



Spreading Innovation Across Local Authorities

Realising the Potential of
School-based Networks

This book has been jointly produced by The DfES Innovation Unit, The National College for School Leadership and the Improvement and Development Agency.



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INTRODUCTION

Every local authority across the country is engaged in a major programme of organisational and cultural change

In many cases the critical trigger was the publication of *Every Child Matters* in September 2003, reinforced by the Children Act 2004, and the publication of *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* in December 2004.

Each change programme is different and programmes are at different stages. However, an increasingly common element is the recognition that partnerships and networks, rather than individual institutions, are the critical 'units of engagement', and that the current challenges offer real opportunities to profoundly reshape, for the better, the relationship between local authorities and their schools.

Programmes are typically centred on the requirement to appoint a Director of Children's Services, and to work across social care, education, health and other agencies to make sure that competing priorities no longer get in the way of the best deal for children. But at the same time authorities are seeking to reshape provision for 14-19 year olds, bringing together secondary schools, colleges and other training providers to offer both more integrated and more differentiated learning pathways. They are also being asked to develop a New Relationship with Schools using a cadre of School Improvement Partners, to ensure both

continued upward pressure on standards and increasingly personalised provision for individual pupils.

And some authorities, particular those in large urban areas, see these changes not as standing alone, but as inextricably linked to a wider and more profound process of urban renewal and regeneration – making communities attractive and supportive places for families to live and for children to grow and learn.

This publication

The material in this publication has arisen out of a programme of work involving more than fifty local authorities who took part in a series of 'strategic exchanges' during 2005. Participants at these events were asked to tell the story of their particular approach to the strategic development of school-based networks. While the story each authority told was clearly unique, reflecting its particular history, geography, and local political realities, a pattern of generic challenges emerged which every local authority in the country is likely to face, in one form or another, as it works through its own change programme.

The purpose of this document is to set out these generic challenges and to illustrate how different local authorities are seeking to resolve them,

in the hope that this will help enable more local authorities to find solutions which work for them, in their own situations. In addition, the process embodied in the events, and this publication itself, seek to model the potential for authority-to-authority exchange and joint learning.

How might you use this material in your local authority?

It is hoped that the key challenges identified in this publication and the examples of current practice it shares will stimulate discussion amongst local authorities around realising the potential of school-based networks.

There are a number of ways in which local authorities are already using this material. These include using this publication's findings to:

- Focus workshops with participants from across the local authority, which encourage discussion and joint approaches to problem solving.
- Focus meetings amongst groups of headteachers who are considering the implications of the *Every Child Matters* agenda for schools and networks.
- Stimulate thinking at a strategic level about the relevance of these challenges to a local authority, and to help identify further challenges not addressed here.
- Act as a planning tool in the development of pre-existing network structures.

- Help engage new local partners in developing a strategy for realising the potential of school-based networks.

In addition to this publication, an accompanying CD is planned. It will contain a PowerPoint presentation outlining the key questions, adaptable for use in any face-to-face meetings or presentations that might be convened to stimulate conversations with colleagues about the issues raised here. The CD will also contain some additional resources provided by the authorities which offer further insight into the work they are undertaking.

Further support

The DfES Innovation Unit, NCSL's Networked Learning Group and IDEa are interested in hearing from any local authority who would like to receive practical support in responding to the issues raised in this material. This could be as a broker for building relationships with other authorities or in offering facilitative/consultative help in taking the issues forward. Please contact Perrie Ballantyne perrie.ballantyne@dfes.gsi.gov.uk. In addition, all the local authorities mentioned are willing to be contacted for further information about their work via the email addresses provided in this booklet.

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THE CHALLENGES

As local authorities seek to realise the potential of school-based networks, they face a number of strategic challenges. These are set out under the following five generic headings, each of which has its own trail of supplementary questions and issues. Turn to the relevant pages to find out how some local authorities are seeking to meet these challenges.

FOCUS

What do you define as the key strategic challenge you are facing – how wide-ranging is your vision and your aspirations?

- Are you using school networks primarily to address school improvement, the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters*, or both simultaneously?
- Is your focus on specific tasks, such as getting Primary Strategy Learning Networks, Education Improvement Partnerships, or 14-19 collaboratives up and running successfully?
- Or is it much wider, for example community regeneration, where powerful learning networks of schools support a strategic re-alignment of schools with health services, youth services, housing, shopping developments and leisure facilities?
- Is it sensible or desirable to ask networks that were set up with a focus on improving teaching and learning also to take forward responsibilities emerging from the *Every Child Matters* agenda?

OWNERSHIP

How do you create the authority-wide vision and will for making networks of schools a key element in the new organisation and culture?

- How do you generate an authority-wide vision which embraces all partners and achieves buy-in from schools?
- If you start with voluntary learning networks created by schools themselves, how do you retain the commitment that ownership generates if you need to use these existing structures for new forms of delivery?
- How are you working with school leaders to achieve 'co-leadership' and ensure that there is commitment to a shared strategic vision?
- How do you engage colleagues from social services and other agencies outside schools and win their support for networks of schools as an integral part of the solution? How do you ensure that other services share this vision?

