



Independent/state school partnerships

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Executive summary

Partnerships between independent and maintained schools have existed in a variety of forms for a long time. The independent/state school partnerships (ISSP) programme was set up by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 1998 to provide a structure and funding for co-operation between the sectors. The programme has enabled a wider range of schools to become involved in joint work. Funding has been on an annual basis, with projects running from less than a year to a full three years. Many partnerships have continued beyond the funding period as a result of the commitment of the schools involved.

Partnerships have had several aims, including the breaking down of barriers between the sectors, the sharing of professional expertise and the raising of standards. Their coverage has included information and communication technology (ICT), sport, the arts, and provision for the gifted and talented. Initially, the model for the programme largely involved just two schools, or sometimes a key school serving a cluster of schools. As the scheme has expanded, the range of partners has grown. Local education authorities (LEAs) have increasingly acted as facilitators, as have local enterprises and business partnerships.

In 2003-04, 29 of the 46 partnerships set up in that funding year were visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). All the partnerships had carried out evaluations of their work and most were able to provide interim reports based on those evaluations.

HMI judged that a majority of the partnerships were very effective in realising their objectives. While it is too early to say how effective the partnerships are generally in contributing to the raising of standards, the signs are encouraging.

The strongest projects almost always had the active support of headteachers, whose involvement enabled them to widen the scope of the activities envisaged at the outset and to identify key staff who could define and implement effective arrangements. Another feature of successful projects was that staff not directly involved were kept informed about their nature and purpose of the activities, so that they were not disconnected from the normal work of the school. A further strength was early identification of practical issues such as timetabling and communication. Where governors were involved, awareness of the value and impact of partnerships was considerably enhanced.

Not all projects involved direct contact between pupils in the partner schools, but all had at their heart the aim of developing teaching and opportunities for learning. Innovative approaches included the use of different learning styles, specific skills training, access to enhanced ICT such as interactive whiteboards, peer mentoring, extension classes, curriculum enrichment or wider opportunities in sport and the arts. Technicians, sports coaches and other support staff benefited from this, as did other professional contributors from fields such as music, dance, drama, football, museums, conservation and business. Successful projects enabled pupils both to extend and evaluate their learning experiences, while providing stimulating contexts in which staff could share their expertise.

In some schemes, parents were directly involved in the activities. In others, they were kept up-to-date on the involvement of their children. Good communication with parents from the outset helped to establish understanding of what the activities were intended to achieve and to generate pride in pupils' work. Events, displays and celebrations were staged, at which parents could see the outcomes of activities. Many projects were well covered in the local press.

Nationally, the number of partnerships supported by the scheme has been relatively small and they have been unevenly distributed across the country. In some cases, these partnerships have contributed to a broader appreciation of the benefits of independent and maintained schools working together, recognising that neither sector has a monopoly of expertise or high-quality resources. Active support from LEAs has almost always been helpful to partnerships, whether through explicit support, active facilitation, fund-holding or monitoring. Several successful schemes had no direct LEA involvement but benefited from LEA interest. By contrast, in some areas there was no evidence of either involvement or interest on the part of LEAs.

Evaluation by the partnerships themselves of the quality and benefits of the work was of varying depth and usefulness. In most projects criteria for success were defined and linked to an appropriate timescale, but some evaluations did not gauge the impact on pupils' performance or identify how practice might be sustained.

Overall, the independent/state school partnerships have been a success. Bridges have been built between the sectors and staff and pupils have benefited from the contacts. In most schemes, the expertise of teachers has been developed in new and challenging contexts. Where assessment criteria have been made clear it has been easier to identify improvements in pupils' performance as a result of the activities. The best partnerships have evaluated their work effectively and have clear perspectives on how activities will be sustained in the medium to longer term.

