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Education Committee

School Partnerships and Cooperation

Fourth Report of Session 2013–14

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The Education Committee

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Summary

School partnerships and cooperation have become an increasingly important part of a self-improving or school-led system. We believe that such collaboration has great potential to continue driving improvement to the English education system. The diversity of structures and models already in place is a strength and proof of vitality. Schools should be able to adopt models of partnership and cooperation that suit their needs within a legislative and policy framework that is as non-prescriptive as possible.

School collaboration offers benefits to all schools involved. While there are tensions between competition and collaboration, these are largely creative tensions and collaboration is growing in many forms within a competitive school system.

Given the high level of enthusiasm for school collaboration, it is striking that definitive evidence of its impact is lacking. We recommend that the Government embed evaluation into further initiatives relating to school partnerships and collects systematic evidence on what works.

The Government has published similar schools data to help schools identify possible partners. Much more needs to be done to provide richer and more easily accessible information and to make this an effective resource for schools. It is regrettable that the data system is not modelled more closely on the families of schools used in the London and City Challenge programmes.

There are different possible incentives to encourage school collaboration. We support Sir Michael Wilshaw's proposal for an excellent leadership award to be given to headteachers who support underperforming schools in disadvantaged communities. We regret that no one has yet devised a workable model of school accountability that incentivises school partnerships and we encourage efforts to generate an appropriate model.

We believe that the Government is right to provide funding to help schools meet the costs associated with taking part in collaboration. We recommend that the Government widen this funding beyond academy sponsorship to assist other partnerships, in particular using the Primary Chains Grant to help schools cover the cost of forming federations. We also recommend that the Government re-introduce targeted seedcorn funding for sustainable Independent State School Partnerships.

Local authorities have a critical role to play in a school-led improvement system. We welcome this emerging new system and we recommend that the Government set out clearly the role of local authorities in helping to broker school-to-school partnerships and acting as champions of all parents and children in their region.

The evidence suggests a need for greater oversight of school partnerships and cooperation, possibly on a regional basis. The Government should set out how organisations in the middle tier will be held to account for strategic oversight of partnership-working in all schools and how they will ensure that gaps are not allowed to develop or remain unfilled, particularly in rural and coastal areas. The DfE and the National College of Teaching and Leadership should identify and designate system leaders, such as National Leaders of

Education and Teaching Schools, in areas where they are currently lacking, and increase incentives for existing leaders to work in the areas of greatest need.

The DfE should make an assessment of the quality and capacity to provide expertise within a school-led improvement system and ensure that schools are aware of where they can access such advice.

There is no doubt that academy chains will play an increasingly important part in a self-improvement system. We recommend that Ofsted is provided with the powers it needs to inspect academy chains. We also recommend that the procedures for schools to leave chains by mutual consent are formalised and published and that the Government explains how an outstanding school would be able to leave a chain when this is against the wishes of the chain management.

Convertor academies are expected to support other schools in return for their academy status and yet the evidence to us suggested that this is not happening. We recommend that the DfE urgently reviews its arrangements for monitoring the expectation that convertor academies support other schools.

1 Introduction

Background to the inquiry

1. In the 2010 Schools White Paper the Government set out its vision of a self-improving education system, stating that:

our aim should be to create a school system which is more effectively self-improving. [...] It is also important that we design the system in a way which allows the most effective practice to spread more quickly and the best schools and leaders to take greater responsibility and extend their reach.¹

2. Partnership working and cooperation between schools has long been part of the education landscape, whether encouraged by government or not. Nevertheless, in recent years and alongside the changing role of local authorities, school partnerships and cooperation have become an increasingly important part of what has been referred to as a “self-improving” or “school-led” system.² This has been seen particularly in the successful London Challenge and City Challenge programmes which led to significant improvements in the schools in the areas involved. It has also been a key driver behind the rapid expansion of the academies programme.

3. There seems little doubt among school leaders that collaboration can play an important part in school improvement. Research commissioned by the National College of Teaching and Leadership suggested that 87% of headteachers and 83% of chairs of governors describe partnership with other schools as “critical to improving outcomes for students”.³ The same survey also found that a majority of headteachers (60%) felt the policy environment is supportive of forming collaborative partnerships, although this leaves a large proportion of school leaders who do not endorse that view.⁴

Our inquiry

4. We launched our inquiry into School Partnerships and Cooperation on 13 March 2013, inviting written evidence on the following matters:

- the differing forms of school partnership and cooperation, and whether they have particular advantages and disadvantages;
- how highly performing schools could better be encouraged to cooperate with others;

1 Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching: the Schools White Paper 2010*, Cm 7980, November 2010, para 7.4

2 *Ibid.*

3 National College for School Leadership, *Review of the school leadership landscape*, December 2012., p 56.

4 *Ibid.*

- whether schools have sufficient incentives to form meaningful and lasting relationships with other schools;
- if and how the potential tension between school partnership and cooperation, and school choice and competition can be resolved;
- whether converter academies' requirements to support other schools, included in their funding agreements, are sufficient and are effectively policed;
- whether academies sponsored by another school receive sufficient support from their sponsor;
- whether school partnerships drive effective school improvement; and
- whether there are any additional upsides or downsides for highly performing schools supporting others through partnerships.

Evidence base of our inquiry

5. We received around 50 submissions of written evidence from a range of organisations and individuals, including state-funded schools, independent schools, an academy chain, Co-operative trusts and clusters, representatives of local government, national collaborative organisations, teaching and school leadership unions, academics, policy researchers, Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE).

6. We held two formal oral evidence sessions, where we heard from a range of witnesses. These were:

- leaders of schools and organisations involved in collaborative working;
- academics and researchers with expertise in the field of school partnerships;
- representatives from organisations providing the structure for schools to work together; and,
- the responsible Minister (Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools) and relevant DfE official (Andrew McCully, Director General for Infrastructure and Funding).

7. This inquiry has benefited from the involvement of our specialist advisers, Professor Mel Ainscow and Professor Alan Smithers, and we are grateful to them for sharing their expertise.⁵

⁵ Professor Smithers, Director of the Centre for Education and Employment Research, University of Buckingham, declared no interests. Professor Ainscow, Professor of Education and co-director of the Centre for Equity in Education, University of Manchester, declared no interests.

Background information

8. The forms of collaboration included within the description of “schools partnerships and cooperation” are highly diverse, both because of substantive differences in the depth of collaboration and because of differences in the forms partnership can take. The terms “partnership”, “cooperation” and “collaboration” are sometimes used interchangeably, but the key distinction is between those partnerships which have a formal basis and those which do not.

Legal structure underpinning formal partnerships

Federations

9. In a Federation, schools create a single, federated governing body for two or more schools. The federated governing body may then choose to create joint roles, such as a single “executive” headteacher across multiple schools, but this is not a necessary part of federation. The Education Act 2002 initially laid the ground for formal partnership through federation. Since then regulations have been progressively updated so that now maintained schools may form federations under The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012. A variation is statutory collaboration, under the School Governance (Collaboration) Regulations 2003. In these cases, schools retain their own governing bodies but create a joint committee with some delegated powers. Only maintained schools may form federations, just as only academies can form chains.

Trust schools

10. Introduced by the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Trust schools allow a maintained foundation school to be supported by a charitable foundation (referred to as “the Trust”). In return the Trust is able to appoint some of the Governors and bring additional expertise to support the school leadership. They have some similarities to sponsored academies, except that they do not entirely sever links with their local authority. This model has been particularly popular among schools wishing to adopt a Co-operative model, with clusters of schools setting up Co-operative trusts with representation from stakeholders, such as parents, staff, learners and the local community. In the same way as academy chains, schools supported by one Trust work together.

“Academy chains” (Multi-academy Trusts, Umbrella Trusts and Collaborative Partnerships)

11. The term “academy chain” is often used to describe any group of academies working together (under some definitions, such as that adopted by the National College for School Leadership report “The growth of academy chains: implications for leaders and leadership”, more than two schools⁶). As such, it has become a broad term covering a wide

6 National College for School Leadership, *The growth of academy chains: implications for leaders and leadership*, January 2012, p 6

variety of partnership structures of varying degrees of closeness. The following definitions draw on pages⁷ and documents⁸ from the DfE website:

- i. **Multi-academy Trust (MAT):** A number of schools join together and form a single Trust and Board of Directors—there is only one legal entity accountable for all schools in the Trust and there is one set of Articles which governs all the academies in that Trust. The MAT has a Master Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State and each academy also has a Supplemental Funding Agreement. The MAT may set up either a local governing body or advisory body for each Academy. The MAT can agree to delegate some matters to this local governing body.
- ii. **Umbrella Trust (UT):** This allows a cluster of primary schools, or a mixture of primary and secondary, to set up a trust which allows them to work together while still retaining a certain level of independence and individuality. For example, the UT may appoint a governor in each school in the chain to provide a clear link between the schools. It can also procure joint services to reduce costs for all of the individual schools involved. This allows schools of mixed category (e.g. Voluntary Controlled, Voluntary Aided, and Community) to work together. Multi-academy Trusts can be members of an Umbrella Trust.
- iii. **Collaborative Partnerships:** There is no shared Trust or governance arrangement in a collaborative partnership. A collaborative partnership is simply an agreement between a group of Academies to work together. The Academies themselves can decide how tight or formalised to make such an arrangement; for example, through agreeing a contract or publicising their arrangement.

12. MATs and UTs are functions of the structure and content of academies' funding agreements and memoranda and articles of association. These can only be altered with the permission of the Secretary of State.

Looser collaboration and school-to-school support

National Teaching Schools

13. The Government's primary focus for school to school cooperation is through National Teaching Schools. These act as hubs for both initial and ongoing training. Schools applying to become Teaching Schools are asked for "evidence of successful partnerships as well as excellent leadership with a proven track record of school improvement".⁹

14. Teaching Schools act as the core of a Teaching School Alliance. These are cooperative organisations that may cross phase, sector and local authority lines. There is no single model of what a Teaching School Alliance should look like. They vary both in structure—for example some are led by more than one teaching school—and in funding strategy (as

7 "Academy chains FAQs", Department for Education, 20 July 2012, www.education.gov.uk

8 "Models of Academy chains", Department for Education, www.education.gov.uk

9 National teaching schools, National College Support for Schools article, www.education.gov.uk

we heard from Peter Maunder, when comparing Torbay Teaching School Alliance with Cabot Learning Federation's Teaching School Alliance¹⁰). As of May 2013, there are just over 360 Teaching Schools across England.¹¹

System leadership (National Leaders of Education, National Support Schools, Local Leaders of Education and Specialist Leaders of Education)

15. The National College of Teaching and Leadership co-ordinates the “system leadership” programmes. These encourage headteachers of highly performing schools to “use their skills and experience to support schools in challenging circumstances” by working to “increase the leadership capacity of other schools to help raise standards”. Outstanding headteachers can apply to be Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) or National Leaders of Education (NLEs). The selection criteria for the latter are more demanding than those for the former and the role encompasses other members of their school staff, with the schools designated National Support Schools (NSS).¹² There are over 800 National Leaders of Education (NLE) and almost 2,000 Local Leaders of Education (LLE), with a third of secondary heads and a sixth of primary heads either an NLE, LLE or a member of a Teaching School alliance.¹³

16. Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) are outstanding middle or senior leaders, with “the skills to support individuals or teams in similar positions in other schools”.¹⁴ Unlike NLEs and LLE, SLEs are specifically attached to a local Teaching School alliance.

Collaborative organisations

17. Many national school to school support organisations have sprung up in the past few years. A report from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on the role of the “middle tier” in enabling school improvement argues that such “national middle tier bodies [are important] for inspiration and support”.¹⁵ Examples of national collaborative organisations include the Whole Education network,¹⁶ the PiXL club,¹⁷ and Challenge Partners.¹⁸ Unlike the programmes above, such organisations are not Government initiatives. As such, they are particularly good examples of the concept of a school-led system.

10 Q 31 [Peter Maunder]

11 Teaching schools get £10 million to boost quality of teacher training, Department for Education press release, 21 March 2013, www.gov.uk

12 National leaders of education and national support schools, National College Support for Schools article, www.education.gov.uk

13 Teaching schools get £10 million to boost quality of teacher training, Department for Education press release, 21 March 2013, www.gov.uk

14 Specialist leaders of education, National College Support for Schools article, www.education.gov.uk

15 National Federation for Educational Research. *What works in enabling school improvement? The role of the middle tier*, 2013, p 4.

16 What we do, Whole Education website, www.wholeeducation.org

17 Home page, The PiXL Club website, www.pixl.org.uk

18 About, Challenge Partners website, www.challengepartners.org

2 Potential for school collaboration

School collaboration for school improvement

18. We heard near-universal support for the concept of schools collaborating in order to provide a better service for all children and young people.¹⁹ Witnesses described a wide range of activities involved in school collaboration and identified a number of clear benefits. For example, the Culm Co-operative Learning Partnership considered that school to school cooperation “broadens opportunities. It enables faster policy implementation of new ideas and policies. It contributes to efficiency”.²⁰ A common theme in evidence was being able to provide activities, whether for staff or pupils, that would not be viable within the constituent schools on their own.

19. Much partnership and cooperation involves shared Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Evidence from Collaborative Schools Ltd., a partnership in Wiltshire, stated that joint CPD allowed them to provide “more opportunities tailored to meet needs”.²¹ Evidence collected by Myscience showed that “a significant minority of the [Myscience] teacher panel felt that being in a family or alliance offered increased access to CPD”, noting that this feeling was particularly strong in primary schools.²² We heard from the Girls Day School Trust (GDST) about their ‘Driving Outstanding Practice Programme’, which gives teachers the opportunity to “learn from experiences and best practice in different environments” in order to “develop the skills and strategies to achieve outstanding learning and progress from students.” The teachers are then encouraged to share this with colleagues back in their own schools.²³ An alternative model is followed by North Tyneside Learning Trust, who told us that they sponsor “a range of CPD opportunities geared towards strengthening leadership and supporting outstanding teaching”.²⁴ The Association of Teachers and Lecturers noted that collaboration also allows for “opportunities to observe teaching and gain feedback from peers on their own teaching”, in addition to what might traditionally be thought of as CPD.²⁵

20. Collaborative working also has the potential to provide direct benefits to pupils. St Peter’s School, York told us that its Independent State School Partnership helps with “increasing access to minority and shortage subjects”,²⁶ which would not otherwise be viable. Similarly, the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) pointed to the “exchange programmes between rural and inner city schools which offer opportunities for

19 Qq 1-4

20 Ev w6, para 6

21 Ev w40, para 7.1

22 Ev w49, para 29

23 Ev w13, paras 27-31

24 Ev w111, para 4.2

25 Ev w78, para 27

26 Ev 57, para 4.7.1

pupils from different and diverse backgrounds to mix”.²⁷ Evidence from Culm Co-operative Learning Partnership implied that inter-school collaborative working also helped encourage teachers to see their role as part of something bigger. It listed advantages of its partnership including: “developing networks so that everyone feels part of the larger community of schools [and] finding out about what happens at each phase of education to help pupils make sense of progression from one stage to another and to enable continuity and preparation for lifelong learning”.²⁸

21. Other evidence focused on leadership development, such as the example we received from Helen Salmon, currently Principal of Tavistock College but at the time Headteacher of St James’ School in Exeter.²⁹ The DfE argued that school collaboration’s “biggest contribution to school leadership development lies in providing rich and varied opportunities to lead, innovate and take responsibility. Collaborative working therefore provides a broader base for developing leaders and greater opportunity for leaders to learn from one another”.³⁰

22. Some partnerships are also able to deploy their staff across different schools to make the best use of them. Cllr Ralph Berry, Portfolio Holder for Education and Children’s Services at Bradford Council, described how brokered support saw “an experienced Academy Head and two Community School Deputies move to [a failing] school for 2 years to tackle [its] issues”.³¹ Movement between schools was not just restricted to staff: in some cases partnerships can also facilitate the movement of pupils. Sir David Carter told us that the Cabot Learning Federation “are able to create Managed Moves between the Academies in order to give students in the CLF the chance of a ‘fresh start’”.³²

23. We were given several examples that point to the potential of school collaboration as a strategy for raising standards. Many of these described how relatively successful schools - in both the state and private sector—have been effective in supporting improvements in poorly performing schools. For example, we heard from Peter Maunder, Headteacher of Oldway School in Paignton, who stressed the long term nature of his school’s involvement in collaboration with other schools³³ and the great benefits they had seen flow from it: “all schools that were below category have experienced significant improvement and have moved above floor targets”.³⁴

24. It is apparent that school partnership and cooperation is generating new energy within the education system and, in so doing, fostering a great deal of innovation. We note, however, that we also heard warnings that the approach might wrongly come to be seen as

27 Ev w25, para 2

28 Ev w4, para 1

29 Ev w20, para 2.1

30 Ev 46, para 20

31 Ev w71

32 Ev 45, para 4

33 Q 4

34 Ev 84, para 1.2-1.3

the answer to all the challenges facing schools. Both the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)³⁵ and Ofsted argued in written evidence that collaboration is not a panacea. Ofsted explained: “The success of the collaboration will ultimately depend on the quality of the leadership in identifying an ambitious vision for improvement, a clear strategy for its implementation and a rigorous system for monitoring its effectiveness”.³⁶ The National Union of Teachers (NUT) similarly identified that collaboration can only work with proper commitment:

School collaboration is not a simple strategy that automatically brings about success. It can be complex and time consuming and may not always be successful. Neither is it cost neutral: many activities require teacher time, both during and beyond the school day, as well as support staff administration and co-ordination. All of these may deplete the time and effort available for staff to focus on their own school and students.³⁷

25. These reservations raise concerns that collaboration may exhibit some features of a ‘fad’. Whilst such strategies for improvement work when adopted by energetic individuals, who will implement them with the high quality leadership, clear vision and rigorous evaluation identified above, their impact may fade when adopted by schools who do not implement these strategies with the same enthusiasm, commitment and skill.

Importance of mutual benefit

26. Some concerns were expressed in written evidence that becoming part of a partnership, or engaging in other forms of cooperation, could pose risks to the performance of highly performing schools which were supporting others. ASCL reported that within schools such fears are often expressed by governing bodies, especially where they are concerned that there could be an adverse impact on performance measures.³⁸ Similarly, the NAHT were concerned that “it is not uncommon for high performing schools to experience an amount of ‘backlash’ if it is perceived by the schools’ parent body that the head and leading teachers are spending too much time off-site supporting other schools”.³⁹ The GDST echoed both of these points⁴⁰ and evidence from Myscience stated that its experience was that “tension exists between outstanding schools using their staff to support other schools [...] and leaving them in the classroom to continue to achieve outstanding results”.⁴¹

27. Despite this, most of the evidence we received focused on the mutual benefit in such partnerships. Mervyn Wilson, Chief Executive of the Co-operative College, argued that no school “has all the answers” and as such “stronger [schools] benefit as much as the schools

35 Ev w6, para 7

36 Ev 80 paras 7-8

37 Ev w33, para 51

38 Ev w6, para 14

39 Ev w25, para 7

40 Ev w13, para 32

41 Ev w49, para 8

that they are supporting”.⁴² Leo Winkley, headteacher of St. Peter’s School in York, said that parents also understood the benefits both in these terms, and in giving children “a sense of the world around them”.⁴³ Peter Maunder told us: “There is always a challenge within the school or on my very best teachers to get a balance between my very best teachers teaching children, coaching and developing other teachers in my school and carrying out outreach work. However, we have been involved in this for a long time and we can definitely see great benefits”.⁴⁴

28. While it may be true that there are inherent risks to highly performing schools in collaborating with others, most expressed confidence that they are manageable. Sir David Carter, Executive Principal of the Cabot Learning Federation, stated that “the best leaders will mitigate that risk and look very carefully at what capacity they can create”. He argued that taking into account the needs of both schools will produce the best results: “The model of the successful school working alongside a school that is on an improvement journey is enhanced when the results of both schools are expected to improve”.⁴⁵ The DfE endorsed this view in its written evidence and quoted Dr Gary Holden, Chief Executive of The Williamson Trust, an Academy Sponsor, who said: “We took the decision to sponsor because it was the right thing to do and because it is itself a great school improvement strategy. By working together all partner schools improve”.⁴⁶

29. Co-operatives UK argued that the fact that both sides benefit from partnership means that the relationship should not be seen as one-sided and paternalistic. On the contrary “there are advantages recognised in co-operative school partnerships of mutual support”.⁴⁷ The National Union of Teachers followed a similar line of argument in concluding that schools in partnerships should be “treated as equal partners rather than their influence and activity in the partnership being determined by Ofsted grade or league table position”.⁴⁸ The NAHT argued that, without this mutual respect, collaboration will not be an effective improvement strategy: “There must be trust between those schools working together, mutual respect for staff and pupils alike and confidence and recognition that all schools in the collaboration have something to bring to the group as well as something they want to take out”.⁴⁹ The Co-operative College also argued there is much greater capacity for collaboration for improvement in relationships of a non-paternalistic nature: “if a number of schools are working mutually together to support a school with a lead school overseeing delivery of the support, in consultation with the school being supported and the other schools involved, provides much greater capacity—and much less ‘doing to’”.⁵⁰

42 Q 6

43 Q 3

44 Q 4

45 Q 9

46 Ev 46, para 3

47 Ev w82, para 25

48 Ev w33, para 4

49 Ev w25, para 5

50 Ev 86, para 3.5.4

30. Mervyn Wilson from the Co-operative College accepted in oral evidence that he could see circumstances where this would not be completely appropriate: “It is also fair to say that a co-operative model is not a solution for a failing school. The model does not address the weaknesses within a school in that way”.⁵¹ Similarly, evidence from Tavistock College, while advocating cooperation which is “not too forced”, stated that this was not meant in reference to “schools in special measures where wholesale change is required”.⁵² On the other hand, evidence from City Challenge demonstrates that more intensive partnerships were often effective in bringing about rapid improvements in such schools.⁵³

31. Properly handled, school collaboration offers benefits to all schools involved. The Government should continue to promote this message so as to reassure reluctant governing bodies and promote equality of esteem among all participants.

