

**LEARN SHEFFIELD
INDEPENDENT
EVALUATION**

2015-2023



LEARN SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENT EVALUATION 2015-2023

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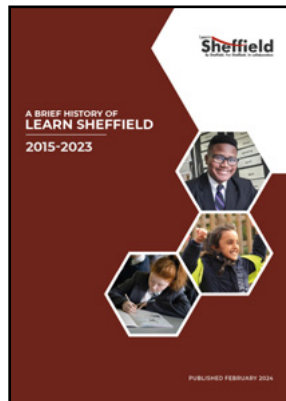
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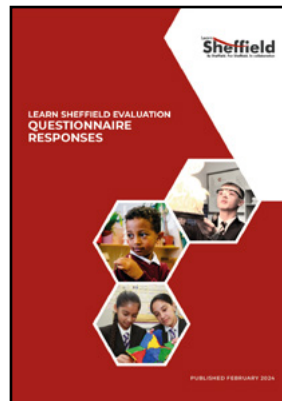
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Executive Summary

This executive summary brings together the findings from an external evaluation of the work of Learn Sheffield.

The scale of engagement with Learn Sheffield has remained very high over the past eight years. Leaders and other stakeholders say that Learn Sheffield continues to successfully foster an ‘excellent, collaborative culture’.

All of the leaders who responded to a questionnaire agreed that Learn Sheffield acts with integrity and reflects the values education settings promote for their children and young people. Leaders typically described Learn Sheffield as an ‘ethical partnership which fosters a real sense of loyalty and fraternity’ and as ‘something we should be proud of.’ Leaders agree that a key strength of Learn Sheffield is that it deeply understands Sheffield. Indeed, 98% of leaders who responded to the questionnaire agree that they would recommend Learn Sheffield to a colleague.

Colleagues working for Learn Sheffield have a wealth of knowledge about the context of the area and about individual schools and trusts. Leaders know that the work of Learn Sheffield is driven by the desire to improve outcomes for children and young people in Sheffield. Leaders have absolute trust in Learn Sheffield and in particular of the integrity shown by the Chief Executive of Learn Sheffield. They are confident that help and support would be found or signposted, adding ‘Learn Sheffield are always willing to be involved, even in the most difficult of times. You are never turned away.’

Learn Sheffield oozes collaboration. Leaders consider Learn Sheffield has been instrumental in ‘keeping many schools working together’ and ‘maintaining partnerships and trust.’ Leaders particularly valued the work of Learn Sheffield during the Covid pandemic.

98% of leaders who responded to the questionnaire agree that they would recommend Learn Sheffield to a colleague.

Learn Sheffield believes that an infrastructure of partnership meetings is essential. The vast majority of leaders who responded to the questionnaire agree, typically commenting that: ‘Learn Sheffield is very proactive in developing a strong infrastructure’ and acts as a ‘vehicle for partnerships.’ Some leaders say partnerships are ‘shaped in the right way.’ On the other hand, others are of the view that it would be beneficial to reconsider the current structure of groups and partnerships, as ‘there seems to be some duplication’, particularly regarding the information shared.

Since Learn Sheffield was formed in 2015, the proportion of good or better settings in Sheffield has improved markedly. The vast majority of school leaders spoken to during the evaluation confirmed the view that Learn Sheffield’s support before and during Ofsted inspections is excellent. They talked about the positive impact of Learn Sheffield through

providing support and challenge for senior and middle leaders during school reviews, as well as a strong professional development offer for example, in particular subject areas. Leaders were almost unanimous in their view that the work of Learn Sheffield contributes positively to school improvement and therefore to rising inspection outcomes.

Despite the very impressive Ofsted trend, pupils' outcomes in Sheffield largely remain below the national average. Data continues to be forensically analysed by the Learn Sheffield team with a view to identifying and addressing any underlying trends. Analysis shows that priorities need to focus primarily on supporting leaders of various settings to address common challenges, such as: improving attendance; helping all pupils do as well as they can, particularly disadvantaged children and those with SEND; improving pupils' outcomes and improving behaviour.

Leaders were almost unanimous in their view that the work of Learn Sheffield contributes positively to school improvement and therefore to inspection outcomes.

The development and training programme offered by Learn Sheffield has developed significantly over the past eight years. Analysis of the numbers of settings accessing Learn Sheffield training suggests leaders consider that the training offered is helping to improve key aspects of their work. Nevertheless, leaders say that it would be beneficial if Learn Sheffield planned its CPD programme much earlier in the school year. It is suggested that Learn Sheffield routinely canvasses the views of setting leaders, Multi-academy Trust (MAT) leaders and the Learn Sheffield Improvement Partner Team (LSIP) team to ensure the CPD programme aligns with the key MAT, individual school and Sheffield priorities and to avoid replicating training already scheduled.

Learn Sheffield is currently reviewing its subscription model to ensure it is financially viable and to ensure CPD and in-school support provided continues to meet the needs of its subscribing settings. As Learn Sheffield reviews the structure and shape of its work and its financial viability, it is important it maintains and continues to build on its many strengths. Succession plans need to be in place to consider the 'future proofing' and leadership of Learn Sheffield. It is vital that the leadership structure of Learn Sheffield going forward has enough capacity to respond to future opportunities and the need for strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation of the school improvement services (including requests from other local areas) and has more distributed leadership. It is recommended that Learn Sheffield continues to build both its Improvement Partner team and its team of school-based Support Partners, through rigorous recruitment and induction processes.

Learn Sheffield continues to deliver very well on its motto, 'By Sheffield. For Sheffield. In collaboration.'

