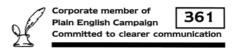# Developing leadership: National Support Schools

Strategies used to develop leadership potential and effectiveness in schools

This small-scale study identifies the strategies used in 24 successful schools, designated National Support Schools, to develop effective leadership skills and build capacity to sustain excellence. The schools gave their staff a wealth of opportunities to take on leadership roles and provided them with high-quality support and training. The report also identifies good practice in the approaches these schools took to develop leadership skills and effectiveness in 20 client schools with whom they were working.

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Executive summary

During 2009, inspectors visited 24 primary and secondary National Support Schools, led by National Leaders of Education.[1] Visits were also made to 20 schools that were working in partnership with these National Support Schools. Partnerships had been established for a variety of reasons and ranged from supporting client schools in an Ofsted category of concern to working on developments with other schools judged as good or outstanding in their previous inspection. The focus of the survey was to identify the strategies and approaches used in these effective schools to develop and sustain the quality of leadership at all levels, in both their own and other schools.

One key feature of these successful schools was the strong leadership demonstrated by their headteachers, particularly of teaching and learning. This leadership provided all staff with a clear role model from which they could learn and could develop an understanding of effective leadership. Another key feature was the unremitting development of leadership at all levels. Four important factors contributed to this: the headteacher and other senior leaders invested time in knowing all their staff extremely well in order to develop all aspects of leadership; strong professional development networks were established, in and beyond the school, to create a wealth of opportunities for staff to develop their leadership skills; frequent, open and candid communication ensured that staff knew with absolute clarity what was expected of them; and well-developed systems for monitoring and evaluating staff performance were intrinsically linked to whole-school improvement.

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

All the client schools visited were positive about working with National Support Schools and how it had contributed to developing leadership skills in their schools. A

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[1] National Support Schools are selected by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services. In order to become a National Support School, a school's performance data must show a clear upward trend or consistently high levels of attainment, with contextual value-added data above the national average. Alternatively, the school's local authority must provide evidence of the school's upward trend or pupils' high attainment that is attributable to the headteacher. The eligibility criteria are listed at Annex B. For further information, see:
www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/professional-development/national-leaders-of-education/nle-who-for.htm

crucial factor in the success of such work was the care with which a partnership was set up, and particularly the extent to which staff in both the schools were clear about the expectations of joint working and the protocols to be followed.

Partnership work provided mutual benefits for the schools visited. These included flexibility to meet the different needs of the schools working together; opportunities to reflect, support and challenge across the partnership and to observe and adapt good practice. In particular, partnerships provided the National Leaders of Education with good opportunities to share and refine their own skills. Their staff gained additional and valuable experiences of leadership through working in another school, often in a very different context. However, inspectors found less evidence that the leadership skills and effectiveness of governors were being developed as thoroughly through these partnerships, for example by providing them with opportunities to work together directly and share effective practice. Inspectors also found that the impact of work to build leadership capacity was not measured and evaluated consistently and systematically across the partnerships.

Key findings

- The best leadership was focused on teaching and learning with headteachers seeing this as their core business.

- There was a strong emphasis in the schools visited on distributing leadership and creating opportunities to provide staff with meaningful and relevant leadership opportunities in a variety of contexts.

- The concept of 'growing our own' leaders was a particularly strong feature of the schools visited. Potential staff leaders were identified quickly and their skills were developed systematically. This contributed significantly to recruiting and retaining high-quality staff and sustaining the schools' good or outstanding overall effectiveness.

- There was no one model of successful leadership development. Crucially, training and development were carefully tailored to meet the needs of the school and the individual, although the focus was always on improving teaching and learning.

- Coaching and mentoring successfully underpinned training and development opportunities to build up confidence. Staff were given time to reflect on their learning and discuss with other leaders how it could best be applied in practice.

- For the client schools, working in partnership with successful schools had mutual benefits for the development of leadership capacity and effectiveness. Partnership provided professional challenge and support, offered examples of good practice, allowed a flexible approach and presented a wide variety of opportunities for staff to develop their skills within and beyond their own school context.

- Partnership work got off to a positive start when clear protocols and shared aims were established across the partnership from the beginning. Where this was less evident, barriers (including some reluctance to engage) had to be overcome.

- Opportunities for governors to work together in the partnerships to support their development and effectiveness were not as frequent or systematic as for other leaders.
- The systematic evaluation of partnership working in building leadership capacity at all levels was evident in only 11 of the 20 partnerships.

Recommendations

The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services should:

- extend opportunities for successful leaders and their schools to work in a variety of partnerships with others to build wider leadership capacity and spread the influence of the best practice on school improvement.

Local authorities should:

- increase opportunities for governors to work in partnership with those in other schools to develop and sustain high-quality leadership.

Schools should:

- develop plans for sustaining effective leadership and building capacity, including through working in partnership with others
- ensure their planning is rooted in improving teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils
- ensure that, when setting up partnerships, protocols and expectations are clearly defined
- evaluate systematically the impact of working together on building capacity at all levels of leadership across a partnership.

Developing leadership potential in effective schools

National Support Schools

1. In 2005, the then Secretary of State asked the National College for School Leadership to establish a group of outstanding headteachers from primary, secondary and special schools; these would demonstrate not only excellent leadership in their own schools but also support schools in challenging circumstances.

2. In 2006, 68 headteachers were designated as National Leaders of Education and their schools as National Support Schools.[2] There are now over 300 of these schools. Their purpose is to provide additional leadership capacity for others. Typically, a National Support School will work with another school for between one and three years.

3. Visits were made to 24 of these schools to identify the strategies and approaches they used to develop and sustain effective leadership from which others might learn.

Positive role models and leadership credibility

4. Evidence from Ofsted's inspections shows that effective leadership is key to school improvement and to sustaining high levels of performance. Common characteristics of the best leadership include honest self-evaluation and well-distributed leadership. Underperformance or a decline in performance are linked to weak leadership, changes in or vacancies for leadership posts, and difficulties in recruiting or retaining effective staff.[3] The most effective headteachers develop leadership capacity in their own schools to sustain excellence through:

   ■ creating the right climate and investing time in knowing their staff well

   ■ linking their own leadership and, indeed, the rest of the school's, to improving teaching and learning

   ■ using robust monitoring and evaluation

   ■ leadership development and planning for succession in leadership

   ■ creating opportunities for leadership

   ■ tailoring in-house and external leadership programmes to match their particular needs

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[2] Designation requires evidence of successful school leadership, sustained high standards, significant added value, a record of effective support to other schools and strong leadership at school, senior and middle leadership levels. For further information, see Annex B and the website of the National College at: www.nationalcollege.org.uk/national-leaders-of-education.

[3] *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2009/010*, Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Annual-Report-2009-10

- using research and academic development
- developing support staff as leaders
- developing pupils as leaders.

