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Schools and academies

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How schools, federations and chains grow education leaders

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Resource

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ARK Schools

Best Start Federation, Hackney*

Blackpool Primary School and The First Federation, Devon*

Bournemouth Alternative Needs Federation*

Cherry Orchard Primary School and Children's Centre, Birmingham*

Comberton Village College, Cambridgeshire

Drove School and Federation, Swindon

Gable Hall School and William Edwards School and Sports College, Thurrock

Greenwood Academies Trust

Kunskapsskolan Lund, Ystad and Trelleborg and The Learning Schools Trust

Moredon and Rodbourne Cheney Federation, Swindon *

Norlington Secondary School, Waltham Forest

Oldway Primary School, Torbay*

Outwood Grange Academy, Wakefield and Outwood Academy Adwick, Doncaster

Ravens Wood School, Bromley

St John the Baptist Roman Catholic Secondary School, Surrey*

St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Barnsley*

The Compton School, Barnet*

The Harris Federation of South London Schools*

Twynham School, Dorset*

West Trafford Learning Partnership, Greater Manchester*

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Executive summary

The pattern of education in England is shifting. Schools that once were islands are becoming connected. Indeed, it is increasingly rare to find outstanding schools that do not have a web of links with other schools. Competition remains, but now co-exists with collaboration and the creation of formal alliances through federations and chains. These changes have not only placed a greater premium on school leadership but have also opened new opportunities for developing leaders.

This research explores the development of leaders in and for schools at the leading edge of change. The work is timely, owing to the government's commitment in its 2010 white paper to 'support strong and confident leadership for every school' and to 'continue with successful leadership development programmes' (Department for Education, 2010:26). It also reflects extensive international evidence that leadership is second only to the quality of teaching in its effect on pupil progress and achievement.

The paper focuses first on the identification and progressive development and advancement of leaders as they take on increasing responsibility (vertical development). Leadership growth is promoted in particular through encouragement to take the initiative and new responsibilities, mentoring by good role models, and professional development in the workplace. The best examples observed in this research were of high-quality and outward-looking schools that provide headteachers and deputies for schools at large. One secondary school has exported over 20 staff to deputy headships and headships elsewhere while the current head has been in post. It recently lost two deputies and two assistant headteachers at the same time without missing a beat, such was the depth of leadership development and succession planning.

The report then considers the additionality (ie added value) offered by leadership development that takes advantage of opportunities beyond the home school (lateral development). There is evidence that some connected schools, such as National Support Schools (NSSs), as well as school groups, such as federations and chains, can offer an increasing range of real hands-on opportunities and challenges to potential headteachers and executive headteachers in associate, acting or head of school roles.

Such workplace or apprenticeship opportunities provide more direct and powerful learning than indirect experiences such as shadowing and short placements, and have an important place in the training and accreditation of headteachers. Equally, outreach commitments that involve leaders in working in other schools can broaden their experience, extend their interpersonal skills and create new and often testing challenges. At the higher levels of leadership, succession planning is now extending to the identification and development of potential executive headteachers to replace members of the current pioneering generation as they retire.

The case for school partnerships and the value of schools supporting or leading other schools as a means of both growing leadership capacity and ensuring school improvement is strong. However, while some of the boundaries between school partnerships or groups are permeable; others can be less so. The strong brands and shared systems and policies within some chains are among the conditions for membership. This can result in brand loyalty that promotes collaboration within the group but inhibits outreach work beyond the organisation.

Other groups may have a federation at the core but welcome other schools into their professional family provided there is a common philosophy and commitment. The benefits of federations and chains which may accrue to the schools that join the club are balanced by a degree of exclusivity that limits the opportunities of other schools to draw from their knowledge and experience. While these chains and federations may be effective at growing leaders for their own needs, those same leaders may lack the wider experience and connections that come from working with schools more widely, which could be critical to making them truly effective. In contrast, there are many examples of individual national support schools (NSSs) that engage in partnerships with less effective schools to the limits of their capacity.

The introduction of teaching schools will provide centres of excellence in teaching and learning, initial teacher training and continuing professional development, and leadership development. The implications from this research are that they will be most effective if they attract other schools into professional alliances to share school practice by partnering rather than simply acting as a magnetic showcase in the manner of a beacon school.

A clear message from this research is that more, and more effective, leadership development is occurring within the workplace and is being led by schools, individually or in partnership. The school is the locus for core leadership development provision as part of its responsibility for self-improvement, high-quality provision and succession planning. The College has played its part, for example by fostering local solutions to succession planning and working in partnership with schools and groups in evolving the Middle Leadership Development Programme and other programmes. The revision of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) will need to take full account of the high-level leadership development and demonstration opportunities provided within and between schools and other partners.

Central to the future role of the National College is its management of NPQH and its contribution to school improvement through managing the supply and designation of specialist, local and national leaders of education, national support schools and teaching schools.

The ingredients are in place for self-improving schools and groups of schools, but a self-improving school system will need to be more than the sum of its parts. The National College, in partnership with other bodies, will have a crucial role in providing a catalyst for this transformation: knowledge to inform practice; brokerage to bring partners together; excellent study and research opportunities to fuel the minds of school leaders and provide, in partnership with higher education, access to relevant and demanding postgraduate qualifications. The College is in the ideal position to provide a qualification framework linked to Master's degrees and a modular curriculum that leaders and schools can draw on flexibly. Despite the balance shifting to school-based leadership development, most of the headteachers and principals involved in this project considered that a system with leading-edge leadership should be served by a leading-edge leadership staff college.

Main findings

1. The biggest contribution to school leadership development lies in providing rich and varied opportunities to lead, innovate and take responsibility, and the encouragement and trust to accept a measure of risk and enable new and aspiring leaders to demonstrate their aptitude for leadership.
2. These opportunities are inevitably more numerous and diverse in school partnerships, federations and chains than in discrete schools, especially where staff are appointed to the group of schools rather than to a single institution. That said, some free-standing schools with connections to other schools have also developed innovative ways of providing a diverse experience.
3. The lower staff turnover reported in many high-performing federations, trusts and chains is attributed largely to the opportunities available for professional and career development within the organisation.
4. A professional apprenticeship approach to leadership development is a particularly effective way of familiarising and inducting leaders into more demanding roles, at all levels up to and including executive headship. This can contribute powerfully to succession planning and training new headteachers.
5. The best school leaders provide strong leadership role models and share their expertise through effective coaching and mentoring.
6. Direct or indirect leadership of learning and improvement of teaching top the agenda of senior leaders in highly effective schools and school partnerships.
7. Success in leadership development has different forms, ranging from highly stratified programmes of leadership training and development to the creation of more organic cultures in which everyone, staff and students alike, is expected to be a leader and is given the support and encouragement to be one.
8. Head of school or operational headship positions, mentored and supervised by an executive head, encourage those with headship potential to gain experience and confidence in a supportive environment and may attract more teachers to headship.
9. As the capacity of many local authorities to provide opportunities for leadership development is likely to decrease, there will be an increasing need for headteachers to promote inter-school partnerships, particularly built around national teaching schools.
10. There is a case for a greater emphasis on developing skills for the leadership of learning.
11. The attention that a head or principal gives to the development of school staff as teachers and leaders, with a focus on student learning, is an important indicator of the effectiveness of the school and its leadership.
12. The National College continues to have an important but changing role, particularly in providing: a high-level staff college for school and system leaders; a source of expertise, research and best practice in school leadership; and support and quality assurance for effective leadership and management development programmes – mainly delivered locally. It has played an important part in the designation, development and deployment of system leaders for school leadership and improvement. This takes on a new dimension with the designation of teaching schools. It is in a good position to offer a suite of modular programmes, linked to postgraduate qualifications, for leaders throughout their careers.

Introduction

This study examines how successful schools, federations and chains of schools identify, develop, support and train new leaders. The study also analyses how such leadership development and the deployment of new and aspiring leaders across groups of schools drive and sustain school improvement and contribute to the regeneration of the headship pool.

The research focuses on a number of successful individual schools – distinguished by being national support or potential teaching schools, federations and chains of schools – which we describe collectively as ‘groups’¹ – in order to identify the key elements of their approaches to leadership development. It also considers the role they are playing in addressing the challenges of succession planning that the system as a whole is facing and the policy implications for leadership development.

Evidence is drawn from visits to over 25 schools, either discrete schools or members of federations of 3 or more schools or chains of schools, covering primary, secondary and special educational needs providers. The schools and school groups were identified in discussion with the National College and comprise a purposive rather than statistically distributed sample. They were chosen not to provide for a statistically reliable survey of practice but because of the likelihood that they would demonstrate thoughtful, purposeful and, perhaps, leading-edge practice. In terms of their most recent Ofsted inspection, the individual schools are mainly graded 1 (outstanding) and cannot be considered representative of schools more generally.

These schools are also all involved in outreach work or some form of informal partnership with other schools. They are no longer islands. The school groups provide a range of examples of which distinctions such as ‘federation’ or ‘chain’ are sometimes too simplistic or misleading since the groups may be combinations of schools in tight and loose partnerships.

These multi-school entities vary from those that accommodate different approaches and philosophies to those that do not. This permeability – or lack of it – in terms of boundaries can affect the passage of leaders into, and particularly out of, the group and the extent to which schools in the group are at liberty to help those beyond it.

Surveys of leadership development in national support schools (Hill & Matthews, 2010; Ofsted, 2010a) shifted the focus from individual schools to school improvement partnerships. Papers by Hill (2010) and Hargreaves (2010) are among recent publications that examine the potency of school groups such as chains to raise the performance of the system. We refer to specific findings in the text, as appropriate.

In terms of schools as single institutions, leadership development has focused on equipping leaders at different levels within the school to fulfil the roles expected of them. These roles are articulated both in policy, for example through the leadership components of the national agreement on teachers’ pay and conditions (DfE, 2010b), and through the National Professional Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004). The criteria used in Ofsted inspections provide a criterion-referenced basis for assessing the quality of leadership and management. Research adds to our understanding of the importance of school leadership, which – it is commonly agreed – is ‘second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning’ (Leithwood et al, 2006), what effective school leaders do (eg Marzano et al, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2001; Pont et al, 2008), how what they do has an impact on the achievements of pupils (Robinson et al, 2008; Louis et al, 2010) and what effective leadership looks like in particular schools (Barnes & Ireson, 2007).

System leadership at the macro level has been charted by, among others, Fullan (2004), Senge (1990) and Hopkins (2007), who identified a trend towards schools taking responsibility for the leadership agenda, and recently by Barber et al (2010) in a comparative study of leadership in high-performing national systems. It is clear that system leadership in England has evolved further in the short period that has elapsed since the national state of play was analysed by Higham et al (2009).

¹ Hargreaves (2010) uses the collective term ‘clusters’, but groups are emerging that consist of more than one cluster as part of a corporate provider.

This study takes three dimensions of leadership development (after Matthews, 2008):

- vertical development – related to increasing leadership responsibility and development within schools and school groups
- lateral development – in terms of the added value that informal – or temporary – school partnerships and more corporate school aggregations can provide for leadership development. It considers the way in which such opportunities are provided, supported and used. The research then discusses how leaders are developed for the school system. Finally it considers implications for policy with particular reference to the designation of national teaching schools and the work of the National College
- system development - which discusses how leaders are developed for the school system.

Finally the research considers implications for policy with particular reference to the designation of national teaching schools and the work of the National College.

1. Vertical growth

1.1 Leadership development cultures

The approaches taken to leadership development in schools and multi-school groups reflect the leadership culture of the organisation. The case studies (Annex 1) attempt to capture the context in which leaders grow and develop in different school settings. It is possible to discern in the studies three overlapping philosophical approaches to the leadership development of new teachers which may be summarised as follows:

- a. everyone is a leader
- b. everyone can be a leader
- c. anyone could be a leader

a. Everyone is a leader

In this type of organisation, leadership is expected of all, pupils and staff alike. One feature of this culture is that leadership structures are de-layered. They become less complex or hierarchical as leaders take responsibility for each other, for the school and for corporate learning. Staff have leadership responsibilities, centrally and very clearly for pupils' learning. Student leadership is actively encouraged and supported. The school takes responsibility for developing its staff both as teachers and leaders through structured and high-quality professional development that is attuned to its culture.

In Ravens Wood School, for example, all staff are regularly drawn into learning threes within which all members may be leaders, coaches and consultants in turn. The constant objectives are to improve practice, share knowledge and provide professional support. The approach was born of a need to sustain and build organisational knowledge at a time of high staff mobility, when experienced staff left, taking their knowledge with them. This was a threat to the performance of the school for which a systemic response was needed (see also Berwick, 2010). In Ravens Wood, the success of meeting the threat imposed by staff turbulence is evident in the sustained upward trend of the school's results and four successive inspection reports grading the school as outstanding.

But two other features are embedded in the culture of this school as a learning organisation. The first is a management structure in which each member of staff has both a line manager and a coach. The rule that line managers manage but do not coach those whom they manage, and are in turn managed and coached by different people, contributes powerfully to performance management and staff development. It also institutionalises coaching, in which the school commissions its own expert training. Oldway Primary School has a similar approach. Everyone new to the school has two mentors: a personal mentor (a buddy) and a professional mentor (the line manager) who also conducts performance management. This also applies to anyone changing roles in the school. The professional mentor oversees and assures the quality of the person's work, also calling on specialist expertise where required. The personal mentor acts as coach and helps the individual think through how to improve his or her own performance.

b. Everyone can be a leader

In some schools, leadership development is structured so that all staff, from appointment, step onto a leadership ladder. Structured opportunities, incentives and rewards are all readily available and there are clear routes for leadership progression. The stages are finely delineated in both primary and secondary examples.

In Middleton Technology College, for example, the thrust is on motivational leadership progression which begins with newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and provides leadership opportunities and rewards in the second, third and fourth years of teaching and so on. In-school opportunities are rewarded by bursaries, and teachers are expected to undertake nationally recognised development programmes for middle and aspiring leaders.

Best Start Federation has a highly structured career ladder for teachers. This is conceived as 14 steps in which the teaching and learning responsibility steps lead towards assistant headteacher, deputy head and head of school posts. The steps are interspersed with periods in leadership development roles. These are described by a head of school as “opportunities that teachers may request in order to develop skills that will enable them to successfully apply for paid teaching/learning management posts when they arise.” The school’s first priority is for a teacher to be an excellent practitioner. If they demonstrate this, they are likely to be accepted for leadership development and the door of opportunity opens.

At Best Start, if people are “really good teachers”, they will take on the role of mentoring an NQT, and then become a trainee co-ordinator (shadowing a co-ordinator in the federation), which equips them to apply to be a co-ordinator themselves. Once they have developed the necessary skills through the federation’s leadership and management development scheme, they can become a year-group leader, followed by assistant headteacher and trainee head of school. Some people may not progress because they aren’t motivated or can’t take on more. Others move quite rapidly and they are encouraged and empowered. The executive headteacher describes his approach below.

Leadership journey 1: The beginning

Last week I went to watch a Year 1 teacher. She was doing very well and I was thinking, “Where’s she going to be next year?” I want to keep her so let’s look at where she is and what’s the next step for her. Trainee assistant co-ordinator? Staff know that all the time you are looking at their career, even if they’re not. You need to be one step ahead in thinking about it.

With the maths co-ordinator who started in September, we said: “You’ve been appointed here, this is what we want you to concentrate on initially. Once all of this is in place, we will begin development work.” She’s done lesson observations with me; she’s now doing observations and book scrutinies by herself, and I’m monitoring her work. Once she is secure in her role and wants to think about the next step, then we’d look at that together and we’d do some coaching or she’d work with somebody at another school. Many people are contributing to professional development.

Executive headteacher, The Compton School

c. Anyone could be a leader

Some highly effective schools and school groups provide every opportunity for those with an aptitude and desire for leadership to gain experience and develop skills. Rather than providing structured leadership development opportunities, these schools encourage and support people who want to grow as leaders. In Cherry Orchard Primary School and Children’s Centre, for example, the head strongly encourages teachers to undertake Master’s level study as a priority for professional development but also readily supports staff who wish to undertake leadership development programmes provided either by the large local authority or the National College. It is for staff to take the initiative.

The school has what it terms a blended approach, which combines in-house continuing professional development (CPD), courses, meetings and dialogue. CPD is viewed as being about personal as well as professional development, that is, irrespective of role, reflecting where people are at the time. Identification of needs and interests comes as much through informal conversations with people about their career as from performance management.

ARK Schools is at an early stage of developing a training menu which aims to complement school-based CPD focused on individual development as well as supporting the performance management cycle. The menu offers quality-assured professional development that takes advantage of the size of the ARK Schools network and allows staff access to individual training without necessarily having to leave their school or day job. The emerging CPD programme has four main strands:

- in-school organised CPD that relates to individual school improvement priorities
- a training menu that focuses on individual self-paced and self-led learning aimed at all employed by the network including teaching staff, leaders, teaching assistants, and operations and support staff
- network hubs organised across ARK Schools around subject specialisms, with hubs in primary, mathematics, literacy and music already functioning
- the ARK Schools summit: beginning in November 2010 for over 800 ARK staff, and involving 28 breakout sessions offering role-specific teacher training or soft skills training in areas such as line management, communications and time management

The training menu is perhaps the most innovative dimension. Staff will be guided onto it through school-based performance management. It will relate to 10 core categories (for instance, middle leaders aspiring to senior leadership would be one of the primary audiences). The training is hosted online and offers a range of skill-based training that staff can select according to their development needs. The modules, in large part, will be developed by lead practitioners within the ARK Schools network at little or low cost. Links will be made to encourage progression into existing Leading Teachers, Future Leaders and other external programmes.

The different approaches summarised above all aim to provide or grow sufficient capable leaders for the home organisation. The highly directive approaches reflect a concern that talent should be identified early and developed as a priority, often by giving new leaders opportunity and challenge, while the less directive approaches put a greater onus on individuals to take responsibility for their own development.

1.2 Identifying new and aspiring leaders

We start by considering the identification, recruitment and development of new leaders, in schools and (to a large extent) groups of schools, some of which recruit to the group rather than to an individual school. The identification and development of leadership potential have been tabulated (Table 1) in Barnes & Ireson (2007), *Greenhouse Schools: Lessons from schools that grow their own leaders*.

Table 1: How do schools identify leadership potential?

Prior to appointment	Post appointment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Assess the potential of final practice students at the school in relation to future opportunities for employment. — Stress the ability to learn (and share) as well as teach in recruitment documents and processes. — Screen applications for evidence of prior leadership experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Observe and assess colleagues at work, responses to different situations, work with others, classroom practice and contributions at meetings. — Attach senior leaders to departments as internal consultants. — Provide leadership opportunities. — Combine performance management with less formal career chats. — Track participation in extra-curricular and voluntary activities.

Source: Barnes & Ireson, 2007

Appointment of new staff

When appointing new staff, all the schools and groups are looking primarily for teaching ability, together with willingness to learn, leadership potential and the attitudes and commitment that chime with the ethos of the school. To a greater or lesser extent the schools all have leadership potential in mind when recruiting to the profession, although this generally comes second to aptitude for teaching, attitudes and match.

Oldway Primary School sets out clearly what is being sought in new teachers. The headteacher looks for:

- positive attitudes
- being interested in learning: a hunger to learn
- the quality of questioning skills with children and engagement in their learning
- teaching skills more broadly
- a willingness to get involved in the wider school community (for example, through the performing arts or sports)
- specific subject knowledge (e.g. in music)

The theme of teachers as learners recurs in most of these schools. This is crucial to Ravens Wood Secondary, which identifies the four things new teachers will need when they join the school community:

- talent
- effort
- ability to learn
- ability to share knowledge with other people

These attributes are consistent with the school's meticulous approach to building and sharing knowledge through learning it, doing it, and coaching or teaching someone else to do it. The school is also looking for people who can lead – people who will be capable of leading a department within three years – but admits to using an intuitive approach to estimating leadership capacity on initial selection.

