esteem.

Main findings

The main purpose of the evaluation is to examine the impact of the project on distinct populations:

- School and LEA staff
- Pupils and Parents
- SRB staff.

We do not believe that the impact of the project could best be measured solely in terms of increased literacy attainment, nor has it been possible to conduct a 'before and after' study since the Project was well-established before the evaluation was commissioned.

Our emphasis has been on seeking an understanding of the interaction between pupils, school staff and LEA and SRB personnel, and how the experience is seen by all participants in terms of providing practical benefits and creating possibilities for bringing about changes in ways of working and raising attainment.

The following findings are based on our exploration of the context of processes, outcomes and costs. They are based on the analysis of several in-depth and one-to-one interviews, which have been tape-recorded to ensure accuracy. Structured thematic analysis has formed the main approach to data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Project Identity

All of the school staff involved in the evaluation has a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the Literacy Transition Project. In addition, all staff acknowledged
specifically that a system had been established that was successfully delivering in terms of the generation of projects and activities that were benefiting pupils. It is evident that all SRB staff are very enthusiastic and committed to the Literacy Transition Project.

All SRB school staff is involved in regular ‘cluster meetings’ which are used for the purposes of information exchange and updating on project progress. All of the staff involved in these meetings found them useful and helpful.

Integration and Collaboration

Given the geographical location and the presence of various funding programmes, schools are evidently involved in other initiatives, but view all of these other projects as complementary and as "adding-value" in a cumulative way to the education of their children. As a member of staff at secondary level pointed out,

“This project dovetails with other projects that we do and it has to. It doesn't stand in isolation and neither should it”.

All of the school staff interviewed pointed out that the ‘infrastructure’ was already in place into which a Literacy Transition Project could be seamlessly integrated with little disruption to the normal running of the school system. The following comment is typical:

“With school systems, if we didn’t already have them in place, it would be hard to do that just for these children. But because it has already been in place, the Literacy Transition Project has been able to easily fit in with the systems we have.

While some of the schools collaborate directly with other schools in the cluster in relation to Literacy Transition Projects, others did not. Reasons for not collaborating appear to revolve around the fact that each school has essentially developed its own unique approach to Literacy based on identified needs. A participant in the Literacy Transition Project felt that …

“The only negative side of the schools doing their own individual projects is that there is no cohesion between the schools. The schools can't get together and share their experiences”.

A member of the LEA pointed out that there was no reason why schools should not collaborate more, but suggested that perhaps geographical reasons may have made such collaboration problematic. Despite this claim, we found that two schools do collaborate effectively, (perhaps due to the fact that the coordinators are friends anyway) regardless of the distance between their schools. However, some schools also expressed the view that collaboration was not necessary.

Literacy projects and other projects have been accepted throughout and across schools by staff not directly involved in SRB-funded literacy work as worthwhile and providing value for money. At secondary level in particular, there is a great deal of evidence to show cross-curricular spread and impact. The Coordinator there pointed out that,
“We decided that literacy was a cross-curricular issue, it was not limited to the English Department. So, therefore it went across the school”.

The coordinator went on to provide some examples of cross-curricular impact,

“The Science teacher uses literacy techniques in her classroom and that has had a knock on effect in teaching literacy for her because she feels more comfortable, more competent and can do it in a scientific way rather than just imposing literacy on her”.

While there is evidence of parental involvement in formal literacy work and in non-formal work such as after-school clubs, there is a limit to how far parents can be involved in the more formal aspects of literacy conducted within 'normal' school hours.

Staff in all the schools appear to require very little, if any, support from agencies or individuals external to the schools. The view was expressed that advice and support - if these were necessary - can, and have been sought, from, for example, the Project Administrator and other SRB staff beyond the confines of the schools.

While some Co-ordinators and Head Teachers have had the opportunity to undertake or to attend training sessions related to Literacy Transition work, in some cases staff felt that they already possessed the skills necessary to set up and operate a Literacy Transition Project.

Management

All of the staff interviewed expressed overwhelming support and satisfaction with the way that the Literacy Transition Project has been administered, especially in relation to the placement of SRB Co-ordinators within each of the schools. As one interviewee stated,

“There is nothing negative about it. I think it is very well managed, very well run. It has been immensely helpful for us. It dovetailed very well into our system”.

