



## **The Bedford Borough Learning Exchange**

(Affectionately known as 'The Bubble')

### **Briefing Paper**

- The BBLE started in 2009 (with a grant from The Bedford Charity, now known as The Harpur Trust) as a monthly networking meeting for all the head teachers in the Borough - state and private - and the LA.
- In the second year it was co-funded by The Harpur Trust and Bedford Borough LA, and rebadged as a forum for all educationalists in the town incorporating Bedford College, the University of Bedfordshire, two further independent schools and the Prison Education Service.
- In January 2012 it adopted a formal constitution which listed six main objectives:
  - ❖ Fostering the mutual support and understanding of educational practitioners in Bedford Borough.
  - ❖ The regular sharing of good and emergent practice.
  - ❖ Consensus building and collaborative planning.
  - ❖ The development of effective working partnerships across the system.
  - ❖ Maximising the resources available to BBLE partner organisations.
  - ❖ Engaging in systematic programmes of innovation and improvement to improve the quality of learning, drive up levels of achievement and improve individual life chances.
- In the first phase of its growth it focussed on professional development issues which included presentations from several prominent speakers (e.g. David Bell PPS, Sir Keith Ajegbo, John Bangs and Estelle Morris) but as levels of trust grew it began to engage more in 'consensus building' activities (e.g. the delegation to see Michael Gove in Spring 2011 to put down a marker - in advance of the James Review - on earmarked capital funding both for special school reorganisation and funding for transition from a three to a two-tier system).
- Though the Coalition White Paper contained controversial elements there was a general willingness within the BBLE to work 'with the grain' of government policy. Developments here have included:

- ❖ Engaging with the idea of a Free School and inviting the leadership to join the BBLE.
  - ❖ Engagement with the idea of competitive Academies but allied with a determination to maintain a high energy collaborative working.
  - ❖ Collaborative working on the creation of local Teaching Schools to act as local centres for powerful ITT and career-long professional development.
  - ❖ Using the pupil premium to drive up levels of student achievement in deprived areas (as evidenced by the day-long BBLE conference on 'Narrowing the Gap' and subsequent development activity).
- As the BBLE developed there were calls for the collaborative to become a legally incorporated body so that it could begin to commission educational services within the Borough, but following thorough consideration it was decided to focus on being a high quality and innovative 'learning exchange'.
  - Building upon these solid foundations it is now sponsoring development activities, including:
    - ❖ The Bedford Copenhagen Learning Exchange
    - ❖ The Associate Educational Fellowship Programme
    - ❖ The BEM 'Step-into-Leadership' Programme

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Chair of BBLE 2016/2017