Competition and collaboration

32. The written evidence we received was sharply divided over whether competition between schools creates serious problems for encouraging them to collaborate or whether they can co-exist happily. For example, the NUT expressed concern that “the single biggest challenge to collaboration is the Government’s marketised approach to education”.⁵⁴ Similarly, the NASUWT argued that “the use of competitive quasi-markets in the provision of education works to undermine collaboration between educational institutions”.⁵⁵

33. James O’Shaughnessy argued that this is a misguided view of markets, where collaboration and innovation does take place within firms.⁵⁶ Evidence from the London Leadership Strategy highlighted an example given by David Hargreaves, Associate Director for Development and Research of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, in a report on the leadership of a self-improving school system.⁵⁷ He argued that:

It is commonly claimed by school leaders that collaboration between schools would increase if only competition between them were to be removed. In the business world, including Silicon Valley, collaboration and competition live side by side. It seems that if the system is rich in social capital, competition does not drive out collaboration but may actively promote it.⁵⁸

34. In general, witnesses endorsed this view that the two could coexist, with partnerships helping schools to rise to the challenges created through competition. ASCL stated that what is needed for a successful education system is a careful balance between these two

51 Q 22

52 Ev w18, para 4

53 Hutchings, M., Hollingworth, S., Mansaray, A., Rose, R. and Greenwood, C. (2012), *Research report DFE-RR215: Evaluation of the City Challenge programme*, London: Department for Education

54 Ev w33, para 52

55 Ev w56, para 9

56 Ev w84, para 7

57 Ev w102, para 3.4

58 National College for School Leadership, *Leading a self-improving school system*, September 2011, p 18

forces, but that “this balance is not yet right. [...] Autonomy and collaboration are both needed, so these tensions cannot be resolved; rather they need to be held in balance. The tension then has the potential to be creative and positive”.⁵⁹ Sir David Carter argued that, even within cooperative organisations, accountability measures created healthy competition with “academy principals sitting around the table who all want their school to perform well in the Federation”, but it does not erode working relationships, because they all know that “everybody is contributing results to that whole”.⁶⁰ James O’Shaughnessy also argued that the creative tension between competition and collaboration is beneficial: “Competition is the sharp edge that ensures that collaboration does not slip into complacency”.⁶¹

35. The Minister agreed with this position, arguing that “The fact that there are schools in the area that are doing better and are collaborating may well cause tension among those schools in the area that are not doing well and maybe not collaborating. That is healthy, because it might encourage them to collaborate”.⁶² **We believe that while there are tensions between competition and collaboration, these are largely creative tensions. Collaboration between schools is growing in many forms within a competitive school system.**

Evidence of impact

36. Given the high levels of enthusiasm and belief in the efficacy of school partnerships, it was striking to hear that definitive evidence of impact was lacking.⁶³ In particular, Dr Caroline Kenny, a Research Officer at the Institute of Education, and David Sims, Research Director at the NFER, pointed out that evidence was missing on the conditions needed for successful partnerships and how they generate positive effects.⁶⁴ David Sims argued that:

There is not really a rigorous evidence base on the impact of partnerships on attainment and attendance, for instance. There are pockets of qualitative evidence that we have, but in terms of hard, measurable evidence there is very little. If claims are made that certain partnerships, federations or trusts are having an impact, where is the evidence for that and how testable is it? I think we have a long way to go to provide that kind of evidence.⁶⁵

37. These comments should not be taken as critical of school partnerships in themselves. James O’Shaughnessy, former Research Director of Policy Exchange, while generally positive on the effects of partnership, agreed that “we want to be able to disaggregate the impact of a school just being better led or having better teachers or teaching practices from

59 Ev w6, para 29

60 Q 38

61 Q 94

62 Q 249

63 Ev 74, para 6

64 Q 56 [Dr. Kenny]

65 Q 57 [David Sims]

the effect of being part of a chain, group or federation”.⁶⁶ Dr Kenny argued that such research was important to “make [school partnerships] the best that they possibly can be” and hence guide effective policy-making. She also stressed that evaluation should be an integral part of the roll-out of the partnerships programme, not something that is an afterthought.⁶⁷

38. Some research has been carried out or commissioned. Two projects funded by the Education Endowment Foundation include school collaboration within their approach. Challenge the Gap⁶⁸ aims to measure “whether schools can work together to successfully narrow the gap and raise attainment”.⁶⁹ Achieve Together⁷⁰ includes a pilot project “to see if greater collaboration can improve results”.⁷¹ Quantitative evidence was provided by Chapman, Muijs and MacAllister in a report for the National College of School Leadership. Using statistical matching, they found that schools in “performance” and “academy” federations started with similar results but, two to four years after the formation of the federation, had better performance than schools with apparently similar characteristics that had not federated. In addition, they identified federations adopting executive leadership structures (one executive head leading schools within the federation) as achieving better results than those which maintained traditional structures (one head teacher for each school).⁷²

39. The DfE view was that “the research is clear; schools that are working in partnership arrangements are raising standards and improving at a faster rate”.⁷³ While Government statistics back up this case, identifying the underlying cause of this improvement is more complicated than this makes it sound. Given the widespread enthusiasm and the encouraging improvements already seen, the intention of seeking evaluation is not to slow down the introduction of a school-led system. On the contrary, the aim is to ensure that what works and why is fully understood, and hence the education system can achieve the best possible outcomes from a school-led improvement system. Indeed, later in this report, we suggest steps to maintain the momentum behind school collaboration and get more institutions involved in partnerships and cooperation. ***Although evidence on the impact of school partnerships seems positive, it would still benefit from robust evaluation, particularly aimed at identifying what works and why. Given the importance of a school-led improvement system to its vision, we recommend that the Government embed evaluation into further initiatives relating to school partnership and collect systematic evidence on ‘what works’.***

66 Q 68

67 Q 60

68 Run by Challenge Partners and to be evaluated by Manchester University.

69 Challenge the Gap: Challenge Partners, Education Endowment Foundation projects, 10 February 2012, educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk

70 Run by Teach First, Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders and to be evaluated by the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

71 Achieve Together: Teach First, Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders, Education Endowment Foundation projects, 23 January 2013, educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk

72 National College for School Leadership, *A study of the impact of school federation on student outcomes*, August 2011, p 4

73 Ev 46, para 20

3 Diversity and desirable features

Diversity of models

40. During this inquiry we heard about the wide range of ways in which schools are working together and the many different models of school partnership and cooperation that support this. Even within the broad headings given to different models there is a great deal of variety in the way these operate. We took oral evidence from representatives of an academy chain, with an overlapping Teaching School Alliance; a maintained school, accredited as a Teaching School and leading a Teaching School Alliance; an independent school, participating in an Independent State School Partnership; Co-operative schools; a local authority, whose schools were now part of autonomous self-improvement consortia⁷⁴; and a national collaborative organisation. In addition, we received written evidence describing an even broader range of collaboration arrangements. Understandably, witnesses each argued for their own models of engagement.

41. In their written evidence ASCL advised us that, such was the diversity of collaboration between schools, that one should not “be fixated on a limited number of named types of partnership”.⁷⁵ Various witnesses argued that this diversity was important to the success of the approach and that autonomy of choice was key. The NAHT argued that “Open and transparent collaboration can provide school leaders and governors the opportunity to tailor partnerships to their individual school and pupils’ needs”.⁷⁶ On a similar point, Tavistock College emphasised that: “Partnerships are far more effective if they are driven at the local level. This doesn’t mean to say that they are insular and that national/regional expertise cannot be brought in but there needs to be a local structure that has autonomy”,⁷⁷ and the National Association of School Partnerships told us that:

if schools are going to benefit long-term from real partnerships that begin to transform the system, then a large degree of autonomy is always going to be important. Otherwise there is a risk of one system (Government/Local Authority controlling) being replaced by a similar one (Academy Chains/Teaching School Alliances controlling) and a real school partnership driven system, with all of the benefits this can bring, may not become a reality.⁷⁸

42. Different organisations highlighted diverse aspects of partnerships as being of importance to them. Academy chains, such as the Cabot Learning Federation in Bristol, are at the harder end of partnership, and Sir David Carter clearly felt that this was important to the organisation’s success: “the tighter your structure, the better the accountability”.⁷⁹

74 Local Government Association, *The council role in school improvement: Case studies of emerging models* (London, 2013), p 18

75 Ev w6, para 16

76 Ev w25, para 8

77 Ev w18, para 2

78 Ev w64, p 3

79 Q 19 [Sir David Carter]

However, even within the category of academy chains we heard that there is a great deal of diversity in the closeness of the relationships between schools involved.⁸⁰

43. Members of and advocates of Co-operative school clusters emphasised the importance to them of being “multi-stakeholder models that engage parents, staff, learners and the local community”.⁸¹ Titus Alexander, convener of Democracy Matters, argued for the benefits of such a Co-operative model because: “The membership based model of community stake-holding offers genuine localism in the management and use of public assets by local communities. Co-operative trusts are about mutualisation and groups of schools working strategically together for the common good”.⁸²

44. The evidence we heard explained different schools’ rationales for their particular models, in terms of suiting a particular school’s ethos and history. There was no support for the need to tidy up what can appear a ‘messy’ picture. Kirston Nelson, Assistant Director of Education at Wigan Council told us that they didn’t want the Government to start prescribing what sort of partnerships should be being created.⁸³ ASCL expressed the view that “Where schools are forced to collaborate, especially with partners with very different institutional cultures, then the collaboration tends to be token, and the benefit slight”.⁸⁴ More practically, Sir David Carter argued that it would be a distraction to alter the terms of engagement for a partnership, when it is working effectively.⁸⁵

45. The DfE told us that “At the heart of this Government’s reforms is the belief that school leaders and those working in schools are best placed to make effective decisions regarding schools”.⁸⁶ Whilst the Minister was “clear that the strongest and best form of collaboration is found in the strong governance of a multi-academy trust”, he also considered that “most school partnerships should be down to local determination”.⁸⁷ **We believe that, in common with the Government’s view of the education system, schools are best placed to identify the most effective ways to work with other schools, based on their particular history, ethos and challenges. Schools should be able to adopt models of partnership and co-operation that suit their needs within a legislative and policy framework that is as non-prescriptive as possible.**

46. There were common threads that emerged from the successful models about which we heard. Altrincham Grammar School for Girls argued that “under a more formal arrangement such as a trust of sponsored academies, there is the capability to make things happen in a more strategic and consistent way. There is more ownership by all”.⁸⁸

80 Ev w6, paras 21-22

81 Q 8

82 Ev w100, para 3.2

83 Q 116

84 Ev w6, para 20

85 Q 20

86 Ev w46, para 28

87 Ev 55

88 Ev w52, part 3, para 1

Similarly, Mervyn Wilson described the Co-operative school clusters as “not unbreakable but sustainable beyond individuals”.⁸⁹ The DfE echoed these sentiments: “It is the Government’s view that many of the advantages of collaborative working can only fully be realised through establishing formal partnerships in which all those involved make a long term commitment to the partnership and in which the lines of accountability are clear”.⁹⁰

We believe that school partnerships with clear lines of accountability and some element of obligation are more likely to be successful in achieving gains from collaboration.

Families of schools

47. We heard evidence that school-to-school cooperation has to be based on an analysis of data that invite schools to compare their performance with other schools serving similar populations, for example through ‘families of schools’ data as used in the City Challenge programmes.⁹¹ Professor David Woods, former Principal National Challenge Adviser for England, told us this should include socio-economic make-up and prior attainment.⁹² The GDST told us their schools’ performance data is shared across the group, “encouraging those who are not performing well in some areas to seek advice from those who are”.⁹³ The use of such data systems provides a challenge to existing expectations as to what is possible and helps to ensure that there is an emphasis on mutual learning within the collaborative activities that occur. Professor David Woods and Professor George Berwick, Chief Executive of Challenge Partners, both expressed this in terms of preventing schools from being in denial about what they could achieve for their pupils.⁹⁴

48. Without this, it was felt that there is a danger of creating time-wasting ‘talking shops’ that have little or no impact on the practice of schools and the learning of pupils. In commenting on the Greater Manchester Challenge, Professor Mel Ainscow, Professor of Education at the University of Manchester and an adviser to our inquiry, observed that “collaboration is at its most powerful where partner schools are carefully matched and know what they are trying to achieve. Data also matters in order that schools go beyond cosy relationships that have no impact on outcomes”.⁹⁵ In addition, detailed analysis of schools data helps to identify areas of relative strength that can be used for the purpose of mutual improvement. Professor Ainscow argued in a research article that “schools have to dig more deeply into the comparative data in order to expose areas of strength that can be used to influence performance across their Family, whilst also identifying areas for improvement in every school”.⁹⁶

89 Q 14

90 Ev 46, para 6

91 Ev 1, para 10

92 Q 131 [Professor Woods]

93 Ev w13, para 46

94 Q 131 [Professor Woods]

95 Ev w1, para 10

96 Professor Mel Ainscow, “Moving knowledge around: strategies for fostering equity within educational systems”, *Journal of Educational Change*, vol 13 (2012), pp 289-310

49. The Government has recently introduced ‘similar schools’ data to the performance tables on its website. Using a statistical matching technique, these place secondary schools within a group of 55 and primary schools within a group of 125 similar institutions, based on prior attainment of their intake. Unlike the families of schools, these are not fixed groups, but rather generated separately for each school. For secondary schools the Key Stage 2 performance of each member of the school’s intake is used to predict the probability that they will achieve 5 A*-C grades in GCSE or equivalents, using national-level data. An average figure for the school is then calculated. The schools are then ranked by the actual proportion who achieve 5 A*-C grades in GCSE or equivalents. Schools achieving statistically significantly higher than the school of interest and located within 75 miles are highlighted in green as potential partners.⁹⁷ A similar method is used for primary schools, except that the probability of an individual achieving Level 4 in English and Maths at Key Stage 2 is predicted using scores from Key Stage 1.⁹⁸

50. Andrew McCully from the DfE told us that the similar schools data “is precisely the kind of information that was so powerful in the London Challenge”.⁹⁹ We are not convinced that this is the case since, as discussed above, a key feature of the families of schools was that they compared schools outcomes across several characteristics. The data included GCSE results with and without English and Maths, and a Contextual Value Added measure, as well as additional contextual families focusing on EAL and Mobility that enabled schools with significant proportions of pupils with these characteristics to compare themselves and share their experiences with other similar schools.¹⁰⁰ This meant that matches could be made where both schools could see what they could learn from collaboration. The similar schools data is more limited. ***The Government’s publication of similar schools data is a useful first step but much more needs to be done to make this an effective resource for schools. In particular, the data should highlight schools’ strengths and weaknesses so that schools find it easier to form partnerships where both parties can challenge and be challenged to improve. We recommend that the DfE review the presentation of similar schools data in consultation with schools in order to provide richer and more easily accessible information on possible partners.***

51. Doubts were also expressed about the rationale behind changing the name from ‘families of schools’ to ‘similar schools’. The term ‘families of schools’ was raised in several submissions to us, suggesting an enduring familiarity among schools in former-City Challenge areas. Andrew McCully advised us that he was “unsure how much faith you should put in a name”.¹⁰¹ The Minister later told us that, given the changes in methodology outlined above, “it would be confusing to previous users if we used the same title”.¹⁰² Having seen the implementation, we agree with this assessment, but consider that this

97 KS4 Similar Schools Guidance, Department for Education website, www.education.gov.uk

98 KS2 Similar Schools Guidance, Department for Education website, www.education.gov.uk

99 Q 174

100 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0438-2006>

101 Q 175

102 Ev 56, paras 3-4

highlights the shortcomings of the new system. The Government’s 2010 White Paper appeared to envisage the introduction of a system much closer to the original ‘families of schools’ approach.¹⁰³ **It is regrettable that, in establishing the similar schools data system, the Department for Education did not adopt a model more like the original ‘families of schools’ and then use the familiar name to help achieve buy-in from schools.**

Geographical coherence

52. We heard during this inquiry that the issue of locality, or geographical coherence, is a key factor in creating effective school partnerships.¹⁰⁴ More specifically, much of the evidence suggested that groups of schools that serve a relatively small area have a greater chance of moving expertise around in order to address challenges and raise standards.¹⁰⁵ This argument was seen to be relevant to all types of partnership, including chains of academies. In his written evidence, Sir David Carter emphasised the importance of proximity in arguing: “In a school system where the accountability rests within schools and between partnerships, there can be no better way for a group of motivated and talented leaders, sponsors and community representative to take responsibility for the educational standards in the towns and cities where they are based”.¹⁰⁶ Peter Maunder similarly emphasised the moral purpose generated in working together for children within a particular place.¹⁰⁷ We heard from Mervyn Wilson that this was about being rooted in a community.¹⁰⁸ There are also practical difficulties if geography is not given priority. Wellington School, which sponsors an academy a considerable distance away, told us that “the distance between the College and its Academy has proved a challenge at times. Logistical difficulties (time taken to travel, differing length of the school day at each establishment, cost of transport) has inevitably required careful planning and budgeting”.¹⁰⁹

53. The view that partnerships should be in a tight geographical area was not universally shared. Devon County Council told us in its written evidence that it has found that geographical proximity between schools is not essential for effective partnerships.¹¹⁰

54. As discussed above, we consider that the best partnerships are built bottom-up and, while many are likely to emerge on a geographically coherent basis under these conditions, some may not. The idea of a self-improving school system is that schools are generally the right bodies to identify the support they need. As such, it would not be right to

103 Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching: the Schools White Paper 2010*, Cm 7980, November 2010, para 7.10

104 Q 13 [Peter Maunder]

105 Q 12

106 Ev w107, p 8

107 Q 13 [Peter Maunder]

108 Q 13 [Mervyn Wilson]

109 Ev w109, para 2

110 Ev w95, para 1

circumscribe schools' options on geographical lines. Some partnerships, however, such as forced academisation, do involve a central body picking a sponsor. In these cases, it seems right that the importance of geographical coherence is taken into account and the Minister assured us that it is one of the criteria used.¹¹¹ *The preponderance of the evidence we received suggests that partnerships in which all members are located within close proximity are most likely to be effective. The DfE should bear in mind the significance of this when identifying sponsors for academies and should ensure that the advantages of geographical proximity are set out in relevant guidance on school partnerships and cooperation more generally.*

55. We discussed with witnesses the question of the areas within which partnerships are best located. Sir David Carter told us that the members of John Cabot Academy's Teaching School Alliance are all "within 25 to 30 minutes of each other and probably within three or four square miles" and that the Federation would struggle to achieve the same depth of collaboration, such as movement of staff and pupils, without this close proximity.¹¹² The distance between Wellington School, whose concerns about distance we noted above, and The Wellington Academy is approximately an hour's drive, under 50 miles as the crow flies.

56. The Minister told us that 'similar schools' data would include a higher performing school "within a reasonable travelling distance",¹¹³ which he clarified to mean a maximum of an hour's drive.¹¹⁴ The 'similar schools' data now provided on schools' performance tables highlights "better performing schools in each group that are located within 75 miles of the focus school".¹¹⁵ 75 miles is not legally an hour's drive between any two points in England and is considerably further than can be travelled within an hour in many parts of the country, including major conurbations and very rural areas. *We are concerned that the Government's definition of a "reasonable travelling distance" has not been sensibly applied to the similar schools tables. We recommend that the definition is altered to become "within an hour's drive" (ie 30 to 50 miles depending on location).*

57. *We note that in rural and coastal areas the number of suitable partner schools within an hour's drive may be very limited. We recommend that the Government set out how the similar schools model applies to schools in rural and coastal areas and assess the applicability of the collaborative model to remote schools.*

111 Q 242

112 Q 12

113 Q 176

114 Q 177

115 KS4 Similar Schools Guidance, Department for Education website, www.education.gov.uk

4 Incentivising partnerships

Ofsted

58. A major lever for policy makers is the incentives provided by Ofsted’s frameworks, against which schools know they will be judged. We therefore explored the potential for these to have a role in incentivising partnerships. At the moment, it appears that the potential is not being fully realised. Professor David Woods suggested that, while recognition of outstanding leadership beyond an individual school is mentioned in some Ofsted reports, it is very “hit and miss” and incentives should be strengthened.¹¹⁶

59. We heard various suggestions to make better use of these incentives. Earlier this year Sir Michael Wilshaw told us that he would like to introduce a grade for “excellent leadership” specifically for headteachers that “support an underperforming school in the most disadvantaged communities”.¹¹⁷ Written evidence to this inquiry from Nottingham City Council suggested that “A pre-requisite of an overall ‘Outstanding’ grade by Ofsted could be evidence of having had a measurable impact on supporting other schools”.¹¹⁸ The Greater Manchester Partnership concurred in its support for including school to school support as one of Ofsted’s criteria:

The proposal to include school to school support as one of the Ofsted criteria for receiving an outstanding judgement has significant merit and would act as an incentive to develop a more systematic approach to school to school support.¹¹⁹

Similarly, the Academies Commission recommended that Ofsted should only judge a school’s leadership as outstanding if the school could provide evidence of a contribution to system-wide improvement.¹²⁰ Members of the Commission subsequently told us that they also supported the proposal that Ofsted should deny an overall outstanding judgement to the school as a whole unless this condition was met.¹²¹ Kirston Nelson from Wigan Council told us of her disappointment that a judgment based on a school’s capacity to support other schools was not included in Ofsted’s new framework.¹²²

60. We discussed with the Minister the possibility of introducing a new Ofsted category which would recognise school to school support. He expressed concern that this could be “confusing”,¹²³ arguing that it might lead parents to think the education provided by schools judged ‘outstanding’ was inferior to those who are judged ‘outstanding and providing support to other schools’. Instead he referred to proposals for “a star rating for

116 Q 137

117 Oral evidence taken before the Education Committee on 13 February 2013, HC (2012-13) 980-i, Q 15

118 Ev w9, para 2

119 Ev w52

120 Academies Commission, *Unleashing greatness: Getting the best from an academised system* (London, 2013) p 10

121 Oral evidence taken before the Education Committee on 24 April 2013, HC (2012-13) 1102-i, Q 8

122 Q 138

123 Q 191

the leadership of the schools involved in system support”,¹²⁴ which would be kept distinct to avoid confusion.