STRUCTURES

What structures are you putting in place within and across your school networks?

- What structures and activities do you need in place, and in what order, to support networks to be successful and to make the most of a more networked system?
- How are you seeking to balance risks – the proliferation of separate, unconnected networks, for example, against the risk of trying to bring too many organisations together and making the changes over-complicated?
- How are you structuring your school networks – for example, is it based on geographical area or by common interest? How does your focus impact upon this?
- How do you build sustainability into your networks – and into the local authority's support for them?

CAPACITY

How do you grow the capacities that the new organisational structures and cultures require?

- To what extent do networks of schools represent a new 'unit of engagement' from individual schools working in isolation?
- What are the new roles and key capabilities required? Where are they needed – in local authority staff, in schools, in neighbourhoods more generally?
- How does being part of a network affect the role of headteachers? How can the local authority help build capacity in schools to support heads in taking a more strategic, more system-wide role than in the past?
- How critical is a process of shared dialogue around the challenges and issues, 'wondering aloud', problem-framing and problem-solving with colleagues?

EFFECTIVENESS

What else do you need to do to make networks effective – what is the role of the local authority in supporting networks? How different is this from the traditional one?

- How do you best use national initiatives and what local incentives should you create?
- How important are facilitation and brokerage – of individual networks and of the system as a whole?
- How can you provide support and challenge to networks as the 'unit of engagement', ensuring that aspirations are consistently high?
- How can you act as a 'knowledge broker' to ensure networks have access to information on effective network operation, and share their learning with each other?
- How can you baseline, benchmark and assess the quality of work that is taking place within your networks and its impact upon young people?

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What do you define as the key strategic challenge you are facing – how wide-ranging is your vision and your aspirations?

Are you using school networks primarily to address school improvement, the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters*, or both simultaneously?

West Sussex has set its key strategic challenge specifically around serving every child – both in terms of developing personalised learning and delivering integrated children’s services. The twin drivers for change have been *Every Child Matters* and the localist agenda, which have led to bringing together the Children’s Service agendas for learning and welfare at a local level. School networks are therefore at the heart of the dynamic multi-agency services which the local authority supports. The Children’s Trust, established in the county, also facilitates close connection between the schools and a number of providers including the Police, Health and Social Care Trusts, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), Connexions and NHS Acute Trusts.

West Sussex – Robert Back

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“School networks are at the heart of the dynamic multi-agency services which the local authority supports.”

Is your focus on specific tasks, such as getting Primary Strategy Learning Networks, Education Improvement Partnerships, or 14-19 collaboratives up and running successfully?

Wiltshire is keen for its schools to take the lead in reform and to do so through setting up school networks based on national initiatives. The local authority is establishing a number of collaboratives including: Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs), Primary Strategy Learning Networks, Extended Schools and secondary foundation partnerships. In particular, EIPs provide the architecture for collaboration in the county, allowing functions to be increasingly delegated to schools and for the local authority to become a commissioner rather than a deliverer of services. The authority’s aim is to encourage local initiative.

Wiltshire – Stephanie Denovan

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“EIPs provide the architecture for collaboration in the county, allowing functions to be increasingly delegated to schools and for the local authority to become a commissioner rather than a deliverer of services.”

Or is it much wider, for example community regeneration, where powerful learning networks of schools support a strategic re-alignment of schools with health services, youth services, housing, shopping developments and leisure facilities?

Sheffield faces many problems associated with urban development and has widespread disadvantage and areas of extreme deprivation. The local authority's vision is to create successful neighbourhoods, which place schools at the heart of communities. Networks of schools are central to this, building more integrated local services and pooling resources to ensure effective intervention. Primary Strategy Learning Networks and Sure Start are important foundations in primary, whilst partnership working is already strong in secondary. The scale of the challenge means that this is a long-term project: this is reflected in existing agreements between Sheffield schools which commit to tackling issues collectively.

"The local authority's vision is to create successful neighbourhoods, which place schools at the heart of communities."

Sheffield – Bernard Campbell

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Is it sensible or desirable to ask networks that were set up with a focus on improving teaching and learning also to take forward responsibilities emerging from the Every Child Matters agenda?

Leicester City has spent some time working closely with schools to develop and implement a city-wide strategy for networks with a clear focus on teaching and learning. The School Improvement Clusters, which are not always geographical groupings, are configured only after schools have undertaken extensive needs analysis to identify the particular areas and foci they would like to take forward in a cluster. The groupings come together for a specified time period to undertake clearly focussed collaborative activity. Given the enthusiasm being shown for collaborative methods, the local authority is now consulting with key partners about how to move forward with the strategic delivery of children's services within a networked environment. At this stage, however, the authority is reluctant to overburden the new structures; particularly as so much energy has been exerted encouraging a bottom-up approach to collaboration.