Main findings

- Most partnerships inspected are effective in fulfilling their objectives. Their effectiveness is exemplified by:
 - success in building bridges between the two sectors, and in breaking down barriers and negative preconceptions
 - the fostering of imaginative, creative and exciting classroom and extra-curricular provision
 - providing opportunities for pupils from widely differing backgrounds to enjoy meeting each other in a positive and often innovative learning context
 - enabling teachers and support staff to benefit from high-quality professional development and the sharing of expertise and, in the best examples, enabling good practice to be disseminated more widely
 - helping to dispel the idea that one sector is uniformly better resourced than the other and encouraging schools to develop their strengths and realise the potential both of staff and pupils
 - securing the endorsement of governors, parents and the wider community
 - rigorous evaluation of their work through the use of success criteria and ensuring that pupils' progress is tracked and assessed.
- It is too early to say how effective the partnerships are generally in contributing to the raising of standards but the signs are encouraging.
- Some LEAs have recognised the benefits partnerships bring to schools in their areas and have either involved themselves directly or through other agencies. Others have chosen not to become involved.
- Take-up and bidding for partnerships is geographically patchy. A large number of independent schools in an area does not necessarily lead to more partnerships and in some areas of the country pupils have no opportunity to take part.
- Attendance at partnership activities is generally very good. Where it is poor this is usually because of inadequate planning or a breakdown in communications.

Points for development

- There are a number of issues that need to be considered as independent/state school partnerships are developed further:
 - there is scope in most partnerships for school governors to play a larger part in ensuring that the benefits of projects are shared across the wider community of schools
 - assessment of pupils' progress and evaluation of the wider impact of the work of partnerships should be more rigorous
 - schools in a partnership would benefit from sharing, at senior management level, their evaluations and approaches to assessment with a view to attaining greater consistency and learning from each other
 - the role of parents in promoting awareness of how schools are working together could be enhanced
 - pupil mentors need to be better trained and prepared for working with other pupils whose backgrounds, ages or perspectives might be significantly different from their own
 - all partners in a project should have a consistent approach to health and safety and ensure that risk assessments are duly carried out and parents fully informed
 - ways should be sought of enabling more pupils nationally to have the opportunity to take part in projects of the kind sponsored by the programme.

Forging partnerships

1. This report focuses on the independent/state school partnership programme, with particular emphasis on those in the funding round for 2003–04. The partnerships covered need to be seen in the context of development since the inception of the scheme in 1998. Over this period, for example, levels of funding have varied, as has the involvement of other agencies. In round 2003–04, 92 applications were received: 46 general, 35 gifted and talented, 11 sports. The applications' value was £3.38 million, representing an over-subscription of more than three times. The ISSP has had clearly defined objectives since its inception. The specialist areas for funding have varied over that time. The round under review funded 28 mainstream, nine gifted and talented and nine sports projects. Sixty-four specialist schools (14 of them as leads) were involved in successful ISSP applications for 2003–04. The largest number (20) were technology-based, but all other specialisms were represented. A synopsis of some of the successful bids is given in Annex A.

2. All the partnerships in the current funding round supplied written information to the DfES concerning provision, and almost all completed useful and informative self-evaluation forms. HMI visited 29 of the projects, mainly between April and June 2004. The visits involved:

- interviews with headteachers, governors, teachers and support staff
- observation of lessons
- attendance at sports and arts events
- discussions with pupils and parents, and with people from the local communities.

3. Once a bid has been successful, schools and their partners have considerable scope to administer a partnership in the way most calculated to enable it to fulfill its objectives. A small team at the DfES administers the scheme and supports partnerships in getting going. The team's remit includes assessment of the success of a sample of individual projects through self-evaluation and interim and final reports, and use these to award additional sustainability grants where appropriate. The whole scheme is overseen by the ISSP forum composed of representatives of both sectors, of local government and a range of education charities and representative groups. It is successor to two previous advisory committees. The group promotes wide-ranging discussion of issues germane to both sectors and oversees the bidding process for funding and the awarding of grants.

4. Funding is awarded on the merit of individual bids. Areas of the country or LEAs that have developed an interest in the scheme have been well placed to gain access to funds, but in some areas there are few if any partnerships. Partnerships themselves come in many forms. Some are straightforward subject links between two schools. Others have a particular school at the heart of a cluster of schools. Schools with pupils of different age ranges have worked together. Many have included the help of a variety of outside agencies and businesses.

