

Sharing excellence

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Outstanding schools have much to offer other schools by way of systems, practices, knowledge and experience. Several of the schools remarked on excellence bringing with it an extra burden of responsibility. This takes many forms.

**125** National recognition puts the schools under the spotlight and makes many demands on the headteacher: the DCSF seeks them out as examples of outstanding practice; local authorities are increasingly likely to ask the schools to help in their improvement strategies; other schools beat a path to their door; and researchers and evaluators seek interviews and discussions.

## System leadership

**126** All the headteachers in the sample of outstanding schools are ready to share their expertise freely, and do so in one way or another. Some go out of their way to support other schools; others are more reticent, willing to help if asked but otherwise predisposed to focus their attention on their own school. The 'Beacon school' concept, although discontinued as national policy, applies to some extent to all 12 of the outstanding schools.

### Support across a broad canvas

Robert Clack School hosts around 200 visits per year and has supported a number of other schools. The school has, for example, helped two local schools out of special measures. It is also a Specialist Schools and Academies Trust mentor school for a school in Birmingham. The headteacher has spoken at many conferences and sits on a number of national bodies. He is very clear that any support work does not undermine the progress of a school with nearly 2,000 students and 200 staff and carefully limits his time out of school to about one in seven school days.

**127** The outstanding schools include examples of headteachers and schools who see the process of lending expertise and support to other schools and pupils not only as a moral purpose, something which brings the stimulus and satisfaction of new professional challenge, but as a strategy for developing staff and bringing new knowledge and ideas into the school. A growing body of research into the work of consultant leaders<sup>17</sup> in contributing to the success of London Challenge<sup>18</sup> and National Leaders of Education<sup>19</sup> finds that such outreach work is almost always mutually beneficial, however great the disparity in the effectiveness of the two schools. System leaders have been defined as 'those headteachers who are willing to shoulder system-wide roles in order to support the improvement of other schools as well as their own'. Research into so-called 'system leadership' has identified five key system leadership roles:<sup>20</sup>

- choosing to lead a school in very challenging circumstances and then sustaining it as a high value-added institution over a significant period of time
- partnering another school facing difficulties and helping to improve it
- acting as a community leader to broker and shape partnerships or networks of wider relationships across local communities to support children's welfare and potential
- developing and leading a successful school improvement partnership across local communities in order to support welfare and potential
- working as change agents or expert leaders.

**128** All the headteachers represented here fulfil the first role described above. The sustained success of their schools is due in large measure to their leadership of what has been termed a 'complex school', that is, a school in challenging circumstances. The factors in the success of this role were explored in the two earlier sections of this report.

<sup>17</sup> P Matthews, P Sammons, C Day, Q Gu, and P Smith, *Supporting leadership and securing quality: an evaluation of aspects of the London Leadership Strategy*, School of Education, University of Nottingham for the London Leadership Strategy/NCSL, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> *Improvements in London schools* (HMI 2509), Ofsted, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> R Hill and P Matthews, *Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education*, National College for School Leadership, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> D Hopkins and R Higham, 'System leadership: mapping the landscape', *School Leadership and Management*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp 147–162, Routledge, 2007.

### Balancing commitments

Like many headteachers of very successful schools, the headteacher of one of the schools is committed to the wider community of schools but has not provided intensive support to a school facing difficulties beyond mentoring the headteachers. Understandably, he feels that leading a successful but very complex school is a sufficient challenge and worries about being side-tracked. That doesn't mean that the school is isolationist. It is currently in the process of setting up a joint sixth form with two other schools, all three of which offer different specialisms. It also contributes in many other ways and the headteacher sits on a number of national committees. The school is highly active in the local community and hosts many international visits.

### Partnering another school facing difficulties and improving it

**129** Several of the school leaders have worked to support other schools, either individually or in a deeper partnership which involves other staff in their schools. One example of the latter is Greenwood Dale School, which was asked to support a secondary school in special measures.

### Executive headteacher

The school partnership lasted for seven months and made a significant difference. One of the staff of Greenwood Dale School became associate headteacher of the supported school with oversight from the headteacher of Greenwood Dale, who acted as executive headteacher for both schools. Results rose in 2007 from 23% to 44% (five or more GCSE grades A\* to C), and from 4% to 14% including English and mathematics, and there was a positive independent exit report. When a substantive headteacher was appointed, the local authority asked Greenwood Dale School to discontinue its support. This left insufficient time to complete the work of building capacity in the school in order to sustain improvement.