Head Teachers appreciated the fact that they were empowered because of a flexible LTP management system to determine and deal with their own unique school-based problems.

“I think the idea is that you know the children in your school. They [administrators] are not in your situation. They are not there seeing the children everyday. As long as you’ve got shared goals, to raise standards in literacy, we know that that is the aim and we know how best to do it because we know our children. So, it is a mutual trust really. They are giving you the flexibility to address your own particular school’s needs and that was one of the aims of the project from the outset”.

The capacity to identify problem areas and then being able to target resources where they are most needed is viewed as very satisfactory by Senior Management Teams.

School staff expressed satisfaction with the way that responsibility and accountability for the Literacy Transition Project was delegated to Senior Management Teams within the project schools. However, a senior member of the Literacy Project staff said, that while he was pleased with the way the project had been administered overall, he felt,
“They [the schools] all wanted to do different things and that is fine although it is a bit of a nightmare for me with overall administration”.

Monitoring

The Project Administrator highlighted a number of difficulties he had encountered with monitoring aspects of the Project. Initial problems included actually collecting the data in usable form,

“In the beginning when I asked for the data, I used to get it on the back of envelopes in some cases. Now, when I ask for the data, three of the schools provide the results on disk whereas before it was handwritten”.

As the project has developed, so systems for collecting data have improved. However, three main problems have been identified hampering the systematic analysis of data:

- High pupil movement rates in and out of project schools
- Pupils failing to complete SATs and other tests
- Teacher movement in and out of the project schools

The Project Administrator highlighted the difficulties when he said,

“The big problem we are having, and that is with all the schools is the number of kids that have dropped out. There is quite a lot of transition and that is a problem we are going to have to face. Because there are kids coming in and kids going out, all the way through, we are actually down to 60% of the children who actually started the project”.

Systems are in place to monitor the impact of the Literacy Transition Project based on National Curriculum assessments and standardised reading tests. However, they may not be sensitive enough to meet the Project’s aims and objectives. The Project Coordinator is also aware of the fact that the Literacy Transition Project is only one of many projects that may have an impact on children,

“As with all analysis, what else is going on? Although the children are carefully targeted groups and I am using children who are not part of the Project as well to try to eliminate some of those extra bits [extraneous variables], we are part of the EAZ as well so there are all kinds of things going on there”.

In some respects it might be argued that while areas with high levels of deprivation need a variety of initiatives, perhaps there are too many initiatives that overlap, making it difficult to measure impact on learning outcomes.

School staff appeared satisfied with the monitoring systems in place but nevertheless identified some shortcomings with the optional SATs when they said,

“Children don’t take the optional SATs as seriously as they should and you can’t rely on the marking that is done internally. The rigour of that is questionable but it is a national problem”
Staff also recognise that while optional SATs and standardised tests are used to measure pupil progress, they are not perfect measures of progress. Typical comments from staff included:

“The only thing that it is hard to do, it’s hard to say, “Yes, we’ve got these fantastic results here but can you solely attribute that to SRB funding?” You can’t really attribute it to that. It’s all just contributing factors really”.

And,

“We have massive school data, we are immensely data rich. Our problem would be if you were to say to me, ‘How can I prove that the SRB work directly influences it?’, what I would have to say is, it’s part of the overall picture of all the literacy activities we run. There is not any specific test that would tell us that”.

Another issue that the Project Administrator felt needed to be addressed was the focus and reliance on test results as indicators of progress.

“While we are doing this, I’m aware that some of this should be going into attitudinal scales as well as SATs. The problem with trying to do that is that all of the projects are so different, trying to do that, there is a time problem. Some of the projects are longer and some of the children don’t even know they are in projects”.

Similarly, to highlight the potential negative consequences of measuring progress, another staff member said,

“I was really worried about it (measuring progress) because last year when I knew we were really stuck on outputs and I said right what can I do. I’ll get them to do a poem and teach them how to do this and I’ll measure it at the end. But I found that it was just like doing a Literacy Hour after school and I felt rotten for them because I was worried about getting the result at the end of it and I was planning lessons. I think that was a problem with the attendance because they were being taught after school”.

