

Schools leading schools II: the growing impact of National Leaders of Education



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Robert Hill and Peter Matthews

Schools leading schools II: the growing impact of National Leaders of Education

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Schools leading schools II: the growing impact of National Leaders of Education

Dear Colleague

The mission of the National College is to grow, support and inspire great leaders of schools and children's services. We do this, of course, through our various leadership development programmes. However, in recent years it has also become increasingly clear that great leadership can be embedded in many schools by empowering excellent leaders to support the development of others. Leadership development is starting to become a self-generating enterprise.

This trend is no more evident than in National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and National Support Schools (NSSs). When the then Secretary of State commissioned us to set up the programme in 2006 its primary purpose was (and still remains) to raise standards by harnessing the skills and experience of our best school leaders, as well as their schools, to support those that need to improve.

In 2008 Robert Hill and Peter Matthews were able to chart and identify some of the early benefits of the NLE programme in *Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education*.

Two years on their latest review shows the momentum that the NLE programme has gathered. NLEs and NSSs are no longer about potential but about solid and persuasive achievement. The number of NLEs is now well over 400 and, as this book demonstrates, there is a profusion of evidence of their impact: crucially schools being supported by NLEs are improving at a significantly faster rate than other schools nationally.

The impact is not just confined to one sector or phase of education. NLEs are active in primary schools, special schools and secondary schools, including academies. Along with Local Leaders of Education, they have also been a lynchpin for raising standards in the three city challenge areas of London, the Black Country and Manchester. NLEs are the entrepreneurial vanguard when it comes to leading school improvement federations and National Challenge trusts and forming accredited school providers and groups.

In short, wherever NLEs and their teams are operating there is a level of challenge that requires expertise, innovation and strong leadership to make a transformational difference to pupils in our most challenged schools. Being an NLE is not for the fainthearted, it requires vision, commitment and resilience.

What is especially welcome is how the NLE programme is helping to foster what the National College calls 'system leadership' – the growth of school leaders able to exercise leadership beyond the particular institution they run and contribute to organisational improvement and pupil progress in other schools. This book provides vivid examples of how NLEs and their teams are able to do this and use their schools to share learning with others, bringing on a new generation of leaders imbued with the same skills and expertise.

However, the College's purpose in commissioning this book was not just to hear about what was going well but to also to understand the issues and challenges that NLEs and NSSs often come up against. We have encouraged Robert and Peter to act as critical friends in assessing the progress of the NLE programme and thinking about the future.

The final chapter of the book looks forward to how NLEs can maintain and extend their contribution and impact. A new government inevitably brings fresh directions in policy and practice for schools. Public spending constraints will bring their pressures and problems. However, our belief is that in NLEs we now have an unparalleled source of expertise and leadership that can continue to drive and underpin progress and improvement across schools in England.

Our schools are improving. The quality of leadership is rising. But the imperative to ensure that every school is a good school and every pupil has an opportunity to access a high quality education remains. In NLEs and NSSs we have the means to help us achieve those objectives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Munby". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Steve Munby

Chief Executive

National College for Leadership of
Schools and Children's Services

Introduction – the story so far

The story so far

In 2008, the National College published *Schools leading schools: the power and potential of national leaders of education* (Hill & Matthews, 2008). In this book we charted the birth and growth of national leaders of education (NLEs) and national support schools (NSSs) from the appointment of the first NLEs in 2006.

We explained how struggling schools progressed fastest when they were supported by excellent leaders who, as it were, moored their outstanding school alongside one that was marooned or sinking, and imported their systems, skills and expert practitioners to get it moving in the right direction.

We described how the NLE concept was different from other support models that rely on consultants or advisers who have left the frontline of school leadership. Such models by their nature cannot draw on the current practice or skills of other colleagues, that is, the senior and middle leaders and expert teachers whose contribution to achieving improvement is fundamental.

We set out the criteria and quality assurance procedures that the National College was using to ensure that appropriate leaders and schools were designated as NLEs and NSSs. We also described the respective roles of local authorities and the brokers¹ appointed by the National College in matching NLEs to schools requiring assistance.

We noted the designation of the first local leaders of education (LLEs), successful headteachers who have a more limited role than NLEs but who provide valuable support to help build capacity and raise attainment by providing mentoring and coaching to other school leaders.

We detailed the processes by which NLEs were effective in working with schools in improving teaching and learning and behaviour management. We described the systems, interventions and phases of the improvement cycle that were characteristic of the partnerships between NLEs/NSSs and the schools they supported. We argued that this approach was more likely to provide a sustainable and systemic model of school improvement than continuing the practice of shuffling excellent headteachers from one school to another, which has tended to result in improved performance simply following the leader.

From looking at Ofsted reports and tracking the results of test and examination data, we were able to evaluate the first groups of NLEs to be appointed and to demonstrate their effectiveness and impact.

But we also identified a number of challenges for the NLE programme to address as its scope and role expanded within the school system in England.

¹ The brokers are now formally known as NLE/LLE regional support associates.

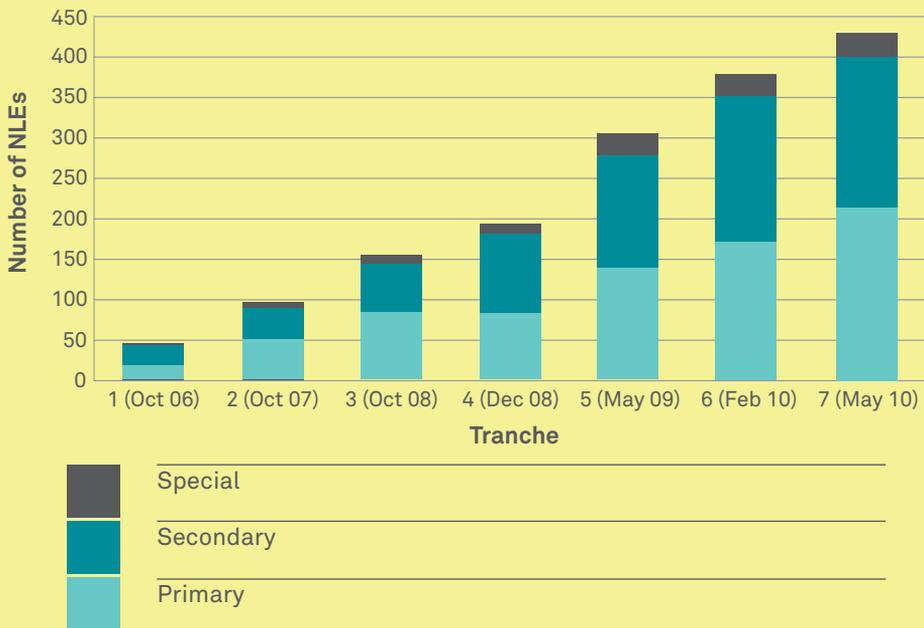
A developing storyline

Two years on and a lot has changed. In order to understand and evaluate these developments, we have visited and talked with NLEs and their staff and leaders in the schools being supported, talked with staff from the National College, had access to background papers and statistics, and held discussions with local authority representatives and policymakers.

The picture that emerges is positive and exciting. The work and role of NLEs are increasingly recognised and pervasive in the English school system, with press reports from around the country featuring the work of NLEs and NSSs. Previous challenges have largely been addressed, yet the full potential of NLEs and NSSs has still to be realised.

The NLE programme has more than doubled in size since we produced our first report and as of May 2010 there were 431 NLEs. The National College is on track to meet its target of having designated 500 NLEs by 2012. The breakdown of NLEs by tranche and school phase is shown in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1: Aggregate number of NLEs by tranche, as at May 2010



Source: National College

The National College is also on target with its aim of ensuring that it makes the best use of NLEs in schools on a day-to-day basis. It would not be sensible to try to deploy NLEs all of the time because that would leave no spare capacity to deal with new demands and requests for support as they arose and nor would it allow NLEs time to take stock and get up to speed with developments in their home school. So the College has set a target for having, at any one time, 80 per cent of NLEs deployed supporting at least one other school. During 2009/10, the deployment rate was 79 per cent.

Over 500 schools have been supported since the first NLEs were appointed and over half a million pupils have benefited as a result.

The criteria for being designated an NLE continue to be demanding and have been updated to reflect changes in the wider education system in England. The full criteria are set out in Appendix 1 but in short they require potential NLEs to demonstrate that they:

are headteachers of schools that have been judged by Ofsted as outstanding in leadership and management

lead schools with the necessary leadership capacity to support and achieve improvement in other schools without compromising standards at the home school

have the track record, experience and capability to lead schools out of the most challenging circumstances, providing intense levels of support

can lead one or more schools, in addition to their own, at any one time

are able to provide expert advice to ministers on future development strategies

The arrangements covering the circumstances in which NLEs should be de-designated have also been formalised (including establishing an appeal system) and these are discussed in chapter 5.

In addition, NLEs have evolved from being a means to support schools in the three city challenge areas (London, the Black Country and Greater Manchester) to being a national resource and an important part of the school improvement landscape, as chapter 2 describes.

There is also two more years' worth of data on the impact of NLEs. We evaluate the latest test and exam results in chapter 4, but it is clear that the value of NLEs is growing. Analysis of test results for 2007 to 2009 produced the following picture:

Primary schools supported by NLEs during 2007/08 improved the average percentage of pupils gaining level 4 in English and maths at Key Stage 2 by 10 percentage points, while schools nationally flatlined over the same two-year period (ie, saw no increase in attainment).

For secondary schools supported by NLEs during 2007/08, the improvement rate in GCSE pass rates over the two years (as measured by the percentage of students gaining five GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and maths) was double the national average.

The impact of NLEs and NSSs has not been confined to improvements in exam performance. Chapter 2, for example, describes how NLEs are:

developing and extending support for primary school improvement

contributing to the development of academies, 10 of which have NLEs as their principal or chief executive; in four cases NLEs are involved in leading more than one academy

developing federations, trusts and chains or accredited groups of schools based on their improvement methodology

helping to establish national teaching schools that provide a range of intensive programmes to improve teachers' skills in the classroom

developing strategic and advanced system leadership skills and contributing to policy development through the National College's Fellowship programme

Chapter 3 identifies the broader learning that is emerging about the effective operation and innovative practices of NLEs and their staff and highlights the range of skills required for the role.

Chapter 4 includes examples of how NLEs are contributing to high-quality professional development as well as to the sustainability of leadership and succession planning. The chapter also examines the cost effectiveness of the NLE programme.

Chapter 5 reviews how the NLE programme has taken on the challenges we identified in our first report.

A changing educational policy context

At the same time as the NLE initiative has been growing and developing, the broader educational landscape has also been changing. The Labour government's approach towards securing school improvement evolved during its period in office. The early years of Labour's approach were rooted in the application of national strategies, supported by the deployment of consultants and advisers. The mantra, 'standards not structures' encapsulated the strategy.

However, the emphasis shifted over the years. Policy retained a strong national focus, as the national challenge timetable for secondary schools to have 30 per cent of students achieve five GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and maths by 2011 indicates, and a quarter of the schools still below the threshold are receiving support from NLEs. But by end of its period in office, the Labour government's overall approach had changed. The DCSF² document subtitled *Timetable for action* (DCSF, 2009a), which addressed the implementation of the 2009 schools white paper (DCSF, 2009b), adopted what might be termed a three-S approach towards school improvement: spatial, structural and sectoral. Each of these is discussed below.

² On the 12th May 2010 the Department for Children, Schools and Families became the Department for Education (DfE). Throughout this publication we have used the term 'DCSF' in relation to ministerial actions and departmental publications prior to May 2010 and the new name in relation to developments thereafter.

Spatial

Those parts of the country that face some of the toughest challenges in raising performance have been targeted for additional assistance. Building on the success of London Challenge, which has seen standards in London schools rise consistently faster and further than in the rest of the country, two further conurbations – the Black Country and Greater Manchester – have also been designated as city challenge areas. As with London, these areas have been receiving highly targeted additional school improvement support and help from the National College in developing school leadership.

Structural

The Labour government created a diverse range of new school structures designed to support school improvement. Academies had been designed to challenge cultures of low aspiration which ministers saw as afflicting too many communities and underperforming schools. The freedoms granted to academies have been aimed at encouraging them to be bold and innovative in breaking the cycle of failure. In February 2010, 203 academies were open in 83 local authorities, up to a further 100 are due to open by September 2010 (DCSF, 2010a) and plans to establish at least 400 academies have been approved.

National challenge trust schools and federations (collectively, NCTs) provide a mechanism to take schools that are below the national challenge benchmark standard of five good GCSEs (including English and maths) within the control and governance of a high-performing school. The high-performing school can receive up to £750,000 to take on this role and the government has allocated funding for up to 100 NCTs. By March 2010, half of the NCTs up and running and being led by schools involved an NLE (DCSF, 2010b; DCSF, 2010c; DCSF, 2010d).

A more recent development has seen the introduction of accredited school providers (ASPs) and accredited schools groups (ASGs)³, ideas that have grown out of the development of groups of academies sharing the same sponsor and two or three NCTs led by the same NLE. The accreditation programme provides a more formal quality assurance arrangement for providing underperforming schools that are either incorporated into a federation or trust or become an academy with an assurance that the school, education provider or sponsor involved in taking over the school on a long-term basis has the necessary experience and expertise for the task.

The Conservative Liberal Democrat administration may decide to amend the accreditation arrangements but under the scheme announced in February 2010 only an accredited school provider or group is eligible to be selected as an NCT or academy sponsor. This policy development was in part shaped by recommendations to ministers by the first NLE fellowship commission.

Accreditation has also opened the door to education providers (such as further education colleges, independent schools, universities and education consultancies), church and faith groups and private and third-sector organisations, in addition to schools. These providers and groups now have the opportunity to be involved and apply to run formal intervention projects in schools, subject to meeting the accreditation criteria that have been broadly aligned with the criteria for becoming an NLE.

The concept of accreditation has also been extended to the primary sector where a range of innovative structures is starting to emerge. These include federations between primary schools, federations between primary schools and secondary and special schools, town-wide

3 Accredited school providers (ASPs) will support and lead up to two underperforming schools in need of rapid, sustainable school improvement. ASGs with the best track record can apply to become accredited schools groups (ASGs) and support and lead three or more schools or academies.

clusters of primary schools working together under the umbrella of an education company, and all-through 3-19 schools and academies.

Given the origins and role of the accredited school concept and the role played by NLEs, it is not surprising that they were very well represented among the first ASPs and ASGs to be selected ^(Table 1).

Table 1: Number of ASPs and ASGs and links with NLEs/NSSs, as at March 2010

	ASPs	ASPs that are NLEs/NSSs	ASGs	ASGs that include NLEs/NSSs
Secondary	39	22	10	7
Primary	15	10	1	1

Note: The figure of 39 secondary ASPs in column 1 includes 6 FE colleges, 3 universities, 1 independent school and 1 education charitable company.

Sectoral

Plans approved by the outgoing Labour government involved responsibility and resources for school improvement being devolved to schools themselves. It decided to take this action because 'peer-to-peer learning and lateral learning between institutions, particularly those in similar circumstances or facing similar issues, is a very effective means of spreading effective practice around the system' (DCSF, 2009a:49). In other words, schools leading schools, the principle at the heart of the NLE/NSS programme, was being extended and applied more generally to school improvement. The sector was being given the opportunity to become more responsible for its own future.

Both local authorities and school improvement partners (SIPs) were given an enhanced role in co-ordinating and supporting the operation of this threefold school improvement system. Through the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (ASCL Act), ministers strengthened the statutory duties on local authorities to identify and intervene in underperforming schools and increased their own powers to take direct action where there was evidence that a local authority was failing in its actions.

What does this changing context mean for NLEs?

As we have described, NLEs and LLEs and their schools are very much involved in shaping the changing educational landscape: working in city challenge areas, supporting academies, leading national challenge trusts, developing accredited school groups and playing a leading role in school improvement work in their own locality. NLEs have emerged as system leaders, leading improvement and thinking strategically.

However, the school improvement agenda is dynamic and, as chapter 6 sets out, NLEs will face new opportunities and challenges as the Conservative Liberal Democrat government develops and implements its plans for school improvement. Whatever the agenda and policy prescriptions adopted, NLEs will surely constitute a growing and increasingly indispensable part of the school system in the years ahead.

The expanding role of NLEs and their schools

NLEs and NSSs supporting primary schools

Chapter 1 described how the NLE programme has been developing overall. NLEs and NSSs are now operating in a wide range of school contexts and, along with LLEs, have in a relatively short space of time established themselves as an essential feature of the educational landscape in England. In this chapter we look at growing and new areas of NLE and LLE activity and how this is contributing both to improving schools and colleges and to wider education policy.

The primary sector has become a particular focus for the NLE programme. While performance in secondary schools, as measured by the steady increase in the proportion of students and schools achieving five good grades at GCSE (both with and without English and maths), is improving year-on-year, progress in primary schools, as measured by the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 at Key Stage (KS) 2, has plateaued.

There is also a large tail of primary schools struggling to reach standards achieved by the majority. In 2009 nearly 1,500 primary schools were below the floor target level (ie, with fewer than 55 per cent of pupils achieving level 4 at KS2 in both English and maths). This represented an increase of over 100 since 2008 (DCSF & BIS, 2009).

In 2008/09, over two-thirds of primary schools inspected by Ofsted were classified as 'outstanding' or 'good' (Ofsted, 2009) and three per cent assessed as 'inadequate'. That is a small proportion but in overall terms it indicates that there are at any one time several hundred such schools across the country.

It was these factors that led the Labour government in December 2009 to introduce its World Class Primary Programme focused on raising attainment in primary schools (DCSF, 2009a). The programme was based on a strategy of deploying NLEs to focus on schools below the floor target level and using LLEs to help primary schools where performance was seen as vulnerable or inconsistent.

During 2007/08, 43 primary schools were supported by an NLE/NSS. In 2008/09 this rose to 97 (including 29 schools supported in both years) and in 2009/10 it is expected to reach 190. In total NLEs and their schools have, since the start of the NLE programme in 2006, been active in supporting 249 primary schools⁴.

As chapter 4 demonstrates, this support has been effective and successful in helping to improve outcomes. But the number of primary schools where significant improvement is needed means there is still a huge challenge. It is against this background that recruitment for the tranche of NLE leaders designated in spring 2010 was focused on those coming from a primary school background. A total of 47 applications was received and 42 appointments made, meaning that in May 2010 there was a total of 215 primary NLEs.

Primary schools are being supported by NLEs and NSSs in a number of ways. For example, in some cases the NLE/NSS support comes in the form of one primary supporting another primary school within the framework of a contract. Sometimes this is brokered by the home local authority in which the NSS is situated and sometimes by a neighbouring or different local authority, as [Case study 1](#) illustrates.

⁴ The numbers for the various years do not sum to the total number of primary schools supported because support for some schools straddled two years.

Case study 1: Primary school supporting other primary schools

Huntingdon Primary School in Nottingham has not been called upon by its own local authority but is in demand by Leicester City Council. The first assignment of the NLE, Diana Owen, and her school involved working with a community primary school in an Ofsted category which was subsequently inspected and deemed satisfactory after an intervening monitoring visit.

The second assignment, which in March 2010 had been in progress for a term, is with another Leicester school where results are below the floor target although the school has emerged – for the second time – from special measures. The emphasis has been on working with leaders, improving leadership strategies and the leadership of teaching and learning.

The NSS has also provided in-house training sessions for Leicester headteachers, focusing on the journey from special measures to outstanding – a journey that Huntingdon itself once travelled, having been led out of special measures by its current headteacher.

For a small school, Huntingdon has built impressive capacity to support other schools. For example, the deputy does not have responsibility for a class, allowing the headteacher to spend time in other schools. The special educational needs co-ordinator is an expert on extended services, the advanced skills teacher focuses on literacy development and another outstanding teacher concentrates on Years 5 and 6 and more able pupils. The school hopes to become an accredited schools provider.

In other cases an NLE may act more as a consultant, providing support to headteachers with specific issues and problems that need addressing. This approach is most effective where there is a close working relationship with a local authority that appreciates the NLE's abilities and has a good understanding of the schools that might benefit from his or her input.

At the other end of the school improvement support spectrum there is a growing number of cases where the school being supported either comes together in a federation with the NSS led by the NLE who acts as an executive headteacher, or is amalgamated with the NSS. One example is the Loughborough federation described in [Case study 2](#).

Case study 2: Kings Avenue Primary School and the Loughborough federation

Kings Avenue Primary School in Clapham, south-west London looked likely to fail its Ofsted inspection in 2006 so the local authority asked it to become part of a soft federation with a nearby successful school, Loughborough Primary. Richard Thornhill, headteacher of Loughborough and a national leader of education, became the executive headteacher of the federation. In 2008, Iqra Primary, a small Muslim voluntary-aided school needing support, also joined the federation.

The executive headteacher works across all three schools, spending time in each supporting the headteachers and their respective leadership teams, focusing in particular on the quality of teaching. In line with the way that many NLEs and NSSs operate, the schools do their planning together and apply common procedures. Some specialist staff such as SEN teachers also work across all three schools.

In 2009 all three schools improved their KS2 results. At both Kings Avenue and Loughborough the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 in English and maths rose by nine percentage points.

In 2008 Kings Avenue was assessed by Ofsted ⁵ as being ‘satisfactory’ but improving rapidly: ‘The executive headteacher, well supported by the local authority, has been very successful in arresting the school’s decline and improving pupils’ progress’.

Every third year, the governing bodies of schools that are part of the Loughborough federation can vote on whether to stay in or leave the federation. In September 2009, Kings Avenue’s governors voted to extend their participation in the federation until September 2011 – a vote of confidence in the value of the NLE-led federation. In March 2010, Loughborough was successful in becoming an accredited school provider.

Not all primary schools receiving NLE help are being supported by another primary school. In an increasing number of cases, secondary schools are providing support to nearby primary schools, and the experience of the secondary schools involved is that the learning is far from being one-way. For example, Highdown School and Sixth Form Centre in Reading has provided support for a local primary school. The reverse has also happened with primary and middle schools occasionally supporting a secondary school, as [Case study 3](#) illustrates.

⁵ References to Ofsted reports are not cited in the text but are listed in the Bibliography.

Case study 3: Lincroft Middle School supporting an upper school out of special measures

The headteacher of Lincroft Middle School, an outstanding school in Bedfordshire, was asked to become executive headteacher of Northfields, a 13-19 upper school with specialist technology status that was in special measures. Northfields – 25 miles from Lincroft - was due to be closed and replaced by an academy a year later. The consequent uncertainty over structure and staffing threatened to distract staff and prompt an exodus.

