

PLANNING, PREPARATION AND ASSESSMENT TIME IN PRIMARY AND NURSERY SCHOOLS - IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

Report by

This is a summary of a Scrutiny Review by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee of Oxfordshire County Council into the introduction of Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time for primary and nursery school teachers. The Review Group consisted of Councillor Sue Haffenden, as Chair, with Brenda Williams and Sue Matthew. It was supported by Dr Tony Eaude, as research consultant, and Julian Hehir, as Scrutiny Review Officer and was conducted between January and May 2007. It had the backing of the Workforce Remodelling Steering Group (WRSG) (which includes all the teacher unions, headteacher organisations, UNISON and the Oxfordshire Governors Association) and of the Cabinet Member for School Improvement. This summarises only the main points, with the recommendations included verbatim, and readers are urged to read the full report, available at <to be inserted> The Review Group wishes to thank all those who supported the Review by returning questionnaires, giving evidence, hosting visits and in other ways.

The aim was to: **'undertake a wide-ranging and systematic examination of the impact on headteachers, teachers, other relevant staff and pupils in Oxfordshire primary and nursery schools of the introduction of guaranteed professional time for Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) and make recommendations.'**

There were four main lines of enquiry:

1. in what ways PPA time has been introduced, including the personnel, timetabling and financial implications;
2. the benefits and the disadvantages for staff of different models adopted;
3. the impact on pupils' progress and learning of the introduction of PPA time;
4. how strategic approaches have helped, and continue, to support staff and to disseminate good practice to enable schools to develop effective and sustainable models.

The national and local context: Phase 3 of the National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload guaranteed all teachers 10% of their timetable for PPA time from September 2005. This was signed by the Government and 'social partners', including all teacher unions except the National Union of Teachers. The Review considered how PPA time had been implemented and its impact during the first and the second year. A survey by Ofsted in 2003 indicated that only a quarter of schools were well placed to implement the (whole) national workforce agreement, with two fifths expected to find some elements difficult and almost one in ten very challenging. A higher proportion of schools would find it difficult to implement the National Agreement fully and the challenge was greatest in primary and nursery schools. The DfES increased the funding for primary and nursery schools in 2005/6 by

1%, with a further £500 for the smallest schools. This was based on a survey of sixty schools, in seven local authorities, estimating the likely cost of implementation. Local Authorities were urged to provide additional funding to schools experiencing pressures. The 1% figure was not raised in 2006/7 or 2007/8. Small amounts of additional funding locally have been passed on, but Oxfordshire has not changed the funding formula significantly, so that schools know their likely medium-term funding and given the conflicting pressure of other priorities. Schools have some slight flexibility through standards and personalised learning funding, although other pressures on this are considerable.

The regulations on PPA time emphasise that the aim is 'to safeguard standards in the classroom and preserve the role, status and overall responsibility of qualified teachers.' Some adults without qualified teacher status (QTS) can carry out 'specified work' related to teaching and learning, such as planning, preparing and delivering lessons and assessing and reporting on progress and attainment. Apart from qualified teachers, those who may carry out such 'specified work' are teachers without QTS and support staff, such as teaching assistants, nursery nurses and librarians, as long as the specified work is to assist or support the work, and subject to the direction and supervision, of a qualified teacher. The headteacher must be satisfied that the person has the necessary skills, expertise and experience. Part of the rationale of Workforce Remodelling is for support staff to reduce teachers' workload by relieving them of tasks which do not require that teachers undertake them.

The evidence gathered: All staff and governing bodies were invited to complete questionnaires of which 532 were returned (98 headteachers, 253 teachers, 149 school support staff and 32 governors). The confidential nature means that the exact number of schools represented is uncertain, but about 41% of the 245 Oxfordshire primary and nursery schools were identified in at least one return. The 146 anonymous returns are likely to have represented many other schools. Nursery schools were underrepresented. Eight schools, varying in size and school context, were visited to speak to the headteacher, at least one teacher, at least one member of the support staff and a group of children as a minimum. Two other schools were visited for more specific purposes. A range of witnesses gave evidence, including school staff, a group of governors, advisers and officers with responsibility for, and expertise in, specific areas and those representing groups of school staff. Local and national documentation, mainly on the regulations, funding and training implications was considered. The strengths of this approach are that it looked at actual implementation, in a large sample of schools, from a wide range of perspectives, with confidentiality enabling some forthright responses. However, resources did not enable observation of teaching and learning. Judgments based on children's attainment scores are neither feasible nor valid given how recently PPA time has been introduced.