Creating the climate and investing time in knowing staff well

5. The senior leaders in the schools visited for this survey knew their staff very well. As well as knowing their professional strengths and what needed to be developed further, the leaders took time to understand individuals' aspirations, including how they saw their careers developing. This detailed understanding was gained informally as well as through the formal process of performance management.

6. These leaders made sure that performance management was highly effective because it was relevant, meaningful for individuals and linked closely to the school's professional development and improvement plans. In the best examples, the specific development of leadership skills was explicit, clearly articulated and central to the school's performance management.

> In one of the primary schools visited, all the staff had a specific performance management target that related to leadership and management, as well as a target for pupils' performance and one for professional development.
>
> Performance development included 'career conversations' to support long-term planning that was designed to sustain growth in leadership skills. Questions such as 'Where do you see yourself next?' and 'How will you get there?' focused staff on planning for their futures. As a result of these meetings, the headteacher took specific action to create opportunities for staff to work towards their career goals. For example, a deputy headteacher returning from maternity leave wanted to increase her knowledge of budgeting in readiness for moving to headship, so arrangements were made for her to work with the person responsible for finance.

7. Clear structures for line management and communication were a common feature of the schools visited. Staff valued such structures not only for the purposes of accountability but also as a source of support. For example, they furnished opportunities to observe senior leaders using specific skills, such as conducting difficult conversations.

8. The senior leaders in these schools successfully and continually communicated their ideals, vision and expectations, summed up by the member of staff who said that these high expectations were communicated through the headteacher's 'every action, daily conduct and interaction with staff and pupils'. This was typical of the leadership seen in the National Support Schools visited.

9. Staff at all levels in these schools saw their leaders as approachable and willing to give them time. As a result, they felt able to share concerns and make suggestions about how to improve the school. During the survey, it was common for them to describe how they were able to say: 'I don't understand' or 'I need more support'; they were confident that leaders would respond positively and provide them with the help they needed to undertake their roles well. Typically, such support was provided through a range of strategies, including:

- training programmes
- working alongside experienced colleagues
- coaching
- rehearsing difficult conversations
- reviewing, with senior leaders, the effectiveness of actions that had been taken.

10. These effective schools balanced support with challenge. Staff explained how their headteachers were not afraid to have challenging conversations and take difficult decisions. As one headteacher explained: 'I had to accept that mistakes could be made and accept them as part of growth and development. This does not mean an acceptance of failure and poor standards but it does mean an earned autonomy.' The three examples below, from secondary schools, illustrate how leaders made a point of giving honest and focused feedback to develop their staff's effective leadership skills.

> Staff who applied for internal promotion received very detailed feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. If they were not successful, the reasons were set out clearly so that they were encouraged and better prepared for their next application. As a result, staff had a clearer understanding about why someone else got the job and what they needed to do to improve their promotion prospects. They used the information to identify training needs or seek other leadership opportunities, resulting in the success of subsequent applications

> On an 'away day', senior leaders observed middle leaders and their teams on team-building activities. Following this, they gave detailed feedback to the middle leaders on team dynamics, including the extent to which the team leader ensured that all the team members were involved. Senior and middle leaders discussed together how any weaknesses that had been identified could be tackled. This helped team leaders to reflect more critically on their own leadership skills and develop new approaches to leading their teams.

> Middle leaders were given specific time to shadow senior leaders over the course of a term. They observed a range of activities, including conducting meetings with stakeholders, monitoring provision, providing feedback and holding difficult conversations. At the end of the term the headteacher held a detailed debriefing so that the middle leaders could reflect on what they had seen, consider what worked well and what they might have done differently in a similar situation. The experience helped middle leaders to understand not only the wider issues of school leadership but also the impact of their own work in the school. It gave them the opportunity to experience how an effective team worked. Importantly, the debriefing also enabled the headteacher to learn where improvements might be made in the leadership teams and evaluate the impact on staff of strategies, approaches and policies.

Improving teaching and learning through leadership

11. All the National Support Schools visited made an explicit link between the effectiveness of leadership and the improvement of teaching and learning. This emphasis on good-quality teaching and learning was given the highest priority and was central to the work of leaders at all levels. For instance, teaching and learning dominated discussion at recruitment interviews. One primary headteacher, when recruiting staff, emphasised this by asking candidates if they could identify what made an outstanding lesson and if they could teach such a lesson.

12. Typically, developing leadership skills to improve teaching and learning included training on how to conduct lesson observations and give incisive, effective feedback. Training included undertaking observations in a pair with senior leaders as well as with colleagues from other schools to moderate judgements and secure consistency. This reinforced the intrinsic purpose of leadership in driving improvement in teaching and learning.

> In a secondary school, a headteacher observed a lesson with the head of the mathematics department, following some work that they had done together on identifying the features of good mathematics lessons. The joint observation identified a need for the middle leader to focus more on the progress students were making rather than what the teacher being observed was doing. Taking part in this process sharpened the head of department's understanding of how to judge the quality of learning in mathematics lessons and how to help teachers to become more effective. As a result, the quality of mathematics lessons improved because teachers were placing a greater emphasis on assessment for learning and giving students better written feedback.

13. Consistent, high-quality teaching and learning were central to the work of the senior leadership teams in all the schools and were at the heart of their discussions. High expectations of the quality and consistency of teaching and learning permeated all levels of leadership. Typically, these schools had

invested in developing leading teachers or Advanced Skills Teachers.[4] All the leaders were involved in sustaining this high quality through robust tracking of pupils' progress, systematic monitoring of teachers' planning, scrutiny of pupils' books, as well as through regular observations of lessons. In one of the secondary schools visited, the staff noted that there was no complacency because 'we know that any satisfactory teaching seen is not good enough'. In this school, the teachers whom the school judged to be satisfactory were given tailored support until their teaching developed to a consistently good standard.

14. All the staff in the schools visited understood what good teaching and learning looked like because they had been given opportunities to see it for themselves, both in their own and other schools. These observations were commonly followed by discussions about what they had learned, how it might have an impact on their own practice and what the school itself could also learn.

> A number of teachers in a primary school were participating in a programme to improve teaching.[5] This involved some taught elements as well as opportunities to observe good practice. The participants explained that one part of the programme focused on the start of lessons. They watched a variety of lessons with good openings before planning their own lesson starter. This was then observed and evaluated by two other participants. The experience was discussed with the rest of the group before the programme moved on to consider another aspect of teaching and learning.

Robust monitoring and evaluation

15. Robust planning, monitoring and evaluation by leaders were consistent features of the National Support Schools visited. School managers analysed a range of performance data, carefully tracked the progress that pupils made, conducted lesson observations systematically, and routinely scrutinised pupils' work to identify strengths and areas for further development. Staff at all levels were involved in professional dialogue and were therefore very clear about the expectations of them and the pupils.