The identification of leaders invariably starts at the time of staff recruitment. Comberton Village College is typical in “doing all it can to get very good people”, including as NQTs or trainees. The school then purposefully supports new staff to take on roles beyond classroom teaching. There is no single system for identifying future middle and senior leaders.

Increasingly, both the primary and secondary schools in the sample reduce uncertainty by appointing new teachers from the ranks of those they have trained, especially those they have accepted onto the graduate teacher programme (GTP). Several providers comment favourably on the quality and maturity of the candidates. A small primary school like St Mary's C of E Primary offers one GTP place a year whereas, for a number of years, Ravens Wood has taken five annually onto its GTP. Places are often taken by those who have worked in the school in some capacity, from teaching assistant to sports instructor, or as a former student.

At Twynham School, the process of recruitment and promotion contains aspects of leadership identification. Recruitment at Twynham is seen as a first step in identifying aspiring leaders of the future. The headteacher always meets candidates on their arrival for interview and talks through Twynham's two pillars, on which all aspects of school and professional development rest. These pillars are:

- **learning:** with all planning and decision-making very clearly focused on the classroom
- **relationships:** to build a supportive community and encourage people to go the extra mile

These two pillars clearly inform leadership activity and development. New staff remember these focuses being set out in the advertisement and by the headteacher in the interview. Candidates are always observed teaching and, on a tour of the school, they are observed informally as they interact with students.

At St John the Baptist School, it is clear what outstanding leadership looks like and this directly informs the identification of potential leaders. The process of identification itself is more informal, ad hoc and based on existing good knowledge of and relationships with staff. It is also strongly informed by substantial experience of identifying, developing and rapidly promoting staff who have leadership potential. Table 2 illustrates the indicators of leadership looked for by St John the Baptist and Twynham schools.

Table 2: How two schools view leadership potential

Descriptions of leadership potential	
St John the Baptist	Twynham
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Having drive, passion and an ability to inspire — Having a focus on solutions not problems — Being an excellent practitioner — Developing good relationships with other people and students — Owning the role they currently perform: knowing the responsibilities that come with leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — High professional standards — Jobs well done and solutions developed — Supportive relationships with other staff and students — Modelling the school's ethos and culture

Cherry Orchard Primary summarises the leadership qualities sought in new staff as initiative, spark and fit ("although we have to strive to work with people who are a bit different"). The sense of match is also important to The Compton School:

"Our staff are our most important resource. We have a good reputation so a lot [of candidates] apply. We invest much time in making the appointments. There has to be a sense a person will be right here."

Headteacher, The Compton School

When asked how Gable Hall School assesses leadership potential at the selection stage, the executive headteacher's reply is unequivocal:

"By questioning – asking about ambition first of all; about how they treat people and how they lead and manage this, and their views on that. For example they're going to be led – what are they looking for in the person who's going to be leading them? What do they consider to be a good leader? What type of person would they be looking for? Ultimately they're going to be leading themselves in the classroom, so what do they want their pupils to be regarding them as?... That line of questioning."

The school has a high regard for Teach First² and the skills and attitudes it promotes. But the executive head's frankness is a reminder of how difficult it is to judge potential:

"When it comes to interviewing, I trust my guts more than I trust my head. I've made some appalling appointments. Still do. But if it's a conflict between head and gut feeling, I'll go with gut feeling. And that has let me down a lot less."

Executive headteacher, Gable Hall School

There is a common consensus across the schools that instructional leaders must first and foremost be excellent teachers. This is in some schools a firm prerequisite for entry to leadership development opportunities. This raises the question of how teachers in less effective schools can get a sense of what outstanding teaching looks like.

Lack of this knowledge is hardly the best basis for growing as leaders. Raising the visibility of high-quality practice has been done in the past through initiatives such as beacon and leading-edge schools. Teaching schools must go a lot further and provide the immersion in effective leadership and effective teaching and learning that gives new leaders something on which to set their sights.

² The charity Teach First was founded in 2002 to address the problem of educational disadvantage (www.teachfirst.org.uk)

1.3 Developing leadership in the first few years of teaching

All the schools and groups in this study are committed to offering leadership development opportunities from the start. The evidence suggests that the most important conditions for effective leadership development are as follows:

- The school requires a culture that encourages people to take on leadership roles.
- There are rich and varied opportunities to gain leadership experience, supported by coaching or mentoring. This involves aspects of learning by doing, on-the-job training, or taking on real acting promoted posts which give the authentic experience of new challenges in a supervised environment. Such 'leadership apprenticeships' (Earley, 2009) allow talented leaders a chance to test and refine their skills under the eye of a mentor.
- There is ready access to good leadership role models. The evidence is particularly strong in terms of the perceptions of staff of their own headteacher's leadership qualities and ability to recognise strengths in others and trust them.

There are close parallels in the report on greenhouse schools (Barnes & Ireson, 2007) which identified the need to 'provide leaders with space to try things out and learn from their efforts' (ibid:10; see first bullet above) and to 'provide internal role development opportunities and offer coaching and mentoring' (ibid:11; see second bullet above). Our findings also place considerable emphasis on the importance of role models – via apprenticeships rather than shadowing – and real development projects that may or may not be rewarded.

The executive head at Gable Hall School, who worked in industry before entering teaching, learnt that:

“your most expensive resource and most valuable are your staff. I believe that to be the case in schools. Development is about concentrating on two sides: first, on their skills as teachers: promoting their pedagogy, and, in parallel, advancing their leadership skills. It is a question of looking at someone as soon as you take them on and assessing and developing their potential.”

Executive headteacher, Gable Hall School

In The Compton School, people have a chance to take up opportunities from their first day in the school. This school uses short-term bursaries to incentivise and reward prospective leaders – not that much incentive is needed. The school offers a lot of opportunity within each department. For example, in the first year, an NQT will design a part of the curriculum:

“Opportunities are there for anyone who wants them. Most grab them. Senior leaders look to see how well they grab them and begin to spot that that person has something about them and will begin to nurture it and find opportunities that will keep them in school rather than go elsewhere.”

Headteacher, The Compton School

Nevertheless, since 1992, seven staff have gone on to be heads elsewhere and more have gone on to become deputy heads.

“I have thoroughly enjoyed being here. You can thrive if you are of a mind to get involved. You are being allowed to have ideas and put them into practice. There were many opportunities when it was a new school but it's still the case. If you stood still, your job wouldn't be there.”

Business manager, The Compton School

In this school and many of the other secondary schools in the sample, the same principle of providing leadership opportunities applies to students, as these comments illustrate: “taking on a responsibility you wouldn't normally have and sharing it with everyone else” (Year 11 student); and “being able to voice your opinions so the school can be built in the way you want it to” (Year 8 student).

Many of the opportunities to take on leadership projects in the early years of teaching are supported by bursaries for those in their first, second or third year of teaching which the school can award for specific contributions. These are overseen by someone in the senior leadership team (SLT) and action plans are talked through. Topics include international schools, community cohesion, e-learning, multinational co-ordination, developing the curriculum – whatever the school needs. The projects last a year or more.

One young teacher at The Compton School, now third in the science department, gives this sense of a land of opportunity in Leadership journey 2.

Leadership journey 2: Early opportunities

It's a strong feature of school internal promotion that you're given the opportunity to have a go. I had the opportunity to do a teacher learning academy project in my NQT year – stage 1 – and decided to focus on assessing pupil progress. I got the opportunity to do research, take the initiative and develop resources and lesson plans. When the head of department saw the improvement, he sent me on a course to develop a science scheme. I had to present to our SLT link and the head of department. I was steered towards the Outstanding Teacher Programme last year, seeing that it was what I needed to do to develop as a leader.

Science teacher, The Compton School

At Gable Hall School, leadership development is a managed process, carefully tailored to the individual to ensure that potential senior leaders face different types of challenge in their progression. Without such a leadership development structure, that potential does not necessarily emerge.

Greater opportunity can be provided where the school is working in partnership with others. This is illustrated in the following example, related by the executive headteacher:

Leadership journey 3: NQT to head of an outstanding school

A very promising leader came here as an NQT, and worked his way up the development ladder rapidly. He had some interesting, enjoyable developmental positions, so I put him in charge of a particular year group, to get experience of disciplinary problems and other staff challenges. You have to be resilient and hone your diplomatic skills. You want to get the person responsible for creating the problem better at not creating those problems. You're also dealing with irate parents occasionally, who do not want to believe their son is a problem. That needs further diplomacy – you can put yourself in a position where you're creating another block between the school and the parent, which is easy to do, or you're breaking down those barriers. It's a difficult job and you don't see it as developmental because you're doing it time and time again. I then introduced a contrast by asking him to develop student leadership. He jumped at the chance and began to transform that.

When he had demonstrated his leadership skills in a range of situations, he needed greater challenge than we could provide in this school and I moved him into a school in special measures as deputy headteacher. His tremendous impact was noted by HMI. Now he is head of a school nearby, which has just been judged outstanding.

Executive headteacher, Gable Hall School

Work as system leaders allows headteachers who are national leaders of education to create opportunities for staff beyond those that can be offered in the home school. As one executive head said, "The way the governors here retained me was to allow me to work externally."

A teacher who joined one secondary school reflects on impressions of the school and the head's approach to leadership. She remembers being shown round by students and was struck by their confidence and what they had to say. There was openness, a willingness to be part of taking the school forward and a sense of leadership at all levels, notably student leadership, and personalised learning.

“I had met the headteacher at conferences and knew he was someone I’d like to work with. The school was forward-looking, a learning place, wanting to find better ways of doing things, taking risks, innovating. The head was driven when developing leadership at every level, including students. He wants people to find the leadership within themselves. So that they can explore those possibilities, he has created an environment in which seeds can be sown. There is much cross-fertilisation. Who would benefit from being with whom?... To create a spark.”

Teacher

Similar characteristics are seen in the head at another school who is described by one of her colleagues as:

“Having a great understanding of individuals and where they fit in school. She identifies different skills and looks at opportunities to develop them and let people make a contribution. In the school improvement review, everybody has the chance to reflect. She is supporting staff, and the teaching staff all have a part to play.”

Deputy headteacher

This headteacher is passionate, also, about developing student leadership.

At St John the Baptist School, the identification of potential leaders in relation to its criteria is led by the headteacher. Staff report that the headteacher has a knack of spotting people’s potential and reading people’s characters. (This is also widely reported of the headteachers in the other schools.) She is highly trusted to identify and develop talent. However, it is also the role of a range of other staff to identify and nurture future leaders. Staff who had experienced promotion through a number of leadership posts reported:

- They were firstly nurtured towards new roles, with mentors or members of the school leadership team helping them to raise their whole-school profile: a common phrase is that of aspiring leaders learning to ‘behave in the manner of the next role you want to be in’.

- They were then encouraged, steered towards or nudged into applying for particular posts: another common phrase was that ‘it was suggested that I apply’.
- When in post, they were supported and coached where necessary, with current leaders always available to help.

This role of identifying potential leaders is also expected of middle leaders, with one commenting: “I see it as my duty to identify leaders: in my line management meetings I am considering who has got those qualities, whose skills are we not using?” In this school as in the others, if staff have potential and are considered ready, they are promoted. There is no sense of serving time; promotion to initial leadership roles often starts in the NQT year or NQT+1. If you are good enough, you are old enough.

1.4 Leadership development or training programmes

There is strong evidence that most leaders on their way up these schools are trained on the job rather than for the job. In the case of Gable Hall and its partner school, William Edwards, each of these outstanding schools is a hub school for either National College or Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) leadership programmes. Most staff have engaged in middle leadership programmes and all staff have undertaken coaching programmes provided by professional coaches.³ The school has established staff learning threes. The same model is used with students; there are student coaches.

Comberton Village College is an example of schools and groups that have tailored their approach to leadership development training. The college has developed the majority of both its senior and middle leaders internally.

Of the current 4.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) deputy principals, 4 were originally recruited as heads of department. Staff estimated that at least half the current middle leaders had been internally promoted. The college has a policy of interviewing external candidates for all leadership positions and is committed to taking the best. However, it is generally found that internal candidates are well placed as they have had a range of opportunities to develop themselves for the post.

³ Gable Hall uses a coaching model framework developed by Edison (www.edisonlearning.net). The school has developed a framework that uses teachers’ professional standards closely aligned with Ofsted criteria but which is described by Gable Hall as ‘more refined’ and having ‘much more depth’. The school provides clear pathways for teachers to improve their practice.

In part, these opportunities stem from the internal leadership culture, coupled with a commitment to CPD and practitioner research, supported by a strong partnership with Cambridge University. Over 20 staff have completed research-based Master's programmes. The other two main components of leadership training are a formal middle leadership programme and a wide range of outreach opportunities and challenging assignments.

Leadership journey 4: Leadership development and the satisfaction of outreach work

An assistant principal now at Comberton was promoted rapidly after her NQT year and quickly became the head of the modern foreign languages department at her first school, which served a challenging context. After four years she didn't feel she could take that department much further and took a sideways move into Comberton Village College. Comberton enabled her to try out new ideas. It wasn't a strong department. She "did what she needed to do for Year 11" (in 1999) and then, over 5 years, moved the department from 40 per cent to 70 per cent of students attaining at least grade C at GCSE. Strategies included engaging parents and raising the profile of language learning, both within and outside the school.

In 2003 she applied to become a SSAT lead practitioner. This provided a very good opportunity to reflect on practice and have a wider impact within SSAT networks. In 2004 she led a pilot to place ceiling projectors in classrooms and led and researched their impact on teaching methods.

Both of these experiences have led her to becoming an external consultant for two days a week, speaking at conferences, leading consultancy projects, working with Edexcel and writing for the Times Educational Supplement. She was promoted to assistant head to lead the school's specialism as a language college.

She is not keen to go elsewhere to become a deputy head as she enjoys outreach work and believes that, to have an impact on teaching and learning, she needs to keep a foot in the classroom, directly engaging and keeping up to date with practice and curriculum developments.

Like many of the schools and groups included in the sample, Comberton has piloted the National College's Middle Leadership Development Programme (MLDP). This places a greater focus on in-school and school-led leadership of development training. Comberton has promoted an experienced middle leader to a new assistant principal post with a specific remit to develop the skills and capacity of middle leaders and to lead the MLDP pilot. The pilot has been run across a cluster of schools for the past two years, with training delivered at Comberton and facilitated by the assistant principal. The pilot includes an overarching focus on within-school variation, supported by related literature provided by the National College, and participants undertake a practical leadership challenge. Participants present this challenge work to the SLT. Recent participants reported the benefits of undertaking such projects as: leading rather than managing; thinking through the bigger picture; their own role in developing and delegating; and the time to stop and think. The move from external to on-site leadership development training exemplified by MLDP derives from:

- the belief that schools will never sustain outstanding quality without middle leaders of high quality across the board
- the challenge for middle leaders to find time to attend external programmes (mixed with concerns over the quality of these programmes)
- the need constantly to build leadership capacity within the culture of Comberton

MLDP leadership challenges provide a context for aspiring leaders to tackle real problems in the familiar contexts of their own schools, contributing to their own development at the same time. The following example of a leadership challenge comes from Oldway Primary School, which is a leadership development hub school for Torbay.

Leadership journey 5: Example of an MLDP leadership challenge

The Year 1 team leader (three classes) undertook a leadership challenge as part of her involvement in MLDP. She decided to focus on children's learning of the concept of number and understanding of place value, which was one of the school's concerns. The teachers had realised that Year 1 children did not have a sufficient understanding of the concept of, say, 26. They knew it was two units – 10 and 6 – but when asked to demonstrate '26' using concrete apparatus, such as Numicon⁴, the children chose '2' and '6' (not '20' and '6'). Led by the Year 1 team leader, the teachers used more practical apparatus, such as bead strings. They asked more probing questions, took photographs, annotated the photographs they had taken as a record of the work children had done and became less concerned about children completing written maths in workbooks.

They also took the Dutch approach in the early years, which uses role play to help children understand number.⁵ For example, playing with the idea of children getting on and off a bus helped to develop understanding of subtraction. The teachers also made resources to represent the role play (for example, buses and children made out of felt and Velcro that the children could handle). The teachers had realised that, because of pressure from the national strategies, they were removing role play too early.

The impact on learning was seen in the children's increased confidence and, later, in higher attainment at the end of Key Stage (KS)1.

The development of leadership came through dissemination of these approaches to the teachers of the reception classes and KS2 and, subsequently, teachers in other schools. The implementation of the ideas is being monitored, for instance through scrutinising planning in a lot more detail to make sure that the opportunities (as described) are being built into teaching and are permeating across the teaching teams.

Leadership development pathways

Many of the organisations have structured leadership development programmes. A ladder of formal leadership development courses developed by St John the Baptist School in partnership with three other schools and offered even more widely includes the following components:

- **NQT +1** is aimed at staff who have secured their own classroom practice and are thinking about the next step. The course identifies responsibilities beyond that of a classroom teacher; prepares staff to take on extra responsibility; identifies routes for development; and develops the interpersonal and communication skills required to lead. It also, in its last two sessions, helps attendees prepare an application letter and then undertake a mock interview. In the last round, 26 staff from the 4 schools attended. The message emphasises, 'we want staff to stay'.
- **Aspiring head of department** provision is for aspiring heads of department with a focus on: the role of a head of department; practical strategies to bring out the best from a departmental team; how to use data to effectively to raise performance; and how to manage conflict and change and resolve difficult situations.
- **Aspiring head of year** provision is aimed at current, new or aspiring heads of year with a focus on: the role of a head of year; strategies to bring out the best in students; using data to monitor and track performance; and dealing with different personality types and critical incidents.
- **Leadership for newly appointed heads of department and heads of year** has been devised for all middle leaders who are newly appointed and is similar to the courses above but also includes what it means to be a leader at St John the Baptist.
- **Aspiring to senior leadership** (in a Catholic school) is aimed at middle leaders with the potential to move into senior leadership within 12-18 months and focuses on developing an outstanding Catholic school in the 21st century and on preparation for the senior leadership application process.

⁴ Numicon's website describes Numicon as 'a multi-sensory maths resource for maths teaching... using structured shapes to represent numbers' (www.numicon.com).

⁵ See, for example, www.fi.uu.nl/en/rme/.

The schools have also developed additional joint targeted development provision. For instance, St John the Baptist School leads an annual development day for all heads of department across the four schools which includes: a keynote presentation on school improvement by the headteachers; collaboration exercises in subject clusters; and sessions on leading learning and using data. The whole day is led by senior and middle leaders from the four schools.

Other organisations envisage and support different career development pathways. For example, Greensward Academy (formerly Greensward College) developed in parallel three well-established progression routes for leadership development, each of which could lead to senior leadership roles:

- The managerial route leads through leadership of subjects and departments or years to senior positions.
- The pedagogical route recognises lead professionals as advanced skills teachers and can bypass the head of department role.
- The business management route is for those inclined towards management and administration.

It is increasingly common to find schools using standing working groups for staff and leadership development. Membership may be open or stratified, with each group including a vertical section of staff from different levels of the organisational structure. Themes for these groups may include teaching and learning, and curriculum, but the universal focus is on school improvement. Such approaches have been refined and developed in schools such as The Compton School and Outwood Grange and Outwood Adwick academies following the idea of the 'deeps' – deep learning, deep enrichment and so on – conceived by professors David Hargreaves and Guy Claxton, and others.

Quality assurance and evaluation

The quality of structured leadership development within schools and groups is, typically, subject to the same standards and expectations as the rest of the school's work. In addition, schools monitor and analyse responses to their CPD provision. For example, Twynham School analyses approaches to leadership development within its wider whole-school self-evaluation. This includes an externally contracted annual student and staff survey. Separately, there is also a 360-degree review by the school's school improvement partner and local authority school improvement adviser with a focus on 'How are we doing, what shouldn't we be doing, what should we be doing better?'

Both the survey and the review have become increasingly positive.