**130** Once schools have embarked on school partnerships and gained expertise in helping to turn around other schools, they tend to continue applying this expertise. Serial partnerships are not uncommon. In the case of Greenwood Dale School, for example, the school started to work with Elliot Durham School, with a brief for 'light touch' support in the last academic year, whereupon another member of Greenwood Dale School's senior leadership team took over as acting headteacher and the executive headteacher spends two days per week there.

**131** The opportunities for headteachers and their most effective colleagues to develop, broaden their knowledge and expand their spheres of influence beyond the school have never been more prolific. Many of the schools have multiple engagements with other schools. Plaset is one example. While the headteacher sets a brisk pace as an influential figure nationally, the school's senior and middle leaders take on a range of projects as trainers and mentors.

### Wider spheres of influence

Plaset School became a Leading Edge school in 2004, having been a Beacon school between 2000 and 2004. Projects have included setting up teaching for community languages; auditing the curriculum for the celebration and recognition of different cultures; and researching underachievement among Bangladeshi heritage students, then acting upon the findings to make provision more responsive to these students' needs. Senior managers and heads of department act as consultants to strengthen systems and structures and promote achievement in other schools, and they assist with planning. They guide new heads of department in their middle management role. In addition to her work as a school improvement partner, the headteacher mentors new headteachers and gives presentations on raising the achievement of minority ethnic students to teachers and parents.

**132** Sometimes, despite its readiness to contribute, a school is not able to help others as much as it would like. Sometimes this is difficult within a school's own authority, particularly if it is small and closely knit.

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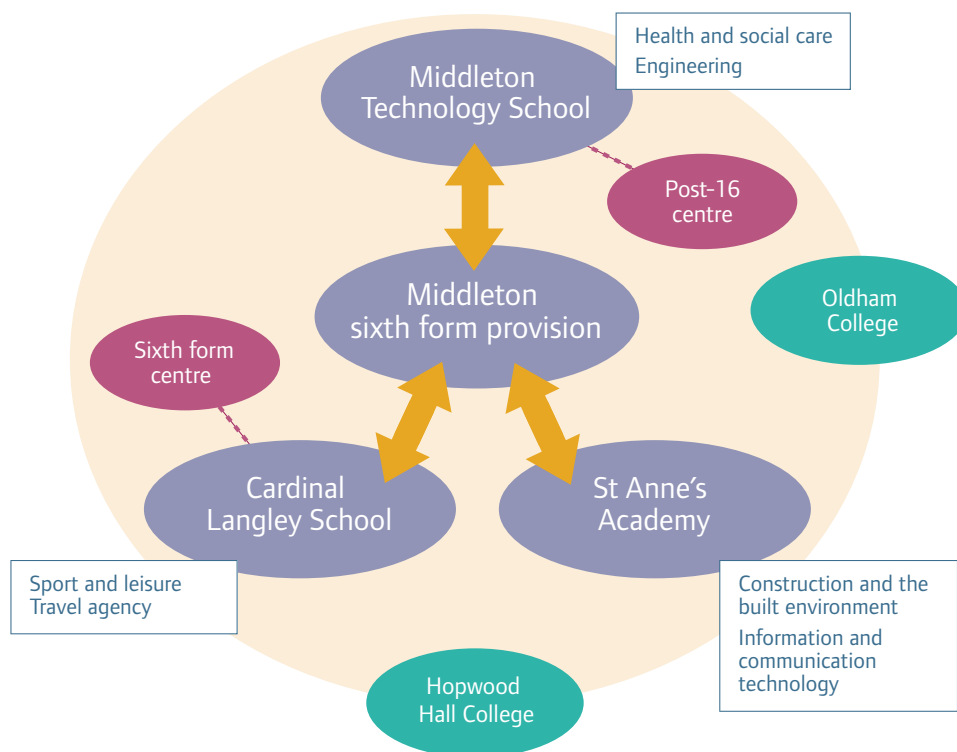
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The school's five advanced skills teachers provide capacity for outreach work which finds expression in a range of supportive functions, from technology in feeder primary schools to providing lead teachers across the authority in a number of subjects. Languages are taught in primary schools by the school's staff as part of the community dimension of the languages specialism. The headteacher mentors other new headteachers but there is some reluctance by other schools in the authority to capitalise on the school's readiness to provide support and advice. Plans are well advanced, however, for the construction of a sixth form centre for the school under the 'presumption' funding which, together with the imminent Building Schools for the Future programme, will transform the school.