The NLE brought to Northfields an emphasis on finely tuned tracking and intervention, modifying the curriculum and developing staff and building their morale. Strategies for raising the quality of teaching included:

monitoring and accountability measures

a whole-school coaching model repeated on five-week cycles

capability procedures as the bottom line

Student support was improved through creating three student advocate posts. The appointment of high-quality staff contributed greatly to all-round improvements in behaviour and attendance.

Two months after the NLE took over as executive headteacher, Ofsted removed Northfields from special measures. The inspection report stated that the executive headteacher had 'enabled existing members of the senior team to flourish while maintaining tight lines of accountability'. Northfields became the All Saints Academy in September 2009 and the NLE has become executive leader of a neighbouring middle school. The schools are federating with three others to provide a 9-19 secondary experience.

NLEs and NSSs supporting secondary schools

As at May 2010, 265 secondary schools had been supported by NLEs since the inception of the NLE programme. As with primary schools, the range of NLE/NSS support by secondary and special NLEs and their schools is very wide-ranging. [Case study 4](#) reinforces the finding, highlighted in *Schools leading schools* (Hill & Matthews, 2008), that the support and resources of the NSS are often crucial to the NLE being able to offer and provide sustainable support for improvement. It also illustrates how the transfer of effective systems and teaching and learning models frequently involves peer-to-peer support and development for leaders, curriculum leaders and teachers. These issues are further explored in chapter 3.

Case study 4: NLEs and NSSs supporting other secondary schools by transferring skills and providing peer support

The headteacher of Gable Hall School, Thurrock is a vastly experienced NLE, having been a pioneer consultant leader for the beginning of London Challenge. His first inter-school partnership occurred in 2000, when he was parachuted into the vacated headship of a school in special measures. He no longer thinks this is a good model, preferring to develop the staff in place and build capacity.

Since then, the school has worked with others from Suffolk to Lewisham and several within the local authority. The school has a relentless focus on excellent teaching, with in-school staff development concentrating on this. The aim is that every new teacher is not only outstanding but also capable of supporting those in other schools within three years. Of the senior leadership team of 8, almost all can provide external support; half of the 20 middle leaders work externally, and there is a constant pool of advanced skills teachers on which to draw.

The NLE and his colleagues are clear about the qualities and skills of outreach staff:

“They should be experts in their own fields and able not only simply to judge a lesson but to identify the key things that would help a satisfactory but vulnerable teacher to become rock solid, a satisfactory and solid teacher. They should be able to tell what a good teacher needs to do to become outstanding. The skills incorporate analysis, diagnosis and synthesis, exactly the same as assessing a student’s progress. What you do with a child, you do with an adult.”

The principal of Chafford Hundred Business and Enterprise College is a relatively new NLE. His school’s results have improved from 16 per cent to 62 per cent of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and maths in four years, making it one of the most improved schools in the country. The school is supporting others, not only locally but in north and west London.

The school uses a large cohort of advanced skills teachers (ASTs) as the basis for its partnership and peer support work in teaching and learning. Vice- and assistant principals provide outreach expertise in leadership. Achievement directors in English and maths and pastoral and SEN leaders also make a key contribution. The partnerships are “two way processes in which staff really enjoy working with each other, using very student-centred approaches”.

As in the primary sector, NLE intervention is increasingly being allied to high-performing schools incorporating one or more underperforming schools. In large part this is being driven by the government's decision to establish national challenge trusts and federations for those schools that are struggling to reach the threshold of 30 per cent of their students achieving good GCSE passes including English and maths. As highlighted in chapter 1, many of the national challenge trusts and federations are led by NLEs.

The development of national challenge trusts has resulted in some NLEs (and their NSS leadership teams) working across and supporting several schools at the same time. For example, the Kemnal Trust based in Bromley is currently supporting three other schools in south-east London, Essex and Kent. There are in total five schools within the trust and in February 2010 the trust was designated an accredited school group.

NLEs and NSSs supporting special schools

Among special schools, 24 have received NLE support since the programme's inception. However, the contribution of special school NLEs and NSSs goes much wider than support to schools of a similar type. The NLE programme is allowing high-performing special schools to show their capability and versatility in contributing to the improvement of not just other special schools but mainstream schools as well, as [Case study 5](#) illustrates.

Case study 5: The contribution of special school NLEs and NSSs

The headteacher of Grangewood School in Hillingdon was one of a group of NLEs giving strong support to schools on the Isle of Wight at a time of school reorganisation. His expertise on assessing and tracking pupils' progress came to the fore as well as his school leadership expertise. In a unique scenario, this NSS has also been contracted to take responsibility for managing the nearby Royal National Institute of Blind People residential school, after a critical Ofsted report. The NSS has assigned one of its deputy headteachers to the school as head of education.

The head of the Bournemouth Alternative Needs Federation has, together with some of his colleagues, been widely used by the local authority to work with mainstream schools with challenging pupil behaviour as well as a pupil referral unit in Southampton. The federation includes Bicknell, a school for 70 pupils aged 5-16 with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, Nigel Bowers School which specialises in pupil referral, the Thrunge Unit for sick children and those with school phobia, the Alternative Centre for Education, which provides for mainstream pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are disaffected with school, a turnaround centre and an action unit for pupils with extreme behaviours, as well as support for home teaching and curriculum provision. The work of the NLE and colleagues with other schools is prolific and includes:

leadership development in a national challenge secondary school

leadership support for another secondary school to address the behaviour issues that presented a serious challenge within the school

assessment and recommendations for a coasting special school and expert advice on physical intervention

support for a pupil referral unit that had experienced a catalogue of neglect and had been put into special measures

review of all behavioural, emotional and social difficulty support across the local authority

mentoring of the headteacher of a secondary school designated to become an academy

coaching a potential NLE

Not surprisingly, the NLE identifies the key attribute needed for such work as resilience.

The headteacher of Ash Field School for children with physical disability and a diverse range of other needs is, with his staff, engaged in an equally diverse range of commissions, largely in the mainstream sector, ranging from training and mentoring special educational needs co-ordinators to reviewing outreach services across the City of Leicester.

Academies

Academies are a growing and integral feature of the secondary school scene in England. In 2009/10, 203 academies in 83 local authorities were open. A further 100 are due to be up and running by September 2010, en route to the establishment of at least 400.

Many academies take over schools that have been struggling or are introduced into areas where low aspirations and attainment have become the norm, sometimes for generations. The challenges faced by sponsors and school leaders in establishing effective new institutions in these circumstances are, therefore, often very considerable and NLEs and NSSs have developed into a key source of support.

Currently, 10 principals/chief executives of academies are NLEs and in 4 of these cases are involved in leading more than one academy. In addition, other NLEs are acting as executive headteachers of academies or providing other assistance. In November 2009, 29 academies were receiving support that fell broadly into one of four main categories:

sustaining a school that is scheduled to become an academy

assisting academies to establish themselves

helping academies that are in operation but struggling to deliver their objectives

using the resources of an NSS as the basis for sponsoring a new academy

Each of these models is described below.

Sustaining a school that is scheduled to become an academy

The period between a school being designated to become an academy and the academy actually opening is a high-risk one. There is a risk that during the transition process, staff turnover will increase and/or staff morale will fall. Given that the school may not be performing strongly in the first place, it makes it important for schools in these circumstances to have strong leadership if the quality of education and students' prospects are not to suffer. NLEs are helping to provide that leadership.

For example, Altrincham Girls Grammar School (AGGS) is a high-performing school in Trafford. The headteacher, Dana Ross-Wawrzynski, does not believe that the type of school is the major consideration when it comes to NLE/NSS work: "Being a grammar school doesn't really matter; the dialogue is important," she says. The school is a specialist school in languages and a training school, two strengths which have been used to support other schools in the borough, both secondary and primary schools.

Greater Manchester Challenge asked AGGS to support a school in a different part of the city, about an hour's drive away. The school was underachieving, not functioning well and scheduled to become an academy in September 2010. The NLE was deployed as an executive headteacher and spent up to three days a week at the school. An HMI monitoring visit reported that:

“Since the start of the academic year, the executive headteacher and senior leaders have swiftly introduced and implemented a range of actions to tackle the key issues for improvement, namely attendance, behaviour, the quality of teaching and students’ progress and attainment. The introduction of more robust quality assurance and behaviour management systems is improving classroom practice; monitoring by senior leaders is more systematic and is providing more detailed information on the quality of teaching, students’ behaviour and performance.”

Assisting academies to establish themselves

Setting up a new school from scratch is a substantial undertaking requiring detailed thought and planning and NLEs are providing practical help with this. For example, Jennifer Bexon-Smith, an NLE in the West Midlands, had considerable input into the establishment of the new Tudor Grange Academy in Worcester. Within a very challenging timescale she devised new conditions of service and an innovative curriculum model based on her own school’s provision. She introduced a comprehensive behaviour policy, as well as bringing in a different uniform for students. She is now executive headteacher of her original school and the new academy with a leadership and management structure embracing both establishments.

A similar situation developed at the Furness Academy in Barrow where NLE help was sought at short notice following the resignation of the principal designate. Martin Shevill, the NLE selected for the task, worked alongside the new principal to help establish the strategic direction of the organisation and to provide practical support on timetabling, performance management, quality assurance of teaching and learning, the introduction of pupil voice and writing the strategic plan.

In both cases, without the significant and extensive contribution of the NLE, the successful and timely launch of the academies would have been at risk.

Helping academies that are in operation but struggling to deliver their objectives

Tony Rawdin, an NLE and headteacher of Norton College in Malton, North Yorkshire was deployed to Oasis Academy, Immingham in Lincolnshire by agreement with the sponsor, the Oasis Trust. An 18-month contract was agreed in June 2009 with Tony Rawdin becoming executive headteacher and his deputy, Chris Mitchell, becoming associate principal. Their brief was to raise the morale and aspirations of staff and pupils against the background of a departmental review having identified inadequacies in leadership and management and learning and teaching. The due diligence exercise (undertaken by NLEs before starting an assignment) had identified an urgent need to redesign the whole curriculum to a tight timetable. In leading on this work, Chris Mitchell was able to draw on his expertise as a lead practitioner in curriculum design for the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT). The NSS was also able to use its strength in depth to provide significant advanced skills teacher (AST) support, as well as facilitating learning visits between the two schools.

Since the partnership began, the academy has moved out of national challenge. An Ofsted inspection at the end of 2009 found that the academy was ‘emerging positively from a recent period of considerable change’ and showing ‘several important areas of rapid improvement’, with the executive principal ‘providing strong strategic leadership, driving the academy forward with a clear sense of direction and purpose’.

Using the resources of an NSS as the basis for sponsoring a new academy

This is what is what NLEs such as Barry Day, David Triggs and Michael Wilkins have been doing. As has been charted in *Chain Reactions* (Hill, 2010) these NLEs are taking the vision and values, teaching and learning models, behaviour management, operating systems and the wider leadership expertise of their schools and transplanting them into new contexts to sponsor and run new academies [\(see Case study 6\)](#).

Case study 6: NLEs that have used their national support schools as the basis for establishing new academies

Barry Day is an NLE and chief executive of the Greenwood Dale Trust which incorporates the Nottingham Academy, a 3-19 institution with 3,600 students operating on three sites – formerly Greenwood Dale and Elliot Durham Secondary Schools and Jesse Boot Primary. The academy is also sponsoring and establishing the Skegness Academy which is due to open in September 2010 and the new Nottingham Academy for Girls. Other projects are in the pipeline. The trust executive provides high level central services for all its schools, each of which is led by a head of school.

David Triggs is an NLE and chief executive officer of the Academies Enterprise Trust. The trust grew out of work at Greensward School in Essex, which then became the basis for establishing three academies based around Greensward. The family of schools has subsequently been extended to encompass an academy in Clacton and there are plans to open two academies in the London borough of Enfield and one in the London borough of Richmond-upon-Thames.

Michael Wilkins is executive principal of the Outwood Grange family of schools, which includes five schools serving over 6,000 students. Two of the schools are academies (Outwood Grange Academy in Wakefield and Outwood Academy in Adwick, Doncaster) and the other three schools in Yorkshire and Stockton-on-Tees were linked to Outwood Grange because they were in special measures, national challenge or both. Outwood Grange is working with these schools under NLE contracts. Each school retains its own governing body or has an interim executive board.

The principals of these schools, together with those which Outwood Grange has supported in the past, attend regular Outwood Grange ‘family of schools’ leadership meetings which are both supportive and challenging. This system can be a very effective means of sustaining and disseminating good practice. It also provides a practical way for principals to exercise collective moral responsibility for other schools and provide a safety net for them.

There are a number of common issues that emerge from the different roles NLEs are undertaking to support academies. First, there is the importance of carrying out the due diligence assessment and agreeing in advance the scope of the intervention/support. Second, there is the challenge of managing tense situations and difficult human relationships, particularly when the headteacher of a predecessor school is not successful in being appointed principal of the new academy. These issues are explored further in chapter 3. Third, there is the question of whether in all circumstances the academy sponsor (rather than the Department for Education or the local authority) should be the client and fund NLE support work. And fourth there is scope for NLEs to play a greater role in supporting academies than they are currently doing. These latter two issues are discussed further in chapter 6.

Geographic proximity

Most NLE/NSS contracts involve providing support to another school situated within reasonably close travelling distance. However, in some cases NLEs are working across much bigger distances. [Case studies 1 and 4](#) showed how NLEs based in Thurrock had been supporting schools in London and Suffolk and an NSS in Nottingham is working with a school in Leicester. Outwood Grange in Wakefield supports schools in other parts of Yorkshire and surrounding local authorities.

In part, these approaches are possible because executive headship involves a different degree of engagement with a school and it is not so necessary for headteachers to be constantly present on the site. Chapter 3 describes how Sir Dexter Hutt, the executive leader of Ninestiles School in Birmingham, is spending three days a week supporting three schools in East Sussex. However, the further the distance between an NSS and a supported school, the more difficult it becomes for classic school-to-school working to be the driving force of an improvement model. Ninestiles has developed other mechanisms for supporting and complementing the NLE's role and developing and supporting other local leaders to help bridge the distance barrier.

The growing role of LLEs

NLEs provide intense support to schools in the most challenging circumstances. However, as chapter 1 explained, the reach and impact of NLEs is being augmented by the development of LLEs across the country.

From its experience of using consultant leaders in London Challenge and the Primary Leadership Programme, the National College identified a demand for a body of school leaders who could provide leadership support and expertise to headteachers whose schools might be in danger of falling into difficulty or were not making the progress expected of them. The level of support would not usually be at the level or intensity provided by NLEs but would nonetheless constitute an important additional resource. The concept of LLEs is built on a coaching model and [Figure 2](#) describes how the roles of NLEs and LLEs complement each other.

Figure 2: Respective roles and operation of NLEs and LLEs

NLE model	LLE model
Provides intensive support for schools in a category needing an interim headteacher or moving through federation or trust status	Is more likely to support schools around the floor targets or those needing to maximise progress ('satisfactory' schools needing to move to 'good')
Is available for deployment outside own local authority and brokered into an appropriate client school with the support of a National College broker	Usually works within his or her own local authority as part of a networked team being called on directly by the local authority to support a particular school
Accesses additional support for the client school through the attached national support school (NSS)	Can allocate some of the contracted days to other members of staff to pair with the partner school's equivalent staff member in a more informal way
Is more likely to lead 'outstanding' schools or to have been rated 'outstanding' in leadership and management by Ofsted	Will have a successful track record of leadership with Ofsted judgements of at least 'good' and lead a school that is judged 'good' overall (full criteria for LLEs is included at Appendix 3)
Recruitment is managed by a central National College team once or twice a year with induction events for NLEs and NSSs held centrally	Recruitment is to the National College through the participating local authority only and to a bespoke local authority timetable. It currently includes a four-day training programme held jointly with the local authority

The LLE approach was first tested in the three city challenge areas. However, since our first report, the National College has, in partnership with local authorities, extended the initiative across the country. As at March 2010, around two-thirds of local authorities in England were either using or on the way to establishing the use of LLEs. In many areas NLEs are working in tandem with LLEs to maximise the leadership available to local schools.

The Labour government's World Class Primary Programme (DCSF, 2009a) recognised the value of LLEs, and the LLE model, alongside NLEs, was identified as a central feature of the strategy for helping to raise attainment across all primary schools.

An LLE will spend approximately a day or a half day a week in the school being supported and will draw on a wide menu of activities in his or her confidential coaching and mentoring role

(see Figure 3)

Figure 3: Typical activities undertaken by LLEs

Meeting the partner headteacher regularly and providing coaching and leadership mentoring to develop skills, judgement and professional effectiveness.

Negotiating with the headteacher a shared understanding of objectives for improvement, including clear outcomes and timescales, forming the basis of the partnership contract.

Arranging coaching for members of the senior leadership team or middle leaders.

Contributing to reviews of staff and student performance, including gathering evidence to evaluate the impact of school improvement activities.

Discussing and reviewing in-school documentation, policies and procedures.

Advising on in-service training (Inset) or continuing professional development (CPD) activities for members of the school staff and brokering external expertise from the local authority or from other networks and providers.

Inviting the headteacher or other staff to visit the LLE's school for dialogue or observation activities, or for some staff to take up short-term placements.

Developing leaders by arranging for staff with specific expertise at the LLE's school to provide agreed best practice modelling or coaching.

Helping to identify, develop and motivate potential leaders who can contribute to sustained improvement.

Celebrating strengths and successes evident at the school.

Responding to the headteacher's concerns through telephone or email dialogue.

The precise focus of LLE activity will depend on local circumstances but the schools most likely to benefit from LLE support are those where:

the headteacher would benefit from peer challenge and support to ensure impact on priorities for improvement

the headteacher is new to the school and would benefit from assistance in the transition period to maintain momentum in the school's improvement

the headteacher is looking to develop fresh perspectives on issues presenting considerable challenge

Deployments may last anything from six months to three years with regular opportunities to review progress. LLEs will be contracted to the local authority for the duration of each placement. The role of the local authority is to:

identify the need for LLEs and how they may be used to support interventions such as the World Class Primary Programme and ensure their appointment and use complements wider leadership strategies

agree the target number of recruits for the identified schools in need of support, including cross-phase groups

work with the National College to identify and recruit potential LLEs

agree a daily rate for the work of LLEs and ensure appropriate contractual arrangements are in place

work with each LLE, once trained, to match their strengths to the needs of a school and agree what the terms and duration of each deployment will be

monitor and quality assure the outcomes of each LLE engagement and provide support for LLEs in resolving issues and challenges that LLEs may encounter

liaise with the National College regarding overall progress and outcomes of LLEs in the authority, including collating and providing any impact data as it becomes available

Case study 7 summarises the experience of Essex County Council in establishing a team of LLEs.

Case study 7: LLEs in Essex

Essex County Council became involved in the LLE programme in October 2008. The council saw the initiative as complementing its strategy to build sustainable leadership within the authority. The council's lead officers were anxious to broaden the involvement of headteachers beyond the 'usual suspects' used to working with the authority and were successful in recruiting 20 headteachers to their LLE team.

The LLEs went through the four-day training programme on a cross-phase basis. Priorities were agreed in terms of the categories of primary, secondary and special schools that were to receive support and specific schools were identified. An experienced headteacher co-ordinator approached heads and negotiated deployments. This was seen as more effective than a local authority officer trying to broker the arrangements and this approach has now been embedded in a protocol for the Essex local authority area.

A flexible approach was taken on the number of days LLEs were to be deployed, how the days would be used and on the length of the assignment, though the duration of the school year was seen as the default position.

The protocol also provides for LLEs to report termly to the LLE headteacher co-ordinators rather than the local authority. This process is supported by a simple and undemanding questionnaire that is independently completed by LLEs and partner headteachers. The questionnaire assesses the extent to which the partnership is offering progression and value to both parties.

The LLE experience in Essex has been a positive one and the outcomes have been valued:

“The LLE approach of using confidential collaboration has enabled underlying obstacles to progress to be addressed and empowered headteachers to work out how to take their school forward. We have been able to draw on the rich leadership experience and expertise within Essex schools and use this collaboratively for the benefit of all schools. Essex County Council sees this initiative as making an important contribution to school improvement and the raising of standards.”

Graham Handscomb, Senior Manager, Strategic Development,
Essex County Council

“The LLE programme has been instrumental in providing my teachers with a different view of learning and teaching practices in another school.”

Amanda Mitchelson, Headteacher, St John the Baptist CE Voluntary-aided
Primary School, Pebmarsh, Essex

“This has proved to be an excellent model of partnership working in collaboration which has led to sustainable improvement and benefits to both schools.”

David Iles, local leader of education, Richard de Clare Community Primary School

However, the council has also identified a number of learning points:

There is great value in seeking out LLEs who are enthusiastic about developing a coaching role. There can be a significant difference in motivation and philosophy between headteachers who wish to become an LLE and those who are thinking of being an executive headteacher.

Organising active and persistent communication so that all local authority officers, headteachers and governors are clear about how the LLE programme fits with the authority’s strategy for leadership and school improvement.

Having at least one named and committed local authority lead officer is crucial to sustaining dialogue and joint learning as the LLE programme evolves through the introduction, training and implementation phases.

Establishing a small team of headteacher co-ordinators helps to create shared ownership of the programme and supports decision-making, openness and accountability.

A quality assurance model covering the input of LLEs should be developed and agreed once group trust and understanding are established.

Ensuring that the initial set-up phase with partner headteachers works smoothly is crucial – they need to feel that they will be partnered with an LLE whom they like and for whom they have respect in order to avoid a sense that intervention is being imposed.

Sharing news of progress and benefits through LLE conferences, team meetings and emails helps to sustain energy and motivation.

The growing role of brokers

Much of the activity and reach of NLEs along with the high rate of NLE deployment would not be possible without the role played by a team of brokers employed by the National College on a regional basis. Their role is to help match demand for the services of NLEs with the supply available. The brokers do this by drawing on the intelligence and data collated nationally by the College and then working in their regions with local authorities, school leaders, governors and sponsors across the country to match the needs of underperforming schools with the particular skills and expertise of the appropriate NLE/NSS. The number of brokers is planned to increase to around eight, in part to support local authorities in developing LLEs.

The College expects brokers to have experience of leading a successful school, of leading school improvement beyond a home school, and knowledge of or involvement with a local authority and other local education structures and stakeholders. In addition, brokers need to have strong mediating and influencing skills since, as chapter 3 explains, they are frequently operating in sensitive circumstances where decisive action is needed in a school and a range of interested parties have to be brought on board. The ability to make the most appropriate connections among varying stakeholders and interest groups is key to successful deployment.

