



The Aylsham Cluster. Together we are Stronger we are Better.

The Aylsham Cluster of Schools has gained quite a reputation in recent years for the way schools collaborate for the benefit of all the children, young people and families in the area. Schools from all over the country have visited the area to try to find out more about how the schools work together and what the benefits are. The schools in the Aylsham Cluster include Aldborough, Aylsham High, Bure Valley Junior, Buxton, Colby, Erpingham, Hevingham, John of Gaunt, Marsham and St Michaels. The Cluster has also been identified as a model of excellent practice by a number of national bodies, including the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, The National College for School and Children's Centre Leadership and the Training Development Agency.



The collaboration was initially strengthened through joint special curriculum days or weeks where children from all of the schools would share a theme for their learning during the week and then representatives from the individual schools would come together to show each other what they had learned and enjoyed the most.

The Headteachers of all of the schools recognised the benefits of working together as lead professionals, sharing ideas, experiences and opportunities. Many strong professional partnerships have grown over the years and recently a joint Cluster Development plan has begun to take shape which will involve other members of staff in the coming months.

All of the schools are at the heart of their local communities and much work has been done to involve parents and carers and grandparents in school life and to support their child's learning at school. Hundreds of parents have been able to study accredited courses to help them understand how best to support their child and over 1500 have attended Family Learning or Parenting support sessions. Much of this work is only achievable through pooling resources and it is this work that has made the 'brand' of the Aylsham Cluster so visible.

The annual Family Learning Day, sponsored by The Rotary Club of Aylsham, has become a key date in school calendars with hundreds of parents from all of the schools coming together to celebrate the work of their schools.

The work of the Parent Support Adviser has also worked with a large number of parents and families throughout the Cluster. Much of this work would not have been possible for individual schools. Like most of the collaborative projects and shared staff are only possible through pooling resources.

Staff training has also been significantly enhanced through this joint working, with teaching and classroom based staff taking part in joint training days with high quality national speakers. Two Headteachers in the Cluster are currently completing an MA through Aylsham High Training School. The Cluster has pioneered training for all support staff and has provided high quality, relevant local training over the last two years for a high number of staff working in local schools. Again, this work is made possible through the c lose collaboration of the schools and parents can be assured that few schools nationally have access to this model of training.

Teachers with responsibility for Special Needs have been working together to develop their understanding of the complex needs of children and to be able to share specialist training. This network also helps when children are transferring to another school in the cluster.



Transition from one school to another can be a really challenging time for children and their parents, however all of the schools in the cluster have worked together to make sure that everything possible is done to make this move as smooth as possible.

For the children there are lots of opportunities to work with those in other schools in the cluster. Last year most of the schools set up businesses with pupils making a range of products to sell at the monthly farmers market in Aylsham. All of the groups met together to present their product and thoroughly enjoyed listening to the ideas of other pupils and to refine their business strategy before the event. The feedback from all of the pupils involved was very positive and most of the businesses sold their products on the day. All of the schools have groups of pupils working to raise awareness of the environment. Representative pupils from Year 2 upwards have been meeting termly to share ideas and projects and really enjoy contributing to a wider community.

A School Sport Co-ordinator has been working with all of the schools in the cluster for the last 3 years to encourage more pupils to become more active in and out of school and to organise inter school competitions.

Transition from one school to another has also been a key focus, with all of the schools collaborating to ensure that the move from Year 6 to Year 7 at Aylsham High is as comfortable and enjoyable as possible. In addition to the 3 days that Year 6 spend at Aylsham High in the summer term there are also opportunities to attend drama performances by older pupils, sporting and activity days and The Grapevine, a Saturday morning school for all pupils in Years 5 and 6 in the cluster. Staff at John of Gaunt and St Michaels have also worked very hard with colleagues at Bure Valley to support a smooth and comfortable transition from Infant to Junior school.



There are a number of benefits that stem from this level of partnership. Headteachers and staff benefit from sharing good practice and mutual support, pupils learn to explore the wider community and build relationships with children from other schools and parents and families have increased opportunities to build strong partnerships with schools that share similar values as their child moves from one phase of schooling to another.

This level of collaboration is unusual in Norfolk, but is a model that other clusters are using to build their own vision for future collaboration. Nationally, a large number of clusters have been set up as formalised groupings so that they can build sustainable collaborations. For Governors and Headteachers in the Aylsham Cluster, an exploration is taking place to continue to build on all the good work that has taken place.