Introduction & Methodology

This report sets out the findings from an external evaluation of key aspects of the work of Learn Sheffield, following on from the [Peer Review](#) in May 2018. A range of review activities were conducted over the second half of the Autumn Term 2023. These were designed to evaluate the impact Learn Sheffield has had on education settings in Sheffield, since it was formed in Summer 2015. The purpose of the evaluation is to help Learn Sheffield ensure its improvement priorities are the right ones for education settings, children and young people in Sheffield and to help Learn Sheffield check that the structure and shape of its work is relevant for the next stage of its development. Account was taken of the views of education setting leaders, MAT leaders, governors and other stakeholders.

Review activities focused on the following questions:

1. Have Ofsted outcomes for education settings in Sheffield improved since 2015, including what leaders say about the extent to which the support provided by Learn Sheffield has supported them with any aspect of the Ofsted process in their setting?
2. Have outcomes for Sheffield children and young people improved since 2015, including what leaders say about the extent to which the support provided by Learn Sheffield has supported them with raising standards in their setting?
3. What has been the impact of school improvement offered by Learn Sheffield, with regards to:
 - 3.1. in-school support provided, including how effectively the related recommendations of the Peer Review in 2018 have been addressed
 - 3.2. the CPD provided
 - 3.3. Strategy Funded Programmes, focusing on the curriculum and teaching
 - 3.4. evaluating what case studies of subscribing settings tell us about the impact of Learn Sheffield's work?
4. What do leaders, governors and other stakeholders tell us about how well Learn Sheffield delivers on its motto: 'By Sheffield. For Sheffield. In Collaboration.'

The following colleagues contributed to this evaluation:

Sir David Carter
Dame Christine Gilbert
Fiona Gowers
Helen Lane

The following activities were conducted as part of the evaluation:

- Analysis of Ofsted inspections in Sheffield 2015 – 2023
- Analysis of Pupils’ Outcomes in Sheffield 2015 – 2023
- Feedback from setting leaders, governors and other stakeholders
- Analysis of the 102 responses to the questionnaire sent out to setting leaders and MAT leaders, the 47 responses to the questionnaire for governors and the 20 responses to the questionnaire for other stakeholders
- Discussion with the Chief Executive of Learn Sheffield, LSIPs, the Finance and Operations Director, the Governance Lead and other colleagues from Learn Sheffield
- Case Studies of subscribing settings
- A range of documentation was considered, including: Peer Review of Learn Sheffield (May 2018) led by Christine Gilbert; Learn Sheffield Position Statement (January 2023); Learn Sheffield Board CEO Update (Summer 2023); Sheffield Performance Analysis 2023; Education Strategies Funded Programmes evaluation (September 2023). Reference was also made to the Learn Sheffield website.

The team would like to thank everyone at Learn Sheffield for their assistance with the evaluation and thank those interviewed and completing questionnaires for their time.



What does Learn Sheffield do?

Learn Sheffield is a not-for-profit school company owned jointly by Sheffield schools (80%) and Sheffield City Council (20%). Learn Sheffield was formed in the summer of 2015. It is a School Company, which is governed by the [School Companies Regulations](#) and is limited by guarantee. Any publicly funded Sheffield school, academy or college can join Learn Sheffield, and those settings own an equal share of eighty percent of Learn Sheffield. The funding for Learn Sheffield comes from traded school improvement services, a range of funded projects and commissioned school improvement activities. A key function of Learn Sheffield is to provide a city infrastructure for partnership working, as reflected in its motto: 'By Sheffield. For Sheffield. In Collaboration.'

The vast majority of settings in the city currently work with Learn Sheffield through a subscription package. This offer includes in-school support from an LSIP and access to a range of training opportunities. Learn Sheffield also currently carries out a number of commissioned school improvement activities on behalf of Sheffield Local Authority, such as: monitoring and moderation of KS2 writing and SATs, involvement in support for Ofsted inspections and headteacher recruitment. When Learn Sheffield was formed in 2015, Sheffield City Council (SCC) provided 95.9% of Learn Sheffield's funding linked to a broader range of commissioned activities. However, funding from SCC has reduced markedly over the past eight years. SCC currently provides 6.6% of Learn Sheffield's funding.

The scale of schools' engagement with Learn Sheffield has remained very high over the past eight years. This has been accompanied by an upward trend in the levels of service that have been purchased over this time. In 2022/23, 91.2% of settings in Sheffield subscribed, with around a quarter of those purchasing a larger package than they had in previous years. This year (2023/24), the proportion of schools subscribing has dropped (to 87.5%). The drop can largely be attributed to one MAT opting not to subscribe this year; removing seven schools from the overall total of subscribing settings. The average level of engagement over the past six years of the subscription offer has remained high in every sector; marginally higher in the primary (88.8%) and special (89.45%) sectors, than the secondary (83.1%) sector.



It seems clear, from leaders' and stakeholders' feedback, that Learn Sheffield continues to successfully foster an 'excellent, collaborative culture', as recognised at the time of the Peer Review. Leaders who made their views known were glowing in their praise for the team at Learn Sheffield, typically commenting: 'the support and responsiveness of colleagues from Learn Sheffield has been invaluable.' Leaders are very appreciative of the whole Learn Sheffield team, 'they can't do enough for you.'

Leader after leader expressed their immense appreciation for the 'professional and personal support' provided by Learn Sheffield's Chief Executive. He is seen as being visionary and inspirational. Likewise, leaders spoke very positively about the work of the LSIPs. Leaders say LSIPs are 'greatly trusted and valued' and 'very focused and thorough'. Leaders appreciate the way LSIPs foster very positive relationships with those working in schools and adapt their approach to meet the individual needs of each setting. Leaders value the extensive local knowledge of many colleagues working for Learn Sheffield, which helps them understand the unique context of each setting.