How PPA has been implemented: In almost all schools, teachers have timetabled PPA time, though in a few not their full entitlement. Many headteachers, especially in small schools, do not get PPA time. In a minority, when PPA time is missed, it is not 'paid back.' When those timetabled to release teachers are absent, headteachers or

support staff often have to change other commitments to step in. A huge variety of models for releasing teachers have been adopted, with a minority of schools involving only qualified teachers and a few using only teaching assistants. Most use a mixture of qualified teachers, some specialists without teaching qualifications, including Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) and some teaching assistants, sometimes in pairs or groups, sometimes leading classes on their own. Most enable teachers to have PPA time in blocks of an hour or a session, usually in the afternoon, often with a shorter slot. Teachers are often released in pairs or teams, where possible. The teachers' main concern was for PPA time to be uninterrupted, in part related to physical space, in part of the level of direction and supervision required. Almost every school has had to make minor changes as staff or classes changed. One significant minority has changed from higher quality, usually teacher-led, to cheaper provision, usually because of budgetary constraints. A smaller minority has moved to provision by more highly qualified staff where the quality of learning has been disrupted. Many schools have models which they do not plan to change, even where concerns about quality have been identified.

The benefits and disadvantages for different groups of staff: The impact on staff has been very varied, depending largely on the model adopted. The impact on teachers' workload and morale has been positive, though many teachers report that workload continues to increase. Some headteachers, especially, suggest that many teachers have become less flexible. The impact on headteachers' workload has been considerable, notably in small schools, especially where they have taken on the responsibility for the details of organisation and additional teaching commitments. This has had a negative effect on morale. The impact on support staff has been extremely varied. Some, especially those training to be teachers or HLTAs have greatly welcomed the increased responsibility of leading classes. Of those teaching assistants leading classes without additional training, some enjoy the additional responsibility, but most feel that they do not have the necessary skills, expertise and experience, especially those working with older children. Support staff are often treated with less respect than teachers. Most planning takes account of the medium-term plan, but the responsibility for planning sessions varies widely. Those releasing teachers unwillingly are often concerned about the quality of lessons and sometimes about the health and safety implications. Most support staff have little or no timetabled time to prepare. Much the most common concern, even from those who welcomed the new opportunities, is that any increased levels of pay, by no means universal, in no way matches the additional responsibility. The benefits for teachers' workload and morale are perceived to be mainly at the expense of headteachers and support staff who do not wish to lead classes but are doing so.

The impact on pupils' progress and learning: During PPA time, some schools continue with the usual curriculum, especially for children in the Foundation Stage and nursery schools. A changed curriculum is more usual, with PE, Art/Design Technology and a modern foreign language being the most common subjects covered by specialists. Where teaching assistants lead sessions, spelling, handwriting, guided reading and maths practice were popular, with other aspects of literacy and numeracy rarely covered. ICT, PSHCE and RE were less frequently mentioned, science, history

and geography only occasionally. The impact on the quality of the curriculum during PPA time depends very substantially on the quality of the staff leading classes. Where these are specialist teachers or coaches, most schools thought the curriculum was enriched. Unchallenging lessons result in lessons less well differentiated for those of different abilities. This often leads to poor behaviour where staff leading a class were not well qualified and familiar with the children, especially with older children in Key Stage 2. Children who find change difficult were reported as finding a range of adults difficult, but the Review Group believes it is good for children to learn to relate to different adults, as long as this change is not too frequent.

