

## Next Practice in System Leadership – Case Study

### Remaking Learning in Barnsley

#### Context for the Field Trial Site

'Remaking Learning' is an Authority wide programme aimed at transforming lifelong learning in Barnsley using phase three of Building Schools for the Future (BSF) as a catalyst. In the programme, provision in both the primary and secondary phases is being rationalised to create new Primary Learning Centres and Advanced Learning Centres. These will make a new and extended offer to the communities they serve by providing improved access to a range of services including education.

The Next Practice field trial centres on a locality that is currently served by two small secondary schools, Royston High and Edward Sheerien, eleven primary schools and two children's centres.

The schools are:

- Royston Meadstead Primary School;
- Carlton Primary School;
- Royston Parkside Primary School;
- Royston Summer Fields Primary School;
- Royston St John Primary School;
- Athersley North Primary School;
- Richard Newman Primary School;
- Athersley South Primary School;
- Holy Cross Deanery Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School;
- Royston St John The Baptist Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School;
- St Dominics Catholic Primary;
- Edward Sheerien School;
- Royston High School

This area of Barnsley was an established mining community. Since the closure of the mines, families have experienced long-term high unemployment, especially amongst men, and low expectations and aspirations. Academic achievement is improving but remains below the national average for all age groups. Most of the children have a white British background and the population is, on the whole, very stable.

#### Organisational structure underpinning Next Practice

Local Area Action Teams, for the two localities were established, comprising headteachers, schools governors, community leaders and representatives from the local authority. The role of the teams was to work collaboratively to design and test models of:

- (i) provision organised around community need, as the community expressed it; and
- (ii) school leadership and governance that would facilitate such provision.

The teams have since evolved into Wellbeing Partnerships and have seconded a primary headteacher, Karen Butcher, to pilot the role of Director of Community

Wellbeing. Karen is one of the heads of the primary schools in the Royston-Athersley site and is well connected with a range of voluntary sector providers and other providers.

### **Leadership management & governance practices being developed**

The role of Director of Community Wellbeing, as well as providing additional and much needed capacity, has been conceived as a brokerage role in which the Director will facilitate connections between the different groups of professionals from education and other services and with the communities they serve. The purpose of the role is to ensure that decisions about future provision and related leadership and governance arrangements are made collaboratively and take account of the perspectives of the community, especially parents and young people.

The role is being designed 'in flight' and in collaboration with stakeholder groups through a pilot that is running alongside other related development activities.

Remaking Barnsley have made extensive and strategic use of Coach in a Box, an Innovation Unit offer designed to provide individual support to leaders of Next Practice projects. Coach in a Box supports leaders to reflect on their beliefs about themselves as leaders and their leadership behaviours in the context of their contribution to Next Practice. This form of leadership learning has proven to be very helpful in the Barnsley project.

Regular events bringing the whole or parts of the stakeholder community have helped at various stages to raise awareness and ownership of the project and its outcomes.

### **Impact; actual and predicted benefits**

By working with the locality Remaking Learning in Barnsley propose to develop new models for leadership and governance that can flex to accommodate the needs of different configurations of schools across the Authority. In doing so they intend to:

- provide year round, high quality education and care from 8am to 10pm for all children and young people in the locality;
- create full service extended learning centres in each locality;
- locate services within each of the nine localities for swift and easy access for children, young people and families;
- grow strategic partnerships between public, private and voluntary organisations to facilitate full service provision;
- redesign governance to support new staffing arrangements and working practices in participating schools, possibly through seeking trust status and/or by establishing a Core Services Delivery Board;
- widen access to learning about learning for parents and families; and
- open the school to the community for sport, leisure and learning.

### **Emerging issues**

This is a challenging context in which standards of achievement remain an issue and are the focus for continuing improvement work in the schools and the local authority. At the same time, those same organisations are being asked to commit to a substantial process that may result in the closure of schools and the loss therefore of jobs and opportunities for some, alongside the creation of new jobs and opportunities

for others. Given the recent economic and social history of the area, such negotiations are unsurprisingly even more delicate and difficult than is usual.

By creating a situation where anyone likely to be affected by the changes is also an actor in the design, decision making, planning and implementation of those changes, Remaking Learning in Barnsley aims to ensure that developments and their outcomes are (i) appropriate and fit for purpose and (ii) widely understood and owned.

The success of this enterprise relies on Barnsley's multi layered approach to networking. They describe a situation in which lateral connections were good and productive at a senior strategic level and at an operational level between individual schools, but where vertical connections between the tiers in the system have had to be deliberately made and maintained. Specific individuals in different parts of the system have taken responsibility for explicitly bridging the thinking and action that are taking place.

The appointment of an existing, trusted member of the group, Karen Butcher, to pilot the new role of Director of Wellbeing Partnerships means that Karen can build on existing relationships and that the partnership can benefit from the networks and connections that she has built up over time to take their work forwards. Karen's approach has been to systematically meet with each of the stakeholders individually and listen carefully and sensitively to their perspectives on their role in the changes, and the challenges they worry about. This has enabled Karen to gain both big picture and detailed insight into the tensions and the opportunities that exist in the community of the partnership. It has also helped her to develop a differentiated approach to engaging stakeholders from different parts of the network.

## **Implications**

The outcomes of this case study suggest that leaders of partnerships could usefully consider the following questions:

What roles, structures and processes can be put in place to support stakeholders to engage with and contribute to a large-scale change process? How and how often can and should their involvement be facilitated?

What leadership learning opportunities might support individuals going through significant change?

Who are the most influential stakeholders and what strategies will secure their support?