> Staff in one of the primary schools visited explained: 'The school shares all outcomes of reviews with staff, warts and all.' The staff appreciated that this resulted in improvement, helping them to develop their own understanding of excellence and their ability to evaluate their own work as well as that of others.
>
> The headteacher broke down the approach into four simple steps:

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[4] Advanced Skills Teachers are those who are judged, through external assessment, to have demonstrated excellent classroom practice. Their role is to support colleagues in their own and other schools to develop their practice. For further information, see: www.teachernet.gov.uk/professionaldevelopment/ast/
[5] The school was part of London Challenge.

- say what we want people to do (expectations)
- show them how to do it
- give them the resources to do it
- monitor that it is being done.

The headteacher illustrated this by describing the approach taken to improve teaching.

'We started off by saying: "What is a good lesson?" We trained people how to teach it and got the best teachers to demonstrate this. We gave specific time for planning and improving. Then we monitored it systematically to ensure it was being done the way we wanted it to be done. All staff look at practice together, with clearly defined roles for teams. For example, everyone brings their class books to a book review meeting. Some meetings may look at consistency in marking, others at progression in learning and others at presentation.'

16. By involving all staff systematically in monitoring and evaluation, leaders were able to demonstrate through their own practice how to use a range of leadership skills effectively. They were also able to identify potential leaders by spotting staff who already had some or all of these skills and those who needed further development. The skills included the ability to:

- evaluate the quality of a lesson accurately

- provide candid feedback and give hard messages

- identify areas of development for the individual and school

- analyse a range of data

- synthesise information to identify priorities

- triangulate information from a range of sources to evaluate the impact of actions

- present information to a range of audiences

- set deadlines and use time effectively to ensure that they were met.

Leadership development and planning for succession

17. A particular feature of successful leadership development was the skill with which the headteachers spotted potential and, at an early stage, developed the leadership skills of teachers or other staff. 'Growing our own' was an important principle underpinning staff development in these schools.

18. The headteachers recognised the benefits they gained from investing in leadership development. They retained high-quality staff and sustained excellence. One primary headteacher captured this by saying:

'The impact has meant that staff feel valued and want to work here. Genuinely empowering them is the best retention strategy and a high-

quality staff team is the best resource. The most important outcome is the pride everyone feels at being part of a successful school.'

19. It was not uncommon during the visits to these schools for staff to point out to inspectors that they had not recognised skills and talents in themselves until the headteacher had shown them their potential. Such potential was developed explicitly and systematically through clear career pathways, underpinned by good-quality training and support. The training and support were matched to individuals' different stages of leadership development.

> On appointment to one of the primary schools visited, all teaching and support staff had their own long-term development plans, established through consultation between the headteacher and the individual. These plans included a timescale with responsibilities, training, internal staff development and clearly identified external development opportunities. Each stage was planned methodically and reviewed regularly, both informally and through planned formal reviews.

20. In another example, leaders in an outstanding secondary school realised that they needed to increase their leadership capacity in order to be in a better position to provide a range of support and training to other schools. The 'apprentice leader' scheme was introduced as a response.

> Apprentice heads of house and apprentice assistant headteachers were assigned to substantive leaders, shadowing their work and gradually taking on some responsibilities. Aspects of the role were considered in regular meetings in the context of whatever was happening in school at the time. For instance, linked to the start of the monitoring cycle of the tutorial programme, apprentice heads of house discussed what to look for when observing tutors. Apprentices were mentored carefully to ensure that the role of an apprentice was providing good-quality professional development.

21. In one of the secondary schools visited, many of the teachers had been trained at the school through the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP).[6] For instance, a member of the support staff successfully followed the programme and, after qualifying as a teacher, quickly became a head of department. In the schools visited, there were many examples of support staff who had had similar career pathways. They were very clear that the headteacher was constantly searching for leadership potential, looking for specific skills and attributes so that the school could 'grow its own leaders' from the current staff.

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[6] This is an on-the-job training programme that allows graduates to qualify as a teacher while they are employed by a school. For further information, see:
www.tda.gov.uk/Recruit/thetrainingprocess/typesofcourse/employmentbased/gtp.aspx.

22. Successful leaders had a perceptive understanding of wider leadership issues and took advantage of external developments to assist their own school. For example, with the approaching retirement of a number of its headteachers, one of the local authorities visited recognised the need to plan for succession. A National Leader of Education worked with the authority to identify potential headteachers at an early stage, developing and piloting a programme in his own school to support them.

> An internal programme of targeted support, 'Future Change Makers', began in April 2008. This was a pilot of an approach that might be used across the local authority, building on a course for middle leaders. The programme comprised five elements:
>
> ■ career coaching by headteachers
> ■ internal and external training sessions
> ■ placements and internships – one week in a similar school and another in a very different school
> ■ a school-based project, working with another staff member on the programme
> ■ involvement in the local authority's Coaching Schools Project.
>
> The programme specified entry criteria. In the first cohort, applicants had to have had two years of successful teaching experience, and show clear potential for senior leadership and high levels of commitment. In the words of the headteacher, these staff had to demonstrate that they were 'ardent self-developers'.
>
> The events of the programme, spread over three terms, included termly reviews and evaluations, as well as an external evaluation.

Creating opportunities

23. In the schools visited there was a particularly strong emphasis on providing opportunities, through shared or distributed leadership, for all staff to develop their skills and effectiveness. In one of the primary schools visited, for example, the headteacher held regular, open, senior leadership team meetings to which all staff were invited. Agendas were published in advance and those who had a particular interest in the focus of the meeting or wished to develop in that area attended. Some staff, such as those who had expressed an interest in taking on leadership roles, were expected to attend routinely.

24. One way of sharing responsibilities was to move staff periodically into different teams. This helped them to learn about the variety of leadership roles and gave them opportunities to take on new responsibilities. They also had the opportunity to observe highly effective leaders, establish wider professional links and share responsibility across the wider school community. Staff in one of the primary schools visited were emphatic that: 'There is no "us and them" because senior leaders and staff are part of one team.'

25. As part of their strategy to sustain effective leadership and build capacity for the future, all the headteachers visited created opportunities for as many staff as possible to lead different aspects of the school's work. One of the headteachers said:

> 'The key to a successful school is recognising that everyone has the potential to lead on some aspect which is going to add to the education of the children. My job is to find the area in which they can make a contribution and help them develop that potential so that the school really benefits.'

26. Typically, staff were given opportunities to shadow leaders with different levels of responsibility and to take on part of that role. This shadowing led to the gradual acquisition of wider responsibility and so built leadership capacity systematically. In this way staff were willing to 'step up' and grasped the opportunities to do so. The two examples below illustrate this approach.

