

## **Lent Rise Primary School**

This case study demonstrates employer partnerships with primary schools and areas where employers can add value.

Brenda Bigland CBE is the long-standing Head Teacher of Lent Rise Primary School in Slough, a school rated Outstanding by Ofsted. She feels that employers can contribute to school performance through school management and the curriculum.

Brenda's call for support in school management, for instance as a school governor or by providing support direct to senior management in the school, includes:

- Experience and support around HR, discipline and legal implications
- Performance assessment, budget and scenario planning
- Experience in changing organisational attitudes and turning trends

Working directly with young people can be just as important:

- Support small groups on reading and numeracy, to foster an enjoyment of learning
- Positive adult role models from outside school and outside education
- Support enterprise and business projects that excite children and link to lesson plans

Studies of life outcomes generally place greater weight on the importance of primary school years than secondary school years – getting it right at primary school, with employers helping to raise aspirations and show how lessons are relevant, means fewer secondary schools playing catch-up.

As smaller organisations with fewer staff, leaders in primary schools are often less able to develop specialities, with less access to employment and management expertise. Where employers and volunteers provide access to specialist advice or previous experience, it can make a real difference.

Brenda has benefited from a business mentor, helping her explore how to have an effective and professional dialogue with employers, and volunteers from the world of employment have supported her staff on teaching business-linked courses and contributed talks on leadership. The following two case studies show in more detail how employers have made a difference.

## **Literacy support in primary schools**

**Drivers Jonas** is an SME with a few hundred employees working in commercial property consultancy. They doubled in size between 2000 and 2010 and have now become part of the Deloitte Group. This case study focuses on their education partnerships prior to joining Deloitte. Over ten years the organisation developed from having very little involvement with education providers near their offices to supporting multiple primaries and running business challenges for secondary schools.

Various inner city primary schools across London. One of these is Queen's Park Primary School, in a deprived area of North West London with an above-average number of learners who do not have English as their primary language.

In 2000, Drivers Jonas built links with schools through the Westminster Action Zone, a medium-term project in the local council to support education-employer partnerships. The council staff helped ensure the two sides understood each others' needs and worked well together. This laid the foundation for Drivers Jonas having independent and sustainable partnerships with the schools, without ongoing involvement from the council.

The school identifies the children who would benefit most from the support and divides them into small groups of one to three children. They tend to be from years three to six (ages 7-11).

- Drivers Jonas publicise the opportunity to staff and managers are encouraged to understand the opportunity. Volunteers pair up and take it in turns to visit the school once a week, substituting for each other as needed. With a maximum travel time of 30m and a literacy session of 20m reading followed by 10m of word games, the time commitment per volunteer is about 1.5 hours a fortnight, during term time, or about 20 hours a year.

Drivers Jonas do not have a dedicated member of staff or department to support this partnership activity. A partner and a trustee allocate some time to talking with the schools to supervise the projects and make the necessary links, and individual volunteers liaise with a named teacher at the school directly. With a certain amount of understand and flexibility in both sides, the scheme works well without formal ongoing management.

The scheme has grown over time and in 2010 has some sixty volunteers working across a range of schools. As Rod Jones, Partner at Drivers Jonas explains, 'Staff enjoy volunteering and build up real relationships with the school and children they support. It's an enjoyable activity to share and discuss at the office – and is particularly appealing to our graduate entrants and has become something we discuss during recruitment.'

- The targeted one-to-one work over an extended period of time can have great effects. The schools have often seen dramatic improvements in the children's English scores (with examples of three sub-levels progress over the year and better than predicted). Spill-over benefits include more motivated children who look forward to meeting their reading partners and engage more positively in school.

- These relationships have often built up over time. For instance, a volunteer at Queen's Park Primary School has gone in to become a long-standing and valued members of its governing body, contributing his expertise in buildings management and effective budgeting and financial controls.

More detail on similar schemes <http://www.employers-guide.org/ways-of-working-with-schools-and-colleges/supporting-the-curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy.aspx>