

Wickford

Theme 12: Income generation – grants bid / income strategy

The Wickford Collaboration includes 4 schools forming a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) working in the primary phase. Currently they have an application pending for a secondary phase free school, potentially forming a MAT of 5 schools in the longer term.

The Trust is very focussed on supporting small schools and has a history of completing a range of outreach activities. In September 2014, the Trust achieved teaching school status. As the appointed Cluster SBM, Steve is developing a role where he works increasingly on Trust wide issues for the benefit of all the schools. He likes to ensure that he visits all the schools regularly and keeps a high profile in each location. His broad remit is essential to the longer term sustainability of the role and identifying financial savings is a key part of this plan.

Outreach work generates a significant amount of additional income for the schools and it is clear that Steve's financial expertise is essential in supporting the growth of this model. Typically they would expect to see consultancy income in the region of £50,000 per year. He has also been a key player in the development of the free school application.

One of the schools who had recently joined the Trust has a deficit budget. This has required a significant review of the staffing structure and capability in the school to ensure sustainability.

The Cluster SBM is a fundamental part of the school's leadership team, and as a result Steve has been heavily involved in the decision making and modelling of options for consideration in developing a working plan that allows the school to join the Trust and benefit from wider school improvement services.

Steve has this to say: 'Clearly with a deficit situation there is an underlying problem with the structure of the school – it was vital that we unpicked this and developed a plan that would support the sustainability of the school in the Trust setting.'

Working with the Executive Head is a vital part of Steve's day to day activity, and it is clear they value the expertise he can bring when looking at restructuring staffing arrangements. Longer term, there is a need to grow pupil numbers in this location and as a result, the Cluster SBM will also need to develop an appropriate approach to marketing and increasing the schools profile in the community. This will be a real challenge but with further intervention and support from the Trust there is every reason to be confident that progress can be made.

Steve works as part of wider support team, so building relationships with others is a vital part of his remit. He is quick to recognise that using the skills of others is essential in building a strong team across the Trust. In addition to his visits there is an established series of regular meetings amongst support staff. This allows Steve to monitor progress and improve accountability on agreed actions. Utilising the strengths of the site team has been a real success. Steve has facilitated the involvement of one of the team members across the Trust, ensuring their expertise is utilised to its maximum potential. He is quick to recognise they have qualities which he does not possess, and this self-awareness is therefore further supporting the overall Trust and its services. This has been a significant help in completing two successful bids from the Capital Improvement Fund (CIF) generating £275,000 for the Trust to make property improvements.

Longer term, Steve expects the Trust to settle at 5 schools and for all his work to be focussed on Trust Management. Beyond the development of staffing, the next priority is growing more shared purchasing and improving management of contractors.