> Senior leaders in an outstanding secondary school had a 'leading teacher' programme with a number of two-year developmental posts. The programme focused specifically on staff in their third year of teaching. It helped them, at an early stage in their career, to build up leadership skills through carefully structured and targeted developmental work in school, high-quality training and group work. Their potential to take on leadership positions was identified through the school's performance review system and the headteacher's understanding of the characteristics of good leadership. The posts covered six areas:
>
> ■ provision for gifted and talented pupils
> ■ information and communication technology across the curriculum
> ■ international education
> ■ assessment for learning
> ■ developing 'pupil voice'
> ■ literacy.
>
> Successful applicants took the lead in one of these areas. The development work was carefully structured, with clear outcomes and signposts for progress. Each member of staff had a separate line manager and coach from the senior leadership team. They were also given additional non-teaching time. The leaders worked together as a developmental group and received training, including wider background theory.
>
> At the end of the first year, the participants presented their findings to the rest of the group. In the second year, they wrote up their work fully as a case study. Both these aspects were accredited at Masters level. Many staff on the programme had already been promoted to substantive leadership posts within the school.

> In one of the primary schools visited, reviewing and developing the school improvement plan provided specific opportunities for staff to have a taste of senior leadership roles. After consultation, including with governors, a limited set of priorities was identified and each priority was assigned to a staff member who was not necessarily an established leader. With mentoring from senior leaders, these staff led the work: planning actions, providing training, leading working parties and monitoring progress. They gained experience of taking the lead on a whole-school issue and the confidence to seek promotion.

27. Staff in these schools were also encouraged to look for and create their own development opportunities. For example, if they had a particular interest, they were able to undertake action research or lead small pilot areas. If successful, these pilots were rolled out more widely.

> One of the schools visited promoted the management of change and innovation through trials or pilots involving a small number of pupils or a few teachers working together. Support provided to the staff working on a pilot included:
>
> - identifying the specific timescale, costs and benefits of new projects with senior leaders or line managers
> - with senior leaders, rehearsing presentations about the pilot to the whole staff
> - receiving coaching from senior leaders in how to take forward new developments
> - clarifying how to track the progress of the initiative
> - discussing with senior leaders how to identify and overcome potential barriers
> - getting explicit feedback on performance.
>
> If the trial was effective, the initiative was implemented for all.
>
> This approach made change manageable, built links between departments and equipped staff with the skills they needed to lead change successfully.

28. Developing successful leadership skills required the right balance of support and challenge for staff. One headteacher stressed that 'leadership opportunities often involve providing a challenge and taking people out of their comfort zone'. These successful leaders were aware that simply creating opportunities was not enough and that support was needed, which they provided, to ensure that new challenges were accomplished well. One of the headteachers remarked on the 'fine line between empowering and dumping'. Another explicitly differentiated between staff to whom responsibilities could be devolved and those to whom responsibility was delegated. He made a clear distinction between 'devolution' and 'delegation' in his school:

'Those staff who have the expertise and experience have devolved responsibility and are given autonomy. They are solely in charge of their area. However, less experienced staff have responsibilities delegated to them, with more experienced staff providing support and an overview.'

29. Co-opting staff to senior leadership teams for a fixed period provided aspiring leaders with meaningful opportunities that helped them to understand the 'big picture' and develop their strategic thinking. It also helped them to gain confidence and make an informed choice about whether to seek substantive leadership roles.

30. The National Support Schools visited were able to provide their teaching and support staff with opportunities to develop their leadership skills beyond their own school. These included:

- shadowing colleagues when supporting staff in another school

- undertaking temporary leadership roles in another school for a short time

- rotating roles and responsibilities to facilitate substantive leaders in providing external support

- being seconded to other schools or to the local authority

- working with national subject organisations to provide training for other schools

- undertaking action research or higher education qualifications.

31. Headteachers took the initiative to make sure that these wider development opportunities were available for their staff. For example, one headteacher commented: 'I don't wait to be asked. I tell the local authority that one of my teachers is particularly skilled in – whatever, and then I ask "How will you use their skill?"'

32. The two examples below illustrate how a primary school used internal and external opportunities in different ways to develop leadership skills.

The work of six Advanced Skills Teachers on the staff was planned carefully. There needed to be a balance between providing meaningful opportunities for them to develop their leadership skills and maintaining excellence in the school. To achieve this, the headteacher things so that the Advanced Skills Teachers worked in pairs and shared a class. This meant that when they were supporting others inside and outside the school, high-quality teaching continued in their classes. In addition, the teachers used each other as sounding boards, challenging one another to improve.

Another member of staff who was teaching in the school was given the opportunity to provide cover for leave being taken in the specialist unit for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders that was attached to the school. It

became evident that inclusion was a particular strength of hers. She was supported to become assistant manager and then manager of the unit. Her expertise is now used to support staff in the main school and in other schools, including working with the local authority's specialist advisory team.

Tailoring leadership development programmes

33. Headteachers in the schools visited placed great emphasis on providing training and development that were specifically designed to enhance leadership skills, sustain high-quality leadership and build the capacity for leadership in the future. Training and development were provided for leaders at all levels through:

    ■ in-house training

    ■ local, national and international programmes

    ■ involvement in networks with leaders at a similar level from other schools

    ■ opportunities to take on new leadership roles in their own and other schools.

    In-school training was tailored carefully to the specific needs of staff. External training was also selected to secure a close match between the course content, the needs of the individual and those of the school.

34. Headteachers kept their own leadership skills up to date and sustained their high levels of motivation by supporting the provision of leadership training and the development of training packages. For example, a headteacher and deputy headteacher from one of the secondary schools visited provided the local authority's programme for aspiring middle leaders. They drew on the expertise and skills of other headteachers and practitioners to enrich the programme and to provide diverse learning experiences for the participants. The programme included nine after-school sessions and a residential weekend. They benefited from building wider networks with leaders from a range of other schools and used these to provide further development opportunities for their own emerging leaders. Training packages that they had provided were also modified for their own school's specific leadership priorities. One primary headteacher described how the work kept her 'energised' and helped her to sustain excellence.

35. Assigning a mentor and providing coaching to emerging leaders were common and important features of the approach to leadership development in the National Support Schools visited. By providing dedicated time and specific support to help staff to reflect on, evaluate and solve problems, mentoring and coaching successfully complemented the practical opportunities and training that staff had received. An associate headteacher in one of the secondary schools visited illustrates this approach.

'I was offered a place as an "associate deputy headteacher" as part of the Future Leaders programme. A deputy headteacher was identified as my mentor. Initially, I shadowed him wherever he went and also shared his office, allowing me to observe every interaction that took place. Gradually, I began to take on particular responsibilities. With this came numerous challenges, including managing staff. Responsibilities continued to increase gradually and I found myself leading a group of middle leaders. I would discuss every idea with my mentor and send him all my written communication to check the 'tone'. Gradually, as my actions and decisions became more autonomous, I depended on him less for the guidance and just 'checked in' with him after situations to ensure I had responded correctly.

The most difficult challenge was when I was managing a particular member of staff who was underperforming. Initially, I had to prepare and rehearse every interaction thoroughly. I would explore conversations and outcomes with my mentor, often writing down excellent responses to achieve the outcomes that I wanted. The performance management meeting was an uncomfortable one but I was determined to secure change quickly. I set the targets high. The feedback from my mentor matched exactly how I was judging my performance in this situation and was the most accurate feedback I have received throughout my teaching career. The tips my mentor gave me about dealing with challenging situations helped me to reflect on my practice. The important point was that the discussions were candid and constructive. They helped me to deal with a real situation.'