61. We agree with the Government that it would be incorrect and confusing for Ofsted to label outstanding schools differently according to their excellence in supporting other schools, when they deliver just as good levels of education to the pupils in their care. We strongly support Sir Michael Wilshaw’s proposal for an excellent leadership award to be given to school leaders rather than schools, as the highest accolade available to headteachers and only for those who support underperforming schools in disadvantaged communities.

School accountability measures

62. The school accountability system rests entirely upon a school’s own results. The system therefore provides no recognition of a school’s efforts to help other schools to improve. Indeed, both the Teacher Development Trust¹²⁵ and ASCL argue that the current accountability system acts as a disincentive for schools to work with others,¹²⁶ due to the risks discussed above that results may be adversely affected. To address this, Peter Maunder argued that the accountability system should be strengthened by “looking at a whole area—the children and the education of those children across an area—between schools in terms of school improvement, teaching school alliances, federations all working together”.¹²⁷ The NASUWT highlighted “the previous administration’s School Report Card proposal, subsequently discarded by the Coalition Government, [which] sought to examine ways in which systems of accountability might be recast to emphasise more effectively the importance of collaboration between schools.”¹²⁸

63. We are concerned that using the accountability system to make schools responsible for all the children within their local area could dilute their focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for their pupils. As Andrew McCully from the DfE suggested to us, despite agreeing with the ultimate aim, over-complicating the system might also reduce its effectiveness.¹²⁹ We note that neither the Government’s consultation on school accountability measures for secondary schools¹³⁰ nor the consultation on primary schools referred to trying to use school accountability measures to encourage school collaboration.¹³¹ **We regret that no one has yet devised a workable model of school accountability that incentivises schools to form partnerships, whilst preserving school level responsibility and retaining the impetus to maximise their pupils’ performance.**

124 Q 191

125 Ev w107, para 2.1

126 Ev w6, para 5

127 Q 37

128 Ev w56, para 16

129 Q 253

130 “Secondary school accountability consultation”, Government Consultations, 7 February 2013, www.gov.uk

131 “Primary assessment and accountability under the new national curriculum”, Department for Education, 17 July 2012, www.education.gov.uk

We see the potential of such an approach and encourage further efforts to generate an appropriate model.

Financial incentives

64. A more direct incentive for collaboration would be a financial one. Evidence presented to us suggested that funding was needed to ensure that schools did not suffer losses, rather than to act as an additional reward. The NUT pointed out that “many activities require teacher time, both during and beyond the school day, as well as support staff administration and co-ordination”.¹³² Mervyn Wilson told us that, while he was “rather cautious about the over incentivising that creates the wrong motives”, there was a role for financial incentives, in particular to meet specific costs associated with building a formal partnership. He expressed disappointment at the closure of the Supported Schools Programme, which provided funding towards the costs of conversion to foundation status.¹³³ Similarly, Nottingham City Council argued in its written evidence for “Financial inducements to meet the costs of supporting other schools”, including back-filling for the staff working in other schools.¹³⁴ Collaborative Schools Ltd. argued that financial incentives could help to alleviate pressures on the capacity of highly performing schools to support others.¹³⁵

65. The Government recognises the role of using financial incentives per se, with programmes such as the NLE Deployment Fund, Sponsor Capacity Fund, and initial funding for Teaching Schools.¹³⁶ The 2010 Schools White Paper stated that the Government would “establish a new collaboration fund worth £35m each year [which] will financially reward schools which support weaker schools to demonstrably improve their performance while also improving their own”.¹³⁷ It was not clear to us what had become of this promise. On 24 April 2013 the Minister of State for Schools (Rt. Hon. David Laws MP) stated in a parliamentary answer that no allocations had been made “using the model originally envisaged in the White Paper”.¹³⁸ When pushed in oral evidence, Andrew McCully did “not quite recognise that particular bit of the White Paper”.¹³⁹ The Minister later wrote to inform us that, in fact, the DfE had “not made a specific allocation to a collaboration incentive” but did fund “a number of initiatives that facilitate school to school collaboration”. These included using inspirational leaders to build capacity and the sponsored academy programme. Taking account of the costs of these programmes, “the Department has spent far more than £35 million per annum on supporting school collaboration”.¹⁴⁰ We note from this reply that the Department is unable to quantify exactly

¹³² Ev w33, para 51

¹³³ Q 33

¹³⁴ Ev w9, para 2

¹³⁵ Ev w49m para 4.1

¹³⁶ Ev w107, para 21

¹³⁷ Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching: the Schools White Paper 2010*, Cm 7980, November 2010, para 7.13

¹³⁸ HC Deb, 24 April 2013, col 959W.

¹³⁹ Q190 [Andrew McCully]

how much has been spent on rewarding school to school collaboration, nor has it been able to offer an explanation as to why the initiative was dropped.

66. In its original evidence the DfE also highlighted the Primary Chains Grant, which it told us provided “£25,000 of financial support to primary schools converting as part of an academy chain” to recognise “both the benefits of academy chains and the particular challenges primary schools face when managing conversions”.¹⁴¹ We heard some concern about the over-emphasis on academisation in relation to primary schools. The Academies Commission, for example, recommended that “the federation of primary schools be encouraged without an immediate emphasis on academy status”.¹⁴² Similarly, the National Governors’ Association considered that primary schools should be “offered financial incentives to use the collaboration regulations and/or form federations”,¹⁴³ and Dr John Dunford argued that “The government should provide stronger financial incentives to small primary schools to federate”.¹⁴⁴

67. We believe that the Government should provide funding to help schools meet the costs associated with taking part in collaboration. We are concerned that the existing funding incentives are concentrated too narrowly on the academy sponsorship route. The Government should widen this funding to help meet the costs associated with formalising other partnerships. In particular, we recommend that the Government widen eligibility for the Primary Chains Grant to help schools cover the cost of forming federations, since many would benefit from working in partnership without leaving local authority control.

Funding for Teaching Schools

68. Specific questions were raised with us about funding for Teaching Schools. We heard arguments against the very principles of the Teaching School form of collaboration. The NASUWT argued in its written evidence that “incentives have been created for schools involved in [teaching schools] to focus on commercial objectives and priorities rather than on ensuring that collaboration works to maintain and enhance the quality and range of educational opportunities made available to pupils”.¹⁴⁵ Other witnesses were concerned about the structure of the funding arrangements. Funding for Teaching Schools is currently tapered over three years and Dr John Dunford argued that this should be changed to ensure that the “very small” amount of funding available for local partnerships “continues to stimulate the collaborative working of teaching school alliances”.¹⁴⁶ He argued that the withdrawal of funding might prevent schools from taking on the role in the first place.¹⁴⁷ Professor David Woods agreed, suggesting that, while it was right not to fund

140 Ev 56, para 3

141 Ev 46

142 Academies Commission, *Unleashing greatness: Getting the best from an academised system* (London, 2013), p 35

143 Ev w90, para 4.5

144 Ev 79, para 12

145 Ev w56, para. 30

146 Q 99 [Dr. John Dunford]

147 Ev 79, para 6

the entire programme, the funding represented very good value for money at “only £60,000 for an infrastructure of 15 to 20 schools”.¹⁴⁸

69. The potential extension of funding was not universally supported. Sir David Carter, for example, argued that it was clear from the start that this funding was short term and that it is “appropriate to apply a business model” in this way.¹⁴⁹ This would allow for continuity, with the support provided by Teaching Schools able to survive future changes in policy, including, for example, the end of Teaching Schools as an initiative. He also expressed concern that unless it is clear that ‘pump-priming’ funding will be withdrawn after a set period, schools may not plan for its withdrawal and could become dependent on it.¹⁵⁰

70. We recognise the challenges posed by the nature of funding for Teaching Schools but the take-up rate of the Teaching School Programme suggests that concern about the limited period of funding has not deterred schools from participating. We believe that the DfE has adopted the right approach in providing funding only to help with start up costs with the expectation that they become self-sustaining organisations thereafter.

Independent State School Partnerships

71. We were told that Independent State School Partnerships (ISSPs), such as that in York which we heard about from Leo Winkley,¹⁵¹ have the potential to bring large benefits to independent and state partners. Mr Winkley set out how such partnerships can do a lot with “quite modest funding”,¹⁵² and the Independent Schools Council (ISC) told us that “Numerous external assessments of the scheme noted the positive outcomes for thousands of children”.¹⁵³ ISSPs allow these schools to work together in “flexible” ways, a quality greatly valued by participants from the independent sector.¹⁵⁴¹⁵⁵

72. The Independent Schools Council was critical of the removal of seed corn funding for such partnerships, which they perceived as an effort to prioritise “a single preferred model of engagement, that of sponsored academy”.¹⁵⁶ Recently, the Secretary of State for Education has called for more independent schools to become Teaching Schools.¹⁵⁷ This adds an additional route for engagement, but it does not offer the same scope as ISSPs,

148 Q 140

149 Q 31

150 Q 33

151 Ev 57

152 Q 32

153 Ev w86, Executive Summary para 4

154 Ev 57, para 5.1

155 Ev w86, para 3

156 Ev w86, para 15

157 Michael Gove calls on independent schools to help drive improvements to state education, Department for Education press release, 10 July 2013, www.gov.uk

which often include shared activities for pupils as well as teachers, such as the “Saturday sessions for pupils across the schools in York” that Leo Winkley described.¹⁵⁸

73. Independent schools and state schools have much they can do for and usefully learn from one another. We welcome the Government’s steps to promote closer links between the independent and maintained education sectors, but consider that academy sponsorship is not always the right engagement model for such partnerships. We recommend that the Government re-introduce targeted seed corn funding to encourage the establishment of sustainable Independent State School Partnerships.

5 Coordinating collaboration

The middle tier and the new role of local authorities

74. The debate over whether there is a need for a middle tier in the new school system as a result of the academies programme has been going on for some time. Several submissions to this inquiry argued that a middle tier is an important part of a self-improving school system. The McKinsey report “How the world’s best education systems keep getting better” argues for the critical role of a “mediating layer” or middle tier for several reasons: they can provide targeted support to schools; act as a buffer between central government and schools; and enhance collaborative exchange between schools (for example through brokering support).¹⁵⁹ A review of the role of the middle tier by the National Foundation for Educational Research argued that the key foci for the middle tier in enabling school-to-school support are to:

Develop a long-term vision and strategy for Teaching and Learning that moves beyond compliance and to which all partners sign up. [...] Develop a framework for school-to-school support.[...] Embed evaluation and challenge.¹⁶⁰

75. Who or what should constitute the middle tier is also a matter of some long-standing debate. Dr John Dunford argued that Ofsted might have an important role in brokering partnerships, especially in using its data as “the starting point for a comprehensive database of excellent practice”.¹⁶¹ The majority of witnesses, however, pointed to the unique position of local authorities. The Local Government Association told us that “The councils we have spoken to see a continuing council role in holding school improvement partnerships to account, backed by a continuing council role in tackling underperforming schools. The importance of this ‘convening’ and ‘accountability’ role for councils has been underscored by Ofsted’s decision to inspect council school improvement services”.¹⁶² Devon County Council also considered that “the Local Authority’s brokerage role is key and ensures that these partnerships are robust and sustainable.”¹⁶³ Speaking from a non-local authority viewpoint, Sir David Carter cited the “soft intelligence” held by local authorities and the important role this can have for effective collaboration.¹⁶⁴

76. Witnesses did not advocate a return to the old model of LEA-led improvement. Peter Maunder identified some of the limitations of the previous system, in particular that, while “the expertise resided in schools”, it was delivered by “top-down systems through advisers

¹⁵⁹ Mourshed, M., Chijioke, C., Barber, M. (2010) “How the world’s best performing school systems keep getting better”, McKinsey & Co., p.81-87.

¹⁶⁰ Aston, Easton, Sims, Smith, Walter, Crossley and Crossley-Holland (2013). What works in enabling school improvement? The role of the middle tier. National Federation for Educational Research. p.9.

¹⁶¹ Ev 79, para.4.

¹⁶² Ev 78, paras.1&3.1.

¹⁶³ Ev 95, p.2.

¹⁶⁴ Q 16

and consultants who had been out of schools for a very long time”.¹⁶⁵ Rather, the evidence suggests that local authorities have already adopted a new way of working. Recent research for the National Foundation for Educational Research into what works in enabling school improvement found that “LAs were repositioning themselves to put schools in the lead, while securing delivery of their statutory duties through education partnerships. They were adopting a more adaptive style of leadership, and were prepared to move radically to enable school to school support”.¹⁶⁶

77. Mervyn Wilson described the new role of local authorities as being to create an “enabling environment” within which schools could find the support they need.¹⁶⁷ The task for local authorities, therefore, is to have the big picture of schools across their districts, such that they are in a position to identify areas of concern and mobilise strengths within the schools, including academies, which can be used to address these challenges. At the same time, they must be ready to intervene where a school is seen to be a cause for concern. We heard from Kirston Nelson of Wigan Council that this is a model they have already adopted:

providing an enabling infrastructure, which is about being able to identify, through performance data, the schools that may require support through the partnership. It is a commissioning and brokerage role, but we also have a role in terms of quality assurance. Our school partnership and the model that we have put in place reflects that, but it reflects a collective accountability with head teachers, all on the same driver in terms of moral purpose for system improvement for all children in Wigan.¹⁶⁸

78. The new role has been recognised by Ofsted and by the Government. Earlier this year Sir Michael Wilshaw told us that “local authorities have a key part to play: in brokering [school collaboration] and incentivising those chains of schools. I would hope that central Government provides the financial support to local authorities so that they can do that”.¹⁶⁹ The Government’s Schools White Paper stated that “In a more autonomous school system, local authorities have an indispensable role to play as champions of children and parents, ensuring that the school system works for every family and using their democratic mandate to challenge every school to do the best for their population”.¹⁷⁰

79. Lessons regarding the tasks required of local authority staff in this new context can be drawn from the work carried out by the expert advisers employed to coordinate school to school support within City Challenge.¹⁷¹ There is strong evidence that their contributions

165 Q 15

166 National Foundation for Educational Research, *What works in enabling school improvement? The role of the middle tier* (Slough, 2013), p 4

167 Q 16

168 Q 117

169 Oral evidence taken before the Education Committee on 13 February 2013, HC (2012-13) 980-i, Q 40

170 Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching: the Schools White Paper 2010*, Cm 7980, November 2010, para 5.28

171 Hutchings, et al (2012)

were essential in making partnerships effective, such that the best practices were made available to a wider number of learners.

80. Local authorities still have a critical role to play in a school-led improvement system, in particular through creating an “enabling environment” within which collaboration can flourish. We welcome Ofsted inspection of local authorities’ school improvement services which has acted to highlight the importance of this role. We also support the new system which is emerging with recognition that the expertise lies within schools but with local authorities as part of the picture. The role of local authorities is still evolving and some clarification of what is expected of them is needed. We recommend that the Government set out clearly the role of local authorities in helping to broker school-to-school partnerships and acting as champions of all parents and children, with particular reference to academies in their region.

Strategic oversight

81. Mervyn Wilson identified the role of the ‘middle tier’ as being “not about control, it is not about delivery, but it is about a strategic oversight” and argued that “it does need that joined-up approach, otherwise that will be lost and people will be left vulnerable”.¹⁷² We heard concerns from witnesses that there are parts of the country where little school-led improvement is occurring. This picked up on many of the same fears about rural communities and coastal towns expressed by Sir Michael Wilshaw in his “Unseen Children” speech.¹⁷³ Professor David Woods highlighted this, noting that “geographically, we are going backwards, arguably, in raising attainment and standards. In the other half of the country—and I would say that about London Challenge and City Challenge—we are leaping forwards”.¹⁷⁴ Sean Harford, Ofsted Regional Director for London and the East of England, agreed and highlighted the differences he saw between the East of England, where Teaching Schools are lacking, and the continuing progress in London.¹⁷⁵ In some areas the absence of outstanding schools means that there are no teaching school alliances and few national leaders of education to stimulate cooperative activities.¹⁷⁶

82. To address this difficulty, Sir Michael Wilshaw has called for ‘sub-regional challenges’, a more strategic approach to the appointment of National Leaders of Education, and ‘National Service Teachers’ to help spread high quality leadership to where it is needed.¹⁷⁷ The DfE told us that, in respect of Teaching Schools, “national coverage has increased by 16% to 89% and there are now 360 Teaching Schools with 136 LAs now seeing a Teaching School operating within their boundaries”.¹⁷⁸ We note, however, that some local authorities are very large areas and being in the same local authority as a Teaching School may not

172 Q 50

173 “Unseen Children” Speech by Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector, 20 June 2013

174 Q 166

175 Q 124 [Sean Harford]

176 Q 125 [Professor Woods]

177 Access and achievement: recommendations, Ofsted, 20 June 2013, www.ofsted.gov.uk

178 Ev 50

mean particularly good access for all schools, particular those in rural areas. As Altringham Grammar School for Girls pointed out, “Pupils in areas with no Teaching School should not be disadvantaged; you could match a high-performing school with schools outside their geographic area”.¹⁷⁹ The DfE explained that the National College had already used the NLE Deployment Fund to match NLEs with areas of need, including some NLEs travelling from London to parts of the South East and East and NLEs from Greater Manchester supporting schools in Merseyside.¹⁸⁰ Again, we have concerns that there are geographical limits to the possible success of such an approach.

83. We recommend that the DfE and NCTL take steps to identify and designate system leaders, such as National Leaders of Education and Teaching Schools, in areas where they are currently lacking. This should be coupled with increased incentives for existing system leaders to work in the areas of greatest need. Coordination of system leadership may well be better achieved at a sub-regional or local level than at the national level and we recommend that DfE and NCTL explore such an approach.

84. The discussion on system leadership suggests to us a need for greater oversight of school partnerships and cooperation, possibly on a regional basis, in order that the successful practices that exist lead to system-wide improvements. Without some form of coordination the development of a self-improving system could lead to some vulnerable pupils being overlooked, as their schools opt out of any form of grouping. We have already identified a role for local authorities as part of this greater orchestration and we also recognise the part played by Ofsted. Nevertheless, there is a risk that no one will be responsible for keeping in mind the bigger picture of the patterns that are emerging and taking steps to encourage the development of fruitful partnership working in areas where schools are slow to respond to the existing incentives. This is not about dictating the how, what and who, but about awareness and enabling. **The Government should set out how organisations in the middle tier will be held to account for strategic oversight of partnership working in all schools and how they will ensure that gaps are not allowed to develop or remain unfilled, particularly in rural and coastal areas.**

Role of advisers

85. As we have noted, there is evidence from the City Challenge programme that expert advisers made an important contribution in analysing the situation in schools experiencing difficulties and finding an appropriate strong partner school.¹⁸¹ They also had important roles in ensuring that schools were not overlooked and, where necessary, brokering partnerships that cut across traditional local authority boundaries. The independent evaluation report suggested that this was a key factor in respect to the success of such arrangements, noting:

179 Ev w52, part 3 para 4

180 Ev 55

181 Hutchings et al (2012) Evaluation of the City Challenge programme. Research Report DFE-RR215, Department for Education.

Individuals in these roles were valued for their expertise and for being encouraging and supportive. KTS/PTA worked best when the Challenge advisors and other key stakeholders including NLE/LLEs, School Improvement Partners (SIPs) and LA officers worked effectively together.¹⁸²

Similar roles were subsequently introduced to support the National Challenge in secondary schools. However, in the new policy context, it is unclear who has taken on the role filled by Challenge advisers. Professor Berwick told us:

We were never able to replicate the adviser role. It is interesting: we do not have the same degree of advisers, for a number of reasons. Maybe they were not accredited, or whatever it is, but they are in short supply, basically because the way they were operated in London required three really important elements. There are lots of people around who can judge where a school is now, and that is done pretty thoroughly and tested in the courts etc. There is a smaller group who can decide what should happen next: “We know you are bad but what are the things you ought to do next to be better?”¹⁸³

He considered that “It is one of the huge issues in the system at the moment.”¹⁸⁴

86. Dr John Dunford was adamant that advisers should be found within schools themselves and that the emphasis should be on “using that expertise and having the leadership capacity in the schools that employ them to enable them to go and work in other schools”.¹⁸⁵ Another witness, Kirston Nelson from Wigan Council, pointed out that providing such expertise raised issues of “funding, resources and sustainability”.¹⁸⁶ Local authorities do not have sufficient of the former two of these to ensure the latter.

87. London Challenge and City Challenge, two of the most successful school improvement initiatives of recent years, both relied heavily on the use of expert advisers. We recommend that the Department for Education make an assessment of the quality and capacity to provide this expertise within a school-led improvement system and ensure that schools are aware of where they can access such advice.

182 Hutchings et al (2012) Evaluation of the City Challenge programme. Research Report DFE-RR215, Department for Education, p 9

183 Q130 [Professor Berwick]

184 *Ibid.*

185 Q110 [Dr John Dunford]

186 Q130 [Kirston Nelson]

6 Academies and collaboration

Inspection of academy chains

88. At present, while Ofsted can inspect schools within academy chains and has recently begun inspecting local authority school improvement services, it does not have the power to inspect academy chains themselves. James O’Shaughnessy has previously argued for this development in a report published by Policy Exchange¹⁸⁷ and he reiterated this in his evidence to us. He told us that “chains in themselves should be inspected and evaluated to see that they are adding value as opposed to exogenous factors that have just happened because they have replaced the head or whatever it is”.¹⁸⁸ Professor David Woods similarly argued that, just as variability is seen in other parts of the education system, variability is likely to occur in the offer from academy chains.¹⁸⁹ Inspection would shine a light on this and help to drive improvement. David Sims from the NfER told us that inspecting individual schools only gives a partial picture of what is going on in a partnership and argued that inspection of the partnerships would provide more evidence of the group effect.¹⁹⁰

89. Sir Michael Wilshaw has previously told us that:

We will be inspecting local authorities and we should inspect academy chains as well, if we identify underperformance. I have made that clear to the Secretary of State. It is only fair and equitable that we do that. We have not got the same powers at the moment, but I look forward to receiving the powers to do that.¹⁹¹

When questioned on this matter, the Minister told us that the Government “would rather Ofsted focused on its other activities, which are extensive.”¹⁹² He argued that such inspections would not “give us any information we do not have materially at the moment” from the inspection of the underlying schools and stated that the Government did not “feel [academy chain inspections] would be of any benefit to the Department” in assessing their activities.¹⁹³

90. We disagree with the Minister’s assessment and point out that Ofsted inspections are intended to provide information to parents, as well as the DfE. ***We conclude that parents should be provided with information about the performance of academy chains, as well as individual schools. We recommend that Ofsted be provided with the powers it needs to inspect academy chains.***

¹⁸⁷ Policy Exchange, *Competition Meets Collaboration: Helping school chains address England’s long tail of educational failure* (London, 2012)

¹⁸⁸ Q 68

¹⁸⁹ Q 126

¹⁹⁰ Q 85 [David Sims]

¹⁹¹ Oral evidence taken before the Education Committee on 13 February 2013, HC (2012-13) 980-i, Q 18.