5. Among the most successful and active partnerships, several are directly administered by LEAs or their agencies. These often owe their impetus to initiatives set moving by senior LEA officers and the headteachers of independent schools. There is often little historical precedent for local co-operative endeavour of this kind.

6. Often, however, partnerships are initiated at school level. In one particularly successful partnership in the north east, the LEA is aware of developments, is supportive but not directly involved. In another partnership in the North, the chief education officer is actively involved in promoting partnership, and feels that the misconceptions between sectors have rapidly broken down and that the benefits of partnership to children are clear to see. It is also apparent that there has been significant sharing of ideas, professional expertise and resources between schools.

7. In the Midlands, an LEA has conceived the idea of a 'commonwealth' of schools. The partnership for the year under review was based on three schools in close proximity to each other. Good planning and evaluation enables frequent contact between the schools, and the local education/business partnership monitors

progress. Where an LEA has not fostered partnerships, on the other hand, contact between schools tends to be more difficult to establish in the absence of any forum for discussion and planning.

8. A small number of independent schools in an area does not necessarily lead to an absence of partnerships. In a county in the south west, there are several successful partnerships, although few independent schools. Conversely, a high number of independent schools in an area are no guarantee of more partnerships in that area.

9. The sharing of facilities has been a two-way process. There is a widespread conception that independent schools are better equipped than their state counterparts, but this is not always the case. An independent school on the south coast, for example, was able to offer outstanding outdoor sports facilities, while its partner state school could offer outstanding indoor provision in return.

Teaching, learning and professional development

10. Planning for teaching within the majority of partnerships is of high quality. With an emphasis on dialogue, the sharing of expertise, detailed preparation and effective lessons with clear learning outcomes, most pupils gain immediate benefit from the provision. Pupils enthuse about the contacts, the care they receive and the excitement of visiting and learning in centres other than their own.

11. The benefits to teachers, support staff, technicians and others from beyond the world of education in sharing their expertise and reflecting on good practice in a constructive way are considerable. The sense of isolation felt by teachers working in a small, specialist department or in a remote countryside location and who are unused to regular professional dialogue is quickly broken down by the contact made. Senior LEA officers have noted the benefits to schools in the maintained and independent sectors working together on behalf of their pupils.

In one project in the Midlands involving close co-operation between science departments, a training day had been arranged for laboratory technicians. This had been a great success. For some involved it had been their very first in-service training, providing a chance to meet other practitioners and they were strongly appreciative of the opportunity. In another, very well received project, London teachers were able to observe each other teaching with new inter-active whiteboards and discussed afterwards the issues which had arisen.

12. The organisation and planning, the shared use of ICT, the opportunities for lesson observation, briefing and feedback all contribute to the professional development of those involved. Quite apart from the need to consider issues of teaching and learning, the pressure on timetables, use of resources and planning for travel make it essential that there is good communication, not only between schools but with the wider school community, in order to avoid conflict of interest or excessive pressure on particular pupils. In atypical projects where, for example, two

schools shared the lead in a project with others involved in only part of a scheme, it was more difficult to find time for staff to convene to share their experiences.

13. Where partnerships had initially encountered serious problems, these could be attributed to specific issues arising from that partnership. In one case, an independent school was unable to meet its commitment to provide a site suitable for its intended purpose. Without an independent school involved, the partnership would no longer meet the criteria for funding. The member of staff responsible for developing the bid on behalf of the independent school had left and the replacement had not become fully involved. Nonetheless, pupils from the school took part, the difficulties were overcome and the partnership has developed successfully.

14. In another imaginative project, change of circumstances had forced facilitators to travel long distances to fulfil their obligations. Such dedication meant that time for evaluation and reflection was at a premium. In a third, involving a sports partnership and one with some very successful elements, issues to do with timing and monitoring and the need to welcome pupils arriving at a school other than their own had been overlooked.

15. Several LEAs have promoted partnerships through connected organisations and these are not confined to a particular region, although there is wide disparity across the country. The involvement of outside agencies has grown substantially as the awareness of partnerships has been developed. The range of experiences on offer has been considerable and this has been enhanced by the involvement of a wide range of providers. This is the case in Oxfordshire, where the LEA has acted as an umbrella for an enormous number of partner schools and organisations.