36. All the National Support Schools visited used a wide range of external programmes and training courses to develop the leadership capacity of teaching and support staff, such as those offered by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services and local authorities. Very importantly, the key to successful leadership development was not linked to any one specific programme or course but to mixing and matching them carefully to meet the well-understood needs of both the individual and the school.

37. The schools noted that, as they became more familiar with the variety of courses and programmes offered by the National College, and as programmes had developed in response to participants' feedback, they were able to match them more precisely to the needs of individuals. One way that schools did this was to invite previous participants to share their views of the training with prospective participants before the latter applied. This helped to determine whether a particular course was right for them.

38. Leaders at all levels benefited from external training because they developed networks. Leaders noted how much they learnt from one another because, despite their differing contexts, their schools often faced similar leadership challenges.

39. Almost all the leaders identified the coaching programmes provided by the National College as being the most influential in informing their practice. They particularly noted how these programmes helped them to build problem-solving skills in others so that emerging leaders were better equipped to present solutions.

Using research and academic development

40. Particularly strong features in 12 of the schools visited were their links with higher education institutions and the use of academic research to sustain excellent practice and ensure that leaders were at the forefront of new developments. In these schools, there was an explicit expectation that academic literature should be used to drive improvements. As one primary headteacher said: 'There is a hunger to be informed by research, by national as well as international developments, and to continuously improve.' To promote this the school distinguished between operational and leadership meetings. In leadership meetings, research articles were discussed, including how they might be used to inform practice in their own context. The leaders attended educational seminars and lectures together and also looked to business practices to 'keep things in school fresh and make it a vibrant place for staff to work'.

41. By understanding research methodology, leaders were able to adopt similar approaches to challenge complacency and drive change for improvement.

> The headteacher in one of the secondary schools was supporting another school to improve the rates of students' progress. Staff in the client school were deeply sceptical about the proposal to adopt more challenging targets. A piece of research was undertaken in which half the year group (120 pupils) was given targets in the school's usual way and the other half was given more challenging targets. Pupils were randomly allocated to the two groups and checks were made to ensure there were no differences in the abilities and attitudes of the two groups. Staff were not made aware of the experiment and assumed that the same mechanism was used to produce the targets for both groups. When pupils completed their GCSE courses, the extent to which targets were achieved was evaluated. Approximately similar numbers exceeded, reached or fell short of their targets, regardless of the degree of challenge. Consequently, staff were convinced of the value of setting challenging targets.

42. Four of the schools visited saw strong links with schools overseas as an opportunity for promoting leadership development. The different approaches they discovered were adapted to develop practice in their own schools and in other local schools.

> One of the primary schools had well-established links with a school in the United States of America which had an academic book club. The headteacher introduced a similar approach. He routinely identified

academic literature and discussed its implications with other headteachers to ensure that the improvement work they were undertaking together was informed and well grounded in research. Staff in the headteacher's school were expected to read key academic books that exemplified the school's vision so that they quickly understood the school's ethos and long-term goals. As well as this, all staff were expected to read two short children's books which exemplified the school's philosophy: *Once upon an ordinary school day* about exciting teaching and learning and *Something else* which promoted inclusion. Academic literature, guidance from the then DCSF and Ofsted's reports were used in staff training to set the scene and explain the thinking behind any new developments.

The American school also used secondments to other schools to develop staff. The headteacher had adopted a similar approach and regularly sent teachers and support staff to other schools to develop their good practice further.

Developing support staff as leaders

43. A common feature of the National Support Schools visited was the priority they gave to developing the leadership skills of their support staff because they were aware of the important contribution they made to sustaining the school's high performance. Senior leaders recognised the leadership potential in support staff and used the same strategies and approaches to their development as they did with teachers.

44. A clear career structure and progression routes for teaching assistants were common. For example, in one of the primary schools visited, this had raised expectations and increased the leadership responsibility and accountability of support staff. They were able to describe clearly the impact they were having on learning and how they contributed to sustaining high-quality provision. In another primary school, a higher level teaching assistant became a champion for higher level teaching assistants for the local authority and helped other schools in developing the role. She was then seconded to the local authority for two days a week to take the lead on this area.

45. Typically, support staff in the National Support Schools felt that their views were welcomed and valued. They were encouraged to identify problems and present solutions which the school would consider and act on if necessary.

A teaching assistant came to a small primary school as a volunteer five years before. She said that she was 'inspired' by the teacher she was working with to gain a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 which the school supported. She then successfully applied for a job as a teaching assistant in the school. Having discussed her particular interests with the headteacher, she was invited by the school to undertake a three-

day Forest School residential course which she said 'switched something on inside me'.[7] She completed the course successfully completed, is now the Forest School leader and direct supports six pupils each week who need additional support.

46. Developing the leadership skills of support staff increased the schools' capacity to improve. The common principle was that the development of support staff was linked explicitly to improving outcomes for pupils. This was achieved, either directly or indirectly, by enabling teachers to focus more of their time on planning and teaching successful lessons.

> A member of the support staff in a primary school was the lead for resourcing the curriculum. Her role was clearly defined and designed to ensure that teachers had the tools to teach consistently well-planned, high-quality lessons. She looked at lesson evaluations and subject overviews to ensure that the right resources were available when they were needed to make sure good learning took place.
>
> She was also responsible for all the timetabling, staff rotas and managing parents' appointments with teachers on open evenings. This not only contributed to the smooth running of the school but freed teachers to focus on the key task of teaching and learning. She attended senior leadership team meetings on a rota basis and shared responsibility with the co-headteacher for assessment. Crucial to the success of the distributed leadership was that the division of responsibility was clear and understood by everyone in the school.

47. In this sample of National Support Schools, priority was given to the leadership development of support staff who were not directly involved in teaching and learning. A business director in one of the secondary schools visited said:

> 'In the five years I have been here my role has grown considerably. I am no longer someone who just looks after the finance but am part of the senior leadership team. The headteacher has constantly encouraged me to improve my knowledge and qualifications. Being part of the senior leadership team, I have seen how good leaders behave and go about things. As well as the finance part, I have had to learn about the priorities for development in the school and how these are linked with the school finances. I have been able to help the leadership team do their jobs better because I make sure that they have accurate financial information and can consider a number of alternatives. We have also extended my role to providing service level agreements to local primary schools for financial support.'

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[7] The aim of Forest Schools is to develop personal, social and communication skills through outdoor experiences. For further information, see: www.forestschools.com/index.php.