Brokers also have to develop an in-depth knowledge of the skills and capacity of NLEs and, importantly, NSSs in their area so that they can recommend the most appropriate deployments to local authorities. They may on occasion go and head hunt the right NLE to fit a particular set of circumstances. The service provided by brokers is appreciated by the local authorities that are, for the most part, commissioning and funding NLE and NSS support in schools. The experience of Linzi Roberts, assistant director achievement and inclusion for St Helen's metropolitan borough council, illustrates how a broker can support a local authority to rapidly develop the right solution for a particular school [\(see Case study 8\)](#).

Case study 8: Example of a National College broker supporting a local authority

“We were planning to use the NSS model for the first time but we did not have real knowledge about its capacity. We also knew we would be seeking support outside of our own locality. So on the advice of National Strategies we contacted the National College’s broker for NLEs.”

“He immediately came to discuss our circumstances and in a very realistic and pragmatic way described how the model could help – and also set out its limitations. He took the time to really probe our needs so that he could suggest NSSs that would be good matches for the schools needing support. He was then able to contact the NLEs, which assisted in progressing the negotiations swiftly.”

“The broker also helped with the communication with governors who understandably had some very specific questions. This again was extremely helpful in ensuring all parties were happy with the agreement. Within both schools where we used NSSs we have found the model very effective and undoubtedly one of the keys to success was the quality of the communication with the National College broker.”

Linzi Roberts, assistant director of achievement and inclusion for St Helen’s metropolitan borough council

In addition to the specific brokering function, brokers also play a larger role in supporting the development of NLEs, as [Figure 4](#) describes. This role will continue to evolve as the arrangements for providing support to schools change.

Figure 4: The broader role of brokers in the NLE system

Participate in panels for assessing new NLE applicants and review the designation of existing NLEs.

Lead and facilitate NLE induction events and provide coaching and mentoring to NLEs.

Act as a mediator when difficulties are encountered to ensure that relationships between a lead school, a support school and a local authority are sustained.

Help to retain the services and expertise of NLEs through discussions with governors or local authorities who may have concerns about what the broader role of being a system leader means for their particular school or locality.

Promote understanding and the potential of the NLE programme at local authority, regional and national level.

Liaise with national challenge and city challenge directors and teams on providing support to schools in challenging circumstances.

In addition, from May 2010, the role of the broker will be extended to encompass the LLE programme. The change of title from brokers to NLE/LLE regional support associates explained in chapter 1 [\(see footnote 1\)](#) reflects this wider brief. In their new role brokers will be the first port of call for local authorities to discuss how they can use school-to-school leadership in their school improvement strategies. This approach has been welcomed by stakeholders. It will bring greater coherence and make it easier for authorities to draw on the pool of outstanding school leaders who are available to provide support.

National teaching schools

A continuing theme of this chapter has been how NLEs use and depend on the resources of their own schools. NLEs are effective in their own schools because they develop systems and staff which then become a resource to be deployed on a wider canvas.

The development of leaders and teachers and excellence in pedagogy is a critical piece of this jigsaw. Dr George Berwick is an NLE and headteacher of Ravens Wood School in Bromley where he developed and demonstrated the power of intensive programmes of pedagogical development [\(see Figure 5\)](#).

The teaching and learning immersion programme has proved a particularly effective dimension of London Challenge. Teachers from London 'keys to success' schools found that participating in the programme at Ravens Wood could transform their professional practice within a period of 14 weeks, which was also the time it took one participating school to improve its teaching and emerge from special measures.

This approach has increasingly been applied effectively across a growing number of London Challenge schools and in Bristol, Luton and more recently in the Black Country and Greater Manchester. Despite the secondary school environment in which the programmes were developed, there has been a growth of interest by outstanding primary schools in offering the outstanding teacher and improving teacher programmes. These programmes have been adapted by the London Challenge primary team to meet the primary context and several primary schools in London and Greater Manchester are now delivering them.

Figure 5: Teaching and learning programmes developed at Ravens Wood School

The **improving teacher programme** focuses on ensuring a minimum satisfactory standard of teaching and learning. It is developed around the needs of individual teachers and consists of a full day and two half-days of training followed by teachers working in trios to implement a plan of improvement.

The **teaching and learning immersion programme** takes place over 14 weeks and includes an intensive two-day workshop. The aim of the programme is to move the quality of teaching and learning in a participating school to being consistently good. It equips participants – through a process of being observed, mentored and coached – to understand what constitutes a good lesson and good teaching and to use lesson observation as a means of being able to mentor colleagues to improve their practice.

The **outstanding teacher programme** aims to develop teachers from good to outstanding. The programme enables teachers to identify and understand the characteristics of outstanding teaching and learning through workshops, lesson observation and critical analysis. Participants then work intensively in small groups to develop their skills as teachers, observers and coaches, all the time receiving feedback on how to improve their practice. At the end of an 11-week period, teachers are potentially in a position to apply for advanced skills teacher (AST) recognition.

In 2009, these programmes became the basis for establishing national teaching schools (NTSs) led by NLEs. As chapter 1 explained, school-to-school support has increasingly become the cornerstone of the approach to school improvement. As city challenge moves into its final phase (it ends in 2011), it is vital that progress is sustained and continued. The goal is to achieve this continued improvement by establishing around 40 NTSs across all three city challenge areas.

NTSs will be schools that have consciously developed themselves as successful learning communities, akin to teaching hospitals in the health sector. They will be highly effective providers of education, have been designated as an NSS led by an NLE and have a grade of 'outstanding' for overall effectiveness and for teaching and learning in their most recent Ofsted inspection. In addition they will have to demonstrate a proven capacity to:

assist schools in challenging circumstances or that are causing concern

build the capability of the schools they work with so that improvement is embedded and sustainable

develop their own staff in a systematic and strategic way

deliver one or more of the programmes described in [Figure 5](#)

Figure 6 describes how NTSs will carry out their function. The first 19 NTSs were designated in December 2009 and the support for the development of the initiative has been contracted to a not-for-profit organisation, Olevi, led by Dr Berwick. The aim is to designate 40 NTSs across all the city challenge areas by March 2011.

Figure 6: The role of national teaching schools

National teaching schools will:

demonstrate leading-edge pedagogy

have leaders of teaching and learning and expert practitioners who are able to deliver high-quality coaching and teaching programmes to improve performance and inspire teachers

provide exceptional professional development

exemplify high-quality assessment for learning

offer excellent personalised learning provision

make best use of technologies to maximise learning opportunities

provide teams of experts (eg, advanced skills teachers) and enquiry/research teams

write up case studies of highly effective practice

ensure best practice is shared within city challenge, nationally and internationally

Fellowship programme

The Fellowship programme is for outstanding NLEs who have shown that they are capable of improving other schools and of contributing to systematic educational improvement in their locality. The programme examines cutting-edge theory and practice of leadership and management. It provides access to the highest level of academic thinking, and exposes participants to leaders across a range of different sectors, enabling cross-sector sharing and learning.

The programme takes nine months to complete and is made up of three elements (see Figure 7). The first Fellowship programme ran from 2008-09 and the second programme started in summer 2009 and concluded with a commission week in March 2010. By the conclusion of the second commission, around 40 NLEs had completed the programme.

The significance of the Fellowship programme does not just lie in the support it gives to individual headteachers and executive headteachers to develop their leadership skills, important though that is. The programme is also helping to grow system leadership for schools, colleges and academies in England. It is creating a cadre of leaders who are engaged in turning around schools, bringing vision and ambition to school improvement in their localities, creating chains of schools and moving into chief executive officer roles.

It is also helping to develop and harness the strategic capacity of some of the best headteachers in the country. It is supporting them in thinking about how the work they are undertaking on a day-to-day basis relates to a broader policy context. This is resulting in leading headteachers being able to contribute to policymaking and acting as a valuable sounding board for ministers and policymakers as they develop their thinking on education policy. As [Figure 7](#) highlights, NLEs were instrumental in developing the concept of accredited schools and were consulted closely by officials in drawing up the details of the scheme.

Figure 7: The three elements of the Fellowship programme

1. Threshold event

The threshold event takes place over two days and brings together all participants. It gives the NLEs the chance to explore the substance, expectations and aspirations of the programme. Participants undertake a 360-degree evaluation of their work and role and this helps to inform each participant's choice of a pathway course at stage 2 of the programme and the one-to-one coaching they receive throughout the programme. The coach challenges and supports participants to examine and develop their personal approach to leadership.

2. Pathways stage

Following the threshold event, NLEs take up places on selected top leadership programmes offered by leadership centres or business schools. The key objective of the pathways stage is to enable participants to work with top leadership colleagues outside education and the public sector in order to strengthen and widen their leadership learning, equipping them to deal more effectively with system leadership challenges. The coach will help guide participants to the programme that best meets their development needs.

3. Fellowship commission

The Fellowship programme culminates with the fellowship commission. The commission brings the whole group together to work intensively for one week on a major challenge to the education system by combining insights and understanding from three fields: published research and other exhibits, expert witnesses, and the practitioner knowledge of the NLEs.

In 2009 the first fellowship commission was asked to address the question 'How can the school system develop the most effective numbers of trusts/federations/chains, and what would be the associated accountability framework?' In early 2009, the commission presented its findings to ministers as they were planning the 2009 schools white paper (DCSF, 2009b). Their recommendations contributed to the government's proposals for introducing accredited school providers and groups.

The second fellowship commission considered the respective role of system leaders (such as NLEs, LLEs and SIPs), leaders of single institutions (for example, headteachers and leaders of children's centres), directors of children's services and other educational leaders in creating world-class achievement and attainment. The commission's findings were again presented directly to a minister.

Indications of the potential long-lasting impact of fellowship commissions can be seen from the comments of those on the first commission (Matthews, 2009). Participants valued the contribution of the programme to their personal goals and development. One commented:

“I believe I am a better, stronger and more effective leader as a direct consequence of the programme. I am actively engaged with my own teams in transformational and experimental leadership. This is having a strong impact within my schools and within my local authority.”

Another said:

“My personal leadership development has changed as evidenced by other colleagues. My overview and insights into system leadership have helped me view the school in a different way, which helps strategic planning.”

Other participants highlighted the new knowledge they gained of cutting-edge practice and described how it widened their horizons on the direction of future education policy. In a number of cases participants were able to show how the commission was affecting their practice in their school. For example:

“Future Highdown is an initiative I have launched which is focused on improving leadership across the school and, separately, across the senior officers of Reading local authority. Within school we are working with our students to identify opportunities to develop and expand their leadership skills and grow them through their time in school and on into the future. Within the [local authority], secondary headteachers and senior [local authority] officers are working together to develop leadership awareness and work together to solve deep-seated problems.”

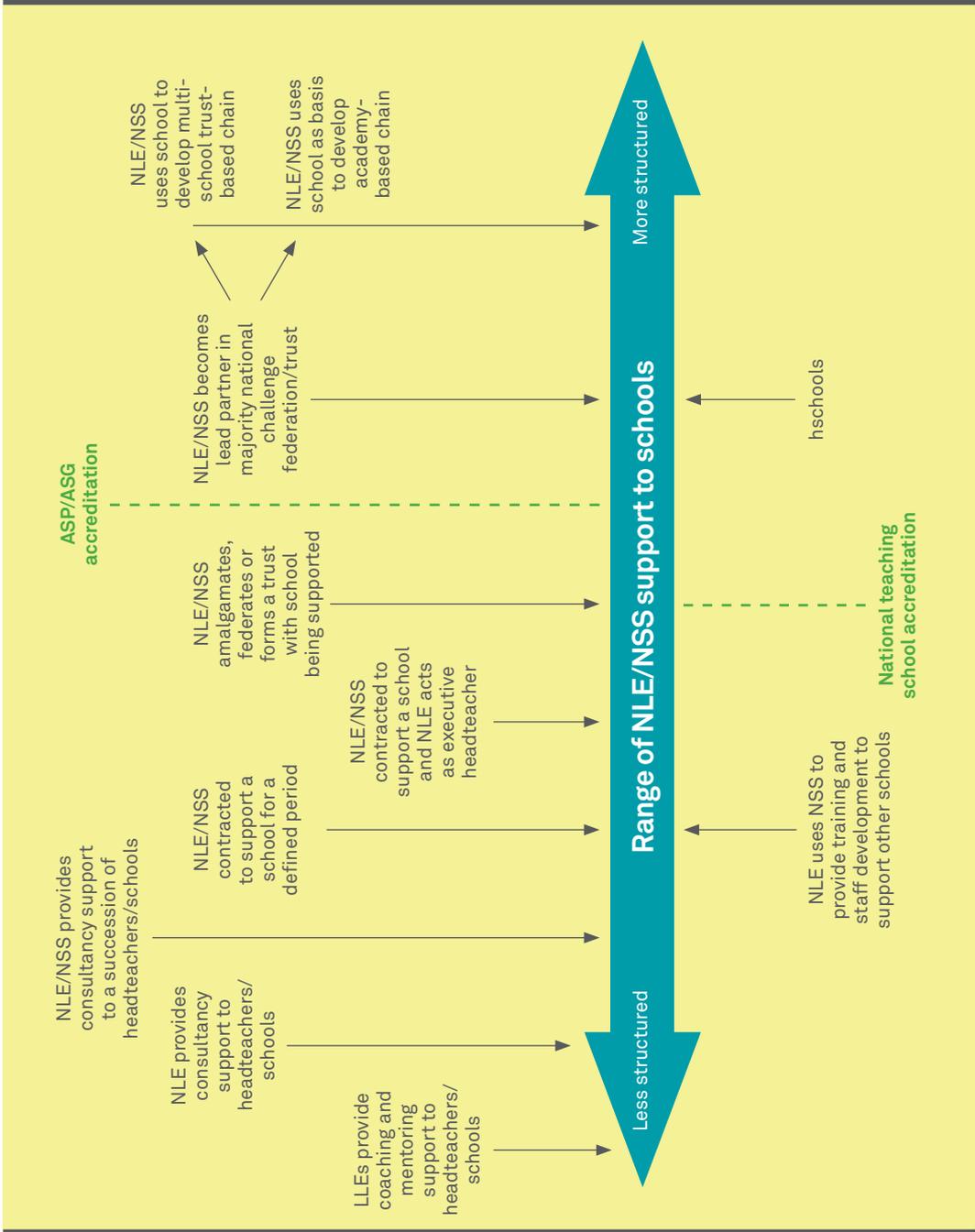
And another reported that:

“[W]ork on 360-degree review from Ashridge [Business School] is being used already to sharpen the focus of our performance management work across the school... useful for improving team work through a 24-hour experience involving senior and middle leaders.”

Conclusion

This chapter has described the variety of ways in which the NLE programme, supplemented by the work of LLEs, is developing and becoming the core of systemic school improvement work in schools in England. [Figure 8](#) (overleaf) summarises the main ways in which NLEs/NSSs provide support and places them on a spectrum according to the scale of intensity and the degree of impact on the overall school system they represent. Chapter 3 explores the practice of inter-school leadership, identifying some hallmarks of effective working and describing some of the challenges NLEs have to overcome.

Figure 8: Scale of intensity and impact of NLE/NSS and LLE support on the school system in England



School-to-school support in practice

Introduction

Chapter 2 gave an indication of the growing breadth and scope of NLE/NSS activity. But what is it like to be involved in the day-to-day reality of going into another school and organising support? What is it like to be on the receiving end of NLE/NSS support? What are the practical and human problems that NLEs and their staff encounter? What lessons can we learn from those at the very cutting edge of school improvement practice?

In this chapter we try and answer these questions. The examples we use are all real and because we have tried to describe things as they are – warts and all – some of the case studies are reported anonymously.

Getting engaged

An NLE normally gets engaged with another school in one of two sets of circumstances:

unplanned: in response to an emergency in another school such as a breakdown of leadership, unexpected concerns about performance or conduct or critical inspection findings. These situations demand a rapid response

planned: in response to anxiety about a forthcoming inspection, local authority concerns about declining performance or at the invitation of a school or governing body. These circumstances allow more time for analysis of the nature of the response needed and how it should be procured. Typically, the support school, having been approached by a local authority or an academy sponsor, will then scope the task and estimate the nature, cost and duration of the mission⁶

Into the breach

Taking over in an emergency is one of the most challenging assignments. The work of school improvement partners (SIPs) should provide reliable early warning of schools heading into difficulty. This does not always happen and local authorities are sometimes caught out or vacillate when decisive action is needed.

Case study 9 provides a classic example of how not to act when a school starts getting into difficulties and how not to use an NLE. It was only the fact that the NLE had a strong leadership team in her own outstanding school that made it possible for her to take over the other school at very short notice (supported by a colleague she took with her as associate assistant headteacher), confident in the knowledge that the NSS was in good hands. Although the NLE had good support from the school improvement partner, the ambivalent attitude of the local authority constrained her effectiveness and made it difficult to do more than act in a firefighting capacity.

⁶ Scoping, often referred to as 'due diligence', is described in Hill & Matthews, 2008:41-3.

Case study 9: An example of an NLE deployment undermined by delay and inaction

A school in a disadvantaged area in the North East, serving mainly white British families, with high unemployment, drug-related problems and much poor health, slipped back from 'good' to requiring special measures within a few years. A key factor was the loss of a very strong headteacher who was replaced by one who did not command the same respect.

Behaviour became unacceptable. Teachers were assaulted regularly and not supported when they complained. Pupils ran riot and there was much self-harm and bullying. The headteacher departed on sick leave just before the inspection and the local authority brought in a consultant to take the school through the inspection.

It took time to set up an interim executive board (IEB), and the appointment of a substantive headteacher was delayed to the point where the local councillor asked the authority why it was not involving a local NLE. An NLE was eventually approached just before the first HMI monitoring visit was due.

Although the NLE was quickly able to make progress in tackling behaviour, restoring calm and supporting teachers, the local authority was less than wholly committed to the NLE/NSS concept. After some months, the NLE resigned. The authority dissolved the soft federation with the NSS and appointed the school's link inspector as acting headteacher.

Case study 10a shows greater decisiveness in engaging an NLE in an emergency. A primary school in the North West was in special measures, having had four headteachers in quick succession. The governing body expressed concern about leadership as a succession of HMI monitoring visits reported insufficient progress. The governors suggested to the local authority that a federation would give them access to an experienced headteacher. Lisa Vyas, the headteacher of Ladybarn Primary School in Withington, became headteacher of the school in addition to her own school. In **Case study 10a** she describes what happened.

Case study 10a: Experience of an NLE on an unplanned deployment into another school

The headteacher resigned on the Wednesday; my governing body was approached by the local authority on the Friday and I started on the Monday. My governors couldn't really say 'no' as they had agreed to me becoming an NLE. The authority, which was under pressure to bring the school out of special measures, initially just wanted me to achieve this. But I said I would only do it for a minimum of two years as I was about building capacity and not just a trouble shooter. (I had taken advice from other more experienced NLEs who pointed out that anything shorter meant you built the school up and then left it on its own to cope).

I then went to the school and found I needed to stay there full time for a period. Behaviour was very poor. It was an unloved school. The roll was falling. The previous headteacher had made progress and brought in new staff but lost the resilience to complete the job. The two assistant headteachers at the NSS were given two-year contracts as deputy headteachers and took charge of my school for the initial six week period.

In September I shared the school improvement plan with all the staff. They had never seen one before. Next year I will involve the phase leaders. The school had been a rudderless ship, working really hard without a sense of direction and not getting anywhere. The staff were exhausted.

But even when the intervention arises in an unplanned way it can still be effective. Having been parachuted into the NLE assignment, Lisa Vyas started off by interviewing every member of staff to get their perspective on the school and their role and responsibilities. The local authority adviser was also a helpful source of information and advice.

She put strict systems in place since behaviour was appalling and pupils were running out of classes – 13 very challenging pupils had been taken out of class and hidden when the inspectors came. As behaviour improved rapidly, she observed staff and pupils at work before redefining roles and putting in a proper leadership structure. This involved quick and decisive action to stop the recruitment of an assistant headteacher, and instead persuade the governors to re-advertise for an upper Key Stage 2 leader.

“I saw an opportunity to have four phase leaders; it's a great model as there are three classes in each phase and now all the class teachers for a phase, along with the leader of planning, assessment and tracking for the group, can have their [planning, preparation and assessment] time together.”

Like many NLEs, she also found herself having to deal with cynicism and lack of confidence from a range of colleagues including fellow headteachers in other schools. One teacher left because he felt the school was striving to be too high performing. A phase leader felt she was not up to the job but is now performing at an excellent level.

Another action was greatly to reduce local authority intervention in the school, particularly in the training provided by a range of consultants, and to undertake more training in-house. This empowered staff and gave them a much greater sense of ownership. This was reinforced with

staff from Ladybarn who provided support to areas of the school's work, such as literacy, where development and improvement were needed.

Within a year, the school was out of special measures and there was a range of evidence of improvement:

Behaviour had improved immeasurably and attendance increased by two percentage points to 94 per cent.

There was a menu of after-school clubs where previously there had been nothing.

Children were motivated to come to school and the teachers were very positive with the pupils.

Teaching and learning had improved. There were no lessons graded 'unsatisfactory', though more of them still needed to become 'good' or better.

Standards were rising but have further to go. By 2009, the school was above the floor target with 56 per cent of pupils attaining level 4 or above in both English and maths.

By the end of the first year and as headteacher of two schools, Lisa was able to give equal time to each school though she is still ambitious for the supported school and aware of the need to continue to make improvements. Having got the basics right and laid the foundation, her plan is to move the school on to the next stage of its improvement journey.

“When I reflect on progress, our actions may seem a bit formulaic, for example, establishing uniform planning systems, and hammering literacy and numeracy so much that we lack a creative approach to teaching. When we do more thematic work and engage the children more in learning across the curriculum, the staff will relax and improve. I've had to do the nitty gritty stuff and lay the foundations; there isn't that buzz about learning that there is at the support school. Also, the pupils' mental health and wellbeing need to be addressed as the children don't have the same level of confidence and are not as articulate as they should be.”

Maintaining the home front

The last thing an NLE or the governing body of his or her school wants is for school support commitments to have a negative impact on the home school. An NSS needs the capacity both to sustain itself if the headteacher is away for a period of time and the capacity to share its expertise with one or more other schools. In the case of Ladybarn, there were two deputy headteachers and a capable and experienced staff. Even so, the sudden departure of the headteacher had repercussions, as the NLE relates in [Case study 10b](#).

Case study 10b: Reflections of an NLE on the implications of deployment on the NSS

“On reflection the biggest mistake I made in the early days, owing to the suddenness of the transition, the state of the supported school and pressure of the looming HMI visit, was that I did not plan for time in my home school. I wish I had done rather more than just stayed in telephone contact. My departure led to a bit of confusion among inexperienced leaders, who had been here a while but had not done my job before, being unclear about their role.