In a project on the north coast of Devon a well known pottery has opened its doors to 14-16 year-old students involved in a range of geography projects, and they have been able to combine study of the materials involved in making pottery with detailed fieldwork in the nearby estuary. Local environmentalists have opened their resources to the schools. In another project, in Newcastle, a large number of agencies and partners are involved.

A partnership between a school in the East End of London and an independent school in Kent enabled the pupils to travel to each other's school and perform music which included work especially written for them. On two consecutive nights the combined orchestra, choir and percussionists of the two schools performed in the town hall and the independent school's chapel. Both events were well attended, achieved a high standard and gave much pleasure to the participants. Nearly 150 pupils walked together through the streets of London with great self-discipline and performed to their local audience. Collaboration between the pupils of the two schools was of a high order, and teachers worked closely and professionally with each other to develop the pupils' skills.

16. Mentoring is a key ingredient of several of the projects, whether at peer group level or by older pupils of younger cohorts. Generally it is very effective and well received by those involved. Mentors felt that they learnt as much from the

experience as did their mentees. Mentees enjoyed the opportunities of discussing their learning, their problems and their achievements with other pupils. A key contributing factor to success in mentoring is good training, and the ability of mentors to think and plan ahead.

17. Maintaining momentum is sometimes difficult with mentoring. Once a dialogue has been opened between pupils it needs to be maintained and kept fresh. Flexibility on the part of the organisers is important. If two pupils do not find it easy to work together, arrangements may need to be changed. The importance of research at the planning stage, to ensure mentors understand something of the environment and background of their mentee, assists understanding and helps to remove any misleading preconceptions rather than reinforce them.

Evaluation and assessment

18. There is a wide variety of projects across the partnerships, making comparison between them, for the purpose of assessing their effectiveness, difficult. For this reason, effective self-evaluation is especially important. In partnerships that have identified for themselves clear assessment criteria, where monitoring of pupils' progress is regular, based on effective recording procedures, and where pupils are clearly informed about the progress they are making, it is possible to define the impact of a scheme on pupils' achievement.

19. Success criteria for projects were defined in a variety of ways. At the simplest level, success was defined in terms of tidy organisation, drawing expressions of appreciation by all involved. More substantial evidence of success incorporated evidence of good timetabling, clear timescales for completion, open and shared procedures for monitoring the progress of pupils and clear evidence of improvements in pupils' knowledge and skills.

20. A majority of schools evaluated their schemes with some degree of success at least. The more successful schemes used self-evaluation very well through direct critical feedback from pupils, teachers and senior managers. Occasionally, some self-evaluations and interim reports were not shared with senior managers or other partners, which was unsatisfactory.

21. Assessment of pupils' progress is helped when pupils themselves keep notebooks, logs or other records and samples of their work. Across a number of projects this approach both helps the pupils to understand and see the progress they are making and thus enables their acquisition of knowledge and skills to be closely monitored. Where this is not done, evidence of progress remains impressionistic, as it is based on comments by pupils and staff and accounts of intended, rather than necessarily realised, benefits.

22. Longer-term projects provide good opportunities for assessing the impact on standards in particular subject areas, but schools within some partnerships are often inconsistent in their approaches. There is a need to establish clear expectations of

what a project is intended to achieve over its life-span and about how pupils' progress is to be recorded and the project evaluated.

In a partnership in the north west the project's aim is to raise standards of achievement in literacy over three years in one school in Years 4–6 and in Years 7–9 in the others – catering for new pupils identified annually. In the independent school pupils are tracked in English 1, 2, 3 assessments to the end of Key Stage 3. In the state sector school all pupils remaining below Level 4 at Key Stage 2 receive termly assessments and measurement of progress through optional tests. This assessment continues through Years 8 and 9.

Much of this work takes place in the state school's community learning resource centre under the direction of the librarians, through access to an ICT suite and inter-active whiteboards with a connection between the two schools. The LEA is giving full and practical support.