¹⁹² Q 226

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

Moving on from partnerships

91. Several witnesses suggested that being able to leave hard partnerships, in particular, academy chains, under certain circumstances, was important. We heard from James O’Shaughnessy that at least one academy chain had already disaggregated by mutual consent and informal conversation. He expressed concern that if movement between different partnerships becomes more widespread (as he argued that it would) then the lack of a formal process would become problematic.¹⁹⁴ Formal procedures for the leaving or dissolution of federations between schools are written into the regulations governing these kinds of partnership.¹⁹⁵ In its written evidence, Devon County Council argued the fact that schools can ‘de-federate’ at a later date is a “very attractive” feature of federation as a partnership model.¹⁹⁶ Similar formal arrangements do not exist for academies, although the Minister confirmed that schools could leave hard partnerships by mutual consent.¹⁹⁷

92. We believe that it would be desirable to have clarification about the formal procedures for leaving hard partnerships with mutual consent, given the growing number of academy academies and chains. ***We recommend that the procedures for schools to leave academy chains by mutual consent are formalised and published. The Government should consider modelling them on those already in place for federations.***

93. Witnesses also raised the question of schools being able to leave chains under certain circumstances, even where this is against the wishes of the sponsor. An example of this would be a school wishing to move from one chain to another that better fits its ethos. James O’Shaughnessy argued that “I do think it is a reasonable thing to think about how schools could move between chains or different governance arrangements, particularly if they are ‘outstanding’. [...] I think there is a case for a formal route to do that, but carefully circumscribed”.¹⁹⁸

94. The need for this careful circumscription was the Minister’s primary objection to enabling schools to leave academy chains. He told us that “I do not see how the organisation of the chain group can work if people can, frankly, come and go at their will”.¹⁹⁹ We recognise this concern and agree that there needs to be stability in the system. A more fundamental difficulty, however, is the lack of a legal entity within an individual school which is capable of taking the decision to leave, since there is no governing body of an academy independent of the chain ***It appears logical that in a mature education market, schools should have the flexibility to move between partnerships where this is the right thing to do for their pupils. We recommend that the Government explain how a school consistently judged ‘Outstanding’ would be able to leave an academy chain where this is against the wishes of the chain management.***

194 Qq 90-91

195 The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012, parts 6 and 7

196 Ev w95, p 1

197 Q 230

198 Q 91

199 Q 241

Monitoring converter academies

95. In the 2010 Schools White Paper, the Government stated that “We will expect every school judged by Ofsted to be outstanding or good with outstanding features which converts into an Academy to commit to supporting at least one weaker school in return for Academy status”.²⁰⁰ During this inquiry, we received overwhelming evidence that converter academies are not living up to this expectation and pulling their weight when it comes to supporting other schools. One submission suggested that many only “paid lip-service to this requirement”,²⁰¹ and another argued that converter academies are “working in isolation”.²⁰² Similar sentiments were expressed by ASCL²⁰³ and the National Governors’ Association (NGA).²⁰⁴ This is despite the fact that, as part of their application for academy status, these schools named a school that they would support.²⁰⁵ Even supporters of academies suggested that more could be done. Kent County Council told us that “Academies have played a very active part in [the development of Kent’s collaborative partnership model] and are leading a number of partnership initiatives. It may be that the DfE could assist the development of collaborative partnerships by strengthening the requirement by convertor academies to contribute to school to school support”.²⁰⁶

96. We investigated the reasons behind the situation. The National Association of School Partnerships argued that “Stand alone converter academies tend to be confident, independent, competitive schools with little or no interest in the wider system. Their commitment to form and develop real collaboration is often negligible. At best they show a willingness to help a weaker school”.²⁰⁷ Others were more inclined to look beyond individual schools. The NAHT argued that the DfE’s current policy on converter academies supporting other schools ignores “geographical dimensions of school performance”,²⁰⁸ with outstanding converter academies often not having nearby schools in need of intervention for this reason. Nottingham City Council told us that part of the problem was “a lack of clarity about what is actually required as a minimum” from converter academies.²⁰⁹ They also questioned whether the problem was entirely with the converter academies themselves and suggesting the DfE shared some of the blame for not fully supporting this policy: “Some successful converter academies, who are motivated to support other schools in challenging circumstances, find the main barrier to doing this is DfE bureaucracy and policy change, perceived lack of engagement and understanding”.²¹⁰

200 Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching: the Schools White Paper 2010*, Cm 7980, November 2010, para 5.12

201 Ev w95, para 5

202 Ev w49, para 31

203 Ev w6, para 30

204 Ev w90, para 6.1

205 Ev 80 para 27

206 Ev 78, para 7.2

207 Ev w61, p 6

208 Ev w25, para 10

209 Ev w9, para 5

210 Ev w9, para 5

97. The DfE told us that “Findings from an early sample showed that all of the academies we spoke to either had or were supporting other schools”.²¹¹ In oral evidence, the Minister argued that they “do not see a big problem with this”, citing seemingly the same survey.²¹² When pressed, the Minister told us that the survey consisted of asking 21 converter academies what they were doing to support other schools.²¹³ No information was given on the basis on which the sample was selected. The DfE implicitly acknowledged this monitoring was not adequate in its written evidence, stating that it “is currently considering putting in place additional steps to monitor academies’ support for other schools and how best to monitor and review this more closely”.²¹⁴ It is essential that converter academies properly fulfil their obligations to support other schools. This is particularly important if progress is to be made in closing the gap between the performance of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and the rest of the school population. *We recommend that the DfE urgently review its arrangements for monitoring the expectation that converter academies support another school and implement more effective processes as soon as possible. We recommend that such processes include surveys of the schools which were promised support on converter academies’ applications forms, since this would give a more accurate picture of the support being provided.*

98. *We recommend that the Government ensure outstanding converter academies are able to support other schools in the ways they think will bring about the best results. Some schools will wish to support others through models other than that of sponsoring another academy and this should be positively and actively encouraged by the DfE.*

211 Ev 46, para 31

212 Q 201

213 Q 202

214 Ev 46, para 31

7 Conclusion

99. In conducting this inquiry we have heard many impressive examples of school partnership and cooperation from across the country. We believe that a school-led improvement system has great potential to continue driving improvement to England's education system, not least in finding more effective ways of breaking the link between home background and poor levels of achievement. To reach this outcome, the right policy framework must be in place.

100. We applaud many of the steps the Government has already taken towards allowing schools the freedom to innovate and work together for the benefit of all pupils. Our recommendations aim to support and extend these steps, to encourage the continued development of a self-improving system, and to help it to be as effective as its many advocates believe it can be. The Government should have the confidence of its conviction that teachers and schools, supported by, rather than controlled by, local authorities and other middle tier organisations, hold the expertise to develop a world-class education system. This means accepting diversity of models and structures as a strength and as proof of the vitality of the school system. It also means accepting that an effective self-improving system needs a degree of coordination, not least to ensure that no schools and no groups of students are overlooked. Such arrangements should be about enabling and facilitating, rather than command and control.

101. Our inquiry has raised particular questions about the role of academies. There is no doubt that academy chains will play an increasingly important part in a self-improvement system and it is important that the issues we have identified regarding academy chains and monitoring convertor academies are addressed. The overall picture is a rapidly developing one but we are confident that the expertise and drive is there within schools to raise standards for all.

Conclusions and recommendations

Potential for school collaboration

Importance of mutual benefit

1. *Properly handled, school collaboration offers benefits to all schools involved. The Government should continue to promote this message so as to reassure reluctant governing bodies and promote equality of esteem among all participants. (Paragraph 31)*

Competition and collaboration

2. We believe that while there are tensions between competition and collaboration, these are largely creative tensions. Collaboration between schools is growing in many forms within a competitive school system. (Paragraph 35)

Evidence of impact

3. *Although evidence on the impact of school partnerships seems positive, it would still benefit from robust evaluation, particularly aimed at identifying what works and why. Given the importance of a school-led improvement system to its vision, we recommend that the Government embed evaluation into further initiatives relating to school partnership and collect systematic evidence on ‘what works’. (Paragraph 39)*

Diversity and desirable features

Diversity of models

4. We believe that, in common with the Government’s view of the education system, schools are best placed to identify the most effective ways to work with other schools, based on their particular history, ethos and challenges. Schools should be able to adopt models of partnership and co-operation that suit their needs within a legislative and policy framework that is as non-prescriptive as possible. (Paragraph 45)
5. We believe that school partnerships with clear lines of accountability and some element of obligation are more likely to be successful in achieving gains from collaboration. (Paragraph 46)

Families of schools

6. *The Government’s publication of similar schools data is a useful first step but much more needs to be done to make this an effective resource for schools. In particular, the data should highlight schools’ strengths and weaknesses so that schools find it easier to form partnerships where both parties can challenge and be challenged to improve. We recommend that the DfE review the presentation of similar schools data in consultation with schools in order to provide richer and more easily accessible information on possible partners. (Paragraph 50)*

7. It is regrettable that, in establishing the similar schools data system, the Department for Education did not adopt a model more like the original ‘families of schools’ and then use the familiar name to help achieve buy-in from schools. (Paragraph 51)

Geographical coherence

8. *The preponderance of the evidence we received suggests that partnerships in which all members are located within close proximity are most likely to be effective. The DfE should bear in mind the significance of this when identifying sponsors for academies and should ensure that the advantages of geographical proximity are set out in relevant guidance on school partnerships and cooperation more generally.* (Paragraph 54)
9. *We are concerned that the Government’s definition of a “reasonable travelling distance” has not been sensibly applied to the similar schools tables. We recommend that the definition is altered to become “within an hour’s drive” (ie 30 to 50 miles depending on location).* (Paragraph 56)
10. *We note that in rural and coastal areas the number of suitable partner schools within an hour’s drive may be very limited. We recommend that the Government set out how the similar schools model applies to schools in rural and coastal areas and assess the applicability of the collaborative model to remote schools.* (Paragraph 57)

Incentivising partnerships

Ofsted

11. *We agree with the Government that it would be incorrect and confusing for Ofsted to label outstanding schools differently according to their excellence in supporting other schools, when they deliver just as good levels of education to the pupils in their care. We strongly support Sir Michael Wilshaw’s proposal for an excellent leadership award to be given to school leaders rather than schools, as the highest accolade available to headteachers and only for those who support underperforming schools in disadvantaged communities.* (Paragraph 61)

School accountability measures

12. *We regret that no one has yet devised a workable model of school accountability that incentivises schools to form partnerships, whilst preserving school level responsibility and retaining the impetus to maximise their pupils’ performance. We see the potential of such an approach and encourage further efforts to generate an appropriate model.* (Paragraph 63)

Financial incentives

13. *We believe that the Government should provide funding to help schools meet the costs associated with taking part in collaboration. We are concerned that the existing funding incentives are concentrated too narrowly on the academy sponsorship route. The Government should widen this funding to help meet the costs associated with formalising other partnerships. In particular, we recommend that the Government widen eligibility for the Primary Chains Grant to help schools cover the cost of forming*

federations, since many would benefit from working in partnership without leaving local authority control. (Paragraph 67)

Funding for Teaching Schools

14. We recognise the challenges posed by the nature of funding for Teaching Schools but the take-up rate of the Teaching School Programme suggests that concern about the limited period of funding has not deterred schools from participating. We believe that the DfE has adopted the right approach in providing funding only to help with start up costs with the expectation that they become self-sustaining organisations thereafter. (Paragraph 70)

Independent State School partnerships

15. *Independent schools and state schools have much they can do for and usefully learn from one another. We welcome the Government's steps to promote closer links between the independent and maintained education sectors, but consider that academy sponsorship is not always the right engagement model for such partnerships. We recommend that the Government re-introduce targeted seed corn funding to encourage the establishment of sustainable Independent State School Partnerships. (Paragraph 73)*

Coordinating collaboration

The middle tier and the new role of local authorities

16. *Local authorities still have a critical role to play in a school-led improvement system, in particular through creating an "enabling environment" within which collaboration can flourish. We welcome Ofsted inspection of local authorities' school improvement services which has acted to highlight the importance of this role. We also support the new system which is emerging with recognition that the expertise lies within schools but with local authorities as part of the picture. The role of local authorities is still evolving and some clarification of what is expected of them is needed. We recommend that the Government set out clearly the role of local authorities in helping to broker school-to-school partnerships and acting as champions of all parents and children, with particular reference to academies in their region. (Paragraph 80)*

Strategic oversight

17. *We recommend that the DfE and NCTL take steps to identify and designate system leaders, such as National Leaders of Education and Teaching Schools, in areas where they are currently lacking. This should be coupled with increased incentives for existing system leaders to work in the areas of greatest need. Coordination of system leadership may well be better achieved at a sub-regional or local level than at the national level and we recommend that DfE and NCTL explore such an approach. (Paragraph 83)*
18. *The Government should set out how organisations in the middle tier will be held to account for strategic oversight of partnership working in all schools and how they will ensure that gaps are not allowed to develop or remain unfilled, particularly in rural and coastal areas. (Paragraph 84)*

Role of advisers

19. *London Challenge and City Challenge, two of the most successful school improvement initiatives of recent years, both relied heavily on the use of expert advisers. We recommend that the Department for Education make an assessment of the quality and capacity to provide this expertise within a school-led improvement system and ensure that schools are aware of where they can access such advice. (Paragraph 87)*

Academies and collaboration

Inspection of academy chains

20. *We conclude that parents should be provided with information about the performance of academy chains, as well as individual schools. We recommend that Ofsted be provided with the powers it needs to inspect academy chains. (Paragraph 90)*

Moving on from partnerships

21. *We recommend that the procedures for schools to leave academy chains by mutual consent are formalised and published. The Government should consider modelling them on those already in place for federations. (Paragraph 92)*
22. *It appears logical that in a mature education market, schools should have the flexibility to move between partnerships where this is the right thing to do for their pupils. We recommend that the Government explain how a school consistently judged 'Outstanding' would be able to leave an academy chain where this is against the wishes of the chain management. (Paragraph 94)*

Monitoring converter academies

23. *We recommend that the DfE urgently review its arrangements for monitoring the expectation that converter academies support another school and implement more effective processes as soon as possible. We recommend that such processes include surveys of the schools which were promised support on converter academies' applications forms, since this would give a more accurate picture of the support being provided. (Paragraph 97)*
24. *We recommend that the Government ensure outstanding converter academies are able to support other schools in the ways they think will bring about the best results. Some schools will wish to support others through models other than that of sponsoring another academy and this should be positively and actively encouraged by the DfE. (Paragraph 98)*

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 30 October 2013

Members present:

Mr Graham Stuart, in the Chair

Neil Carmichael	Siobhain McDonagh
Alex Cunningham	Ian Mearns
Bill Esterson	Chris Skidmore
Pat Glass	David Ward

Draft Report (*School Partnerships and Cooperation*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 101 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for printing with the Report (in addition to that ordered to be reported for publishing on 19 June and 9 October 2013).

[Adjourned till Tuesday 5 November at 9.15 am

Witnesses

Wednesday 19 June 2013

Page

Sir David Carter, Executive Principal, Cabot Learning Federation, Bristol, **Peter Maunder**, Headteacher, Oldway School, Paignton, **Mervyn Wilson**, Chief Executive, The Co-operative College, and **Leo Winkley**, Headmaster, St Peter's School, York

Ev 1

Dr John Dunford, Education Consultant, **Dr Caroline Kenny**, Research Officer, SSRU, Institute of Education, London, **James O'Shaughnessy**, former Deputy Director, Policy Exchange, and **David Sims**, Research Director, National Foundation for Educational Research

Ev 11

Wednesday 3 July 2013

Professor David Woods CBE, former Principal National Challenge Adviser for England, **Professor St George Berwick CBE**, Chief Executive, Challenge Partners, **Sean Harford**, Regional Director for East of England, Ofsted, and **Kirston Nelson**, Assistant Director of Education, Wigan Council

Ev 22

Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, and **Andrew McCully**, Director General, Infrastructure and Funding, Department for Education

Ev 32

List of printed written evidence

1	Cabot Learning Federation (CLF)	Ev43
2	Department for Education	Ev46
3	St Peter's School, York	Ev 57
4	Challenge Partners	Ev 59
5	Dr Caroline Kenny, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education	Ev 64
6	Policy Exchange	Ev 71
7	National Foundation for Educational Research	Ev 74
8	Local Government Association (LGA)	Ev 78
9	Dr John Dunford	Ev 79
10	Ofsted	Ev 80
11	Peter Maunder	Ev 84
12	The Co-operative College	Ev 86

List of additional written evidence

(published in the virtual Volume II on the Committee's website www.parliament.uk/educom)

1	Professor Mel Ainscow, Centre for Equity in Education, University of Manchester	Ev w1
2	Culm Co-operative Learning Partnerships	Ev w4
3	Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)	Ev w6
4	Nottingham City Council (P Whitby—Education Partnership Strategy Manager)	Ev w9
5	Girls' Day School Trust	Ev w13
6	Tavistock College	Ev w18
7	Northampton Town Area Improvement Partnership (NTAIP)	Ev w20
8	Rugby School	Ev w22
9	National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)	Ev w25
10	Director of Partnerships at King's College School, Wimbledon	Ev w26
11	Liverpool Learning Partnership	Ev w29
12	GL Education Group	Ev w31
13	National Union of Teachers (NUT)	Ev w33
14	SCiPS, Education and Media	Ev w38
15	Collaborative Schools Ltd (SCL)	Ev w40
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List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2010-12

First Special Report	Young people not in education, employment or training: Government Response to the Children, Schools and Families Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2009-10	HC 416
Second Special Report	The Early Years Single Funding Formula: Government Response to the Seventh Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2009-10	HC 524
Third Special Report	Transforming Education Outside the Classroom: Responses from the Government and Ofsted to the Sixth Report of the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2009-10	HC 525
Fourth Special Report	Sure Start Children's Centres: Government Response to the Fifth Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2009-10	HC 768
First Report	Behaviour and Discipline in Schools	HC 516-I and -II (HC 1316)
Second Report	The role and performance of Ofsted	HC 570-I and II (HC 1317)
Fifth Special Report	Looked-after Children: Further Government Response to the Third Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2008-09	HC 924
Third Report	Services for young people	HC 744-I and -II (HC 1501)
Fourth Report	Participation by 16-19 year olds in education and training	HC 850-I and -II (HC 1572)
Fifth Report	The English Baccalaureate	HC 851 (HC 1577)
Sixth Report	Services for young people: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2010-12	HC 1501 (HC 1736)
Seventh Report	Appointment of HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted	HC 1607-I
Eighth Report	Chief Regulator of Qualifications and Examinations	HC 1764-I and -II
Ninth Report	Great teachers: attracting, training and retaining the best	HC 1515-I (HC 524, Session 2012-13)

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First Report	The administration of examinations for 15–19 year olds in England	HC 141-I (HC 679)
Second Report	Appointment of Chair, Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission	HC 461-I
Third Report	Governance and leadership of the Department for Education	HC 700 (HC 919)
Fourth Report	Children first: the child protection system in England	HC 137-I (HC 993)
Fifth Report	Support for Home Education	HC 559-I (HC 1013)
Sixth Report	Pre-legislative scrutiny: Special Educational Needs	HC 631-I
Seventh Report	Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools	HC 632-I (HC 1078)
Eighth Report	From GCSEs to EBCs: the Government's proposals for reform	HC 808-I (HC 1116)

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First Report	2012 GCSE English results	HC 204 (HC 662)
Second Report	The Role of School Governing Bodies	HC 365 (HC 661)
Third Report	School sport following London 2012: No more political football	HC 364 (HC 723)

Oral evidence

Taken before the Education Select Committee on Wednesday 19 June 2013

Members present:

Mr Graham Stuart (Chair)

Neil Carmichael
Alex Cunningham
Bill Esterson
Siobhain McDonagh

Ian Mearns
Chris Skidmore
Mr David Ward

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Sir David Carter**, Executive Principal, Cabot Learning Federation, Bristol, **Peter Maunder**, Headteacher, Oldway School, Paignton, **Mervyn Wilson**, Chief Executive, The Co-Operative College, and **Leo Winkley**, Headmaster, St. Peter's School, York, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good morning and welcome to this session of the Education Committee. It is a delight to have such a distinguished panel before us and I do not know until the sword has ascended on the shoulder whether it is formally true or not, but Sir David Carter, congratulations on your ennoblement. It is lovely to have you here and to have such a distinguished panel accompanied by such a distinguished audience, in which I see Geoff Whitty. It is a great pleasure to see you all here today. We are looking at school partnerships and co-operation. You are generally all enthusiasts for partnerships and co-operation, so tell me what is so great for a headteacher about sending his best teachers out, away from their classrooms, to help out in another school?

Sir David Carter: Any partnership work that I have ever been involved in has been a two-way process and there are benefits for the schools that are receiving the support, but also in what you learn as a provider of the support to bring back into your own school. In my own organisation, the Cabot Learning Federation, we take the view that the talent pool of staff is a talent pool that is there for the benefit of all our students, not just the children who attend one particular building. Any support that is done where teachers are moving between school buildings or across school organisations has to be judged by the quality of the impact on the work of those children. Successful partnerships take that collective responsibility for a large number of children and direct their talent pool to give the maximum benefit to as many children as possible.

Q2 Chair: So there is nothing but upside, Leo.

Leo Winkley: I think it is pretty much all upside, because I entirely agree that there is a sense of positive infection, if you like, when enthusiastic colleagues come together and talk about the things that really matter, i.e. how you inspire the young. You have to commit the staff to it and you have to be willing to allow them to make this a priority, and that obviously implies an investment of time and energy and, in some cases, money, but the upsides are so significant.

