Validated Self Evaluation

Final Report from Theme Group

February 2012

Evaluate progress of the development of the Learning Community model since Transforming Children's Services (TCS) recommendations were implemented.

Section 1 – Scope and remit of the working group

The theme group was set the following scope and remit by the Education and Lifelong Learning Senior Management Team:

- Consider levels of involvement from schools in the Learning Community model
- Consider levels of involvement of Integrated Children's Services (ICS) and Community Learning &Development CL&D) within the learning community
- Consider levels of involvement of other partners working within the Learning Community
- Investigate the effectiveness of learning community governance to include Learning Boards (LCB) and sub-groups
- Highlight areas of good practice within the Learning Community model
- Investigate the impact of the LCB on learner experience
- Identify areas for improvement/development

Section 2 – Approaches taken

The theme group took the following approaches to their work:-

- Reviewed reference materials provided
- Made use of the quality indicators detailed in Quality Management in Education 2 – Self Evaluation for Quality Improvement, Part 7 – self-evaluation questions and sources of evidence, to support planning and formulate course of action
- Conducted interviews, using agreed questions, with a range of personnel across 6 Learning Communities and agencies
- Conducted interviews with groups of pupils
- Requested and analysed related documentation
- Administered electronic questionnaire

Section 3 - Specific activities undertaken

The theme group undertook the following specific activities:-

- Sought TCS documentation to clarify the original vision, rationale and operational guidance underpinning the move to the current Learning Community model
- Made use of the quality indicators detailed in Quality Management in Education 2, Part 7 to inform discussion and formulate relevant interview questions
- In pairs and using agreed questionnaire, interviewed a sample of post holders across the 6 Learning Communities and representing E&LL Directorate, ICS, CL&D, Education- schools and pupils
- Requested plans, including evaluations and any documentation that would provide evidence related to the group's task
- Collated evidence by Learning Community, identified gaps and further information sought
- Evidence analysed to an agreed remit related structure
- Through working in subgroups, the analysis of evidence was cross referenced/moderated
- Identified strengths, areas for improvement, emerging themes and recommendations

<u>Strengths</u>:

- The Learning Community model is providing opportunities for staff to work collegiately when involved in joint training and planning sessions, leading to improved relationships.
- The Learning Community Board members recognise that the current structure provides opportunities for discussion regarding shared target-setting, planning, evaluation and review.
- Communication and relationships across agencies are improving.
- CL&D are seen as partners within the Learning Communities. It is recognised that there is good support from CL&D resulting in better engagement with learners. This could be further enhanced by a clearer shared vision of CL&D's rationale and role within the Learning Community.
- Communication between CL&D and other agencies is effective within some Learning Communities and is improving in others. Opportunities for collaboration and integration across agencies would improve communication further.
- Stakeholders recognise some improvement in partnership working. There are improved links, communication and collaborative practices with agencies across sectors,
- There is evidence of improved partnership-working, including cross-sector involvement in Learning Community planning.
- The LCB structure provides opportunity for discussion regarding target-setting, planning, evaluation and review. This opportunity now needs to be realised at a strategic level and with a consistent approach to developing, implementing, evaluating and sharing plans and practice.
- SBC, national and local priorities are taken into account in planning although there is further need for clarity of vision with regard to a central strategic direction.
- There are opportunities for distributive leadership through sub-groups, with Learning and Teaching groups focusing on key developments linked to Sector Improvement Plan.
- There are improved procedures for allocation of some resources. These now need to be developed further to ensure equitable and fair distribution and effective use of resources including mechanisms for monitoring impact.
- There are two examples of Learning Boards measuring impact on learners' experiences. A few stakeholders stated that positive inter-agency work supported learners. A few stakeholders identified that teachers' practice has improved through the work of the sub-group.

<u>Areas for Improvement</u>

- While there are a few examples of pupils' views being sought at school level, there is a need for better processes to ensure the consistent involvement of learners in this and in decision-making
- Communication and relationships across agencies could be developed further by:
  - Ensuring a clear vision, rationale, and understanding of roles
  - Providing more opportunities for collaborative work across sectors
- Responses suggest that there is a need to improve understanding and relationships between schools and ICS

- There is a need for further improvements in communication and collaborative practices, including a better understanding of, and respect for, partners' cultures and roles.
- There is an identified need for more dialogue between the LCB and staff working with children and young people.
- There is an identified need to establish links across Learning Communities, including the sharing of LC plans. Improved communication is required between LCBs and all stakeholders. Responses suggest that Learning Communities with two secondary schools have found it more difficult to engage with the Learning Community model
- A strategic approach should be developed to gather learners' views in order to inform Learning Community business
- There is a need to improve understanding of vision, rationale, practice and principles of a LCB, including updating the Toolkit
- There now needs to be increased focus on the need to evaluate impact of Learning Board activity on learners' experience.
- The majority of LCB members expressed a lack of clarity regarding the vision and purpose of the Learning Community and role of the LCB. This is mirrored by a lack of clarity on individual roles and responsibilities within the LCB and a few issues have been raised regarding its membership.
- The planning, monitoring and evaluation of LCB activity is inconsistent. LCB planning rarely influences School or Service Improvement Plans and in some cases does not involve key partners.
- While members of LCB members recognise improved communications with each other, the work of the LCB is not disseminated effectively to the broader staff groups within the LCs
- There is a recognised need for clearer and consistent central direction for the LCBs and a greater level of sharing development activity to avoid duplication of effort and promote best practice
- Members of one Learning Community Board have stated that their visions and aims are clear. However, members of other Learning Communities have highlighted a need for clarity.
- While there are examples of agendas and minutes being shared with LCB members, there is a need to share information with a wider group.

Recommendations:

- The Education Authority and Learning Community Boards should investigate ways of improving the Involvement of pupils and young people in decision-making should be explored
- The Education Authority needs to direct the work of the LCBs on an ongoing basis to ensure a core consistency of practice, that also allows some flexibility to respond to different local contexts e.g. where a LC contains 2 secondary schools
- The Education Authority and Learning Community Boards should develop mechanisms to improve the quality and consistency of the LCB's strategic planning and ensure there is system of coherent implementation, evaluation and sharing of those plans between the six LCs
- The Improvement Planning cycle and meetings e.g. SSPPG, LCBs, HTS, needs to be synchronised to support a clear, co-ordinated, strategic direction that has a positive, measured impact on learner experience

- LCBs should continue to develop opportunities for staff to improve relationships through collegiate working
- Communication tools should be developed to reach all stakeholders in the LC and to share practice between Learning Communities
- All LCBs should develop processes to evaluate the impact on children's and young people's learning of any work developed on their behalf
- The vision and purpose of the Learning Community and role of the Learning Community Board should be revisited, reviewed and refreshed to reflect the current context
- The Education Authority should continue to invest in leadership training to ensure that appropriately skilled leaders are operating within Learning Communities