

Leading from the Middle goes from strength to strength

The National College for School Leadership recently introduced a new programme for middle leaders in school as part of its provision for 'emergent leaders'. Leading from the Middle (LftM) started life as a pilot project in London and the North West just over two years ago and in June 2003 the NCSL Yorkshire and Humber Affiliated Centre successfully bid for the roll out of the programme in the region. CCDU currently holds the contract for LftM on behalf of the Affiliated Centre.

LftM is the first blended learning programme to be introduced by the college and represents a new approach to leadership development in schools. The first cohort of almost 180 middle leaders from schools across Yorkshire and Humber began the programme in September 2003.

Leading from the Middle is designed to help participants analyse their existing leadership skills, identify key areas for development and use the responsibilities of their existing leadership role in school as a vehicle for focused developmental activities. Whilst the focus of the programme is upon individual development, it is intended that groups of participants from each school work together on the programme. It is possible, however, for participants from small schools to work collaboratively across a network of linked schools. Participants are supported throughout the programme by an in-school Leadership Coach who is a member of the School's Senior Leadership Team and is able to take responsibility for facilitating participant group learning as the programme unfolds.

The programme takes place over three terms and includes a preparation day for coaches, an induction twilight and three face to face days for participants and a further twilight session for coaches mid way through the programme. The programme culminates in a twilight celebration event when participants have an opportunity to share the learning and development they have experienced and the impact this has had on their Leadership role in school.

The Cohort 1 programme came to a conclusion in late June, early July 2004. Participants, coaches, Headteachers and members of the Affiliated Centre were present at each of the final Celebration events to present certificates and congratulate middle leaders on their successful completion of the programme.

Karen Coulthard, from Cawood Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School near Selby, said "Pupils at the school are already benefiting from my participation on this programme! As a result of my in-school project, we are integrating maths across the curriculum in creative ways. Working with colleagues, and with input from our leadership coach, the programme helped me develop new skills and insight."

Gill Tricoglus, Programme Manager says "A new cohort of 220 participants began the programme in April and we are really pleased to report that a further 396 have enrolled for Cohort 3 which begins in September 2004."

Participants are organised into phase specific groups of approximately 24 middle leaders. Each group works with two tutors throughout the programme, the tutor role being to lead the face to face training and guide the Leadership Coaches in their supportive work with participants throughout the programme.

“We are extremely fortunate in Yorkshire and Humber to have a very strong team of experienced and enthusiastic tutors who have shown a huge commitment to the introduction of this new and exciting programme” comments Gill.

In addition to the face to face learning sessions for participants and coaches, NCSL, as part of the ‘blended learning’ philosophy, have developed a range of innovative on-line learning opportunities for Leading from the Middle, accessible through the ‘Learning Gateway’. These include ‘Learn to Lead’, a range of materials based on current research about leadership, and the ‘Virtual School’ an interactive tool where participants can role play leadership scenarios and see the effects of their virtual actions on the pupils and staff! Participants, coaches and tutors can also access regional and national on-line communities which provide valuable opportunities to engage in discussion with colleagues.

Manohar Raju, Head of Maths at Stocksbridge High School, Sheffield, said “All the components of the programme have worked together to make a significant impact on me; and in turn these will make a difference to students and staff in school. As well as a chance to look at strategic planning across the school, receive support from my coach and our tutors, and completing programme materials online, the programme has enabled me to reflect on my practice as a leader and has also provided the opportunity to talk to colleagues across the region about all sorts of issues concerning education. I am looking forward to monitoring and evaluating the long-term effect of my Leadership Focus, which looks at developing students’ Thinking Skills in Maths.”

The team responsible for LftM at CCDU are Gill Tricoglus, Programme Manager, Naomi Jackson, Programme Administrator and, most recently, Tam Mason, E-Learning Facilitator. The major focus for the team in this first year has been to establish the quality delivery of the programme, for example finding venues that meet the high specification for ICT required by the programme and supporting tutors in the facilitation of a new programme.

The involvement of the Affiliated Centre has been crucial in establishing Leading from the Middle as an important and worthwhile programme in the region. Margaret Christian, the AC Director and the Affiliated Centre Development Group, which consists of representatives from the AC partner LEAs and HEIs, have worked hard to ensure that schools know about the programme and are encouraged to consider the programme as a relevant and essential development opportunity for their middle leaders. We are very pleased to say that by Cohort 3 all of the 15 LEAs in the region will have been represented by participating schools.

The programme is open to all middle leaders in both primary and secondary schools. Further information about Leading from the Middle can be obtained from lftm@ccdu.co.uk.