More detail about the history and activity of Learn Sheffield can be found in [**A Brief History of Learn Sheffield 2015-2023**](#), which has been published as a supporting document for this evaluation.



PART ONE

WHAT IMPACT HAS LEARN SHEFFIELD HAD?

OFSTED outcomes

1. Have Ofsted outcomes for education settings in Sheffield improved since 2015, including what leaders say about the extent to which the support provided by Learn Sheffield has supported them with any aspect of the Ofsted process in their setting?

Over the lifetime of Learn Sheffield, the proportion of settings judged good or better by Ofsted has improved markedly. The city's performance relative to all schools nationally has improved by 10.7% points over the past eight years. When Learn Sheffield was formed in 2015, there were fewer good or better settings in Sheffield than found nationally. At the time of the Peer Review in 2018 inspection outcomes in Sheffield had improved, although the proportion of good or better settings in Sheffield remained lower than that found nationally (5.3% below national). By the end of 2022-23, the proportion of good or better settings in Sheffield increased still further to slightly above that found nationally (+0.9%). When evaluating the performance of education settings in Sheffield over the past eight years it is useful to compare Ofsted outcomes in Sheffield with the Ofsted outcomes of the eight Core Cities namely: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield. In September 2015, Sheffield's ranking was eighth out of the eight Core Cities. By 2019 Sheffield ranked fourth. However, in September 2023 Sheffield's ranking had improved markedly to second out of the eight Core Cities.

When the trend of Ofsted outcomes since 2015 in Sheffield is considered, as the [Learn Sheffield Position Statement](#) reports, it seems reasonable to suggest 'that the quality of education available to Sheffield children and young people is currently the strongest that it has ever been.'

The vast majority of school leaders spoken to during the evaluation confirmed the view that Learn Sheffield's support before and during Ofsted inspections is excellent. When asked, one headteacher said, 'Ofsted outcomes have improved because of Learn Sheffield.' Others talked about the positive impact of Learn Sheffield through providing support and challenge for senior and middle leaders during school reviews, as well as a strong professional development offer for example, in particular subject areas. Leaders were almost unanimous in their view that the work of Learn Sheffield contributes positively to school improvement and therefore to inspection outcomes.

Pupils' outcomes

2. Have outcomes for Sheffield children and young people improved since 2015, including what leaders say about the extent to which the support provided by Learn Sheffield has supported them with raising standards in their setting?

In comparison with other Core Cities Sheffield outcomes improved up to 2019, but outcomes have declined somewhat since the pandemic and currently do not compare as favourably in some measures relative to the outcomes of other Core Cities. In 2023, 64.9% of children in Sheffield achieved a good level of development compared to 67.2% nationally. National rankings for KS1 have generally worsened since 2016; although rankings improved slightly for Year 1 and Year 2 phonics. At KS1, Sheffield's position amongst Core Cities has declined from third place in 2016 to fifth in 2023. At KS2, 56.9% pupils in Sheffield achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined in 2023, compared to 59.8% nationally. 2023 KS2 outcomes put Sheffield at fifth place relative to the KS2 outcomes of other Core Cities; compared to being in third place 2016 – 2019.

At KS4, Sheffield's position has improved slightly in national rankings and overall gaps with national have reduced since 2019. Sheffield's performance is overall slightly above average for Core Cities. Progress 8 has improved but has not returned to the 2019 performance. At KS5, the average points score for A levels and technical levels is broadly in line with the national average and above that of the Core Cities average. However, the average points score for applied qualifications was below the national and Core Cities average.

The Peer Review in 2018 commended Learn Sheffield for its 'mature and considered approach to the use of data...which is put to good use in analysing performance within individual schools and across Sheffield.' Since the Peer Review, Learn Sheffield has continued to enhance the quality of the data analysis package it sends out to subscribing settings. The data package is based on performance data provided by the Local Authority. The Peer Review makes reference to the 'excellent quality of the data analysis'. It is clear from questionnaire responses that leaders value the data package sent out by Learn Sheffield.

Despite the very impressive Ofsted trend, pupils' outcomes in Sheffield largely remain below national averages. The school data package is forensically analysed by the Learn Sheffield Chief Executive, Improvement Partners and lead analyst with a view to identifying and addressing any trends and their underlying causes. Declining levels of attendance since 2019, in line with schools nationally, has been identified as a key causal factor. Analysis of the 2023 outcomes shows that the standards attained by pupils with good levels of attendance (95+%), are typically much higher than the standards attained by pupils who attend less frequently. The Learn Sheffield team are fully aware that further improving pupils' outcomes and also attendance in each sector need to remain key priorities for Sheffield.

The [Sheffield Performance Analysis 2023](#) identifies trails for further analysis, including Insight Reports into [Attendance](#), [SEND](#) and [Outcomes](#). Learn Sheffield is in the process of conducting further analysis to identify factors which do, or might, affect the outcomes in Sheffield in a different way from those in other Core Cities which appear to be attaining and achieving more highly, such as: the nature of disadvantage; the SEND profile; social and health indicators, pupil mobility and the specific make-up of the school population in Sheffield, compared to that of other Core Cities.



School improvement

3. What has been the impact of school improvement offered by Learn Sheffield?

3.1 What has been the impact of school improvement offered by Learn Sheffield, with regards to the in-school support provided, including how effectively the recommendations of the Peer Review in 2018 have been addressed?

