

1. Please provide a brief overview of your enquiry – including your research question, rationale, methodologies (and findings, if applicable).

What support does the staff require during the process of curriculum design and implementation?

2022 sees the launch of Wales' New Curriculum. As a pioneer school, the new curriculum has been at the forefront of our School Improvement Plan. In 2020, at Oldcastle Primary School, a Curriculum Lead group was formed. Each Area of Learning Experience (AoLE) was assigned a staff member with specialist subject knowledge, who was responsible for researching, mapping and designing their curriculum area, with a view to work collaboratively and create a curriculum that is knowledge-rich and forward in its approach.

Designing a curriculum should not solely be a top-down approach. However, although all staff must be involved in the planning and the design, a core group is key to securing a structure within AoLE leadership. This viewpoint prompted the enquiry design to identify what support was needed during design and implementation. The enquiry has been subdivided into three phases - phase one; supporting curriculum core AoLE leaders, phase two; supporting teaching staff and phase three; supporting Learning Support Officers.

The curriculum lead group consists of 5 appointed AoLE leaders with a range of teaching experience from NQT+1 to UPS3. For the enquiry to be viable and sustainable, it was proposed that each AoLE lead would complete a questionnaire on how they felt they were currently supported within their design and implementation, where they felt support would be needed in future and offer opinions on what support looks like for them. In addition to the questionnaire, professional discussions also took place. The information gained fed into developing a support programme for AoLE leads that will be reviewed regularly. It was accepted that the support required might be specific to each AoLE lead as they are all at different points within their experience and their planning and design.

It was essential to ensure the enquiry question could be used as part of whole-school development. This is an open-ended enquiry that will develop and grow as time goes on. Once the initial support has been put in place, and once the 2022 launch has happened, the support required will differ. Still, with a robust support plan and guidance in place, all staff will have the confidence to continue developing their knowledge, skills and delivery, using it for their CPD.

From the original lead group questionnaire and staff meeting discussions, it has emerged that communication is the key to ensuring this enquiry is successful. All staff have been kept up to date, documents have been widely available to ensure everyone is invested in the journey and not solely the curriculum core group.

2. What are you learning, individually and as a school, as a result of the enquiry process?

There has been an extensive range of learning that has taken place during this enquiry process, not only as an individual but as part of Senior Leadership Team, curriculum core group and as a support role for PES schools. On a personal level, engaging with my research has reignited a love for learning and developing. This enthusiasm has been shared with not only the staff within the school but also with the other schools taking part in the programme. It has reinforced the notion that teachers are learners too; it is a journey that we are all on. As a school, amidst management changes, we have developed a close communication process, a culture of sharing information and ensuring everyone is involved in the future of the curriculum. Ensuring time is dedicated to planning and implementation has given staff not only the support they require but the freedom to have a professional discussion in the knowledge that they will be listened to.

With regards to the curriculum core group, the members identified how essential personal, professional development was and how further academic reading and research not only supported their knowledge but enabled them to share information and their experience with others. This culture of professional learning has filtered through to staff and Learning Support Officers.

As previously mentioned, communication has been vital. As a Senior Leadership Team, we have mapped out staff meetings and inset training to ensure time is dedicated to curriculum planning. This mapping has assured us we are able to cover all areas; training, discussion, mapping, evaluation, reflection and development.

3. What's working well? What aspects are you finding most useful?

Developing the curriculum core group has worked well. It has given each AoLE even notability. The staff involved now feel supported and that there is guidance at each stage of the design and implementation process. As the curriculum core group were aware of the initial enquiry, they felt more open to and confident in sharing insights into their area knowledge and experience as well as their pedagogy knowledge and skills. This openness is something we will continue to adopt across the whole school; meetings and discussions are a place to share, learn and encourage one another.

As well as developing verbal communication, the curriculum core group have created a website and blog that is regularly updated. This is available on the school website and accessible by not only staff but parents and pupils. In addition to the staff, we have found communicating with Governors and stakeholders has enabled them to be an active part of the journey.

4. What's been more of a challenge? What will you do differently in future?

The biggest challenge for us as a curriculum core group has been to adapt our way of thinking and map out a curriculum that is knowledge-rich. Transitioning from the 'How' to the 'Why' brought about many professional discussions. Discussions that previously would have been had at a class teacher level. The expertise and experience of the staff lead to many agreements as well as disagreements. Ensuring that the same language was used throughout by all core group members omitted any discrepancies in understanding: e.g. concept, area, domain.

As with all schools, COVID restrictions placed extra pressure on schools and staff. Initially meetings were held virtually, which in itself is not an ideal situation to be in but also upon returning, staff and pupil welfare was paramount. Finding the balance between moving forward with the enquiry, supporting staff, mapping a new curriculum as well as adjusting to the Government guidelines was challenging. However the staff have been incredibly professional with their approach to all aspects, we feel we have found and marinated that balance.

5. How will you sustain and develop the culture of enquiry in your school?

Since the beginning of the enquiry, staff have invested in the journey wholeheartedly. They could see from the offset the benefits to them and how it would support them in future design and implementation situations. This collaborative approach has shown what a strong network of staff we have and how we are all working together towards a common goal, this alone has ensured that a culture of enquiry within Oldcastle Primary School will continue. The curriculum core group will continue to meet on a weekly basis, taking time to reflect and evaluate their AoLE and how the design process is moving forwards across both Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2. This directed time will enable consistency and allow for action plans to be formed based on staff reflections.

As a school, we will be developing research and collaboration meetings whereby staff will be able to share professional research they have undertaken, share good practice and use this as a tool to develop their pedagogy knowledge. By introducing this development continuum, staff will begin to adopt their own personal enquiry across teaching and learning.

6. As a school, how are you evaluating the impact of enquiry?

Initially, the enquiry was focussed on the whole staff; however, to ensure maximum efficiency and robust support in place, the focus was broken down into three phases: Curriculum lead group, whole staff and support staff. This will allow us to reflect on and evaluate at each stage, what is working, what isn't and adapt accordingly rather than a whole school project that has little impact or reflection. It is proposed that staff will be involved in focus group discussions at regular termly intervals to measure: the impact of support on staff, the success of what we are designing and implementing as well as the impact it is having on pupils' engagement and learning.

7. How are you developing your professional relationship with partner schools?

As part of the enquiry, we have worked closely as a group. As a lead practitioner, I ensured I was available to support and discuss at various points during each cycle. Due to COVID restrictions, all meetings took place virtually. Discussions could take place as either 1:1 or as a group. It was commonly taken up as a group to allow us to share good practices and lead a professional discussion. The PES and LES are within the school cluster; prior to this enquiry programme, we worked together for transition, curriculum moderation and other aspects of the curriculum. It is hoped, now that we have built up a research and enquiry group, we will continue to work together as a cluster. Since the beginning of this enquiry into the new curriculum, we have arranged a cluster Mathematic Mastery programme, whereby we will be sharing good practice in developing a fluent and robust maths curriculum that moves fluidly from Primary school to Secondary school.