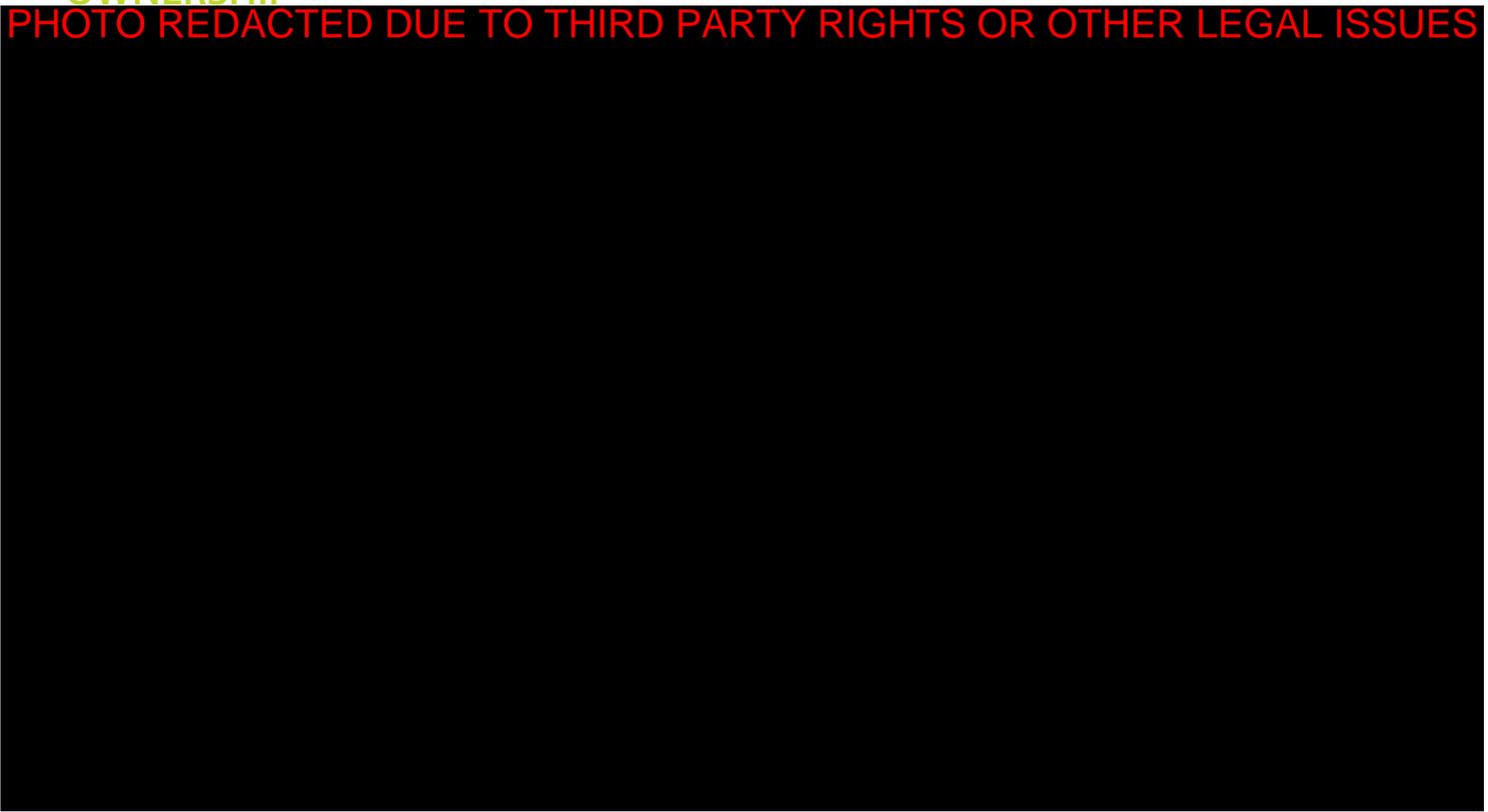
"...the School Improvement Clusters...are configured only after schools have undertaken extensive needs analysis..."

Leicester City – Peter Chilvers

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OWNERSHIP

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How do you create the authority-wide vision and will for making networks of schools a key element in the new organisation and culture?

How do you generate an authority-wide vision which embraces all partners and achieves buy-in from schools?

Although the enthusiasm of existing networks has been a key driver in **Liverpool's** decision to take forward a networked strategy, the local authority has recognised the need to generate the desire for participation beyond enthusiastic schools. A year of extensive consultation with schools has led to jointly-owned structures and all headteachers and schools participating. In Autumn 2004 all schools were asked to form themselves into networks, with primary schools (which have historically been less networked) taking the lead. Headteachers themselves have nominated the network co-leaders and have been fully involved in the appointment of seven Learning Network Co-ordinators, who will provide crucial, additional leadership capacity. As a result headteachers are showing real commitment to the developments. The task now is to generate deeper ownership and involvement in network activities by ensuring teachers, support staff and pupils take every opportunity to learn from, and with, each other.

Liverpool – Richard Powell

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“...the local authority has recognised the need to generate the desire for participation beyond enthusiastic schools...”