## Acting as a community leader to broker relationships across other schools

**133** With the focus on 14–19, several of the 11–16 schools in this group are developing sixth forms, either individually or in partnership with other schools. The Middleton Sixth Form Partnership is one such example. Originally the schools jointly appointed a senior leader at assistant headteacher level, now the deputy headteacher at Middleton, as partnership coordinator. He chairs the 14–19 partnership steering group which represents the school and two other partner schools. A post-16 centre has been constructed on the Middleton site, and provision for Middleton is shown in Figure 4. Figure 4 also shows the network of providers and the vocational specialisms offered by the three schools. Two further education colleges are also part of the Partnership.

**Figure 4: The Middleton Sixth Form Partnership**



**134** The Partnership is a model of organisation and cooperation. The capital programme is well advanced; diploma courses have been assigned and there will be a wide range of A level courses. Progression routes have been delineated; common block timetabling has been agreed across the three schools; transport will be provided; catering facilities are available at all the sites and modern wireless technologies will support learning across the area.

**135** A similar partnership is planned for Tower Hamlets, where Morpeth School is one of a partnership of equals with two other specialist schools that have acquired a sixth form centre building between them and will offer a full range of A level courses and diplomas relating to their existing specialisms. Harton Technology College has been awarded presumption to develop a sixth form, adding to the range of provision within South Tyneside, and the Greenwood Dale site is intended to become the post-16 centre for the Nottingham East Academy. These are all examples of success attracting investment and breeding success. They require skills not only of leadership but, more subtly, leadership from within partnerships.

Highly effective schools are increasingly forging partnerships with other schools.

## Developing and leading a successful school improvement partnership

**136** Highly effective schools are increasingly forging partnerships with other schools through federations (informal or formal) and trusts which are more comprehensive than the 14–19 consortium arrangements illustrated above. This is illustrated through a further twist in the Greenwood Dale story.

**137** Owing to its success, Greenwood Dale School has received the go-ahead to sponsor its own academy. Plans are well advanced for a 3–19 Academy Trust sponsored by Greenwood Dale School and embracing Jessie Boot Primary School, Elliott Durham and Greenwood Dale schools. The Trust will cater for around 3,700 children and young people. The Academy will have three sites and three heads of school, with the executive principal managing all the services needed to support learning across the campus. The reorganisation has huge implications for the curriculum and standards. The ambition is to accelerate learning by capitalising on the efficiencies gained from a 3–19 all-through system. It is expected that there will be much better curriculum continuity and progression than in separate schools. In view of this, it is proposed that there will be two schools catering for children from Nursery to Year 10, providing for the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 to 4, with a three-year sixth form on the Greenwood Dale site. This builds on the accelerated learning already established at Greenwood Dale School, where, in any case, a significant number of students take one and a half A levels by the end of Year 11.

**138** A frank, independent review of the proposal reveals the boldness of vision which underpins this innovation.

‘If you were to write the risk register for this project, you would abandon it after the first three headings: super-size; all-age; split site. To establish the largest school in England, for a 3–19 age range, across three sites, in a socio-economically deprived area of one of our most challenging cities would appear to present a collation of fundamental risks that would make such a project unthinkable. But my analysis is that, given a fair head of wind the success of this project

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is not only possible but has the potential to expose the youngsters of East Nottingham to educational opportunities they have not accessed in a generation.

The main reason I have reached this counter-intuitive conclusion is the level of enthusiasm and sign-up for the project. During my fieldwork, everyone I met and interviewed was in favour of the proposal as it now stands: Parliamentary and City Council elected members and officers; governors, headteachers, leadership teams and staff of all three schools; and pupils and parents in all three schools. Such unanimity of purpose and motivation to succeed is rare in academy projects and remarkable in such an ambitious one. With such levels of support, the counter question is: why wouldn't you?'<sup>21</sup>

National Leaders of Education and their schools play a powerful role in helping weak schools improve.

