

Barlow Hall Primary School, Manchester, Our school improvement journey

Barlow Hall Primary School is an average sized primary school in the south of the city of Manchester. The current leadership team have been in post since 2005. We are committed to excellent teaching and children enjoying their learning. Children need to experience the joy of discovery, enquire, be creative, solve problems and develop their confidence as learners. We have a duty to make sure that our children become effective and enthusiastic learners.



Our school serves a diverse community, 83% of our children come from ethnic minority backgrounds, 31% speak English as an additional language and there are twenty languages represented in school.

The diversity of our school's population is one of our great strengths. The school serves a community with high deprivation. 44% of our children are entitled to free school meals and there is high mobility at Barlow Hall. Many of our children enter nursery, developmentally, behind their chronological age. By the end of their time at Barlow Hall the majority of our children have achieved national expectations, many doing even better. 35% of our school population are on the school's SEN register.

By 2005, Barlow Hall had been identified as a priority for school improvement by the local authority. Barlow Hall became a 'SITU' school early in 2006. This was a programme of support from the local authority and DCSF to turn around standards in 'hard to shift' schools. The school had experienced a very difficult recent history including the death of the head teacher. Attainment and achievement were at the lowest point in the school's history.

Staff and community morale was low and Barlow Hall had a poor reputation in the district.

Over the next two years, the leadership team undertook a wide reaching and rigorous school improvement focus based on four key principles:

- to raise the attainment and achievement of all pupils,
- to improve behaviour, including behaviours that support learning,
- to develop inclusive practices
- to enrich the curriculum.

At the heart of everything was a determination to improve learning and teaching. By 2008, Ofsted reported that:

'This is an inclusive school where all groups of pupils achieve well, including those for whom English is a second language, those with minority ethnic origins and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.'

One of the key school improvement moments was the successful application for the school to become involved in the *Every Child a Reader* programme, which was being implemented in Manchester local authority. From the start of this programme in September 2006, Barlow Hall has embarked on a fascinating and critically important journey which has helped to transform our school.

The teaching staff team, with a few exceptions, has remained the same since 2005. With a new staff structure and a shared vision for the school in place, the leadership team, including the new chair of governors, began a rigorous drive to improve Barlow Hall.

In 2006 the Local Authority appointed a Reading Recovery teacher to work 0.6 FTE in school. The leadership team was committed to using her expertise and knowledge to develop the teaching and learning of reading and writing across the whole school. By 2008, Ofsted was reporting that, *'provision for developing children's reading skills is particularly strong and it's effectiveness can be seen in higher achievement throughout the school.'*

The Reading Recovery teacher worked closely with the Year 1 link teacher and the newly established literacy leadership team to implement a structured approach to the teaching and learning of reading across the school, improving the quality of learning experiences for all children. The year 1 teacher was able to 'try out' aspects of the teaching techniques used by the Reading Recovery teacher in her whole class lessons. The aim was to ensure that Reading Recovery core principles could then be incorporated into the school's new reading policy and applied to class teaching throughout the school.

One of the key aspects of the training was to enable the teacher to develop a detailed knowledge of each child's strengths and difficulties in reading and to apply the knowledge and skills required to move the child forward. As the year 1 teacher, Joanna, said of her professional development, *'it's massive; it's given me a structure. Where I am and where to go next. I don't hear children read anymore. I teach them. I hadn't got a clue about how I was teaching reading before, but now I know exactly what I am doing.'*

A series of professional development programmes were delivered in order to train all staff on how to take and use running records and teach effective guided reading. The school's reading resources were completely restructured using the book banding system. Additional reading books were then bought to supplement particular book bands.

All staff were shown how to use Benchmarking Assessments so that the children's book band level was known and then all children could be taught how to read using texts that were at an instructional level. Children were then grouped appropriately for guided reading sessions.

Three times a year, children are assessed to find their reading level and this information is put onto tracking sheets to show development and highlight those children who are not making the expected progress. Those not making expected progress can then access appropriate interventions including: additional guided reading sessions, Direct Phonics and Fisher Family Trust wave 3 literacy programmes.

The school used its recently developed monitoring system of evidence trails to ensure delivery of guided reading sessions were in line with the school's newly developed policy and were being delivered at a high enough standard, thereby resulting in maximum impact on pupil progress. Where lessons were below this level, a structured staff development programme including observation of lessons and coaching was put in place, with follow up observations to support further development.