“Also, I think that the parents went into shock as they thought I had disappeared and the children had been so used to me being here. Next time I would be here an hour a day even if I had left five minutes after school started. Getting the public relations wrong meant I had to spend twice as long picking up the pieces. I had to make amends and reassure parents that I am not leaving.

“I did it because I had faith in staff being able to cope – I had been away on maternity leave before and everything had been all right. The deputy headteachers didn’t want to bother me as I had a tough job and they wanted to try and make it work and do the job.

“What I think was lacking was that although we had the status of being an NSS I had not been called on in this capacity before. We did not prepare enough for the eventuality of me being called away. My senior team said that they went into a bit of shock initially. While many staff rose to the occasion, some were a bit stunned and stood back to see how it was going. I should have put in some training beforehand along the lines of ‘If it happens, this how it will work.’ This would have led to a smoother start to the process and reduced my own feelings of guilt!”

Planned interventions

NLE/NSS interventions do not, however, necessarily have to take place in a rushed, unplanned fashion, as an example from Barnsley illustrates. The local authority asked Craig Lee, an NLE who was headteacher of St Mary's Primary School – a one-form entry, voluntary-aided primary school – to support Darfield Valley Primary School, which had been put into special measures.

The substantive headteacher of the school requiring support was absent on health grounds. Staff morale was low. Pupils' behaviour was poor, particularly in Years 4, 5 and 6. Year 6 did not have a class teacher owing to illness. There was little assessment to aid learning and hence no accurate knowledge of what children had learned and the levels they had reached. There was no evidence of planning, and teaching assistants flitted from class to class and group to group. The financial position was also poor.

The local authority asked for support from Craig Lee and also placed a school improvement officer to work with him to have an immediate impact on the school. So even before Ofsted had published its final inspection report, the NLE had become fully involved as executive headteacher designate and made a number of visits to the school. His visits amounted to a due diligence exercise and identified a wide range of issues requiring attention – a list that will be familiar to other NLEs [\(see Case study 11a\)](#).

Case study 11a: Issues requiring action in school requiring NLE/NSS support

Issues in supported school (special measures)

Leadership and management	Behaviour	Attendance
Year 6 teaching pre-SATs	Assessment	Pupil voice/school council
Whole-school baseline	Teaching and learning	Pride and culture
Role of key staff	Assessment for learning	Parents' evenings
Wellbeing	Marking	Economic wellbeing
Safeguarding	Target-setting	Lack of sport
Extended services	Curriculum	Monitoring and evaluation
Community cohesion	Budget	Science teaching
	SEN procedures	

For each of these issues, Craig Lee recorded the evidence and decided on a course of action.

[Case study 11b](#) shows part of the template he used to develop his understanding of one of the areas requiring attention – assessment – and to identify the next steps he planned in order to bring about improvement.

Case study 11b: Actions on assessment planned by an NLE for a supported school

Area	Date	Monitoring opportunity	Observation made	Next steps
Assessment	12/02/10	Practice across the school	No evidence of assessment in practice	Whole-school baseline needed. Reports for each year group by 05/3/10
	12/02/10	Further investigation	Assessment tools exist for writing, reading and maths	Link assessment tasks to learning objectives Incorporate into planning folders (by 21/2/10) and lodge on shared database
	22/02/10	Enquire about targets	No evidence that targets have been set	Targets to be created from objectives and to be sent home by the end of the week. Staff meeting on 1/3/10 to check appropriateness of targets
	26/02/10	Asked Foundation Stage staff about targets	No targets shared with parents	Asked staff to think about this and come with ideas for the staff meeting

Craig also kept a log of his engagement with Darfield Valley. [Case study 11c](#) describes some of the actions taken in the first week of supporting the school and illustrates the immediate impact that an NLE can make through well-directed interventions.

Case study 11c: Actions taken by the NLE during the first week supporting a school in special measures

Asked the supply teacher taking Year 6 to leave and shared the class myself with another teacher from the NSS.

Gave all pupils baseline assessments. Year 6 were given SATs and others given tests to find out individual needs. Foundation Stage profiles were updated and end-of-year targets created for Years 1 and 2.

Found out which units were being taught in maths and pupils marked against 'big write' criteria.

Cancelled staff attendance at local authority's 'Good to outstanding' in-service training (Inset) session.

Coached Year 1 teacher and led Inset for the whole staff based on a vision for learning using four key questions:

What do children know?

What do they need to work on?

How are we going to do it?

Have they got it?

Held a Dragon's Den week in Year 6, culminating in a presentation to the chair of governors and senior leaders (see Case study 11d).

Reviewed existing systems and set policies that:

all planning to be lodged on computer system

targets created for all pupils

all results of assessment to be put on database

tracker folders to be updated

all groups to be heard reading twice a week

new planning grids

TAs' hours extended to arrive earlier

TAs to be linked to particular classes to create a team ethos

There was one other noteworthy aspect of the NLE involvement with Darfield Valley. As Case study 11d describes, he decided on a very personal intervention to tackle a difficult problem and help to change the learning culture of the school. The headteacher saw what was needed and did it. He modelled what he wanted, part of the essential trilogy of modelling, monitoring and discussion that marks out the good headteacher and is a prerequisite for the effective system leader.

It was also an intervention that was effective. For example, Year 6 pupils said it was the best week they had ever had. Assessments now provided an understanding of pupils' knowledge and needs. Parents commented to staff that they were pleased to see the headteacher in the playground. Staff were aware of the direction in which the school was going. A system was in place to show progress in Years 1 and 2.

Teachers who were planning to leave the supported school withdrew their resignations when they saw the changes being made and the direction adopted. Their work now had purpose. Bored and fractious children were already engaging in learning. And all this happened before the Ofsted inspection report was published.

Case study 11d: Example of an NLE re-establishing a learning culture

As soon as he took oversight of the failing primary school, Craig knew immediately that damage limitation would not be enough. Year 6 had had enough. They had given up. They saw no reason for staying in school since its failure had been blazoned across the local papers. Coats on, hoods up, they had been given a succession of supply teachers in the previous weeks, and the latest was sitting on the desk at the front as objects flew across the room. The challenge was to recapture their engagement with school in the seven days before half-term and Craig decided to take the class himself in order to effect this.

First, he showed the class some extracts from the Dragons' Den TV programme. Knowing their interest in computer games, he then played one in front of them on the interactive whiteboard. Would they like to design a game?

There followed a week of intensive, largely self-directed work in which the 10-year-old pupils worked in self-chosen groups of four or five to design, produce, price and market their game. They had to produce a business plan, calculate profit margins and present their ideas to a Dragons' Den: the executive headteacher, school business manager, local authority support officer and the school's chair of governors. The amount of learning and enterprise was phenomenal once children had been given the opportunity. Could they use the library? Go on the internet to access information? Of course they could. They wrote synopses, produced artwork, scripted presentations, calculated profitability and produced forecasts, brainstormed, researched and negotiated. They learned to work together and pool their skills. They also produced computer images of the characters in their games.

In the following six weeks, the progress of Year 6 pupils was astonishing. The proportion of children working at or above level 4 in mathematics rose from 33 to 58 per cent and the headteacher predicts that the 2010 SATs indicator will reach 70 per cent. Learning had been transformed; the bell for break was no longer the signal for a stampede. The Dragons' Den did not provide a template for the curriculum but it did re-establish learning. The curriculum was remoulded and the changes infected the rest of the school.

Leading from the front

Struggling schools often need this sharp injection of leadership to kick start the process of improvement – all the time they soldier on in isolation they fail to provide an adequate education or even a safe environment. For example, Dana Ross-Wawrzynski, headteacher of Altrincham Girls Grammar School, recognised in one of her NLE assignments that the first challenge was to improve discipline in the supported school. Behaviour was very poor and included spitting at staff. Dana acted quickly to reduce outlandish behaviour and gave staff the confidence to realise that they could manage behaviour and demand higher standards, as she describes in [Case study 12](#).

Case study 12: Example of an NLE executive headteacher leading from the front in an inadequate secondary school

The behaviour problems owed much to poor teaching. I worked with the principal designate to review lesson planning and brought experts in to talk to the staff about what good lessons look like.

Staff attended the improving teacher and outstanding teacher programmes at the NSS, which has become a national teaching school. I personally coached every teacher in Year 11 and helped remove barriers to effective teaching. Staff did not know how to deconstruct and analyse lessons. Starting with Year 11 staff, teachers are now beginning to reflect on what is happening in their lessons.

We have now set achievement targets for every student. Robust monitoring has been introduced in Key Stage 3. A focus on the quality of teaching has led to the departure of six staff that did not make the grade. Other staff from the support school have been closely involved with their counterpart departments, especially the English, mathematics and technology departments. The focus on standards is projected to raise the percentage of pupils attaining five or more A*-C grades including English and mathematics from 17 per cent in 2009 to at least 40 per cent in 2010.

Unpredictable scenarios

Even with advance notice and good planning and preparation, establishing school-to-school improvement partnerships invariably involves tensions and unpredictable scenarios. These can be particularly intense when the support, federation or amalgamation involves neighbouring schools, each of which has loyal communities and allegiances. [Case study 13](#) provides an example of how events can unfold and again demonstrates the value of strong leadership.

Case study 13: Anatomy of an inter-school partnership leading to federation then combination

To the parents, the school was their local school. It had a strong headteacher and achieved good results. Yes, there were some behaviour problems but isn't that true of all schools? And their children were not always keen to go to school, but isn't that true of many kids? To other local schools, there were perceptions that all might not be as it seemed. Key Stage 2 results seemed unnaturally glowing. The school did not appear to be a happy school but presented a competent face. Even Ofsted inspectors did not get to the bottom of what was happening at the school.

Eventually, faced with growing concerns, the local authority investigated the school. Its findings resulted in the suspension of headteacher and deputy for a range of irregularities. An acting headteacher was appointed and a neighbouring NLE asked to give support, which included lending a deputy headteacher to the school. The situation was too much for the acting headteacher, who left, bringing matters to a crisis.

The NLE then decided that the right thing to do was to withdraw from the supported school. Her governors agreed that the NSS would only give support if the NLE had sufficient control of the situation to give pupils in the supported school the same high-quality education and opportunities enjoyed by pupils in the NSS. It was then agreed that the two schools would be linked in a soft federation, with the NLE becoming an executive headteacher.

Having gained full access to the school, the NLE and her colleagues found a very unhappy place where there had been systemic bullying of both staff and pupils. Some pupils were traumatised and staff were insecure and reluctant to take the initiative. The governors of the NSS and the local authority agreed that major changes would be needed to erase memories of the past and that the two schools should be run as one.

The NLE faced strong and at times unpleasant opposition from the failing school's governors and even parents, and remonstrations from other headteachers who believed the school should be closed and the children dispersed among other schools. Capital funding allowed the supported school to be reshaped internally to remove sight and memories of places where children had been scared. The result is a bright, happy environment, where all provision is of the same quality as the NSS. Staff work and train across the two schools and the parents are now very pleased with the outcome.

Head or no head?

In many ways, it is easier to support a school which is temporarily leaderless because the headteacher has gone and no replacement has been appointed. There may be no one on the leadership team who can take on the acting headship. NLEs are often used to turn such a school around and set it on a strongly improving path before the post is advertised. They have the advantage of having unequivocal responsibility for the school.

Such a scenario gives the NLE the opportunity to exert clear and transparent leadership, taking direct responsibility for the school. The way ahead is clear although many obstacles can be encountered. Some relate to the circumstances of the headteacher's departure and the strength of the residual support for the departed headteacher, which may range from loyalty to self-interested cronyism. Strong leadership is essential. As one NLE said:

“You have to be very clear and insistent about what you expect of people and what you are aiming to do. The pupils come first, and although you need to work at winning colleagues over, there may be some whose continued resistance or quiet subversion means they will have to decide whether or not they can continue to work in the framework of principles and expectations you have set.”

However, as chapter 2 showed in relation to academies, NLEs frequently have to work alongside an existing headteacher, and that can result a range of reactions. If the headteacher is part of the problem and continues to be so, the situation can be untenable. If, on the other hand, the headteacher has the potential to succeed, there is a duty to help them do so.

Many headteachers of schools identified as needing support are receptive to the idea of consultancy from a respected fellow headteacher. They also value the expertise that a support school can offer through particular staff. Some headteachers have themselves taken the initiative to enlist the support of an NLE in their school.

At the other end of the scale are headteachers who resent the idea that their schools are underperforming and that they need help. Self-esteem is at stake and they fear that the involvement of a fellow headteacher will erode their position. Building the bridge with a headteacher in place can be like walking on eggshells; one false step and the relationship is cracked. As NLEs become experienced in their work, they learn to deal with a range of reactions.

Both the scenarios outlined above have been encountered by Llyn Codling, the headteacher of Portswood Primary School, and who is an NLE based in Hampshire. Along with her school she has provided support to a number of schools within the local authority area.

One of the schools supported was in the 99th percentile of Ofsted performance data at the time that Portswood became involved. The school had been placed in a category of concern by the local authority. A new headteacher had been appointed two years previously and was doing many good things to try and improve the school, but the school faced challenging problems, particularly in terms of inclusion and behaviour. The local authority wanted someone to work alongside the headteacher to give a sharper focus and support the leadership of the school. [Case study 14](#) describes how relations between the two headteachers and the two schools worked.

Case study 14: Example of an NLE working alongside an established headteacher where circumstances required sensitivity and diplomacy

The NLE had to tread carefully with the headteacher of the supported school in working to improve the quality of teaching and learning. She succeeded in building a good relationship with a headteacher whom she felt 'would certainly have opposed executive headship'. The mode of working that evolved was, in effect, a partnership of the two headteachers, with NSS staff involved in coaching teachers and developing coaching techniques. Successful aspects of the support programme included a joint staff training session between the two schools, especially on assessing pupil progress (APP).

Two teachers and a deputy headteacher from the NSS were very heavily involved in the school as well as the NLE. The deputy is a professional and trained coach and acts as a professional tutor in the NSS.

However, Portswood has subsequently disengaged from the supported school because:

**They are ready to move forward – Ofsted feels the same –
and we can still provide a link if it is needed.**

When inspected in December 2009, the supported school was described as a 'satisfactory' and rapidly improving school with 'some significant strengths'.

Portswood also became involved in supporting a very large junior school that the local authority saw as having significant challenges. When the school appointed a new headteacher and deputy the new team had no qualms about accepting the support of a fellow headteacher, as [Case study 15](#) illustrates. The relationship was positive from the start.

Case study 15: Example of an NLE working alongside an established headteacher in a positive relationship

The new headteacher, despite being an experienced headteacher, welcomed Llyn Codling's presence and wanted her to stay on supporting the school wearing her NLE hat. Although the school's results were acceptable, both Llyn and the headteacher felt they should be outstanding. They worked strategically, putting in place an action plan to develop assessment for learning (AfL) approaches but found that inadequacies in senior and middle leadership were a barrier to progress.

These leadership weaknesses were addressed by Llyn, her deputy and two phase leaders pairing up with each of the four year-group leaders in Key Stage 2 of the supported school. They trained these leaders to coach, monitor, plan and support teachers in using AfL. There were staffing and capability issues to be addressed.

The local authority originally funded the support for two terms, but continued it beyond that as the new headteacher needed continuing support to develop the leaders of the year groups. The NSS deputy headteacher is head of teaching and learning in the supported school and effectively acts as professional tutor. The supported school subsequently identified a lead teacher for teaching and learning.

Results in the supported school have improved significantly.

These case studies demonstrate how improvement through school-to-school partnerships relies on the quality of individual interactions between people. These relationships are central to making progress and achieving the desired results. They are often difficult to forge, particularly in circumstances where one party may feel threatened, inadequate or criticised and reacts defensively. Such relationships need to be conducted with the highest motives, and in ways in which superiority and self-promotion are absent. Their purpose is centred on improving the deal for young people in the schools they are helping.

Each interpersonal partnership is unique, although patterns can be detected. NLEs and NSS staff require a set of high-order leadership skills as well as courage, responsibility, determination and emotional intelligence. Their success also usually has the important bonus of improving the lot of staff in supported schools, who have often become demoralised through working in a school that lacks consistency, direction and support.

Other staff who are key to inter-school support

When it comes to improving schools causing concern, the agent of change is seldom the NLE alone. Other leaders and staff also play an important role as the case studies in this chapter have illustrated. Ninestiles Plus, the school improvement arm of the Ninestiles Federation in Birmingham, provides another example of how the role of other staff can be significant. Ninestiles was commissioned by East Sussex County Council to raise standards in three

schools in the Hastings and Bexhill area in 2007. In their first year, the schools' results improved dramatically, from well below to significantly above the floor targets for secondary schools.

Sir Dexter Hutt, an NLE and leader of Ninestiles Plus, became the executive leader of the three schools, working with the headteachers in place. The strategy to support the schools has two dimensions.

First, ASTs from Ninestiles (there are 13) and members of the Ninestiles leadership team come to Hastings for two or three days at a time, and work closely in the core subjects to support the local directors of improvement. The scale of support varies according to the phase of the contract but the aim is to embed sustainability so support is front loaded. A typical month would see 30 days of Ninestiles AST/senior staff support in addition to that of the executive leader.

The second key part of the strategy was to appoint local directors of improvement in English, mathematics, science and ICT across the three schools. These curriculum leaders, who have assistant headteacher status, were recruited through open competition rather than being relocated from the Ninestiles Federation. They have been very instrumental in the drive to raise standards and their authority comes not only from their own expertise but also from the executive leader to whom they report directly, as [Case studies 16a and 16b](#) describe.

Case study 16a: Using specialist staff as part of an NSS intervention to improve English in a national challenge school

The director of English had been head of English and an advanced skills teacher in another county school in East Sussex. She took up the new post in Hastings in September 2008. Her description of conditions in one of the schools gives an indication of the challenge she faced:

“The school was dysfunctional; pupils lacked motivation and were poorly behaved; systems were broken and finances in a mess. The English department was appalling, staffed mainly by teachers from abroad, including the head of department and second in department. Four of the five teachers, including the head of department and second in department, were observed giving inadequate lessons in the first term. There was no effective leadership or management. The school was hostile to federation which made working with the head of department very challenging.”

The director of English used a number of strategies including:

introducing behavioural standards for teaching and learning

giving demonstration master classes with 40 students at a time

taking twice monthly training slots with staff and involving the county adviser in aspects of teaching English

setting expectations for departmental leadership

Improvements have resulted. For example, all staff were teaching satisfactory lessons by the end of the first year. Standards in English have risen and the target in all three schools is to exceed 60 per cent of pupils gaining an A*-C grade in the subject (10 per cent above Fisher Family Trust band D). There is a focus on progress, regular reviews, assessment for learning and networking between staff on APP. The director of English is on the leadership team and her impact on teaching English across the three schools has been substantial.

Case study 16b: Developing ICT infrastructure and curriculum

ICT is another area that has developed rapidly across the schools. This is driven by a partnership between the director of ICT and the IT manager who masterminds an impressive infrastructure.

The ICT curriculum director came to the Hastings Federation after eight years as head of department in two schools. The second was a national challenge school in which he had helped improve ICT results substantially. The IT manager had worked for 10 years in one of the schools in the federation, Grove School, and had recently taken a Masters in computing.

ICT was a strong aspect in Grove School, but weak in the other two schools. These schools were “years behind” in their infrastructure, with “dysfunctional teachers in one school who were doing no ICT work with pupils”.

Between them, the two leaders worked with the IT teams across the schools to identify and resource the courses they wanted and to provide CPD for all the schools in the use of a standardised computer office suite.

The long-standing head of department in one of the schools, where the ICT A*-C pass rate was 19 per cent initially, thought it was crazy to aim for 100 per cent across the federation when the curriculum director first suggested this as a target. Performance is now running at 92-93 per cent.

The federation’s technical team now supports ICT across the federation and 11 primary schools and provides a reputable consultancy service to schools far and wide. The federation is also a development reference site for commercial school management information systems.

Challenges faced by outreach staff from NSSs and benefits of engaging in such work

An internal survey of staff from national support schools undertaken in 2008 provides further insights into how teacher-to-teacher support works and adds value. By far the most common activities across NSSs and supported schools were training and leading Inset, and mentoring and coaching. Many respondents also modelled lessons. One respondent said:

“All teachers and teaching assistants have had opportunities to observe me in my own setting for two whole days. Follow-up planning sessions initially focused on planning numeracy with emphasis on small-group work, then literacy with emphasis on cross-curricular activities.”

The role varies according to the circumstances. For example one respondent said:

“My role is determined by the school’s needs. During this placement I have coached the Year 6 teacher with a focus on reflecting on the support given and putting in place points of how to carry this forward. Where appropriate I have also modelled lessons, team taught lessons and delivered a whole-school training morning.”

The biggest challenges faced by teachers who engage in work to support their colleagues in other schools relate not to the technicalities of the work but resistance by those unwilling to change. Asked what the main difficulties were, teachers from a range of primary schools quoted examples such as:

“persuading more reluctant staff to deal with pressing issues and realise their importance”

“overcoming obstacles, negative attitudes and resistance to change from staff”

“maintaining good relationships”

“teachers who are not interested in making a change”

Despite these challenges, the overwhelming majority of teachers, by a ratio of 10 to 1, affirmed the benefits of outreach support experience to their own professional development and practice. Typical comments were:

“It helps my own professional development. Talking about teaching and learning enables me to think through good practice.”

“[It] helps to reflect on own practice and practice within my home school; helps to keep [me] up to date [and] builds confidence.”

“My own practice is enhanced because I always have to keep ahead, ie researching latest initiatives etc.”

“I reflect on and improve my own practice and analyse what makes a good school.”

Others mentioned the benefits of sharing systems and planning between the two schools:

“There are benefits in the integration of programmes which support learning across two schools.”

“Any units of work I have planned or resources made with any support school I have shared with the relevant year groups back at school.”

“The experience increases my reflection on how we are working and systems we need to develop further.”

Another relishes the role:

“I enjoy the challenge and it is very satisfying to help other professionals to improve the quality of teaching and learning on offer in their schools. I have the opportunity to visit other schools. We access support packages, for example a science package.”

Conclusion

The examples in this chapter are but a few of the many that have been accumulated during the short life of the NLE programme. Nevertheless, the main conditions for success emerge strongly from the range of schools that are leading schools. These can be summarised in terms of four Cs: commissioning, capacity, capability and commitment.

Commissioning

This involves the process of engaging the provider school (NSS) with the client school. This is normally the role of the local authority, but could be a governing body, interim executive board, academy sponsor, local government office or even DfE. It may involve brokerage, invitation or competitive tender. Sometimes the work is instigated by the NLE who does not wish to stand by and see another school fail. It is important that commissioning is a rapid and decisive process undertaken with due care and, as we discuss in chapter 6, facilitates an early introduction of the NLE into the school with problems.

