

## Unlocking Gifts 2: Introduction

Thanks to the generous support of the Jerusalem Trust we have been able to run the Unlocking Gifts project for a second time. The first round of Unlocking Gifts funding enabled nine different projects involving 22 schools to run throughout the 2015/16 academic year. These projects ended with a final report outlining the successes and challenges of the different projects.<sup>1</sup>

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, has spoken of the Church's vocation of service to the poor and the role of schools in this. His desire to focus resources on those most in need in Church schools has been central to the motivation for this project and for the successful proposal to the Jerusalem Trust to fund this work. Government data shows that deprivation is the key determinant in attainment at every key stage, but research also shows that when children receive intervention then barriers to learning are reduced and their potential is more likely to be realised.

The aim of Unlocking Gifts is to further resource Diocesan Boards of Education in helping schools to narrow the disadvantage gap, address social injustice and enable the flourishing of all children. By investing in innovative and creative projects and showing what can be done with relatively small amounts of funding, we hoped to encourage and inspire further investment in such projects.

Learning from the first Unlocking Gifts, we decided that two years of support would be more effective in establishing projects that were embedded and therefore more likely to be able to continue beyond the initial funding. The sustainability of projects was also further enhanced by ensuring each project was monitored and supported by a diocesan adviser who could continue to support the school after the project period.

Over 40 bids were received from schools and after careful consideration six projects were selected. These projects covered a range of contexts and geographical locations and addressed several different needs and issues. This report sets out the focus of each project as well as their successes, challenges and also how they plan to continue the project and share their learning.

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<sup>1</sup> The report from the first Unlocking Gifts can be found on the Church of England website: [www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications](http://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications)

## Where has unlocking gifts helped?

The map below shows the dioceses and number of schools which benefitted from Unlocking Gifts funding.



## Closing reflections

All six projects in this second round of Unlocking Gifts funding have succeeded in addressing issues and challenges in their local context and they have made a difference to their pupils. Each project reduced the disadvantage gap and improved the life chances of some of the most vulnerable children in their schools. Academic performance and progress certainly improved in all the projects, but it was the growth in confidence, self-esteem, interpersonal skills and wellbeing that were perhaps even more valuable. All the schools found that the pupils who were the focus of their projects grew in their soft skills and became more confident in school, better enabling them to reach their potential and flourish.

Through these positive gains the schools have shown what can be achieved with the investment of relatively small amounts of money. More importantly, through their evaluative and reflective approaches each of the schools improved their projects over the two years and developed sustainable ways to continue the work. Different approaches to building this sustainability were taken by the schools. As we have seen, some projects used the funding to bring in external expertise with the view to building internal knowledge and capacity. Both Lowton High School and Crompton House School brought in an external mentoring service which then enabled them to create their own mentoring programmes. Building sustainability also came through professional development, including at Market Harborough Academy where staff were able to learn from experts from within the academy trust. Rather than investing in external expertise, Fishponds Academy utilised the expertise already present in their school, showing another way in which the funding could be used to great effect.

The variety in approaches, based on local context and need, is what is so striking in this range of projects. There are similarities between some of the projects, but each one took different measures to address the specific needs of their pupils and their communities. The schools found new and innovative ways to meet the needs of their pupils and it is the reflective evaluation that enabled them to propose such successful methods and continuously adapt their approach to achieve their aims and unlock the gifts of their pupils. These Unlocking Gifts projects lay down the challenge to other schools to learn from these case studies and find their own ways to address educational disadvantage in their school community.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the diocesan advisers who monitored, supported and reported on all the projects. This report is only possible because of the valuable information and insights that you were able to provide.

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