However, we cannot escape the fact that with any project or initiative that is dependent on external funding, there will inevitably be a focus or requirement on ‘measurable’ outputs as a way of monitoring progress and impact.

**Benefits: Qualitative evidence**

While one of the main objectives of the Literacy Transition Project was to create and to develop literacy activities that would ultimately benefit pupils, staff also highlighted the impact of the Literacy Transition Project on the internal organisation of the schools. At secondary level a member of staff pointed out that:

“The impact of SRB is massive. It is right across the school. All departments in the school have a literacy input from resources that we have available. I can honestly say that all our pupils, particularly stage 3, benefit from SRB funding.”

And went on to say,

“It has an impact on teaching and learning styles in the school and we now incorporate literacy activities in all our lessons. All staff has to record what they have done for literacy in every lesson. We didn’t do that before”.
In some cases, elements of the school timetable appear to have been reorganised so that literacy sessions and teacher time could be targeted more accurately. It is also clear that SRB funding has had other important impacts on school staff. Head Teachers and Coordinators referred to the professional development of staff that has accrued through experience and knowledge gained from organising and managing Literacy Projects. A typical comment was:

“Not only have the children benefited from the project, but the staff, given that role as a facilitator, as professional development for them, it has been superb.”

Another member of staff also highlighted the potential impact of the project on the SRB Coordinators when he said:

“Whatever they have gained personally will make them different teachers or better teachers and hopefully that should spin off into whatever else it is they do”.

In terms of pupil benefits, all of the Head Teachers and SRB Co-ordinators provided anecdotal evidence, which suggests that pupils are indeed benefiting from participation in literacy projects and other complementary projects operating within their schools.

A Head Teacher suggested that:

“It would be wrong to say that success should be measured by SATs results. I think success is measured by the children’s interest in literacy and books. Their desire to read, their desire to be life-long readers and to be competent readers who can understand what they read. And that is hopefully going to be the benefit when the children move to secondary school”.

Another staff member said:

“All I can say is that there are other issues that allow us to measure impact on pupils, which you can’t assess. So, there is pupil attitude. There is their enjoyment, self-esteem and self-respect. Their confidence comes through. Parents are very keen for their children to be involved in SRB so there is a knock on effect in the community”.

Head Teachers and SRB Coordinators view the extra activities that SRB funding has enabled as going beyond and enhancing what is happening more formally in the classroom; in a sense, bringing literacy to life through these extra activities. A Head Teacher suggested that activities such as inviting a poet to the school…

“…brings the literature to life in diverse ways that you can’t quantify. But it is happening”.

Head Teachers and SRB Coordinators highlighted the centrality and importance of introducing children in the Literacy Transition Project to activities above and beyond the normal classroom and school routine. Activities highlighted by school staff included newspaper days with staff from the Sunderland Echo, visits to museums and parks, pantomimes and visits to professional football grounds. The Secondary school organises residential literacy oriented weekends with groups of its children.

Coordinators generally reported seeing an impact on the children in terms of increases and improvements in motivation, self-esteem, attitude and self-confidence in literacy work but above all an increased sense of enjoyment and pleasure in such work. Staff
attributed these improvements to participation in various literacy activities: Typical comments include,

“This year I know the kids have enjoyed it more and their work has been lovely”.

“They’ve been fired up to do poetry because they enjoyed that so much. They love reading poetry. They love it”.

And,

“The after school club is certainly boosting motivation and enthusiasm but I’d like to think that they enjoy literacy anyway... The quality of their work was brilliant”.

At secondary level a member of staff said,

“The intensity of the work that we do is phenomenal. Their concentration has improved stunningly.

Identifying an individual pupil, the secondary staff member added that,

“For him [pupil] to see that what he has done himself makes him think, wow, I can do this”.

A member of staff at secondary level reported that new intakes of Year 7 pupils appeared to be better prepared for work at secondary level than in previous years.

“We find that because now we are into the third year of SRB, an increasing confidence from our new intake of Year 7 pupils coming from the SRB feeder schools. They understand literacy, they can discuss literacy terms and are comfortable with that”.