The schools in this study also have many means of evaluating the **effect** of their leadership development strategies. The project and action research work that is part of the diet of emergent leaders is invariably evaluated either through presentation to leadership teams or through its impact on pupils' progress, or both. Out-of-school provision and experiences are commonly shared with staff. Ultimately, everything has to relate to student performance and/or their wellbeing. In one school the range of approaches to evaluation of effectiveness includes the following:

- What are the exam results: is each student doing as well as she or he can? Do results signify that the school is improving?
- What is the feedback from students?
- What is the informal and formal feedback from staff, gathered through dialogue, management and coaching processes, termly reviews each term and exit interviews?
- Meetings are held with each head of department three times a year. The autumn meeting looks back at results and forward at the results predicted. In the spring an aspect of the department is investigated and the emergent leaders give and get feedback about what could be done to support them more. In the summer, with their SLT link, they look at performance management in supporting leadership development.

Performance management and leadership development

Performance management is a very significant process in supporting leadership and identifying and reviewing leadership development needs in almost all the organisations visited. One head said, “Our aim is for the school to be as successful as can be. We have all sorts of hard and soft measures and indicators of effectiveness. We’re always asking.” Performance management in the Bournemouth Alternative Needs Federation (BANF) is described by the executive headteacher as follows:

‘Leadership development is closely tied to a range of processes of which performance management is at the core. Objectives and challenging targets are set in September, followed by observations and collecting evidence throughout the year, with regular one-to-one meetings with managers. Action plans are discussed and followed up at middle leader meetings so as to track the activity of leaders and ensure that it is geared towards improving processes and outcomes. Rigorous objectives, evidence of impact and leadership development needs are pillars of the process.’

Bournemouth Alternative Needs Federation

In Bicknell School, within BANF, structures such as the educational leadership team (ie middle leadership team) are designed to move the whole school forward. The fortnightly meetings are described as leadership development in that whole-school improvement issues are discussed and actions are agreed, with responsibilities for carrying these out. The work of carrying these out is also considered leadership development, and the achievement of the objectives is checked.

1.5 The prevailing approach to leadership development

In concluding this section, we consider how the approaches to leadership development in the organisations included in this study relate to those reflected in a recent study of how the world’s top school systems are building leadership potential for the future (Barber et al, 2010). The authors identified three types of approach to unlocking and developing leadership talent:

- The first depends primarily on self-identification by potential leaders and informal mechanisms by which potential leaders are coached and given opportunities to develop within schools.
- The second builds on the first by providing opportunities for potential leaders to take courses or join programmes to build their capacity and interest in leadership.
- The third approach goes further, proactively guiding the careers of potential leaders so they gain progressively greater leadership experience through new roles taken on within their schools with guidance and support.

Barber et al, 2010:9

We found all three approaches operating prominently in the organisations included in this research, but with a greater emphasis on talent-spotting of leaders than self-identification, and a strong emphasis on providing opportunities to take on new leadership roles. But a fourth approach is found in England: the development of leaders within and across partnerships and groups of schools: ‘lateral growth’, which is the subject of section 2.

2. Lateral growth

2.1 Leadership development through inter-school partnerships

The growth of school partnerships, federations and chains in England provides an extra and powerful means of developing leadership talent:

- A fourth approach (in addition to those listed by Barber et al (2010) in section 1) provides opportunities for leaders to develop their skills by undertaking work in partner schools, often in challenging circumstances, or occupying temporary posts in those schools.

This approach was recognised in a survey of national support schools (Ofsted 2010a) which found that:

- these schools were able to provide their staff with opportunities to develop their leadership skills beyond their own school. These included:
- shadowing colleagues when supporting the staff of another school
- undertaking temporary leadership roles in another school for a short time
- rotating roles and responsibilities to facilitate substantive leaders in providing external support
- being seconded to other schools or to the local authority
- working with national subject organisations to provide training for other schools
- undertaking action research or higher education qualifications.

Ofsted, 2010a:17

All the overtly stand-alone schools in the sample – like many other good or outstanding schools – are actively working in partnership with other schools in non-federated and chain models, either to provide and enable high-quality talent and leadership development or in school-support relationships in which leadership development is a feature of capacity-building. These might be better termed ‘connected schools’.

There are three identifiable circumstances in which talent and leadership development takes place in connected schools, although more than one of these can apply in the case of a particular school. The types are:

- a. schools that act as a training and development centre for others in a local authority area and act as hub schools for nationally recognised and locally designed programmes: for example, Oldway Primary and St John the Baptist schools
- b. schools that act as a training and development centre for other schools within or beyond the local authority area, offering programmes they have designed: for example, Ravens Wood and The Compton schools
- c. schools in which leadership development is part of a temporary or ongoing partnership with one or more other schools: for example St Mary’s C of E Primary and Twynham schools

a. Schools that act as a training and development centre for others in a local authority area

Oldway Primary is a training school and national support school (NSS). It has the size and capacity to be a major resource for the small local authority and its schools. The headteacher is seconded to the local authority for half his time to work jointly with a secondary headteacher as the authority’s head of school leadership. He is a key part of the Torbay leadership academy: a virtual academy for taking forward the Aspirant Headteachers Programme, MLDP and the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH).

As an NSS, the school has worked particularly closely with two other schools in the authority to develop their leadership capacity, both of which wanted to continue their links with the MLDP when their support finished. In other words, the school had understood the need for the development of individuals as well as the need to take children’s learning forward. For example, Oldway’s head says that the headteacher of one of the schools is now actively engaged in developing the leadership academy as a result of her involvement in support work.

She now contributes to the Aspirant Headteachers Programme, describing what she learnt while being supported, and is in a position to support others. The headteacher of the supported school, which had just been given a notice to improve when she took up her post there, describes the leadership support provided by the Oldway headteacher and staff in Leadership journey 6.

Leadership journey 6: Perspective of the new head of a school causing concern

I already knew the Oldway headteacher as a deputy in the same authority, so trust and good relationships were established. There were too many action plans in my school. We reduced these to one and worked to secure the people who could help the most. Oldway provided support for English, for special educational needs and for data analysis. The advantages of using Oldway's staff were:

- They are in a school: they immediately bring respect; they're there, on the ground, day to day.
- They lead by example; teachers think: 'I should be able to do that, too.'
- They are already known to our staff; there's a rapport.

Support from the Oldway headteacher was both informal – through telephone conversations, informal meetings and through him being my chosen mentor as a new headteacher – and formal through the NSS programme: dates arranged; improvement plan; discussion of data; discussion of the first RAISEonline; help with writing the [self-evaluation form], and support for personnel issues. The main difference made was strategic: I see the bigger picture of where we are going... seeing how everything links and is inter-related.

The headteacher also gained much from a visit to two schools in Oldham organised by the NLE, being "very inspired by the co-operative, active learning I saw. It really had an impact." This, in turn, had an impact on her own school; she feels that the children's learning is now (in 2011) much less passive.

Oldway Primary School has a much wider range of specialists to call on compared with the schools

it supports. The headteacher of Oldway can also delegate more to his senior staff who, in turn, can call upon middle leaders.

Subject leaders at Oldway also have more opportunities for their own development by working with others in development teams. Opportunities for internal development are fewer at supported schools, but the staff have developed as leaders by working with colleagues at Oldway.

b. Schools that act as a training and development centre for other schools within or beyond the local authority area: the emergence of teaching schools

Ravens Wood Academy is an NSS in south London and provides the model for teaching schools, where the concept was first developed. Its headteacher and staff have made a significant contribution at system level. This has been through the head's directorship of the leadership strategy of London Challenge, as well as through the school's direct work on building leadership capacity and improving teaching and learning in many of the keys to success schools identified through the Challenge for school-to-school support. Through the Thinking and Learning Schools Association (now OLEVI⁶), which spans schools in western Quebec and London, Ravens Wood led the development of a 10-week Outstanding Teacher Programme for improving teaching and becoming outstanding, which has a strong focus on the leadership of learning. Ofsted (2010b) reports as follows on the evolution of teaching schools: 'Ravens Wood School used a 'coaching triads' (or 'learning threes') model of professional development and by 2004 it was providing training to teachers from 58 schools, some of whom were in the early London Challenge programme. Twelve secondary 'teaching schools' and nine primary ones are in London, with a further 10 primary 'facilitation' schools at an earlier stage of accreditation. The principal training is done at the host school, provided by host school teachers to a group of around 15 or so teachers from the schools being supported.

A teacher in the supported school is trained as an in-house mentor, whose role is to help the trainee develop her or his new skills further between training sessions, when she or he is 'back home' in their own school. The model has been taken up by other schools nationally.

6 OLEVI is a registered charity based at Ravens Wood Academy, which produces resources for developing leadership in teaching and learning: www.olevi.co.uk.

The 'Improving Teacher Programme' aims to improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good. The 'Outstanding Teacher Programme' helps teachers to understand what makes a lesson, or series of lessons, outstanding. Teachers on these programmes universally welcomed their impact on the quality of their teaching. School managers could point to measurable improvements in the quality of the teaching, with consequent improvements in outcomes for pupils. Providers also noted that the quality of their own teaching had improved further. Participants at all levels considered that this intensive approach – learning, discussion, practical exercise and live teaching – was much more effective than a more traditional model of continuing professional development by attending a course of instruction.

Working with teachers from other schools with similar challenges, outside the confines of their home school, enabled frank discussions of strengths and weaknesses in their own teaching, free from concerns about performance management or the disapproval of peers. In particular, a high proportion of time was dedicated to reflecting on and reviewing their own teaching, and their understanding of pedagogy. This taught teachers to become reflective practitioners and they began to share that skill with their colleagues at their home school, under the guidance of the school mentor.

This sharing continues with the 'coaching triads' model, in which the lead teacher works with two colleagues to demonstrate an element of teaching while being observed and then observes her or his colleagues 'having a go' themselves. The process of sharing itself reinforces the training received by the 'lead' teacher and boosts confidence as well as expertise.

"Teachers on the 'Outstanding Teacher Programme' in the teaching schools, both primary and secondary, noted that it involved serious debate and shared reflection with colleagues about what led to outstanding teaching."

Ofsted, 2010b:15

There are significant benefits in the development of instructional leadership to those who attend these programmes. The programmes not only hone the skills of lesson observation, evaluation and giving feedback, but develop coaching skills and require the participants to model good or outstanding teaching. Working in threes, they all experience the key range of roles that are central to the work of curriculum leaders.

The influence of Ravens Wood is strongly reflected in the leadership development work of another teaching school in London, The Compton School in Barnet.

The Compton's contribution to the leadership development of other schools is shown in Leadership journey⁷. The school was designated a Leading-Edge school in 2006 and a training school in 2007. An important aspect of both specialisms is the partnership and outreach work with a range of local schools, as well as regionally and nationally. The headteacher has a wide range of experience of working as an NLE in London Challenge and mentoring two other headteachers as part of a moving to new headship programme. A flavour of The Compton School's leadership development provision is as follows:

- **National Teaching School⁷**: as one of four schools in London to be designated a pilot national teaching school as part of the City Challenge, The Compton's role is based on delivering an Outstanding Teacher Programme and its focused partnership work with other schools in Barnet on improvements in teaching and learning, including support from advanced skills teachers (ASTs) in science, modern foreign languages, coaching and mentoring.

The school is also working with a range of schools on the following projects:

- **Going for great programme**: The school will act as a hub for three outstanding schools in north London and facilitate a joint publication linked to aspects of outstanding practice in each of the three schools.
- **Barnet outstanding schools project**: This is a Barnet-based project with four other schools, based on a model of co-operation among outstanding schools to support the raising of standards across a local authority. The project includes inter-school visits and learning walks as well as seminars with national leaders of education.

⁷ Teaching Schools were pioneered by Ravens Wood School and expanded through the London and City Challenge leadership strategies. The model – along with the work of Training Schools – has informed the remit and role of teaching schools outlined in the white paper, 'The Importance of Teaching', DfE, 2010.

- **Gaining Ground programme:** In this national programme, the focus is on working with two local schools to improve teaching and learning in mathematics. In 2009/10 the school developed a teaching and learning programme around intensive work with all staff within one department as well as coaching and mentoring work. Shared lesson observations by heads of department, work on assessment for learning and shared resources were other features of the programme.
- **MLDP:** In 2009/10 the school was one of a small number asked to pilot this new National College leadership programme for middle leaders. The pilot is now being rolled out nationally and the school is currently developing a second cohort of middle leaders in Barnet to undertake the programme.

Few schools, however good they are, have equal strengths in every subject or aspect. But many outstanding schools provide a tapestry of leadership development for their own staff and others. This is illustrated succinctly by one of the staff at The Compton School:

Leadership journey 7: A flavour of leadership in The Compton School

There are leadership opportunities from cradle to grave. We appoint teaching assistants and promise that, if they do well, we will sponsor them to become teachers on the graduate teacher programme. NQTs also come by other routes. We are the north London hub for the Middle Leadership Development Programme. We run this for the National College and include our staff on it. As a national teaching school, we run the Outstanding Teacher Programme which provides for teachers from many other schools and our own staff. We host placements for NPQH. All the time we are promoting and growing our own leaders; we have a bespoke MA programme and organise host days – people within the school run sessions for these. In-school briefings include fortnightly ‘butterfly sessions’ where the snippet of a good idea is presented to all staff in briefings; frequently, a first year teacher will do this, alongside a deputy head.

c. Schools in which leadership development is part of a temporary or ongoing partnership with one or more other schools

Networks and more closely defined partnerships for initial training and professional development are well established. Twynham is an example of a school that leads a range of staff and leadership development opportunities in partnership with other local schools in the local authority:

- **Teacher training:** Twynham is the lead training school in a local school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) programme with partners that include the University of Bath, three other curriculum lead schools and five partner placement schools. Each year, there are 24 trainees in 4 subjects: science; mathematics; modern foreign languages; and design and technology.
- **Early professional development:** The school runs an NQT programme in collaboration with another local school, Grange School. The focus is on pedagogic development for NQTs and includes coaching and lesson observation. The programme also supports staff in Twynham to take on aspiring leadership positions in their NQT+1 and +2 years including as innovation trio members or as class tutors and assistant heads of year.
- **Leadership programmes:** Several of the external leadership programmes for middle leaders are being organised in collaboration with Grange School. Wider collaborations on development have also occurred when there has been a joint need. Twynham is also the hub school for staff to undertake research to Master’s level in partnership with Winchester University. This has included mentoring and coaching staff in other schools.

Twynham has achieved a balance between school-based professional development and leadership opportunities and structured development programmes, making the most of opportunities that can only be provided through the range of partnership work that is readily available in schools that are connected with others through strong and purposeful partnerships.

2.2 School improvement partnerships and their impact

School improvement partnerships provide opportunities for leaders at different levels in the school with challenging opportunities for development. The impact of such work has been evaluated and documented from the beginning of London Challenge in 2003 to the present (Hill & Matthews, 2010). Ofsted's (2010b) review of London Challenge found that the strategic deployment of well-matched support schools with supported schools in London 'is a key reason why outcomes are improving across London in all categories of schools' (Ofsted, 2010b:9) and that 'supported schools become influenced by the rigour and high expectations of the colleagues who are providing the support' (ibid:13).

The executive headteacher of St Mary's C of E Primary has been spending three days a week for a year with a primary school which went into special measures in spring 2010. This has provided the opportunity to give two of his own staff experience as acting deputy and associate headteacher and to involve several other staff in joint work across the two schools. The headteacher describes the commitment in Leadership journey 8.

A year after the school support partnership was established, with the new head becoming established, the school is well on track to come out of special measures at the next monitoring visit. The executive head has been commissioned to help a neighbouring school, leaving his deputy in the supported school for another term.

The leadership development benefits of working in partner schools in challenging situations are also illustrated by a head of sixth form at Outwood Grange College who undertook outreach support of Harrogate High School before becoming acting headteacher of North Doncaster College of Technology and substantive principal of the new academy, bringing it out of special measures. She describes her experience in Leadership journey 9.

Leadership journey 8: Opportunities for senior leaders

I was there five days a week up to May, then three from October. A colleague came over as full-time deputy head and stayed when the new head was appointed at Christmas. I remain as consultant. Our deputy became acting headteacher here. Five other staff have worked with colleagues at the supported school, coaching and working with them to build capacity. Every teacher has been to our school to watch the equivalent teacher teach. Our [higher level teaching assistant] has worked with all their [teaching assistants]. Our sports leader trained theirs. Our deputy is there today, advising on safeguarding. Out of our 24 staff, only a few have not worked over there. I believe that coaching from the roots up is more likely to be effective than starting at the top and cascading down.

Executive headteacher, St Mary's C of E Primary School

Leadership journey 9: Outreach support leading to academy principalship

From an English teaching background, I became deputy, then head of the sixth form at Outwood Grange and loved the job. Although vacancies existed at vice-principal (VP) level, I felt this step was not for me. Not being 'on the bus', so to speak, it was no longer an option for me to stay. So I applied for other jobs and nearly got a job as head of sixth form in Sheffield. When I got back, colleagues urged me to try for the VP job. All it needed was for someone to have confidence in me. I was appointed VP for deep learning at Outwood Grange and loved it. My leadership was concerned with a different type of learning: student voice, learning to learn, the development of skills and qualities – all challenging stuff. It is especially difficult to make changes when the school is outstanding. The deep learning team was a vertical cross-section of staff, including aspiring leaders, assistant heads [and] leaders of gifted and talented provision. It was a great learning journey for me.

Then I was asked to transform the sixth form in a supported school in Harrogate. After that, an acting head was needed at a school in special measures in Doncaster which Outwood Grange had been asked to support. North Doncaster Technology College had been in and out of special measures for about 10 years and was a real challenge. With the support of other Outwood Grange leaders, I led the school out of special measures. I was then appointed to the principal role of this new academy through open competition. I had my NPQH interview on the same day as the interview. Taking two members of staff with me from Outwood Grange made a huge difference. My presence there was accepted by some staff, not by others. It is helpful to be able to close the door and talk to people you trust and can bounce ideas off. I believe that experience helps you to make judgement calls and take time to reflect. The experience I had had in challenging situations where there were colleagues I could turn to gave me the confidence, experience and skills to go for headship.

Principal, Outwood Academy Adwick

All the providers in this study can cite evidence from test and examination results, Ofsted reports and other indicators and evaluations to show the benefits to schools causing concern and to the pupils and staff who study and work in those schools. Schools in special measures or other categories of concern that have been partnered by Outwood Grange, Greenwood Dale, Ashton-on-Mersey, Oldway, Woodberry Down, Ravens Wood, Gable Hall and other schools have improved radically. Schools sponsored by chains such as the Harris Academies and ARK Schools have also shown strongly improving trends which can be seen on the organisations' websites.

Twynham School has provided a range of direct support for school improvement in local schools:

- School A is assisted by supporting an internally promoted head to recover from a notice to improve, with Twynham's head working formally as associate/mentor head one day a week and deploying SLT colleagues to implement a system of faculty review and improve the school's use of data. Twynham is now supporting the federation of school A and school B.
- School C is supported through the implementation of data-tracking systems.
- School D is provided with support for improving the quality of teaching and by coaching its senior staff in lesson observation and feedback.
- School E is supported by the development of a proposal for a hard federation with Twynham's head becoming the executive headteacher. This came about when school E's headteacher asked for local schools to help.

Twynham staff are positive about these roles and the professional and leadership development they create, but several staff also note the challenge of working with some resistant staff in partner schools.

The main effects of leadership development programmes include: measurable improvements in teaching and pupil achievements; action research or challenges that are adopted by the school; building confidence and capacity in other colleagues; contributing to improvement in schools, departments and teachers causing concern; and of course the increased capability and confidence of the leaders involved.

2.3 The value of partnership and outreach opportunities for leadership development

There is no best model for partnership work. Very effective opportunities for leadership development can be found in connected schools such as national support schools as well as in federations and chains.

The governing body of St Mary's Primary School declined the opportunity to federate. Like Oldway, the school prefers to be free to provide support to other schools as a national support school, helping schools to build the leadership capacity to thrive, and it is not persuaded of the benefits of federation, particularly with a school some distance away. These schools, however, are in no doubt about the benefits of partnership working, which have been explored thoroughly in other research (eg Hill & Matthews, 2010).

