Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Priority Area

Kinderley Primary School

Kinderley Primary School is a small rural primary school based in Tydd St Giles, near Wisbech in Cambridgeshire. There are 74 children on roll between the ages of two and 11 in four mixed-age classes. The school is graded 'Good' following an Ofsted visit in April/May 2024, having previously been judged 'Requires Improvement' in 2022.

The school has been supported by the Priority Area Local Needs Fund, which targets improvements in literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 through the funding of evidence-based programmes or activities that will address locally identified needs. The Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Priority Area works with schools that have the lowest attainment/progress and highest rates of disadvantage, and seeks to maximise accessibility and uptake of existing local offers and national policies.

For Kinderley, the focus has been on Literacy (Phonics and Writing) at Key Stage 1 and early Key Stage 2. Following a diagnostic phase (March-July 2023), a theory of change and support table, and implementation plan were developed and approved in partnership with a Fenland and East Cambridgeshire Priority Area link coach (Lesley Birch), who worked with the school to identify strengths and areas for improvement relating to their priority. The programme has been in place for two years.

Challenge: Low reading and writing attainment, underpinned by inconsistent teaching

Haidee Norman, who has been Headteacher of Kinderley Primary School since November 2023, has progressed the work with the Priority Area team originally started by her predecessor in the role.

"A huge issue has been the turnover of leadership," Haidee said. "The constant turnover, and it has been the same with teaching staff, created a lack of consistency in our approach to reading and writing and this is essentially where all our problems have come from. The curriculum was not established, and children could not build on their skills because there was nothing familiar to build on, and they would go from teacher to teacher with a completely different way of doing guided reading, or writing or spelling. That was the root of everything."

Not enough children had secure phonics knowledge, and this impacted end-of-key stage assessments in reading and writing. In writing, results were not in line with national expectations: 2023 Year 6 writing data was 42% EXS+, and 25% for Year 2. There was also not a secure staff knowledge of phonics teaching, especially in terms of Read Write Inc scheme progression, and colleagues did not have sufficient subject knowledge to ensure the writing curriculum builds on prior learning and prepares children for the next steps.

"We have a rolling two-year programme in our mixed classes, so one year we do the lower year group and the next year we do the higher group," Haidee revealed. "If you have a class of children who are in years 3 and 4 and they have not got the skills they should have but are now teaching a Year 4 curriculum, the gap is even bigger. We were in a situation where the behaviour of a small number of children with high needs in class was impacting other children, which only exacerbated the

challenge we had. As a small school we do not have support staff to do interventions, so teachers' time was being spent on high needs children and that left us with children who did not have age-appropriate skills. For teachers, the differentiation was literally off the scale, and that was really hard."

In response, lead practitioner support to upskill staff in developing Read Write Inc, and the organisation of this, was requested by the school; as well as leadership support on preparation and implementation of the writing programme. In addition, a gap was identified around support to enable teachers to make more effective adaptions to meet the needs of SEND pupils in their classes, and to deal more effectively with behavioural issues from high needs pupils.

The Priority Area programme has run in parallel with support from the Local Authority (SEND, subject leadership, work scrutiny and parental engagement) and The School Improvement Offer (quality teaching, progression documentation and implementation of the curriculum, and interventions/adapting lessons for SEND).

Implementation: Curriculum development, staff training/upskilling, and SEND support

With £11,500 from the Priority Area Local Needs Fund *(breakdown available in the school's theory of change and support table),* Kinderley Primary School outlined the intended impacts of these actions and how they would be measured: phonics outcomes at Year 1 to be higher than in 2023; at least 50% of pupils to be at age related expectations for writing at Year 6; phonics teaching to be stronger and more embedded across the school; and writing progression to be identified and implemented.

"Working with the Priority Area team has kept me on track for my wider

improvement of the school, and the actions set at the start of the programme have stayed in place for the entire time," Haidee explained. "Fundamentally, we knew what was wrong. We had no phonics scheme that there was fidelity to, and we had no structured writing curriculum, so the children could not build their skills and their knowledge. I cannot deny that the money from the Priority Area Local Needs Fund has had a huge impact because it has allowed us to buy the schemes that as a really small school we just could not afford."

Those schemes were Read Write Inc – specifically using the funding to train all staff in the resources, and ongoing upskilling and support (including for new staff) – and CUSP, which has been purchased for reading, writing and spelling.

