

FMS Burning Issues Conference

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‘Self evaluation from a user’s perspective’

- **Self evaluation and the MSEP visit**
- **Benefits and challenges**

John has asked me to give you a brief personal view based on my own experiences of going through the self evaluation process and receiving the MSEP peer moderation. From my perspective this has been a very positive experience for our service.

I will talk a little bit about the practicalities of undertaking the self evaluation and the MSEP peer moderation, followed by some comments on the benefits and challenges we experienced along the way.

- **Firstly The Self Evaluation**

The FMS Framework and toolkit had been in the system for sometime and we had started to look at it last year, but my impending MSEP visit in the Autumn term did force my hand to prioritise and engage with the process. We had our service plan in place required by our Local Authority but in terms of any self evaluation at best this was sketchy... as you all know the reality is our busy jobs often become more about reacting to circumstances rather than reflecting on our own practice.

But when the dates were in the diary we really had to get on with it. We found the FMS guidance to be very useful, we used the tool kit as an initial prompt for ideas and then used the Framework for our document.

We tried to be open and honest about what we do and how we judged our performance. There were no smoke screens.

The process also forced us to reflect on what we think about our work, do we really know our strengths and weaknesses?

We may have thought we were strong or weak in a certain area but how do we know?

Where is the evidence and then where is the room for improvement?

I’ll give you an example.

In terms of our perceived strengths much work has been done over the last few years to support our young musicians in continuing to play their instrument through that tricky transition phase from year 6 to 7.

We knew we had a lot of strategies and positive initiatives to support continuation but I'm not sure in the past we really knew how well they were working.

By looking more closely at the data we now have a much better picture of how well we are doing, how many pupils we lose to Out of borough schools (which we can do little about), which schools do well and why.

We now know the percentage of our yr 6s who continued through to yr 7 this year and therefore we now have a music service benchmark to work with, we can set appropriate targets and plan actions to sustain and improve on this figure.

There were definitely some lessons to learn along the way for me, particularly in terms of the workload. I now recognise there is a need to plan throughout the year and involve all our team of staff in the process. We have planned a timetable for monitoring and updating the SEF in the form of a calendar (similar to the suggestion in the tool kit document but in more detail) this gives us the space to spread the load, not only to identify when we need to collect data or gather feedback but more importantly identifying time to analyse that data and evaluate what it is telling us and as a result how we can plan actions for improvements.

Well that's the theory! We are certainly further on that journey than we were before this process started.

- **The MSEP visit itself**

And now to the MSEP visit itself. Hopefully this will resonate with those of you who have already had your visits. Obviously we tried to be as hospitable as possible, not quite the smell of fresh coffee and fresh flowers but we did provide a designated room for our visitors, lunch and made sure that they were driven to all the observation visits. All of which was appreciated

The MSEPs had asked if there was any contextual information I could send prior to the first visit and I did send a recent document I had written, it didn't involve any extra work, as it was a copy of the latest report that I am required to write termly for our Advisory group. I wasn't in a position to send the SEF in advance because in all honesty I was still working on it up until the eleventh hour. Next year it will be better

We prepared copies of the SEF for our MSEPs and signposted evidence relating to each section of the SEF on a lap top. So if they were reading section 2 of the SEF 'Views of Learners.. there would be a folder on the lap top entitled 'Views of Learners' with examples of the evidence to support our statements.

The first day was a very 'full on' day for all concerned. There is a huge amount of information to impart. I did a lot of talking in that first morning but I did try to empathise with the MSEPs here and appreciate how much harder it is for them to listen, reflect and absorb all that new information.

Another really positive element to the process is that talking with the MSEPs gave me the opportunity to compliment my team, to talk about their strengths and how much I value their contributions.

In terms of the relationship with my MSEPs there was a moment when everything came alive for me, and that was after the first lesson observation when we began to discuss what we had just seen, here was a real opportunity to share ideas around teaching leading learning and pedagogy, the discussion became animated and at that moment we realised we were all on the same wave length which led to mutual understanding and respect.

The visit from our MSEPs and the peer moderation has encouraged us to ask lots of questions and whilst this provides some answers, it inevitably provokes more questions. So the process is continually evolving

- Benefits and challenges

In terms of benefits, for me the opportunity to share a professional dialogue with colleagues was invaluable and the MSEPs were often able to reflect on their own practice and offer insights and advice as to how to move our service forward.

I think we must recognise that this is for some of us the first stage of the journey, so at present I feel that the challenge with this process is to steer the balance of the peer moderation in favour of just that, peer moderation, more along the lines of mentoring and not tip the balance towards an inspection mentality. For our service the MSEPs very much followed the former and any judgements were agreed together, sometimes with a fair amount of debate, but in a professional way and in the spirit of peer support.

For some there may be a tension and challenge here because whilst we understand the messages from all, that this is a peer moderation and

based on self evaluation and relevant to local situations there is a written summary at the end of it all. The common language being used is that of Ofsted...also we are dealing with government money and this brings with it a level of accountability. We need to therefore make sure our self-evaluation is as rigorous as possible.

The written summary may well go up the chain to representatives within the Local Authority, who are used to receiving judgements based on national indicators and statistics often benchmarked and ranked across the country but music services are not in the same position.

Given that music services do not have equitable funding streams and we are all so different I think it is important that our local picture is presented to these Local Authority colleagues.

I feel any MSEP summary for music services needs to tell the whole story in terms of funding, whether the service has the ability to access data necessary to make some judgements and the capacity to make the improvements it wants to.

Therefore, if I am advocating an honest and open and rigorous approach to your self-evaluation, which I am, this needs to be complimented by an honest and supportive summary report.

Again in my case this support did come from my MSEPS but I wanted to mention as I see it as a challenge for us all

I feel that through the evaluation process we can individually demonstrate what we can do confidence and clarity and with informed knowledge to plan priorities for the future.

In conclusion, for our service the process of self-evaluation has been invaluable and the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue between colleagues has given me much support.

I am happy to take any questions but wanted to end this talk on a lighter note by showing you a short clip, this is a fine example of professional dialogue in action..... not, here is David Brent trying very hard to engage with appraisals (The Office, Second Series, 'Keiths Appraisal')