Capacity

Capacity is about the ability of an NLE and NSS to take on a significant outreach commitment. Capacity is described by the criteria that NLEs and NSSs are required to meet before designation. It is a prerequisite that the school should be highly effective, very well led at all levels and have a sufficient number of staff who are outstanding in their work, particularly in leading core subjects, managing the school's business and preparing for headship. NSS work is no place for a fragile school. It offers the extra development and learning opportunities for an excellent school to become even better.

Capability

Capability describes how well equipped an NSS is to provide solutions for the underperforming client. It is about having strategies for:

working alongside headteachers and other leaders in situ

replacing a departed headteacher

assessing priorities and finding the most appropriate solutions

communicating with different and often challenging stakeholders

identifying and implementing the right actions to raise standards

understanding how to deal with typical challenges in poorly performing schools

modelling, communicating and implementing vision and aspirations and bringing the provider and client schools together

Capability also involves having systems for:

restoring calm and acceptable behaviour, using clear sanctions and rewards

securing the safety and wellbeing of pupils and staff

ensuring consistently effective teaching

ensuring rigorous assessment of progress and intervention where it is insufficient

establishing the responsibilities and accountabilities of leaders at all levels, and ensuring these are met

bringing about consistency and reliability in all aspects of the school's work

Commitment

School-to-school support work is not for the faint hearted. NLEs demonstrate such attributes and qualities as:

courage and commitment – a determination to do what is right for the pupils in the supported school whatever the barriers

tenacity – to ensure that what is started is finished, whatever it takes to achieve that

resilience – to cope with opposition, barriers, setbacks and disappointments

vision – seeing what is possible and raising sights and expectations

self-belief and confidence

emotional intelligence – in order to encourage and get the best out of people who may find it hard to change

a sense of urgency, knowing how quickly to change things while carrying people along

humility – recognising that success relies on harnessing the efforts of many people

These characteristics are also evident in other staff from the NSS who are successful in partnering, guiding and teaching staff from the client school. The low attrition rate among NLEs/NSSs suggests that the great majority of those designated for this role meet the conditions above.

Assessing the value of the NLE programme

Introduction

In *Schools leading schools* (Hill & Matthews, 2008), we presented the first assessment of the progress that NLEs and NSSs were contributing to school improvement. Drawing on information from independent evaluations, Ofsted inspection reports on schools that had been supported by NLEs and NSSs and analyses of a limited number of test and exam results for 2007 and 2008, we were able to demonstrate that the NLE programme was of growing value to the school system.

However, the conclusion was inevitably a preliminary one as the work of NLEs and NSSs was still in its relative infancy. There is now a much richer source of data on which to draw. In this chapter we examine:

- test and exam data covering a broader range of schools and over a longer period
 - updated information from Ofsted reports about the impact of NLEs and NSSs
 - the impact on the development and progression of school leaders
 - information on the cost-effectiveness of NLE/NSS interventions relative to other forms of school-to-school support
-

What do test and exam results tell us about the work of NLEs and NSSs in the secondary sector?

For this evaluation we have looked at the GCSE results (as measured by the average percentage of pupils who achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and maths) at 26 schools that started to receive support from an NLE/NSS during the school year 2007/08. We then compared their results over a three-year period with the average for schools generally in England and with NSSs (Figure 9). The picture that emerges is a positive one:

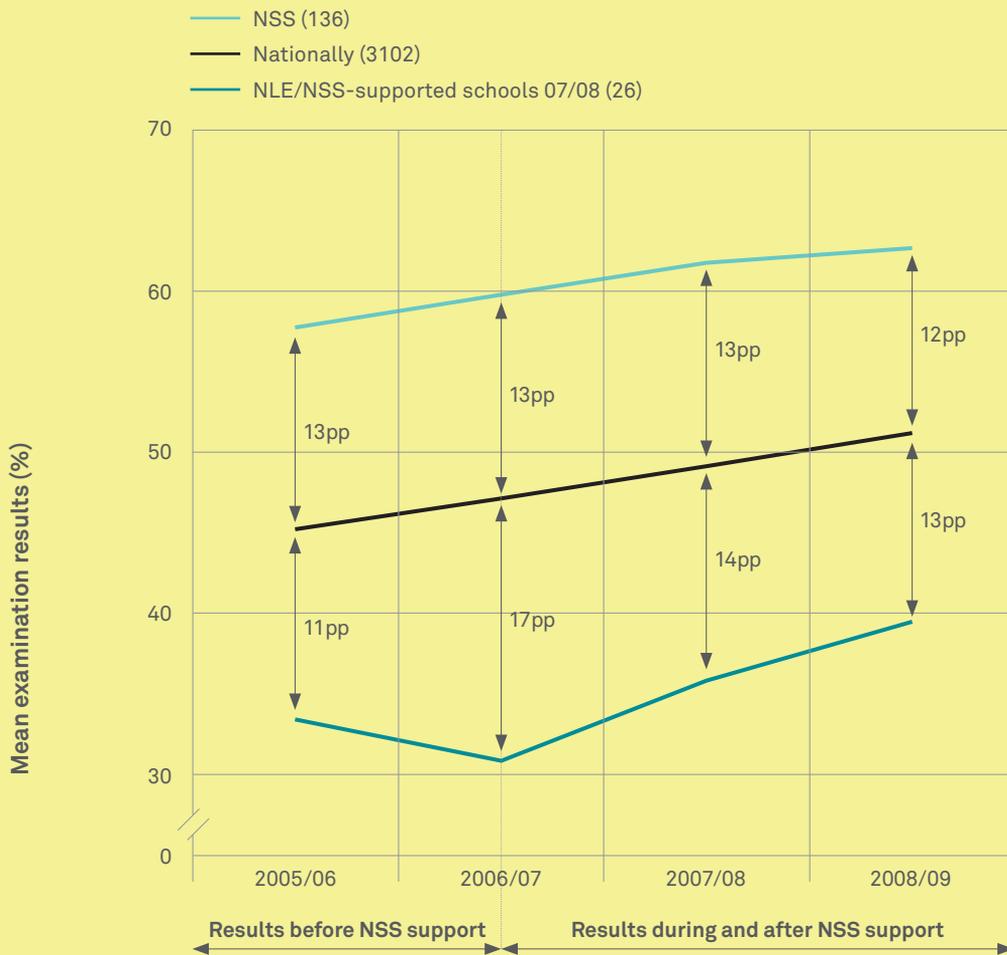
The decline among the supported schools was arrested, preventing many of them from slipping into national challenge territory.

The annual rate of improvement among supported schools was over double the national average and enabled them to close the gap in performance on other schools – an 8.5 percentage point increase for supported schools from 2006/07 to 2008/09 compared with the national average improvement of 4 percentage points over the same period.

The results in supported schools continued to improve even though in many cases the NLE/NSS support would have ended or tailed off in the 2008/09 school year.

NSSs maintained an increase in performance; although starting from a much higher base, their rate of improvement was very slightly less than the national average.

Figure 9: Comparison of exam results for NLE/NSS-supported secondary schools who started receiving support in 2007/08, NSSs and all schools in England, 2005/06 to 2008/09



Source: National College analysis of published performance data

Note 1: Based on 26 secondary schools that began receiving NLE/NSS support in 2007/08, as measured by average percentage of students achieving five GCSEs at grades A*-C (including English and maths).

Note 2: 'pp' refers to percentage point difference

Despite the overall positive nature of the figures, there were a few schools that saw little or no improvement or where improvement was not sustained. Our view is that the most likely explanations for this are twofold: in some schools the deployment of the NLE/NSS may have started relatively late in the 2007/08 school year and so would not have had sufficient time to make an impact. In some cases the support was not sustained for the length of time necessary to embed improvement in the supported school.

What do test results tell us about the work of NLEs and NSSs in the primary sector?

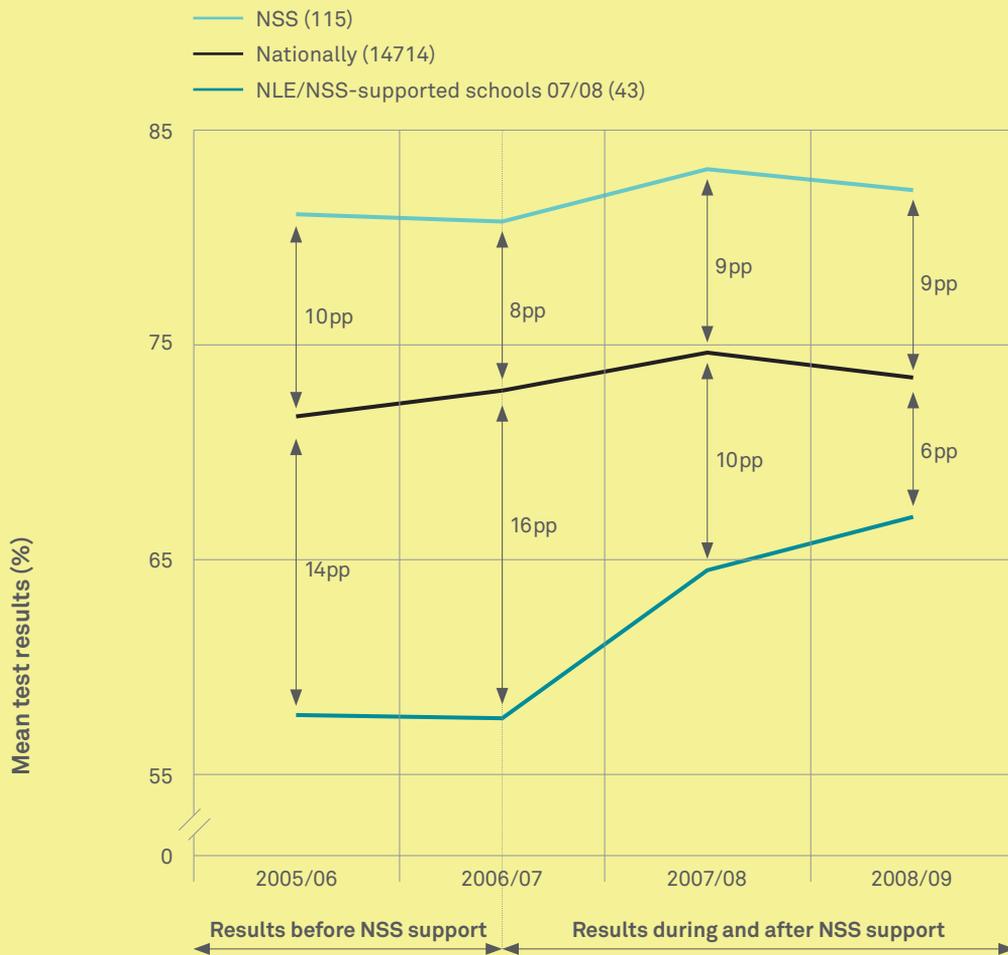
We adopted a similar approach for looking at comparative performance in the primary sector (Figure 10). A total of 43 primary schools started receiving support during 2007/08. Figure 10 shows that prior to receiving support, these schools had been bumping along just above the floor target for Key Stage 2 attainment:

Following the injection of support, supported schools increased the proportion of their pupils gaining level 4 for English and maths at Key Stage 2 by a total of 10 percentage points between 2006/07 and 2008/09, by 7 percentage points in the first year and by 3 in the second.

During the same period, schools' results in England on average flatlined, ie there was no net increase in average attainment so the supported schools took a giant stride towards closing the attainment gap with other schools.

NSSs, starting from a far higher base, maintained and slightly increased their performance over the three years, although in common with schools in general in England they did fall back slightly during 2008/09.

Figure 10: Comparison of test results for NLE/NSS-supported primary schools who started receiving support in 2007/08, NSSs and schools in England, 2005/06 to 2008/09



Note 1: Based on 43 primary schools that began receiving NLE/NSS support in 2007/08, as measured by the average percentage of pupils achieving level 4 in English and maths at Key Stage 2.

Note 2: 'pp' refers to percentage point difference.

As with secondary schools, there was not an improvement in performance in all schools. We looked at one particular case to understand why this might be. As we suggested with secondary schools, the history of the NLE's relationship with the school (which is summarised chronologically as school A in [Figure 11](#)) helps to explain the context of the school's performance. It can be seen that the NLE was supporting the school when it emerged from special measures but was no longer attached to it in the run-up to the 2009 SATs.

Two key learning points arise from this example:

the importance of maintaining NLE/NSS support until a supported school is on a continuing and sustainable improvement trajectory, a point that also emerged from the case studies in chapter 3

the need for a strategy and support to sustain improvement after the NLE/NSS moves on

We return to discuss both these issues in chapter 6.

Figure 11: Example of NLE giving serial support to schools and its interaction with progression in attainment in supported schools

Date	Event	Evidence and notes
May 2007	Ofsted inspection of school A results in special measures	Headteacher had been at the school for only a few months before the inspection
Sep 2007	NLE begins to support the leadership team	
Mar 2008	Ofsted monitoring report	Monitoring report indicates good progress: strong and decisive leadership with increasing support from other leaders and the help of other consultants
Jul 2008	Ofsted inspection of school A removes special measures	School A now out of special measures and assessed as satisfactory. Inspection report comments: <i>The leadership of the interim headteacher is inspirational and she has high expectations. Importantly, she has ensured there is now a clearer vision for improvement that puts pupils' achievement and the raising of standards firmly at the top of the agenda.</i>
Jul 2008		Combined percentages of pupils achieving level 4 in core subjects in school A is 217 (190 and 228 in the two previous years respectively)
Autumn 2008	NLE link with school A ends	
Summer 2009		Combined percentages of pupils achieving level 4 in core subjects in school A is 180

What do Ofsted reports tell us about the work of NLEs and NSSs?

Our first report (Hill & Matthews, 2008) cited examples from Ofsted inspection reports that illustrated how NLEs and NSSs were being recognised for the contributions they were making to bringing schools out of special measures and notices to improve. We have repeated that analysis and have again found acknowledgement of the way in which NLEs are constructing and providing support to other schools. The support, systems and leadership for schools that are struggling are being acknowledged as significant factors in helping to turn these schools around. In schools that are being aided by an NLE/NSS, it is common to find that Ofsted monitoring and inspection reports include statements that reflect the views described in [Figure 12](#).

Figure 12: Illustrative comments from Ofsted monitoring and inspection reports on the value of NLE and NSS contributions to school improvement

“Partnerships with the local authority and NLE have meant that the school’s leadership has been considerably strengthened.”

Puriton Primary School

“The school has been federated with Moorside Primary school [an NSS]...There is an executive headteacher [an NLE] responsible for both schools with a head of school on the Westgate Hill site. The executive headteacher and head of school are tackling the main issues facing the school with rigour and determination.”

Westgate Primary School

“A national leader of education is working with the school on a part-time basis supporting the new headteacher... There has been a step-change at the school and progress in tackling the two areas for improvement since the last inspection has accelerated markedly since September 2009. This is because the new headteacher is driving forward improvement with tenacity and determination.”

Ofsted, Willow Tree Primary School

“The executive headteacher [an NLE], ably supported by the governing body, has set a very clear course for improvement. The impact they have had on overcoming weaknesses since the last inspection in behaviour, attendance and the achievement of pupils, demonstrates the school’s good capacity for further improvement...”

The federation with the partner school [an NSS] is a significant factor in helping to achieve this improvement.”

Fairfield High School

“Debden Park High School provides an outstanding quality of education for its students. The school was the subject of special measures following its inspection in January 2007. One of Her Majesty’s inspectors removed the school from this category in October 2007, after one monitoring visit... The improvement since the last inspection has been significant and much of the school’s work is now exemplary... The school’s success is a product of the very effective senior leadership team. Under the direction of an exceptional headteacher, and with considerable strategic support from the Kemnal Trust [an NSS], the school has become outstandingly effective.”

Debden Park High School

We have also been able to examine a further source of Ofsted evidence.

In 2009 Ofsted published three reports on outstanding schools in challenging circumstances (Ofsted with Matthews, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c). Each of the reports, drawing in part on the experience of NLEs and featuring practice from a number of them, showed how deprivation or historical underachievement need be no bar to ‘Achieving excellence, sustaining excellence and sharing excellence’ – the three themes of the reports.

The reports also identified leadership development as a feature common to these outstanding schools and this resulted in Ofsted commissioning some further work to study the practice of leadership development. During late 2008 and 2009 Ofsted inspectors visited 24 NSSs – 12 primary and 12 secondary – to survey good practice in the development of leadership skills and effectiveness. In all but two cases they found the practice of the schools in leadership development to be ‘outstanding’. Even in the residual two cases HMI was supportive and complimentary about the work of NSSs in this area. Ofsted also recognised the crucial role that NLEs/NSSs are playing in developing middle leaders in particular, an issue highlighted in chapter 3.

Ofsted inspectors sent letters to each NSS following its visit, in which it talked both with the NSS and a partner school. In the letters Ofsted identified key elements of the NSS’s effective practice. We found 10 themes on the nature of effective leadership development that recur in these letters (Figure 13). The themes echo many of the factors identified in the Ofsted studies of outstanding schools and reinforce the practices that contribute to the success and effectiveness of the NLE programme.

Figure 13: Themes emerging from Ofsted visits to NSSs to survey the development of leadership skills and effectiveness

1. Clear leadership vision is allied to high expectations and is visible throughout the school.

“You have successfully created a common vision based upon high expectations; a relentless pursuit of excellence; and a belief that the key to school improvement is the development of leadership at all levels.”

Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School

“The headteacher’s high expectations permeate every part of the school.”

Whitley Abbey Business and Enterprise College

“A strong vision is evident and a positive ethos permeates the school.”

Belleville Primary School

2. The senior leadership of the school communicates effectively with other leaders and with staff.

“Excellent communication, the consultative style of leadership and strong team-work are at the heart of the college’s sustained high-level effectiveness.”

Westwood College

“Your work in ensuring staff understand how effective leaders develop people and how effective teams communicate ensures there is a common understanding and a common language. This contributes to the positive ethos and culture evident amongst staff in the school.”

Walthamstow School for Girls

3. Senior leaders are focused on leading effective teaching and learning.

“Across the federation, teachers continue to improve their effectiveness because senior leaders ensure they have the opportunity to work alongside colleagues and share best practice... The federation’s leaders give clear guidance to staff about what constitutes effective learning and this is helping to drive up expectations of what students can achieve.”

Westwood College

“A key feature of your work to develop leadership is the support given to staff to enable them to lead in areas unfamiliar to them. For example, through joint planning and in-class support by senior leaders, teachers have delivered new courses outside their areas of specialism.”

Walthamstow School for Girls

4. Senior leadership teams ensure that there is effective and systematic performance management in place across the school and in other schools with which they may be working.

“The school’s performance management process is rigorous. It enables senior staff to identify precisely leadership development needs.”

Whitley Abbey Business and Enterprise College

“The school’s performance management system is excellent. It is clear, comprehensive and very well organised. This helps senior leaders to identify the development needs of staff new to leadership and those aspiring to leadership positions.”

Thornden School

“The restructuring of leadership and management across the federation has taken account of the development needs of both schools and is supporting rigorous accountability at all levels.”

Westwood College

5. The leadership team takes positive steps to identify and support aspiring leaders and provides clear pathways for leadership progression.

“There are clear pathways and many opportunities for all staff to develop their leadership skills.”

Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School

“The identification and development of future leaders is impressive. Well-planned training for middle managers and aspiring senior leaders benefits staff, including those from local schools.”

Nower Hill High School

“Staff speak very highly about leadership programmes such as those for aspiring middle and senior leaders. These enable them to have an informed perspective on the next step up as well as equipping them with the key skills necessary to effectively fulfil their current roles. Opportunities to shadow senior leaders further add to the menu of training available to develop leaders.”

Walthamstow School for Girls

“Systems and processes are securely in place to ensure that senior leaders are able to identify leadership skills and talent at an early stage in a teacher’s career. The school’s ‘Leading Teacher’ scheme provides strong, well-structured support to enable aspiring leaders to develop leadership skills quickly and effectively.”

Norton Hill School

6. The leadership of the school provides intensive support to help develop middle leaders, including enabling them to develop expertise in new areas.

“Middle leaders are provided with excellent support to enable them to develop their effectiveness and leadership skills. In particular, senior leaders help them to prioritise and plan their actions very carefully.”

Thornden School

“Middle leaders are provided with very effective mentoring and support. This helps new middle leaders to prioritise actions and balance the demands of the job very well.”

Norton Hill School

“You have created a culture where staff are empowered to take risks in a managed way. They speak very highly of the opportunities they have to take on responsibilities and the confidence of senior leaders in their ability to meet new challenges. Of particular note is the positive impact of senior leaders recognising and nurturing talents in staff which they had not yet recognised in themselves.”

Walthamstow School for Girls

7. The senior leadership team develops a culture that empowers staff to take decisions.

“All staff are given the opportunity to lead aspects of the school’s work... Staff appreciate the autonomy given to them but also the support available.”

Belleville Primary School

“Your team of committed staff feel empowered to make improvements to the quality of existing provision.”

Ravens Wood School

“Leaders at all levels feel trusted and empowered to make decisions.”

Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College

“Leaders are empowered to make decisions. They feel that the contributions they make to the work of the school are highly valued.”

Wellacre Technical and Vocational College

8. Fostering student leadership is a key aspect of supporting leadership development in the school.

“Students are encouraged and empowered to share their skills with others; act as positive role models for younger students; and contribute to many school decisions.”

Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School

“Students are provided with an impressive range of opportunities to develop their own leadership skills.”

Norton Hill School

“Students are encouraged to develop their own leadership skills, and levels of participation in such activities are high. Students report that these opportunities develop their confidence, character and life skills.”

Nower Hill High School

“Students are thoroughly involved in improving the work of the school which, in turn, is developing their leadership skills.”

Ofsted, Ravens Wood School

9. Support for leadership development is not confined to the NSS but includes other schools with which the NSS may be working.

“There is a commendable commitment to developing leadership capacity in other schools. You offer a range of very helpful support to your partner schools, including seconding staff to key positions when necessary.”

Nower Hill High School

“High-quality leadership skills have enabled the school to play a very effective role in the development of leadership in other schools.”

Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College

“The school plays an important role in the development of leadership in other schools.”

Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School

10. Partnership with other schools is a powerful source of professional and leadership development for staff and leaders in NSSs.

“Staff are united in their view that they have developed as leaders largely because of the opportunities they have had to undertake school improvement work.”

Whitley Abbey Business and Enterprise College

“The support you provide for others has benefited your own school and those receiving additional help. Leaders, including some who are not teachers, have grown in confidence through being involved in advisory work... Collaborative work with other providers is increasingly becoming the main means of promoting professional development.”

Wigmore High School

“Your staff cite the benefits to their own professional practice of working with other schools.”