The relationship with their supported school was typical of the style of soft federation in which many executive headteachers, particularly NLEs, work. Subsequently, the two schools tend to become either statutory federations or revert to being stand-alone schools, although there are exceptions. In a growing number of cases, two schools decide to share an executive headteacher. Such pairings can be valuable in developing the deputies or heads of school or headteachers in the constituent schools. Examples of such arrangements include Gable Hall and William Edwards secondary schools in Thurrock, Old Ford and Culloden primary schools in Tower Hamlets and – perhaps uniquely – the shared headship of a Roman Catholic church school and a community school in Southampton.

The range of outreach work that Comberton Village College is engaged in – from leading edge and NLE/NSS work to CPD and research partnerships – has meant not only that the school has had to build additional leadership capacity but has also provided a range of opportunities for staff to develop as leaders through new and challenging roles. This has been an explicit strategy, with Comberton quick to develop many AST posts in a short period of time when there was an opportunity to do so, both creating some of the first county posts and linking further posts with their specialisms. The ASTs are used in ongoing partnership and support work.

Building capacity in Comberton and other schools so as to take on the obligations of a national support school through a range of challenging leadership roles has also resulted in large SLTs and a culture and structure of distributed leadership. These have benefits but they also require highly effective communications to ensure clarity about

the distribution of roles and the matters being tackled. Another concern common to many schools that have built the extra capacity needed to sustain outreach work is that any change in demand or funding could result in over-capacity and the need for rationalisation. The executive principals at both St Mary's and Comberton are confident that there remains a strong demand for school-to-school and local authority-commissioned improvement work for schools that have strong track records of leading improvement.

Similarly, for Twynham School, the benefits of the school's leadership development approach are reported to include more effective whole-school leadership of learning, as well as capacity-building and increasing the capability for leadership succession and for the range of outreach work the school undertakes. Its concerns include being more liable to lose some staff who have strong potential for promotion elsewhere. This is partially mitigated by the outreach assignments that are helpful in retaining staff seeking new challenges. But when staff do leave, the school also sees this as an opportunity for other staff to step into acting roles or to realign the SLT to reflect new priorities and assign responsibilities in response to change. For instance, where the school is likely to lose an AST to promotion, the solution may not be to recruit another AST but rather to give three lead teachers the opportunity to take on aspects of the AST role.

The upside in all the schools is that a wide range of staff are gaining the confidence and skills to lead cutting-edge practice or challenging assignments and interventions. In doing so, they develop their leadership potential. Outreach opportunities have also enabled these schools and others to retain staff who would otherwise be seeking promotion to another school by giving them opportunities to take on new external responsibilities.

At a wider system level, these schools have developed leaders that move out to take on challenges elsewhere, well prepared to lead and innovate. One school's loss is another's gain. People who leave for promotion only threaten the previous school if they have no ready successor for an indispensable role. Unless the organisation is expanding or has many staff approaching retirement, some throughput is essential to provide opportunities for those leaders coming up behind. Nowhere is this philosophy demonstrated more vividly than at St John the Baptist School, where more than 20 leaders have moved on to headships and deputy headships since the current head took up post. This school even took the simultaneous departure of two deputies and two assistant headteachers in its stride, such was the reservoir of leadership talent at the school.

2.4 Bearing the torch and lighting the flame

National support schools, whether or not they are members of larger groups such as a federation or chain, are well equipped to produce leaders who are not only able to take on headship but to rise to the challenge of headship of a school causing concern. Programmes such as the National College's Associate Headteacher Programme and Future Leaders have also contributed. Aspiring headteachers whose launch-pad is a high-quality and effective school, with robust approaches and systems, distributed leadership, ambitious for the highest success of its pupils, with leaders who model best practice, should be well equipped to take on challenging headships. They come from good stables.

Every new headteacher has to find a balance between what he or she brings from previous experience, in particular the previous school, and what he or she does afresh on assessing the new situation. This is illustrated by two examples. The first demonstrates that the fundamentals are universal; the essentials simple, in theory at least. The example is of the newly appointed head to the secondary school in which he had been associate headteacher, which had been the responsibility of an executive headteacher with whom the new head worked previously. Steve Munday, head of the William Edwards School, describes his development as a leader.

Leadership journey 10: Seizing opportunities and learning from the best

The most important experiences of my preparation for headship were:

- the range of roles and responsibilities I had in both curriculum and pastoral areas before joining the senior leadership team
- the opportunity to have a term on secondment to a school in special measures as acting deputy, which was the most challenging and difficult but rewarding period of my career by some distance and where I learned about swift impact, identifying key priorities and focusing on them solely, and about people leadership
- mentoring and coaching from my head, a very experienced executive headteacher and NLE
- an associate headship in which I took responsibility for headteacher roles, like governors' meetings and staffing issues, with my mentor looking over my shoulder

Speaking about the executive head as role model, this headteacher remarked:

“The first thing that it is impossible to ignore is his unrelenting determination to raise standards, motivated by a genuine desire to improve the life chances of young people in this area. He focuses on diet and delivery; that is to say, the curriculum and teachers teaching well, because these have the main impact. This is a consistent message. As a leader, he never rushes decisions. Things are considered carefully. He takes the strategic view: what are the key things? He is not bogged down with superfluous detail.”

Headteacher

This new headteacher no longer has the umbrella of his executive headteacher, who retired, but has inherited a school – newly turned academy – which was recently deemed outstanding by Ofsted, including outstanding teaching and learning.

The second example is of a headteacher whose experience has prepared him very well for headship, and provided impeccable strategies for achieving success, but who has had to adapt and innovate to meet the demands of a very challenging school.

Leadership journey 11: The DNA of success

The relatively new headteacher, John Hernandez, has reproduced several essential strands of DNA from Ravens Wood, where he was a deputy head, and has developed his own considered and well-informed approach to leadership. The Ravens Wood inheritance includes approaches to the intelligent use of information; six-weekly progress reviews for staff and students; learning threes as the foundation of CPD; and a focus on high-quality teaching and learning supported by the Outstanding Teacher Programme first developed at Ravens Wood; and cutting out the avoidable incidents or allergies that disrupt learning. But the vision he has established at Norlington Secondary School is supported by a framework in which progress, whether of students or staff, towards the vision is energised within clear boundaries. The route map can be visualised as a green roadway flanked by amber run-off areas bordered by red (Figure 1).

The vision is couched in terms of five aims: developing staff and building capacity; student outcomes; student learning experiences; school of choice for local community; and enrichment and opportunities to succeed. Influenced by Goleman's (2003) leadership styles, those on course (green zone) have a great deal of autonomy. Coaching is intensified for those straying into the amber zone and red triggers a more commanding approach.

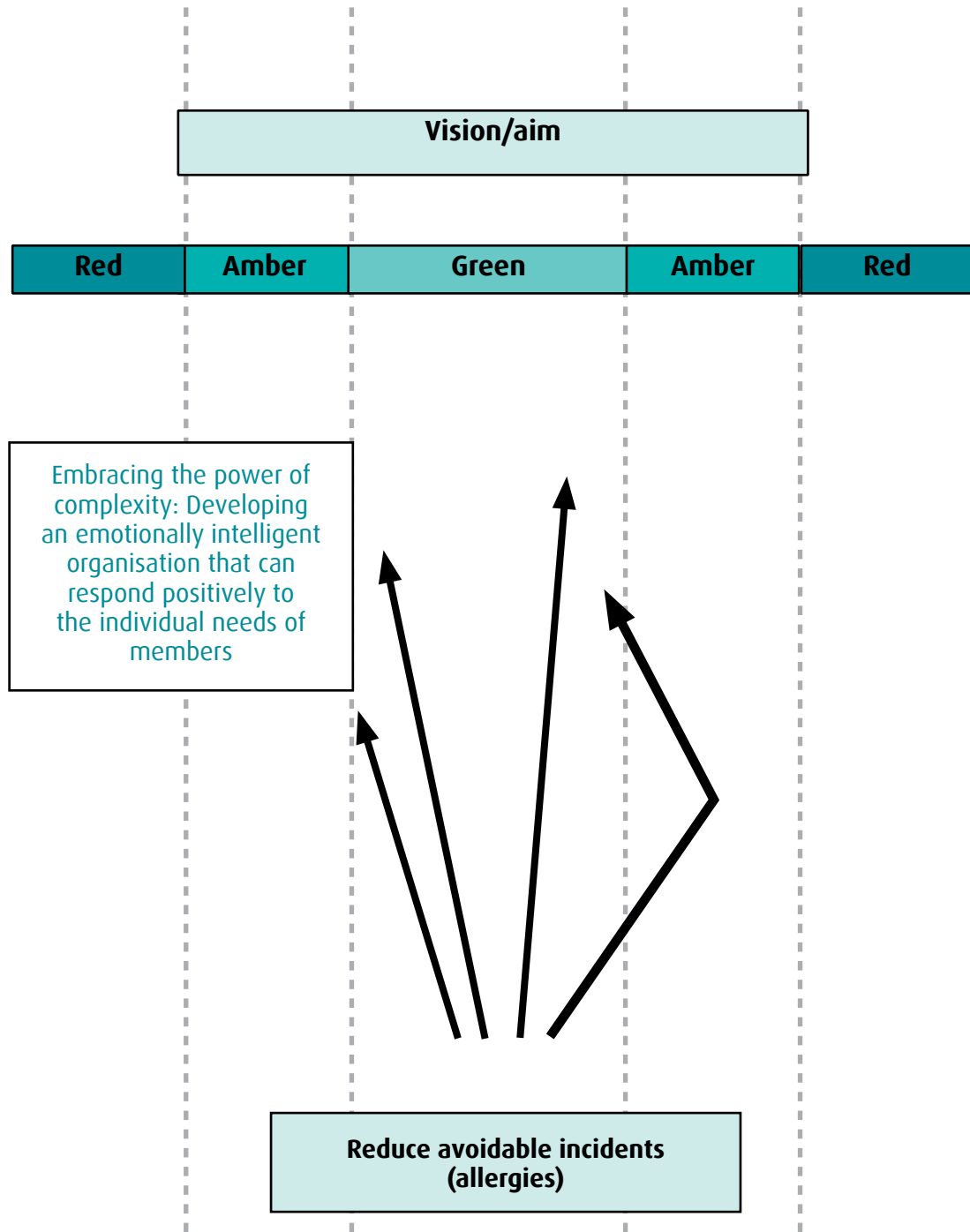
In the early days of taking on the headship of a school in which there had been several changes of leadership and many other human and financial challenges, John has built a climate of high expectations and shared values and a team of responsible and accountable leaders. The framework has enabled him to simplify and share expectations and apply consistent approaches to leadership and the performance management of students and staff. There is no need to exercise control of people who are working within the framework of expectations, provided there is a clear and shared vision of what they are trying to achieve. Staff have taken some major decisions democratically, such as the adoption of a two-week autumn half-term. Information, not personality, is used to drive change, which gets a far better response. There will be a big school-based development programme for middle leaders, heads of department and heads of year because they are crucial in driving change.

One of the deputies, who leads CPD, has been trained as a facilitator in the new Middle Leadership Development Programme, which will be offered in the school and across the area. John concludes:

“The middle leaders have already come a long way. They are far better than they were at using performance information. They readily recognise meritocracies in school and are willing to articulate them. They can describe their leadership roles in the school. The old middle leaders programme was too much about process, when middle leadership is a lot about management: this is what we are trying to achieve, and this is what we need to do to get there – together.”

Headteacher, Norlington Secondary School

Figure 1: Depiction of a school operational framework



Source: John Hernandez, Norlington Secondary School

The head considers that his best professional development came from his time at Ravens Wood, which included substantial outreach work with two of the London Challenge 'Keys to Success' schools, extensive reading, attendance at conferences run by SSAT, which provoked his thinking, and NPQH.

The Ofsted (2010a) survey of leadership development in successful NSSs found that leadership development approaches were flexible, responsive to changing needs and closely attuned to the central processes of the schools:

'A focus on teaching and learning was central. These highly effective leaders understood the changing needs of their schools and their staff. They planned ahead to sustain excellence, ensuring that leaders at all levels developed the skills to meet those needs. They recruited and retained high-quality staff and focused very specifically on professional development, in particular on developing and training their own leaders. Teaching and support staff were given opportunities to undertake new leadership responsibilities in areas that were relevant to them. These opportunities developed their leadership skills systematically. The staff were supported by good-quality mentoring and coaching to ensure that they reflected on and learned from their experiences. Typically, all this was underpinned by well-developed leadership training programmes, tailored for staff at different stages of leadership development.'

Ofsted, 2010a:4

2.5 Leadership development in chains and federations

Opportunities abound

It is evident that the accelerated development of aspiring, middle and senior leaders benefits when their skills and capacity are applied and challenged in new professional environments. Leadership development in groups of schools has the common feature of greater access to the opportunity for experience in other schools, which tends to increase in proportion to the number of schools in the group.

West Trafford Learning Partnership's model of leadership development, for example, includes encouraging young teachers to hone their skills in neighbouring schools. It is an organic model based on evolving partnerships and relationships, and young staff relish the opportunities provided:

"The federation gives us opportunities to go beyond our expected duties. As a young member of staff, I never would have got these opportunities in another school. If you want to develop in this school, you can put any idea forward. If you want to work hard, they'll exploit this in the nicest way!"

Teacher, West Trafford Learning Partnership

The partnership is sustained by a cohort of senior leaders who each play a significant role in supporting schools in the formal partnership, as well as in a range of other schools that need support to boost their thinking, learning and development. As the executive principal of the partnership commented, "This probably offers some of the best hands-on professional development around." He is proud of the fact that so many leaders from the learning partnership take on more senior leadership positions, not only in the partnership but also across the local system. Leadership in the partnership is system-orientated, both in its intent and its outcomes. The internal focus is on leadership for learning. The external orientation seeks to make connections with the external and wider community, and to bring that understanding to the needs and aspirations of the young people in the schools served by the partnership and in the wider locality.

Interviewees spoke of the importance of distributed leadership and acknowledged and appreciated the high levels of investment in staff development. It is also open to staff to apply for a range of opportunities, not only to conventional leadership programmes but also resources to travel or explore new ideas, if these are linked to specific objectives and outcomes. Over recent months, middle and senior leaders have been to Finland, Sweden, South Africa and the USA. One senior leader explained: "We have a 'bid' culture, which is not a dash for cash... Any bid has to link into improvement."

There is a culture of rigorous performance feedback and intensive coaching in West Trafford Learning Partnership. The approach is strongly influenced by the specialist nature of the lead school, Ashton-on-Mersey, as a sports college in which teamwork and coaching are essential ingredients. Coaching is central to the process of leadership development and capacity-building.

Students are coached in their work, as well as in their sporting activities, and coaching is part of the school's routine professional development cycle. The director of sport observes younger members of staff and provides feedback and coaching on their teaching practice. The principal, in turn, observes the way the director of sport provides feedback and coaches him on his approach. Young staff have a mentor for specific projects from whom they can seek advice. Mentors and coaches work closely together.

The head of PE at Ashton-on-Mersey joined the school in 1998, attracted by its specialist status in sport. He began as a supply teacher, although permanent positions were available elsewhere. His story in Leadership journey 12 illustrates the power of coaching and role models.

Leadership journey 12: Role models supporting individual career development

Over the last 10 years, I've worked my way up through the school: KS4 curriculum lead, director of sport [and] various regional leads on sport and coaching. I'm responsible for the development of support staff. The school gives you opportunities at every stage. It's really hard to say no. You don't say no because you realise that you are a part of something much bigger. It's very special what we are doing here. If I wanted to move to another school I could do that easily, but no other school round here would give me the same type of opportunities. Not only are we a specialist sports college, but because we're sponsored by Manchester United Football Club, there is a real edge to what we do.

There are two outstanding senior leader role models for me here who have helped me become what I am. They really saw what I could do and brought me on, and I think the principals have been role models for them. Five people from our SLT have had sports backgrounds. It's very unusual in a school. You're not held back because you are the PE teacher – quite the opposite. Everything we know from sport we can put into place in our teaching and the way we work with people.

There really is a climate of coaching. That's direct talking, encouraging you to know yourself and do your best. And that can be tough talking too, which means acknowledging your mistakes and going back and getting them sorted out. You can get help if you need to. You're not on your own. It's my turn now to be coaching others. That's support staff and teaching staff, particularly new staff. I've been able to get some of our support staff (for pupil behaviour) here to take their ideas to Broadoak [School]. Our senior behaviour manager has developed a scheme with Broadoak so that if pupils are struggling and misbehaving they can switch schools for a while. It's worked really well and we're all delighted.

"This school and the partnership has an amazing reputation, for sport, for studying (that's staff and students) and for getting on. There's a pride in getting on. The sports element really matters. The pupils do well academically because of it and the Manchester United⁸ bit helps. It gives status to sport but it's also saying that, even if you are a promising football star, your education really counts."

Head of PE, Ashton-on-Mersey School

⁸ Manchester United FC's youth players are educated at the school and sixth form.

There is much in common between the leadership development opportunities in groups of schools (ie federations and chains) and connected schools such as national support schools, particularly up to senior leadership level. The sharing of middle leader expertise is a real strength of such partnerships.

In federations and chains, one additional opportunity for curriculum leadership is to be seen in the appointment of directors of subjects – particularly core subjects, specialisms and ICT – across secondary schools or across the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in primary school federations. Expanding groups of schools, however, provide a range of additional opportunities for headship. One example is the Harris Academies.

Systems within a system: established chains

The Harris Academies provide one of the longest established chains, which currently stands at nine academies and is growing. Its approach to leadership development within the chain is illustrated in the case study of the Harris Federation of South London Schools (see Annex 1). A cross-section of staff relate how they see leadership opportunities and development as Harris employees in Leadership journey 13.

Leadership journey 13: Opportunities for top leadership within a chain

The principal at Harris Academy South Norwood recalls how she was supported after appointment as principal-designate, one year before the academy opened:

“I was able to prepare for a year because of the federation. I had a network of support, particularly through the SLT at Harris Academy Crystal Palace. I had no access to the students before the school opened so we concentrated on team building. Only one of the senior leadership team had been appointed from the previous (boys’) school.”

The vice-principal explains:

“I want to be a principal for a Harris academy because I share the vision, which is about making a difference to lives of Londoners. It’s firstly about being an outstanding teacher. Second best is not good enough. I have independence but also the opportunity to make and contribute to the federation – which may in time grow to 20 academies.”

A vice-principal in another academy says:

“I was in the Harris Academy Crystal Palace, and I wanted a change... a different challenge. I made the decision not to go for a vice-principal’s job there. More and more people are making moves across the federation. There are cross-academy groups [and] people build up strong links and loyalties. As an AST, I worked in all of the academies and got the opportunity to see other contexts, all very different.”

Others speak of the part they have played in setting up the federation, helping to establish its philosophy and having real opportunities to step up to new and more responsible roles. One who joined as an NQT and is now a vice-principal in a third Harris academy summarises his career:

“I was an NQT at Kelsey Park, then head of year; head of history at Beaverwood and then joined Harris City Technology College as humanities co-ordinator in 1999. The Harris approach of involving middle leaders in whole-school roles gave me good experience, for example organising daily cover, duties, homework monitoring and so on. This helped in moving to the SLT as head of faculty/assistant principal. I had lots of high-grade experience including autonomous leadership of my faculty which included pastoral support for a quarter of the academy. The growth of the federation also meant I got involved with our new academies and worked with two local primaries which were funded as specialist schools. I did this job for six years before I moved to be vice-principal at Falconwood when we opened here in 2008.”

Staff express a desire to attain headship within the federation. They report an expectation that they can work across schools and encouragement to pursue their ideas provided they have people’s trust. The culture and opportunities build self-confidence and strong loyalties. As one senior leader said:

“I’ve never wanted to be a headteacher... But I’m gradually getting closer and closer. I’ve had access to work at the highest levels, and can now see myself doing it. There will be opportunities here. Because of my work at the federation, why would I want to be a head elsewhere? I wouldn’t want to walk away from the federation. I value the federation. I like the collaboration and the support and the high expectations of me. It might be that I won’t be successful immediately but it will come.”