Q3 Chair: Have you had any negative feedback from parents or others in your school community suggesting that perhaps you should be concentrating a bit more on the pupils in your school rather than helping somewhere else?

Leo Winkley: No, far from it. Anything that helps interact and create a permeable membrane, if you like, between schools is a positive thing, and I think parents understand that any child growing up having a sense of the world around them and what you can learn from others is a good thing. We have certainly had no negatives from parents.

Q4 Chair: No chinks in your armour so far. Peter, are there no risks to this approach? Are there no ways it could undermine the core purpose of the school, which is to educate the pupils within?

Peter Maunder: Obviously, I am extremely keen and in favour of as much co-operation as possible. There is always a challenge within the school or on my very best teachers to get a balance between my very best teachers teaching children, coaching and developing other teachers in my school and carrying out outreach work. However, we have been involved in this for a long time and we can definitely see great benefits. It would benefit from more funding, quite simply.

Q5 Chair: What do you need the money for?

Peter Maunder: To have more teachers there, so you can get a balance of very high quality teachers and to provide opportunities for the most talented teachers within an area to work together. If we look abroad in terms of action research and teachers looking at working in classrooms, working with higher education and other teachers carrying out that research and then bringing those benefits back to school, the knowledge is in the school. We need to create the opportunities for the most talented teachers in a whole area in different schools to work together to benefit that wider group of pupils.

Q6 Chair: Mervyn, is there any evidence of where a school is co-operating happily with other schools and then has a dip in results? Have there ever been any cases where there has been a bit of a panic and maths

has dipped fairly horribly and the top maths teacher is suddenly withdrawn from the co-operative programme? Does that ever happen?

Mervyn Wilson: I am not aware of those circumstances, although I think that there can be pieces where cohorts from individual year groups can affect performance, but the principle of working together that others have spoken of is very, very clear. I do not think any school has all the answers, and our experience is that the schools that can be perceived as the stronger ones benefit as much as the schools that they are supporting.

Q7 Chair: How would you evidence that?

Mervyn Wilson: A really good example would be one of the early National Challenge Trusts that used a co-operative model in High Wycombe, Cressex School, which is a very challenging school in an area with selection and a very, very high proportion of BME students in challenging circumstances. Its partner institution within the model is one of the highest performing independent schools in the country, Wycombe Abbey School. The head there has said over the years how their learners have benefited. It is not just the teachers benefiting; they have used learners working on reading schemes and other activities with the students at Cressex. It is really emphasising the enormous mutual benefits that have come from that and the benefits through the trust model of institutionalising what was an informal relationship previously. That is critically important now, because the head of the independent school, who is about to retire, was absolutely determined that that institutional partnership carries forward so the model embeds that collaboration that has developed.

Q8 Bill Esterson: I am going to follow up with a question to the answer that Mervyn just gave. In that example, was the benefit partly because the learners at the school giving the support were involved in supporting students in the other school as well, rather than just the teachers and the head?

Mervyn Wilson: I certainly think the strongest of these collaborations and co-operative trusts and partnerships benefit where it is a multi-level engagement. The co-operative models are multi-stakeholder models that engage parents, staff, learners and the local community. One of the really important pieces that we are seeing from the most successful trusts is multi-level opportunities for those stakeholders to engage, so opportunities for teachers to meet and share issues, but also opportunities for learners to come together and celebrate activities and achievements as well.

Q9 Bill Esterson: A number of headteachers have said to me that they are concerned particularly with pressures on budgets, and if they are taken out of school or one of their high performing members of staff is taken out of school for any length of time, they have noticed a dip in performance and then they have had to come back. Are you all saying that that is not a concern? I think you were saying earlier that was not a concern.

Sir David Carter: You know in advance that is a risk, so the best leaders will mitigate that risk and look very carefully at what capacity they can create. I would agree that in the days when there was funding available for this work that was easier, but those days have gone, so we have to develop the talent pool that we have in our organisations so that the backfill comes from, possibly, the school that you are supporting. There is a real need to look at the long-term partnership and not the quick-fix solution. When you see examples of schools that begin to see their own performance erode it is because they have not anticipated what that will look like in six, 12 or 18 months' time and looked at ways in which they also have to perform in a different way. The model of the successful school working alongside a school that is on an improvement journey is enhanced when the results of both schools are expected to improve.

Q10 Bill Esterson: Does anybody have anything to add to that?

Leo Winkley: I would agree with that, and certainly our experience in York is that it has been successful because there has been a sense of a partnership of strengths rather than one school being perceived to bail out or improve another; there is a sense of mutuality about it, which is really important. The initial pump-priming of funding got the momentum going, but it is now running really on peanuts financially and a real sense of collective identity, which has been built up over a period of time. The success of these federations of partnerships is to do with identifying small, doable projects in the first stages, operating within the parameters of the possible and building up the trust over a period of time, and then all kinds of other things are generated from that. It is also important to consider the local factors—that there are some things going your way in terms of the simple geography of where the schools are. For example, in York you have that on your side: you have a communal kind of city, which is again going in your favour, and you have two universities and quite a number of other things. There has to be the right soil, if you like, as well.

Q11 Bill Esterson: In terms of the impact on the school giving the advice, a lot of it is about long-term planning and watching for any impact as well. That is broadly what you were saying.

Leo Winkley: Absolutely.

Q12 Bill Esterson: If I can turn to the different types of partnerships now, we have heard evidence of a great diversity. Do you see this as an advantage, and specifically when it comes to academy chains and teaching school alliances, are those the best ways for schools to work in partnership?

Sir David Carter: If I can perhaps come in first on that one, the thing that binds the answer to your question together is about locality and geography. We have 11 schools in our academy chain and another six schools that are part of our teaching school alliance that probably never will be in the Federation. However, they are all, in terms of driving distance, probably within 25 to 30 minutes of each other and

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probably within three or four square miles and a couple of postcodes in Bristol. The locality bit for me really makes the difference, and I struggle to see how a national chain would be able to do some of the things that we can do so easily in terms of the movement of staff between the schools and the movement of students between the schools. Our post-16 offer, for example, is a good illustration of a question that somebody asked earlier about where students fit into this. Our four academy sites in Bristol and South Gloucestershire run a really diverse curriculum that enables 600 children to access a range of curricula that a single school will struggle to offer in the future given the way that sixth-form funding is developing. For me, it is about the locality part of that, and I would go back to the phrase I used earlier: it is about the resource. I do not mean the financial resource, but the staff expertise that you have. For example, we employ 60 to 70 qualified science teachers to work across our secondary academies. That talent pool is best placed to look at what the best science curriculum is that we can offer to our students in that way.

In the first question that Graham put to us about whether there are any disadvantages, I do not see it as a disadvantage but there is a real communication issue with parents and the wider community about why a federation is working in the way it is. The best federations are not just about a governance structure and about a central back-office team that provides support. They are about the front end of education delivery.

Q13 Bill Esterson: Do any of the rest of you think that geography does not have to be a problem?

Peter Maunder: It is hugely important. David Hargreaves in one of his self-improving system papers—and we have done a lot of work with David—says that, in our case, in the teaching school alliance in Torbay, nearly every single school in the Bay, with four exceptions, is part of that alliance. There is very much a shared moral purpose for the education of children in Torbay, and that is a significant factor. That helps us in our case as well work in partnership with a local authority as opposed to being seen as a threat to the local authority.

Mervyn Wilson: In our case, there are now well over 500 schools that have adopted co-operative models, but they are essentially local, autonomous, co-operative structures. I strongly agree with the point about localism: most of those are now geographically based clusters that are serving distinct communities and are rooted within those communities. They have developed innovative ways of collaborating vertically so that they can work together on a regional or sub-regional basis on things like staff development aspects of procurement. It is very different from a national command and control top-down chain. It is a bottom-up, locally geographically rooted network that works together at different levels to bring about other savings as well.

Q14 Bill Esterson: Sure. So are some models of partnership and collaboration stronger than others?

Mervyn Wilson: One of the reasons that we were so interested, after the 2006 Act, to develop a model for co-operative trusts was the experience, through working with a number of schools on specialism, that direction could change quite drastically with a change of head or a change in aspects of funding that looked to other priorities. What we were looking for was a structure that helped embrace aspects of an ethos and made it more difficult to walk away from good collaborative arrangements that had been established—not unbreakable but sustainable beyond individuals. That is one of the crucial things about the difference sometimes between soft federations and more informal partnerships that could implode when either funding stopped or individuals who had been very committed to that changed. That was a very, very strong view expressed by many of the heads that we were working with.

Q15 Mr Ward: Before we move off point, you were talking about the locality; how important to all of this are local authorities?

Peter Maunder: I think it is different, because they are very, very different. In my experience talking to headteachers across the country, it varies incredibly. I did some work for our local authority, which is a small unitary authority in Torbay. At that time, I was really telling them that the quality of school improvement work was not good enough, because the expertise resided in schools and not in top-down systems through advisers and consultants who had been out of schools for a very long time. They moved with us and we reduced the local authority adviser workforce. I would like to be accurate in this setting, so I will not give figures, but it was a large number of advisers and consultants, and we have just one head of school leadership now and they work with us.

Q16 Mr Ward: The reason I ask is because obviously there are capacity issues for many local authorities as budgets have devolved.

Peter Maunder: Absolutely.

Mr Ward: I was just wondering whether that capacity still exists.

Sir David Carter: It is a new relationship that has been developing. We work with four local authorities that our academies are in, and I think the relationship is different with all four. However, one of the things that local authorities still have a key role to play in, which is why we work very closely with them and we have local authority representatives within our governing structure, is the soft intelligence, as I call it, that local authorities often have about the history of schools over time, not necessarily how they are being judged at that moment. One of the challenging things in the system at the moment is that that soft intelligence is being lost as employees who have had that traditional role are either back in schools or are retiring or moving into other areas. No matter how effective my academy group will be, it will never have the knowledge of Bristol as a city that people who have been in charge of that authority for 20 years will have had, so I think there is something about that. There is also something about the role in joining up the strategies. My simplistic view of it is that the

parents of the children in our academies pay their council tax into those local authorities and have a right to expect that we have a relationship with the local authority and join up some of that thinking. In my experience, where the local authorities recognise that the relationship has changed with schools, it is working really effectively. Where the local authorities are still trying to work in the Venn diagram intersect between the old and the new, I think it is more difficult.

Mervyn Wilson: Can I just add to that?

Chair: Briefly, Mervyn, because I am conscious of time.

Mervyn Wilson: Sure. The experience with local authorities varies absolutely enormously, and one of the challenges for them has been seeing that fundamental difference in the role. As the others have said, we largely use the trust model and we strongly encourage schools to consider inviting the local authority to be a partner in those trusts to maintain those links. The crucial thing for local authorities is to help create what I would describe as an enabling environment through which such collaborative arrangements can be made. I would just say that is not done by policies that say, for example, every school should be part of a co-operative trust or any other model. It is encouraging people to look at diversity and look at what is appropriate for them.

Q17 Bill Esterson: Mervyn, you told us about the particular strengths of the model that you use. Perhaps I can ask the other three panellists to give the equivalent strengths for your own models. Leo, do you want to start?

Leo Winkley: I mentioned some of them earlier on: the initial momentum of an injection of funding, and therefore a really close scrutiny of the viability of the project that is set up—that it looks like it is going to be productive. Starting small and building up has been a key element, and that is building up the trust between colleagues. Quite a key element there is the continuity of staff involved. Obviously you cannot manage that always, but one of the ways it has worked in York is we have had a longstanding co-ordinator since the inception of the project in 2007. They bind it all together and are now co-funded by one of the academies and by my school, which is ensuring that continuity which I think is very important. We have touched on the active commitment and involvement of heads and deputies in allowing their staff the time to get involved in this; I think that is very important. Also, it is important the schools themselves are not defensive. It is not a threatening process. It is a partnership of strengths, and there is the assumption embedded at the start that everyone is going to learn and benefit from the partnership. There is a flexibility about this particular model, because it can adapt, it can change direction, and it can operate on relatively low amounts of funding and quite a lot of goodwill. Some of the experiences that staff get out of it are pretty rewarding, such as being able to teach diverse classes, for example through master classes who have opted to be there, so that is another element.

Q18 Chair: Are these classes outside normal school hours?

Leo Winkley: They are, yes. Saturday sessions for pupils across the schools in York, which they can sign up to and they can be themed. It brings in, as we talked about, the talent pool of the teachers across the city. Initially, the tutors of these courses were doubled up because there was quite generous funding, so there was a lot of sharing of ideas. As the funding diminished, the enthusiasm did not, and I think colleagues see this as a way to extend their professional development, which is a really positive thing to build on. People get very excited about the master classes and other things have spun off—bilateral partnerships between schools, whether it is offering rowing sessions to other schools or exchange programmes, sharing of teaching expertise and so on.

Q19 Chair: I did want to pick up on sport. We are just doing a school sport inquiry. Has sport been a beneficiary of this co-operation? It sounds like it has been in your case.

Leo Winkley: We have just begun to look into that area. We started very much focused on extending provision for the able academically and interested folk. We have run a pilot programme between my school and York High in rowing, getting people out on the river and doing dry training, which has been pretty successful. We have just looked at some other areas recently, such as a Combined Cadet Force, which again is not something that is very easy to put together, but we have pupils coming from another local school, Canon Lee, joining our CCF. We are just looking at little spin-off projects, I guess. Linking back to my observation at the outset, we have to be a bit careful about over-diversifying, because the quality has to be kept high.

Peter Maunder: For ours, because of the geographical location and the unitary authority, one of its strengths is it is built on high social capital trust. People choose to come into it or they do not. That enables our school to be made up of academies, church schools, grammar schools, secondary modern schools—all of those different types of schools—and we are all trying to work together for the benefit of pupils in Torbay. We have this close relationship with the local authority in that much of the work and improvement work is carried out by talented teachers and leaders within our schools, so they come from within that school community. Likewise, local authorities sit on our strategic board and they employ me part-time on their leadership board, so we have this joined-up thinking. I think we are missing a trick with Ofsted, if we are going to get on to that, and accountability. With the soft intelligence that David talked about, there is the combination of the intelligence we have as a group of schools working together and wanting to support those leaders who perhaps need a little bit of support, for the benefit of the pupils, in working with the local authority. If we worked a little bit more sensibly and sharper with Ofsted and cut out some of the inconsistencies around that and worked more with perhaps the more highly qualified Ofsted inspectors, we would have a much sharper system benefiting our pupils.

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Sir David Carter: I know time is of the essence, so I will give you four bullets that I think underpin that. The first one is around accountability: the tighter your structure, the better the accountability. I am accountable for what happens in my Federation. I am under no illusion as to what would happen to my role if the Federation failed. We are three to 19 in terms of age range; we educate 6,000 children in Bristol and South Gloucestershire. We have no more excuses. We cannot blame the local authority; it is us. That is number one.

Number two, working really effectively with our sponsors, Rolls-Royce and the University of the West of England, has brought a sharper business dimension and focus to our quality assurance. We have leaned down the governance model. We have tried to capitalise upon well-meaning volunteers, balancing that with people who have something professional to offer to our organisation.

The third point is the issue about the sharing of staff. I get frustrated when I hear people talking only about best practice. Yes, that is important, but if it does not have any impact, it is just a conversation, so turning best practice into something that happens in somebody else's classroom is something that I am tasked to do. The fourth one is when you have an organisation such as ours, which has an income now of over £50 million, there are efficiencies in back-office function and benefits of procurement, and the benefit of going to contract en masse gives us the opportunity to keep pumping resources into the front-line classrooms by thinking very carefully about how we manage ourselves.

Chair: Thank you very much, and we do have a lot to cover and limited time.

Q20 Chris Skidmore: Looking a bit closer at the mechanics of your structure, I am intrigued to find out, Sir David, for instance why the co-operative model that Mervyn has been talking about would not work for you and the Cabot Learning Federation, and why the Cabot Learning Federation model would not work for the co-operative. What is different about those structures that means you would not turn the Cabot Learning Federation into a co-operative model?

Sir David Carter: Part of that is history. We are not a new organisation. We have been set up since 2007. At this stage of our development I would not want the distraction of rethinking our trust model. It works. It is fit for purpose. People have transferred into it and have chosen to do so on the basis of how we set ourselves up. I think our sponsors would have a view about a different form of structure, so it is not an issue for me.

Q21 Chris Skidmore: It is not a different philosophy as such. Some of the evidence we have received, for instance from the Tiverton Co-Operative Learning Partnership, talked about choosing the form of their partnership, the co-operative model, because it was non-paternalistic. Do you consider yourself paternalistic in your model when you take over schools?

Sir David Carter: I certainly welcome your reference to the family structure. You have a model in the

Federation of what I would call "earned autonomy", so schools such as John Cabot Academy, which has been "outstanding" for five years, need less intervention support from me and my team than a school that joined us last September in special measures. I want to have the authority, if that is the right word, to decide at what point the autonomy becomes looser and less tight.

Q22 Chris Skidmore: Mervyn, in terms of the co-operative model, the evidence we have received talked about shared moral values and a focus on success rather than competition and fear of failure. However, if you take on a school that is in special measures, then surely there comes a point when there has to be that fear of failure there—when you want to say to that school, "Come on."

Mervyn Wilson: Absolutely, and within the current Ofsted framework, there is that fear all the time. The overwhelming desire of schools that have adopted the model is the belief that working together co-operatively can address those issues—that there is sufficient strength within the network to do so. It is also fair to say that a co-operative model is not a solution for a failing school. The model does not address the weaknesses within a school in that way.

For us, the most critical aspects are trying to have a sustainable transformation of achievement by directly engaging those key stakeholders. In many of the really challenging areas where those schools are, it is about seeing how you can transform aspirations in the community by having a governance model that directly engages those stakeholders and the parents and the local community as well. It is one of the differences of the sponsor model; where sovereignty, governance and accountability lie makes the models very, very different.

Q23 Chris Skidmore: I should probably declare an interest and say that John Cabot Academy is in my constituency in Kingswood and also the Learning Federation recently took over Kingsfield School, which has now become King's Oak Academy. Also, Sir David, you will know that the Kingswood Partnership was an entirely separate organisation of a local authority chain of schools run by Sir Bernard Lovell School principally. Kingsfield had to come out of the Kingswood Partnership to join the Cabot Learning Federation, which broke up one partnership in order to join yours. I just wondered whether you find that there is something to be said about more formal partnerships posing barriers to co-operation with schools outside the partnership. Do you entirely look inwards or would you collaborate with schools outside the chain and cluster itself?

Sir David Carter: Absolutely, and I refer you to the answer I gave to Bill's question earlier about the teaching school alliance. We have partners in Bristol and South Gloucestershire that are already academies working with other groups that will never be part of the Federation formally, but want to be part of the teaching school alliance. In specific reference to the Kingswood Partnership, we could have a debate offline about how effective that was for the school. I

made the judgment that coming into our post-16 collaboration was the best fit for the children, and that is what we did. King's Oak Academy is an example of a school that joined us in an Ofsted category, and last week it had a very successful Ofsted, in 18 months, so I think the model for them has worked really effectively.

Q24 Chris Skidmore: You talked about geography, but I am also interested in size. Is there a point where you say, "Right, that is it. We are shutting the doors now. We have the size we can cope with. We have £50 million turnover. We have reached a point where, even if there were other schools just outside, even though they are close by geographically, we will say, 'I am sorry, but we are full'"?

Sir David Carter: That is a really good question, and I am not going to give you a numerical answer, because I do not think it exists. We wrote a protocol at our board level to determine under what circumstances we would say yes or no to a new partner. That has been very helpful, because we need to be accountable for that decision if a school is looking for help. I am very conscious that all of our schools, apart from John Cabot, which you know well, have joined us as a result of being in an Ofsted category or significantly below floor targets. I am also conscious that it is probably their last chance. If we fail with them, I am not quite sure what happens next. So we have to balance the size of the organisation against the capacity it has to improve those schools, because I think it is dishonest to continue to take schools into a chain when you know you do not have the capacity to improve them.

Q25 Chris Skidmore: Leo, I wanted to talk about independent school partnerships as well. The Independent Schools Council is saying that 80% of independent schools are working in partnership with the state sector in some form. You have touched on it already, but how far does that go beyond just allowing people to use their playing fields? Where do you think independent schools could be working further to create concrete partnerships that go into the classroom?

Leo Winkley: The figure may be even higher than 80%, and it is really important that it is. There is a genuine desire in the independent sector to engage locally in meaningful partnerships. They add value both ways through bringing colleagues into contact with each other, bringing pupils into contact with each other, and it is not about sharing AstroTurfs and swimming pools and things like that. It is about much more. Particularly in York, it is about the young of the city—inspiring them and ensuring that there is a collective sense that we all have a responsibility to the young of the city and the generations coming through.

Q26 Chris Skidmore: I talked about the paternalistic relationship; if you have the independent sector coming in to help the state sector, how can you not have a paternalistic relationship where you say, "We are the independent school with the better results and the money, and you are the state school"? How do

you overcome those barriers? I am sure there must be hostility philosophically or politically.

Leo Winkley: What we have found is that some of it is about people getting to know each other, spending time together and agreeing on the thing that everybody can agree on, which is: do young people matter? You can debate the models that you then pursue, but if that is your ultimate focus, the barriers begin to fall away, the trust builds and because you are working collaboratively with no other agenda than these high-minded and idealistic aims, that is a unifying principle.

Q27 Mr Ward: Moving specifically on to teaching schools—I know we have mentioned it before—in terms of the head of the teaching school, where is the accountability for that responsibility?

Sir David Carter: The head of a teaching school is not the same as the head of an academy. It is a leadership post at the level and pay level in our organisation of a vice-principal. The accountability in our model is directly to me for educational standards and the impact of the teaching school work. On our board we have one particular member who has oversight of the teaching school and reports back to the chair of the board on the expenditure of teaching school grant and the evidence of the impact of that work.

Mr Ward: Peter, is it the same?

Peter Maunder: Yes. In terms of designation, there is a DfE National College designation based on the performance of your own school. This goes back to the earlier question from Bill: if your own performance drops, that is a weakness in that system. If it does happen, you can build up a very effective collaboration of schools. We have 37 schools in our alliance. If we were Ofsted tomorrow and downgraded, there is a question mark about what would happen.