Developing pupils as leaders

48. Eleven of the National Support Schools visited focused specifically on developing the pupils' leadership skills. This was seen as an essential part of preparing them not only for the next steps in their learning but also for the world of work. Approaches used included:

- providing realistic and supportive contexts for pupils to take forward ideas
- enabling pupils to work with a broad range of people, including those older and younger than themselves
- enabling them to reflect on their learning about leadership
- giving them realistic responsibilities with clearly defined outcomes.

A student in a secondary school explained: 'We were asked to design and lead a project to be presented to pupils in primary schools. We decided that we would combine our love of dance with getting the children in the primary school to understand some scientific principles. First of all, we met a group of sixth form pupils who had a good knowledge of science to ensure that we understood the scientific principles clearly. An external dance company was employed to help us work out a suitable dance through which we could teach the science. We then worked with the teachers to plan lessons. Then we went into the primary schools and taught the classes.

'It was really scary but the children responded really well to us and they seemed to enjoy the lessons very much. In the end, the children performed the dance very well in front of an audience. It made us feel very proud that we had been part of the project. Throughout the project, we were asked to think about what we were learning and how it helped us develop our skills for life and our leadership skills. We were even asked to give a presentation to other teachers. We didn't think we could do it but we did.

'We feel that our confidence has grown, especially working with children and adults. Leadership is about helping others and improving what they do. We feel that the project allowed us to do this. We learned about the differences between autocratic and democratic styles of leadership and the advantages and disadvantages of each style. The project has made us more aware of how important relationships with people are in leadership and also how important it is to plan each project carefully. We feel that we have learned so much that the skills will stay with us at university and at work.'

49. Pupils in the primary schools also had a wide range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills. These included:

■ leading the school council, generating agendas, taking minutes and running council elections

■ supporting the learning of others by acting as buddies for reading

■ taking collective responsibility for the safety and well-being of others, for example, as health and safety representatives and as playground leaders, including supervising activities indoors when it was raining and they could not go outside.

50. In one of the primary schools visited, pupils could explain what being a good leader meant because leadership skills were taught explicitly. For example, the school council wanted to review the variety of homework tasks. The pupils undertook a survey and recommended that homework should be more varied and use a more project-based approach. The findings were fed back to senior leaders and action was taken as a result. The school council monitored the variety of homework activities and its members told inspectors that homework had improved, following the recommendations from the survey.

> A primary school, involved in a network of six other schools, had developed a pupils' conference. This had included key speakers from the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency.[8] Pupils conducted research and presented their own ideas and findings to staff at the conference. Themes included 'What helps us to learn more effectively'.

National Support Schools in action

51. A key element of the National Support School initiative is to support the improvement of other schools, particularly by building leadership capacity within client schools so that improvement can be sustained.[9]

52. All the National Support Schools and client schools visited gave examples of the mutual benefits of working together to develop leadership skills and effectiveness. Supporting others beyond their own school provided the National Leaders of Education with a fresh challenge, as well as realistic opportunities to enhance the leadership skills of their own staff. The client schools benefited

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[8] The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) is responsible for developing the curriculum, assessments and qualifications for schools and colleges; www.qcda.gov.uk

[9] The Schools White Paper noted that 'primary schools which received NLE support in 2007–8 saw a ten percentage point increase in pupils reaching the expected level by age 11 and secondary schools which received NLE support during 2007–8 improved pupils' success at GCSE twice as fast as the national average'; *The importance of teaching – the Schools White Paper 2010*, Department for Education, 2010;
http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=CM+7980.

from the flexibility, support and challenge provided by experienced staff who had effective leadership skills and an up to date understanding of the challenges schools faced. Importantly, the approaches were tailored to meet schools' differing needs and contexts.

Setting up the partnership

53. Partnerships with the National Support Schools were brokered for a variety of reasons, including:

■ to tackle a local authority's concerns about low achievement

■ to provide support for new headteachers

■ to provide support to schools placed in an Ofsted category of concern.

Headteachers from the client schools also sought the opportunity to work with colleagues they knew to be successful.

54. Where partnerships had got off to a good start, those commissioning the arrangement had paid careful attention to how they were set up, for example, by considering the contexts of the schools, their geographical proximity and the characteristics of the people involved that were likely to contribute to the partnership's effectiveness.

> The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services brokered a partnership between two local authorities. One of the local authorities invited bids from schools that it felt would benefit from a partnership with a National Support School in the other local authority. The bids had to identify how the partnership would provide support. Three schools came forward and visited the National Support School before the partnership was finally agreed between the school and one of the bidding schools. Both schools identified similarities in their characteristics. The client school also considered its readiness for the partnership following actions that it had already taken. Agreed areas of focus were identified and an action plan drawn up.

55. The credibility of the National Leaders of Education as successful, serving headteachers who understood the day-to-day issues of leadership was specifically mentioned as a factor contributing to the success of the partnership in 18 of the 20 client schools visited. The work of these successful leaders in building leadership capacity across all levels in their own schools meant they were well placed to support others. A headteacher of a client school in a partnership said:

> 'We were all, at first, a bit wary of what to expect. I was invited to go to the National Leader of Education's school and have a look round. I did not know what to expect. When we walked around, we quickly established an excellent relationship. The National Leader of Education was totally honest about the National Support School and talked about the weaknesses as

well as the strengths. Because of this openness, I felt I was an equal partner. It was important for me to know that the headteacher was experienced and the school had a very good reputation in the area. Their credibility was very important to me. If the National Support School had been disorganised, I would not have had the confidence in its leadership. Once I saw how calm the school was and how clear the systems were, I felt very reassured. There was a feeling of "Let's move forward together". That was very reassuring for me.'

56. The National Leaders of Education interviewed for the survey recognised the sensitivities involved in working with others, particularly where their client schools were in challenging circumstances. Typically, when initiating contact, they paid close attention to ensuring that productive working relationships were established quickly, such as making time for discussions with senior leaders and staff to share their concerns, as well as identifying the key areas of focus for the partnership. The openness of leaders in both the schools in a partnership was a key factor in securing more rapid improvement.

> The National Leader of Education in a secondary school visited the client school at the start of the process and spoke to the whole staff, to 'set the tone and put staff at their ease'. The headteacher also accompanied middle leaders from his school on their first visits to the client school. This helped to develop the relationship by emphasising how much value was put on partnership work.

> In a client school that had been judged by Ofsted to require special measures, staff were extremely positive about the support they had had from the National Support School. At the start of the partnership, the National Leader of Education and the client headteacher held interviews with every member of staff, giving them an opportunity to express their feelings, concerns and hopes. Following these interviews, an action plan was drawn up so that staff could see how their concerns were being taken into account. As a result, staff were more open to change and willing to engage in the work of the partnership.

57. All the client schools visited viewed the partnership positively. However, there were barriers to be overcome if insufficient attention had been paid to establishing clear protocols and shared aims. For example, as a result of roles not having been agreed at the start of a partnership, one National Leader of Education found difficulties 'because, sometimes in front of the governors, it was not clear who was the headteacher and who was supporting'. Barriers included the reluctance of some staff to try new ideas and scepticism about whether the suggestions would make a difference in terms of improving provision and outcomes.

