

National Professional Enquiry Project

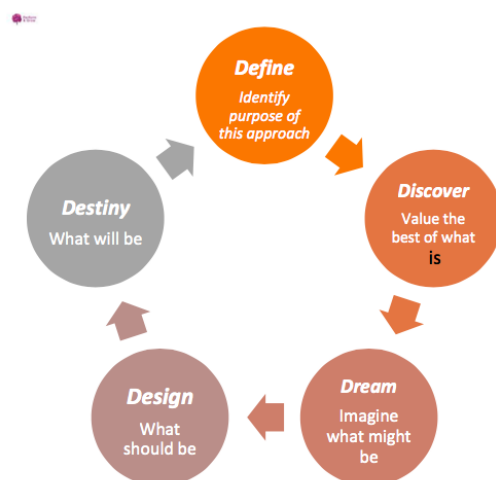
Section 3 report Cadoxton Primary School

Enquiry question:

How well do school leaders, staff, learners and the wider school community promote and develop the four purposes?

Enquiry progress

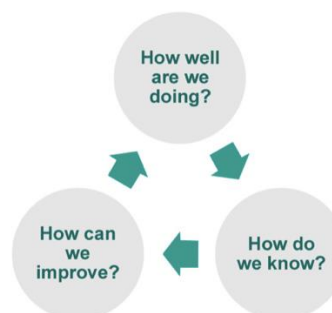
- We have spent the last four years on our pioneer journey exploring why, how and what we do to create a curriculum with the four purposes at the heart of our vision. Latterly we have used appreciative inquiry (AI), involving all stakeholders, to evaluate our progress.



Whilst engaging in our own AI we simultaneously collaborated with six partner schools, all at different points in their own development. Whilst supporting the enquiry process itself, our work was really about aligning self-evaluation to school improvement as an integrated process, promoting a collaborative culture of continuous professional reflection, learning and improvement.

The improvement cycle

We used the National Evaluation and Improvement Resource as a simple model.



Our aims:

- be reflective, open and honest
- refine self-evaluation activities
- make evaluation about the school and its learners
- involve and listen to all staff, learners, parents/carers, governors and other stakeholders
- use different approaches to gather reliable evidence
- use data alongside first-hand testimony
- share effective practice across schools

We held a series of focus groups with the lead enquirers from each school to understand our different contexts and build positive relationships. This was the 'Discover' and 'Dream' phase of the AI and enabled leaders to focus on what was going well in order to understand what needed to happen next.

As the lead school we modelled the enquiry process for the cluster schools and facilitated a series workshops with our different stakeholders as created in the 'Design' stage of the process. The cluster schools were then able to utilise a parallel process but with a personalised approach. The essential part of the enquiry was to explore as individual schools and then as a collective the 'Destiny' of the reflective cycle and our next steps. This entails developing a learning culture that promotes continuous improvement aimed at realising the four purposes.

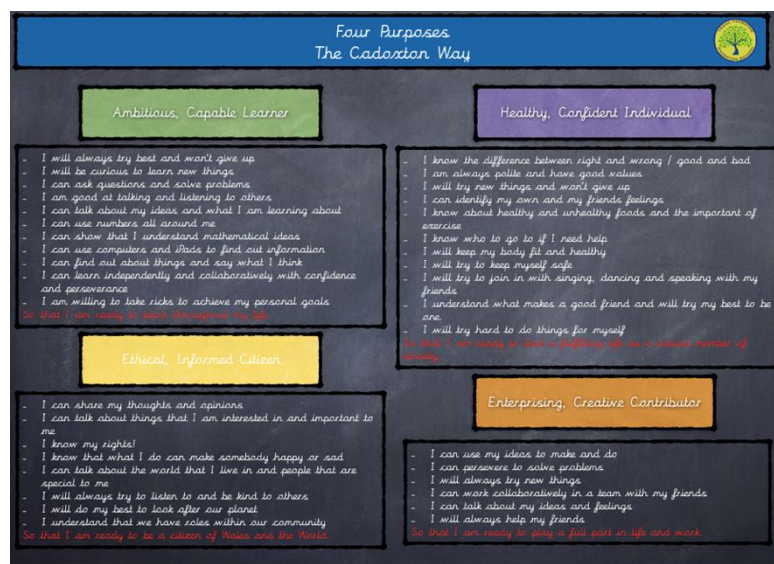
Emerging findings/recommendations

The final 'Destiny' stage is where action is translated into outcomes. It was also important that we were able to build an AI mindset into our cultures so that change becomes sustainable. All the lead enquirers felt that the most successful part of this project had been to focus on their systems and process for self-evaluation. There was a shared commitment to enabling leaders to cultivate a culture of enquiry that focusses on the goal of improvement and inclusivity. The reflections on the process were just as important as the findings themselves.