Mr Ward: Embarrassing.

Peter Maunder: Possibly, yes.

Q28 Mr Ward: That is a large group that you mentioned. Going back to an earlier question, you are either in or you are out. What if you are not in? What happens to those schools?

Peter Maunder: It is through choice. The only primary school in Torbay not in is part of a national academy chain, and they have chosen not to buy in; every other school has. The other three schools are all grammar schools in Torbay, and they have chosen not to be part of that alliance. All the other schools work together. It is choice.

Q29 Mr Ward: You say it is choice but, Sir David, you were saying that you have to reach a point that you really cannot go beyond in terms of capacity.

Sir David Carter: That answer was more directed to the academies that might join us permanently. We have different levels of engagement in the teaching school, and in a maturing education system some of it has to be about schools seeking the support as well as waiting for it to come to them. As an example, schools that join our Teaching Alliance would be contributors to the delivery of support as well as recipients of it.

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Schools who are not members of the Alliance would be people who would receive some of that support, whether it was support for their newly qualified teachers or support for their leaders in the school. Like many teaching schools have done, we have devised a series of school improvement strategies almost like a menu, for which they can come to us and broker that support. A secondary school in Bristol that is not part of our Federation but is part of the Alliance commissioned a teaching and learning review from us where we watched 50 or 60 lessons over a two-day period and wrote them a report about what we felt the standard of teaching was in that school at that time. They have used that as an action plan for their own development. That is possibly the only interaction we will have with that school, other than going back and reviewing the teaching in six months' time to see if any change has happened. It is really important that, when you do that school-to-school support, you follow it up. There has to be a "so what" consequence to that amount of work.

Q30 Mr Ward: There is a requirement, as I understand it, for self-sufficiency within two years for the teaching schools.

Sir David Carter: Yes.

Q31 Mr Ward: Is there a conflict there between offering what you feel is right and having to make a living?

Sir David Carter: No. I think it is absolutely appropriate to apply a business model to that. It is very clear that the teaching school grant was there to get us started. The first year was £60,000 and we are now in the £40,000 grant category. That is not going to employ one vice-principal, so you have to use that money to grow other aspects of commercial work that can sustain this should teaching schools no longer exist or if the grant goes. So we have had, for some time, a trading company linked to the Federation that is the vehicle for any commercial school-to-school support, national leaders of education work, for example. Any surplus from that money is then Gift Aided back to the Federation to support that work and to subsidise those programmes. If I give you an example, we run the National Professional Qualification for Headship, the NPQH. The recommended retail price from the National College is about £1,800. We deliver that for £800 because we can subsidise it, but we cannot do it for free.

Mr Ward: Peter, you smiled when I asked the question.

Peter Maunder: Our model is very different. Our schools do not all come and buy services off us. It is not that we do not know how to do it; our model works on acknowledging that there is talent in lots of different schools. Those schools choose to pay in and give us a budget that is run through the teaching school. If we know one school is particularly good at leading ICT, they develop that work and the best ICT teachers go. We lead a maths network. We work with the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics, and all of the maths leaders in the different schools come in from that network. The entire budget is owned by the 37 schools, so there is

total transparency and we continually go back to them and say, "Do we have the right networks to meet your needs? Are we running the right leadership programmes?" We similarly have a licence to run NPQH and the National Curriculum programmes. "Are we offering the same leadership development policies? Are we developing national and local leaders of education to help in school support? Can we match the right support from one school to another?" We do not do all of that support; we broker that support from the talent across a range of schools. It is a very different structure.

Q32 Neil Carmichael: Good morning. I want to talk a little bit about incentives and then accountability, basically. I was just wondering what sort of financial incentives there are for collaboration and if you think that is sufficient to motivate schools to collaborate.

Leo Winkley: In our particular model, the initial investment was quite generous, quite significant.

Chair: From?

Leo Winkley: From the Government programme. That helped to get it going, but we have proved that in York we can run on quite modest funding, which is provided, I think, out of the maintained sector's independent gifted and talented budget, with the independent schools contributing. That money can then go on to incentivise tutors to get involved, but the main incentivisation is to do with the professional reward and satisfaction you get out of working with colleagues who share the same vision and working with classes of engaged and interested pupils. It feeds on itself very positively.

Q33 Neil Carmichael: So, essentially, the financial incentives are basically a pump-priming mechanism.

Leo Winkley: That is what we found. If it is more significant and more sustained, there are more possibilities that open up, and we have certainly had to be judicious about which projects we invest in and take forward. The simple truth is if there is more cash there, you can do more, but you do need to ensure that the quality is there.

Mervyn Wilson: It is interesting. It was the previous Schools Minister who described collaboration as the suppression of mutual hatred in the pursuit of Government money. We are rather cautious about the over-incentivising that creates the wrong motives for doing so. The vast majority of the schools that we are working with are looking to adopt trust models. One problem is that the Supported Schools Programme, which did give schools some funding towards the cost of conversion, was stopped in 2010. That does create some problems particularly for smaller primary schools, because the legal costs have no relationship to the size of your budget. You have to deal with land and asset transfers, company registration, etc. Some small funding to help that would, I am sure, help smaller primaries. That is really important because they desperately want to work in collaborative clusters, because they do not have the capacity. Even, for example, if they have "outstanding" Ofsted grades, they do not have the capacity to run effectively as academies on their own. Some incentives to help schools—there is funding available to schools that

wish to convert using the academy model, but not for the trust model—would be extremely helpful.

If there were a begging bowl, the other thing that is worth saying is that, when you are doing these profound models, there is a critical piece about getting them up and working. It is one thing putting structures in place, but there is a short-term culture change that is required, and there was a small piece of funding at one stage to help develop those membership models. Something short term might be helpful to make sure these things work.

Sir David Carter: I would not add any more to that, other than the fact that how you sustain that incentivisation over a period of time is critical. For me, it is why I feel so strongly that the hard federation model works, because the schools that are in pay a small contribution into the central team in order to create that resource—to create those people who can do the school-to-school support and provide HR, finance and IT support. One of the challenges of pump-priming is that you become over-reliant on it and you do not use that window you have to think about what you are going to do when it stops. I think that is why you saw, five or six years ago, some of the very difficult schools turn around very quickly but find it hard to continue that momentum. I hope that building a structure for the long term and having a plan in place that enables us to sustain it will reap benefits for us.

Q34 Neil Carmichael: Is there any danger that incentives, and certainly financial ones, might pressurise schools into collaboration when perhaps they do not really want to go there?

Peter Maunder: I would not have thought that was a big issue, personally. Clearly, the motivations to collaborate go well beyond, as Leo said, the issue of finance.

Sir David Carter: I do not think it is a problem, but it is something that needs real accountability around it. If I look back to the early part of the last decade with specialist schools when the SSAT was at its peak and every secondary school in the country had a specialism—and I would probably say I was guilty of this—I do not think we were held to account that rigorously for how that money was spent. So we have to be really careful; if we are going to use public money to incentivise that kind of partnership, part of the outcome has to be that you have a plan, as I have just mentioned, for what you do when that money runs out. The bit that concerns me about the incentivisation model, to make it start happening, is that whilst that pilot or whatever you want to call it is taking place, there are children going through school. We need to demonstrate the benefit for them; they cannot be guinea pigs in this. Entrepreneurial heads are very good at accessing resources, but they need to create impact with it.

Q35 Neil Carmichael: Let us talk about accountability now, because that is really where I want to go. The first question I want to ask is about governance. Obviously, governance does have a role here, and I would like you to talk a little bit about

how it contributes to the collaboration and then how it manages to affect accountability.

Chair: Neil, may I take this opportunity to remind the panellists that what we do is conduct inquiries into things, write a report and make recommendations to Government. If there are elements of the current system that you think might be at risk and need to be protected and you would like to see us recommending such protection, let us know. If there are things that need to change, let us know. Please do not leave here today without letting us know the things you think need to be in our report. Indeed, if you think of them afterwards, do feel free to write, but just remember that. Make sure that if you have a recommendation, you make it clear to us and spell it out in nice simple terms, so even we can understand. Thank you.

Neil Carmichael: That is an invitation to do a shopping list, isn't it?

Sir David Carter: Can I start, in answer to your question, with something on my shopping list? In a system whereby we are becoming so divorced of a middle tier, to call it something else, where the accountability for academy chains and individual academies is still untested, the role of chair of governors becomes a really vital one. I would like to see chairs of governors properly trained, I would like to see them performance managed and I would like to see them paid.

Neil Carmichael: I would like all of those three things as well, and we are doing a report that probably will not say that, but that is certainly a direction of travel we need to go in, so thank you very much for that.

Chair: It would of course be contempt of Parliament to declare what our report was going to say before it said what it said, Neil, which I know you are very aware of.

Q36 Neil Carmichael: I said “probably”. Moving on, but still on the subject of governance, is there a case for collaboration to effectively federalise the governance structure in some way, and how might that work in your various models?

Mervyn Wilson: It is really important that we strengthen accountability downwards to local communities as well as the way that the academy, and particularly the sponsored academy, model works in terms of accountability to the Secretary of State through funding agreements, etc. I think there is a democratic deficit emerging in some of the models. One of the strongest aspects of the co-operative model is that it attempts to reconcile that by building strong accountability into those key stakeholder groups and also treating staff as real professionals and co-partners within the model by opening up membership to them, with a strong voice for learners and a strong voice for the community. That aspect is absolutely crucial so we do not end up with a very crude accountability mechanism that is based on largely performance accountability and, if you do not perform, we will take the sponsorship away and hand it to another sponsor, which is a very simplistic way of looking at it. The accountability has to be strengthened to local communities.

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Q37 Neil Carmichael: Have any of you seen a need to adjust governance either through membership or structure or just basic practice as a result of the collaboration?

Sir David Carter: I will be brief. A federated model of governance looks fundamentally different from a single school model, and it has to. The Cabot Learning Federation board is, in effect, the governing body, as we understand that term, but they cannot be visible or have a governance role over 11 academies. So some of the responsibilities are delegated to what we call “academy councils”, which is where the local representation is; the elected parents, elected teachers, the support staff and the headteacher of the school would sit on that group. The chair of the academy council and I, in my role, are both members of the board and we are both members of that academy council, so that is how we transmit the information from the council up to the board and the board back down. The academy council is not accountable for any of the traditional governor responsibilities other than the quality of standards in that school, and that is what they are held to account for.

Peter Maunder: We are in that middle tier level of accountability, because our problem in our country is this gap between performance and poverty. That link between performance and poverty is the issue that we face as a country. If we strengthened the accountability by looking at a whole area—the children and the education of those children across an area—between schools in terms of school improvement, teaching school alliances, federations all working together, with that soft intelligence David talked about being there with a local authority, but working alongside Ofsted, you are combining that, which means working together so it really does become a risk-based Ofsted system. Ofsted should be the independent guardian of educational standards. That is what I have always understood them to be, and increasingly they seem to be enforcers of Government policy, and I do not think that is their role. They need to step back and work alongside them, so if they take that objective and bring that hard cutting edge to accountability for pupils’ achievement across an area, I think it would be far more productive working with a smaller group. Then you can shift a bit of funding from the accountability system into the teaching system, and that would surely be a good thing.

Leo Winkley: Could I just slightly go into shopping list mode?

Chair: As long as it is a very short one.

Leo Winkley: It will be. I think the guidelines need to encourage inspiration and not limit and be too focused on accountability, because that may risk stifling some of these looser partnerships. I refer back to an Ofsted trial inspection of the City of York ISSP, which talked about it being exemplary partnership working and being used as the model for development in this field in the future. I think that is right, because it has identified the fact that it is not a paternalistic model. Independent schools benefit as much as state schools do, and these sorts of federations are very valuable. If funding to the tune of two quid a pupil in the area was

available, it would make a massive difference in our setting, focusing on York as an example.

If we are looking at measurability of outcomes, it is quite difficult to measure things like growing aspiration, growing confidence, but we feel very strongly that we have made impacts on that. This model has made impacts on social cohesion and it has encouraged youngsters who might not have thought about certain subject choices at A-Level and, indeed, university, to pursue those, all of which are more qualitatively assessable and incredibly important.

Q38 Siobhain McDonagh: Does the fact that you are competing with other schools make you less likely to form partnerships with them? At the moment, do schools co-operate with one another in spite of competitive pressures, or does collaborating give schools a competitive edge?

Sir David Carter: The latter. I do not think you will ever have a system where competition is removed and I do not think we should have; I think it is really healthy. When my leadership team meetings take place, there are 11 academy principals sitting around the table who all want their school to perform well in the Federation. For me, that is healthy, because it means that the children are getting the best possible deal with that. You can have both. It is not an either/or situation. What you can do in the strongest local collaborations is think very carefully about how you articulate the responsibility that we have for all of those children. For example, we will publish the results of all our 16-year-olds in the Federation as well as by individual academy, because that is a healthy thing to do. It does not start creating a league table from one to 10, because everybody is contributing results to that whole. So collaboration and competition can work really effectively in partnership. I do not think there is a tension between that and schools that are not in our Federation either.

Q39 Siobhain McDonagh: I just want to ask a quick question of both you and Peter: do the schools that are not part of your partnership or collaboration hate you?

Peter Maunder: I do not think so. Certainly the one that is in the national academy chain wants to join next year. Despite getting bucket loads of money, they were quibbling about paying in to join us and asking what they would gain from it. That is fine. I think those children miss out, but that is a personal view. We have three grammar schools within the Bay and they collaborate with other grammar schools up the south coast. We do some work with them and clearly we are inclusive, we invited them, but they choose not to be part of it.

Sir David Carter: I suspect it is probably a similar relationship that the system has with politicians.

Siobhain McDonagh: So they do dislike you really, don’t they?

Q40 Mr Ward: For both those within your groups and those without, would you say that completely fair admissions criteria are applied and there is no difference at all between the intake in terms of free school meals, children with special educational needs, maybe ethnic minority background?

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Peter Maunder: As far as I am aware, the admissions basically go around the geographical location and catchment area. I am not aware of any distortion in that.

Sir David Carter: It is not equal, because the communities we serve are different. In central Bristol we have schools where the ethnic population is much higher than it is in Weston-super-Mare, for example, where it is predominantly white working class, but the admissions policies are the same across the Federation from primary transfer to secondary.

Q41 Mr Ward: There is no Stanine, no taking them from postal areas.

Sir David Carter: The John Cabot Academy has a Stanine system simply because of the number of children who apply, and it is the only transparent way we can communicate to parents why a student would have access to a place. The legacy of the City Technology College when we negotiated with Bristol and South Gloucestershire to become an academy was that they wanted us to get as close as possible to an even split of children from the two authorities, because not to do that would have had an impact upon secondary schools in Bristol and South Gloucestershire. It is not done by postcode, but we do have a lottery system to achieve that.

Mervyn Wilson: In the case of the co-operative schools, there is an absolute commitment to inclusivity, and that is absolutely fundamental to the value system. I am really impressed with the way that a whole number of schools have stated categorically that they see the need to serve the whole of their community. Perhaps the answer to your earlier point, Siobhain, is that the very common message from co-operative trusts is that they are there to see that all schools within their network succeed—that they take as much pride in helping one of the weaker schools improve their performance. Rather than the sharp elbows of the over-competition in some areas—of almost being pleased with the weaker school down the road because it puts them in a better light—there is an absolute commitment to all succeeding.

Q42 Siobhain McDonagh: I see it the other way. I see an academy sponsor who is enormously successful and who I am desperate to have take over a primary school, but all the other primary school heads do not want them in because it is going to be pretty challenging for them if they do so.

Mervyn Wilson: If you look at where some of the very strong trusts are, there is now an ecology of educational forms out there, and there is no doubt at all that that means that everybody has to look for the highest possible standards within that variety of models. The one piece for that co-operative model is the commitment. The biggest trust at the moment is 22 schools, but they want every one of those 22 schools to meet the highest standards possible.

Q43 Ian Mearns: Does anyone think that there is a need for any kind of middle tier above schools helping to broker support for schools that may need it, or do you think the model that you have talked about among

yourselves this morning is going to be the way of the future?

Peter Maunder: Certainly within our model, in my experience—and I am talking of a small unitary authority—that could be strengthened if we had a balance of professional accountability amongst our teaching school alliance, working alongside external accountability through Ofsted. This would show up in a stronger relationship with a slimmed down, new relationship with the local authority. I am not suggesting going back to the old system in any way at all, but if it is just a new, slimmed down relationship, then I think yes—if we are going to truly look at closing the gap and look at the achievement of children from all different parts of society.

Q44 Chair: Sorry, was that a yes or a no?

Peter Maunder: Yes.

Q45 Chair: A slimmed down local authority working with schools that co-operate.

Peter Maunder: And Ofsted.

Q46 Chair: And Ofsted, and there is no need for anyone else. So there is no missing middle tier if all those people step up, is that right?

Peter Maunder: For me.

Mervyn Wilson: I would agree. I do not think you need any more than that.

Q47 Alex Cunningham: We have seen a considerable reduction in the ability of local authorities to support schools comprehensively as their spending has been cut. Can you define that role for the local authority? Is it the same as the academy chain that is controlling a number of schools across the piece, or what is it? What are they going to do?

Peter Maunder: Not controlling. They will be monitoring and working with teaching school alliances. In the role that Ofsted has now given them and are checking up on, basically they expect local authorities to be aware of the performance of all children within that area. Whether they are academies or church schools or free schools, they still have that role of monitoring. My understanding is that if they are not happy with the performance of those schools, they challenge the academy or they challenge an academy chain or they write to the Secretary of State, but they do not have a role in controlling it. That work should still come from where the expertise is, which is within schools.

Alex Cunningham: The Secretary of State does not see it that way, does he? He does not see a situation where local authorities have any role whatsoever. He wants it elsewhere.

Siobhain McDonagh: Sir Michael Wilshaw did not.

Q48 Ian Mearns: There are a couple of problems with that, because there are a number of schools that are not part of chains at the moment. As the academisation programme has gone on, an awful lot of money that used to reside with local authorities now resides with schools themselves, and that is understandable. So if you want to slim down local authorities having a monitoring role, who is going to

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pay for that? All of that money that used to go to local authorities and then to schools is now going to be going to academies. Are academies going to buy back into that in some way?

Peter Maunder: No, but they have to at the moment. Ofsted turn up to the local authority and expect that. In the new legislation, the new subject framework, they expect local authorities to be able to tell them about all the schools. That is happening now; that is not new.

Q49 Ian Mearns: Except that within the last three to four years local authorities across the country have suffered significant cuts.

Peter Maunder: Are struggling to do that, absolutely.
Ian Mearns: The infrastructure that they have previously had in order to do that role or to develop that role has been dramatically undermined, and they are not going to be able to reinvent that without some resource.

Sir David Carter: I think you have hit on a really interesting point there.

Peter Maunder: Absolutely.

Sir David Carter: When we have a system where every single school in the country is an academy, which I guess is the direction of travel we are heading for at some point in the future, then that description you have just given is going to come true, isn't it?

I do not think the local authority has any role in school improvement anymore, and I think many of them have not for some time. However, I do think they have a role as the guardians of vulnerable children. Unless an academy chain runs an entire city or town, you are always going to have a need for someone to be monitoring admissions, SEN, school transport—all of those things whereby if they break down, the vulnerable children lose out first. So when we get to a system where in an entire local authority every single school is an academy and benefiting from that money coming into the schools, there is then an argument to talk about what you do collectively to take care of every child in the city, even if they are not in your schools.

Q50 Ian Mearns: That is the possible flaw in having the fragmentation of the schools into different regimes

of accountability, inasmuch as making sure that every child has a place in an appropriate school for their needs may be much more difficult.

Sir David Carter: Can I just add one thing to that? I agree with everything you have just said except I would change the word “appropriate” for “good”, because if this system is going to be self-improving, that has to be the goal. At some point the Chief Inspector for Ofsted’s annual report will say, “100% of schools in this country were judged to be ‘good’.” When we have that, we will have closed the gap that Pete talked about, which is such a challenge.

Mervyn Wilson: In respect of that middle tier role, it is not about control, it is not about delivery, but it is about a strategic oversight. It is also about joined-up services. We have looked here specifically at schools. When we look at children and young people, there is a wider range of services where it is the local authority that has traditionally provided that joined-up piece. As time develops, there is the potential, particular for the larger trusts, the larger groupings of schools, to be the deliverers of some of those services that we saw originally envisaged in the Children’s Trust. However, that does require some form of strategic oversight at some form of local level. I am not saying that is necessarily local authorities, regional or sub-regional, but it does need that joined-up approach, otherwise that will be lost and people will be left vulnerable.

Q51 Ian Mearns: There is the simple thing of school place planning, for instance. When you look at the number of live births in a particular area, you know that in three years, five years you are going to need an appropriate number of school places, and of course those things vary. When I took over as chair of the education committee in Gateshead, we had 19 secondary schools; we currently have nine, but that does not mean to say that we have worse education. In fact, we have much better education than we had when we had 19 schools, but who would have done that without the local authority, I wonder?

Chair: Thank you for that. Gentlemen, thank you very much for being our first panel on this new inquiry and stimulating us.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Dr John Dunford**, Education Consultant, **Dr Caroline Kenny**, Research Officer, SSRU, Institute of Education, London, **James O’Shaughnessy**, former Deputy Director, Policy Exchange, and **David Sims**, Research Director, National Foundation for Educational Research, gave evidence.

Q52 Chair: Thank you all very much for joining us today as we continue to inquire into school partnerships and co-operation. Reflecting on that first session and straying into an area that we will come to later anyway, where schools co-operate what is the benefit of having all the schools in an area co-operating, an example or two of which we have heard today? It could also be said that rather than wanting all the schools in an area to co-operate, you would not want too many schools in one area to be with any one chain or organisation, because you need

to have some form of competition. Otherwise once you have a monopoly provider, you will not have the sufficient challenge where it goes wrong. Does anyone have any thoughts on that?