Benefits for the client schools

58. For the client schools, working with leaders at all levels from a successful school had a range of benefits, including a strengthening of the school's leadership and its capacity for improvement. One of the client schools moved from having a notice to improve from Ofsted to being judged good at its next inspection; another moved from being deemed to require special measures in January 2008 to being judged satisfactory in June 2009.

59. Leadership in client schools was supported to:

   ■ develop organisational skills

   ■ distribute leadership roles and responsibilities more widely

   ■ build leadership capacity at all levels.

   For example, in a school which had been judged to require special measures, the partnership had helped to develop clear structures which had been absent before. Roles and responsibilities were clarified, enabling staff to be held accountable for aspects of the school's work for which they were responsible. A member of staff explained the value of the approach:

   > 'We have overlapping responsibilities, so if anyone leaves it would not all collapse. We know our school from the ground now, so we understand where we are having an impact and where we are not.'

60. As noted earlier, a particular strength was the flexible support that the National Support Schools could provide. The degree and type of support varied, depending on a client school's particular needs. One client headteacher explained: 'It [the support] allows us the freedom and flexibility to manage the agenda, but only if the right people with the right attitudes are involved from both schools.'

61. The client schools also valued the 'external eye' that the National Leaders of Education offered. A headteacher of a client school said: 'They provide support as well as challenge in identifying what needs to be done now and what can be left until later.' This helped in prioritising actions for improvement. Another said that the support from the National Leader of Education had helped to rationalise and bring coherence to the external support that was being provided, giving senior leaders 'the space to step back, reflect and consider'. As a result, they were not overwhelmed and remained focused on the right priorities.

62. Expertise in subject leadership from the National Support School was used effectively to strengthen specific areas of the curriculum or build greater capacity within departments. A leader in a secondary school explained:

   > 'We are a newly appointed engineering specialist college and wanted to employ a head of department. As there was no-one with specific

engineering expertise on the staff, I decided to invite the head of department from the National Support School to join the selection and interviewing panel. This worked well because I knew that he had good skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject. Also, since he had been involved in the appointment, it helped to establish good relationships from the start. This was beneficial to both schools, especially as we would be working together on some engineering programmes.'

63. Where accurate and robust monitoring and evaluation were a focus for the work in the client schools, the senior and middle leaders benefited from supportive demonstration and coaching to develop their skills. A headteacher in a client school explained:

'Every meeting we have with the National Leader of Education has a clear, specific purpose. We have gone from a notice to improve to being judged as good. We now want to be outstanding. The coaching model is being used extensively to drive improvements. My assistant headteacher and I have undertaken training in coaching with the National Support School and this is now being developed with other leaders in our school.'

64. Typically, support focused on helping leaders at all levels to have a better understanding of how teaching, learning and achievement were central to their leadership roles.

One of the partnerships had a major focus on joint observations of lessons by leaders at similar levels. The client school was very small and its middle leaders, in particular, had few opportunities to observe teaching elsewhere. Pairs of middle leaders from the two schools therefore observed lessons together in both the schools. This supported high-quality discussion about effective teaching and learning and about giving teachers feedback to improve their performance.

65. A National Leader of Education working in another partnership noted that the impact of the work undertaken was reflected in the language the staff used in the client school; they 'changed the language they used so that it became more focused on teaching and learning and they were held more accountable for the progress of children'.

66. In the way they involved their own middle leaders systematically in providing partnership support, the National Support Schools demonstrated the benefits of developing leadership capacity at all levels. For example, in one partnership, all the staff from the client school – senior staff, teachers and support staff – attended the National Support School for a day. They observed lessons and joined workshops. Middle leaders spent the day in their paired departments. They carried out joint observations with their peers, talked about and saw first-hand how the department worked. They also attended leadership workshops; these were matched carefully to areas of need that had been identified and were led by the National Support School's middle leaders.

67. Four of the 11 client secondary schools visited cited the secondment of staff to the client school as a benefit. In one school, the secondment of a head of department from the National Support School to support a new head of department who was leading an inexperienced team was seen as particularly beneficial. It enhanced the leadership skills of the head of department and, as a result, the quality of teaching in the department also improved. The following example demonstrates clearly the benefits of a secondment to both schools in a partnership.

> The deputy headteacher from the National Support School was seconded, initially, to the client school for two days each week. He got to know the client school well and was able to judge better what would work and what would not, given the very different context and size of the schools. The experience provided him with a meaningful opportunity to develop his leadership skills and he used them to apply successfully for a headship. His secondment created opportunities for eight staff in the National Support School to take on additional responsibilities and so develop their own leadership skills.

68. There was little evidence from the schools visited, however, that the leadership skills and effectiveness of governors were being developed as systematically through the partnership as other aspects of leadership. Opportunities for leaders to work alongside their peers in real-life situations were not evident for governors in the schools visited, even where governance was a focus for the partnership work. This limited the opportunities governors had to develop their skills in challenging as well as supporting leaders to sustain high-quality leadership.

Benefits of partnership work for National Support Schools

69. The National Leaders of Education and their staff saw benefits of partnership work in developing and sustaining high-quality leadership in their own schools. Typically, leaders in the National Support Schools noted that working with other schools and in different contexts gave them opportunities not only to develop their leadership skills but also to see their own school with a fresh pair of eyes and reflect on their leadership. Senior leaders in one of the National Support Schools summed this up by saying it made them 'consciously competent'. A National Leader of Education in a secondary school reflected that supporting other schools had made him think more deeply about leadership and management:

> 'Having now worked with other schools, it has made me realise what happens when a school starts to slide. I thought my standards were high before, but they are higher now. School-to-school support is the way forward, provided schools are well-matched and support is not dominating.'

70. One headteacher said, 'We unashamedly borrow from the best practice in our partner schools.' As an example, he described how the client school held meetings to discuss pupils' progress in year groups rather than in key stages as in his school. Realising that there was potential in the large phase group meetings for some pupils to be 'lost', meetings were changed to year group meetings to make sure this did not happen.

71. Leaders also identified the benefits to the retention of staff by providing them with professional challenge and support in working with other schools. One headteacher said that he did not want to leave headship but wanted additional challenge; his work as a National Leader of Education challenged him intellectually.

72. By working with client schools, staff were able to gain new leadership skills, put their training and development into practice, and widen their experience. This helped to prepare them for future leadership roles, including headship. A National Leader of Education in one of the secondary schools visited said:

> 'Even the most effective school gains from the relationship because there is always something to learn from another school. Crucially, it can dramatically increase the confidence of emerging leaders, making a major contribution to building leadership capacity. In being identified as a National Support School, it gives the school a reputation that it must strive to live up to.'

73. Successful headteachers were outward-looking and reflective, seeking opportunities for themselves and their staff to learn continually and improve by working with others. Perceptive and thorough self-evaluation ensured that partnership activities carefully matched their schools' needs, balancing the demands of working with others with the benefits to the school and individuals.

