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Key stages	KS2-KS5
School type	LA maintained primary and secondary
Themes	Federation, transition

Improving pupil outcomes in a cross-phase federation

Almond Hill Junior School and The Barclay School

Context

In September 2014 Almond Hill Junior School and The Barclay School formed a hard federation, resulting in a single governing body for the two schools. Almond Hill is a larger than average sized primary school and is The Barclay School's main feeder primary school. Both schools are located on adjacent sites in the Stevenage district of Hertfordshire.

Brief description

Almond Hill and The Barclay School formalised their partnership as the Stevenage Inspire Federation to strengthen their already close and long-established relationship. Headteachers at Almond Hill and Barclay were conscious of the importance of the continuity of learning between primary and secondary school and wanted to achieve a seamless transition based on better links between the schools. In addition there was a shared perception that federating would increase opportunities for all pupils and staff based on a wider pool of knowledge and resources.

The schools federated after completing joint research and holding consultations with parents, staff and governors, who unanimously supported the decision. The resulting governing body consists of one chair, three vice chairs and committees to cover the main stages of education from junior to key stage 5. Several joint committees manage cross-phase issues across teaching and learning whilst the finance, personnel and health and safety committees of the two schools remain independent.

A symbolic opening, in which pupils from both schools joined arms to link across the two sites, marked the launch of the federation in 2014. The Stevenage Inspire Federation aims to become a model of good practice in Stevenage, particularly in the area of transition. However the benefits of the collaboration are expected to extend to all pupils, including those who go to and come from other secondary/primary schools.

The benefits of federating

Joint moderation and subject collaboration

The Barclay-Almond Hill federation has led to considerable improvements in assessment and moderation procedures across the two schools, as well as more subject collaboration and planning. During the initial stages of the federation year 6 teachers from Almond Hill and key stage 3 English teachers at Barclay worked together on the joint moderation of writing. As well as overcoming any discrepancies in assessment, this communication allowed the schools to discuss literacy, plan their curriculum to avoid repetition and share information to plan the scheme of learning in year 7.

Through federating, both schools have developed an understanding of each other's assessment without levels criteria and an awareness of how they can compare. After attending raising achievement priority (RAP) meetings at Barclay school, leaders at Almond Hill adopted the same method at their school, demonstrating the benefits of having another model to learn from.

Opportunities for staff

The federation has provided teachers and governors more opportunities to develop their professional practice through a wider pool of expertise and shared training. Joint INSET days on grammar and reciprocal reading, arranged by Almond Hill, allowed staff to develop their skills in a more efficient manner. Almond Hill teachers have taken part in the Barclay resilience programme, which not only developed their own professional skills, but will allow them to provide children with particular needs targeted support earlier, in preparation for secondary school.

The federation aims to provide opportunities for staff to develop across the curriculum stages. Music, PE and art teachers from The Barclay School often teach at Almond Hill, and both schools share teaching assistants and a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator from Barclay attends reviews of year 6 pupils.

Peer-to-peer support and opportunities for pupils

The federated schools have taken advantage of having a wide age range of pupils by arranging several peer mentor programmes where pupils from Barclay have supported pupils from Almond Hill. Last academic year, year 7 pupils from Barclay supported year 5 pupils from Almond Hill in a mathematics mentor programme designed to accelerate the progress of pupil premium pupils (funded by the Herts for Learning Closing Gaps project). The project was repeated again in the summer term as pupils found it beneficial. Similarly a reading mentor programme gave year 3 pupils confidence to work with older students.

Sixth formers from Barclay have also been involved with Almond Hill School and have supported more able pupils with mathematics. Sixth formers have also held assemblies for younger pupils about their future choices, acting as role models and making them aware of what is achievable, as well as developing leadership skills that can be used in their future careers and for university and work applications.

Other opportunities that the federation has provided for pupils include work experience for year 10 students with Almond Hill, shared workshops in science, drama and languages, joint musical assemblies and steel pan workshops and a wide range of sports partnerships and student leaders in coaching opportunities.