23. A similar approach involving inter-active whiteboards has been adopted in a successful two-school partnership in London. Regular meetings between staff enable the progress of pupils to be monitored jointly.

24. In another successful project where there has been a very clear breaking down of barriers between state and independent sectors for both pupils and staff, the issue of raising standards has proved the hardest for staff to grapple with. The pupils themselves were able to identify the areas in which they felt they had gained, such as in increased knowledge of history and science, as well as self-esteem. The LEA intends to introduce the tracking of specific Year 6 pupils in gifted and talented summer schools from 2004.

25. Across a number of projects pupils are very positive about their experiences. They not only express enjoyment in being able to have access to new equipment and the acquisition of new skills but also have enjoyed meeting pupils from other schools and backgrounds. They appreciated increased opportunity to participate in new sports and to perform unfamiliar music in different venues.

26. Sometimes pupils are less clear as to why they have been chosen to take part in a scheme. Many had volunteered, but others were aware that their performance in a particular year group or class or their involvement with a specific subject had been the determining factor. The majority felt that they knew what to expect and that clear targets had been set for them to achieve during the scheme. Others felt that enjoyment and the widening of horizons were ends in themselves.

Management

27. Where headteachers fully endorse, though have not necessarily instigated, a partnership, it is almost always successful. Such endorsement involves ensuring the participation of key personnel on both the administrative and academic sides of a school, delegating appropriate lines of responsibility, identifying the benefits, objectives, timescale and success criteria for the school and sharing these with the

wider school community. The willingness of headteachers to work closely with leaders in partner schools to ensure compatible approaches and procedures is key.

28. The support of governors is highly desirable. Governors have not always been involved as supporters of partnerships. Where they have been, this has increased the support to the staff involved and conveyed positive messages to parents and pupils. For example, the presence of governors at a concert which was the culmination of a music partnership between two schools reinforced its significance for all involved.

29. Three management issues present themselves as potential pitfalls if they are not given sufficient consideration at the outset of a scheme and monitored closely as it unfolds:

- planning for the longer term
- contingency planning to ensure that schemes are not easily de-railed
- definition of clear criteria for success of a scheme coupled with rigorous self-evaluation

30. The three issues are connected and their importance illustrated by examples, both successful and less successful.

In a partnership where the two partner schools are a long way apart, there was real enthusiasm to develop the musical skills of a large number of pupils by exposing them to a much wider range of musical styles than they had hitherto encountered. In both schools the directors of music had important management posts. With the full backing of their headteachers, they involved other musical staff and liaised closely with timetablers in order to minimise potential disruption to the rest of the school. The school calendars were scrutinised at an early stage to identify possible clashes and to keep staff informed, and the impact of the partnership on the internal examinations and sports events was also taken into account.

31. Such good practice was not always to be found. In several partnerships attendance had dipped, or arrangements had to be cancelled or rescheduled because clashes had not been anticipated. In one case, departments not directly involved were unaware of the partnership timetable and that planned overseas visits involved the same cohort of pupils. Occasionally some pupils were required to attend extra classes in other subjects as a result of insufficiently detailed planning.

32. The close involvement of senior managers is a key ingredient in helping to ensure that a scheme keeps going. The personal commitment and attention to detail required in order to maintain and develop activities are considerable. A number of partnerships were vulnerable when this commitment and attention to detail faded.

33. In several cases, schools withdrew at an early stage or between the bidding process and the implementation of a project because of the personal circumstances of the teacher at the school concerned, for example when there was a change of

employment or bereavement. In one case, no steps had been taken by management to ensure that another member of staff was at hand or already involved to ensure continuity.

34. Nevertheless, in most cases efforts were made to build in the continuation of projects through alternative provision when, for instance, a public venue suddenly became unavailable, or a key member of staff was absent.

35. Good planning also took careful account of pupils' health and safety. In one case, an overseas trip was cancelled because it had not been possible for the partners to agree that the planning timescale was sufficient. In this case, parents and pupils, though disappointed, were fully supportive of the care taken in evaluating the situation.

