

Ancaster

Theme 8: School maintenance savings and shared resources

All of the schools had individual needs but in one, there was an urgent need for expansion due to rising pupil numbers. Negotiations had been opened with the Local Authority who acknowledged the capacity needs of the school.

“As an experienced School Business Director, I was able to provide the Headteacher with contact details to get things moving as I had previously worked with this team on setting up a new Academy in Lincoln. A meeting was quickly arranged and, as the Cluster SBM, I attended to support the Headteacher. We put our strong case forward for basic need due to an increase in pupils for September. Within weeks, confirmation had been given that there would be a large new build/extension on the site that would not only support the additional children this year, but would prepare the school for an increased intake over the next few years.”

The Cluster includes 4 suburban/village primary schools. The first school is a primary school of 300 pupils, set a distance away from the other 3 schools. This school was identified as a potential partner in the cluster by the other 3 schools due to their having an experienced School Business Director. She is a specialist leader in education (SLE) and has 17 years of experience working in schools. Some of the cluster leadership team members had met her whilst she was presenting finance training on the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) course and she was asked how smaller schools could afford to access the expertise of a School Business Manager. The cluster of 3 schools met with her and she agreed to be part of their bid to have access to a shared SBM. Her own school agreed to become the fourth school in the cluster as they were not in partnership with another school at the time.

The SBM is working alongside the Headteachers and Governors at the schools. The schools have different priorities and plans.

The plans across the cluster are as follows:

- Working with Headteachers to develop long term financial planning
- Working with Headteachers to identify training needs for Governors – to put training in place to ensure Governors have a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities
- Working with administration staff to ensure smooth transition onto a new finance package
- Looking at ways to market and increase the intake of one small school
- Working with a Governing body, in the absence of a Headteacher, to provide strategic financial direction and premises improvements in a school
- Seeking additional funding to improve the schools, including securing LA funding to provide additional accommodation due to a rising role in one
- Working with Headteachers to ensure that all funding is in place for the schools to maintain their premises in line with asset management plans
- Exploring plans to combine a nursery and primary school to secure the future of both.

The schools within the cluster have not previously employed SBMs. The Headteachers were carrying out much of the role of a School Business Manager, including presenting finances to the Governing Body. This was time consuming and not the most effective use of their expertise.

It was important to build confidence and Trust with the Headteachers and Governors from the start of this project. The SBD made a presentation at 2 of the schools which outlined the key SBM tasks involved in working alongside and supporting Headteachers and Governing Bodies and describing all their roles within the school. This was also invaluable in promoting the advantages of the role in terms of freeing up Headteacher time to concentrate on teaching and learning.

One school has benefitted from gaining over £300,000 for school expansion. Initially only £150,000 had been earmarked for the school but with the support of the SBM, the Headteacher was able to persuade the LA to increase the fund. School Administrators are also reporting increased knowledge from working with a SBM. One school has secured commitment to replace water and oil tanks this summer totalling around £10,000.

One school has begun using Devolved Capital on school improvements which have started to impact on learning. The SBM had explained that the monies received each year were for the children currently in the school during that financial year and carrying forward a large surplus was not supporting improvements to the school.

One Headteacher has reported that having a SBM gives them the capacity to be a better Headteacher. A quote from one of the Headteachers very much supports this: "Working in our schools, you are making the most amazing difference and we are all very lucky to have you!"

In terms of learning points, the cluster felt it was important to ensure that the role remains strategic, not operational.