While most of the children interviewed about their participation in various literacy related activities were unaware that they had actually been involved in specific projects, most were able to provide comments about the ways their literacy work was helping them. Comments were usually of the type, “Yes it has helped me with my reading” or “Yes it has helped me with my spelling”. Teaching staff was most helpful in encouraging the children to talk about some of the activities they were doing in literacy. Staff pointed out that the children were making progress in their literacy work. On a more impressionistic level, pupils appeared buoyant and happy when talking about some of the activities they had been taking part in.

**Benefits: Quantitative evidence**

While SATs results provide something of a broader overview of school and pupil performance between 1996 and 2001, these too are quite difficult to interpret and to link directly to SRB activities. Table 1 below, for example, shows percentages of children in the Literacy Transition Project schools achieving level 4 or higher in English between 1996 and 2001 in comparison with Sunderland and national level results. The results show variations in all of the schools between 1997 and 2001. Two schools in particular appear to stand out as exceeding national standards in English in nearly all of the years. While most of the schools show signs of improvement (some jumping quite considerably) there are in some cases what can only be described as minor regressions especially in 1998 and 1999. Sustaining the improvements may, therefore, be difficult.
Table 1: English SATs results for Literacy Transition Project Primary Schools 1996-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadway Junior School</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarry View Junior School</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pallion Primary School</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Anne’s RC Primary School</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Hylton Primary School</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havelock Primary School</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunderland</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DFES Key Stage 2 assessment test results. Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above

The Project Administrator provided data in the form of NFER test results from all of the primary schools involved in the Literacy Transition Project. While these show that in the main, pupils appear to be benefiting from involvement in the various Literacy Transition Projects, clearly, these data on their own are insufficient to prove any direct causal link between Literacy Projects and pupil improvements in test results. For example, while NFER tests seem to show most pupils are benefiting from their participation in the Literacy Transition Project, other pupils appear not to have made any improvement at all or in some cases have regressed. Difficulties in analysing the data at school level are compounded by the fact, mentioned earlier, that test data for some pupils is not available simply because they have either moved schools or failed to complete all tests.

Table 2: Cluster NFER Test Results Jan 2000-Sept. 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL NAME</th>
<th>NFER JAN 2000 (MEANS)</th>
<th>NFER SEPT 2000 (MEANS)</th>
<th>NFER SEPT 2001 (MEANS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadway</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>93.94</td>
<td>100.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havelock</td>
<td>89.83</td>
<td>89.58</td>
<td>92.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarry View</td>
<td>87.12</td>
<td>93.19</td>
<td>87.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Hylton</td>
<td>100.20</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>101.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pallion</td>
<td>86.54</td>
<td>90.97</td>
<td>88.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Annes</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>Missing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Literacy Transition Project

Table 2 shows NFER test results for primary schools between January 2000 and September 2001. Some of the data is not available at this time. However, while some of the schools show improved test scores, some appear to have improved and then regressed again. However, the figures themselves do not tell the whole story. As the Project Coordinator pointed out, the data will have been affected by missing scores due to pupils moving out of the project and also pupils completing an earlier test but failing to complete a later one. Having said that, most of the pupils involved in the Literacy projects appear to show, with reservations mentioned, improvements in test scores. While the improvements are small in some cases, in others they are quite large. Looking at the full NFER tables shows a complicated pattern of individual improvement, no improvement and in some cases regression. Some pupils have clearly benefited from some input but whether this input has been SRB funded is not known. So many variables can impact on a pupil’s performance at any given time e.g.
difficulties at home, moving to a new school, working with a new teacher, that are
difficult to measure without experimental designs. However, there have been
improvements in literacy. Whether this is an impact from the Literacy Transition
Project or other factors combined in a cumulative way is not certain. The Project
Administrator believes that,

“What seems to be coming through is a fairly consistent result in that the children in the
project are doing better”.

The only data available at secondary level are taken from Suffolk Reading Tests
administered to children involved in the Literacy Transition Project in that school in
June and September 2001. Again, the data do appear to show that pupils have
received some benefit from their involvement in the school project, although once
again, whether this improvement is linked to Literacy Project activities or normal
teacher input and normal pupil progress anyway is not possible to untangle. Since
nearly all of the pupils tested have shown improvements, selected data have been used
to provide an indication of any changes that have occurred.