More junior staff are equally positive. The second in charge of the PE department in one Harris academy said:

“Our academy and the federation in general tend to be proactive in identifying leadership talent and opportunities for staff; my own participation in [MLDP] was initiated by the assistant principal in charge of CPD.”

These accounts reflect the federation's approach to growing leaders – providing opportunities to widen leadership roles, empowering leaders to make key decisions and creating autonomous faculty communities where leaders are responsible for the full range of whole-school issues on a smaller scale. The federation's policy is for all members of staff, irrespective of seniority, to be engaged in some form of CPD that relates to progression. This forms part of their performance management. However, this is not to suggest that staff are railroaded into decisions; leadership development opportunities are discussed during performance management meetings. With that in mind, the federation is always keen that any in-service training is offered by one of their other academies for the purposes of validation and credibility; external providers would generally require strong references from within the federation.

Support for aspiring leaders is facilitated through the allocation of a professional learning colleague (PLC). The role of the PLC is to act mainly as a discussion partner with whom to try out ideas. PLCs tend to be senior members of staff whose insight and experience are invaluable and again, having them within reach makes support far more effective.

3. System growth

3.1 Generating leaders for the school system

There is national concern about the potential shortfall of good candidates for headship vacancies resulting from the ageing population of headteachers. This prompts two concerns: (i) is the system generating potential headteachers quickly enough? and (ii) are senior leaders prepared to take on headship? In terms of this study, there is also the question of whether leaders trained in chains and federations move out to work in the wider school system, or whether they tend to stay in the chain or federation because of the range of leadership positions offered within it.

The evidence from the schools included in this study and many others visited in the course of identifying NLEs and NSSs is that all the schools and school groups are growing leaders effectively and as far as possible expanding their senior leadership teams to accommodate the best of them. Programmes such as the graduate teacher programme and Future Leaders have contributed to this growth of leadership potential.

Members of senior leadership teams exhibit three characteristics which could be described as: 'happy as I am'; 'aspiring to be a deputy'; and 'aspiring to lead a school'. Interviews with middle leaders often elicit an ultimate ambition of becoming a deputy headteacher. Reasons given often suggest either lack of confidence in their own ability, or apprehension about taking ultimate responsibility for a school and the accountability associated with this.

Where deputy headteacher positions are occupied by incumbents who have no desire to become headteachers, there is the potential for blocking opportunities to aspiring headteacher colleagues. This risk would be lessened if deputies or vice-principals were fixed-term appointments. Although there are many assistant headteachers who would be good candidates for headship, many governing bodies are often reluctant to shortlist candidates other than deputies or existing headteachers for headteacher posts. A case can be made, therefore, for the second tier of school leadership to be occupied by more than one equivalent postholder, as happens in many secondary schools, and be seen as a position of preparation for headship.

It is in this spirit that Ravens Wood School has abolished deputy posts in favour of an expanded second tier. Similarly, Outwood Grange has a range of vice-principals but no deputy principal, and many primary schools have assistant headteachers but, again, no deputy.

The main opportunity offered by the school partnership work of national support schools and the increasing number of schools within groups or chains is experience as an acting or associate headteacher, head of school or operational headteacher working in a supervised environment under an executive headteacher. Commonly, many of the people occupying these positions who previously did not aspire to headship have gained sufficient confidence to reconsider. Often, the aspects of headship that turn prospective heads off the idea are, apart from school inspections, related to finance, administration and human resources; balancing the budget; preparing the timetable; and dealing with ineffective performance.

Research into leadership succession (Macmillan 2000; Fink & Brayman, 2006; summarised by Leithwood et al, 2006) suggests that 'unplanned headteacher succession is one of the most common sources of the school's failure to progress'. Succession planning does not necessarily mean the appointment of an incumbent deputy headteacher, which may or may not benefit the school. The growing proliferation of roles such as head of school, associate principal or equivalent roles is a promising safety net since it provides a real test of headship capability and qualities in an ultimately protected environment.

3.2 Leadership transferability and support for other schools

The permeability of the interface between the different schools and school groups varies according to the principles on which each provider operates. A good leader is a good leader, but cultural transitions are not always comfortable.

One of the potential strengths of school groups such as federations or chains is the sharing of core principles, policies and procedures. The leadership culture of the Greenwood Academies Trust chain, for example, is strongly informed by Greenwood Dale School's culture and its history of school improvement. This is focused on:

- very high expectations for student learning, progress and behaviour
- student pride in the school and its uniform
- consistency of teaching quality
- commitment to staff development

There is clear leadership of very tightly defined whole-school regularities on staff roles, teaching, marking, behaviour and support. These are codified in the staff handbook and supported by in-service training. Some might see this as a highly (perhaps overly) managed environment, but the senior leadership sees it as essential to set clear priorities and to ensure all staff and pupils know what is expected of them.

In the Outwood academies, there are seven such strands, which include procedures for assessment and recognition ('praising stars') and behaviour ('consequences') as well as curriculum, teaching and so on. Some of these have their origins in work the CEO did before his first headship. They provide a very strong set of practices, founded on well-conceived principles, that have now been tested in many schools. The Outwood group's boundaries are relatively permeable. It will accept newcomers into the family if they are prepared to challenge and be challenged, learn and share at family review meetings that scrutinise the performance of all member schools at each meeting, and share initiatives and celebrate success.

The current acting principal at Outwood Grange Academy describes its seven strands as "a great framework on which to fasten your values." One of the strengths of the strands is that any modifications are considered by the whole family of schools before being adopted. This builds in quality assurance as well as risk assessment.

Leadership journey 14: Using a school leadership toolkit

It sets you in the right direction. It doesn't matter which measures of data you use, it is what you do with it and what students get out of it, what difference it makes to children's lives. We talk about 80:20 in the classroom in terms of praise and discipline, 80:20 in terms of standard operating procedures across the family with 20 per cent being contextualised. There is no need to rewrite the script because it is a very good script. What it doesn't stop us doing is taking those ideas and digging deeper. So, for example, last year I took 'praising stars' and organised it so we reported it in exactly the same way as RAISEonline is reported. Exactly the same pupil groups, the same three levels of progress, etc [and] you produce your own RAISEonline six times a year. Before we make such changes, they are brought to the family of schools, and the entire family of schools develops at the same time. What you don't want is one praising stars in one school to look different from praising stars in another. Then what we did was look, for example, at the 4i system: information, identification, intervention and impact. We used that system and looked at how to embed it more deeply. It's used for everything: staff structure, development plan, individual student, plan for a class etc. Same system across the way we work. Having the seven strands does not mean you can't change, but if you do, you do it in a consistent and honest way so that it applies in all the schools and everyone learns and moves forward together.

Acting principal, Outwood Grange Academy

The 80:20 ratio is quoted by several groups of schools in terms of the balance of standard operating procedures and local initiatives or variation. The First Federation is a primary example. The approach works well where leaders are grown within the system and then take on schools themselves, either within or in association with the home group.

Some school groups are subject to greater philosophical differences or creative tension, especially when they bring in outstanding established principals to take on new schools. In ARK Schools, most academies followed the central ARK principles but in developing their own vision and ethos some have diverged. The principles followed most closely include:

- depth in English and mathematics, before curriculum breadth
- priority on reading fluently, with many students following the accelerated reading programme
- a longer school day to enable a range of extra-curricular activities to take place
- high expectations for pupils' progress and achievement, both in core subjects and in aspiration for university entrance
- an absolute and consistent approach to behaviour and high standards of discipline

Principles that some members of ARK Schools have not followed so closely include the following:

- ARK's 'small schools within a school' concept is used by some schools as a means of personalising pastoral support to students and enabling aspiring leaders to take on aspects of whole-school leadership in a more protective environment. In one of the newly established schools, however, this model is perceived to have some potential problems including the possibility that one 'small school' becomes visibly stronger than another 'small school'.
- The US knowledge is power program (KIPP)⁹ approach to learning, in which many individual ARK schools have found useful aspects such as the very explicit ethos and culture of high attainment, has been found by some to be too focused on classroom management and silent corridors rather than on a high-quality curriculum and pedagogy.

This commitment to the leadership of learning has led to:

- the development of a detailed, innovative and coherent policy for teaching and learning that sets out, in a handbook, the 13 main aspects of the academy's approach and how teachers are expected to lead this in practice
- very regular observation and team teaching in building up a professional learning community

Students are also encouraged to see themselves as a learning community. The academy's motto, *civitas* ('the city'), and a related pledge are foundations on which a sense of community and shared responsibility can be built, discussed and promoted.

One of the pressing development needs throughout the profession is that all who teach, all who lead learning and all who lead school systems should understand what excellence is, know it when they see it, show it through their own practice and help others to achieve it. As one interviewee said: "Every aspiring headteacher should have seen and worked in an outstanding school. Good is not enough." In one of the chains visited for this study, appointment to post requires experience of an outstanding school as an important prerequisite. An advantage of many school groups and partnerships is that they include at least one outstanding school and, usually, pockets of other outstanding practice. Outstanding schools are too valuable not to provide a professional development resource.

⁹ KIPP schools share a core set of operating principles known as the five pillars: high expectations; choice and commitment; more time; power to lead; and focus on results (www.kipp.org).

The group now has four principals, three of them executive principals, who can do this confidently and respond to questions from other heads at the top of their field. Visiting different schools is always useful, and Ninestiles, Birmingham; Brunel, Bristol and Haberdashers' Aske's are among those visited. One of the executive principals said:

“You can also judge how far you have come by the questions that you are asked and the reactions to your answers. It is amazing that experienced heads ask questions such as: ‘What do you do about the unions?... They wouldn't allow us to do that’. Many other heads were taken aback when the discussion came up on a visit to Ninestiles about headteachers who are not effective in the job. The response was to face the issue unequivocally and have the difficult but straight conversation with them. Some prospective executive heads are shocked when faced with this reality; it is a revelation. It made us realise what we had been exposed to. It was time for us to reflect on our own learning”.

Executive principal, Outwood Grange Academy

3.3 Succession planning for system leaders

From middle leaders to executive headteachers

In one school group, all NQTs and support staff are soon invited onto the bespoke middle leaders programme based at the Outwood Grange leadership development centre. All principals and vice-principals in the group are expected to lead sessions in the 10-week module that includes sessions on: vision; leading in a time of change; financial planning; and paradigm shifts in leading and thinking. The executive leaders feel it is important that everyone at the highest level is seen to be presenting to the middle leaders. They also make presentations on SSAT courses for new heads and run the executive headteachers programme that requires participants to make presentations to and be grilled by experienced secondary headteachers.

Succession planning for executive principals

Outwood Grange and Trafford Partnership are among the first to grow executive headteacher capacity within their organisations. They now have three and two NLEs respectively. The CEO at Outwood Grange recognised that succession planning is essential at the top level of the organisation and to do that, prospective executive principals needed to be exposed to everything that he faces. At the heart of this are weekly meetings of the core group of principals where they talk about the real detail, the issues of school improvement “and the politics of it, which is becoming bigger as we move forward.” These meetings are reinforced when the principals join the CEO at national policy meetings: “I took Julie to the SSAT system redesign group and Paul to the National College's NLE advisory group. Paul also came to the SSAT board meeting. And they both came to the DfE, meeting people.” The interview process for two executive headship positions mirrored what it was like to be an executive head: “I wanted to get a process that would test them very severely. It was not a done deal for any of them. The board would have been quite happy and prepared to appoint nobody.”

Leadership journey 15: Appointing executive headteachers in a family of schools

The CEO describes the process of appointment:

“In November I told the two candidates to clear their diaries for a week just to be available. In the middle of it they did have a course they both attended. I wanted them to be very pressured, doing things at short notice, and drive a lot because that’s what you do, and be able to interact with different audiences and see whether their perception of how the meeting went was the same as my perception as an observer. So they had to complete an application form; had to meet an ex-head – at short notice and in widely different locations – who would grill them on their application for an hour. I had gone through applications with him and advised him what to target. They responded differently about whether they should get involved in primaries or not. Then he told them after the grilling that they had to meet him at a county hall and negotiate with a local authority what they could provide for school improvement. Unbeknownst to them I was already in the room to listen. Two days later, they had to meet me at a railway station and we travelled to where I had arranged an interview with a senior DfE official. Each candidate had been given three things to raise in the meeting and get answers. They had to write reports by nine o’clock the next morning. They had further interviews and wrote a report for the board. They then had the formal interviews with the board and had to make a presentation on: ‘How would you scale up without compromising the quality of education at our current schools?’ At the end of the process they were both successful but it was in no way guaranteed. In the interview – maybe a reflection of the training they both had – both started in the same way and said the same things. You need to get people to a point where you’re confident they can do it. How do you get the training and interview to reflect the pressures you’ll be under? One is now engaged in his third school intervention. I’m not doing any restructuring, he’s doing it all. And that’s how it should be. Professional development is critical to what we do.”

CEO, Outwood Grange Academy

Building leadership capacity

Groups of schools have been very conscious of the need to build capacity as they have taken on further challenges such as incorporating more schools. Some have undoubtedly been successful in building the necessary leadership capacity to cope with additional demands. But the proliferation of academies sponsored by existing schools and federations worries those who understand the need to build capacity. As one executive principal observed:

“There’s a land grab at moment; lots of sponsors contacting lots of heads, saying ‘Can we sponsor you?’ I don’t know what their capacity is and how they can do this. One head had two approaches from sponsors in the same week. How can these other emerging groups build capacity so fast? How thoroughly are sponsors – particularly sponsoring schools – vetted? This group would not take a school on unless they were convinced they could have an impact on results within the first year – not in three years’ time.”

Capacity-building is not just about the supply chain of new principals. Moredon and Rodbourne Cheney Federation provides an example of extending capacity at several levels. The first is extended middle leadership described in Leadership journey 16.

Leadership journey 16: Extending middle leadership capacity

An outstanding new teacher in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) became the co-ordinator of the provision in her school, undertaking many innovations in this area. She was subsequently appointed as leader of EYFS provision across the federation, replicating the director of subject role found across many secondary federations or chains.

A second example is the creation of operational headteachers for the three schools in the Moredon federation and the rapid promotion of a gifted special school teacher to take responsibility for all outreach provision for behaviour support across the authority.

A third example is a proposal for this small federation to amalgamate with another primary federation in North Swindon, providing the larger group with two executive headteachers whose skills are complementary.

At Outwood Grange Academy, the invitation by North Yorkshire local authority to support Harrogate High School, raise performance and secure it against an adverse inspection report provided the opportunity to develop a process of school support that has been replicated several times since and has stood the test of time.

Outwood's fundamental strategy when taking on the improvement of a school where the head is missing or insecure was to install one of the vice-principals as an associate headteacher, working to the executive principal, together with two other leaders from Outwood Grange. This trio was supplemented when necessary by subject and financial specialists. The associate head went on to turn around a school in Scarborough, again with two other leaders from Outwood Grange, improving it from special measures to an inspection grade of 'good' in 2010.

The building of leadership capacity is shown by the fact that the associate head has since worked with schools in Thornaby and Worksop and is an NLE. One of his colleagues at Harrogate High School became the acting head of a school in north Doncaster that was in special measures and is now Outwood Academy Adwick; she is now its substantive principal.

There is now a strong modus operandi for turning schools around. It serves the dual purpose of helping other schools improve and giving unrivalled leadership experience.

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3.4 Limits to growth: considerations of size, distance and geography

Asking whether there is an optimum size for school groups in relation to leadership training and development introduces a number of conditions. We must first distinguish between established or growing groups of connected schools, as in identifiable federations and chains, and the expeditionary school improvement missions that have been led by some pioneering headteachers (now NLEs) in an executive or consultative role since the early years of the 21st century. The latter contribute to leadership development to the extent that key middle and senior leaders become part of the mission for periods of time.

Most long-range ventures focus on building local capacity so as to leave behind a self-improving school or federation. The work of some of these enterprises and their contribution to leadership development has been documented (Hill & Matthews, 2010). At shorter range but often involving tortuous journeys, many of the school-to-school partnerships developed to support keys to success schools in the leadership strategy of London Challenge paved the way for the leadership development strategies now widely employed by local and national leaders of education.

Many of the strengths of federations and chains lie in the close professional links between senior staff and the opportunities both to bring staff together from across the federation and deploy staff across more than one school. Geographical groupings greatly facilitate such processes. The nine Harris academies, for example, are located in south London, but they consider that growth beyond about 20 schools would make it difficult to maintain links in the way the organisation does now unless additional schools are nearby.

Urban-rural considerations depend more on travel time than geographical distance. In The First Federation of five primary schools between Exeter and Salcombe, deployments are normally within an hour's travel time from the teacher's home. One hour is quoted by other groups as a maximum limit for travelling time from home to school or between the home school and another.

From Outwood Grange, Wakefield, one hour's travel brings schools from Harrogate to Worksop within range, whereas it can take an hour to cross south London by car. But schools that engage on longer range school improvement missions are undaunted by distance. They make local arrangements such as renting flats or making deals with hotels to accommodate key staff while working to support the schools.

Federations and chains often go through a phase of change when they reach a certain size or exceed reasonable distances. The preferred solution when this point is reached is to begin to develop a further cluster around an outlier school that is already part of the family. This is central to the strategic thinking of the Outwood (Wakefield-Doncaster-Worksop), Greenwood (Nottingham-Skegness) and Learning Schools (Richmond-Ipswich) federations.

Such ideas are not confined to secondary-based school groups. At present the Best Start Federation in Hackney includes three schools but is likely to expand. Leadership training and development across the federation appear to work well. Learning by taking on roles across the federation is manageable. The executive principal is the lynchpin who provides leadership development support at all levels as well as strategic leadership of the federation. This may need to be reviewed as the federation grows. As a senior leader said:

“This federation can grow to any size. New systems will be put in place. Being able to meet is invaluable. If the federation grew to larger than 10 schools we would need to have mini-clusters meeting geographically.”

Senior leader, Best Start Federation

However, one of the headteachers in the study expressed some concerns about federations – “a lot of power-brokering by headteachers” – and wondered: “Are you going to create lots of mini [local] authorities?” He recognised that small schools might want to collaborate, but he felt that there was a danger of moving away from teaching and learning and that if you are in a chain, you've got to have a really good product. He acknowledged that chains could produce efficiencies (for example in procurement) but that this sort of efficiency did not need formal federation.

In the small Bournemouth Alternative Needs Federation (BANF), the executive headteacher sees no reason why it should not be able to grow or that there should be a limit. He has been working with a pupil referral unit (PRU) in Southampton and would favour federation between BANF and a Southampton-based organisation. He has also coached a head in Poole School for years. They could come together and it would give Poole School more stability. It gives greater breadth to have more schools.

3.5 Leadership development in a changing landscape

Hargreaves (2010) has painted a speculative picture of what a maturing, self-improving school system could look like in 2015. This visualises schools in alliances that range from tight clusters in the form of federations and chains to schools that have chosen not to belong to a cluster and mainly stand alone, networking with clusters as the need arises. Federations and chains often metamorphose when they reach a certain size or exceed reasonable distances. The preferred solution when this point is reached is to begin to develop a further cluster around an outlier school that is already part of the family, under the leadership of an executive principal. This is central to the strategic thinking of the Outwood (Wakefield-Doncaster-Worksop), Greenwood Dale (Nottingham-Skegness) and Learning Schools (Richmond-Ipswich) federations.

The shape of the school system is changing rapidly and at an increasing rate due to several factors. One is the greater freedoms allowed in the formation of academies, and another the levels of confidence and leadership capacity that many individual schools and school groups – primary, secondary and special – have developed in recent years, particularly since London Challenge and the inception of NLEs/NSSs. The speed of change is reflected in the fact that several organisations in this study have accumulated, or become engaged in supporting, more schools during the three months in which this study was prepared.

Our sample of organisations shows that clusters, or school groups as described here, can have different shapes and structures, for various reasons in which geography is a significant factor. City groups represented, for example, by Harris Academies can add schools to an expanding but localised pool with little turbulence, owing to a depth of leadership capacity and ease of deployment across the schools in the group.