Becoming a community

Federating has allowed Barclay and Almond Hill schools to become part of a wider community which brings families together and offers them continuity. The schools have often held shared projects and community events including a Remembrance Day event and a Macmillan coffee morning through which parents can form stronger links with both schools. Recently both schools were able to pool their funding to provide books for parents across the federation in 'Project Parent', designed to promote reading and parental engagement.

Impact

Both schools believe that they have achieved a lot more than anticipated by working together as a federation and view their partnership as a positive way forward for education in North Stevenage.

A smoother transition

The federation aims to provide an outstanding, seamless pathway for Stevenage children between primary and secondary school. Whilst previously time had always been a challenge when planning transition, by federating the schools 'didn't just talk about it happening, it actually did happen' (Jude Lovelock, Headteacher at Almond Hill).

Teachers at both schools have worked hard together to remove any barriers to learning from moving between schools. Better communication has resulted in continuity of curriculum ensuring there is genuine progression at secondary level. The schools expect that there will be no dips or gaps in education as children will not need to leave one school to join another if they so choose.

The headteacher at Almond Hill has noticed that pupils no longer worry about secondary school because working with secondary school pupils has become the norm for them. Booster sessions with support from older pupils have also prepared pupils for learning in secondary school. A student survey of current year 7, which has benefited from the first year of collaborative activities and the first year of the new horizontal pastoral structure, shows that students feel more settled, more confident and are already familiar with the school.

Jacqui O'Connor, Headteacher at The Barclay School believes that overall 'this federation has proved invaluable in allowing my team to plan lessons that truly stretch and challenge our new intake as staff have been working with the students since they were in the juniors and so really know what they, and other year 7s, are capable of.'

Parents also feel less anxious about transition and feel familiar with the surroundings of both schools. A year 7 parent commented that: *'my son had the benefit of experiencing some art, PE and design and technology lessons taught by dedicated subject teachers from Barclay School. He also took part in a weekly after-school science club at Barclay. This integration certainly helped him become familiar with the school, its facilities and staff and, along with the family transition events organised in June and July, made the step from junior to secondary school much easier for him in September.'*

Benefits for *all* pupils

All pupils enjoy the benefits of a wide range of extra resources and teaching expertise which supports progress and attainment across all key stages. Close collaboration with Almond Hill has provided The Barclay School with an in-depth knowledge of the primary sector which will benefit primary students from all its feeder schools. Pupils from Almond Hill who go to other secondary schools are also well prepared for secondary school and know what to expect due to links with Barclay. 'Seeing our sixth form students take assembly or our Year 9s run a mini-Olympics is inspiring to Almond Hill students and instils life skills that a traditional curriculum alone just can not' (Jacqui O'Connor).

Both schools still form additional, less formal partnerships with other schools, and federating has allowed them to see a movement away from a narrow focus about pupils in one school to a broader reach about the education of pupils in the wider community.

Shared resources and knowledge

Since federating the schools have enjoyed the benefits of effective direction of resources and shared purchasing power. All staff have better opportunities for professional development and progression, and both schools have saved money on training and recruitment.

Attending work scrutinies at Almond Hill has provided the English faculty at Barclay with invaluable information – teachers commented on how useful the information gained first hand from teachers and students has been in planning their curriculum for year 7. Senior leaders at both schools have changed and developed their own leadership after seeing how another team works and models of SLT and ways of working have been shared across the two schools.

Next steps

Both schools have a joint vision for the benefits of the federation in the future and hope to explore the opportunity to become an all-through school for ages 7-19 and if possible expand to incorporate early years and infants. The schools will continue to develop expertise in transition and in the future wish to work together to support parents in transition.

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Related documents and links	http://barclayschool.co.uk http://www.almondhill.herts.sch.uk

If you have an aspect of interesting practice that could be shared or are interested in finding out more about a case study please get in touch by emailing exchangingexcellence@hertsforlearning.co.uk

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