Table 3: Suffolk Reading Test Results (secondary school) June 2001 - September 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUPILS</th>
<th>READING AGE JUNE 2001</th>
<th>READING AGE SEPTEMBER 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.11</td>
<td>11.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>10.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.11</td>
<td>11.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.03</td>
<td>8.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pennywell Comprehensive School

While all of the children in the original table have shown improvements in reading
ages, it is clear that some have made minor advances, at least 2 have regressed
slightly, and some have made quite large leaps forward.

At the end of the day it may be the case that determining whether there has been an
impact from the Literacy Transition Projects in the cluster schools may only be
possible if the projects are actually put on hold for the next intake of pupils and then
comparisons made between those who took part and those who did not. Even this
approach would be imperfect.

**Sustainability**

There is a general agreement among school staff that literacy projects can only be
sustained if there is a continuation of funding. Much of the funding goes on
employing teaching staff who are seen as vital in supporting literacy work. Funding
beyond the lifetime of the SRB is viewed as a key factor in the continuing
development and success of the literacy work. One coordinator outlined the
importance of continued funding and its impact,

“In the first year we had £15,000 and that meant we could employ a teaching assistant and
have £5000 left for after school booster clubs. Since the money has now gone down to £10,000
our priority was still having the teaching assistant. We have not been able to run after school clubs but we found time during the day for reading clubs. So, the teaching assistant has children in the morning she does reading clubs with”.

The Project Administrator said that,

“For most of the projects to continue would be only through external funding because by and large it has been about additionality and the only way you can do additionality is by having additional funds. All of the schools in the project have got falling rolls and money is getting tighter rather than the reverse. So, I can see in some schools if you are having to pay teachers to work after school, it is teacher time that you’ve got to pay for and if that is not forthcoming then you cannot do it”.

While primary schools are keen to continue with their Literacy Transition Projects beyond SRB 3, they nevertheless appear less confident in this respect than the secondary school, which is confident that it will be able to sustain its LTPs beyond SRB 3 funding. As a member of staff from the secondary school said,

“When SRB disappears, will it all stop? No, not at all. We will continue to run it. We will find funding elsewhere. We will look to continue the the programme. We wouldn’t want to lose it. It’s too valuable”.

Conclusions

Sunderland LEAs approach to dealing with transition within the SRB area has been to generate a sense of ownership among the schools in the Pennywell cluster. While government initiatives have a strong top down focus to deal with Key Stage 2/3 transition, and subsequently have their own particular aims and objectives in mind, Sunderland LEA opted for a locally based approach to the problem with the intention of generating a sense of ownership and empowerment among the Pennywell Cluster schools.

Returning to the main objectives of the evaluation, it is clear that schools have developed and established their own literacy projects. The projects in all of the schools appear to have been well integrated into normal school routines, thanks in no small part, to the efforts of Senior Management Teams, SRB Coordinators and other school staff involved in the projects. Staff highlighted the fact that experiences gained over the early stages of the Project had enabled them to refine their approach in later stages, especially in terms of planning and targeting resources.

Funding from SRB 3 appears to have enabled schools in the cluster not only to develop their own individual projects, but also to employ extra staff within the projects themselves which has apparently enabled more effective targeting and use of existing resources, e.g. setting teachers free to organise their literacy projects.

While quantitative data from all of the cluster schools appears to show that pupils involved in the literacy projects have in most cases improved their test scores, it is not certain that these improvements can actually be linked back to SRB funded activities; a fact that all SRB staff is aware of. Part of the problem lies in the way that Literacy Transition Projects have been so effectively absorbed into established school routines such as schemes of assessment, it therefore, becomes difficult to determine whether
any improvement in optional SATs or NFER tests is the result of SRB funded activities or already established classroom activities.

The problem of measuring progress in quantitative terms has been exacerbated by high pupil movement rates in and out of the projects, incomplete SATs results and, in some cases, teacher movement in and out of the projects. All of these issues have acted in a cumulative way to prevent the development of control groups within the projects, which would have facilitated accurate measurement and assessment of pupil progress.