Dr Dunford: I do not think there is any evidence on this one way or the other, except perhaps that the kind of chain that David Carter is developing in Bristol and the Harris academy chains are very clearly geographically located. They do not form all the schools in a single area, but they are tight geographically. I was involved in a research project

for the National College on school chains, and we could see that where chains were not geographically coherent—that does not mean necessarily all in one place, but geographically coherent with groups of schools together—they met problems. If a chain takes on a school in difficulty in an area where it does not have a good school, there is not the leadership capacity in that area to bring the other school up to standard. So I would say what you need to look for is geographical coherence, but not a geographical entity, if you like.

Q53 Chair: What does the pattern of schools within the ARK academy chain look like?

Dr Dunford: There is a degree of coherence there, because you have more than one school in every area, and where ARK is looking to develop into new areas, it makes sure it has leadership capacity in that area. Of course, ARK is big enough to have a leadership super-structure whereby they have regional people in charge of groups of academies overseeing the principals of those academies.

David Sims: In addition to that sense of place, there are logistics to be considered very carefully, because the resources that schools have to link together are limited; they are not endless. We did research on the Gaining Ground strategy. This was a strategy aimed at so-called “coasting” schools, where coasting schools were partnered with better performing schools. The heads that we interviewed said, “We do not want to be linked with a school more than about 45 minutes’ drive away from our school.” We need to use that resource very, very carefully and very efficiently.

Q54 Chair: At the moment it feels like a bit of a free for all—bits have been thrown in the air and there is a hope that out of all this diversity excellence will flourish. Can we start to understand the criteria required for success? Would there be any use in formalising those and, in a sense, having rules to stop people repeating errors of the past, perhaps? If somebody came along with a new chain and they wanted it to be national but not geographically coherent, would it be sensible to stop that happening rather than let some wealthy sponsor risk the interests of children and their own finances in seeking to do it? Does anyone have any thoughts on codification?

Dr Dunford: For the last 10 years, during this period when school-to-school support has been developing—and that has been continuous through from the Labour Government to the Coalition Government—it has always felt to me that the Government has never had a coherent strategy on school-to-school support, on school partnerships. It has allowed 1,000 flowers to bloom and some of those flowers, as with the John Cabot group of academies, have done fantastic work; others have not been so good. There is evidence that the harder end of federation improves performance better than the softer, “let’s get together and be nice to each other” end.

Chair: It is worth remembering that what we do is conduct inquiries, write reports and make recommendations to Government, to which they are obliged to reply within two months. So whether on

these lines or others, if you have any particular recommendations as to—

Dr Dunford: Arising out of that, Chair, I would look for a recommendation from you that the Government needs to have a strategic approach to partnership working between schools.

James O’Shaughnessy: Yes, I would make the same point. Your described the policy environment as being laissez-faire up to now, i.e. to encourage many academies to convert—obviously there is a sponsorship route, the conversion route—and indeed free schools to start up. That has been important in terms of changing the assumptions about school autonomy. There was a need to break the mould, so there was a purpose for that. I would say it is slightly more strategic than you would, John, but nevertheless there was a purpose to it, which was to break the mould. As the programme matures and we learn more about it, frankly—from the work that John, Christine Gilbert and Chris Chapman for the National College have done on this—there is a growing body of work that suggests that chains can, on average, be more effective. They are more effective because they can share leadership and expertise and, ultimately, people, which is why the geographical thing is so important, because the best people have to get round these schools. As we begin to understand that, I have argued that there is more of a need for an industrial policy type attitude, which is, “Well, hang on; we are learning some things about the way that the best ones work and the circumstances in which they do not work.” Therefore, the DfE needs to take more of a view about what works and, indeed, try to encourage chains to grow where there are none; to potentially stop them where they are growing and there is no evidence of success or there is a threat that they might become a monopoly; and encourage schools through a variety of means to join into harder forms of collaboration, precisely because we think that they can be more effective, on average.

Q55 Chair: Did you think long before you came up with the term “industrial policy” on this? It did not strike me as a very Policy Exchange term. It took me wafting back to the 1970s and the onset of punk.

James O’Shaughnessy: Well, I do not know, maybe. An important point to make here is, okay, it is centre-right think tank, but I do not think anybody apart from a few extremists on the libertarian side would say that they want a completely free market in education. It is not a free market. No one is arguing for it to be a free market. The Government I served certainly did not. The price is fixed, but quality is heavily regulated, admissions and so on, so it is not a free market and no one wants it to be a free market. Given that, it has to have, at some point, some direction from the Government about how it should expand, precisely because it is not subject to the same effects that a free market would have, so I do not think it is inconsistent.

Q56 Chair: In health, the transformation under this Government has been instead of having managerial types in PCTs running the Health Service, we are going to have it led by the clinicians and it might be

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on the same geographic arrangement. They might have pretty much the same responsibilities, but having clinical leads is somehow going to lead to better outcomes. That is the theory and time will tell whether the practice delivers on that. Is that the kind of vision you have for education? Some people would say that if you end up in a geographical area with all the schools, even those part of a national academy chain, joining in to the local organisation, you are just recreating the local authority, but without the democratic accountability. What is going to make that in the long term any more successful than the local authority?

James O'Shaughnessy: I would not disagree. I think there is a commonality of public sector reform approaches if you look across, say, social housing, health services and schools, which is devolution of power to autonomous institutions: housing associations, foundation trusts, and increasingly academies. Then you see quality regulation and economic regulation to make sure that you do not get monopolies or you do not over-borrow, or whatever economic problems mean the market is not working. Ultimately, you see the state subsidising and people choosing. Probably social housing got there first. The NHS has followed and schools are going this way. Again, this is not some great and unique invention particularly, and it has a bipartisan pedigree in education and, indeed, across all these things, but you can see in it the themes of public sector reform that are common not just in this country and in other public services but worldwide.

Dr Kenny: I would take a slightly different stance from the one that has been put forward so far, in that I think there is a growing body of evidence around school partnerships, but that is at a very early stage. Plainly and simply, I just do not think that we know enough about how they work, whether they are effective, and what the outcome is on pupil learning outcomes. Going forward, we need to know more about school partnerships in terms of the impact that they are having, and also what type of partnerships work for what aims and in what contexts, if we are going to make it a sustainable and successful policy.

Q57 Chair: Is there a risk that they will be like specialist schools were—a passing fad and all the evangelicals in the system take it up? It looks at first like it is brilliant because all brilliant people take it up, and everyone thinks, “If we give it to everyone, they will all be brilliant.” Then they find out that they are not all and they will not be.

Dr Kenny: Exactly. There is the assumption that you give the power to schools and they can run with the ball and make improvements, but some schools or some leaders do not have the capacity to do that. So there needs to be that level of support given to them to enable them to do that, and I do not think that is the case at the moment

David Sims: I would echo what Caroline has just said. There is not really a rigorous evidence base on the impact of partnerships on attainment and attendance, for instance. There are pockets of qualitative evidence that we have, but in terms of hard, measurable evidence there is very little. If claims are made that

certain partnerships, federations or trusts are having an impact, where is the evidence for that and how testable is it? I think we have a long way to go to provide that kind of evidence.

Q58 Bill Esterson: What measures would you use to determine success?

David Sims: We would have to focus on pupil attainment, so are students' grades increasing? We should also look at their progression in terms of going on to further education, higher education, apprenticeships—jobs with training.

Q59 Bill Esterson: Would you be able to attribute those results to a specific contributory factor?

David Sims: That is a good question. You would have to do a comparison study of schools that are in federations or partnerships and schools that are not, and compare their results and the impacts.

Dr Kenny: What is also needed as well as the evidence base on impact is to evaluate the partnerships in and of themselves. Whenever an evaluation takes place, you are trying to identify the key mechanisms of change—what factors led to the change. That needs to happen by investigating the partnership itself: what are the important things in the partnerships? Is it the individuals involved who make the difference? Is it the structural or the institutional arrangements? It is a two-stage process.

Q60 Chris Skidmore: You want to evaluate partnerships in a way that we have never really done for local authorities either, in the longer term. If you wanted to ask how some local authorities work better than others, in terms of the evidence, we do not have it for them either, do we?

Dr Kenny: No, but that is not to say that that is right, and we are at the stage now where the Government is encouraging school partnerships and co-operation on a big scale. That seems the way to go and seems a positive move, and this is the perfect time, in a sense, to build that evaluation and that research element in, before it goes out on an even larger scale.

Q61 Chris Skidmore: I know you said the evidence is limited at the moment, but if you just take the act of collaboration, can you divorce that from everything else and say the act of collaboration in itself helps to drive improvement as opposed to anything else? Do you need to have the collaboration there and the partnerships, the hard federations, in place, or do you believe that the evidence suggests it can be done without that taking place?

Dr Kenny: In terms of partnerships between schools, we just do not know. All we can look at is qualitative information, surveys and interviews with school personnel, who seem to have positive reports about this process, but we just do not have any further hard data about that.

Q62 Chris Skidmore: Take the Cabot Learning Federation, for instance: hard evidence for me seems to be that you have Kingsfield School, a local authority school, in special measures. The Cabot Learning Federation has come in.

Kingsfield is now King's Oak Academy; it has had a new Ofsted rating and it has gone up to "good". Surely that is evidence in itself. It must be out there. You are saying there is no evidence, but even I can see there is stuff going on.

Dr Kenny: I agree, but that could be because the teaching practices have changed, so what is going on in the classroom is different now from what was happening before.

Q63 Chris Skidmore: It would not have happened without the catalyst of joining a partnership and the local federation. If it carried on under the local authority model, it would have continued to fail.

Dr Kenny: It may have, but also there is a lot of research evidence to show what works for education. The Education Endowment Foundation produces a learning and teaching toolkit. If we had tried to get that more widely used in schools, that could have had just as big an impact. It is not necessarily the case that the collaboration was the key ingredient.

Q64 Chris Skidmore: I can see where you are coming from. Would you say, in terms of the position of your research, that you would keep the status quo and be overtly hostile to partnerships? Why did you take up this research in the first place? Is it because you think, "Hang on a second. I want to question the value of partnerships because I prefer the values of local authority schools run democratically by elected councillors"?

Dr Kenny: I do not think I am hostile to partnerships in any way, shape or form. I think that they may be a good idea; we just do not know yet. My position is "why not make them the best that they possibly can be?" and I believe you can do that by getting research involved at an early stage.

Q65 Chair: As we have gone sufficiently far, we might as well go even further. So Caroline, what should the research that we require look like and who does it need to be initiated by?

Dr Kenny: It needs to be done on all different levels: at the level of the classroom and teachers. Teachers should not just be taking what works in another classroom for granted and just assuming that "if it works there, then it will work for me". They need to be questioning those processes, trying to find out why that works for that group of students. If they introduce it in their own classroom, they need to be monitoring and evaluating those processes to make sure that it is having the difference that they think it is going to have. At the level of the school, they need to be monitoring their own progress—they need to be conducting their own mini-evaluations of partnership and what they want to get out of it.

Q66 Chair: Are you sure they are not doing so? If they were doing it, we would not necessarily know, would we? They would just do that internally.

Dr Kenny: They are not making that information publicly available, so if they are doing that, then we need to know about it.

Q67 Chair: Above that, you are operating at another level of research. In terms of the sort of thing that we would recommend and at governmental level, is there a failure or a shortage of research?

Dr Kenny: I think there is a shortage of the use of research. There is a lot of research out there that potentially could be very, very useful to schools, but it is just not being used at the moment.

Q68 Chair: But also for policymakers, because policymakers are creating an environment in which co-operation is encouraged, partnership is encouraged, and you are saying there may not be the evidential base to justify quite such a wholesale move to that. What would that look like? Unless it was on a massive scale and collected, it is not going to come from the classroom, particularly.

James O'Shaughnessy: Ofsted have looked at leadership of more than one school, and John and Robert Hill looked at this for the National College. Chapman et al looked at it for the National College and I have looked at it. It is true to say that there is not a slam dunk 20-year evidence base to demonstrate exactly what kinds of partnerships work and what impact they have. However, it is probably fair to say that there is an emerging evidence base that suggests that they are effective and there are lots of reasons why they might be effective. There is also international evidence. There is evidence on the impact of chartered management organisations in the US, and they not only demonstrate the effect of being in a collaborative partnership—in these cases, the harder ones—but they suggest that the harder they are, the better they are. As I say, this is still tentative, and everyone who works in research obviously calls for more research, and it is perfectly reasonable that we want to be able to disaggregate the impact of a school just being better led or having better teachers or teaching practices from the effect of being part of a chain, group or federation. It is one of the reasons I suggested that chains in themselves should be inspected and evaluated to see that they are adding value as opposed to exogenous factors that have just happened because they have replaced the head or whatever it is. So I think it is perfectly reasonable to say they should be subject to a level of scrutiny for their value for money that is the same as schools, but I do not think it is fair to say that there is no evidence that they have an impact.

Q69 Mr Ward: What I struggle with is not so much the evidence base but the fact that this is all supposed to be new. I have known of cluster arrangements in postcodes, and I have known about consortia arrangements within a constituency area, collaborations led by a local authority across the whole of the authority, and the hard federations of failing schools and the most successful. I have known this forever. What is so new about all this?

Dr Dunford: I will try to answer that. When I was a headteacher 20 or 30 years ago, there was collaboration between schools that I would describe as being "non-competition" rather than the hard-edged collaboration that you have now. It seems to me that what we have now begun to recognise much more

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clearly is that the expertise in school improvement lies in schools. We do not look to county hall or universities or the private sector to come in and improve schools. We know that the expertise lies in the leadership of schools. Therefore, if we create systems in which the leaders of successful schools can transfer that successful practice into less successful schools, that seems to me not only to be the right system but a system for which there is already a good deal of evidence that it works.

When I asked to come in just now, Chairman, I was going to say exactly what James has said. I have done some of this research with Robert Hill. Other people have done it too, but you will all have the kind of evidence that Chris suggested. You know of schools that were doing badly and somebody from a really good school has come in, changed the practices in those schools, and changed the fundamentals of classroom teaching and behaviour management in a way that has turned those schools round. You can see that in the way in which the Ofsted grades in those schools have gone up.

David Sims: In addition to that, the higher performing schools say that they also gain from working with schools that are performing less well, because no one has a monopoly on wisdom or practice, so it is beneficial on both grounds.

Q70 Mr Ward: I have seen numerous IEBs do all of that, bring in shared headteachers from better schools—

Dr Dunford: Indeed, and I am not saying that there is any single model that works best, but I do think that a strategic approach that looked at these different models and the way in which the governance of IEBs can play a part here would be useful. However, the fundamental of using good schools to improve less good schools seems to me to be unarguable. The fact is, as David says, that those good schools continue to improve at a faster rate than the national average, as do the schools that they are supporting. That is happening now within the new teaching school alliances as it did under the previous school-to-school support arrangements.

Q71 Chair: What percentage of the English school system is involved in these co-operations right now?

Dr Dunford: In any kind of collaborations?

Chair: No, take secondary schools, because primaries are separate. Do you have any idea?

David Sims: Have we the evidence?

James O'Shaughnessy: It is a good question. I do not think anyone knows, to be honest with you.

Q72 Chair: All this research you guys have been doing and you do not know how many schools are involved?

James O'Shaughnessy: You can tell which ones are in chains, if they are in multi-academy trusts or under umbrella trusts, so those much more formal arrangements.

Q73 Chair: How many of those are there?

James O'Shaughnessy: I think when you did your research you thought there were about 50 chains of

three or more schools. By this September it might be more like 100, and the average size of a chain is probably five or six schools and growing all the time.

Q74 Chair: So it might be 500 then.

Dr Dunford: 15% to 20% of secondary schools I would say are in hard chains, but an awful lot more, most, I would say, of secondary schools are in collaborative arrangements of one sort or other.

James O'Shaughnessy: Particularly with things like teaching schools. The important thing here is that if you step back from the evidence and you think about it theoretically, why would collaborations work? They would work because they take good ideas and they spread them around and you need a transmission mechanism. That transmission mechanism, as John said, is increasingly seen as being most effective when it is school to school and does not involve an intervening authority, particularly one that is rather distant and perhaps not equipped for the task. So the big challenge is how you have those kinds of networks.

It is important to say that not only do you want schools, I believe, to be in hard networks, and indeed for those hard networks to some extent be competing with one another—more for ideas and prestige rather than students, because there are not quite enough school places in this country, as we know—but overlaid with different types of network. That is, using things like, for example, national leaders of education to get out into different schools, teaching schools and so on. Therefore, you do not just want one form of network that schools are in; you want overlays of networks and that they are professionally driven. That will provide the transmission mechanism, which is how the good ideas and the best practice get around and are populated around the school system, which has to be the main policy aim.

Q75 Chair: For every education initiative over the last 40 years there will be a conceptual framework that makes reasonable sense and can be explained in that way. When it is taken out to the first 10%, it seems to work. Stuart's rule would say all new initiatives in education work. They always do, because we get the kind of people involved who will go through walls to make it work, and it does not matter whether they are hanging kids by their toes; they will get a higher educational result. It is when you move to the next 10% and then you move to the 30%, and the fourth, fifth and sixth decile, but by then there has probably been a change of Government and the whole thing is dropped, whether it was good or bad. What is there to give us confidence? From what you have said, we might be somewhere between the first and the second decile of secondaries, so we are way off the real testing ground, which is maybe when you get to 50% of schools doing it. On a wet Thursday in Stockport with a head who is not that bothered but feels they really ought to get involved, is it going to deliver improvement or not?

Dr Dunford: We are focusing here very much on the delivery part of school-to-school support. In my written evidence to the Committee I set out four parts of the process of school improvement: identification,

brokering, commissioning the support and then delivering it, and we have been focusing on the delivery. Whilst within the hard federations and chains all four of those processes take place within that, for any school that is not in a partnership there are some serious questions to be asked about how problems are identified, how support is brokered and who pays for it and commissions it. This comes back to a potential role for a middle tier, which Ian raised with the last panel.

Q76 Bill Esterson: In the evidence you have looked at, have you looked at other fields and the benefits of collaboration there, say in business or elsewhere? The other point is the evidence around the benefits of collaboration and learning, and the logic that collaboration and learning is of a similar nature to collaboration between schools.

Dr Dunford: When I was General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders we commissioned Robert Hill to produce a book for us, which was called *Achieving More Together*. In that book he looked at the ways in which companies work together—pharmaceutical companies, for instance—the way in which police services work together, and the way in which there is collaboration within the health service and so on. He used the lessons from that to suggest ways forward for the education service.

Q77 Bill Esterson: Is that more detailed research?

Dr Dunford: That was a piece of research that was done what must be six years ago now.

Dr Kenny: There is a lot of literature that cites collaboration as important in achieving change. If you look at the health field, the collaboration and interaction between different parties is consistently ranked as one of the most important factors. My research has been looking into research in health, education and other fields of social policy. What I was struck by when looking into that literature is that no one spells out what collaboration means in these contexts. It was “collaboration is good”. Okay, excellent, but how do I go about that? What does it mean to collaborate with someone else? That is where we need more work, whether that is to go back to the existing literature to try to interrogate it further or to undertake more research in these types of collaborations that are going on.

Q78 Bill Esterson: Coming back to partnerships in schools, what is the evidence so far on closing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and others? Is there evidence of experimentation in practice that can help achieve that?

Dr Dunford: The Education Endowment Foundation has, as you probably know, produced a toolkit for schools, which is being used increasingly but is still not being used universally by schools, to help them to close the gap. The evidence is there. The Education Endowment Foundation commissioned Durham University to do a meta-analysis of—

Q79 Chair: Sorry, John, but in the context of partnership working, is there any evidence that school

co-operation and partnership leads to a closing of the gap in particular?

Dr Dunford: The only evidence I have seen is that if you look at the gaps local authority by local authority, almost all the top 20 local authorities are in London. Part of that must be around the success of the London Challenge and the way in which best practice in London has raised standards over the average for the country. It has closed the gaps more in London than it has elsewhere.

Q80 Bill Esterson: Just to be clear, we have talked about the improvement of the school overall, but what about the gap between pupils even within some schools?

Dr Dunford: That is what I am referring to. It is both in relation to raising achievement and in relation to closing the gaps. London local authorities are in the lead.

James O'Shaughnessy: Could I make a further point on that? Up until three years ago there were only 200 academies, so if we are thinking of the academies as being the ones that tended to be in these harder forms of federation, you can see why the evidence base is pretty slender, because it is new. However, the LSE looked at the performance of the sponsored academies that were created under the last Labour Government against similar schools that had not gone down the sponsored academy route, and found them to be higher performing, on average. According to Michael Wilshaw, of the 30 academies currently judged by Ofsted to be “outstanding”, 22 were in a chain with at least one school. There are a few dots to connect there. I am not saying there is a straight line. You have to follow the logic through, and bearing in mind sponsored academies are obviously dealing with failing schools in, generally speaking, disadvantaged areas, it tends to suggest that the original sponsored academies, many of which are in chains themselves, were being effective in raising standards among the very poorest communities.

Q81 Bill Esterson: So you are saying it is the collaboration within academies—

James O'Shaughnessy: I am not saying that. I do not think you can say that. I am just noting that those sponsored academies improving education in the poorest communities tend to be within collaborative organisations. I am not saying that you can link it causally. I am just saying there is a correlation between the two.

Dr Kenny: Sponsored academies only make up 25% of all academies, so you do need to take that into consideration.

Q82 Bill Esterson: The point that I think John made earlier, and it came from the earlier session as well, was that good schools do better as well from providing support. What is the evidence for that?

Dr Dunford: James, you might know the location of that evidence better than I do, but certainly there was evidence in the analysis that was done of the London Challenge that this happened, and I believe there is evidence that has been replicated in other partnerships.

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Q83 Chair: Schools that are already excellent improve their results at a faster rate than other schools that are already excellent that do not partner.

Dr Dunford: Correct.

Chair: According to...?

Dr Dunford: I cannot cite a source, but there is one; it has been done.

Bill Esterson: Could you try to find one?

Dr Dunford: Yes, we will do our best.

Chair: Thanks.

Q84 Alex Cunningham: John, you said that the Government needed a strategy on partnership. What does that look like? Is that about all schools being in partnership in hard networks? Is it about how they should operate, what they should provide? Is it about how they should be accountable? What does that strategy look like, in a couple of sentences?

