



Belgrave St Bartholomew's Academy

Disadvantaged Learners Strategic Review – Stoke Opportunity Area Project Spring 2021

Context

Belgrave St Bartholomew's Academy has 503 pupils on roll. Approximately 23% of pupils are eligible for the Pupil Premium, in line with the national average. 70% of pupils speak English as an additional language, well above the national average (21.2%).

Review

The review was carried out by Marc Rowland, Ian Hunt and Anne Gadsden. It involved a range of detailed discussions with senior leaders, a range of key staff and a governor. The review was initially held online due to Covid 19 restrictions. There was a follow up visit to observe the implementation of the strategy in classrooms, along with some discussion with pupils and teachers.

Key findings and recommendations

1. Belgrave St Bartholomew's Academy is a model of good practice for improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. Disadvantaged pupils attain well. All staff across the school community feel a strong ownership and responsibility for disadvantaged pupils, rooted in knowledge, expertise and commitment.
2. The approach adopted by the school centres on the following themes:
 - Language acquisition / language development across the curriculum
 - Building memorable life experiences
 - Improving attendance
 - Building family engagement.
3. These themes all centre around improving pupils as learners through participation and experiences of success in the classroom. Robust assessment of need, and the development of teachers and support staff to meet that need, underpins the approach.
4. School leaders understand the school community. They tell a powerful story of how they have developed a cohesive school community through shared values. The school is founded on cohesion.
5. The shared understanding of these values was evident both in online discussions, in interactions between pupils and families around school, and in the classroom. School leaders spoke about how they want families to feel like school is 'on their side'. This is delicately balanced by leaders' ambitions to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve through broader vistas and high expectations.



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6. The school has an inclusive, pupil-informed, community-informed disadvantage strategy, not a label led strategy. Everyone takes responsibility and ownership. Staff development focusses sharply on the needs of learners.
7. There was an extended discussion about balancing the need for academic intervention and 'curriculum equity'. Leaders and teachers are aware of the importance of getting this right, and the unintended consequences of withdrawing pupils from lessons to frequently (the curriculum can, in part, mitigate for a lack of enrichment beyond school). A 'planning for all' approach by teachers supports this.
8. Leaders are outward-facing in their approach, learning from research about vocabulary learning from the Aspirer Research School. The vocabulary learning is part of a wider culture about not making assumptions about pupils' language or experiences outside of school.
9. Similarly, pastoral support such as frequent welfare calls are seen as supportive and partnership building – enabling staff to be responsive to need.
10. The school's successful approach to addressing disadvantage and promoting inclusion is founded on strong relationships. Building relationship is not a soft option. This is best evidenced with the engagement with the community over RSE – through a process of consultation, communication and flexibility, a shared knowledge and understanding has been developed within a relentless focus on children's needs. This has also enhanced a culture of trust between school and community over a potentially divisive issue.
11. Staff across the school are confident in their understanding of relationships and language development: 'things get better as we get to know the children better'. But the restlessness to improve is evident in reflections: 'we could be better at teaching vocabulary in subjects where we are less confident... and we need to ensure that [pupils] have meaningful interactions with language.' This is evidence that teachers are research literate.
12. Classroom visits provided further evidence of the strong relationships across school. Teachers know pupils well and look for opportunities for pupils to experience success. For example, in an ICT lesson, a less confident pupil was selected to help lead the learning, modelling to others. The teacher's confidence, trust and expertise in her children enabled this to happen. It creates opportunity and self-belief within an equitable classroom climate.
13. Following the brief visits, there was a short discussion about a more structured focus on rebuilding pupils' listening skills, particularly when less confident pupils are speaking. This could be a pandemic legacy issue. Research on supporting teachers in assessing pupils' oral language can be found below.



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14. Pupils have a very good language for learning. They were able to talk about how to be successful in their learning – ‘you need to listen and concentrate...’ and ‘you need to write neatly... so you can read it, so your teacher can read it’. Some were able to articulate how they knew they had been successful in their learning (before they had feedback from the teacher) and were able to talk in depth about a range of strategies they can use when they are stuck or don't know the answer.
15. Encouragingly, pupils spoke about a range of subjects – from PE to maths to Art and DT when describing their favourite subjects. This is further correlatory evidence that a broad curriculum supports better attainment for disadvantaged pupils.
16. Final discussions with teachers exemplified how ‘bothered’ they are about all their pupils. They recognise that the macro issue of the attainment gap is addresses through the micro interactions that take place in the classroom. There was a discussion about ensuring that reading options are reflective of the school community – this helps create a sense of belonging. The links below from CLPE and the literature spine from Lakelands Primary School may help with this.
17. When discussing the most effective approaches for addressing disadvantage, all staff spoke about their roles and responsibilities, rather than focussing on external factors or family issues. Teachers hold all families, irrespective of background, in high regard. This is testament to the culture embedded in the school.
18. Again, this school is a model for addressing disadvantage. Expert teachers, strong relationships and a shared culture are the key ingredients.

Additional research to support reflections

Assessing oral language (Humphry et al)

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0004944117712777>

Reflecting realities (ethnic representation in children's literature)

<https://clpe.org.uk/publications-and-bookpacks/reflecting-realities>

Lakelands Primary School (inclusive literature spine)

<https://www.lakelandsprimary.com/1431/literature-spine>

Deepening knowledge through vocabulary instruction (Beck et al)

<https://impact.chartered.college/article/beck-deepening-knowledge-through-vocabulary-learning/>

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