

The Mercian Voice

A NEWSLETTER FOR ALL COLLEAGUES WITHIN THE MERCIAN TRUST

Edition 4: January 2018

A new beginning

We react in different ways to change. Some thrive on the adrenalin of new challenges; others find any differences in established routines difficult. Where some see opportunity, others see threat.

On 1st January 2018, a new chapter started in the story of our schools. After two years of debate, occasional disagreement and no little determination, five **Founding Academies** have agreed to work together in a common purpose.

We have entered a Mercian New Year! Our overarching mission is to offer the best education and life chances for the children and young people of Walsall.



There are some significant barriers to overcome and we will be exploring some of them in this edition of the Voice. Our hope, as we begin this new chapter under the banner of The Mercian, is that *together* we will be better equipped to make a positive difference. We want to leverage the strengths of all participating schools - in teaching, leadership and engagement - to do just that. I wish you all strength and courage equal to the task.

Introducing a new member of the team



We are delighted to announce that **Lois Kelly** has joined the MAT to work with us on school improvement.

She joins us from Kingsmead School, where she was Deputy Head. She is also a practising Ofsted Inspector with plenty of current experience. (She is due to conduct her first inspection as Lead Inspector next month). Her appointment – initially at least – is for two terms. During that time we expect that she will ensure that we have the capacity to set up sustainable school evaluation and improvement models.

So far this term, Lois has been working on:

1. An **evaluation** of existing School SEFs SIPs
2. Formulating a **proposal** to put evaluation at the heart of our processes (in such a way that it reduces workload)
3. Providing **support** for Academies in The Trust that are due Ofsted inspections, providing information, advice, and suggestions for short-term gains.

Discussion Point: Social Mobility and Pupil Premium

One of the last things that Justine Greening did as Secretary of State for Education was to present to Parliament a plan for improving social mobility through education. The plan is called Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential and is available for you to read here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/667690/Social_Mobility_Action_Plan_-_for_printing.pdf

The government is setting some tough targets. They are also making it clear where they intend to focus their efforts. The spotlight for Schools – for us – will be on how we are closing the attainment gap for disadvantaged children.



The attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers at school is closing. But, these pupils still remain behind. We will build on recent reforms, and raise standards in the areas where it is now most needed.

This is no small challenge! And there's more: the Inspection Dashboard Summary Reports (IDSRs) for some of the Mercian Academies show that disadvantaged children are making insufficient progress. The spotlight will be on us! But that shouldn't be what motivates us. We are not focusing on this issue simply so that we can tick a few boxes for Ofsted. This is right at the heart of why we have chosen a career in education. The moral purpose of teaching is to reduce disadvantage.

What can we do?

The **Twilight Training** Session on **Tuesday 23rd January** is a good place to start. Teachers from every school can be involved! We are focusing on Progress for pupils in Y11. This is a real opportunity for professionals to get together to discuss and **share what really works** in practice in the classroom. What really makes a difference for disadvantaged children? Please come ready to contribute and to learn from each other.



It can be disappointing to read in feedback about a Training Event something along these lines: "I didn't get anything out of it." If that is how you feel, perhaps you could consider a **New Year's Resolution**: Go along to the training session not so much expecting to **get** something but, rather, ready to **give** something – an idea, a strategy, an example. You might just find yourself inspired in the process.

What more can we do across the MAT?

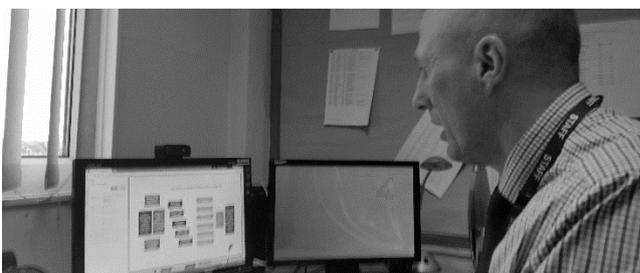
It's a good question!

First of all, we need to recognise that there are some examples of excellent practice in our schools and we are beginning to find ways of sharing that more effectively.