If you start with voluntary learning networks created by schools themselves, how do you retain the commitment that ownership generates if you need to use these existing structures for new forms of delivery?

Lancashire has keenly supported its schools forming networks, working on a bottom-up model in which self-identifying groups of schools want to work together. Schools have been extremely enthusiastic and significant proportions participate in a number of networked initiatives, particularly in primary. These were established for school improvement but the authority is now looking at the delivery of Children's Services. In order to retain this initial enthusiasm and commitment, Lancashire is seeking to influence its networks rather than impose new structures. It is taking a more active stance in brokering membership of networks through a 'Learning Networks Advisor' who takes a strategic overview and acts as a critical friend to schools.

Lancashire – Paul Duckworth

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“Lancashire is taking a more active stance in brokering membership of networks through a 'Learning Networks Advisor' who takes a strategic overview and acts as a critical friend to schools.”

How are you working with school leaders to achieve 'co-leadership' and ensure that there is commitment to a shared strategic vision?

In 2000 **Knowsley** was faced with a significant challenge to improve standards. Having appointed a new Director and restructured the education department, they received a very good OfSTED report in 2003. A defining feature of the restructuring has been to embed collaboration between schools, as well as to embed collaboration between schools and the authority. The central pillar has been a partnership framework in which every headteacher has agreed to work in a 'co-leadership' role with the local authority. This has instilled a strong sense of joint responsibility and all major decisions are now taken collectively and are based on the best outcome for all children in the borough. Schools have mutual accountability and joint targets, while the authority is moving towards providing pooled data for each network.

"The central pillar has been a partnership framework in which every headteacher has agreed to work in a 'co-leadership' role with the local authority."

Knowsley – Elaine Ayre

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How do you engage colleagues from social services and other agencies outside schools and win their support for networks of schools as an integral part of the solution? How do you ensure that other services share this vision?

Southwark has recently established eight geographical Community Learning Networks (paralleling its eight local Community Councils) to deliver integrated Children's Services. Pilots of multi-agency meetings have taken place through two networks in preparation for roll out to two further networks each year. Common Assessment Framework pilots will follow the multi-agency network pilots every year. There is also ongoing development work on multi-agency network links across all services through Senior Multi-Agency Managers meetings which take place once every half term. The authority is looking to pilot a programme for other professionals working with schools, as well as appointing a series of network managers with funds from education and social services. All senior local authority personnel, including the Director of Children's Services, work specifically with one Community Learning Network to help promote collaboration across agencies.

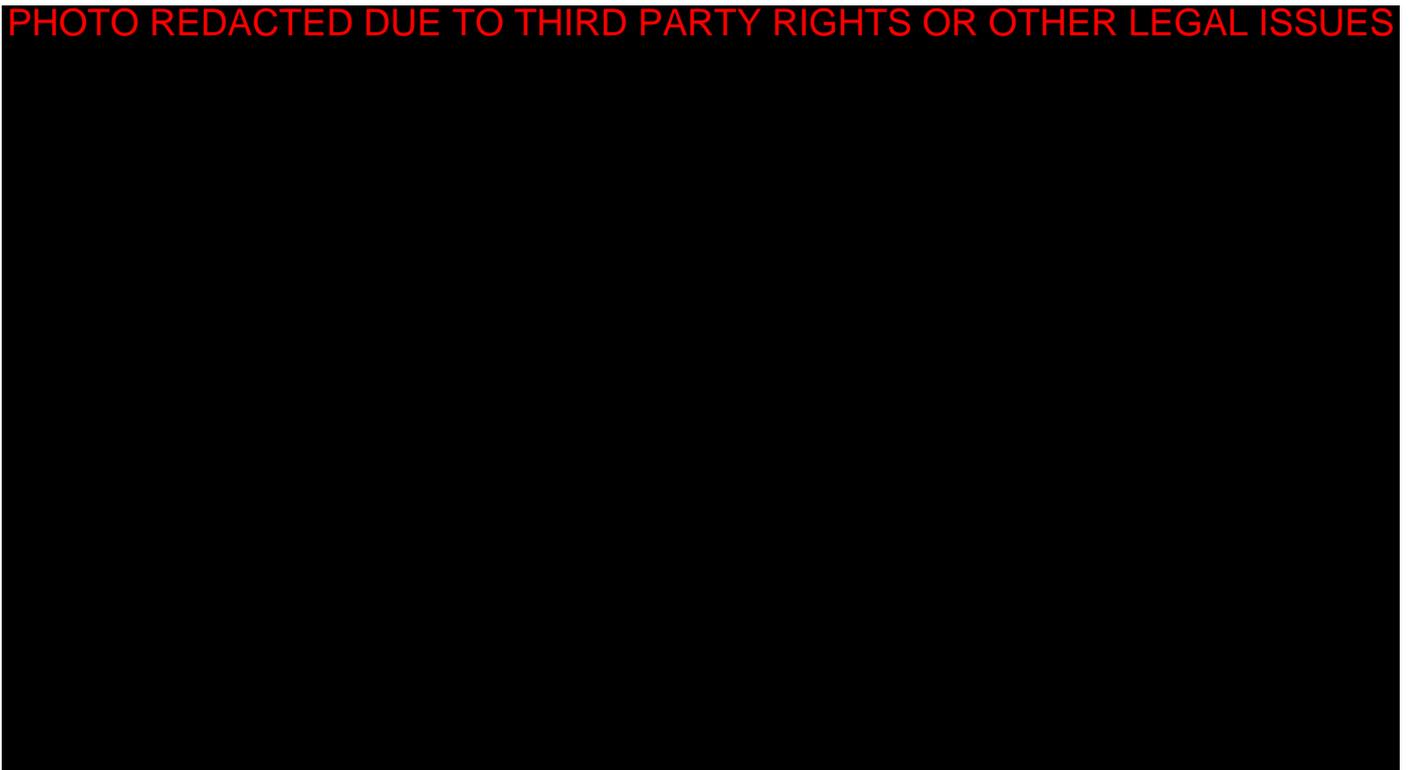
"All senior local authority personnel, including the Director of Children's Services, work specifically with one Community Learning Network to help promote collaboration across agencies."