"My previous school was a Read Write Inc school, and I have always seen it work," Haidee stated. "And at my last school we went from 19% to well into the 90s so I know that if you stick true to the scheme, it works for the children and the staff. For us, it was about how we take that our children, and how we move them on from decoding to actually reading for meaning. So developing the reading curriculum, then we have CUSP building those skills, and improving our library. We have invested in small chapter books as a school because there was a huge gap for the children when they were coming off the scheme. Taking on the writing and reading curriculum together has been essential to everything."

Through the Priority Area programme, the school has received lead practitioner support for phonics, writing (also visiting other schools that are teaching CUSP) and SEND and behaviour alongside the Local Authority and The School Improvement Offer support. Colleagues have also attended online English Hub courses, with a deliberate focus on SEND adaptations.

"When I started here, we did not have a SENCo, yet as discussed we have so many high-profile children with high needs that take up a lot of time," Haidee said. "The support we have received has given us time to train up our own SENCo on the leadership side, and this has been significant because without that there is no way we would have got the Ofsted we did in 2024. The leadership support we have received has also been pivotal in helping us to move the school forward. The additional headteacher support has spent time working on policies, whilst I have focused on curriculum, behaviour and culture, and day-to-day running of the school."

Outcome: Improving outcomes, stronger all-round provision, and behaviour change

Kinderley Primary School's Ofsted report in April/May 2024 inspectors concluded that: *"The school ensures that every pupil enjoys reading and develops the skills they need to be successful. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils develop their knowledge of reading through a structured, carefully ordered curriculum. This starts with the school's phonics programme, which is well established. Regular assessments check pupils' progress in reading. The school provides appropriate support or adaptations so that all pupils can develop their reading skills. This ensures that pupils master their learning before they move on to the next step."*

Haidee reflected: "We were delighted with the acknowledgment in our Ofsted report, and we are now continuing to embed Read Write Inc in all classes, and it is the same with CUSP in writing and across all subjects, so that it becomes the norm. Generally, though, you can go into any reading lesson and the structure is the same. The children know they have got their knowledge notes, and they know that we are going to go through the vocabulary, and there is just that structure and

consistency to it. The key thing has been stability and leadership: the children knowing what they are getting, and the teachers knowing what they are delivering. The support from the Priority Area team has been a vital component of that, and the development is also reflected in our latest data."

Phonics results in summer 2024 saw Year 1 hit 80% and Year 2 60%. Key Stage 2 results were reading 86% and writing 43%. "The phonics scores, in particular, have been amazing – going from 17% to in the 80s – and last year 100% of our pupil premium children passed their year one phonics screen, which speaks for itself," she said. "Most of our learners were very, very reluctant. The thought of learning scared them, or bored them. We have really had to change their thinking, trying to create enthusiastic readers and writers rather than doing this because we have told them to, and we have had to do that against a challenging backdrop of mixed-age classes and adaptions for SEND children. Behaviour support has meant that most children are having their learning interrupted far less."

Throughout the programme, the school has received termly visits from Priority Area coach Lesley Birch, as well as online meetings. "These visits have helped to keep me on track – they make me think, look back at the plan, and check where we should be and ensure we have done what we said," Haidee commented. "Lesley has given us a number of suggestions. For example, I was talking to her about how my Year 4s are particularly low in writing. And she said, 'have you tried Winning at Writing'? I hadn't heard of it, so I looked into it, and thought 'OK, we'll give that a go'. Lesley has a bank of knowledge to tap into. We have had access to range of knowledge and skills from the Priority Area team. Whilst I was not involved in the project from the start myself, as soon as I got to know the people, I realised they were only there to help the school and they have been really supportive."

Haidee added: "As a school, we are further along the journey, but we are still developing teachers' skills and support staff skills to support phonics and writing, and working on leadership development and SEND. It has been hard, and our numbers remain quite low, but for our cohort in September we have got eight first choices for our reception class, and that is the most wonderful feeling I have to say."

PRIORITY AREA COACH FEEDBACK

"Throughout the programme Kinderley Primary School has demonstrated its commitment to supporting children's learning so more is achieved. The learning behaviours of children are improving – there is a greater willingness to 'have a go'. The online learning modules for CUSP have been very helpful, there is a lot of scaffolding for the children, and SEND support is strong. Ofsted's visit, which found 'good in all areas'' is very positive. The Headteacher has provided stability and continuity which is much needed. Outcomes of children continue to improve, and staff are more confident due to high-quality training, supportive monitoring and feedback. There has been a clear impact on teacher's teaching, and children's learning."

Lesley Birch

Case study developed: March 2025