The range of the curriculum was usually thought in schools where specialists are used to have been broadened, sometimes in the subjects covered, sometimes in extending provision to a wider age range. The evidence suggests that the quality of teaching and learning has improved in the rest of the week, particularly because of improved planning and assessment. However, time for curriculum coordinators has been reduced. Though many support staff, especially, are concerned about reduced targeted support for children with special educational needs, the evidence on the overall impact on this group is not conclusive. The use of outside specialists runs the risk of reducing opportunities for cross curricular links and, unless the National Curriculum is closely followed, not providing full curriculum coverage and appropriate progression within a subject. Monitoring both at class and at whole-school level of the impact of PPA time on the curriculum has mostly been informal.

The strategic role of the Local Authority: The training for Workforce Remodelling was perceived as good by a majority of those who replied. Few demands for further training about PPA were expressed, except for sharing of good practice. However, the Review Group considers that there is a need for on-going training and guidance, especially to headteachers and governors. In Oxfordshire, training for individual staff in primary schools to release teachers was mostly to gain HLTA status. Fifty-one individuals in twenty-three primary schools have met the demanding standards, with a further twenty-two awaiting assessment, numbers placing Oxfordshire as one of the authorities with the highest numbers within the region. The Local Authority structure to monitor PPA time effectively is in place, with the Workforce Remodelling Structure Group working well, helping to identify possible difficulties, provide good guidance and monitor progress. The Local Authority has provided detailed support on pay and personnel matters, though with less emphasis on support staff than on teachers. Advice on specific queries related to health and safety is not easy to find, but a new helpline may address this.

Key features of good practice: Recognising that schools need to decide on models which are appropriate to their own context, the Review Group is wary of offering examples of good practice, though the report highlights successful features in six schools. Good models tend to:

- be based on consultation and regular monitoring;
- assess and make creative use of the abilities of existing staff;

- involve the teacher released in little or no detailed planning or marking for the session;
- enable teachers to be released in full sessions, or those of least an hour, with other colleagues in parallel classes where possible;
- inbuild PPA time for headteachers and time for staff releasing teachers to plan and prepare;
- be co-ordinated by an experienced person other than the headteacher, where possible;
- be relatively simple to organise.

Building up capacity, whether in-house or using specialists, is crucial to ensure that good and sustainable models, without absence causing significant difficulties, can be established. The main report reflects on the challenges facing heads and governors making difficult choices on conflicting priorities, while having to guarantee PPA time, and the need to balance the effects on children's learning during PPA time with those in the rest of the week. It considers fundamental questions about the role of specialist teachers and of the class teacher raised by the introduction of PPA time.

Factors in successful implementation: Many of the models established are sustainable financially but make provision which is far from ideal. Many others offer good provision, though often for only part of the time, but are barely or not sustainable financially. School size presents different challenges, with small schools tending to place more pressure on the headteacher, though not necessarily so. The lack of returns from nursery schools - and concerns raised there and in the Foundation Stage - suggests that implementing PPA time has been easier with the youngest children, because of the staffing structure and the nature of the curriculum. However, the Review Group is concerned that the need for high quality teaching for very young children should not be overlooked. While the evidence does not enable a valid judgment on the school's socio-economic background, a lower level of availability of suitable people to release teachers and greater disruption when provision is not good may make the challenge greater in socially deprived areas.

The quality of leadership is varied, especially in making best use of support staff, and delegation of responsibility. The Review Group recognises that many headteachers do not share the assumptions of the National Agreement, but some show greater capacity to manage change creatively. More schools could, valuably, create posts for support staff to use their abilities not only in leading classes to ease the burden on teachers. An audit tool devised by West Sussex will help heads and governors to monitor better the impact at school level especially in terms of the personnel and curricular implications. In the light of the many good and innovative models not sustainable in the long-term, the Review Group concludes that the level of funding to implement PPA time is insufficient to enable primary schools, especially, to adopt models which are educationally appropriate and financially sustainable. Local Authorities have only limited scope to reallocate funding available above the minimum funding guarantee. The Review Group is surprised that the initial additional Government funding was based on so small a survey, that it was not increased in 2006/7 or 2007/8 to reflect the cost in a full year and

that the rationale has not been reviewed in the light of further research of the actual costs of adopting educationally appropriate and sustainable models.