Analysis of the trend of Ofsted outcomes provides clear evidence of improved performance in Sheffield over the past eight years. Pupils' outcomes have also shown some improvement over this period, although they remain below average. It is hard to attribute these improvements solely to the influence and activities of Learn Sheffield. However, it must be acknowledged that during this period the vast majority of education settings in Sheffield subscribed to Learn Sheffield. As described earlier in this report, school leaders speak confidently of the impact of Learn Sheffield's work on positive inspection outcomes. During this period Learn Sheffield also provided multifaceted support to education settings, as they faced lengthy periods of disruption and many challenges due to the Covid pandemic. Leaders' views on how effectively education settings were supported by Learn Sheffield during the Covid pandemic is included in section 3.4 of this report.

The scale of engagement with Learn Sheffield has remained very high over the past eight years, suggesting leaders of education settings consider subscribing to Learn Sheffield is beneficial.

A range of review activities were conducted to help gauge the difference Learn Sheffield has made to education settings in Sheffield over the past eight years. For example, a questionnaire was sent to all education settings in Sheffield, to governors, and to other stakeholders asking for their views on the extent to which support from Learn Sheffield has helped with key aspects of their school improvement priorities. Discussions were held with senior leaders, MAT leaders, the Learn Sheffield Chief Executive, the LSIPs, the Finance and Operations Director, the Governance Lead and other Learn Sheffield colleagues. Account was taken of the numbers accessing Learn Sheffield development and training and the course evaluations completed after training events. Review activities also considered how effectively the recommendations from the Peer Review (2018) have been addressed.

Leaders who made their views known commended the Learn Sheffield Chief Executive and LSIPs for their 'respectful and professional approach', when working with schools in difficult circumstances. Leaders say the support and challenge provided was always with the intention of 'making things better.'

The vast majority of questionnaires are overwhelmingly positive. Indeed, 98% leaders who responded to the questionnaire agree they would recommend Learn Sheffield to a colleague. More detailed information can be found in the [Questionnaire Responses document](#).

School improvement services are Learn Sheffield's core activity and have grown and developed over the past eight years, particularly to accommodate the significant increase in the number of MATs over the past eight years. The Learn Sheffield subscription offer has become increasingly more flexible to enable an individual setting or a MAT to build a school improvement package to meet their specific needs, from a wider menu of school improvement options.

When working with an individual school or MAT, LSIPs aim to provide 'external eyes' to help ensure their self-evaluation is accurate and to support leaders to determine how to prioritise and plan for improvement. The intention is that improvement activities are carried out alongside colleagues rather than 'done to' them. Most settings work with Learn Sheffield through a subscription package; offering a wide range of School Improvement Services. A bespoke package of support and training is agreed with each setting.

The vast majority of leaders who responded to the questionnaire say that they consider Learn Sheffield has helped them improve their curriculum and raise standards.

The scale of engagement with Learn Sheffield has remained very high over the past eight years, suggesting leaders of education settings consider subscribing to Learn Sheffield is beneficial. The vast majority of leaders who made their views known during the evaluation say input from Learn Sheffield helps them gain a clearer understanding of their school's strengths and areas for development. They value the way that school reviews are carried out to both support and challenge leaders and say reviews offer external validation. Strong relationships and trust are key to the school improvement model employed by Learn Sheffield. A unique selling point of the work of Learn Sheffield is the high quality of the colleagues employed to carry out the improvement work. Leaders say they greatly value the 'knowledge, experience and credibility of colleagues who work for Learn Sheffield.' They have unique individual expertise which is used flexibly to bring about change and improvement in Sheffield schools. Leaders recognise that working with Learn Sheffield on school improvement builds their own confidence and knowledge. Many leaders made reference to the relationship of 'mutual trust' that is successfully fostered between Learn Sheffield and schools and how much they appreciated the 'comprehensive and flexible' offer provided by Learn Sheffield.

The Peer Review in 2018 recommended that Learn Sheffield builds on its many strengths by having a more explicit and ambitious focus on higher standards and a greater emphasis on the curriculum. Since the Peer Review in 2018, CPD and in-school support have focused primarily on helping leaders at different levels to improve the quality of the curriculum – overall and in particular subjects. Many leaders agree that input from Learn Sheffield has been key in helping to improve their curriculum. 87% of leaders who responded to the questionnaire agree that information, in-school support and training provided by Learn Sheffield has supported school leaders to improve the curriculum in their setting, and 85% responded positively to Learn Sheffield’s input in supporting school leaders to raise standards.

The second recommendation from the Peer Review was to build and ‘strengthen system leadership’ (a team of school-based support partners) to support improvement and reduce reliance on the small central team within Learn Sheffield. Learn Sheffield benefits from a growing number of school-based ‘support partners’; often bringing key specialist knowledge and expertise to complement Learn Sheffield’s CPD offer, ‘in areas such as the RHSE training, for example. The Chief Executive is looking to build up a larger team of support partners, to support and enhance Learn Sheffield’s school improvement offer. In doing so, it is important to ensure support partners undergo rigorous recruitment and support to develop their work. Clear quality assurance processes need to be in place to ensure that the positive views leaders have about the quality of the service provided by Learn Sheffield is upheld. It is suggested that support partners are recruited to support particular aspects of Learn Sheffield’s work, such as the different elements of the CPD Programme and subject leader networks.

Another recommendation from the Peer Review was for Learn Sheffield to do more to demonstrate progress and impact through: the greater use of metrics and targets; forensic analysis of progress and performance within and across localities; use of case studies of impact and the evaluation of the partnership itself. The Learn Sheffield core team analyse performance data and Ofsted outcomes on a regular basis and try to ensure this informs on-going in-school support, the training offer and ‘point of need’ support in schools. The core team are typically quick to respond to any learning from national developments in the field of education, learning from recent inspections and areas of vulnerability that may come to light in individual settings.