Belleville Primary School

What do the developments in school leadership mean for the wider school system?

The Ofsted findings on the development of school leadership reinforce conclusions based on our own case study visits. We have observed that NLE/NSS practice in leadership development is essentially building the future leadership cadre for schools in England and it is doing so at all levels of leadership.

Headship: Leading the process of support for another school revitalises headship by offering new challenges, satisfaction and rewards at the top of the profession. A new brand of school executives has emerged, known as executive leader, executive headteacher or principal, or chief executive (officer). These executives are bringing entrepreneurial energy to the school system. They are creating larger trusts and chains and learning how to organise or buy in professional personnel management, accountancy and legal services, often recruited from local government or business. These skills and expertise will provide important lessons as schools more generally enter a period of financial constraint.

Senior leaders in schools: The deputy and assistant headteachers and principals, from whom the headteachers of tomorrow are drawn, are through NSS work being given the opportunity of real-time leadership experience by becoming acting or associate headteachers or deputies in their own school or other schools. They gain this experience under the watchful eye of the executive headteacher and with such experience are prime candidates for headship. Some are appointed to the substantive headships of the schools they have led, others to schools elsewhere. Some return to lead their own home school; others relish the challenge of leading schools from weakness to success to the extent that they seek to make a career of it. As chains, federations, academies, trusts and accredited school groups multiply, they will increasingly spin out high-calibre new headteachers into the system, complementing programmes such as the National College's Associate Headteacher Programme and similar programmes.

Middle leaders: The opportunities are greatest for those who drive the engines of the school: the middle leaders, school business managers and advanced skills teachers, who are the expert practitioners and leaders in their fields. As they support NLEs in sharing their knowledge and skill with others, and learn from them in return, they are reflecting more deeply on their practice. They are also gaining the skills and applying the emotional intelligence required to partner unknown colleagues in very different circumstances.

Lower levels of leadership: The backfilling inherent in the process of an NSS supporting another school creates opportunities at lower levels in the school leadership structure. Many schools seek to give increasing opportunities for leadership to teachers from their second year on. In one school we visited, for example, the headteacher expects any teacher on the staff to have the capacity to engage in school-to-school support after three years of teaching.

The support and boost for leadership development via the NLE/NSS programme are timely and of great value. This comes at a time when succession planning is a high priority for the National

College and the wider school system because of the surge in expected retirements over the next few years. In effect, the NLE programme is becoming a hugely powerful means of school leadership becoming self-generating. We discuss some of the policy implications of these developments in chapter 6.

What does information on the relative cost-effectiveness of NLEs tell us?

As chapter 1 described, the government has set in train a number of approaches for supporting schools in difficulty. It is far from straightforward to compare the relative costs of these different programmes because they are structured in very different ways. However, there is enough evidence to conclude that the NLE approach does on the face of it appear to be a very cost-effective way of providing support to schools in difficulty.

Costs for school improvement fall under two headings – the costs of providing the support at the frontline and the central programme costs incurred by the government department or agency sponsoring the programme.

In terms of frontline support for schools the costs of a number of other forms of school improvement interventions are a matter of public record. For example:

the lead or majority partner school involved in forming a national challenge trust or federation receives a one-off allocation of up to £750,000 over three years⁷. The funding can be used to cover costs such as:

organising project management support

recruiting a new leadership team

setting up a trust

staff costs in a partnering good school, e.g. overtime and backfilling

recruiting subject specialists

some additional school improvement support if needed

voluntary redundancy/staff restructuring packages

academies, separate from the capital costs for construction, receive a revenue allocation to cover the costs of setting up an academy. In 2007 the National Audit Office reported that:

“The Department calculates the annual funding of open academies so that they are no better or worse off than similar local schools. To cover the diseconomies in staffing and other running costs (such as the purchase of teaching material) incurred by a new school, the Department also provides each academy with start-up funding for up to four

⁷ Secondary modern schools, or non-selective schools in selective areas, receive up to £1 million over the same period (DCSF, 2008b).

years after opening, or occasionally longer. Start-up funding has averaged £1.6 million in total so far for each of the first 12 academies.”

NAO, 2007:6

the government allocated £10 million in 2010/11 to help primary schools become accredited school providers and £20 million was provided to support the more general development of accredited school providers and groups (DCSF, 2010d)

Set against this, the costs of using an NLE/NSS are advertised to national challenge advisers as follows (DCSF, 2009c)⁸:

a low-level support package: an NLE for 20 days acting as a consultant with AST support for 20 days – around £25,000

a medium-level support package: an NLE for 20 days, deputy headteacher for 60 days, two ASTs for 40 days and 2 heads of department for 20 days –around £75,000

a high-level support package: an NLE with members of his or her leadership team and use of a significant number of NSS staff – in excess of £150,000

Some caution is needed when making comparisons between these various figures because one is not necessarily comparing like with like. However, the cost of NLE support does look to be extremely competitive especially when one takes account of benefits that often get delivered as part of an NLE/NSS package. Not only does a struggling school gain a high-calibre leader, it also gains access to whole lot of other resources as well.

For example, the NSS normally provides venues and facilities for training and development at no cost. An NLE will also usually allocate whatever of his or her school's resources are necessary, without harming the NSS, to make an impact on the problems he or she may face, irrespective of what has been formally agreed in a contract. The NLE/NSS can also provide uniquely valuable opportunities such as an immersion programme for teachers of a whole department or even for a whole school and that if acquired commercially would be prohibitively expensive. The package will, where it is needed, also include support in redesigning the curriculum and access to schemes of work. It can be flexible enough to provide mentoring and coaching for particular members of staff, Inset to make better use of TAs or the use of a school business manager's time to sort out the school's finances.

In addition, the NSS itself gains free of charge an injection of professional and leadership development as a result of its staff being involved in school-to-school improvement work.

The beauty of the NLE/NSS approach is that it is both a diagnostic audit of a school's problems and a flexible set of resources to draw on in working towards solutions. Given the pressure to use funding effectively, NLEs look to be a very cost-effective option around which to base a school improvement strategy.

In terms of programme management and support there are no publicly available statistics that identify the respective departmental central costs for National Challenge trusts, academies and school accreditation, but given the number of staff involved they will be considerable.

⁸ These figures apply to NLEs/NSSs undertaking an NLE support project outside of a National Challenge trust scenario. If an NLE/NSS is involved in an initiative under that programme their school will receive the funding related to that programme.

In the three year spending review period from 2008/09 to 2010/11 the National College's total aggregate cost of supporting the NLE programme is expected to be just under £11.5 million – equivalent to around £3.8 million per year. That funds the cost of recruiting NLEs, delivering induction training and providing development support (including a small bursary), quality assurance and brokerage services. Given the size of the NLE programme and its impact this again seems to be a very reasonable sum.

Conclusion

As chapters 5 and 6 go on to address, the NLE programme is not without its challenges. It is important not to exaggerate its virtues or overclaim in analysing its value. However, the evidence available does indicate a range of very tangible and solid benefits.

Most significantly, NLEs and NSSs are helping to increase improvements in attainment and close the gap with other schools. Their record in helping to turn around schools classified as 'inadequate' by Ofsted is proven. They are proving to be outstanding role models of effective leadership practice. They are training and building future leaders at all levels of the school system. Furthermore in both absolute and relative terms, all this is being achieved in an economic and cost-effective manner.

Revisiting early challenges

Introduction

NLEs and NSSs are bringing to schools measurable benefits in terms of improved leadership and management and increased attainment. However, it is important that we do not gloss over the difficulties and issues that any major new policy programme is bound to encounter. *Schools leading schools* (Hill & Matthews, 2008) highlighted a number of challenges that we suggested the National College should consider as the NLE programme expanded and extended its scope. In this chapter we revisit those challenges and see what progress has been made in addressing them.

Securing better buy-in from local authorities

In our first report we said that the National College was working hard with local authorities to establish the role and use of NLEs but that there was ‘still greater scope for local authorities to draw more heavily on NLEs’ (Hill & Matthews, 2008:69). We suggested that the geographical spread of NLEs should be increased, that the government should issue guidance to local authorities on their role in co-ordinating school-to-school improvement support (particularly with regard to national challenge schools) and that there needed to be greater clarity about the respective roles of the different school-to-school support systems.

There has been good progress across the board on this issue. The number of local authorities that have NLEs in their area has risen from 88 to 121, meaning that four-fifths of authorities now have a designated NLE/NSS from which to draw support. The College has also looked to ensure that the distribution of NLEs in each area more accurately reflects the size of the authority.

This progress in securing local authority buy-in is also reflected in the proportion of local authorities that have made use of an NLE, which has risen impressively from 45 per cent in May 2008 to 87 per cent in March 2010. In addition, the development of LLEs described in chapter 2 (and the active role of local authorities in facilitating this initiative) is a further sign of the understanding and acceptance that the NLE/NSS approach now commands among the education community within local government. [Case study 17](#) provides an excellent example of how the combination of a proactive local authority, an outstanding NLE and well-marshalled support from the National College can help to transform a struggling school.

Case study 17: Example of effective collaboration between the National College, a local authority and an NLE

“I thought it would be helpful to provide you with some brief feedback on the impact of having a national leader of education within the local authority. In West Berkshire, Kennet School is a grade 1 Ofsted outstanding school, of 1,700+ youngsters, with three specialisms. Its track record in raising results over many years is second to none and it has many strengths. This resulted in the headteacher, Paul Dick, becoming an NLE in 2008. Barely three miles away, there is another school, Trinity School, which has struggled for many years to attract its fair share of pupils and its results have been frankly unsatisfactory, apart from in its very small sixth form. A number of different headteachers struggled to make an impact on the reputation or success of the school and an opportunity arose for West Berkshire Council in February 2009, when the existing headteacher left the school.

“As Kennet School has been run successfully for many years by Paul Dick, an NLE, he and Kennet School were approached to form a partnership. Agreement was quickly reached in terms of principle between the local authority, Kennet School and its governing body, and Mr Dick was made executive headteacher of both schools working closely with an associate headteacher appointed in each school. As part of this development, the governing body at Trinity school was replaced by an interim executive board in order to help accelerate its progress. The authority hoped that this would help to stabilise the situation and address the many issues at Trinity School, including an enormous budget deficit.

“Paul Dick was able to draw on the support and advice of [the National College] and his colleagues in the NLE network, and a huge amount has been achieved. Barely six months after the start of this new regime, the school achieved the best academic results it has ever achieved in its whole 10 years and many aspects of the school have improved enormously. The budget situation has greatly improved and the reputation of the school is growing all the while. Visitors to the school remark strongly on the improving climate for learning and the school is slowly restructuring and attracting better staff. The power of the NLE and the NSS arrangement is not to be underestimated in bringing this rapid improvement to bear.

“West Berkshire Council recognises the tremendous power of these arrangements and would encourage others to look at the great potential in using the expertise, experience and networks that are thriving under the National College/NLE/NSS banner.”

Andy Tubbs, Chief Adviser School Improvement, West Berkshire Council

Local authorities have also been given clear guidance on deploying school-to-school support. The statutory guidance on schools causing concern (DCSF, 2008a) does not specifically mention NLEs but does state that local authorities should take the steps needed to build ‘the leadership and management capacity of the school, including middle management level’ and to consider ‘whether there is scope for partner organisations to be brought in to support the school (including other schools, trusts, colleges, or non-educational organisations), and how this collaboration will be facilitated’ (DCSF, 2008a:26).

The Labour government's final major educational policy announcement, *Timetable for action* (DCSF, 2009a), on implementing the 2009 schools white paper (DCSF, 2009b) reinforced this advice. It provided a crystal-clear message on the importance of local authorities developing school-to-school support in general and using NLEs, NSSs and LLEs in particular. The document resounded to a regular drumbeat of pronouncements on the role of school-to-school improvement and the value of NLEs and their staff.

Just in case local authorities had not got the message, a letter was sent by the secretary of state for children, schools and families to all local authorities (DCSF, 2009d) explaining that as part of the government's World Class Primary Programme he was:

“looking to all local authorities to identify their exceptional schools, to work with them to develop proposals for how they could support schools locally and to put these schools forward to lead local improvement.”

However, whether there is now greater clarity about the respective roles and distinct contributions of the varying school-to-school improvement schemes is less clear cut. The best that one can probably say is that by the end of the Labour government's period in office, DCSF and the broader school system were working to the following principles:

For schools causing concern, there was an understanding that intense support was needed and that this was available via NLE/NSS support contracts (including executive headship), or federations with or incorporation into a stronger school (including an accredited school group).

For national challenge schools, there was an expectation that they would either be on a fast trajectory to more than 30 per cent of their students achieving more than five good GCSE passes (including English and maths) or would become an academy or be incorporated into a national challenge trust led by an accredited school provider or group.

For other schools needing support (such as primary schools below the floor targets for KS2 test results or secondary schools that were not improving at the rate expected of them), there were a host of school-to-school improvement resources available including LLEs, NLEs and NSSs, soft and hard federations, support from other local schools, national teaching schools, contracts with external educational providers, Leading Edge partnerships or partnership with an accredited school provider or group. The local authority, the school improvement partner and the school itself had responsibility for agreeing and putting in place the most appropriate package of support.

As explained in chapter 6 this picture will continue to evolve as the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government develops its policies and its approach towards school-to-school improvement and the local authority role in securing school improvement becomes clearer.

Securing stronger support from governors of NSSs

Schools leading schools highlighted how governors of NSSs are sometimes cautious about their school becoming involved in NLE/NSS support for another local school (Hill & Matthews, 2008:70-1). They are principally concerned about what will happen to their school while key resources and leadership are focused on another, struggling institution.

In fact, as we were able to show, and chapter 4 confirms, involvement in school improvement partnership work brings a two-way benefit. As a rule, NSSs, as well as the schools they support, continue to make progress in terms of improved attainment. Staff from NSSs gain learning and ideas from the schools in which they work. They are often refreshed and energised by the development opportunities that being involved in an NLE/NSS contract provides.

Significantly, chairs of governors of prospective NLEs/NSSs, interviewed as part of the selection procedures, have often cited retention of their headteacher as another reason for supporting school partnership work. These chairs realise that talented headteachers who have accomplished a lot in their own schools may look for new challenges and are likely to stay in post longer if their role grows through NLE activity.

In order to provide information and reassurance to governors, the National College has produced a briefing for them that addresses practical concerns that they might have (National College, 2010 a). It covers questions such as 'Will our school suffer if the headteacher is supporting another school?', 'Does the school get any choice over deployment?', 'How is the work of the NLE and the NSS paid for?', 'Do staff who go to work in the client school get rewarded personally?'

However, we accept that governors are right to remain vigilant and consider it worth repeating the advice from our first report on how NLEs should approach and involve governors in their work (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Advice for NLEs/NSSs on involving governors in their work with other schools

Involve governors – particularly the chair of governors – in the due diligence process and make sure they understand the implications of the contract for supporting the client school and that they support the objectives of the proposals.

Discuss and agree arrangements with governors for filling leadership positions made vacant in the home school as a result of redeployment in the client school. Delegated powers may need to be agreed for areas such as staff appointments, finance and exclusions. If necessary, provide training for governors and the leadership team to support the implementation of any revised leadership arrangements.

Consider how far to anticipate gaining NLE work by building up staff and leadership resources within the school to meet the expected demand. For example, some more entrepreneurial NLEs, mainly in the secondary sector, have taken on extra staff in the expectation that they will be engaged in NLE deployment, which will then provide them with the income to cover the costs of these additional staff. There is clearly some risk in this approach, particularly in the current financial climate and particularly for primary schools, and we consider this issue further in chapter 6.

Report regularly to them and encourage them to review and challenge the rate of progress in both the home school and the client school.

Use the expertise of the home school's governing body to support the governors of the client school by holding joint meetings or strategy sessions.

Keep the total volume of support activity provided by the NSS under review. For example, where an NSS is involved with two or three schools, it might be appropriate for the governors to establish a company under the Education Act 2002 or set up a trust in order to manage the scale of management activity and the financial risk involved.

Addressing the cross-phase and cross-sector issue

In our first report we described as 'unresolved' (Hill & Matthews, 2008:72) the issue of whether the NLE programme should be phase- and sector-specific. In other words, should primary NLEs only support primary schools, secondary NLEs only work with secondary schools and colleges, and special schools only work with special schools, or should they cross these boundaries?

That issue has now been resolved since, as the case studies in chapters 2 and 3 illustrate, NLEs are increasingly working across traditional school boundaries. Of course, most forms

of NLE/NSS support will still be to schools of a similar type but during 2009/10, for example, the National College estimates that 37 out of a total of 506 NLE/NSS deployments were either cross-phase or cross-sector.

This more flexible approach mirrors what is happening in the school system more generally. Mainstream schools are appreciating what they can learn from special schools in the fields of behaviour support and management. Federations and trusts spanning secondary, primary and special schools are becoming more common. All-though 3-19 schools are beginning to be an established part of the education landscape. It is appropriate, therefore, that the NLE programme reflects and is helping to shape this trend.

Maintaining an active headship role

A condition of becoming an NLE is that the candidate be a serving headteacher leading a highly effective school. However, as we pointed out in *Schools leading schools* (Hill & Matthews, 2008:72) and reiterated in chapters 2 and 3 here, we are seeing the emergence of some very able school leaders who, as system leadership develops and chains of schools and trusts grow, are one step removed from the active headship, organisation and management of a particular school. Such leaders are taking up different roles and becoming, for example, executive directors or chief executives of a federation, a trust, a group of academies or other education provider.

We recognised the value of the contributions such leaders were likely to make, not least because they provided evidence and proof of the development of system leadership. But we also underscored the importance of the NLE programme continuing to insist on a strong link between an NLE and an NSS. This was partly because of the added strengths and resources a support school brings but also because leading a high-quality, high-performing school brings authenticity to an NLE in their school-to-school improvement role.

The College is very aware of the increasingly complex nature of school leadership and of the way new models of leadership are emerging. The College's panel responsible for designating NLEs continues to believe, as do we, that the accountability of NLEs for one or more schools that meet the NSS criteria is central to the integrity of the NLE approach.

However, it would be regrettable to lose the expertise of some of the best school leaders simply because their role has changed as they take on a broader and more executive role within a school federation, trust or chain. For example, suppose a headteacher or principal who is an NLE becomes executive principal for a group of schools in a federation or trust with responsibility for all of them. He or she is a leader of leaders and may also be an influential actor on the national policy stage. Although not being solely and directly responsible for one school, the NLE can still tap into the expertise of the lead school and others. If this is the case, there seems no good reason for de-designating the NLE unless the lead school and/or others in the trust start slipping back.

Furthermore, as formal groupings of schools increase, it will introduce new dimensions to the designation of NLEs/NSSs. There may, as [Case study 18](#) illustrates, be headteachers or principals within a collective trust who can demonstrate that they and their schools fulfil the criteria for NLE status even though they work to a chief executive or executive principal who may already be an NLE and who carries final responsibility for the quality and standards of trust schools.

Should not these headteachers also be eligible to apply for NLE, or perhaps a new, associate NLE, status?

Case study 18: Examples of outstanding headteachers working within a wider school trust

Lynda Valentine, the headteacher of the very large and successful primary school that has become part of the 3-19 Nottingham Academy, has undertaken substantial school-to-school support work in her own right and may fulfil the criteria for designation as an NLE, even though the academy is part of a trust led by a chief executive who is himself an NLE.

The current headteacher of Scalby School in Scarborough has a substantive post as assistant principal in the Outwood Grange Trust. Paul Tarn first became associate headteacher of Harrogate High School, leading the school (which was supported by Outwood Grange College under contract to North Yorkshire County Council) through a successful Ofsted inspection, presiding over exceptional improvements in results and handing over to a new headteacher. When Outwood Grange was asked to take over Scalby after the school went into special measures in November 2008, Paul had the motivation and experience to step into the vacant headship. In March 2010 the school was reinspected (Ofsted, 2010b) and judged to be 'good' overall. The report stated that the school had:

“Improved very significantly since its last inspection... and the transformation in the provision and outcomes for students is striking... Extensive action has taken place since the arrival of the current principal. His very effective leadership has ensured that widespread changes, particularly in teaching, assessment and leadership practice, have been successfully implemented across the school.”

In a relatively short time, Paul has gained extraordinary experience of taking the helm of inadequate schools and steering them to success, drawing on other resources and expertise in his own school.

Such formal groupings of schools may collectively have enhanced capacity to support other schools although it may be some time before all the schools in a multi-school entity fulfil the criteria expected of individual NSSs. However, is there a case for terming a group of outstanding schools in the same trust a national support trust and the executive principal a national executive leader of education?

Patterns of working life for school leaders are also changing. As headteachers approach retirement they may decide to work for, say, only four days a week. Some headteachers are combining leading a school with other roles, such as being a school improvement partner, acting as a consultant or leading other school improvement initiatives in addition to being an NLE.

The National College recognises the need to consider all these issues and is consulting with its Advisory Group on what changes might be made to the NLE designation arrangements.

Rewarding NLEs appropriately

Schools leading schools argued that it was appropriate for NLEs' efforts in supporting another school to be recognised financially (Hill & Matthews, 2008:73). Indeed, the National College recommends to governors that any member of staff, and not just the NLE, who takes on a more demanding role should receive some reward, normally in the form of additional steps on the pay scale for the time and effort put in to a client school.

Thus the principle of some additional payments for NLE/NSS work was not at issue. However, we did think it would be helpful for there to be some form of guidance for schools and governors on appropriate levels of remuneration. We recommended that the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) examine the matter and advise on fair and consistent remuneration criteria.

STRB was given a remit by the secretary of state to consider this issue and in part 1 of its 18th report (STRB, 2009) made a number of recommendations relating to headteachers who become accountable for more than one school on a temporary or permanent basis. They also recommended that the school teachers' pay and conditions of service document be amended so that governing bodies could 'decide what payment, if any, should be made to the headteacher and other staff' when one school provided services for another' (STRB, 2009:6).

Nearly all the recommendations were accepted by the secretary of state and from September 2009 there has been a clearer structure for remunerating NLEs and other NSS staff for their work. Paragraphs 26-41 of the statutory guidance accompanying the revised terms and conditions of service summarise the changes (DCSF, 2009e).

The arrangements that have been implemented are temporary pending a more fundamental review of the leadership pay to reflect the changing and emerging shape of models of school leadership. The review is scheduled to be implemented with effect from September 2011. However, both the interim arrangements and the longer term plans provide a clearer structure for remunerating NLEs and other NSS staff for their work.

Reviewing quality assurance methods

Our first report suggested that as the NLE programme expanded towards its target of designating 500 NLEs, the National College would in parallel also have to consider how to 'manage the programme and maintain its quality and integrity' (Hill & Matthews, 2008:73). We pointed out that the scale of the programme would require a systematic approach if local authorities and schools in difficulty were to be assured of the calibre and quality of those being called upon to provide support.

