

## **Bolton Schools Catholic Education Partnership (BOSCEP)**

### **Theme 4: Mixed school status (academy and non- academy) working collaboratively on cluster wide projects**

### **Theme 5: Secondary school working with and supporting primary schools, leading to the provision of shared services**

Bolton Schools Catholic Education Partnership (BOSCEP) is an established alliance of 16 primary and 3 secondary Catholic schools in Bolton and 2 primary schools in Wigan. All the schools are voluntary aided maintained schools. The objectives of the Partnership are to bring the schools together as strategic partners to support each other in the provision of education and to ensure support services in schools are efficient, effective and represent good value for money. The partnership has a track record of successfully sharing business resources.

The schools are clustered in three areas (each with a Cluster SBM) based around each secondary school, with each cluster ranging from 5 to 7 primary schools with 1 secondary school.

Health and safety is a key priority for all schools. Following discussion with the Cluster Headteachers and Cluster Business Managers, it became clear health and safety knowledge and confidence across schools was inconsistent, systems and processes for managing premises issues and compliance were in some cases ad hoc and inefficient, and there was an over reliance on key individuals. As a consequence, schools felt exposed to significant risks

The Cluster SBMs sourced and identified accredited trainers to provide appropriate training for school site staff. They negotiated provision of a bespoke package of two training places per school for staff to complete an IOSH (Institute of Occupational Safety & Health) course in Managing Safety. Critically they sought Headteacher and Governor support to release key staff to attend and ensured training was provided at times to suit a range of individualised school needs. The training is developing the confidence of staff, reducing the health and safety risks within schools, enabling site staff to network and share good practice across the clusters.

To address the inefficiencies in the schools' systems and processes, in particular for recording premises matters and health and safety compliance, the Cluster SBM sourced and introduced an external software solution in all schools. This allows the tracking and recording of all health and safety activities, compliance, and contracts; and supports more efficient procurement and administration. It can also be developed to form a communication link for the schools.

Using the same software across all the schools allowed the SBM to negotiate preferential group deals and training, and more importantly it mitigates the risks of over-reliance on individuals, as trained staff within each school are now in a position to support other cluster schools facing staffing absences / capacity issues.

Leading on from these initiatives, a new model of caretaking support, with a secondary school facilities manager leading and managing premises staff at a primary school site, is being developed within the cluster. The role of a caretaker is key to the smooth running of the school; however, it is

a very isolated role. Resilience has increased as individual schools facing a staffing absence issue can confidently seek support / advice from other cluster site staff.

The developing model of sharing site / caretaking support will provide savings from the overall reduction in staffing costs.

The improvement and initiatives brought about by the Cluster SBM role have only been effective where they are built on a strong foundation of trust across each school and where the benefits are clearly visible on an individual school level. Headteacher and governor engagement has been critical to the success of the project.

Some small primary schools have experienced some difficulty in releasing staff to attend meetings; either Headteacher group meetings or the Cluster SBM meetings. As a result, their contribution to, and gains from the project have been more limited. This is not due to lack of enthusiasm and engagement but capacity issues. For these schools, a significant amount of time investment (greater than originally anticipated) on behalf of the Cluster SBM (on a one to one level) has been needed to continue to drive the project forward for all schools.