74. Partnership working extended beyond the model of one highly successful school working with a client school. Almost three quarters of the successful headteachers visited were involved in a wider range of school networks. These brought together not only like-minded headteachers but other leaders, including Advanced Skills Teachers, who saw the benefits of working together to share their expertise, develop their skills and provide support for each other. There was also involvement in partnerships that extended beyond other schools and educational organisations to business, industry and the local community. Consequently, time was invested in managing a variety of network and partnership activities effectively.

Evaluation

75. Inspectors found a wide range of examples in the schools visited that showed working in partnership with an outstanding school was effective in developing leadership skills and capacity. However, only 11 of the 20 partnerships had systematically evaluated the impact of partnership working. The best

evaluations were thorough, carefully planned and included an emphasis on measuring outcomes for pupils. Clear exit strategies were built in so that the capacity of the client school to sustain improvement beyond the partnership was kept in focus. Approaches were adjusted as capacity was built incrementally. However, when evaluation was less well-developed and exit strategies from the partnership were not specific, the client schools expressed uncertainty about the next steps. One school noted a 'lack of clarity' about what would happen when it was no longer deemed to be a school causing concern.

Notes

Between May and November 2009, inspectors visited 24 National Support Schools: 11 primary schools and 13 secondary schools. They were identified from over 300 National Support Schools to represent a broad range of geographical and socio-economic contexts and to exemplify good practice. The focus of the visits was to identify the strategies and approaches used to develop effective leadership skills that built capacity to sustain excellence. Inspectors held discussions with senior and middle leaders, staff and pupils; scrutinised school documentation and observed lessons.

Inspectors also held discussions with staff and scrutinised documentation during brief visits to 20 client schools that had worked in partnership with the National Support Schools that were visited. (At the time of the survey, four of the National Support Schools either were not supporting a school or the client school was unavailable to contribute to the survey.) Some of the partnerships were at an early stage so that data on outcomes as a result of the partnership were not available. Others demonstrated a pattern of improving outcomes, for example by moving out of an Ofsted category of concern. At the previous institutional inspections of the client schools, leadership and management had been judged as outstanding in one, good in six, satisfactory in 12 and inadequate in one.

Further information

Ofsted publications

Reading by six: how the best schools do it (100197), Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100197.

The deployment, training and development of the wider schools workforce (070222),
Ofsted, 2008; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070222.

Twenty outstanding primary schools: excelling against the odds (090170), Ofsted,
2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090170.

Twelve outstanding secondary schools: excelling against the odds (080240), Ofsted,
2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080240.

Twelve outstanding special schools: excelling through inclusion (090171), Ofsted,
2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090171.

Workforce reform in schools: has it made a difference? (080263), Ofsted, 2010;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/080263.

Publications by others

The impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes: final report (DCSF-RR108/DCSF-
RB108), DCSF, 2009;
www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u014576/index.shtml.

The importance of teaching – the Schools White Paper 2010, Department for
Education, 2010;
http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&Pag
eMode=publications&ProductId=CM+7980.

Annex A. Schools visited

* identifies National Support Schools

Primary schools	Local authority
Alma Primary School	London Borough of Southwark
Belleville Primary School*	Wandsworth
Brookside Primary School	London Borough of Hillingdon
Cherry Orchard Primary School*	Birmingham
Colmore Junior School*	Birmingham
Fairlawn Primary School*	London Borough of Lewisham
Hayes Park School*	London Borough of Hillingdon
Highley Community Primary School	Shropshire
Hillbrook School	London Borough of Wandsworth
Houghton Primary School	Cambridgeshire
Hutton Church of England Primary School	North Somerset
Maryvale Catholic Primary School	Birmingham
Mason Moor Primary School	Southampton
Portswood Primary School*	Southampton
Sir William Burrough Primary School*	London Borough of Tower Hamlets
St Chad's C of E Primary School*	Oldham
St Michael's C of E Primary School, Dalston*	Cumbria
St Peter's Church of England Controlled Primary School*	Shropshire
St Vigor and St John C of E Primary School*	Somerset
Yorkmead Junior and Infant School	Birmingham

Secondary schools	Local authority
Bishop Stopford School*	Northamptonshire
Blacon High School A Specialist Sports College	Cheshire West and Chester
Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic College*	Trafford
Counthill School	Oldham
Culverhay School	Bath and North East Somerset
Fartown High School	Kirklees
Harrow High School and Sports College	London Borough of Harrow
Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School*	Cheshire East

Holmfirth High School*	Kirklees
Lister Community School	London Borough of Newham
Lodge Park Technology College	Northamptonshire
Norton Hill School*	Bath and North East Somerset
Nower Hill High School*	London Borough of Harrow
Queen Elizabeth Humanities College	Herefordshire
Ravens Wood School*	Bromley
St Paul's Catholic High School	Manchester
Thornden School*	Hampshire
Walthamstow School for Girls*	Waltham Forest
Warminster Kingdown*	Wiltshire
Wellacre Technology College*	Trafford
Westwood Girls' College for Languages and Arts	Croydon
Whitley Abbey Business and Enterprise College*	Coventry
Wigmore High School*	Herefordshire
Winton School	Hampshire

Annex B. National Leaders of Education and National Support Schools

National Support Schools are led by National Leaders of Education. They are selected by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services. At the time this report was published, the National College listed the following eligibility criteria for a school wishing to become a National Support School.[10]

Criteria	How this should be demonstrated
Your school or academy must be judged to be outstanding.	An Ofsted inspection that has judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness, leadership and management, and capacity to improve **or** 'Outstanding' in any of the two following judgements: overall effectiveness, leadership and management or capacity to improve with a judgement of 'good' in the third category **or** exceptionally 'Good' for overall effectiveness with at least 10 'outstanding' judgements, including capacity to improve and leadership and management, if the school has been removed from Ofsted category and has sustained this improvement in a Section 5 inspection that is subsequent to that which removed the school from category, or if the school is serving an area of high social deprivation (25% or above free school meals)
Your school or academy shows consistently high levels of pupil performance or continued improvement over the last three years, and in addition is above floor targets.	Department for Education performance data shows clear upward trend or consistently high levels of attainment, plus CVA (contextual value added) above national average **or** Local authority reference provides evidence of your school's upward trend or high attainment attributable to the headteacher
Your school or academy must have outstanding senior and middle leaders who have the capacity to provide intensive support to schools in challenging circumstances.	Ofsted grade 1 or 2 for teaching and learning

[10] The eligibility criteria and other details may be found at:
www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/professional-development/national-leaders-of-education/nle-who-for.htm

Your school or academy must be able to commit to the minimum time expectation for NLE deployment.	Confirmation of chair of governor's support in application form
	Supportive reference from the school's local authority
	Supporting information provided by the applicant on their commitment to the role