However, there is also an ethical problem with an experimental design approach to assessing impact. The establishment of control groups within the projects would have raised the issue of which children receive the extra activities and which children do not. If the aims of the Literacy Transition Project were to improve literacy within the cluster schools, excluding some children from the projects simply for the purposes of measuring progress seems to go against the general aim, which is to design and produce activities to benefit all pupils in the cluster schools. It seems clear from interviews and documents received from cluster schools that their general approach has been to introduce activities for all pupils rather than for some. As one staff member typically commented:

"The way we work it is that all pupils benefit from the Literacy project we do with SRB."

It would be difficult to conceive of any alternative arrangements that could have been developed to assess the impact of the Literacy Transition Project as a whole given that school staff has enough to contend with in established school and classroom activities.

With so many government initiatives being imposed on schools on a national level, there is always a concern that initiative overload will have a negative impact on school staff and their willingness and enthusiasm to take on another project. The fact that many of these initiatives have had national rather than local objectives appears to have had an impact on Sunderland LEAs decision to introduce the Literacy Transition Project in a more localised way. Evidently, to encourage and develop a sense of ownership among the cluster schools, Sunderland LEA made the decision not to introduce yet another centrally controlled project, with schools compelled to participate or face sanctions of some kind or other. SRB Coordinators were employed in all of the cluster schools to develop and operate their own Literacy Transition Projects rather than having a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

The result of this approach appears to have had both positive and negative consequences. In terms of positivity cases, schools have been empowered to develop their own projects and strategies to deal with their own unique problems. This has resulted in projects designed to meet the specific needs of children in each of the cluster schools, based on staff knowledge and experience of local conditions and particularly their own pupils. This acknowledgement of the fact by Sunderland LEA that there are skilled, knowledgeable and experienced staff in the cluster schools has been well received within the schools, and has, in all probability, encouraged a sense of enthusiasm for the Literacy Transition Project as a whole.
However, on the negative side, since all of the cluster schools have produced their own unique literacy projects, it then becomes impossible to establish an overall view of the impact of the project as a whole. Adopting already existing monitoring systems makes the Literacy Transition Project blend seamlessly, and ultimately it becomes inseparable and indistinct from normal school practices and routines. At what point is it possible to say that improved test results are the consequence of SRB 3 funded activity?

Beyond the quantitative dilemma, there is anecdotal evidence from SRB staff that appears to show that school literacy projects are enhancing formal school and classroom activities. Teachers have emphasised that it is the nature of the activities themselves that are having the positive impact. The strength of these activities lies in the fact that they are not what you would normally expect in formal school and classroom activities. These activities, including visits to museums, visits by professional poets, writers and newspaper staff, appear to enhance pupil learning experiences by their very active nature. Staff highlighted how these activities are, literally breathing life into pupils for literacy.

The impact on pupils from the teachers’ perspective is clear: Increased enjoyment and pleasure in literacy work; improved attitudes to literacy; improvements in self-confidence and self-esteem.

**Recommendations**

A number of issues have been identified that may require some action from SRB staff over the remaining 2 years of the Literacy Transition Project’s life.

Perhaps the biggest issue to deal with is monitoring and measuring impact. While schools have been empowered to create and design their own unique and innovative projects as a result of SRB funding, this appears to have had the consequence of sacrificing any attempt at developing a broader analysis of outcomes and assessments across schools and projects. An issue that the Project Administrator has referred to. The fact that schools have been given the flexibility to design and create their own projects may have rendered any direct and overall analysis of SRB impact nearly impossible. It is not certain that test results from individual schools are sufficient to show an overall improvement in the SRB area.

That monitoring systems are put in place to measure, consistently, learning outcomes across schools.

While teachers and pupils provided anecdotal evidence to suggest that improvements had occurred in terms of self-esteem, confidence and motivation, it might be advantageous to introduce as a part of the monitoring system, a regular pupil survey to investigate whether pupil attitudes to literacy have changed as a result of their involvement in the Literacy Transition Project.

Collaboration between project schools was identified by at least two senior SRB staff as insufficient. It may be beneficial therefore if schools within the Literacy Transition Project develop stronger links for the purposes of project collaboration, information exchange and further project development.
While there are still two years of the project left to run, it might be advantageous to consider in the present how Literacy Transition activities can be funded in the future.
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