It is clear that Learn Sheffield has a very reflective culture. The Learn Sheffield Chief Executive conducts a one-to-one conversation with every subscribing organisation during the summer term each year. This provides the opportunity to check each setting’s views on the effectiveness of the Learn Sheffield support they have received over the course of the year and to discuss their needs for the following year. This personable and flexible approach is highly valued by sector leaders.

3.2 What has been the impact of the school improvement offered by Learn Sheffield with regards to the CPD provided?

The development and training programme offered by Learn Sheffield has developed significantly since the Peer Review. Analysis of the numbers of settings accessing training suggests leaders consider that the offer is helping to improve key aspects of their work. For example, 98 settings accessed the Learn Sheffield development and training on 'early reading and phonics' in 2019-20, which was followed by a half-day review of the quality of education in early reading and phonics in each school. As one leader reported: 'I feel that Learn Sheffield are well informed and always give a balanced perspective'.

Learn Sheffield are currently offering a Strategic Leadership Programme. The uptake of Learn Sheffield development and training continues to be favourable; suggesting that the focus of the offer aligns well with school improvement needs. For example, two cohorts of ten settings are currently accessing the senior leaders' training and another two cohorts of ten schools are starting in the Spring Term; 24 settings are currently accessing the curriculum middle leaders training, which includes an in-school follow-up visit to each school; 46 schools are currently accessing the course for attendance leaders; 29 schools are accessing the SEND training and 29 schools are accessing the safeguarding training.

Most of the development and training provided by Learn Sheffield is delivered in-house. Learn Sheffield also identifies key contributors from the world of education, for example to deliver on the curriculum and lesson 'walk thrus'. School leaders speak positively about the CPD offer from Learn Sheffield. They say that the offer is planned strategically to address current issues in schools, such as the courses on pupils with SEND, attendance, e-safety, the PSHCE curriculum and safeguarding. Professional development for middle leaders has been developed and is being received positively. One leader described the quality of courses and opportunities provided as, 'brilliant'. Leaders do recognise that there is some variability in the quality of the offer – but say that CPD delivered by Learn Sheffield's team reflects their excellent knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, leaders say it would be helpful to be made fully aware of the content of the Learn Sheffield CPD programme at an earlier stage in the school year, preferably before each setting completes their budget. This would help leaders check the CPD programme matches setting priorities and staff training needs, as well as key priorities for Sheffield.

The focus of leader briefings and seminars has been adapted over the past eight years in response to the needs of schools. This year leader briefings focus on providing local updates, rather than national keynote inputs. For example, recent leader briefings include input from the Sheffield Director of Public Health, Huntingdon Research School and Learn Sheffield partners, such as, Eat Smart Sheffield and Create Sheffield. LSIPs work hard to keep schools well informed about national developments and key learning from Ofsted inspections. The numbers of schools accessing leader briefings has increased significantly suggesting that leaders find the briefings helpful.

3.3 What has been the impact of school improvement offered by the Learn Sheffield, with regards to the Strategy Funded Programmes, focusing particularly on the curriculum and teaching?

Learn Sheffield worked with SCC on the development of a new Education Strategy from the autumn term of 2019. This strategy was delayed somewhat, due to the onset of the Covid pandemic. A series of funding programmes were subsequently launched in 2021-22, as part of the SCC Covid recovery plan.

This evaluation focuses primarily on the impact of two of the programmes, which relate to the curriculum and teaching. Both programmes were seen as a way of bringing best practice to the city and helping to ensure many Sheffield schools had access to high calibre, nationally renowned speakers. Some helpful feedback is provided in course evaluations, such as highlighting the importance of developing oracy and exploring ways of developing a more diverse and inclusive curriculum. However, at this stage it is unclear what the overall long-term impact of the two programmes has been as there has been very little formal evaluation and in some cases, the programme does not appear to have connected closely to the wider school improvement agenda within the setting. Each programme also had to run in a modified form 2021-23, due to some overall funding implications and having to adhere to each school's Covid policy and procedures.

One leader said the Strategy Funded Programme provided the opportunity to discuss the curriculum with other colleagues across settings and that the positive impact of the school's work on further improving the curriculum was recognised in the most recent Ofsted inspection. However, feedback from leaders has been variable. Others considered that although it was very helpful to have access to the materials provided, overall impact was less in-depth and so not long reaching. Feedback from leaders suggests that future development and training programmes would benefit from more rigorous long term strategic planning, to ensure the programmes monitoring processes are fully implemented.



3.4 Evaluating what case studies of subscribing schools tell us about the impact of Learn Sheffield's work?

Case studies of three schools were conducted, to help gauge the impact of Learn Sheffield's work with each school. Account was taken of: feedback from school leaders; feedback from Learn Sheffield colleagues and Learn Sheffield reports; Ofsted reports and data trends since 2018. The three case studies focused on:

- learning from a setting that has improved in performance since the Peer Review
- learning from a setting where the focus of the work has primarily been to improve the curriculum and raise standards, in response to the related recommendation from the 2018 Peer Review.
- learning from a setting that has declined in performance since the Peer Review.

The vast majority of education settings in Sheffield are good or better. The first case study focused on a school that has improved in performance (according to their Ofsted outcome) since the Peer Review. The LSIP supported the setting leaders in identifying areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. The in-school support focused primarily on helping leaders to thoroughly overhaul the school's curriculum and to ensure the curriculum in each subject was well-sequenced. In doing so, leaders were encouraged to take account of the findings of the Ofsted research reviews for each subject.