This is a message that the College has taken seriously. Once recruited, NLEs cannot rest on their laurels. The College has a clear set of de-designation criteria [\(see Appendix 2\)](#) and formally and

regularly reviews the designation of all NLEs. If there is any evidence to suggest that they, or their schools, fall below the entry standards, their designation as an NLE is withdrawn. If an NLE (and the NSS) is in the middle of actively providing support to another school at the time of de-designation, a panel decides whether it is appropriate for this support to continue in order to prevent any good work already in progress being undermined.

The National College closely monitors and collates Ofsted judgements and attainment data for the NLE's own school and any schools it is supporting. A designation review panel then weighs up the evidence and makes a decision on the continuing designation of all NLEs under review. Factors that may give rise to the withdrawal of designation include the following:

The NLE has not practised as an NLE for a year or more (even though appropriate opportunities have been presented by local authorities or the College's brokers) and so is not benefiting other schools.

The NLE's work is not having the desired impact on the schools being led.

There is evidence that an NLE's own school is not sustaining, or has seen a decline in performance as evidenced through Ofsted reports and school performance data.

An NLE loses accountability and responsibility for an NSS due to retirement or transfer to another school, unless the NLE leaves the school during a deployment that also involves members of the NSS staff, in which case the NSS will retain its status for a year or until the end of the current deployment, whichever occurs sooner.

An NLE would also be de-designated in the rare event of him or her being involved in misconduct or improper behaviour. NLEs have the right to appeal against a de-designation. However, as a matter of policy the College takes a firm line on upholding decisions that relate to an NLE falling below the required standard. [Table 2](#) lists the number of de-designations that have occurred since the start of the NLE programme. Only 10 NLEs have been de-designated because the performance of their school has slipped below the standards set by the National College.

Table 2: Total of and reasons for NLE de-designations

Reason	Number of NLEs
Retired	13
Left NSS	11
No longer meets the NLE/NSS performance criteria	10
Withdrawn	3
Not engaged in NLE activity	1
Total	38

Source: National College

As well as acting as guardian of the designation standards, the National College has also continued to promote quality assurance through the range of support it provides to NLEs. The support comes through the College's brokers, newsletters, training courses, access to coaching support and regional networking events.

However, from monitoring feedback, the College became aware that the support for NLEs was not always as joined up as ideally it should have been. It found that while individual services were well regarded, the range of options – and sometimes duplication – was causing some confusion. As a result, the College has decided to pilot a new approach in three regions (the North East, the West Midlands and the South West) from September 2010. Each of these areas will have a regional director who will act as a single point of contact for NLEs, schools and local authorities and offer better co-ordinated and integrated services, reduce duplication and confusion and provide clearer links with other agencies.

Persisting with the NLE programme

In our first report *NLEs* (Hill & Matthews, 2008), we pointed to the risk of NLEs becoming one of those policy programmes that are sometimes initiated and championed by government only to fall by the wayside as another idea comes along. We emphasised the importance of persisting with NLEs and NSSs if the initiative was to deliver its full potential.

We are delighted that over two years on, the NLE programme is still very much growing and extending its influence and impact. It has become embedded in the school system and developed into being a core element of the school improvement armoury. NLEs and NSSs are supporting the move towards system leadership and becoming a key source of schools able to act as majority or lead partners in national challenge trusts and federations, national teaching schools and to apply for accredited school provider or accredited school group status.

However, as one set of challenges is addressed new ones arrive on the scene. In chapter 6 we explore the new challenges that the changing educational policy landscape poses for NLEs and NSSs.

Future challenges for the NLE programme

Introduction

NLEs and NSSs are at the cutting edge of much of what is happening in schools in England. They are:

supporting the creation of academies

helping to turn round underperforming schools

establishing new school groupings across the boundaries of phase and type of education

leading the growth of chains of schools, using the recently introduced accreditation process

developing national teaching schools

In addition, NLEs are developing their strategic expertise to offer advice and leadership to ministers and the wider education system. In short, NLEs are bringing creativity, commitment and energy to schooling and education policy at a relatively low cost to the education system.

The NLE/NSS programme has, as the previous chapters show, moved a long way in the last two years and addressed most of its early challenges. But as the vigour of the programme continues unabated, new challenges have arrived on the scene. Some of these challenges are strategic in nature and relate to the broader development of education policy. Others are narrower and more practical, while some might be described as technical issues. In this chapter we examine all these different types of challenge and suggest ways in which they might be addressed.

Adapting to a changing school improvement strategy

Chapter 1 described the evolution of a three-fold approach to school improvement:

spatial, focusing on school improvement in specific geographical areas of historic underperformance

structural, with high-performing schools and academies taking over poorly performing schools

sectoral, ie empowering school leaders to have greater responsibility for organising and driving school improvement

In the next few years it seems likely that a fourth 'S' will become a significant ingredient in this mix – the opening up of the supply of schooling to new education providers. This process began with the introduction of external sponsors for academies and was given legal force in 2006. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires local authorities to hold competitions for the establishment of new maintained schools. The development of national challenge trusts and

federations and the introduction of school accreditation arrangements, announced in February and March 2010, have given a further boost to this policy approach.

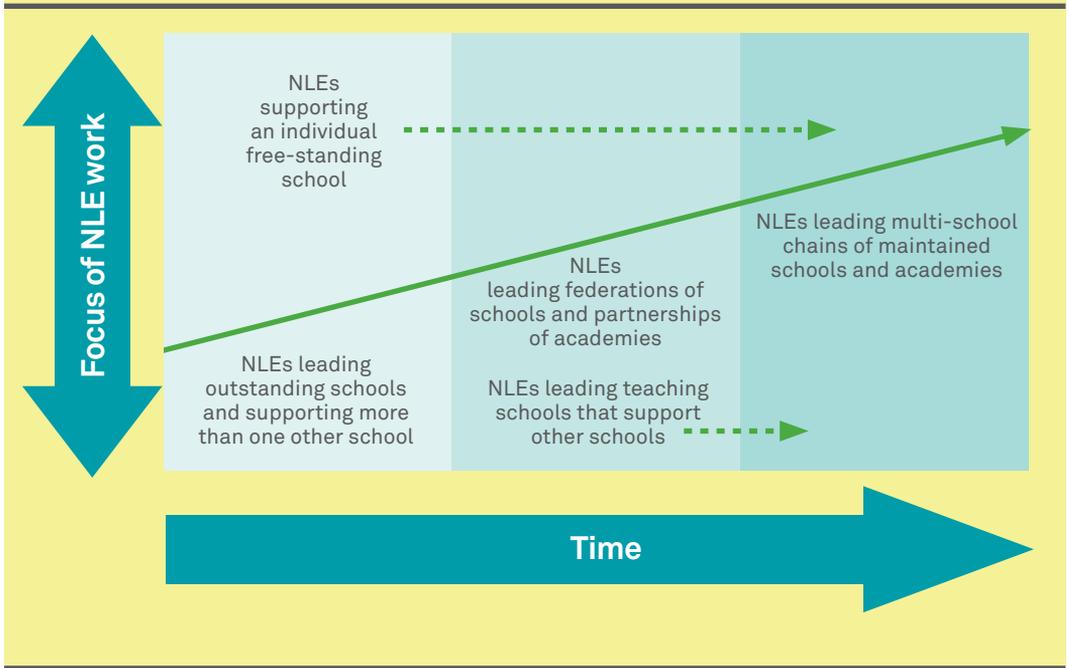
The accreditation framework encourages new educational providers to enter the school market and sponsor academies or take over underperforming schools. As chapter 1 explained, education providers such as further education (FE) colleges, independent schools, universities and education companies, church and faith groups and third-sector institutions are enabled to set up and run groups of schools. By the end of March 2010, 11 of the 39 organisations accredited as secondary school providers came from outside the existing state school system. They comprise six FE colleges, three universities, one independent FE school and one education charitable company.

This is a minuscule number relative to the overall number of schools in England and the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government may choose to amend (or even abolish) the accreditation system it inherited. However, irrespective of the precise arrangements, the policy trend is clear. The new government is committed 'to promot[ing] the reform of schools in order to ensure that new providers can enter the state school system in response to parental demand' (*Guardian*, 2010). We are, therefore, likely to see a significant number of new schools and new school providers. This may well be reinforced by an expansion in the number of academy-type schools, with schools judged by Ofsted as 'outstanding' being given the opportunity to become academies along with an expectation that they will use their expertise to support another school.

The skills and talents of outstanding school leaders will, therefore, be at a premium if these new policies on diversifying the supply of schooling are to take root and grow. NLEs have been the education system's entrepreneurs, leading improvement and innovation. NLEs and their staff have been at the forefront of developing new models of education and taking on some of the toughest performance challenges. So, whether it is opening up new schools, creating school chains or supporting other organisations that are sponsoring these developments, NLEs and headteachers of their calibre will have a key role to play.

This in turn could well result in the centre of gravity of NLE work changing as the accreditation of school chains, the introduction of new school suppliers and the formalisation of national teaching schools take effect. As [Figure 15](#) shows we are likely over time to see the focus of NLE activity shifting from the left to the right of the chart: from time-limited contracts or specific interventions to more systemic support and more formal, longer term partnerships, trusts, federations and chains of schools. This trend accords with how other education analysts see the development of the English schools system moving from one dominated by national prescription to one being led and transformed by school leaders themselves (Higham, Hopkins & Matthews, 2009).

Figure 15: Potential future trend in the development of NLE activity



Another aspect of the trend towards greater diversification of school supply is that outstanding headteachers and schools will be faced with an increasing range of options as to how they might apply their expertise and that of their schools on a wider canvas. Outstanding headteachers will potentially be able to choose between (or combine) the role of an LLE, being designated an NLE, leading a national teaching school, taking over a failing school via a trust or federation, moving their school to academy status and supporting another school, developing a chain of schools or teaming up with another education provider to open a new school. In addition they will be able to lead or support a range of other, more informal school-to-school improvement work.

The role of the National College in this situation should be to focus on ensuring that our best school leaders are used to optimum effect. It can help achieve this in three ways:

First, continue to ensure that criteria for different schemes open to outstanding leaders are closely if not completely aligned. It will be confusing and frustrating for headteachers if they find themselves having to jump through different hoops and/or apply and be assessed separately for what are fundamentally similar roles. Ideally an outstanding school leader and his or her school should go through a single gateway that acts as an entry point to a variety of roles.

Second, the National College should continue to guide outstanding leaders around the various wider leadership roles open to them. Already the College has produced a practical guide on system leadership (National College, 2010b) that describes the different roles that good and outstanding leaders can take on.

This publication will need to be kept up to date as new developments and roles come on stream. It will also need to be promoted online, in the regions and through conferences, as well as reinforced by ministers so that our best school leaders receive a clear and consistent picture on how their talents can be used. Providing the training and support described in the next section will also help address this challenge.

Third, it will be necessary to use the opportunity afforded by school accreditation, the opening of the school market to new providers and the introduction of primary academies to involve more primary headteachers in system leadership. The idea of forming a new school or incorporating another school on a permanent basis may be more attractive to some primary headteachers and governors than organising and leading a series of time-limited interventions, particularly as these are building on the growth in the number of trusts, federations and clusters in the primary sector.

Growing transparency and competition for undertaking school-to-school support work

A further consequence of the evolving approach to opening up the school market is that NLEs are increasingly finding themselves competing against each other or with other providers as greater transparency is introduced to the decisions to award school improvement work. The commissioning of school-to-school support is evolving into a more formal – even commercial – process.

This is not surprising, given the need for government and public bodies to account openly for the substantial sums of public monies being invested in specific school improvement projects. Two factors in particular are creating the pressure for greater transparency:

The first is propriety in acquiring sponsorship for new academy projects. In March 2010, a new, more transparent bidding process for awarding academy sponsorships was announced (DCSF, 2010e).

EU procurement rules and regulations governing local authority procurement will also have a strong impact. It is increasingly likely that the procedure for being designated a majority partner in a national challenge trust or federation or being granted an NLE/NSS contract will become much more open and competitive. Already a growing number of NSSs with established credentials in school-to-school support have responded to invitations to tender for such projects in their own local authorities and beyond. Some have responded individually while others have been approached to work in partnership with commercial support service organisations in joint tenders.

Given this context, the National College will have an important role in explaining to NLEs how this new, more contestable and competitive world will work. It will also be important for the College to continue bringing NLEs and their schools together to share learning and knowledge about school improvement. Such sessions will act as a counterweight to the competitive pressures that could otherwise encourage schools to hold on to the secrets of their effective practice.

Extending the scope of the NLE/NSS programme

The National College is well on its way to meeting its target of recruiting at least 500 NLEs – 200 for secondary schools and 300 for primary schools – by 2012. However, that begs the question of whether 500 – a number that was set at the outset of the programme – is the right number.

It has been evident throughout this publication that NLEs are well established in the school system, but they are also part of a wider network of system leaders. In looking at overall numbers of NLEs we also need to take account of other developments in the secondary and primary sectors.

For the secondary sector, our view is that given the turnover of headteachers and the potential for school leaders to move into different leadership roles, the College should maintain a rolling programme of recruitment for secondary NLEs so that there are 200 NLEs available for deployment at any one time. We do not think that the priority is to expand the number greatly beyond that, given the development of LLEs, national teaching schools, and accredited school providers and groups. The level of system leadership within the secondary sector is in our view developing strongly.

There is one caveat to this conclusion: if secondary NLEs continue to become increasingly involved in supporting primary schools there would be a case for increasing their number as part of the strategy described below.

However, we take a different view with regard to the primary sector. Here the sheer volume of schools (over 17,000 primary schools compared to around 3,300 secondary schools) makes the scale of the challenge of growing system leadership of a different order. In addition, as chapter 4 highlighted, there is a big mountain to climb in terms of improving performance at Key Stage 2.

Meeting this challenge is all the harder because over the past 15 years there has been proportionately less investment in partnership and system leaders in primary schools. There has not, for example, been the equivalent of a specialist schools system for the primary sector. There has been some support for federations but relatively speaking it has been at the margins. The main support for primary schools has come through the National Strategies, which are being wound down.

Accordingly, we think there is a case, in tandem with expanding the number of primary accredited school providers and groups, of continuing to expand the number of primary NLEs. It would be arbitrary for us to set a figure or target but we recommend that the National College review and consider what number might be appropriate.

Increasing support for active and prospective NLEs

Any proposal to expand the number of NLEs is dependent on the ability to attract and recruit candidates of a sufficiently high calibre. Research undertaken for the College (National College, 2010c) shows that there is a healthy interest among a third of headteachers in becoming an NLE but this is an aspiration for the medium to long term. The two main factors that are

holding school leaders back from applying for the role are lack of time (linked to a concern that becoming an NLE could be detrimental to their existing school) and lack of experience. In both cases around a quarter of headteachers cite this as a reason.

More positively, these headteachers have pinpointed the type of support that would be most helpful in addressing these concerns. As **Figure 16** shows, four of the top six areas where they would like training and help have also been identified by serving NLEs as areas where they would value support. One possible approach might be to hold some joint training and development sessions for serving and potential NLEs, where serving NLEs could perhaps also mentor and informally involve aspiring colleagues in school-to-school improvement work.

Addressing the training and development needs of NLEs that have been identified will be particularly important in encouraging more outstanding primary headteachers to come forward and be part of the NLE/NSS system.

Figure 16: Support requested by serving and potential NLEs

Areas where <i>serving</i> NLEs would most value support	Areas where <i>potential</i> NLEs would most value support
1. A bank of case studies / best practice to call upon	1. A bank of case studies / best practice to call upon
2. Access to further help and support structures, including specific school intervention strategies	2. Access to further help and support structures, including specific school intervention strategies
3. Working effectively with pupils and parents from diverse backgrounds	3. Leading and managing change within other schools
4. Knowledge / experience of policy and educational structures	4. Leading learning in other schools to raise attainment
5. Direct experience of different types of school	5. Knowledge / experience of policy and educational structures
6. Establishing effective behaviour management approaches in different school contexts	6. Direct experience of different types of school

Source: National College, 2010c

Streamlining school improvement administration

One of the biggest problems in deploying NLEs is not the decision over whether to support a school but corralling the various parties involved in providing school improvement support. When a school is in difficulty or underachieving, and this has been recognised, there has been a stream of support agencies beating a path to the school's door. These can include the SIP, local authority officers, in-service providers, National Strategy advisers, headteachers and lead teachers employed by the local authority and others.

A key function of the College's brokers, (formally known as NLE/LLE regional support associates) is helping to provide a clear route map to engaging an NLE in these circumstances. As a general rule we would suggest that brokers should advocate and push hard for the earliest possible procurement and deployment of an NLE/NSS. NLEs can manage these well-intended but often confusing pressures and offers of support by providing a filter through which potential help, support and intervention have to pass. NLEs are becoming adept at undertaking this role where there is no substantive headteacher in the supported school, and at providing guidance on deciding priorities for support where a headteacher is already in place.

Indeed, as we discuss in the final section of this chapter, we think there is also a range of other ways in which local authorities can utilise the skills and resources of NLEs.

Ensuring progress in schools supported by NLEs/NSSs is sustainable

The idea that there are no quick fixes in turning around inadequate or underachieving schools is too dismissive and has all too frequently been used as an excuse. There is evidence from the work of NLEs and NSSs that order has been restored within a few weeks or even days in chaotic schools. Poor teaching has been redressed within few months, and pupil outcomes have been levered over floor targets within the course of a school year. It should not necessarily take two years for a supported school to emerge from special measures. Many succeed in less time, even being judged 'good' on exit from the Ofsted category.

However, the speed of improvement is not the only important factor. The analysis of the added value provided by NLEs and NSSs described in chapter 4 highlighted the importance of maintaining NLE/NSS support until a supported school is on a continuing and sustainable improvement trajectory. In some cases progress has not been sustained after the NLE/NSS contracts ends. One contributory risk, for example, is that disengagement occurs too rapidly, a risk that is particularly acute where the NLE/NSS support has been very direct and hands-on.

Sustainability is vital if the NLE/NSS programme is to deliver its objectives and enhance its reputation. This is more likely to be secured where the DNA of an NSS's effective systems and practices is adopted and embedded in the supported school. In addition it is vital that there is a properly planned exit strategy in place before a contract ends. This may take the form of:

extending the length of time between NLE/NSS engagements. Initial contracts can be extended or renegotiated to provide appropriate ongoing levels of supportive or consultancy resource but at a reduced level

forming an informal partnership between the supported school and the NSS. Sustainability is strengthened where staff in the NSS gain permanent positions in the supported school or have ongoing, durable professional partnerships with their counterparts

creating or extending a formal partnership that brings the supported school into a permanent relationship with the NSS via a federation, a national challenge school or other trust, or as part of an accredited school provider or group

moving to academy status, although as described in chapter 2, the process of changing status can be disruptive and the exit strategy should plan carefully for the transition process

A key test that any exit strategy should pass is that it continues to provide the means to develop and empower leaders at all levels in the school.

Extending support for academies

Chapter 2 described how NLEs and NSSs were supporting academies⁹ in a number of different ways. This support is proving significant and important, particularly where academies are involved in addressing entrenched underachievement in an area of deprivation and disadvantage. The process of creating an academy can be destabilising in terms of maintaining standards and behaviour in the period leading up to the opening of a new school. It can also be challenging for a school leader to set up and establish an academy, particularly if he or she has not done anything like it before. The value that NLEs and NSSs can provide in these situations needs to be more widely known and used as the number of academies in operation expands to 400 and beyond.

First, there needs to be clarity that, unlike the case of maintained schools, it is the academy sponsor that is commissioning support from an NLE. This is not to entirely exclude the local authority from being involved in a particular situation but to recognise the different governance arrangements that apply to academies. Having this clarity will also help set the ground rules from the start for an NLE's relationship with the principal, whether that is the headteacher of the predecessor school that is closing, a principal designate or a principal who is in post.

On the assumption that sponsors should have responsibility for engaging an NLE/NSS, the work of NLEs with academies needs to be explained and marketed to sponsors. This might be achieved by writing up case studies of effective examples of support, holding special conferences, offering support from the academies division of the Department for Education and the academy principals' conference, and in articles in *Ldr* and the *Times Educational Supplement*.

The National College's brokers will also need to develop a particular awareness of the NLEs who have the expertise, interpersonal skills and the inclination to work with academies.

⁹ The reference to academies is in the context of an academy being established in an area of deprivation or disadvantage and/or against a backdrop of previous underperformance. This section is not referring to the Conservative Liberal Democrat government's plans to enable all outstanding schools that wish to do so to become academies.

Implications for leadership development strategy

Chapter 3 explained how NLEs were involving a range of other NSS staff in the support they provided for schools. We also showed how this was helping to build leadership capital and develop young, middle and senior leaders and in particular to provide a gateway to headship. These findings reinforce practice emerging from other parts of the school system (Hill, 2010) and have implications for the way in which the National College organises and supports leadership development.

One possibility is that leadership development could have a much more local/regional and school focus. For example, the Greater Manchester Challenge's leadership strategy, which is being led by the National College, builds on approaches developed through London Challenge but has been adapted and tailored to meet specific regional and local circumstances. The strategy's area-specific leadership development opportunities include:

a range of programmes designed to support school leaders

leadership opportunities and high-level coaching skills for senior leaders

seven programmes for middle leaders ranging from school-to-school support skills to bespoke, school-led programmes

team development programmes

programmes for school business managers and a range of other specialisms

These programmes complement the school-based provision that is coming from the increasing designation of teaching schools and outstanding NSSs, such as Middleton Technology School in Bolton [\(see Case study 19\)](#). NSSs such as Middleton are developing leaders of learning and school leaders at a tremendous rate, providing the capacity to undertake intensive school-to-school support commitments without putting their own work at risk.

Case study 19: Leadership development at Middleton Technology School

Middleton School is committed to building leadership capacity. New teachers after their first year are offered a £1,000 honorarium for teaching and learning initiatives. Subsequently, teachers undertake a leading and learning programme and then work in threes on thinking and learning across the curriculum.

Extensive use is made of the National College's Leadership Pathways and other programmes. Staff with leadership ability are likely to be given more senior responsibilities after two or three years. All middle leaders have completed the Leading from the Middle programme and at least six members of the school's senior leadership team have achieved NPQH status. The headteacher has joined the National College's Fellowship programme.

Natalie is one typical beneficiary of the development programme. She joined the school

as a newly qualified teacher (NQT), became a whole-school mentor for gifted and talented students in her second year, science Key Stage 3 co-ordinator in her third year and assistant curriculum leader for science in her fourth. She is a leading teacher in her subject and a professional mentor of NQTs. Natalie has valued the opportunity to undertake a two-year diploma course in leadership, particularly appreciating being able to see how other schools work. Natalie has also participated in a number of the national teaching school programmes and is now the acting curriculum leader for science.