The maturity, consistency of philosophy and systems, and approach to planned expansion of such groups provides a context in which leadership development can take place at scale through a group-wide strategy which takes advantage of the relative homogeneity and proximity of member schools. The main beneficiary of investment in leadership development is the group and the schools within it. The group is self-sufficient in most aspects of CPD and the programmes it commissions from outside the group, like the Master's programme provided by the Institute of Education for Harris Academies, are bespoke to reflect the needs of the client. ARK Schools is moving towards a portfolio of leadership development opportunities with similar characteristics.

Five dispersed groups are shown in Figure 2. Group A represents The First Federation of five primary schools which is now partnered with a sixth which is a school causing concern. Group B is the evolving Learning Schools Federation which has three academies in Richmond and Ipswich with two more intended in the first phase of this development, sponsored by Kunskapsskolan. Group C is the Outwood Grange family of schools with, at its centre, an expanding federation of academies. The family includes schools Outwood Grange has supported previously in Harrogate and Scarborough, schools being partnered in the north east and Worksop, and other potential partners, as well as a federated academy and primary school in Doncaster.

Figure 2: Growth of some illustrative school groups in the period 2008-11 (schematic)



The growth of chains brings new challenges in leadership development, especially where the chains assimilate schools with different operational cultures. The evolution of the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust (group D in Figure 2) exhibits many of the principles of an organisation which, like most other existing chains, is on a journey towards an unfamiliar destination. Competent leadership at all levels is crucial to the effective functioning of the chain as it grows and changes form. The trust was initially formed from the governing body of Greenwood Dale School in Nottingham. The school, which serves a very challenging inner-city area, was judged to be 'outstanding' for the second time by Ofsted in 2007, having sustaining improvement from a very low base in the early 1990s (Ofsted, 2009). The headteacher took on wider system roles in the late 1990s/early 2000s with a seconded post to head school improvement in Walsall before returning to the school and becoming deeply immersed, with the school, in supporting several schools causing concern.

Support of Elliot Durham School led into the development of a merged academy which also incorporated an existing primary school. Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust became the sponsor of the merged Nottingham Academy. It is now the sponsor for a growing chain of schools which includes:

- Nottingham Academy: a 3-19 three-site school formed from the merger of Greenwood Dale School, Elliot Durham School and Jesse Boot Primary School with capacity for 3,600 pupils.
- Skegness Academy: an 11-18 school with 1,350 students which opened in September 2010 after replacing St Clements College.
- Nottingham Girls Academy: an 11-18 school for 900 girls which will open in September 2011 replacing the Manning School for Girls.
- Weston Favell Academy: an 11-18 school for 1,550 pupils which will open in September 2011 replacing the Weston Favell School in Northampton, currently in special measures.
- Appointment by Peterborough City Council as its preferred partner to design, procure and run a new 11-18 school for 900 pupils, opening in September 2013.

A new primary free school and further academy projects including primary chains are under discussion with national and local government. The trust has also established a trading company to contract with schools and local authorities on specific improvement services rather than whole new schools. By 2012 the chain plans to have up to 14 individual academies, mostly in response to the local authority demand-led economy. The trust is driven by moral purpose. It is willing to take on commissions to work and federate with the most challenging schools well beyond its home base in the city of Nottingham.

The anatomy of a growing chain and implications for leadership development

The chain's leadership structure now includes a CEO, who believes the chain is better driven by an educationalist than a corporate foundation. In this role he has moved away from the day-to-day running of schools which until recently still involved teaching the most challenging pupils GCSE mathematics and being at the school gate at the end of every day. He describes his role as:

- the vision for the trust
- being responsible for all finances and all staff in dialogue with the trust

- governance (with local governing bodies having a local overview but less traditional powers)
- promoting and winning new projects, finding resources to support the chain, looking at the logistics of new schools and takeovers, and getting these projects up and running
- identifying and recruiting the best teachers and supporting the development of middle leaders into senior leadership

The CEO plays a key role in the recruitment and internal promotion of senior chain staff. He makes it clear in interviews that the chain has very clear values and accountability for outcomes, for which there is some scope for local variation. He says he steps back once a new academy starts making good progress, with the senior leadership team leading the individual academy.

Nottingham Academy is led by an executive principal, with each of the three sites having a head of school. The executive principal is responsible for the overall leadership, vision and consistency of the academy, while the heads of school lead each site's day-to-day management, including pupil progress and behaviour and the quality of teaching and learning. Each head of school has their own senior leadership team, typically comprising two deputy heads and three assistant heads. While Skegness, Nottingham Girls' and Weston Favell academies will commence with a principal, the plan is to replicate the executive principal/head of school model as the chain grows, so that geographical clusters of three academies will have the support of an executive principal. The chain of schools is supported by a central team which provides expertise in:

- human resources
- CPD
- pupil data, curriculum and timetabling
- ICT
- procurement
- child protection and welfare
- extended opportunities
- programme management
- finance

Such teams are increasing with the rise in school groups staffed by highly skilled professionals, some of whom are not educators. They need access to appropriate professional and leadership development, some of which may be common to, some different from the development provision for other senior leaders in the chain and existing qualifications in school business management.

Leadership resourcing

Like several other chains, the majority of senior staff across the chain have been internally promoted from the original school's senior and middle leaders. Many of these had accumulated substantial experience not only from working in an outstanding school but by undertaking outreach challenges with schools causing concern. These included acting head of school roles. Several key leaders have not been lost to retirement but retained on part-time contracts to mentor staff across the chain under the direction of the CEO. The main external appointments have brought corporate financial and programme management skills on to the central team. The remaining school-level leadership appointments have been made internally from staff in schools incorporated into the chain. The majority of headteachers of incorporated schools have not stayed on.

Leadership development in schools new to the chain

The priority for the chain has been to develop leaders at all levels. For example, a primary concern has been the large number of unqualified teachers, teaching assistants and learning mentors in many of the incorporated schools. The identification of their needs has led to a range of staff commencing CPD in:

- GCSE maths and English
- foundation degrees
- graduate training programme and postgraduate certificate in education (GTP and PGCE) for 15 non-qualified instructors

This is predominately being financed by the academy start-up funds and is considered a priority given the difficulty in recruiting high-quality, experienced staff in the area. This process has also led to staff being identified for rapid development for middle management, such as the resource unit manager who has been enrolled as a GTP student and is expected to become a head of department in two to three years.

Currently leadership development needs are identified through the performance management cycle. All development requirements are sent to the central team. A cohort of middle leaders is placed on the SSAT middle leaders course every year. This is considered to be good quality, and provides the opportunity for aspiring leaders to encounter new and external ideas. Staff who go on external courses are expected to disseminate their learning and give their CPD leader a date by when this will be done. All chain staff have CPD portfolios that include sections on ways to improve practice, internal interventions, their mentor, and records of external courses attended and in-service training they have delivered.

Leadership development in the lead school

It has been crucial to backfill leadership on the Greenwood Dale site (within Nottingham Academy) as a range of staff have been promoted into the chain. Staff reported that most senior leadership roles have been filled internally by promotion, made possible for the reasons given below:

- The best leadership training had been working on the extended senior leadership team at Greenwood Dale, which has developed a depth of leadership capacity. This meets every Thursday and is a dynamic learning experience, with single-agenda development items; presentations on courses; and debates on aspects of leadership, overseen by the headteacher who coaches the team and individuals.
- A lot of Greenwood Dale's middle leaders have had experience of mentoring PGCE and NQT students which has been a good preparation for developing soft skills for management, care and nurturing to balance the pressure for high achievement. One member of staff commented: "If this didn't exist, people would leave."
- Middle leaders had also self-led their own development with a middle aspiring to senior leader group organised by two senior leaders.

These processes are being reproduced and refined at other sites in the chain. Supporting all this is a strong commitment to training and mentoring new staff.

And at the top end? The CEO says succession planning is in place for all promoted posts within the trust, including his own role. He is confident that there is capacity within all academies in the chain to promote internally both to academy posts and to those on the central team. Already three heads of school/principals have been promoted to executive principal positions, thereby releasing their roles for internal promotion.

As the group grows, all staff within the new academies become part of this process, thereby widening the pool of staff available and the breadth of experience to call upon and utilise.

Partnerships with different origins

Most of the existing federations and chains of schools have their origins in school improvement initiatives, with more effective schools partnering and in many cases leading less effective ones to help the latter improve. It is well established that such partnerships are of mutual benefit, however unequal the members. Hargreaves (2010,p16) sums it up thus: 'working with another school is a reciprocal process because there is always something to be learned both from and with others'.

The executive headteachers of two 3-11 federations in Swindon have concluded that mutual benefits will accrue from combining their federations. This would be a partnership of two effective school systems that would bring complementary strengths to the group. The executive headteacher of Drove School in Swindon illustrates the potential benefits of a proposal to merge the Drove Federation with the Moreton and Rodbourne Cheney Federation, after been approached by the governors of Moreton:

"From an education point of view and philosophical point of view it seems to make sense. As local authorities decline, some of the central resources and support mechanisms are no longer going to be there. So we have choices. We can either work collaboratively together and look at the synergy that comes from two very successful federations coming together or go our own ways. This works at a number of levels:

- **Pedagogically** there will be strengths, and weaknesses that we may need help with, which will no longer be forthcoming from the local authority. In a larger federation, we are more likely to have access to the expertise we need rather than commissioning this at some greater expense. We can work collaboratively to bring about improvement. Collaboration brings the opportunity to look horizontally across the key stages or vertically through curriculum areas. Strong quality assurance should enable us to identify very quickly where our strengths are and where we need to put additional resources, support and so on. But we will have the capacity to do it within our organisation.
- **Strategically** there should be many benefits in terms of: greater mobility and opportunities for staff in schools and settings of different types and sizes; leadership development in a range of different situations; and succession planning. In terms of growing leaders, this organisation is far less sterile than starting off as an NQT and rising to deputy within one school, as often happens. We are far more able to mix and match and to give people different experiences, different roles with pupils and parents and you end up growing your own leaders – people who know what you expect and who end up sharing your philosophy. The organisation will also benefit from having two executive headteachers having complementary styles and skills.
- **Operationally**, there will be an operational headteacher in each of the five or more schools in the joint federation, some of whom would not have applied for solitary headship in the traditional sense. We aim to ensure that there is both a synergy across the organisation and a distinct uniqueness for each campus. It's not about creating a homogeneous brand; it's about keeping individuality – a unique identity – with a common philosophical binding.
- **Administratively**, if we combine, there will be five schools and we could have a senior business manager and shared back-office provision, with more development opportunities for administrative and managerial staff. The corporate buying power for 2,000 children rather than 250 means that you can go out to suppliers and get a better deal because you are buying for five providers. Phenomenally powerful. It makes a lot of sense on a commercial basis. Without doubt there are going to be strengths and weaknesses and we will benefit from having an overarching view."

Executive headteacher, Drove School

Notwithstanding the logistical and cost benefit arguments for school groups, the one that matters most is whether they enable pupils to have better educational opportunities and achieve higher standards than in their previous unattached schools. Since many of those were providing inadequate education and are now good or better schools with an upward trend of results, the system of schools leading or partnering schools clearly has many benefits. As Hargreaves (2010) points out, they are developing system leadership at all leadership levels, most importantly among middle leaders. School groups undoubtedly provide for succession planning and their leadership capacity not only promotes improvement but buffers member schools against the risk of regression when key leaders leave.

Equally, the evidence suggests that the most effective stand-alone schools are – at this stage – better than school groups at producing headteachers and senior leadership for the system beyond the organisation. St John the Baptist School is a striking example. Understandably, the groups while in expansion mode are soaking up all the leaders they produce. The individual schools are outward looking and connected schools that contribute greatly to school improvement and staff training and development in partnership with other schools in their areas. But they feel they can influence the system and weave their magic without losing their identity. They are not driven by the excitement of acquisition and merger and their headteachers or principals want to run a school, not a multi-centre enterprise: a school however which will share the secrets of its success with other schools around it.

4. Implications for policy

4.1 The growth of system leaders

There is compelling evidence that the best schools and groups of schools tend to regard investment in the development of their leaders as important and cost-effective. The most favoured development approaches give opportunities for leadership. This is supported by mentoring and coaching but the developing leaders are trusted. In turn, their senior leaders accept risk and provide encouragement rather than blame. The attitude in one school (reflected in others) when something went wrong is always that the senior leadership took responsibility for not having supported the person better. Not that things often went awry, but staff were conscious of a no-blame culture. For them, the issue was about the system not the individual. The message is clear: you learn to lead by leading.

Most effective leaders can point to others they have admired – role models at many different levels. Until their roles expanded far beyond their own schools, many of the headteachers who are NLEs deliberately found time to teach, often with reluctant learners, and sought to demonstrate outstanding practice. Importantly, for many of our respondents, prospective headteachers and principals also need to have a sense of what excellence really means. How else can they shape their vision? For instance, the headteacher at ARK Academy Wembley stresses that working in at least one outstanding school serves as vital experience for aspiring heads.

Leadership development has changed rapidly in the last few years and continues to evolve. At first, many schools instigated it themselves, a combination of happenstance – being in the right place at the right time, for example when a promotion opportunity arose – and ambition. (The ambition to collect the NPQH as a badge of honour when still a head of department in a secondary school, for instance, is fortunately now consigned to history.) Leadership development has now become much more a policy of the school or group as well as a way to meet the needs, aspirations and interests of individuals. The message that schools need effective leadership at all levels has become more firmly embedded in their vision.

The main ingredients of development in the schools and systems visited are the provision of opportunities to lead and take the initiative in an environment that provides support through coaching, for example through modelling and mentoring, encouragement through high expectations allied to the trust which builds confidence, and a range of career pathways and rewards. Connected schools, such as national support schools and school groups, have the advantage of being able to provide leadership challenges elsewhere. Many middle and senior leaders, including school business leaders, have grown as a result of taking on highly challenging assignments in schools causing concern. Such engagements need to be carefully timetabled, managed and supported but it is noticeable how astutely the headteachers or principals judge the capacity of their colleagues to take on these highly challenging roles.

Effective leadership development is also firmly rooted in the CPD that happens in schools and groups: regular meetings that alternate between development and operational matters; working groups; development teams; monitoring, feedback and coaching; and assuming responsibilities. The use of formal training or development programmes varies greatly. In some schools, this is left up to the individual, albeit with suggestions that may arise informally or through performance management. In others there is support for staple programmes, locally based, such as the Middle Leadership Development Programme (MLDP) which was being piloted in some of the schools. Experienced heads valued the programmes for executive headteachers and, of course, NPQH is still a staple. There is a notable tendency for larger federations and chains to provide their own in-house programmes of leadership development. It is notable that, despite their relative youth, several of the school groups are already planning the succession of the executive leader by growing executive principals, some of whom have already become NLEs in their own right.

Many of the groups of schools are still expanding. This means that they absorb most of the leaders they are producing within their own systems; there is little over-production. Although on the face of it stand-alone or connected schools are better at generating leaders for the system, that is, schools outside their purview, the fact that federations and chains are absorbing schools which often need new leadership suggests a false dichotomy. Any organisation that is preparing people with the desire and capacity to take on the top jobs is doing the system a service. Some chains have minimal links with other schools in their locality and are distinctively separate. One said unequivocally that the school had little to learn from schools outside the federation, and that developing links with schools that were seen as weak could tarnish the federation's reputation. In contrast, another growing chain will only add more schools if they are in an Ofsted category so as to do as much good as possible for young people getting a raw deal.

4.2 The consequences of leadership insufficiency

This study has focused on leadership development in good and outstanding schools and leading examples of school federations and chains. It has concentrated on successful strategies for leadership development and includes world-class examples of school and system leadership. All the organisations referenced here have invested in growing leaders, in most cases taking a strategic approach rather than leaving leadership development solely to the initiative of individuals.

One of the main risks to individual schools or school systems stems from leadership failure or illness. This can happen even where there is good succession planning and leadership development. In one recent example, the efficient and effective headteacher of a very large 11-19 school had groomed the long-serving deputy in the school to take over on the head's retirement. The governors appointed the deputy on a three-year contract, during which period – sandwiched by two Ofsted inspections – the school regressed from 'good with outstanding features' to 'satisfactory'. The judgements on leadership mirrored those on the effectiveness of the school. Despite the size and strength of the senior leadership team, its members did not demonstrate the capacity to keep the school moving forward. The report commented on variation across subjects and other issues that suggested a lack of leadership cohesion and consistency.

The annual report of the chief inspector 2009/10 (Ofsted, 2010c) reveals a startling pattern of variation in school effectiveness from one inspection to the next (Table 3). The inspection framework changed from the previous year, so true comparison between the two years is not possible.

Previous inspection grade	Most recent inspection grade		
	Improved	Same	Declined
Outstanding	-	57 per cent (78 per cent)	43 per cent (23 per cent)
Good	15 per cent (22 per cent)	52 per cent (62 per cent)	33 per cent (17 per cent)
Satisfactory	42 per cent (53 per cent)	45 per cent (40 per cent)	12 per cent (7 per cent)
Inadequate	93 per cent (90 per cent)	7 per cent (10 per cent)	-

Source: Ofsted, 2010c (adapted)

In 2009/10, twice as many good schools declined as improved and 57 per cent of satisfactory schools remained satisfactory or declined. In her commentaries to the last two annual reports, Her Majesty's chief inspector said that the greatest challenge is to raise satisfactory provision to good or outstanding:

“The strength of leadership and management is pivotal to schools’ improvement. Effective leaders know their school well and set ambitious targets based on perceptive self-evaluation. They draw on the outcomes of their rigorous monitoring of teaching and meticulous tracking of pupils’ learning and progress to target areas where improvements are needed. This clear direction and high expectations contribute to building morale among staff. Responsibility for leadership is shared and staff work as a cohesive, efficient team. Where leadership fails to drive improvement, self-evaluation lacks insight or is overgenerous so that priorities are not clear, the impact of actions on pupils’ outcomes is not well understood, and responsibility is not shared effectively with middle managers, subject leaders and others in the school.”

Ofsted, 2010c:49

In terms of school effectiveness, Ofsted reported that ‘the decisive impact of the best leadership and management on teaching and learning is also a clear message from inspections carried out this year’ (Ofsted, 2010c:49). The leadership of teaching and learning should therefore command a high priority in the professional development of school leaders.

4.3 Leadership of learning

If there is a gap in the spectrum of leadership development provision, it is – in the view of some heads – that there is too little emphasis on the leadership of learning and the roles that teachers, pupils and pedagogic leaders play in teaching and learning. Some principals of connected schools or within growing chains retain their focus on this process, whatever other preoccupations they have, constantly reflecting on how to make individual (as well as organisational) learning more effective.

They keep abreast of the latest and most powerful research in the field, for example through Hattie’s (2009) ‘Visible learning’, and look for applications for their own schools.

The headteacher of Norlington Secondary School, for example, is concerned that most leadership programmes – senior leadership, middle leadership and student leadership – bypass the classroom (Leadership journey 17).

Leadership journey 17: Personal mastery in leadership development

“There is too little research about leading at the classroom level. If you look at the outstanding teachers as classroom leaders, they manage the emotional dynamic of the classroom. They engage people in the vision they are trying to achieve. Long before objectives and putting the objectives on the board, you could ask any pupil what the aim of the lesson was and they could tell you, because the best teachers show leadership with a clear vision in place. If things were going wrong, they had the emotional intelligence to coach the pupils back in. They taught them the key skills they need to operate effectively as learners.

With poor teachers, there is no vision. It’s always straight to boundaries, ie ‘you will do this or that’ and every time that happens, the relationship is eroded. Success is not just about knowing what is going on but recognising the effect of your own actions, the things that irritate pupils, that create allergic reactions: avoidable incidents. This is something that is missing from training. You don’t need to give pupils an excuse not to learn. The tougher the school, the less of an excuse a young person needs. At Ravens Wood, they need quite a big excuse; here, they hardly need anything to be an allergy, to turn them off.