At the very beginning of the month, Dan Parkes from Walsall Studio School invited **Conrad Bourne** from **Shire Oak Academy** to co-present a training session in the Goldmine Centre on strategies to help disadvantaged children. This is what he had to say after the event:

I had been asked by Dan to be a contributor to the PP session but I joined in the other morning sessions; behaviour and displays. It was very interesting to be involved with another school's CPD programme. I particularly liked the shared emphasis on embedding characteristics of the school as part of the vision and values.

*My contribution focused on thinking about how we can **innovate and re-innovate** PP strategy and use **evidence (research)** to support this process.*



I had previously had a meeting with Dan about how WSS had developed Academic Boards.

I do like the idea of triangulating the data to include PP lesson observations.

Dan has provided me with the report.

The 'report' to which Conrad clearly benefited from the cross-fertilisation of ideas between different Schools across the MAT. It forms the basis of the Studio School's Pupil Premium Strategy.

We now want to develop a Mercian Strategy. This will not impose a straitjacket model for everyone to adopt. That will not work; circumstances in each Academy are very different. But we do want to collaborate on drawing up over-arching principles, based on research of what is effective.

Dan Parkes's report helpfully draws attention to the Education Endowment Foundation's Pupil Premium T&L toolkit which measures the impact of commonly introduced strategies over the last five years. Summaries of each strategy published by the EEF can be viewed here:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/resources/teaching-learning-toolkit>

The Government has set three challenges:

1. Improving the **quality of teaching** in challenging areas and schools
2. Improving the **school improvement** offer in more challenging areas
3. **Supporting pupils** from less advantaged backgrounds of all abilities to fulfil their potential

Social Mobility and Pupil Premium is a key agenda item at the next meeting of Mercian Heads. After that, we will convene a meeting of Pupil Premium co-ordinators.

Why not investigate, talk to relevant staff in your Academy and join the debate. Make your voice heard.

News Round-up

Twilight Training Sessions on Tuesday 23rd January

Tuesday is a big day in the life of the MAT. There will be three different programmes running:

- Subject departmental meetings at Aldridge and Shire Oak, focusing on **Pupil Progress at KS4**
- **Leadership Courses** at QMGS with different seminars for Middle and Senior Leaders
- The launch of the **B Physics TSST** programme organised jointly between the Mercian and Birmingham University

Associate Staff

The Twilight Training session on Tuesday 23rd is focusing on teaching.

We are proposing something different for Associate staff, more directly tailored to an agenda for different groups. Details will be published shortly.

Getting to grips with GDPR

The General Data Protection Regulation or GDPR comes in to force in May this year.

There will be significant implications for the MAT and for individual Academies. For anyone interested, an excellent webinar on the subject can be accessed here:

<https://www.brownejacobson.com/education/training-and-resources/training-videos/2017/09/how-to-implement-gdpr-in-your-school-hear-from-dai-durbridge-and-helena-wootton>

Our intention is to appoint a Data Protection Officer (DPO) with MAT wide responsibilities.

Collaboration in a bid to the Strategic Schools Improvement Fund

We have begun discussions with a neighbouring Black Country MAT to support them in their ambitious bid to the SSIF for a project to improve performance in KS3 Maths.

Stop Press



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the website with links to Walsall Studio School, Shire Oak Academy, Queen Mary's High School, Queen Mary's Grammar School, and Aldridge School. The main content area features the title 'The Mercian Trust' with the tagline 'Life to the full in the business of education'. Below this are five logos representing the member schools. At the bottom, there are two columns of text: 'The Mercian Trust is a group of schools working together under a common banner and an over-arching structure of governance, but retaining their autonomy as custodians of their unique heritage, distinct identities and successful...' and 'It was in Mercia that St Chad established an association of small monasteries which fostered unity through bonds of kinship. We intend, a thousand years later, to adopt the same spirit in our approach to a Multi-Academy Trust. Built on the...

The Mercian trust website is due to go live this weekend with the URL: www.themerciantrust.org

It's a site under construction at the moment and we already have Phase Two planned to allow protected access to certain areas for staff, governors and Trustees.

But you might like to take a look at the work in progress.

Any suggestions for improvements and additional content will be welcome.