Southwark – Denis Kelly

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STRUCTURES

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What structures are you putting in place within and across your school networks?

What structures and activities do you need in place, and in what order, to support networks to be successful and to make the most of a more networked system?

Wiltshire is moving towards delivering integrated Children's Services and supporting its schools to lead reform through networks and collaboration. The authority is keen not to create structures for school-to-school networks on their own without simultaneously setting activities in motion which can kick-start collaboration, creating enthusiasm and engagement. In terms of structures, Wiltshire is looking at Children's Trusts, co-location and multi-disciplinary services. Whilst these are being set up the local authority is also encouraging partnership projects around community responsibility for children in local areas and pupil voice. Education Improvement Partnerships will be an important enabler in getting schools working together quite quickly, while the long-term strategic structures are put in place.

"Education Improvement Partnerships will be an important enabler in getting schools working together quite quickly, while the long-term strategic structures are put in place."

Wiltshire – Stephanie Denovan

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How are you seeking to balance risks – the proliferation of separate, unconnected networks, for example, against the risk of trying to bring too many organisations together and making the changes over-complicated?

Redbridge faced a tough OfSTED review in 2000, after which its schools expressed a wish to work together collaboratively. Since then, the local authority has proactively sought to promote school networks. Having applied successfully to the National College for School Leadership, there are now six thematic, cross-phase Networked Learning Communities (NLCs) which involve 80% of schools in the borough. There are also strong network-to-network connections between them and dissemination of learning through conferences, publications and ICT. The result has been to develop a shared language and a networking ethos and an OfSTED inspection in 2002 noted significant improvements. Having successfully developed this way of working with NLCs, the authority is now looking to create a similar structure with seven thematic Primary Strategy Learning Networks for its 51 primary schools.

"...there are now six thematic, cross-phase Networked Learning Communities which involve 80% of schools in the borough."

Redbridge – Vicky Coxon

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How are you structuring your school networks – for example, is it based on geographical area or by common interest? How does your focus impact upon this?

Sheffield has a vision for the city as a whole which is focused on creating successful neighbourhoods. The local authority is creating an infrastructure for this vision based on seven 'Service Districts' and characterised by local delivery and local management. Geographically-based school networks are providing an important foundation for these broader developments. In primary, the local authority has also established learning networks which cover all schools and which provide the opportunity for schools serving very different parts of the city to learn from each others. In secondary, Excellence in Cities, Leadership Incentive Grants and the Education Action Zone have already underpinned the development of strong partnerships. As the Service District networks begin to secure area planning, the authority will work with all schools to support their involvement in at least one other practice-based network. The geographical compactness of the city is an important factor, allowing schools serving very different communities across the city to work together.

Sheffield – Bernard Campbell

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Sunderland is focused primarily on school improvement, with a major inclusion agenda. Schools have worked with the local authority to create a system of inter-school support, based on a 'hubs and spokes' model, which seeks to utilise a school's recognised strengths and expertise. There are development and support agreements between individual schools, the local authority and the host school, which are underwritten by Partnership Agreements. Some special schools have taken over the remit for the support of specific groups and employ outreach teams across the authority as hubs. All secondary schools are working together to support disaffected children and those at risk of exclusion. The collaborative use of data supports this work and, overall, there has been a significant decrease in permanent exclusions.

Sunderland – Sandra Mitchell

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"The geographical compactness of the city is an important factor, allowing schools serving very different communities across the city to work together."

"Schools have worked with the local authority to create a system of inter-school support which seeks to utilise a school's recognised strengths and expertise."

How do you build sustainability into your networks – and into the local authority's support for them?