Personal mastery, defined as ‘the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience and of seeing reality objectively’ (Senge, 1990:7) should apply equally to the challenge of mastering literacy in Key Stage 3 and to the development of the staff as teachers and leaders and the school as a learning organisation. Personal mastery is the theme running through everything, which, together with setting the boundaries within which there can be autonomy and self-direction, provide the conditions for motivation (as argued by Pink, 2009) and effective learning.”

Headteacher, Norlington Secondary School

In some schools, lessons are underpinned by templates that set out the operating standards but in doing so may consolidate a monolithic model of learning. In others, standing working parties on teaching and learning or deep learning development teams involving staff at all levels keep knowledge flowing and innovation bubbling.

It is notable that the rhetoric of a few CEOs is much concerned with managing and providing the infrastructure for businesses with a turnover of tens of millions of pounds. There may be parallels with the early days of financial delegation (local management of schools) in which headteachers spent months or years wrestling with their budgets – often taking their eye off the ball of school performance – before realising that others could probably do the job better. It would be unfortunate if the executive leaders of learning simply become chief executive officers, managing the business but distant from the core processes for which they are responsible.

Several of the schools stressed the centrality of learning. In one primary federation, Best Start, this belief was tangible. One member of staff said: “You have to be a model teacher to be a leader. You have to walk the talk; show you can do it, prove your worth.” The ethos of the school was one of sharing what you are doing, helping with planning, working in collaboration with others and learning with them. It’s not completely different being a teacher and a leader – the job is still about being a teacher.

“Professional learning doesn’t end when leadership learning begins. It’s all intertwined. What you do with your children, you do with your leaders. It’s just that the gifted and talented teachers get developed at a faster rate. Your staff are like a class. Some need more support; some need less demonstration. So much learning goes on from each other, informally and through peer mentoring. NQTs work with and learn from each other. They get people out of the class observing each other and they plan together. Across the federation there’s frequent planning, monitoring and observing. Professional learning and leadership learning go hand in hand.”

Executive headteacher, the Best Start Federation

In Moredon and Rodbourne Cheney Federation, Ravens Wood School and other organisations, teachers are reviewed on the same cycle and at the same interval as learners. In Moredon, the executive principal observes each teacher in three settings every six weeks, discusses their performance and reviews the progress of every child. Such executive headteachers remain close to the action.

Where students lead their learning

Learning is ultimately an individual process. The individualisation (or in recent years, personalisation) of learning, has become an expectation of the teacher, whose opportunities to work with the individual student are perforce limited by the culture and organisation of most schools.

In the Swedish school chain Kunskapsskolan, the responsibility for setting educational goals to reflect ambitions and potential begins with the student, together with the teacher and parents. The learning goals are then broken down into a plan with termly and weekly goals which are followed up week by week in individual tutorial discussions. Leading learning in this environment is strongly weighted towards facilitating learning.

Students have individual study plans and logbooks in which they plan their weekly learning. This is not to imply an absence of teaching. The student’s personal timetable will include lectures, workshops, seminars, laboratory sessions and the all-important tutorials which the student and personal tutor plan in the student’s timetable for the week.

Learning may involve the student working independently, with a group and with the teacher. Rooms are varied learning spaces around central learning areas and students can learn wherever they work best. But at the centre of the learning is a highly structured curriculum in which the core subjects of English, Swedish, mathematics and modern languages progress in 35 steps, with computer-based materials and tasks that can be downloaded by students to study at as quick a rate as they want, regardless of age or stage. The other subjects are studied as courses, planned as common themes which relate to several subjects. For each course the knowledge portal, a dedicated web portal, gives all students access to the school’s educational resources. It can be reached from school or home, or indeed anywhere the student has access to an internet connection. Kunskapsskolan describes the knowledge portal thus:

“Here you can find all the steps and courses with proposed work procedures, tasks and resources in the form of texts, reference books, manuals, study tips, current news etc. For each course there are clear goals and descriptions of what you are expected to learn – and also what is required to achieve the pass, credit and distinction grades. You yourself, your teacher and your parents can follow how your studies are progressing by reviewing your logbook, via the pupil documentation system and at the knowledge portal.”

This brief description hardly does justice to a well-thought-out system, meticulously designed by school leaders to provide pupils with an attractive way of accessing all the knowledge they need in the way that suits them best. It encourages self-reliance and caters for students who learn in different ways and at different rates.

Leadership in such a school is vested first and foremost in the teacher as leader – enabler or facilitator of learning. A central part of the tutorial role is coaching, and teachers tend to be skilled across a range of subjects. The ethos is pupil centred, but in a rigorous way despite a high degree of social informality. Leadership structures are minimal, comprising (year) team leaders in the 24 lower secondary schools, which have four year groups, a principal and in some schools a deputy who is likely to be a principal in waiting.

The question of internal versus external appointments resonates with the situation emerging in several chains in England: there is a strong preference for appointing principals from within the organisation. As described by a former Kunskapsskolan headteacher:

“The group did not have a good experience of taking over some free schools – and their heads – from another company. They brought lots of baggage with them about ways of working and it was very hard to rid them of that. In our grundskolor [equivalent to a comprehensive school], the early heads were involved in setting up the whole system. They had to believe in it as well as being part of it. The problem now is in having 35 schools. It is not possible to involve them all in areas of development, so we have split them into three regional groups. This is very successful and we have a large number of development projects. These in time involve all staff in working with colleagues to improve the system and the curriculum provision. Now we are intending to exploring a Master’s in Kunskapsskolan leadership.”

Kunskapsskolan headteacher

Kunskapsskolan sponsors the Learning Schools Trust, a federation of five academies in London and the south. The first academies opened in existing schools in the London borough of Richmond and Ipswich in September 2010, so by spring 2011 they were still at an early stage of development. Rather than attempting to change the whole school culture overnight, the personalised learning approach has started with Year 7. Urban schools in England present different challenges to those in the more homogeneous schools in Sweden and it will be of widespread interest to follow the implementation and impact of the Kunskapsskolan approach and the success (or otherwise) of its application in England.

There has been extensive development of leaders in learning trust schools, which includes visits to equivalent schools in Sweden to see the learning culture in action. The Learning Schools Trust aims to operate outstanding schools in which every student, through personalised learning and clear goals, will stretch their boundaries and learn more than they thought possible. Teachers and pupils together are leaders of learning with middle leadership in the schools resting particularly on curriculum and programme leaders.

Intensive work is under way by development teams on the learning portal. The trust is likely to have much to teach the system about how to meet the challenge of providing for all people being different and learning in different ways and at different rates. Regardless of his or her ability, each student will have the right to a personal challenge every day. Teachers are expected to be well qualified, stimulating and hold high expectations of students.

4.4 Teaching schools

The range of practical expertise and research evidence about what makes potent teaching should come together in teaching schools. These are outstanding schools that will take a leading responsibility for providing and quality assuring initial teacher training (ITT) in their area as well as offering high-quality professional development to teachers. They are by definition schools of the highest quality and will be modelled on teaching hospitals. Excellence in leadership development is one of the characteristics expected of teaching schools¹⁰ if they and their strategic partners are to help develop great leaders and the next generation of headteachers. The majority of the leading schools included in this study provide the type of ITT, CPD and leadership development programmes expected of teaching schools. Some indeed are national teaching schools, designated through the City Challenge programme and pre-cursors of the white paper model.

Teaching schools are expected (National College, 2011, p7) to support local school improvement: ‘The aim is to ensure a coherent provision of training and development for new and experienced teachers and leaders which supports school improvement and meets the needs and context of the local area.’ To this end they are expected to form alliances with other schools locally, identifying and involving outstanding senior and middle leaders across the alliance who can support others in similar positions beyond their own school.

¹⁰ The white paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010a) announced the government’s intention to create a national network of teaching schools.

A systemic challenge for the designation and operation of teaching schools will be to ensure that they can be found in areas where they are most needed. They should also be able to link with and support other schools without preference. The chains examined here have considerable degrees of self-sufficiency in providing leadership CPD and leadership development programmes. They are all involved in ITT and are commissioners of external provision such as Master's level qualifications. They will no doubt wish to have a teaching school in their midst, but there may be other priorities – at least for the first 100 teaching schools to be appointed.

4.5 Implications for the National College

The changing school landscape and increased capacity of schools and school groups to provide for many aspects of leadership development have implications for the National College, of which support for local solutions has been a widely valued response. Equally, the College has been progressively focused on the recruitment, designation, deployment and quality assurance of what are now four levels of system leadership, starting from small beginnings with the first tranche of NLEs in 2006. As Hargreaves (2010, p18) pointed out:

Hitherto much leadership development has been to increase the organisational capacity of autonomous schools. All the above demonstrates how the College's most recent focus on system leadership is geared to enhance the system capacity on which a self-improving system critically depends. The way forward for the College has two obvious elements:

- scaling up the recruitment and training of system leaders
- bringing together into a more coherent whole its wealth of experience of relevant work at various levels of leadership other than the headteacher, for here lies the essential complementary support that would make self-improving clusters effective.

Through sponsorship of the NLE, NSS, LLE and SLE programmes and its new remit for teaching schools, the National College has influence over the most effective external levers of school improvement. It is a key player in creating, as Hargreaves (2010, p20) has written, 'system-based means by which schools... take ownership of leadership development and devise sustainable ways of identifying, preparing and supporting leaders at many different levels.'

In terms of its future role, aspects most valued by the schools and groups in this sample included a continuing need for, in effect, a national staff college for school leadership which:

- provides or commissions world-class development opportunities for system leaders and potential system leaders
- is a repository of international and domestic best practice (knowledge capital) in any aspect of the leadership and work of schools and school systems, able to say where things are happening – where leading-edge work is taking place – and, linked to this, developing a more modular curriculum which is constantly renewed by the best practice and research available so that schools and leaders can access what they need flexibly
- uses the network of teaching schools as the local presence of the College, ensuring that they are centres of excellence in professional development and training in school leadership and management, with an emphasis on the leadership of learning and middle leaders
- continues to offer group or alliance-based programmes such as MLDP and the high benchmark for headship offered by NPQH; and also further developing and enhancing the role of placements in the new NPQH, with a focus on the use of outstanding schools
- co-ordinates the development and accreditation of local, specialist and national leaders of education, and teaching schools and their leaders, and promotes effective brokerage of their expertise
- ensures that leadership development provision can be accessed by teachers in schools where school-based provision is ineffective and parts of the country where teaching schools and national support schools may be thinly distributed
- provides a mechanism, in partnership with higher education, for validating and accrediting internal learning and practice in connected schools and school groups, including modular Master's level qualifications
- champions the leadership of learning and teaching as much as providing for the higher levels of school and system leadership

Above all, the National College in its new status of executive agency should be the catalyst that enables the experience and talent in schools and school groups to have the maximum effect in the drive for world-class schools with world-class teaching, learning and leadership. There may be parallels between the idea that teaching schools should reflect some of the features of teaching hospitals and the notion that the royal colleges (of physicians, surgeons etc) may provide another useful model in their relationship with their natural constituents.

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Annex 1: Illustrative case studies

Schools

Cherry Orchard Primary School and Children's Centre, Birmingham

Oldway Primary School, Torbay

St John the Baptist Roman Catholic Secondary School, Surrey

St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Barnsley

The Compton School, Barnet

Twynham School, Dorset

Groups: federations and chains

Best Start Federation, Hackney

Blackpool Primary School and The First Federation, Devon

Bournemouth Alternative Needs Federation

Moredon and Rodbourne Cheney Federation, Swindon

The Harris Federation of South London Schools

West Trafford Learning Partnership, Greater Manchester

Schools

Cherry Orchard Primary School and Children's Centre, Birmingham

The school or system context

Cherry Orchard is a large primary school with over 450 pupils, serving the Handsworth area of Birmingham. A survey visit by Ofsted in 2009 described the school's work to develop the skills and effectiveness of leaders as outstanding. The executive headteacher, Dr Sue Robinson, is a national leader of education who has been involved in supporting other schools for eight years. Currently working with two other schools, she sets up a relationship between her school and the other and allocates a deputy to lead the day-to-day support. Typically, this involves several other staff from Cherry Orchard.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

Ofsted (2009) reported that the school has:

successfully created a common vision based upon a belief that the key to school improvement is the effective distribution of leadership and the development of leaders at all levels... The system for staff's continuous professional development is of high quality. There are clear pathways and regular opportunities for all staff to develop their leadership skills with external providers and the school's own programme for staff development.

The school describes its approach to leadership development as having two components: first, CPD irrespective of role (personal development) and, second, CPD for where individuals are (professional development). The headteacher is very keen on all teachers doing a Master's qualification. Needs are identified both through performance management and "the informal conversations you have with people about their career." NQTs get a "superb mentor" who identifies courses for them and they also have one day a week to work in other schools. There is much peer-to-peer work across the school and other in-school training. Monitoring and evaluation lead to feedback meetings, an important form of CPD. "You can pick up why some things are working and others aren't. We also find this out from pupils." Overall there is a blended approach to development: in-house courses, meetings, and talking to and coaching one another. Staff have had training in coaching but have found other external leadership courses to be of limited value, preferring to learn through school-based CPD and "doing it on the job."

Example of leadership progression

One teacher came to take charge of PE after working for four years in another primary school. She says this taught her a lot about management. She did a mathematics degree and took over responsibility for this subject. Two years later, she became an acting assistant headteacher, specialising in mathematics and assessment and developing these in the two supported schools.

Notable features:

- There is teamwork and leadership development at all levels.
- Excellent work is done in supporting partner schools.
- There are role models for staff, work ethic, empowerment, opportunity, trust and motivation.

Oldway Primary School, Torbay

The school or system context

This very large primary school (693 pupils) was judged outstanding by Ofsted in 2009. At present, Peter Maunder, the headteacher, is seconded to the local authority for half his time to act (jointly) as the authority's head of school leadership. This means that there are opportunities for others to develop their responsibilities, particularly the deputy headteacher. The head is joint founder and chair of the Torbay virtual leadership academy, which supports NPQH and provides the National College's Middle Leadership Development Programme (MLDP) and Aspirant Headteachers Programme.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

The development of leaders at Oldway goes hand in hand with the development of learning. Key features are:

- the link between what the school needs to improve, as identified through self-evaluation, and the development of leadership, with a strong focus on what pupils need to learn
- building the confidence of new and aspiring leaders
- sharing expertise
- professional dialogue, analysis and reflection, leading to improved practice

Action-research projects on the curriculum in particular give leaders a chance to lead others and to evaluate the impact of their work in terms of pupils' learning and progress. The link between leadership and learning is endorsed by Ofsted (2009b): 'One reason for the continuing high quality of teaching has been the school's unremitting focus on the professional development of all staff.' Staff regularly undertake high levels of research and engage in professional discourse. The school's classroom organisation further encourages staff to plan and assess as a team and to share their expertise both within the school and with other schools. Further afield, the school's role as a national support school means that teachers have opportunities to work elsewhere in the local authority, particularly (but not solely) in supporting schools in Ofsted's categories of concern.

Example of leadership progression

In response to the question: 'What has made a difference to your growth as a leader?', the special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator said that she had "never stood still... Opportunities have been highlighted for me which, on reflection, were good for me." She cited reading recovery training, some years ago, as a key moment. Initially, she was reluctant to take on this intensive training at a time when she was working part time. The vital learning for her was to understand what pupils with SEN were capable of: "I didn't know they could progress as well as they can." This had a profound impact on how she analysed pupils' progress subsequently. Her work became known to the local authority and she took part in the local authority's review of special educational needs. She also started to lecture on SEN at Plymouth University and designed professional studies and SEN modules. Her involvement as licensed facilitator on MLDP has helped her to articulate "why I did what I did" and encouraged her in the learning she had to undertake to lead other middle leaders on the programme.

Notable features:

- The school is a leadership development and training resource for the region.
- The school builds capacity in and provides effective support to other schools but is not persuaded of any advantages of federation.

St John the Baptist Roman Catholic Secondary School, Surrey

The school or system context

St John the Baptist School is an outstanding 11–18 Catholic voluntary-aided school in Woking, Surrey (Ofsted, 2007) led by Ani Magill. Ofsted stated that:

What makes St John the Baptist School outstanding is the focus on each student as an individual and an almost unrelenting drive to ensure that all achieve their very best both personally and academically. The head provides inspirational leadership and... has used her talents to build a highly motivated and tremendously effective school leadership team that is constantly striving for excellence.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

The leadership of St John the Baptist is characterised by trust, support and high expectations. The headteacher describes a culture in which teachers serve students and the senior leaders serve the staff: the primary job of senior leaders is to enable teachers to focus on teaching and learning. Teachers are freed as much as possible from behaviour management and bureaucracy and are trusted to teach high-quality lessons.

An important aspect of this leadership culture is exemplified by the concept of presence to which many senior and middle leaders refer. One described that as making use of every minute when students are in school rather than sitting in an office doing tasks that could be done later. Another common example of presence is that members of the school leadership team visit every classroom every day for every lesson. This is described as an important way to support staff and to provide clear expectations for students. The daily rounds result in informal support and are not seen by staff as a form of accountability.

The school is well placed to attract and recruit very good staff. Most new staff join at NQT level, with very few joining at senior levels. Staff appreciate that if they have potential and are considered ready, they will be promoted. There is no sense of serving time; staff are expected to take on leadership roles early, which they commonly do in their first or second year of teaching. The senior leadership team meets fortnightly for a specific development session with a thinkpiece or research articles read and discussed or specific coaching sessions. Most leadership development occurs in school, prior to and then into role. The school has also developed a formal leadership development programme. This consists of four courses – for second-year teachers; middle leaders as heads of department or heads of year; and aspiring senior leaders in Catholic schools – and is advertised to other schools in Surrey.

Consequences of leadership progression

Some staff say rapid promotion has been stretching, challenging and motivating and: “just right for me; I feel I’m just getting a role really right when I’m moving on.” Others say it has been very much entering at the deep-end and learning through mistakes but with support. Occasionally promotions have come too fast. A member of staff had to be asked to step off the senior leadership team. But it was reported that generally the system worked well: internal candidates for promotion were always interviewed and potential leaders had frank conversations beforehand to try to make absolutely certain they were and felt ready.

Notable features:

- The school is a leading-edge partner and national support school, working with schools in Ofsted categories and schools classed as gaining ground.
- The school has supplied 16 headteachers and many deputies to the system.
- There is exemplary succession planning.

St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Barnsley

The school or system context

St Mary's is now a high-performing small primary school with 212 pupils, most of whom live in the immediate neighbourhood. The headteacher, Craig Lee, came in January 2006 and is now a national leader of education. The school was asked to support Darfield Valley Primary School when it went into special measures in 2010. Since then Darfield Valley has made good progress.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

The school has a strong record of growing leaders from within and a shared vision of excellence. There have been 23 internal promotions in under 5 years – a lot for a school of this size. It provides the graduate teacher programme to one trainee a year and recruits from that, and then grows leaders by giving opportunities, project manager posts, providing lead teachers for the authority and experience of outreach school-support work. The school uses recruitment and retention awards to keep the best teachers.

From the NQT stage onwards, there is a strong emphasis on personal responsibility:

This is your class and these are your responsibilities and to improve them (be highly effective) you have to improve yourself. What we're trying to do is get them to oversee the management and organisation of their work and identify what they need. Our job is to support, provide what is needed and direct where necessary.

Leadership development starts with giving opportunities, both here and in the schools it supports. This leads to internal promotion, supported by access to training and less formal professional development. The deputy is completing NPQH, several staff have undertaken Leading from the Middle and the higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) is doing a degree as a prerequisite for joining the graduate teacher programme. The head runs a preparatory NPQH course for diocesan schools.

Example of leadership progression

One teacher started at the school in her third year of teaching. She was awarded a responsibility post for ICT then became a lead teacher. She then became acting assistant headteacher here before moving to another school as a deputy in her seventh year of teaching.