Summary

36. Overall, it is clear that the partnerships are adding value to the educational provision of those pupils involved. Schemes benefit very substantially from the commitment and professional expertise of the staff. Where LEAs and other agencies, parents and governors are involved, the impact of schemes is enhanced. The professional development of teachers across the sectors is very evident. However, the success of these partnerships depends on endorsement and practical support from senior management. Careful self-evaluation, incorporating good monitoring of pupils' progress, is essential if schemes are to justify the funds invested in them.

Case studies

East Yorkshire

This successful project is about enhancing the creative arts in a rural maintained community comprehensive school and a nearby Montessori independent school. The first year's work focused on a dance project with Year 7 pupils in the maintained school and with youngsters of different ages from the Montessori school. A video of the project, together with newspaper reports, testify to the quality of the work. Year 7 boys are clear about the benefits they have gained. Although work began in the creative arts faculties, the broader aims of the work include enhancing creative endeavour across the curriculum, enabling the horizons of all staff to be refocused and expanded. It is planned that the next project, which will focus on the culture of China, will run for pupils in Year 8.

The lead persons, the head of creative arts at the maintained school and the head of the Montessori school, report that the most difficult part of the shared enterprise was countering the negative stereotypical views of some staff in both institutions. Pupils had no such problems. Both younger and older pupils enjoyed working together. The head of the maintained school is a strong supporter of the partnership. This school has a recently appointed teacher of dance, and the head of music has recently been appointed assistant headteacher, thus ensuring that the project continues to benefit from oversight by senior management.

The project has contributed to the professional expertise available to pupils and staff. Much internal in-service training has been done to raise the awareness of all staff to the notion of creativity. Strong training and development links have also been established with other providers, for example the local early years' consortium. The project has a clear priority in the development planning for both schools and work is gradually becoming embedded into teaching and learning strategies.

Funding for the scheme has enabled the issue of transport to be addressed – a major issue given the rural nature of both schools.

Kent

The heads of the two schools — a maintained comprehensive and an independent school — have a good relationship. The current project on cultural diversity in the creative arts grew out of a previous ISSP project based on ICT. Raising awareness of cultural diversity through work of excellence in the arts has been a priority for both institutions, and the schools' respective heads of department met to discuss and plan the project.

A series of workshops took shape, with teaching provided by external professional specialists. Senior staff from both schools formed the interview panels for employing these professional staff, with both schools submitting names for consideration. Heads of department and headteachers monitor and evaluate the project.

The workshops were intended for gifted and talented pupils. They take place weekly in school time and are designed so as to cover areas of the creative arts that would not be covered in the ordinary curriculum. Techniques, skills and ideas are nevertheless intended to enrich and influence the mainstream curriculum and to strengthen work already in progress on aspects of Africa.

Work in musical performance is very good. Fourteen pupils demonstrated work on rhythm and related technical skills with the master drummer, a Ghanaian. The pupils played a variety of rhythms from different countries in West Africa and then talked about what they had also learned of the cultural traditions of those countries. Many of them learnt more about the language of music through working on a different musical instrument, adding to their repertoire. They all enjoyed the work enormously and felt their knowledge and understanding of music had expanded and developed. They found the experience "very different from normal school work", highly absorbing and great fun.

Work in art is of very good quality, some of it exceptional. Pupils researched African art and developed their own interpretations in three-dimensions, creating totems and fabrics, often using natural materials. One outstanding piece included a notebook of research carried out in the Horniman and British museums by a Year 10 pupil, who made remarkable progress as a direct consequence of the partnership. The work would not have been out of place in an A level portfolio with its critical appreciation, historical and cultural comment and annotated examples of interpreted

work in a variety of media. The large-scale collage by the art group was similarly well conceived and executed.

Staff have been able to meet as specialist departments and have visited some of the sessions in order to learn from the professional artists. Their awareness of how to encourage, support and build on the work the target students do in class has increased considerably. The benefits of the teachers' professional development and their experience of the workshops are seen in enhanced and extended classroom provision, as well as through the work displayed or performed for the whole school. Currently the workshops have limited places for pupils since this provision targets the most able. However, it does have a wider impact.