The headteacher reports that the LSIP was very knowledgeable and built excellent relationships, adding that leaders and staff found working with the LSIP 'very motivating and inspirational'. Analysis of the school's data trend confirms improved outcomes at every key stage. Ofsted findings confirm that marked improvements had been made to the curriculum.

The Peer Review recommended that Learn Sheffield had a more explicit and ambitious focus on higher standards and improving the curriculum. The second case study was selected as the scope of the Learn Sheffield work focused specifically on these areas. A review of the Learn Sheffield reports relating to this setting demonstrates a rigorous approach to supporting setting leaders to improve the curriculum, whilst maintaining a constant focus on higher standards. LSIP visits focused on further improving the quality of education in six different subjects. Recommendations for improvement identified at one LSIP visit were subsequently followed up in following visits.

Analysis of the data trend shows standards improved. The most recent Ofsted inspection highlights many strengths to the school's curriculum, citing that the knowledge curriculum leaders want pupils to learn 'is carefully sequenced across all subjects.'

Analysis of the small number of settings in Sheffield that have been downgraded (according to their Ofsted outcome) since the Peer Review in 2018, shows that almost

half of these inspection outcomes relate to the downgrading of historic outstanding schools; reflecting the national picture. The third case study focused on a setting in Sheffield that was downgraded at some stage since the Peer Review. Evidence confirms that improvement activities tended to focus primarily on working with leaders, as opposed to focusing on the implementation and impact of the curriculum throughout school. Analysis of data and attendance trends showed a decline in standards in some subjects. However, school improvement visits did not appear to pick up on the overall vulnerability of the school. The third case study highlights the possible tension between doing what a setting might want, as ‘the customer’, whilst still being able to provide the right level of challenge to weaker aspects of the school’s work. The third case study highlights the importance of having clear channels of communication and time for regular update meetings involving all colleagues who work with a particular setting.

In view of the extremely positive trend in Ofsted outcomes over the past few years and very positive feedback from so many leaders, it seems reasonable to suggest that Learn Sheffield does provide effective support to leaders in their school improvement drive. This is also backed up by the first two case studies. The issues arising from the atypical third case study were explored extensively by Learn Sheffield at the time and continue to inform its school improvement practice.



By Sheffield. For Sheffield. In Collaboration

4. What do subscribing settings tell us about how well Learn Sheffield delivers on its motto: 'By Sheffield. For Sheffield. In Collaboration.'?

All of the leaders who responded to the questionnaire agreed that Learn Sheffield acts with integrity and reflects the values education settings have for their children and young people. Leaders typically described Learn Sheffield as an 'ethical partnership which fosters a real sense of loyalty' and as 'something we should be proud of.' Leaders agree that a key strength of Learn Sheffield is that it deeply understands Sheffield. Colleagues working for Learn Sheffield have a wealth of knowledge about the context of the area and about individual schools and trusts. Leaders know that the work of Learn Sheffield is driven by the desire to improve outcomes for children and young people in Sheffield. Questionnaire responses indicate that the vast majority of leaders have absolute trust in Learn Sheffield and in particular of the integrity shown by the CEO of Learn Sheffield. For example, leaders say that if they needed help with any issue or problem, they would call Learn Sheffield. They are confident that help and support would be found or signposted, adding 'Learn Sheffield are always willing to be involved, even in the most difficult of times. You are never turned away.'

Learn Sheffield continues to provide an infrastructure and organisation for Sheffield schools to work together and a source of on-going guidance and support. Many school leaders typically commented that the support provided by Learn Sheffield during the Covid pandemic was 'remarkable.' They consider that Learn Sheffield rapidly responded to set up invaluable on-line meetings with Public Health, so school leaders were able to keep abreast of any key messages. 82% of schools who responded to the questionnaire said that they highly valued or valued the support that Learn Sheffield provided during the Covid pandemic. Indeed, one leader commented: 'I don't think we would have 'survived' the pandemic without Learn Sheffield! I wonder how other cities coped who didn't already have an organisation already in situ and best placed to coordinate many aspects, in partnership with the Local Authority.'

Learn Sheffield oozes collaboration. Leaders consider Learn Sheffield has been instrumental in 'keeping many schools working together' and 'maintaining partnerships and trust.' Learn Sheffield-led primary and secondary headteacher partnerships bring together citywide leaders. MAT partnership working is in its infancy. Leaders enjoy working alongside their colleagues in these partnerships, although it will be important going forward to ensure good attendance with consistently useful agendas. Leaders would value the attendance of the Local Authority at partnership meetings. Learn Sheffield has been described as the 'glue' that holds education in the city together, playing a key part in 'retaining cohesion across the city and preventing fragmentation.'

Learn Sheffield believes that an infrastructure of partnership meetings is essential. The vast majority of leaders who responded to the questionnaire agree, typically commenting that: 'Learn Sheffield is very proactive in developing a strong infrastructure' and acts as a 'vehicle for partnerships.' Leaders made reference to Learn Sheffield's role in helping to foster a common sense of shared convictions across the city; in providing the opportunity to 'grapple with the same issues together'. Some leaders say partnerships are 'shaped in the right way'. On the other hand, some are of the view that it would be beneficial to reconsider the current structure of groups and partnerships, as 'there seems to be some duplication', particularly regarding the information shared.