The more that school-to-school improvement develops a regional and local focus (as described below), the more this will help develop a sustainable infrastructure for training and growing future generations of school leaders.

Using NLEs as a concentrated force

The national challenge approach to school improvement, like other aspects of policy, may change under the Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition government but there are still lessons to be learned from adopting a spatial dimension to the school improvement strategy, ie focusing school improvement resources, initiatives and interventions in certain challenge areas. These lessons could well have a wider significance for how NLEs and NSSs are deployed in the future. In Greater Manchester, for example, NLEs and LLEs are being used in a strategic and concentrated way to help deliver improved outcomes, as [Case study 20](#) describes.

Case study 20: The role of NLEs and LLEs and their schools in the Greater Manchester Challenge

The Greater Manchester Challenge (GMC) aims to help achieve significant educational improvements in the 10 local authorities in Greater Manchester. It is targeting a sharp drop in underperforming schools (with a particular emphasis on improvements in English and mathematics), an increase in the number of outstanding schools and colleges and significant improvements in educational outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people. GMC is working in particular with 22 'keys to success' secondary schools.

National and local leaders of education and their schools are central to this strategy and are being used in a co-ordinated and concentrated manner. For example:

secondary NLEs are working with heads of mathematics and English to unpick successes and failures and share good practice

22 middle leaders of education (MLEs) have been recruited from the schools of NLEs and LLEs. The MLEs work in their home school for one day a week but are deployed in one or two keys to success schools for the other four days, helping to build leadership capacity in particular subjects and analysing and advising departments on their strategies to raise achievement

NLEs and LLEs working across the secondary/primary divide are developing a programme to address low levels of literacy at Key Stage 3, building on primary methods

a primary NLE is working with one of the local authorities and the challenge adviser to support a group of schools teetering around the floor targets, now known as stepping-up schools

NLEs are acting as lead experts in several of the local authorities as part of a strategy to improve the quality of short-stay provision, and for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties

NLEs are supporting the development of special school hubs across the GMC area to deliver training and support for support staff across the region

NSSs have provided the capacity to create eight national teaching schools delivering the improving and outstanding teacher programmes (see Figure 5 in chapter 2). This is set to grow to 16 by summer 2010 en route to a longer term total of 25

a group of school business manager (SBM) champions based in NSSs has been accredited to support the development of business expertise and demonstrate effective planning and use of resources

It is too early to be definitive about the impact of the NLE/LLE and NSS support and interventions in Greater Manchester. However, an analysis of Key Stage 2 results over the past few years indicates that primary schools in Greater Manchester have had a higher rate of improvement and outperformed schools nationally. Ofsted has commented positively in a number of school inspection reports on the contribution of the GMC programme in general and NLEs in particular to school improvement.

If these trends are confirmed in Greater Manchester and are also evident in the Black Country Challenge, this could point to adopting a more general policy of deploying NLEs in a strategic and concentrated way. This would not of course be to the exclusion of using NLEs for individual school assignments but might over time result in a better balance between the two approaches. However, such an approach requires local authorities, SIPs, the College's regional support associates, NLEs, LLEs and headteachers more generally to work together to agree school improvement strategies for particular areas.

One way of progressing this agenda might be for the National College to identify areas where groups of schools are receiving various forms of school improvement funding, new schools are being set up or taken over by another school or, as it comes into effect, the new pupil premium for deprivation and disadvantage being proposed by the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition government generates an additional significant resource. In these areas the College might work with the schools and the local authority to develop and agree an overall school improvement approach based on making intensive use of the range of support that a group of NLEs and NSSs could provide. In other words, the value of the pupil premium could be maximised by aligning it with a leadership premium to help narrow the gap in attainment, which is the objective of the policy.

NSSs are well positioned to carry out this role as, contrary to some perceptions, they do in fact reflect the socio-economic profile of schools nationally and on average have roughly the same proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) as other schools¹⁰.

¹⁰ Primary NSSs have a slightly higher than average percentage of FSM pupils (16.6 per cent versus 15.9 per cent nationally) and secondary NSSs are just below the national average (at 11.6 per cent and 12.8 per cent respectively).

The impact of spending constraints

Schools, like every part of the public services, are bound to feel the impact of spending constraints over the next few years. Making more efficient use of resources has not been the main focus of NLE work. However, as [Case study 20](#) on the GMC illustrated, developing better business practice can be and often is allied with school improvement. Improved efficiency may come, for example, from introducing or extending the impact of school business managers in schools in which effective control of the budget has been as big a casualty as educational standards.

NLEs also have a yardstick from their own school of the cost of achieving success and are able to apply that to other schools. They know that provided the curriculum is appropriate and well planned and staff are well trained and performing well, then levels of attainment are as much to do with effective use of staff as the number of them. NLEs have the confidence, where necessary, to take cost out of one area of the curriculum or the life of a school and redeploy resources to other, more pressing priorities.

NLEs active in forming federations and accredited school providers and groups also have the potential to realise economies of scale across both support functions, such as human resources, administration and procurement, as well as across specialist areas of the curriculum. As the sponsor of both NLEs and the development of improved business support within schools, the National College is ideally placed to see NLEs and NSSs develop a twin-track approach that harnesses school improvement with efficiency and effectiveness.

However, there is one dimension of the spending constraints that could have a detrimental impact on the work of NLEs. We explained in *Schools leading schools* (Hill & Matthews, 2008) that NSSs quite often carried an extra complement of skilled staff – including some in senior positions – so that they were in a position to respond swiftly to NLE opportunities when they arose. NLEs and governors calculated the risk in adopting this approach but because there was relative certainty about both the approach to school improvement and levels of funding, they felt justified in staffing beyond the complement that was required just to run the NSS. Indeed, some NSSs have gone as far as listing on their websites the staff posts dedicated to wider partnership work, though most do not identify their extra capacity explicitly.

However, as the funding climate changes, schools and governors are less likely to carry this risk. They will want to be sure that there is going to be an income stream to cover the cost of staff engaged on outreach work.

At best, this may mean there are delays while NSSs make the necessary arrangements to free up (by backfilling posts temporarily vacated) the NLE and a supporting team to take on an assignment. At worst, some NLEs/NSSs may simply lose the capacity to fulfil their role.

There are no easy answers to this dilemma though it does provide a reinforcing argument for using NLEs on a planned and strategic basis. A local authority that knows its schools and its area should understand in detail where its problems are and should be able to anticipate and plan for where support is likely to be needed. Surprises – including adverse inspection reports – should be the exception rather than the rule and so a local authority ought to be able to give NLEs and governors broad indications of where, over what period and to what extent their support is required.

Developing the strategic contribution of NLEs

NLEs are accumulating experience of working in different schools and contexts. Those NLEs who have been through the Fellowship programme have had the opportunity to refine and develop their thinking and skills and see them in a broader perspective. These developments are contributing to the creation of a generation of school leaders who are not just outstanding practitioners but also able to think strategically and apply their knowledge and understanding to education policy and the future of the school system. They are able to propose changes that can be applied across the system based on their insights of what works in variety of circumstances.

Government ministers have started to tap into this bank of expertise, as we described in chapter 2. However, there is more that could be done to develop the strategic contribution of NLEs. For example, at national level NLEs who are graduates of the Fellowship programme could:

be tasked with examining practice and making recommendations on particular issues – for example, John Ayres, an NLE and the executive headteacher at Grangewood Primary School in Hillingdon, was a member of the expert group that provided challenge and support to the independent review (led by the National College’s deputy chief executive, Toby Salt) into the supply of teachers trained to meet the needs of children with severe disabilities and profound and multiple learning difficulties

serve on reviews, commissions and task groups such as the one that reported in the last parliament on services for children with speech, language and communication needs

be part of a secondment programme providing experience of working in policy teams and formulating green and white papers

be consulted on new policy proposals while they are being developed with ministers using groups of NLEs as a sounding board

be members of departmental programme boards tasked with implementing specific policy proposals

serve as expert witnesses to select committees of the House of Commons on children’s and education issues

engage in and inform the work of think tanks on the development of education policy

Locally, NLEs are becoming increasingly important providers and contributors to school improvement. They have shown that they have capacity to deliver school improvement not just in individual institutions but across an area and for groups of schools. In the fast-growing world of school-to-school improvement and in the overall context of public spending constraints, there is less need for local authorities to retain significant school improvement teams of advisers and consultants. They should maximise the impact of their NLEs, NSSs and LLEs by using them more strategically rather than just seeing them as a resource for one-off interventions. They could do this by:

commissioning NLEs – or involving them closely in the process – to develop and implement a school improvement strategy throughout the local authority area or subregion

inviting NLEs to organise and lead peer reviews across schools in the area of thematic aspects of education practice, covering topics such as leadership development, teaching and learning in particular subject areas, continuing professional development, use of data, behaviour management and personal catch-up support for struggling pupils

commissioning NLEs to provide internal consultancy by, for example, reviewing and reporting on the provision for children and young people in particular groups such as excluded children or those with particular special needs

arranging for NLEs to manage aspects of local authority-wide services such as pupil referral provision

encouraging NLEs to give evidence and act as advisers to local authority overview and scrutiny committees when they are examining education issues

These ideas draw on what is already happening in some areas. The challenge is to see them replicated across the country and so help to make system leadership a reality in schools.

Conclusion

Addressing these challenges will enable the NLE programme to successfully continue its mission of identifying and empowering our very best school leaders to be in the vanguard of transforming our education system. It will keep NLEs at the forefront of leadership practice. It will equip NLEs and their staff for the new policy challenges that lie ahead. Finally, and crucially, it will ensure that there is a critical mass of flexible, high-quality support to help deliver the aspiration of every school being a good school.

Whether the strategy for school improvement is based on a market or a more interventionist approach (or a combination of the two), NLEs and NSSs have a vital role to play. They provide the essential capacity on which either strategy will draw.

New schools and chains of schools won't succeed without the leaders who understand how school improvement comes about and who are there (with the resources of a good school to back them up) to pick up the pieces if and when the market fails.

Strategic interventions will get nowhere without the vision, creativity, commitment and entrepreneurial capacity of NLEs and their staff.

In short, the successful recruitment, deployment and expansion of a cadre of schools capable of sharing their excellence with other schools and, where necessary, taking over and rescuing failing institutions, introduces a powerful lever for change into the school system. By showing that they can bring about change in the most intractably underperforming or challenging schools, NLEs have demonstrated their capacity as agents of change. They and their schools relish such work; their governors are persuaded of the mutual benefits and tens of thousands of children and young people are getting a better deal as a result.

The availability of quality-assured system leaders and their schools provides the most obvious and proven resource for implementing key policy intentions. As education policy evolves and changes, the skills and resources of NLEs and NSSs should be at the heart of making a changed system work.

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Eligibility criteria for National Leaders of Education and National Support Schools

Eligibility criteria for National Leaders of Education

To be considered as an NLE you MUST:

be a serving¹ Headteacher /Executive Headteacher /Chief Executive² with successful headship experience in one or more schools for a minimum of three years and normally longer. It is also expected that you will be looking to remain a serving Headteacher /Executive Headteacher /Chief Executive for a minimum of two years

have responsibility and accountability for a school that meets the NSS criteria below

have the ability to work sensitively and collaboratively with a range of partners and stakeholders

be able to demonstrate emotional intelligence skills that will allow you to work effectively with schools in the most challenging circumstances

be committed to taking responsibility for another school or schools

be a leader who has worked within and beyond their individual organisations; sharing and harnessing the best resources that the system can offer to bring about improvement in their own and other organisations

have experience of influencing thinking, policy and practice so as to have a positive impact on the lives and life chances of all children and young people

There are also a number of key skills that we would expect applicants to evidence and these are to be:

articulate and reflective about improving schools facing difficulties

determined to improve outcomes for children and young people

expert in managing and sustaining change

strategic in their approach

skilled communicators with experience in a range of circumstances

collaborative leaders who are able to work closely with partners such as governors, SIPs and officers

decisive in identifying issues and addressing them while remaining sensitive

¹ 'Serving Headteacher' means you are required to have direct control and full responsibility for the school and have the ability to deploy staff when required.

² If in the role of a Chief Executive you must have the ability to identify at least one NSS that meets the full criteria, and have the authority to access and direct resources from the NSS.

Eligibility criteria for National Support Schools³

To be considered as an NSS the school MUST:

have either:

received an Ofsted inspection since September 2007 that is:

i outstanding overall

outstanding for either the effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement or the leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners⁴

outstanding for capacity for sustained improvement / capacity to make any necessary improvements⁴

(If one of the three grades is a grade 2, consideration will be given to the application and any issues will be further explored through a school visit)

or

ii been removed from special measures or notice to improve under the leadership of the NLE applicant and has since been judged (in a Section 5 inspection subsequent to that which removed the school from category) to be good overall with at least 10 Outstanding grades, including outstanding for either the effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvements or the leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners⁴ and for capacity for sustained improvement / capacity to make any necessary improvements⁴.

or

iii be serving high levels of deprivation, with 25 per cent or more of pupils eligible for free school meals and having received an inspection outcome of good overall with at least 10 outstanding grades, including outstanding for either the effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvements or the leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners⁴ and for capacity for sustained improvement / capacity to make any necessary improvements⁴.

be able to evidence improved performance and/or sustained high performance with value added scores that exceed local authority and national averages

be able to evidence that senior and middle level leadership within the school is very good or outstanding

³ If responsible for more than one school, at least one of the schools in the trust, federation, or chain must meet these criteria.

⁴ Terminology for leadership and management and capacity to improve relates to the previous Ofsted framework (before September 2009) and to the new Ofsted framework (September 2009 onwards).

be able to evidence that the school has a range of staff at all levels with coaching and mentoring skills

received a judgement on quality of teaching in the most recent Ofsted inspection that is at least good and with evidence of a significant proportion of outstanding teaching within the school

not itself be at or below the floor targets or receiving support from the National/City Challenge programme nor be projected to be at risk of doing so in the next two years.

Criteria for the de-designation of a National Leader of Education and National Support School

Introduction

The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (National College) has the role of designating headteachers, against strict criteria, to become National Leaders of Education (NLEs), and the schools they lead to become National Support Schools (NSSs). Once confirmed as an NLE/NSS, those individuals, and schools, are **designated** as NLEs and **NSSs respectively**. Once designated, the National College keeps under regular review the status and reserves the right to revoke the NLE and NSS designation at any time, if it is found that any of the criteria (NLE/NSS Criteria for De-Designation) listed in below are met.

NLE/NSS criteria for de-designation

1. The LAPSED criterion

The NLE/NSS has not supported another school for a year or more (even though appropriate opportunities have been presented by Local Authorities, or National College NLE brokers).

If a designated NLE/NSS does not practise as a NLE/NSS, by supporting another school for a period of one year after appropriate opportunities have been presented, designation will be withdrawn and the headteacher/school will be de-designated. In such cases the National College will contact NLEs/NSSs likely to meet this criterion, and ascertain the reasons for non-engagement with the programme. If there are valid reasons for non-engagement, for example, the NLE has been willing to support a school suggested by the National College, but the Local Authority of the client school has refused support, then consideration will be given to these circumstances at the de-designation panel. The NLE/NSS may also at this time draw attention to any errors in the information upon which the decision is to be based. If the records held are erroneous, and the headteacher can provide evidence that she or he has practised as a NLE/NSS within the period specified, then the National College will not de-designate the headteacher and/or school concerned.

2. The MISCONDUCT criterion

The NLE conducts himself or herself in a manner inappropriate for an NLE or NSS, or in any way brings into disrepute the National College or the NLE/NSS programme.

NLEs and the staff in their NSSs are required to operate to a high standard of professionalism in their work with client schools, and with the local authorities of these schools, and at any event or activity in which they are acting as a NLE, or representing the National College. They are expected to treat others with courtesy and respect, to be transparent in their dealing with schools and they should at all times behave in accordance with legislation. They should understand and respect the forms of communication client schools and local authorities will require of them, and should always recognise the boundaries of their role in their dealings with staff, governors and others in schools and in local authorities.

The application form to be an NLE/NSS submitted to the National College is a key document in the designation of NLEs/NSS. Withholding or misrepresenting any information in this document in such a way that it materially affects the decisions taken in the designation of a NLE/NSS will be considered to be misconduct and will result in de-designation.

NLEs are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner in the commitments they make to work for a local authority. Any short-notice withdrawal from a commitment (contractual or otherwise) to a school or a local authority without good cause may be regarded as misconduct and could result in de-designation.

Codes of conduct applied by the NLE's employing local authority or governing body of their NSS, and the GTCE Professional Code of conduct will be applied in considering the conduct, including gross misconduct, of a NLE/NSS. Furthermore the code of conduct of the contracting local authority, or the governing body of the client school, will be considered where the conduct or gross misconduct occurs while working at or on behalf of these bodies.

NLEs are expected to deal appropriately with any members of their NSS whose conduct does not meet the above standards. This includes withdrawing individuals from the NSS from any client school support and reporting the matter to the National College.

3. The PUBLIC CONFIDENCE criterion

The NLE has behaved in a way, including behaviour outside his or her work as an NLE, that raises concerns and brings NLE/NSS designation and the National College into disrepute.

NLEs and NSSs are expected to uphold high standards of conduct in public life and to uphold the law. Where a NLE is involved in behaviour, including that outside his or her work as a NLE that has or could call into question her or his integrity or probity, then the NLE designation may be removed.

Where an NLE has been suspended from his or her post as a headteacher pending investigation, the designation of the NLE will automatically be frozen until such point as the investigation has concluded. The National College will abide by the outcome of any investigation by appropriate statutory bodies, including the local authority acting as the headteacher's employer. Depending on the outcome of such investigation, the National College will either resume the NLE's designation or de-designate the NLE. The NSS designation will be reviewed and a decision taken dependent on whether the school is subject to on-going work that may be of a contractual nature.

4. The ELIGIBILITY criterion

The headteacher shows himself or herself to be ineligible as an NLE and/or the school an NSS by falling short of the requirements of the NLE/NSS criteria.

Evidence of ineligibility will usually come from evidence collected through Ofsted and the DfE school performance tables.

This data will be collated routinely for all NLEs and NSSs and if the school performance data shows there is significant downward trend, or if the school has recently been inspected and received an outcome less than that required to be designated then the NLE/NSS will be de-designated. NLE work should not be continued at the detriment of the NSS's performance.

The National College will contact an NLE to discuss any data used in this process and clarification will be sought through the de-designation panel. The de-designation panel will

also consider the individual and school's performance as an NLE/NSS and where this has had impact, the panel may decide to continue designation.

5. The ACCOUNTABILITY criterion

The designated NLE loses accountability and responsibility for the NSS due to retirement or transfer to another school.

The ethos underpinning the NLE/NSS programme is that the NLE works along with staff in their school or schools to support schools in challenging circumstances. Therefore the designation of an NLE goes hand in hand with that of the NSS.

If, for any reason, an NLE decides to leave the school at which they were appointed an NLE, then the NLE will be de-designated and the NSS will also automatically be de-designated (subject to the circumstances set out in the paragraph below). If the NLE moves to a school that is eligible to be an NSS then the NLE designation will be frozen for a period of six months at which point the school can apply to become an NSS.

If an NLE leaves the school during a deployment, which involves members of the NSS, then the school will retain its status as an NSS, for a year, or until the end of the current deployment, whichever occurs sooner, but the NLE designation will come to an end.

There may be extenuating circumstances that allow the school to remain designated as an NSS under the leadership of a new headteacher, but these will be dealt with individually and a decision made which takes all evidence into consideration.

Those NLEs moving into the role of Chief Executive of a group of schools, may retain their NLE designation as long as they continue to be accountable for an NSS which meets the eligibility criteria, and are able to access and direct resources from at least one school that meets the NSS criteria.

Eligibility criteria for Local Leaders of Education

Eligibility criteria for Local Leaders of Education

The criteria used are designed to:

ensure that headteachers are not being used to support other schools when they may need to remain in their own school to address issues there

ensure that the applicant is credible in the role of a Local Leader, giving confidence to those receiving the services and support of the LLE

support sustainable school improvement practices

To be considered as an LLE you must:

be a serving headteacher or executive headteacher with headship experience of a minimum of three years. (It is also expected that you will be looking to remain a serving headteacher for a minimum of two years)

be a headteacher of a school that:

has received an Ofsted inspection (on which you are named, and which took place no longer than three years before the date of your application to be an LLE) with a judgement of at least good overall and at least good for either the effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvements, or the leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners¹

if a secondary school, at least 30% of pupils gained at least 5 GCSEs at A* to C (inc. English and maths) according to the most recently available year's data and the school is not in receipt of significant National Challenge support

if a primary school, at least 55% or more of pupils are achieving level 4 or above in both maths and English at Key Stage 2 according to the most recently available year's data

shows evidence of improved or consistent levels of attainment which are not significantly below the average for the local authority

shows evidence of contextual value added scores which are not significantly below the national average

has the capacity and readiness of middle and senior leadership to support this work, including working directly with a partner school, should this be needed

have the ability to work sensitively and collaboratively with a partner headteacher and other stakeholders adopting a coaching and mentoring supportive style

¹ Terminology for Leadership and Management and Capacity to Improve relates to the previous Ofsted framework - before September 2009, and to the new Ofsted framework - September 2009 onwards.

In exceptional circumstances, applications *may* be considered from applicants who do not meet all the above criteria, for example where:

the school is below floor targets and/or receiving National Challenge support, yet all other criteria are met. In such cases, further information will be sought from the NCA, SIP and/or local authority to ensure that there is a strong consensus that the applicant's school will not in any way be disadvantaged by the Headteacher fulfilling the LLE role

the Ofsted is more than three years old or took place before you took up post as headteacher at your current school (in which case we will request evidence that you currently meet the criteria relating to leadership and outcomes through, for example, a SIP or LA report)

you have not completed three years substantive service at the time of your application but will have following the scheduled LLE training or have served time as an associate or acting headteacher that brings the total to 3 years

The Ofsted judgement overall is satisfactory, but the judgement for capacity to improve and leadership and management are good

In all such cases, the applicant must also receive a highly supportive reference from the local authority explaining the exceptional circumstances as well as provide supporting evidence in the application. The application will be carefully considered before a decision is made.

If you have queries about any of the above, please email localleaders@nationalcollege.org.uk.

Schools leading schools II: the growing impact of National Leaders of Education

National Leaders of Education are outstanding school leaders who, together with the staff in their schools, use their knowledge and experience to provide additional leadership capacity to schools in difficulty.



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