### Working as a change agent or expert leader: National Leaders of Education

**139** There is increasing evidence from both this country<sup>22</sup> and overseas<sup>23</sup> that shows that pairing high-performing schools and their leaders with weaker ones can be a significant and positive force for improvement. Acting on this evidence and the advice of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), in autumn 2005 the Government formalised the role of excellent school leaders and their schools in driving school improvement by commissioning the NCSL to establish a programme of National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and National Support Schools (NSSs).

'NLEs, supported by key staff in their school, are now a growing and powerful force for improvement in the school system. Their numbers are increasing and the use of them is spreading. The first 68 NLEs were identified in October 2006. Those designated were required to be very good or outstanding leaders of schools, and had to show that their school had a good track record of supporting other schools in difficulty. By July 2008, the first group of NLEs had helped 19 schools either out of special measures or in having a notice to improve withdrawn. Reports by Ofsted on schools that are in these categories highlight the powerful role that NLEs and NSSs are increasingly playing in helping inadequate schools to improve. Moreover, key stage and GCSE examination results in 2008 show a marked improvement in the great majority of schools with which phase one NLEs have worked for a year or more.'<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> M J Smith, *Review of the proposals for the Nottingham Academy in Nottingham East, Greenwood Dale School*, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> For example, from the use of consultant leaders in London Challenge and the experience of many federations of schools.

<sup>23</sup> B Pont, D Nusche and H Moorman, *Improving school leadership, policy and practice*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> R Hill and P Matthews, *Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education*, NCSL, 2008.

**140** The executive headteachers of Greenwood Dale and Challney High schools and the headteachers of Lampton, Bartley Green, Rushey Mead and Middleton schools are among the cadre of about 200 NLEs. For the headteacher of Lampton School, the role is a development of her work as a London Challenge consultant leader and support consultant. Her work as a system leader can be summarised as follows.

### Local and national leadership of education

In 2004, the headteacher was encouraged by the London Leadership Strategy coordinator to apply to be a consultant leader. She was then drawn into small contributions before being assigned a 'challenging' consultancy with a school in Lambeth. This was (and is) a school which is very hard to lead, serving a highly disadvantaged and very diverse community, largely composed of Black African and Caribbean families with growing numbers of Somali and other refugee groups. She became consultant to a highly capable and thought-provoking headteacher, in the role of a critical friend. Her role was to provide an opportunity for professional dialogue with someone outside the locality whom he could trust. She subsequently became a support consultant, and then Director of Secondary programmes in London Challenge and has since worked with two schools in Hillingdon and Richmond, both in Ofsted categories of concern. This involved chairing an Interim Executive Board, coordinating support from various sources and – through her school – providing intensive professional development using 'improving teacher' and 'outstanding teacher' programmes developed by Ravens Wood School. As a measure of school improvement, Abbotsfield School in Hillingdon moved directly from having a notice to improve to being a good school when inspected.

**141** Lampton School is one of the first four 'teaching schools'<sup>25</sup> in London, providing a range of extended development programmes on improving teaching and learning to which other schools send staff, in groups of three. Many Lampton staff support other schools directly. They and the headteacher argue strongly that this work does not impair the quality of provision at Lampton; on the contrary, the outreach work is challenging and productive professional development, bringing new ideas into the school. Lampton, Plashet and some of the other schools also have very good links with university education departments and have well-developed professional development programmes for their own staff, trainee teachers and teachers in other schools.

**142 Coda:** It is striking that outstanding schools and their leaders, where possible, are predisposed to contribute to the improvement of other schools however they can. They are driven by moral purpose, wanting to see other students succeed as well as their own. They would not deny their schools the satisfaction of wider recognition, although they do not need this in order to flourish. Increasingly, their schools are investing more in top leadership, by appointing associate headteachers to support the executive headteacher, co-headteachers to share the role, and strengthened leadership teams to whom responsibility and accountability can be distributed. As the proportion of outstanding schools increases and their circles of influence widen, they can make a powerful contribution to the 'National Challenge'<sup>26</sup> drive to ensure that every secondary school is at least a good school.

<sup>25</sup> Not to be mistaken for training schools; the name is coined by analogy with 'teaching hospitals'.

<sup>26</sup> A national programme, introduced in 2008, to ensure that all secondary schools exceed 'floor target' outcomes.