Recommendations: Since it is uncertain whether Oxfordshire's position is typical, further research into the impact of PPA time, nationally, would help to build on the strengths of what has been done well and enable this more widely. The Review Group is concerned that the variation of provision is too great to be acceptable in the context of the Every Child Matters agenda. In the belief that the responsibility for this is shared between the Local Authority, schools and national Government, **it is recommended that the Cabinet should on behalf of the Oxfordshire County Council:**

- R1** issue clear, brief guidance on the legal position for all staff regarding PPA time, including the Health and Safety implications. This could be in poster format, supported by a frequently asked questions section on the Oxfordshire County Council website.
- R2** consider the needs of staff to have space for uninterrupted work:
 - in the specification for new primary and nursery schools; and
 - in auditing the level of accommodation in existing premises.
 and urge the DfES to address this, nationally.
- R3** monitor annually the impact of PPA time, encouraging schools to use the monitoring tool devised by West Sussex. Such monitoring should focus on the effect on staff, especially the headteacher, and the range and quality of the curriculum, including provision for children with special educational needs.
- R4** review training for primary and nursery schools to include support for:
 - headteachers on sharing the features of good practice, especially on the role of senior staff including themselves and on monitoring PPA time;
 - support staff to enable those wishing to do so to take on roles involving duties currently, but not necessarily, taken on by teachers;
 - governors in monitoring:
 - i) the headteacher's role in releasing teachers, ensuring that the head's own PPA time is protected;
 - ii) the morale and effective deployment of support staff; and
 - iii) the range and quality of the curriculum.
- R5** continue to review its model pay policy and personnel guidance for schools, with a particular emphasis on the role and remuneration of school support staff.
- R6** consider, in consultation with the Schools Forum, whether this Review makes the case for a revision of the Local Management of Schools formula, recognising the many other conflicting priorities, the need for predictable budgets and whether such a process would be a worthwhile use of time.

urge headteachers and governing bodies to:

- R7** discontinue the use of teaching assistants taking whole classes on their own without additional and appropriate training, except for very short periods or in emergencies.

- R8** explore ways of providing a continuity of personnel either by building up capacity in house or buying in external providers, or a mixture of both, to ensure that the model is not dependent on the presence of one or two individuals.
- R9** recognise the contribution of support staff who release teachers by providing planning time for them and by treating as a priority the enhancement of levels of pay to reflect the extent and level of increased responsibility.
- R10** monitor the model used to provide PPA time particularly in terms of:
- workspace;
 - the impact on staff morale and workload; and
 - the impact on the range and quality of the curriculum.
- It is suggested that this should involve an annual report to the Governing Body, discussed prior to setting the next year's budget.

to influence the national situation:

- R11** urge the DfES to conduct a wide-ranging, independent survey of the actual cost of successful and sustainable models of implementation of PPA time in primary and nursery schools with a view to this informing the grant settlement for 2008/9 if possible, or 2009/10 and future years. Such a survey should consider the interlinked issues of the range and quality of the curriculum, the implications in terms of workload for different groups of school staff, the different opportunities and challenges for schools of different sizes and types of catchment area and other aspects such as the provision of suitable space to enable teachers to gain the maximum benefit from PPA time.
- R12** request that Ofsted consider the desirability of a brief commentary on PPA time being included in the school's self-evaluation form and of the Framework for Inspection requiring inspection teams to comment on the effectiveness of the model adopted.
- R13** disseminate this report, or its summary as appropriate, to the Department for Education and Skills, to Government agencies including the Training and Development Agency for Teachers, Ofsted, the General Teaching Council for England and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, to other Local Authorities, to those organisations represented in the National Workforce Remodelling Agreement and others representing school staff, to Members of Parliament representing Oxfordshire constituencies, the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, and to staff and governors in Oxfordshire schools.