At Barlow Hall, almost all the children involved in Reading Recovery come from families with a history of learning difficulties. The children's achievement- level 2B+ at the end of year 2- is beginning to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

A key success component has been the involvement of parents in their child's reading. Strategies to encourage this include: coffee mornings, parent focus groups, adult education led family literacy programmes, observations of lessons and before school sessions with children and their parents. At first, many were led by the Reading Recovery teacher. Now, other members of staff have taken on similar approaches. One of the parents of child receiving Reading Recovery led a coffee morning session for other parents about how to support reading at home. Ofsted (2008) reported that *'Partnerships with parents are very strong and questionnaires received by inspectors were completely unanimous in their support for the school.'*

The school has had to overcome some significant barriers to parental involvement, including a long prison sentence for one mum and another Reading Recovery child being taken into public care. The challenge has been to make sure the children sustain the long term progress in reading. Breaking the cycle of family illiteracy has been one of the unseen developments of the school's approaches, including one of our mums gaining qualifications as a Teaching Assistant and being employed as a TA in our local high school. For parents, the value has been extended beyond the improvements in reading. To quote one parent: *'the programme is really good, my child is doing better in their reading and they are much more confident.'*

In April 2008, the school underwent a successful Ofsted inspection. In the report it was noted that *'the improvement in the standards attained by pupils is the result of effective strategies, led by the head teacher, to raise the quality of teaching and*

Learning. This focus is relentless and is shared by all staff... The school has rightly prioritised the teaching of reading. Through very good use of local authority expertise in a national reading programme, many pupils have been able to make rapid progress.'

...we're getting better too

PUPILS and staff at Barlow Hall Primary School in Choriton are celebrating after a dramatic improvement in their results.

Latest figures released by the Government put the school in the top five per cent of the most improved schools nationally in English, in the top eight per cent for maths and the top fifth for science.

The school, which is on Darley Avenue, has 250 pupils and is one of the oldest primary schools at 76 years old.

Results have risen by 37 per cent in English, 34 per cent in maths and 27 per cent in science over the last two years.

Headteacher Jayne Kennedy said: "Barlow Hall is a fabulous school where standards have risen enormously over the past few years.

"We have achieved this by creating an achievement culture where we support our children

areas but now, we are above the average in just about every indicator.

"The teachers and the pupils have worked hard and I am glad the report recognises that."

As a catholic school, Barlow RC High has also been inspected by the Salford diocese, and been

year but also in the way the pupils turn into pleasant well-rounded and mature young people."

He said that the school was now looking forward having work starting on new buildings, under the government's Building Schools for the Future programme.

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For individual families, some parents have been so well supported through the programme that younger siblings are beginning to break the 'intervention' cycle in which their older siblings have been involved. As one mum said, *'it feels good to know that I am actually helping to teach my child something, and winning.'*

A child, who was experiencing significant family trauma, with his mum receiving a long prison sentence, moved from Reading Recovery level 1 to level 20 during the programme, this progress has been sustained and now, in year 4, he has completed all book band levels.

A child with a history of neglect has successfully engaged in the Reading Recovery programme. Despite being taken into public care, he has moved from below Reading Recovery level 1 to Reading Recovery level 9 in eleven weeks.

The writing samples below demonstrate the progress for one child in six weeks.

Supported writing:

13/10/08

m e m

i s a f a r m e t .

Six weeks later (unaided):

'B u c k e

P a i n t

d r o p p e d

o n . m r

B r o w n s

h e a d .

The drive and rigour continues, led by the literacy leadership team. Newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school embark on a thorough induction programme to ensure the quality in our whole school policy in literacy teaching.

Clear tracking and target setting for children and their families give clear indicators of strengths and areas to develop. The school continues to run education programmes for parents.

There is a structured whole school staff development programme in place developing the use of peer coaching to develop more outstanding teachers.

Pupil voice activities help us to tailor our approaches to meet the needs of all our children. They tell us they love guided reading sessions.

Financial resources continue to be planned to support the development of our reading initiatives, including training of our own Reading Recovery teacher.

The school has been invited, as part of The Greater Manchester Challenge to become a centre of specialist support for other schools.

We look forward to the continual development and improvement of our school. We are thrilled when we work with our families to overcome difficulties our children may have. Enabling children to leave us as skilled and proficient readers gives us immense joy.