The Peer Review recommended that Learn Sheffield should give a harder edge to its intervention model, particularly through more robust challenge in the localities so poor progress and performance do not run on for too long. The role of localities has changed somewhat since the Peer Review and as such localities are not so involved in providing robust challenge to poor performance. This is partly due to the increase in the numbers of education settings that have changed to academy status. Localities are no longer in receipt of additional funding from Learn Sheffield (via the SCC Commission) towards their school improvement work and a Learn Sheffield Improvement Partner is no longer linked to each locality. Nevertheless, localities are still in receipt of SEND funding and many leaders say the localities structure is valuable in that it provides a city-wide infrastructure and helps to foster collaborative working. Leaders say they value the Chief Executive's contributions to the meetings, particularly in sharing up-to-date information.

Learn Sheffield offers a range of governance services, which include: access to information, support and guidance; a phone helpline and email support. Education settings can also book onto a range of governor training and subscribe to clerking services. Feedback on the governance services provided is largely positive. 89% of those who responded to the questionnaire would recommend Learn Sheffield. One experienced chair of governors typically commented that: 'The Governance Service is brilliant. Members of the governance team are very helpful and can't do enough for you.' The success of the governance service can be seen in the growing number of settings subscribing to the governance service.

Learn Sheffield is currently involved in clerking 330 meetings each term. Some of the clerking is seen as being of very high calibre. However, feedback on some of the clerking was not as positive. Learn Sheffield has already recognised that some clerks would benefit from more in-depth training, particularly in helping them support governing bodies to be compliant in their work. As a result, Learn Sheffield have developed a comprehensive recruitment, induction and monitoring programme as it increases its team of clerks, in response to the 25% growth in demand for clerking services over this year alone. For example, all clerks have the opportunity to access termly training sessions, conduct a skills audit, supported by a Governance Officer and to share best practice with

more experienced colleagues at regular peer learning workshops.

Questionnaire responses indicate that CPD for governors is valued, particularly by leaders in maintained schools. However, some trust leaders felt that although governance training is considered a strength in the main, the governance model being used as the basis for training is not aligned tightly enough with MAT governance. It was suggested that MAT governance leads could be commissioned to develop a training programme tailored more specifically to the requirements of MAT governance. Some governors also said it would be beneficial to hold governance training in different parts of Sheffield to try and ensure it is accessible for all.



Learn Sheffield works with a range of partners to deliver support and a range of initiatives or projects for the city of Sheffield. For example, the Inclusion Taskforce provides advice and guidance to help providers meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. Leaders, who made their views known, made reference to the ‘lingering impact’ of the Inclusion Taskforce. Other projects and partners, include: the Sheffield SAFE Taskforce; the Racial Equity Programme; Create Sheffield and Eat Smart Sheffield.

Not only does Learn Sheffield foster strong collaboration within the city, but also forges links to support its own development and that of education more widely across and beyond Sheffield. For example, Learn Sheffield is a founding member of the ‘Area based Education Partnerships Association’ (AEPA); an association of over 30 education partnerships across England. The association provides the opportunity to share experiences and ideas; ultimately aiming to have a policy voice canvassing for the good of children and young people. Plans are in place for a growth in Learn Sheffield’s school improvement activity outside Sheffield with local partners, non-Sheffield based MATs and individual schools within the region. For example, the Learn Sheffield development and training offer is currently shared with some schools and settings in a neighbouring local authority and Learn Sheffield delivers school improvement services for a number of settings outside Sheffield.

Some leaders report that teacher recruitment and retention continues to be a challenge across the city as it is in many areas. They consider there is a role for Learn Sheffield and school leaders, to work alongside those running Initial Teacher Training programmes to encourage teachers to embark on a successful and sustained teaching career in Sheffield.

A questionnaire was sent out to key stakeholders of Learn Sheffield, such as representatives from: Sheffield City Council and Public Health; a range of partners who work with Learn Sheffield (based within Sheffield and outside Sheffield) and also from other school-based partnerships (based outside Sheffield). All stakeholders who responded to the questionnaire said their overall impressions of Learn Sheffield are positive; typically describing Learn Sheffield as: ‘a highly professional organisation built on deep moral purpose.’ Stakeholders commented that the Learn Sheffield Chief Executive and Improvement Partners are very impressive and bring a lot of credibility. However, it was suggested that it would be beneficial to expand the staff team to enable Learn Sheffield to ‘do even more good work’.

Stakeholders who responded to the questionnaire typically commented that Learn Sheffield greatly facilitates school improvement and enables the sharing of good practice and joined up working.

Stakeholders who responded to the questionnaire typically commented that Learn Sheffield greatly facilitates school improvement and enables the sharing of good practice and joined up working. One stakeholder added that having access to a single point of contact for schools, such as that provided by Learn Sheffield helped them to engage with schools more effectively and better understand school’s needs. Another stakeholder commented that working with Learn Sheffield helped to bring ‘projects to life’ for the benefit of children and young people in Sheffield.

The Chief Executive is key to the delivery of its motto- By Sheffield. For Sheffield. In Collaboration. and in engendering the trust and respect of education professionals in Sheffield and beyond. He is seen as being visionary and inspirational. The team who support Learn Sheffield are highly regarded, as are the colleagues who work directly with schools. In order that Learn Sheffield continues to deliver on its motto, the board of Learn Sheffield will need to address the issue of succession planning. It is also important for the board to consider the potential challenges of having enough capacity if Learn Sheffield gets involved in issues that could be considered ‘beyond its size and scale’ – such as endeavouring to drive a city-wide multi-agency strategy to improve attendance.

PART TWO

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE SHAPE OF LEARN SHEFFIELD?

Overview

The vast majority of leaders, governors and stakeholders are overwhelmingly positive about the difference Learn Sheffield has made to education settings in Sheffield over the past eight years. Leaders typically say that future priorities need to focus primarily on supporting setting leaders to address common challenges, such as: improving attendance; helping all pupils do as well as they can, particularly disadvantaged children and those with SEND; improving pupils' outcomes and improving behaviour.