Sustainability is an issue both schools have considered at length. Using professional artists is costly, and if this high quality innovative work is to continue it will require dedicated funding.

London

This partnership, between a developing maintained comprehensive school and a long established independent school, is carefully focused on a major development for the maintained school – of establishing a sixth form. The independent school has much experience of sixth form work and is very successful. The initiative has been well conceived with considerable clarity. Two departments have been identified to spearhead development in the sixth form curriculum in the maintained school, whilst the independent school will benefit from improving its expertise in areas such as ICT. Extending teachers' professional development in both schools is the principal focus of the initiative.

Two senior co-ordinators, one from each school, have succeeded in bringing on board the departments intended, drama and the expressive arts. Other subject teachers not initially targeted have also begun mutual observation of lessons and sharing advice on resources and possible joint activities. Staff have been swift to learn from each other in joint drama and art lessons, and to recognise the benefits to their students. The experience has helped pioneer staff feel confident that their ideas, systems, and planning are good, and they are on track to getting the sixth form off to a good start.

The sharing of staff expertise is directed at raising standards in both schools generally and in particular at raising the expectations and standards of gifted and talented pupils. Furthermore, the establishment of a house system in the maintained school is benefiting from the expertise of the independent school, whilst the independent school in turn is considerably extending its expertise in special needs provision.

Pupils have clearly benefited. They speak of having a broader experience in the subjects concerned, and of new opportunities and widening horizons.

Monitoring is thorough — brief evaluations are completed by all participants, both staff and students, who are highly engaged and clear about the benefits. They see no reason why the partnership should not extend its work. These responses need to be utilised to help shape future initiatives.

Work completed so far has been embedded into the schools' development planning. Sustainability is already being planned. Over time in both schools, the increased expertise, confidence and co-operation of staff is seen as a prime contributor to improving the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum. The outcome in terms of students' attainment can only be measured over time, but the project has made a promising start.

Bromley

The main objectives of this project match the overarching aims of ISSP very well. It is clear that at a strategic level the head teachers involved are committed to breaking down barriers between the independent and state school sectors both for pupils and staff. They are also focused on collaborating to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and thereby raising standards, for exceptionally able girls.

More unusually, perhaps, they believe strongly that young people's views should be at the centre of the research into creating a learning environment that best matches the needs and aspirations of very able pupils. Research to this end has been well-planned and integrated within the aims of the partner schools.

The schools have clear views about what they want from the project and each one has planned how to use the ISSP to develop further its own strategies for identifying and educating exceptionally able girls. The LEA's principal adviser has used her knowledge of local schools to build on well-established links and to act as a vital conduit for exchanging ideas, providing resources and for disseminating information from the wider gifted and talented community.

The project has been well founded in terms of research techniques and experience. Analysis of questionnaires indicates strongly that the cross-school teamwork should identify significant characteristics of a suitable learning environment for exceptionally able girls. The mapping of these characteristics already undertaken, and the views of pupils yet to be co-ordinated, will jointly lead to a model of good practice in school development and improvement which can be shared with other practitioners both nationally and internationally.

Given these likely outcomes, the partners need to ensure that the project can be sustained beyond its initial stages. It will also be important for the project to address, where possible, issues relating to ethnic and cultural differences in the education of gifted and able girls and to investigate how far barriers to learning arising from these issues might be overcome. In addition, consideration needs to be given to how far the project might be extended to investigate the education of exceptionally able boys.

Even at this stage, it is clear that one key element in securing sustainability for the project will be in indicating how the findings might be used and applied more widely. There might be a case for involving subject associations and subject departments at universities. This would enable schools, and departments within schools, to make plans that are not only directly relevant to the needs of their particular pupils but also to operate within a web of collaboration, research and investigation that involves other schools (nationally and internationally), universities and other interested partners.

Annex A

The following summary notes give a flavour of some of the projects' initial objectives. These are as described by DfES in the initial tabulation.