Bedfordshire has created seven geographical Learning Communities which include all the schools in the authority. Membership was decided centrally; every school had to join, and work cross-phase. Each Learning Community could, however, choose what to focus on. The aim is to reach a point where the Learning Communities are self-governing and the structures established at this point prove sustainable in the long-term. In order to get there, the Communities receive significant support from the local authority and the Bedfordshire School Improvement Partnership (BSIP). The authority has also attached School Improvement Advisers directly to the Learning Communities, provides a collaborative fund to each in the first year and supplies Learning Community-wide school data to support the development of a Community Collaborative Plan. The fund is being used to pay for seconded Learning Community Leaders, Continuing Professional Development Coordinators and administrators.

Bedfordshire – Bob Clayton

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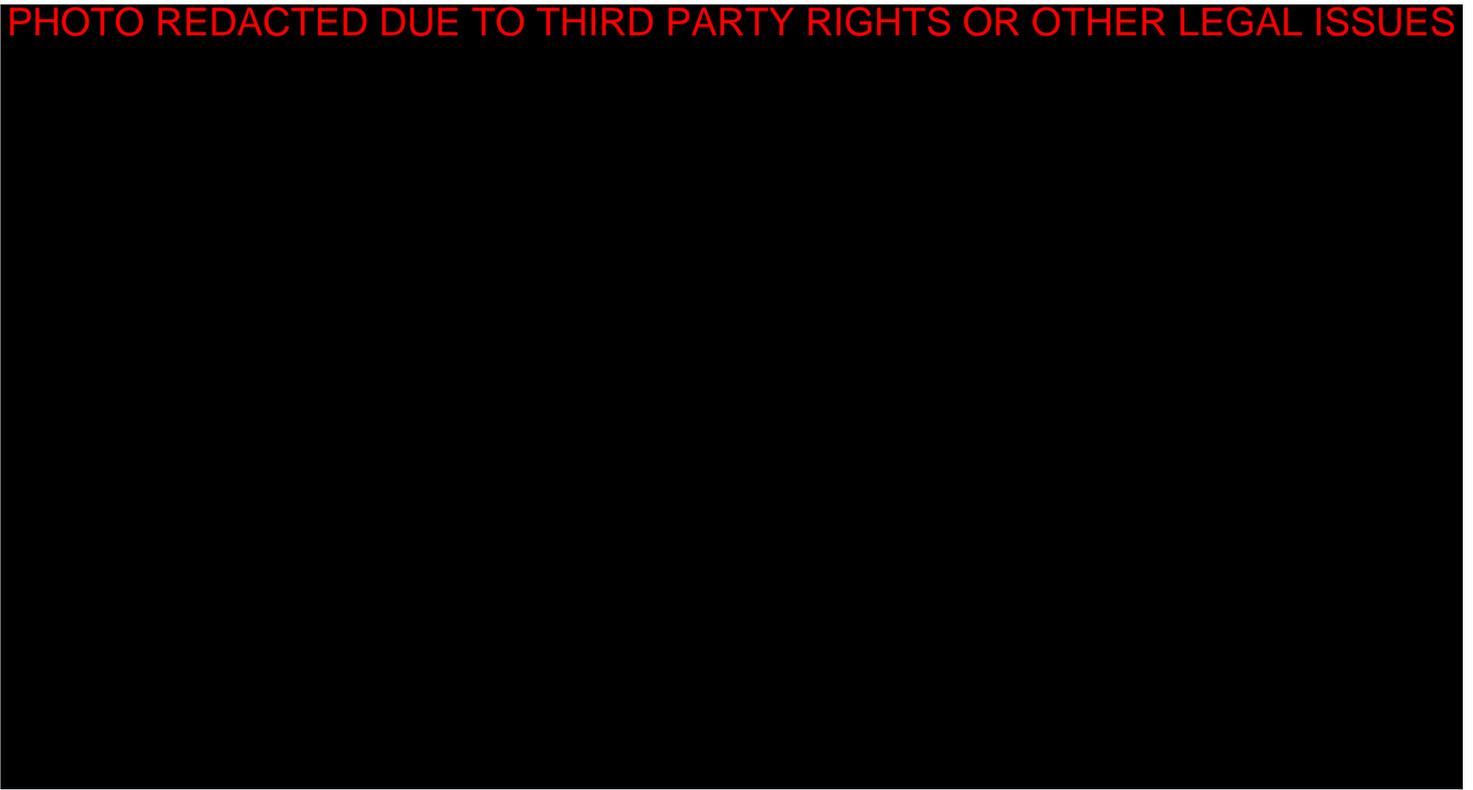
“The aim is to reach a point where the Learning Communities are self-governing and the structures established prove sustainable in the long-term.”

Notes, thoughts and actions

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CAPACITY

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How do you grow the capacities that the new organisational structures and cultures require?

To what extent do networks of schools represent a new 'unit of engagement' from individual schools working in isolation?

Bedfordshire is a small, mainly rural county with 224 schools. With large numbers of small schools and a 3-tier system (with two transition periods), collaboration between schools is a virtual necessity. The seven Learning Communities that were designed centrally were intended to change the 'unit of engagement' between the local authority and its schools, simplifying the complex web of county-wide relationships. In its place are strong localised links, with the schools in each Learning Community increasingly collectively responsible for all the pupils in their area and for the outcomes in each school.