Findings:

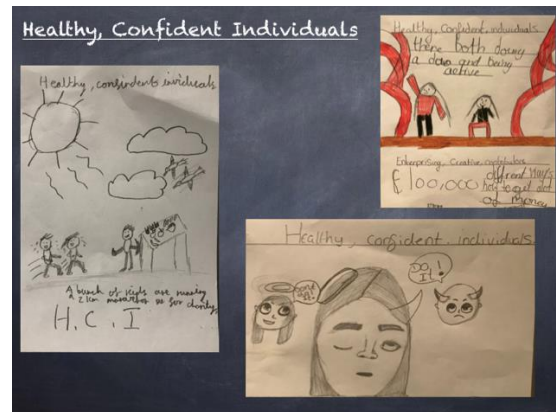
- Defining what the four purposes meant to each of the schools by deconstructing the meaning with each group of stakeholders was fundamental to personalising and processing understanding.
- It was important that progression was understood and embedded within each of the four purposes and for most schools this was a target for next steps of development. In some cases they had been unpicked and put into progressive statements. (see Cadoxton example) Again schools agreed this was specific their own context and their learners understanding.

These were created and refined with learners, staff and parents to ensure that they supported the development of language of the four purposes. They are not a tick box approach but do add to the need for clarity over progression.



- It was not important that the children didn't always use the actual headings of the four purposes but more that they could talk about learning and exemplify through experiences and a shared language; for examples 'schools learning dispositions'
- The language of the four purposes particularly in the Welsh translation was too formal and staff and parents reflections showed that they wanted it to be simplified. In workshops the practical examples were often refereed too.
- A massive strength of the enquiry was to use a variety of different approaches for each group; for example using children's drawings as a means of getting them to reflect.

Teachers used cooperative learning strategies to plan appropriate activities to get children of all ages to reflect in a purposeful way. They planned the key questions and then used the schools pedagogical approaches to involve all learners not just a chosen few.



AI stimulated discussion around sustainable change people because it taps into the human need to be valued, creative and to make a difference.

"The task of organisational leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in ways that make a system's weaknesses irrelevant", Peter Drucker

All schools reflected that it was the use of bespoke approaches to enable all the stakeholders to be involved that was integral to gaining true insight into where they are and where they are going next.

Reflection on cluster involvement

The first reflection and perhaps the most important one of all is that schools don't all have a good understanding of what effective self-evaluation is and should be. This was apparent in conversations about the four purposes being reviewed as a tick box one off annual event.

It has only been through working as a cluster that we were able to make informed, honest reflections about where we are as a collective with regards the National Mission. It was so important to learn how other schools are exploring and embedding the four purposes into their curriculum model and reassuring that all the lead enquiries saw this as a journey of professional development for the whole school not a quick fix.

Next steps

We have therefore decided that our next steps as a cluster is to focus on the integral skills of the curriculum. Just as we teach skills and concepts in the academic curriculum, so too must we teach children the skills to be effective independent and interdependent learners. In other words, we must think of 'independent and interdependent learning' as content areas that need to be taught in the classroom. Without our enquiry focusing on the relevance of the current situation with learner habits and attributes at the core we cannot be prepared to what the future year entails.

Our cluster are keen to continue to collaborate with enquiry as the driver to developing effective self-evaluation. The next steps for some schools is to be mentored through the enquiry process with support and guidance given in a more structured way. For others it is extending the enquiry process to other aspects of school life and using a common set of aims but sharing and reflecting on common findings.

Post script

It was clear that most of the schools understood that the four purposes are the core driver for their schools vision but the focus now needs to be on clarity of understanding the vision, communicating and understanding progression within the purposes. The next steps need to include the development of progression and an understanding for all about child development milestones.

First and of paramount importance has been the need for us to adapt self-evaluation and enquiry to continue to learn and improve during Covid- 19. A real strength for Cadoxton has been that we have such a culture of learning through enquiry embedded that even remotely we have continued to use this approach with staff and learners.

The importance of schools as a learning organisations for us has changed focus and meant that our vision is schools as a learning community. The power of the four purposes being a national vision has been highlighted in these unprecedented circumstances. It shouldn't take a pandemic for schools to see that health and well-being should be our primary focus or that being ethically informed is about understanding the needs of others and making the right informed choices. Never before have we needed the whole community to become responsible for enabling the purposes for us all to thrive.

We have been able to add another layer of clarity to our understanding of the four purposes by seeing how our children learn most effectively when the school routine is disrupted. This led to our professional learning focusing on learning habits and attributes and developing an understanding of the kind of learners we are but also the kinds of people we are. We also focused on reimagining the school system to allow us all to thrive with well-being at the primary focus.