Learn Sheffield continues to hone the data tool it sends to individual schools and MATs and is forensic in its analysis of pupils' outcomes at every phase. It is suggested the Learn Sheffield continues to conduct further data analysis to identify factors which do, or might, affect the outcomes in Sheffield in a different way for the Core Cities which appear to be attaining and achieving more highly. This may help setting leaders as they focus on supporting all pupils, particularly disadvantaged children and those with SEND to reach their full potential.

Leaders say they value being part of the strategic vision for the education of children in Sheffield through their membership of the Learn Sheffield Board and the Strategic School Improvement Board. Some leaders suggest it would be advantageous to rotate board membership more frequently to ensure a range of different voices can be heard, especially when considering key issues of importance to education settings. Learn Sheffield continues to carry out some commissioned school improvement activities on behalf of Sheffield Local Authority. Many discussions with leaders highlighted the importance of Learn Sheffield continuing to work alongside the local authority as a catalyst for improvement, ensuring lines of responsibility are clear to all.

The Peer Review recommendation, to produce a strategy for financial sustainability, was not a feature of this report. However, several colleagues spoke about the very positive impact of the Finance and Operations Director in bringing 'greater structural resilience'. It must be acknowledged that Learn Sheffield continues to operate within a very tight funding model, which allows for very little spare capacity indeed. It is clear that a balance needs to be struck between operating a school-based model of school improvement, whilst ensuring commercial viability.

Of all the components of the Learn Sheffield subscription, leaders who responded to the questionnaire say that they rate the LSIP days (deployed on site) the most highly. The LSIP team is to be commended for the level of support it continues to provide, despite being such a small team. Nevertheless, the challenges of meeting the requirements of the school-based subscription days, alongside commissioned school improvement activities, leaves very little time, if any, for the induction, training and quality assurance of LSIPs. Keeping good levels of communication amongst all members of the LSIP team and

between the LSIPs and the wider Learn Sheffield team is also very difficult, as the LSIPs' time is largely spent working independently in schools. Several stakeholders identified the need to expand the team of improvement partners and expressed some concern that improvement partners were overstretched. Learn Sheffield is currently reviewing its subscription model to ensure it is financially viable and to ensure CPD and in-school support provided continues to meet the needs of its subscribing settings.

As Learn Sheffield reviews the structure and shape of its work, it is important it maintains and continues to build on its many strengths. Succession plans need to be in place to consider the 'future proofing' and leadership of Learn Sheffield. It is vital that the leadership structure of Learn Sheffield going forward has enough capacity to respond to future opportunities and the need for strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation of the school improvement services (including requests from other local areas) and is not so reliant on particular individuals, such as the Chief Executive. It is recommended that Learn Sheffield continues to build both its Improvement Partner team and its team of school-based Support Partners, through rigorous recruitment and induction processes; building in time for training, quality assurance, and ensuring clear communication channels. As it considers the future structure and shape of its work, it is suggested that Learn Sheffield reviews the purpose, function and level of attendance of different meetings, including partnership meetings, to check which are beneficial as it works towards its priorities.

The many questionnaire responses indicate that Learn Sheffield has much to offer. Now Learn Sheffield has demonstrated such a positive track record over the past eight years, it may well be a good time to review the marketing of its services, including its offer to other localities beyond Sheffield.

Recommendations

Ensure the Learn Sheffield school improvement activities, such as the CPD programme, in-school support and partnership working with other agencies (including the local authority), all maintain an explicit and ambitious focus on supporting schools to:

- improve attendance
- help disadvantaged children and those with SEND achieve as well as they can
- improve pupils' outcomes; improving Sheffield's rankings compared to those of other Core Cities
- improve behaviour.

Ensure the factors which affect the outcomes in Sheffield are well understood by:

- conducting further data analysis to identify factors which do or might affect the outcomes in Sheffield in a different way to the Core Cities which appear to be attaining and achieving more highly, such as: the nature of disadvantage; the SEND profile; social and health indicators, pupil mobility and the specific make-up of the school population in Sheffield.

Strategically plan the Learn Sheffield CPD programme (designed to meet improvement priorities) much earlier in the school year by:

- routinely canvassing the views of setting leaders, MAT leaders and the LSIP team to ensure the CPD programme aligns with the key MAT, individual school and Sheffield priorities and to avoid replicating training already scheduled
- scheduling one-to-one subscription meetings with education settings and MATs earlier in the school year - to help tailor Learn Sheffield development support and training to the school's and MAT's key improvement priorities.

Formalise approaches to evaluate the impact of Learn Sheffield's work by:

- establishing a cycle of quality assurance and evaluation of the partnership itself
- ensuring clear lines of communication and information sharing between all colleagues interfacing with a particular setting; scheduling regular update meetings to maintain a well-coordinated approach.

Ensure the structure and shape of Learn Sheffield and its partnership working enables the organisation to maintain and build upon its many strengths by:

- building on the greater financial resilience brought about by the Finance and Operations Director to ensure financial sustainability
- considering the capacity of the leadership structure of Learn Sheffield going forward to respond to the need for strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation of the school improvement services (including requests from other local areas)
- continuing to work alongside the Local Authority as a catalyst for improvement, ensuring lines of responsibility are clear to all
- continuing to build the Improvement Partner and school-based Support Partner teams, through rigorous recruitment and induction processes with time for training, quality assurance and ensuring clear communication channels.



LEARN SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

2015-2023

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Learn Sheffield is a not for profit company limited by guarantee,
of which 80% is owned by schools and colleges and 20% by Sheffield City Council.