Bedfordshire – Bob Clayton

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“Learning Communities were intended to simplify the complex web of county-wide relationships.”

What are the new roles and key capabilities required? Where are they needed – in local authority staff, in schools, in neighbourhoods more generally?

The **Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames** is focusing on the goals of *Every Child Matters*. Its schools are arranged in six geographically-based clusters, working cross-phase for the delivery of extended school provision, integrated services for children, school improvement and SEN services. The local authority is devolving responsibility to groups of schools to take on authority-wide provision of some subjects and support staff training. The new governance arrangements and strategic partnerships have increased leadership capacity, and action-research and enquiry are both significant activities. Headteachers, in particular, are taking an active interest in their own learning. The local authority is working towards having permanent network co-ordinators, but these roles are currently being undertaken by authority staff so that they better understand what this involves. It is also piloting multi-disciplinary teams working with clusters.

Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames – Janet Martin

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“The local authority is working towards having permanent network co-ordinators, but these roles are currently being undertaken by authority staff so that they better understand what this involves.”

How does being part of a network affect the role of headteachers? How can the local authority help build capacity in schools to support heads in taking a more strategic, more system-wide role than in the past?

In **Knowsley** every headteacher is involved in a partnership framework, working as 'co-leaders' with the authority. Their role is more strategic than in the past and is based on outcomes for the whole borough rather than just their own school. As a result, 'system leadership' is an integral part of being a school leader. Currently, headteachers are working together on a strategy for using Building Schools of the Future funding to rebuild all Knowsley secondary schools into seven learning centres and an academy, even though they know it will reduce the number of leaders employed. This is evidence of the strength of collective decision-making and the bonds of moral purpose that have developed.

Knowsley – Elaine Ayre

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"The headteachers' role is more strategic than in the past and is based on outcomes for the whole borough rather than just their own school."

How critical is a process of shared dialogue around the challenges and issues, 'wondering aloud', problem-framing and problem-solving with colleagues?

Cornwall is a very large authority in the process of creating nine geographically-based networks for Extended Schools. The authority has established the multi-agency Extended School Steering Group to address the core challenges of working together collectively. The Steering Group has acknowledged that there will be different requirements and solutions in each area, dependent on factors such as rural isolation, the strength of existing partnerships, and accessibility to other partners and agencies. Regional conferences are organised at which networks and network co-ordinators are brought together, enabling them to engage in problem-solving discussions, to increase effectiveness and to avoid duplication.