Oxfordshire LEA

Work with able underachievers to raise standards. Focus on: creativity; communication; problem solving; collaborative working; leadership skills; understanding and motivation through continuing professional development; curriculum development.

Hammersmith & Fulham LEA

Develop a series of innovative partnerships between departments to enrich curriculum for gifted and talented pupils and provide professional development for staff. Promote links between independent sector and further education sector to raise pupil achievement and aspirations towards higher education.

Penair School, Cornwall

Improve provision for under-aspiring gifted and talented Year 9 pupils, by creating a joint leadership skills programme with strong international dimension and closer involvement of parents. Intended outcome to move pupils out of their comfort zone and on to the cutting edge of their talents.

Penryn College, Cornwall

Use sport and performing arts to raise academic standards through increasing levels of self-esteem, aspiration and lifestyle management. Improve levels of leadership in pupils and give insight into vocational routes in sport and the performing arts. Specialist support to gifted and talented pupils.

Sports Projects

Carter Community Sports College, Poole

Offer new opportunities to girls and boys in untraditional sports. Highlight how techniques can transfer to other sports and physical activities. Promote self-esteem, motivation for improvement, discipline and creativity. Accelerate learning and teaching curve for both pupils and staff.

Angmering School, West Sussex

Raise standards of teaching and learning amongst examination groups; increase participation and raise standards in sport and physical activities, in particular amongst pupils not succeeding in traditional games; provide high level coaching for

gifted and talented sports pupils; develop clear positive links between the two schools.

Claire's Court School, Windsor and Maidenhead

Identify gifted and talented pupils within sport, including those with SEN, and provide further opportunities for enrichment, extension and accelerated activity within and outside curriculum. Support teachers in co-ordination of gifted and talented provision. Outcomes: raise standards of achievement; promote involvement for those not currently actively participating in sport; support very talented pupils.

Burleigh College, Leicestershire

Identify three levels of gifted and talented sports people in all Loughborough schools. Improve sporting opportunities available for pupils to develop their talent and offer lifestyle support so that they can manage all aspects of their life successfully (sport, home, education). Outcome: pupils reach their full potential in sport and all aspects of life.

General Projects

Braunton School & Community College, Devon

Improve performance and motivation of all Key Stage 4 geography pupils: develop new opportunities for data collection; pool resources and expertise within disparate rural area; foster further education links with local organisations and educational establishments.

Edge Hill HE college, Lancashire

Use integrated web portal to develop a learning community for school psychology teachers and sixth form pupils. Portal to sustain and support students following courses in AS and A2 psychology, and their teachers through a range of strategies.

Common Purpose, Newcastle

"Your turn" programme for Year 9 leaders – contributing to citizenship in the curriculum and raising standards in key skills. Enabling young leaders to make positive contribution as active citizens, deeper understanding of how their community works and links with wide range of business leaders and organisations.

Islington LEA

Continue to raise achievement in two schools; share and develop professional knowledge and expertise with emphasis on innovation in the classroom, widening social awareness of pupils and challenging and raising the aspirations of very able girls.

Warwickshire Education Business Partnership

Develop capabilities for teachers, support staff and pupils in science, ICT and maths at Key Stages 3 and 4.

Yarm School, Cleveland

Enable Year 8 pupils to work on design and technology projects using latest tools and manufacturing equipment; build on outcomes into Year 9 and GCSE; involve pupils in extended curriculum experience through Saturday team building days and focused Easter school; promote self-esteem and ambition; accelerate development of knowledge, skills and capacity.

Harrow LEA

Raise standards of attainment at Key Stage 3; increase pupil leadership, raise confidence and self-esteem, develop transferable skills. Increase creativity and independent learning, levels of pupil motivation, pupil engagement and positive behaviour and raised achievement for identified groups, including those in areas of deprivation.

St Bonaventure's School, Newham

Improve profile of instrumental work and standard of instrumental playing. Encourage able musicians at St Bonaventure's to continue with their instruments by working with peers from another, well resourced, boys' school with a strong instrumental tradition. Share experiences of different choral traditions for mutual benefit.

Annex B

Bibliography

For those wishing to pursue this initiative further, the following may be of interest:

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