Notable features:

- The refined staff assessment process highlights outstanding features and uncovers what staff find difficult, leading to coaching.
- This relatively small school has the capacity to be a national support school.
- There is little bureaucracy, few SLT meetings, but many whole-staff meetings which always consider teaching and learning and the development of leadership skills.
- The school excels in developing teaching assistants and taking them to the next level.

The Compton School, Barnet

The school or system context

This outstanding school of over 850 pupils became an academy in January 2011. The Ofsted (2010d) report opened with:

Inspirational leadership of the headteacher, supported by a committed and extremely talented team underpins this school's exceptional success... Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds flourish in an atmosphere of high expectations and positive thinking.

The principal, Teresa Tunnadine, is a national leader of education and has supported many London schools. The school is a lead partner – with Middlesex University – for Whitefield School, which has become a National Challenge trust school.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

Leadership development is closely linked to the leadership of teaching and learning in a vibrant and committed learning community. Among teaching staff, potential leaders are spotted because they are good teachers who have an interest in having a wider impact. They are given a broad range of opportunities and support to develop their leadership, as well as specialist activity to enhance particular leadership strengths. Formal and informal leadership development activities are offered within a culture that values people as its best resource and takes a blended soft and hard approach to nurturing their development. The performance management system is aligned with both leadership development and the school improvement plan; it focuses on individual, team and school objectives. A range of leadership development projects, through bursaries, Master's programmes, programme research and role assignments are linked to the school's improvement priorities and monitored to check impact. Leadership development is inclusive, including support staff and, notably, students. Students are encouraged to become involved in a wealth of leadership development opportunities. These have an impact on their experiences at school and their confidence to make the most of opportunities for learning after school. The school's leaders share a strong sense of moral purpose about supporting the growth of other schools, recognising the benefits that thinking about the bigger picture and partnership support bring to the school.

In terms of external provision, the school is primarily a provider of a range of programmes from piloting the National College's MLDP to the Outstanding Teacher Programme. As first a leading-edge, then a training school and subsequently one of the first four teaching schools in London, it has been at the heart of the London leadership strategy.

Example of leadership progression

A new head of PE was appointed to an underperforming department. He transformed the department and showed great potential for senior leadership. He was coached and prepared for this. When the head became executive headteacher of a local primary school in a category, she was able to increase her senior team and made him acting assistant headteacher. Within a year he had become deputy headteacher. Preparation for headship includes giving him experience in different areas and encouraging him to look beyond the school.

Notable features:

- The school has an exemplary commitment to helping other schools improve.
- It is a centre of excellence for training teachers and support staff and leadership development from NQT to NPQH level.
- It is a strong advocate of leadership by students.

Twynham School, Dorset

The school or system context

Twynham school is an outstanding 11–18 comprehensive school in Christchurch, Dorset (Ofsted, 2006), led by Dr Terry Fish. The school is at the heart of a range of local collaborations that aim to raise students' achievement, support wider 14–19 learning pathways and develop multi-agency learning support. The school is the lead training school in the Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset East SCITT.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

Staff describe the internal leadership culture of Twynham as emanating from a very clear vision. A range of staff described the two pillars of the Twynham Way as, first, learning, with all planning and decision-making focused very clearly on the classroom; and second, relationships, in order to build a supportive community and encourage people to go the extra mile.

These two pillars clearly inform leadership activity and professional development. Senior leaders describe their modelling of leadership to other staff, including, for instance, how staff and students should interact. Professional development comprises three development groups. One, the extended leadership team, chaired by the headteacher, is for assistant heads, heads of faculty, heads of year and ASTs. It meets each half-term and focuses almost exclusively on developing senior leadership potential. The group analyses papers, ranging from, for example, papers from the National College on aspects of leadership and theory to one written by the headteacher on a current whole-school priority. The group discusses the pros, cons and rationale of particular responses. The headteacher also chairs a second group, the leadership development group, for heads of department and key stage co-ordinators. This group uses a new programme on leading learning, prepared by an assistant headteacher responsible for CPD. It draws on her experiences of NPQH, as a coach on *Leading from the Middle*, and from her work in other schools. The headteacher describes his approach as reflecting the "tight-loose paradox": that is, tight on management and systems; loose on people and leadership.

The school encourages staff, at appropriate points, to attend two main external leadership development programmes. Until recently, *Leading from the Middle* was seen by staff to be very good and three or four staff were usually enrolled; three staff are currently enrolled on the Leadership Pathways programme, with the headteacher as their coach.

Example of leadership progression

A teacher who joined the staff as an NQT 20 years ago found that whenever she was ready to move on, new opportunities opened up in the school. Early involvement in adventure trips and co-ordination of the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme helped to hone her organisational skills. She became vocational co-ordinator, then head of faculty across departments before the opportunity arose to become acting assistant headteacher. She is now a deputy head and is currently supporting a partner school.

Notable features:

- There is a strong and innovative focus on leading learning.
- Leaders remain closely in touch with policy, strategy and research developments.
- Support is given to other schools through the capacity of the NLE/NSS.

Federations and chains

Best Start Federation, Hackney

The school or system context

Best Start Federation currently consists of Woodberry Down Community Primary School and London Fields Primary School, which federated in September 2008, and Mandeville Primary School which joined the federation in June 2009. (Collaboration started with the school in January 2009.) Greg Wallace has been executive principal of all three schools since June 2009. A fourth school is joining the federation in September 2011.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

The federation is underpinned by a commitment to improving teaching and learning in areas of significant deprivation. All leaders take collective responsibility to promote the federation's core values and approach in and beyond their school. They ensure that the federation's teaching schemes, techniques and strategies are carried out, embody the federation vision in everyday actions, and manage the implementation of federation policies and other matters. They are passionate about doing this. They consider themselves to be teachers first and foremost, but leadership provides the opportunity for them to increase their influence. They all see the federation and their schools as professional learning communities where teachers learn. The executive principal, clearly influenced by his reading on effective teaching, is heavily involved in leadership development which involves shadowing, observing and coaching, and supporting others across the federation. The school has its own stepped leadership and management development scheme (see main text section 1.1).

Leadership training and development across the federation of three schools appear to work well. One teacher explained: "You experience different scenarios each day that you would never dream you would encounter." They share experiences through meetings and email. Most external training is linked with the core mission of improved teaching and learning.

Example of leadership progression

A leadership progression route is provided. If people are assessed as really good teachers, once they complete an NQT year they are encouraged to take on the role of mentoring an NQT or being a trainee co-ordinator (ie shadowing a co-ordinator in the federation). They may then apply to be a co-ordinator themselves. Once they have developed the necessary skills (included within the development scheme) they can become a year group leader, then assistant headteacher, then trainee head of school. Penny, a joint head of school, is spending three days a week at the federation's new school as preparation to become the single head of school when it joins the federation formally later in 2011. Some people may not progress because they aren't motivated or can't take on more. Others move quite rapidly and they are encouraged and empowered.

Notable features:

- There are very robust systems and practices.
- There is a detailed approach to leadership progression.
- The school delivers high-quality provision and leadership in very challenging contexts.

Blackpool Primary School and The First Federation, Devon

The school or system context

Blackpool Primary School is at the hub of The First Federation – a federation of five primary schools stretching from Exeter to Salcombe. The Ofsted (2009c) report on Blackpool reads: ‘The federation executive head and the head of teaching and learning together provide an exceptionally clear vision and sense of direction for the school and its pupils.’ Each of the five constituent schools that make up the federation has a head of teaching and learning as the head of school, with Paul Jones as the executive headteacher. He is also an NLE. The federation’s business manager and other central services are based at Blackpool.

The origins of the federation are to be found in the work that the head and staff of Blackpool School undertook with Chudleigh Knighton Primary School. They took it over when it was given a notice to improve in June 2006 and it came out of this category as a good school with outstanding features within two and a half terms. Success bred success and, subsequently, Lady Seaward’s C of E Primary and Salcombe Primary schools were brought into the federation. The federation has one governing body. A fifth school, Newton Ferrers, has recently joined and has added to the federation’s capacity to support other schools.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

The federation structure gives expansive opportunities for leadership development. The senior leadership team, which answers to the executive headteacher, includes the heads of teaching and learning in the five federated schools, together with the federation leader of education, newly appointed, who will oversee the CPD, especially leadership development, of all staff. The group is joined by the assistant head in the largest school, who is also being prepared for headship. It is noticeable on visiting more than one of the schools how many systems, procedures and aspects of the school reflect consistency and high quality. The schools subscribe to operating standards which govern 80 per cent of their work and are common to all schools but they have local discretion for 20 per cent of it. Staff from the federation’s schools have engaged in middle leadership programmes, NPQH and, in the case of the executive headteacher, the National College programme for executive leadership. The model overall is an excellent example of a well-thought-out systems approach.

Example of leadership progression

The executive headteacher began his teaching career on a Gypsy site and led a school in Exeter out of special measures before taking on the headship of Blackpool School when it had serious weaknesses in leadership and management.

Notable features:

- Key staff make an effective contribution to the improvement of other schools.
- The wide-ranging work of the NLE contributes to schools far afield.
- A high-calibre appointment leads CPD across the federation.

Bournemouth Alternative Needs Federation

The school or system context

Bournemouth Alternative Needs Federation (BANF) provides education and support for pupils with a broad range of special needs. It comprises Bicknell School, for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD); Nigel Bowes School, a pupil referral unit (PRU) for pupils who are temporarily excluded from school, and a turnaround service for pupils at key stages 1 and 2 to help maintain their mainstream places; the Alternative Centre for Education, supporting disengaged mainstream pupils to complete their education; Throop Learning Centre, intensively supporting medically unfit pupils; and The Bournemouth Alternative Needs Outreach Service, which works with mainstream schools for disruptive pupils. The Bournemouth Behaviour Service will be joining the federation later in 2011. The federation is a national support school.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

The federation is underpinned by an ethos of high expectations for all: "The ethos for both children and staff is to develop your full potential. It's better when staff are challenged... [the executive head] likes to stretch people." There is strong investment in the leadership development of senior and middle leaders; teachers and support staff are equally supported to develop leadership to high levels. The federation has taken up a range of National College opportunities as well as investing heavily in leadership coaching for its senior and middle leaders. The culture provides opportunities for people to lead in very different areas. Leaders are committed to supporting others, both in the federation and beyond. This is also seen as an opportunity for learning. "If someone says they have a great idea, they're told, 'You take it on and lead it,' which fosters confidence." Aligned management processes, including phase leader and one-to-one meetings, ensure that processes are carried through by new phase leaders. Modelling plays a major role and there are people now in the federation who have the capacity to lead it in the future. "Four years ago, everything depended on me," said the headteacher. "Over the years I have strengthened the senior leadership. They are strong, committed, career-minded, future headteachers in their own right. I'm sure they'd like my job. I can go away and they will run the organisation. They are now developing the same with other people."

Example of leadership progression

The manager of the Alternative Centre for Education started as a teaching assistant with one pupil and has been nurtured, encouraged and given opportunities to develop her strengths and challenge herself in new areas. She now has a major role in alternative curriculum provision and is starting to develop new provision offsite. "The senior leadership of the school has encouraged me every step of the way. They've shown me complete support; I am encouraged to make decisions and backed when I make them."

Notable features:

- There is a strong culture of coaching.
- Staff are given opportunities to lead across a range of challenging contexts.

Moredon and Rodbourne Cheney Federation, Swindon

The school or system context

The Federation of Moredon Primary and Nursery School, Rodbourne Cheney Primary School, Moredon Children's Centre and the Nyland Campus (BSED) is unique in Swindon. Moredon Primary School was formed from the reorganisation of an infant and junior school and was judged to be outstanding (Ofsted, 2008). Rodbourne Cheney was in turn judged outstanding in 2010 having had a notice to improve in 2007. Nyland came out of special measures in 2010. The federation also takes responsibility for primary-age PRU provision across the local authority. The federation is led by Lauren Connor, executive headteacher and a national leader of education, and works closely with the neighbouring federation based on Drove School and led by Nick Capstick.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

Something of the approach to leadership is illustrated in the impact on Rodbourne Cheney of federation with Moredon, reported by inspectors:

Four years on from being a school requiring significant improvement with standards that were significantly below national averages, it has achieved a very rapid rate of development, and current standards are well above average. This has been achieved through the following features:

- An executive headteacher who puts quality teaching and learning at the top of her agenda and ensures that all pupils receive very well-targeted support.
- Teaching staff that plan memorable experiences for developing academic skills and also encourage pupils' personal development, thus enabling them to become thoughtful and reflective young people.
- An Early Years Foundation Stage that provides the best start to school life.
- Top quality relationships with parents and carers which promote engagement in their children's learning.
- Close working partnerships with other schools in the federation, specialist support from agencies and sponsorship from local companies.
- A highly cohesive school community that reaches out locally, nationally and globally.
- Highly efficient and effective use of resources across the federation.

Ofsted, 2010e

The head can be both strategic and operational, as needed, but has an intuitive approach to leadership development. She is seen by her staff as providing an excellent role model and a very strong lead. Her vision and ideas are highly motivating. Risk-taking is encouraged; people are listened to and staff have taken on responsibilities beyond anything they imagined or sought. Leadership development is shown for example in the deputy who would never have gone into a school causing concern but who did, and the temporary teacher who now leads the federation's behaviour support work across the local authority.

Example of leadership progression

One teacher started as an NQT five and a half years earlier, working with reception classes. After being demoralised by an early inspection, she grew to become a leading teacher for the local authority after three years, experienced an outstanding Ofsted report and became early years manager for the federation. The outstanding provision has now attracted visits from over 100 schools.

Notable features:

- The executive headteacher sets two weeks aside each term to review the work of every member of staff in the federation and the progress of their pupils.
- Staff retention is good in a very demanding culture.

The Harris Federation of South London Schools

The school or system context

The Harris Federation is an expanding group of nine collaborating academies aimed at raising achievement in south London. Several of the academies have been judged outstanding by Ofsted. The federation has a current target of 20 Harris academies and will comprise 13 academies by September 2011. The federation also sponsors a number of secondary and primary specialist schools.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

There is a strong sense of shared learning across the federation and a view from the CEO that the culture of the federation is “only as strong as the weakest link.” Principals are expected to “work together and have a sense of responsibility beyond their own patch” and “the best principals will become executive principals” (CEO). With the expansion of the federation, and as part of the emerging developmental strategy across the nine schools, each principal takes responsibility for a particular strand of development, for example NQTs. There is also a strong sense that leadership development is linked to the Harris brand which is about “not settling for being mediocre.” Leadership development across the nine schools is linked to two underlying assumptions: (i) it is vital to develop communities across the schools and to encourage movement and shared learning, and (ii) leadership development needs to be linked to learning outcomes. This latter aspiration is manifested in the from good to great project, which focuses on developing the skills of new members of staff. The outstanding leaders programme focuses on outstanding teaching. Other ingredients include a strong coaching model, opportunities for staff to lead developments across the federation and a biennial senior leadership conference. The students’ commission operates in all the Harris schools, and has a strong focus on learning and is linked to developing student leadership. The federation uses a range of external programmes with the National College and the widening leadership programme from the Institute of Education leading to a Master’s in leadership.

Example of leadership progression

The vice-principal of Falconwood joined Harris City Technology College as humanities co-ordinator in 1999:

The Harris approach of involving middle leaders in whole-school roles gave me good experience, for example organising daily cover, duties, homework monitoring etc. This helped in moving to SLT as head of faculty/assistant principal. I did this job for six years before I moved to my current post when we opened here in 2008. In my assistant principal role I had lots of experience that in many schools would have been restricted to vice-principals, for example autonomous leadership of my faculty to include pastoral support for a quarter of the academy. The growth of the federation also meant I got involved with our new academies and worked with two local primaries who were funded as specialist schools.

My story reflects our approach to growing leaders – providing opportunities to widen leadership roles, empowering leaders to make key decisions and creating autonomous faculty communities where leaders are responsible for the full range of whole-school issues on a smaller scale.

Notable features:

- There is strong in-house leadership development provision drawing on the resources of the federation.
- Corporate loyalty is strong.
- Student leadership is promoted, for example through the weighty students’ commission.

West Trafford Learning Partnership, Greater Manchester

School or system context

West Trafford Learning Partnership originally consisted of a core of two schools working together as a hard federation, that is, Ashton-on-Mersey and Broadoak Schools, with a number of other schools in evolving relationships: Parrs Wood (Manchester), linked for support for the last two years; Forest Gate Primary School (Partington, near Broadoak), a new relationship; and an emerging link with a struggling academy.

The learning partnership that exists today sprang from the success of Ashton-on-Mersey School, located to the south of Manchester in a predominantly white working-class area. Given its success in raising aspirations, the school was asked to provide support to Broadoak School in Partington, a school located in a declining industrial area in which aspirations and expectations are low.

Tarun Kapur is the executive principal of the partnership and formal federation of the two schools. Each of the two schools has its own headteacher. Both Tarun and, recently, Vicky Beer (principal of Ashton-on-Mersey) have been designated as national leaders of education. Both the federated schools were inspected in 2008. Ashton-on-Mersey was judged outstanding. Broadoak was judged to be good with outstanding features and to have outstanding leadership.

Leadership culture, opportunities and development

The partnership develops leaders and exhibits leadership at many levels and layers, from the governors to the students. It has developed organically. There is no grand plan to have a set number of schools of the same brand. This is not to say that the development of the partnership is lacking in strategy. The intention is to develop learning and to grow leadership in a range of ways. Relationships and arrangements change. Schools may have a strong tie to the partnership, and then become more loosely coupled. Parrs Wood School, for example, was a school in serious difficulties. Its first relationship with the partnership was tough and intensive. As the leadership of Parrs Wood has grown in confidence and competence, under the direction (in the very early stages) and then the mentoring and guidance of the learning partnership, the partnership has taken a more distant role. The most useful external provision is reported as “partnerships with other schools and the community, together with lessons from the London leadership strategy.”

Example of leadership progression

Vicky Beer had a career in business before joining Ashton-on-Mersey by way of two other schools. She recently received the National College award for outstanding head of school in a national support school.

Notable features:

- The role as a training school, with (currently) 18 trainees is a prime motivator in continuing an enhanced spirit of innovative teaching and learning.
- The approach to coaching has been developed through specialist sports college status.
- The vision, commitment and support of the governing body has supported the work of the partnership well.

Annex 2: Key findings from Developing leadership: national support schools (Ofsted, 2010a)

- The best leadership was focused on teaching and learning with headteachers seeing this as their core business.
- There was a strong emphasis in the schools visited on distributing leadership and creating opportunities to provide staff with meaningful and relevant leadership opportunities in a variety of contexts.
- The concept of growing our own leaders was a particularly strong feature of the schools visited. Potential staff leaders were identified quickly and their skills were developed systematically. This contributed significantly to recruiting and retaining high-quality staff and sustaining the schools' good or outstanding overall effectiveness.
- There was no one model of successful leadership development. Crucially, training and development were carefully tailored to meet the needs of the school and the individual, although the focus was always on improving teaching and learning.
- Coaching and mentoring successfully underpinned training and development opportunities to build confidence. Staff were given time to reflect on their learning and discuss with other leaders how it could best be applied in practice.
- For the client schools, working in partnership with successful schools had mutual benefits for the development of leadership capacity and effectiveness. Partnership work provided professional challenge and support, offered examples of good practice, allowed a flexible approach and presented a wide variety of opportunities for staff to develop their skills within and beyond their own school context.
- Partnership work got off to a positive start when clear protocols and shared aims were established across the partnership from the beginning. Where this was less evident, barriers (including some reluctance to engage) had to be overcome.
- Opportunities for governors to work together in the partnerships to support their development and effectiveness were not as frequent or systematic as for other leaders.
- The systematic evaluation of partnership working in building leadership capacity at all levels was evident in only 11 of the 20 partnerships.

The National College is uniquely dedicated to developing and supporting aspiring and serving leaders in schools, academies and early years settings.

The College gives its members the professional development and recognition they need to build their careers and support those they work with. Members are part of a community of thousands of other leaders - exchanging ideas, sharing good practice and working together to make a bigger difference for children and young people.

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