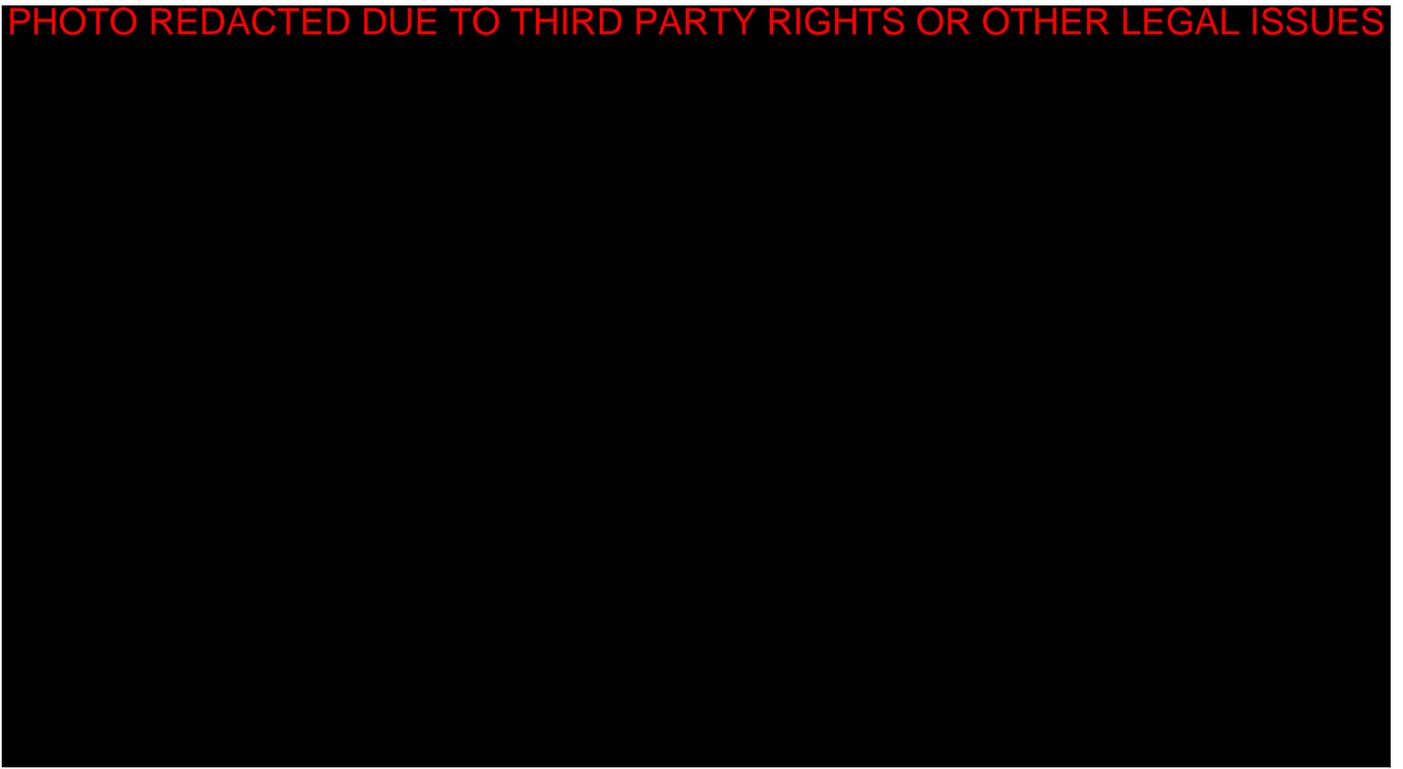
Cornwall – Helen Williams

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"The authority has established the multi-agency Extended School Steering Group to address the core challenges of working together collectively."

EFFECTIVENESS

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What else do you need to do to make networks effective – what is the role of the local authority in supporting networks? How different is this from the traditional one?

How do you best use national initiatives and what local incentives should you create?

Essex is an extremely large and diverse authority. To cope with this the area is sub-divided into four regions each of which contains school networks (Local Delivery Groups) that have been constructed strategically according to geography. These groups are being used as a focal point for national and local initiatives to drive collaboration, but each is adapted to the local context and vision. Collective data sets and profiles for each Local Delivery Group have been developed to support needs analysis, mapping and service development in localities according to locally identified priorities for children and young people. In terms of recent national strategies such as Primary Strategy Learning Networks (PSLN), Essex is working with schools on implementation to align them with the structures that already exist. Rollout of PSLN was delayed until ownership of it by schools across Essex could be assured, and these networks have been strategically located, wherever possible, within the Local Delivery Groups. A combination of extended schools strategy and PSLNs are now having a significant effect on driving the network group agendas.

Essex – Jo Smith

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“Rollout of PSLN was delayed until ownership of it by schools across Essex could be assured.”

How important are facilitation and brokerage – of individual networks and of the system as a whole?

The **Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames** established its school networks through proactive brokerage with each of its schools. Transparency and the presentation of a clear strategic vision of how collaboration could contribute to achieving the goals of *Every Child Matters* were central to getting headteachers on board. With these key structures now in place, priority is being given to the facilitation requirements of the clusters and to how the local authority can move from leading to facilitating. They are taking a practical, learn-through-doing approach, with the CEO and other existing local authority staff working in pairs as facilitators. In the future, designated cluster co-ordinators may be introduced, with the roles based closely on what has previously worked well.

Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames – Janet Martin

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“Transparency and presenting a clear strategic vision of how collaboration could contribute to achieving the goals of Every Child Matters were central to getting headteachers on board.”

How can you provide support and challenge to networks as the 'unit of engagement', ensuring that aspirations are consistently high?

In open consultation with headteachers and governors, **Derbyshire** has developed a structure for supporting and challenging clusters of schools. Advisory teams facilitate termly opportunities to share effective practice around locally-raised issues. Secondary schools and their primary partners receive annual funding for collaborative projects to improve transition across key stages. Learning is carefully evaluated and then disseminated through local cluster meetings. Planning for learning networks has been supported by a rigorous programme of interactions with trained network mentors, ensuring a continuous focus on outcomes for children. School-based network champions, or 'Lead Developers', empowered by their headteachers, work with all staff and children in designing innovative strategies to raise standards through wider collaboration.

Derbyshire – Judy Hardwick

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"School-based network champions... work with all staff and children in designing innovative strategies to raise standards through wider collaboration."

How can you act as a 'knowledge broker' to ensure networks have access to information on effective network operation, and share their learning with each other?

Buckinghamshire has developed a school leadership academy which has over 200 headteachers as paying members, and has 155 primary and secondary schools engaged in learning communities. The Buckinghamshire Academy for School Leadership (BASL) is based on the principles of collaborative leadership learning: sharing responsibility collectively for the transformation of all schools. BASL provides opportunities through a number of other training programmes. An annual residential conference, two Leading Edge seminars and regional half-termly Professional Voice Workshops provide the basic structure of the programme. The ongoing running of the Academy has been entrusted to a board run by and for school leaders. The local authority is also establishing a virtual learning environment to enhance the sharing of knowledge derived from practice and research.

Buckinghamshire – Gordon Vincent

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"The local authority is establishing a virtual learning environment to enhance the sharing of knowledge derived from practice and research."

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ISBN 1-84478-585-8