Dr Dunford: It would analyse the process of one school supporting another in the way that I was just describing in terms of the different stages of support. It would then ascribe clearly to each of those stages how they were going to be done in the different models of collaboration that were being encouraged, such as teaching schools, for example. So there would be ways in which organisations would have clear roles around monitoring data, which local authorities have at the moment and which some local authorities do very well.

On brokering, there would be a strong push by this Committee and the Government to create a database of excellent practice. I think it is quite shocking that Ofsted, which is the repository of the most information around excellent practice in this country, does not do more to get that out there, so that where you have a situation where a school's science department is doing badly, there is somewhere where people can go to find out where the best science departments are in the locality. We are beginning to get that with teaching school alliances using specialist leaders of education. That is to say, in the example I have just given, really good heads of science who can go and support weak science departments.

What you want is both the methodology and the database, and a good strategy would bring those two together. That was two very long sentences, I am afraid.

Q85 Alex Cunningham: Two very helpful sentences though. Just to talk about accountability a little, how do we ensure there are clear lines of accountability when we have a partnership? We have different chains that are controlled by a group compared with loose partnerships. How do we ensure accountability?

Dr Dunford: I would certainly support the accountability of chains as a whole, as James mentioned, and I think the Chief Inspector is beginning to do that now. The two great drivers of school policy behaviour, if you like, are finance and accountability. Both of those are entirely focused on the individual school at the moment, and so if you have four schools in a locality in a chain, they might be inspected at four completely different times on four completely different cycles. It seems to me that Ofsted could do that much more coherently, and certainly, in

terms of the publication of performance, it would be very useful to know how well groups of schools are doing as well as individual schools.

Chair: Any thoughts on that, David?

David Sims: I would endorse what has just been said, because increasingly with schools operating in partnerships, if they are only judged on their individual performance, that only gives you a partial picture of what they are doing. So it is important that schools should be assessed, if you like, as working within groups. We need to identify what the schools are gaining from working in those groups—what the group effect is, what the partnership offer is, if you like, and what gain and benefit there is.

Q86 Alex Cunningham: At the moment, the loose federations do not really provide a clear indication of where the accountability lies.

David Sims: I think that is correct, yes.

Q87 Alex Cunningham: Doubtless when there are schools working together there will be tensions, particularly maybe when there is one school that could be seen to be in the lead as the better or the more successful school. How do you overcome that tension and make sure that you foster an ethos of mutual respect to ensure that they achieve success?

Dr Dunford: Sometimes tensions can improve performance in the way that collaboration and competition can co-exist in a very positive way. My direct answer to your question is you can do that by the groups of schools having really solid systems of governance that, as a group, enable this to happen. When we looked at the academy chains, we observed with all the chains, I think, two levels of governance. There was the chain level of governance and there was the individual school level of governance, but on the whole it was about 80/20.

Q88 Alex Cunningham: You have that in the formal chains, but I am interested in how we ensure accountability in the informal federations.

Dr Dunford: I think human nature is probably beyond the scope of the Select Committee's recommendations.

Alex Cunningham: Okay, fair enough.

Dr Dunford: Can I just reflect one more thing? Certainly during my career one of the big changes has been that there is now a preparedness amongst school leaders to recognise that excellent practice exists in other places—that other places do some things better than we do and, therefore, we will go to them for support—in a way that certainly was not the case when I was a headteacher.

Q89 Alex Cunningham: That leads on to my next question. When you have particularly the more successful school helping the less successful school, how does the school leader in the less successful school get on with their job? How do they lead in their school when they have somebody else looking over their shoulder?

Dr Dunford: One of the very interesting things is the way in which younger people are coming in to school leadership prepared to take on what you might

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describe as “risky” posts, of schools that are in special measures and so on, because it is part of a chain and they have people like David Carter as the executive head over them. There are quite a number of examples around the country of that.

Where you have a school that is an established school not doing very well and going into a chain, then clearly the management and personnel skills of the executive head are paramount in relation to the school that they are taking over. Sometimes that means that they have to do it with a different head.

Alex Cunningham: Are there other views on that?

David Sims: In the research we did on Gaining Ground, which I mentioned earlier, and the so-called “coasting” schools, the headteachers there saw it as bringing a resource or expertise in from another school. They were not intimidated by the higher performing school helping them, but very much saw it as adding something to their school and linking heads of department in the two schools, heads of subject and so on, as a big plus.

Q90 Alex Cunningham: Education is a changing landscape all the time. There are schools in partnerships where it might be better for them to leave one partnership and join another, whether that is a hard chain or a looser fit. How do we make that happen? I just wonder how that can happen. How can they say, “Sorry, this partnership is no longer for me. This one will serve my children better”? How do we make that happen?

James O'Shaughnessy: It is a really good question, because particularly in multi-academy trusts there is no separate trust. What the school is legally is a funding agreement with the Department for Education; otherwise, it is part of a larger body. The lack of a formal exit strategy, if you like, for those schools, particularly if the chain is not doing the job that they expected, is a problem. However, I think there is at least one chain that has disaggregated and others may do so, particularly if they find themselves geographically stretched. Therefore, one of the things that I expect to happen over the coming years is those that are pretty spread over the country and finding that difficult to manage may end up splitting. That will be done sort of informally by conversation, by agreement, and that is sort of manageable when you have a small number of them. If it becomes the norm across the sector, it is a problem.

Q91 Chair: Should we be recommending formal secession provisions?

James O'Shaughnessy: Yes. You have to be careful about how you do it, because you have to be sure that the reasons are the right ones, if you like, for leaving, because they might not be. They might get lots of help and decide to go off on their own way, and they would be much more vulnerable without that kind of help there. You would have to think about it carefully, but I do think it is a reasonable thing to think about how schools could move between chains or different governance arrangements, particularly if they are “outstanding”. As a general rule in school policy, the better a school is, the more autonomy it should be

allowed to enjoy, and so I think there is a case for a formal route to do that, but carefully circumscribed.

Q92 Mr Ward: You talked about how school assessments should broaden in terms of the work that they are doing with other schools, but we know very well the *Telegraph & Argus* will produce a list of all the schools with five A to Cs, and that is what people will look at and how they will judge the success of schools. We know about good leadership, good management and all those sorts of things, but the easiest way to change your attainment is to change your intake. The issue of competition and collaboration: how do they impact on each other in terms of admissions policies within a group and making sure that there is a fairness of intake of pupils in those groups?

Dr Kenny: The question of admissions is something that has been picked up specifically in relation to academies. The recent Academies Commission report talks about this quite a lot, in that we cannot just attribute all of the success of academies down to their working practices; some of it is down to a change in the intake of students. It is a very important issue to focus on. Going back to the first session and some of the points that have been made in this session in particular, that is why we need this level of oversight, with these checks and balances to make sure that the admissions policies and the intake are not changing drastically and, if they are, whether that is the reason for success, so we are not just attributing success to the partnership when it is for very different reasons entirely.

James O'Shaughnessy: It is incredibly important that every school is obliged to and follows the admissions code and that it has oversight to do so. There is a difference between a changing intake and gaming the admissions code to change your intake, the latter obviously being undesirable and the former in some cases being desirable. One of the things that has happened to the original sponsored academies is, for example, because they were set up in areas of deprivation and underperformance, as they have got better, a more diverse group of people has wanted to go into them, so they have tended to reflect better the local average in terms of deprivation. Seemingly, they have become more middle class, if you like. I do not think that is a bad thing in itself, because if you want a broad intake, then that must be a good thing. The key thing is isolating that effect from the effect of the teaching.

Q93 Mr Ward: If you are oversubscribed, for every child who gets into a school one does not, and if that one who does not is from the local community, it is likely that the one from outside, if it is a deprived community, is going to be from a more affluent background. So there will be a change in the intake, which will then lead on to the attainment performance of the school as well.

James O'Shaughnessy: There can be, if it is mixed in the entry point, particularly for secondary, of people coming in. However, if the result is that all of the schools become more reflective of the make-up of their local communities so that you do not have sink

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schools, which have very disadvantaged intakes, and the posh school that has a mainly middle class intake, I think that is a good thing, isn't it? These are supposed to be community schools after all, and that is just something that is happening through parental choice. If the parents are choosing that configuration and, crucially, they are being able to choose among good choices, not among bad choices, then I do not think it matters particularly that the intake has changed, as long as everyone is abiding by the rules.

Q94 Neil Carmichael: What is the balance between competition and collaboration? Where do you see that striking?

James O'Shaughnessy: You need both, and that is the case I make in the title of my Policy Exchange report; it is the case I make through that. Again, some sort of market theory: if you look at how markets work—and I know people are uncomfortable with the idea of describing the school sector as a market, but people are making choices and it has market features, albeit a social market—the most important feature of what goes on is collaboration within organisations, often multi-institution organisations, in order to improve. Competition is the sharp edge that ensures that collaboration does not slip into complacency, because there is always the danger that collaboration is just: “We will collaborate because we will do what we want to do regardless of the impact.” Competition is one way, but not the only accountability mechanism, of making sure that does not happen.

On the other side, if you have an atomised system where there are just single institutions competing against one another vigorously and they do not have the capacity to collaborate and improve, that is a problem too. That was a problem that the New Zealand school system had when they very first went down this set of reforms 20 years or so ago.

There is a happy medium where you have multi-institution groups that have the capacity to innovate and collaborate among themselves, but they are kept in check, if you like, by competition, which also makes sure that what they are collaborating on and innovating is relevant and is going to improve. I think that is what we are inching towards, certainly in some local authorities now.

Q95 Neil Carmichael: Essentially, you have a partnership with collaboration at its core and then another partnership competing with that partnership.

James O'Shaughnessy: Yes. You do not have that everywhere. Some schools will be large enough to be able to do it on their own, particularly secondary schools. We have not talked much about primary schools; it is a very different circumstance, primary versus secondary, and the case for schools grouping together is much, much stronger. It is strong in secondary, but it is much, much stronger in primary, precisely because they are so small.

Q96 Chair: Going back to our recommendations again, you have made it sound as though you are not very keen on the atomised system, and many critics of the whole academy programme worry about atomisation. Should we say going forward we have

enough chains now and groupings that we should change the rules or suggest we will change the rules?

James O'Shaughnessy: I do think secondaries are different from primaries. The average secondary school is fairly large; it has a large staff and a big turnover. The fact that primaries are not converting at anything like the rate of secondaries suggests that the convert-on-your-own approach is not very appropriate, and heads and governors know that at the local level. So I do think there is a case for trying to get schools to go in groups. You just run into a pure game theory problem then: there are six heads; who is going to be the one who ends up as the top dog, who is not and, therefore, who is going to choose to become the second-class citizen in the new group? You just have a very human problem there about who jumps first, so there is an issue there that the current policy framework just does not deal with.

Q97 Alex Cunningham: As you said, let us find half a dozen schools and encourage them. Whose responsibility is it to encourage them? Local authorities do not exist in terms of the level of support they once gave. Are they the ones to push schools?

James O'Shaughnessy: I think they have a role. Some definitely do, others do not. In the report I called for what I termed a “collaborating schools network”—a national education charity rather like the New Schools Network, which has been funded as a charity in order to help free schools, to do the cajoling and brokering role that the Office of the Schools Commissioner does at the moment. However, bear in mind that that is a very small part of the DfE and it has many other responsibilities, so I do think you need some organisation using the evidence about what works, and the size, shape and location of clusters, to go around encouraging schools to do that.

Q98 Neil Carmichael: What about the danger of marginalisation for a school that is not in any partnership? How do we deal with that?

Dr Dunford: Can I just reflect on Neil's initial question about competition and collaboration? I will just feed into your thoughts the fact that most schools are in a lot of partnerships. Do not think of schools as just being in a single chain or a single partnership. I have heard of schools being in up to 40 different partnerships for different things—with schools in different phases, with local colleges, with groups for different reasons—and that seems to me to be healthy. A lot of schools would see themselves as being in a prime partnership and then doing a lot of partnership working with other schools, other groups of schools, different groups of schools for different reasons. It is a complex field, if you like, and I do think there are risks around marginalisation of some schools that are not in partnerships—those that are comfortable with their performance and do not want to get into the challenge of being in a partnership, which can be a very challenging situation. I also think there are issues around governing bodies. They are very often behind the thinking on this and are focusing entirely on the needs of that individual school and are not always recognising the benefits of the partnership working

around the broader quality of education and the ways in which that might improve their test results.

Q99 Ian Mearns: Do you think the financial incentives for school partnerships simply encourage schools to go through the motions at the same time as they suppress their mutual loathing for each other?

Dr Dunford: I do not think it is quite mutual loathing, Ian, as you know, but I do think there are insufficient financial incentives. As I said earlier, financing is entirely focused on the individual school, and then it is up to the individual schools to decide the extent to which they are going to pool any of their finances into a local partnership arrangement. There is no real financing of local partnerships except for the start of teaching school alliances. One of the things I would very much like you to recommend is that the funding of teaching school alliances does not cease after the three years as planned. It is very important that that funding, which is very small anyway, continues to stimulate the collaborative working of teaching school alliances.

James O'Shaughnessy: I think there is something called the School Chain Growth Fund, which is small bits of money but is designed to help schools come together and pay for the infrastructure they might need to do that.

Dr Dunford: That is very important, because of course the small school allowance militates against small schools getting into the kind of federation that evidence suggests they would benefit from.

Q100 Ian Mearns: In terms of the motivation for becoming involved in collaboration and partnership working, is there a risk that the financial incentives for school partnership could crowd out collaboration based on a headteacher's motives, which are based on the purpose of what we are all about: trying to educate children?

Dr Dunford: The incentives are around both improving the performance of your own school and recognising that you can get that improvement partly through learning from elsewhere and partly through schools recognising very clearly that they do not have all the expertise—that some of the expertise lies elsewhere and they need to find ways of capturing it.

Q101 Siobhain McDonagh: How can the school accountability system be used to incentivise schools to work together without simply creating top-down partnerships in name only as schools seek to jump through the hoops presented?

Dr Dunford: As I said earlier, at the moment the accountability system is very much focused on the individual school. Ofsted inspections do not, in my view, sufficiently recognise work that schools are doing in other schools or, indeed, recognise the contribution that other schools are making to the school that is being inspected. I think there are a number of ways in which the Ofsted part of the accountability system could be improved.

Q102 Chair: Do you agree with the Chief Inspector that there should be some new über headship title, where you are an outstanding leader of excellence or

something—I forget the exact phrase—which you can only get if you are not only running an “outstanding” school but helping other schools that are lower level performers?

Dr Dunford: I think there is a moral obligation on “outstanding” schools to help other schools, because they are part of a state school system.

Q103 Chair: Yes, but you just said the accountability, not least from Ofsted, should support that, and I have just given you an example of how the Chief Inspector would like to do it.

Dr Dunford: I think that would be a welcome move.

James O'Shaughnessy: There is a moral obligation, and you might be able to incentivise people financially. You want to use every tool in the box, so one of the ones that Michael Wilshaw has suggested is a very good one, which is if you want to become, as the most ambitious heads will do, the best in your field, you have to show system leadership, for want of a better phrase, so leadership across more than one school.

Q104 Chair: The top accolade will be not only do you run an “outstanding” school but you help elsewhere—if you want to be top head in the country.

James O'Shaughnessy: It sends a very clear signal.

Dr Dunford: Also, it has created a very welcome extra step on the ladder of headship. It is not just about being a really good head of a single school now. You can stay in the same school, you do not have to move schools so readily, but you can become head of a group of schools, and that has been a great thing for the leadership of the system.

David Sims: It is all linked to the moral purpose, which was mentioned in the earlier session, where the focus is not just on your own school but is on the group of schools—the community of schools that you work in.

Q105 Alex Cunningham: We have seen the ability of local authorities to monitor and support individual schools diminish as funds have been cut. Who is going to support the individual school in the future? Who is going to identify the weak school that would benefit from partnership that might not recognise it themselves? I suppose the kernel of this is what does your middle tier look like?

Dr Dunford: The middle tier will be small. In school improvement terms, they will not have people sitting in county hall waiting for things to go wrong in schools and then going out to help them, but they will monitor the data and then they will broker people from my database of outstanding practice to come in and improve that. I have seen a particular local authority I was visiting recently where there is a very constructive relationship between a very, very small local authority school improvement service, just two or three people, and the local teaching school alliance. There is a recognition on the part of the local authority that it is within the teaching school alliance that the expertise in school support and improvement exists, and a recognition on the teaching school alliance's part that the local authority has a role in monitoring

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data, in providing support for vulnerable children and SEN, and so on.

Q106 Alex Cunningham: If you were going to capture a recommendation for the Committee in what you have just said, what would you say?

Dr Dunford: It would be for the first time for many years to create a clear definition of the local authority role around providing services to schools. Those things would embrace SEN, school transport, support for vulnerable children and school places.

Q107 Alex Cunningham: In partnership with third-party organisations.

Dr Dunford: In partnership with third-party organisations, such as local teaching schools.

Q108 Alex Cunningham: That is very helpful. Can schools themselves broker school-to-school support for all schools that need it?

Dr Dunford: For all schools that need it, unfortunately, no, because there are some schools that need support but do not recognise it.

Q109 Alex Cunningham: How do we overcome that?

Dr Dunford: That is where you need the local authority monitoring the data.

Q110 Ian Mearns: The evidence from City Challenge was that expert advisers had a key role and brokering effect on school-to-school collaboration arrangements. What role do you see for such advisers in today's more diverse system? We have already touched on it, but do you think that those advisers would reside in a slimmed down local authority or in some other arrangement?

Dr Dunford: I do not think you want a group of experts sitting at desks in county hall or indeed anywhere. These people need to be in the schools.

Ian Mearns: John, you know they shouldn't do that anyway. They should be out and about in schools—absolutely right.

Dr Dunford: They should be in schools and then using that expertise and having the leadership capacity in the schools that employ them to enable them to go and work in other schools. That is how the system seems to be working best. That is how good teaching school alliances are developing.

James O'Shaughnessy: There is a really important point here about the middle tier, which is a ghastly

phrase and everyone is wondering what it amounts to. It seems to me there is almost no reason why there should be local or bureaucratic oversight of good or better schools. We should be using carrots and nudges to get them to collaborate and realise there are opportunities to help others. However, there is a big responsibility to do something when there is failure or even underperformance. Ofsted has said that as much as 40% of teaching is what was called "satisfactory" and is now called "requiring improvement", so we still have a big underperformance challenge in this country. The question is: who is going to do something about that? Is it possible for just the DfE on its own to do something about that? My argument is no, I do not see the need for a new middle tier. There are lots of roles that putative middle tiers have been given that can be done better by others. I do think there is a role for some authority. I would prefer to see it as an offshoot of the Office of the Schools Commissioner, which is brokering support in those cases and dealing with the consequences of failure, and harnessing that from other successful schools, school chains or whatever it is. That is what any middle tier has to focus on, which is where there is weakness and failure in brokering support. Otherwise it needs to leave good alone.

Q111 Ian Mearns: The first part of your answer I must admit I disagree with a bit, because even good schools get into that comfort zone and they need to be constantly challenged in order to make sure that they continue to improve.

James O'Shaughnessy: I am not sure they should be challenged by some sort of bureaucratic tier. You can do it through data. You can do it through parental accountability. After all, the people who matter most in this thing are parents.

Q112 Ian Mearns: Is it the parents or is it the kids?

James O'Shaughnessy: Yes, but parents acting on behalf of their children, particularly younger children. By and large, that is where the accountability ought to lie. It is clearly the case that in failing schools that is not sufficient to cause action, and that is where you do need some sort of intervention.

Chair: My ability to bring Ian Mearns and James O'Shaughnessy to a halt needs further improvement, but thank you all very much indeed for contributing in such an interesting way to our discussions this morning.

Wednesday 3 July 2013

Members present:

Mr Graham Stuart (Chair)

Neil Carmichael
Alex Cunningham
Bill Esterson
Pat Glass
Siobhain McDonagh

Ian Mearns
Chris Skidmore
Mr David Ward
Craig Whittaker

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Professor David Woods CBE**, former Principal National Challenge Adviser for England, **Professor Sir George Berwick CBE**, Chief Executive, Challenge Partners, **Sean Harford**, Regional Director for East of England, Ofsted, and **Kirston Nelson**, Assistant Director of Education, Wigan Council, gave evidence.

Q113 Chair: Good morning and welcome to this session of the Education Committee looking at School Partnerships and Co-operation. We are delighted that we have such a distinguished panel, though mildly horrified at how little time we have to cover the ground, so I will ask members of the Committee and those on the panel for short, sharp questions and answers. It may not be possible to get answers from all of you to every question.

Let me start by warming you up, though. The pieces have been thrown in the air, and we heard last week how many flowers are blooming. Is a system of any sort developing in this arena, or do you think the Government is just hoping that self-improvement is something that takes off like a virus? Sir George?

Professor Berwick: I have not seen any evidence so I cannot make a judgment.

Chair: Does anybody else want to pick up on that?

Professor Woods: I think it is a very fractured landscape, and lacks coherence and cohesion.

Q114 Chair: Are those definitely demerits of the current situation in your opinion?

Professor Woods: You will have heard the merits of the “thousand flowers bloom” philosophy in the free market. I do not want to rehearse those. There is some evidence of school leaders stepping up to the plate and doing that. We will talk about that later. I would, however, judge that, of 23,000 schools, at least half are not in any partnership that we are talking about, and maybe the other half are. That is not a good way to run a whole-school system, I would suggest.

Sean Harford: I would say that there are green shoots, though, in terms of what can be, from the successful partnerships that we have seen. School autonomy is not going to go backwards, that is for sure; therefore, we need to learn from where it is being done very well and replicate that across the system to make a system, if you like.

Q115 Chair: Who would do that work?

Sean Harford: Essentially, it is up to the schools in those partnerships, but with clear leadership—and I am sure we will come to areas later on where that has been shown—and that leadership then leading through those school partnerships. It has to be, however, about schools working together.

Q116 Chair: The point is, however, as we just heard from David, if it is not coherent, great schools and great leaders in certain places will do a great job; the difficulty is that it does not spread like a virus. It does not necessarily appear that good practice is going to spread. If you have over half the system not participating in partnership or co-operation in any way, you have a bit of a problem, haven't you? You either need incentives or leaders.

Professor Woods: You were at the Ofsted launch of the Unseen Children report the other week. What do we see? People might be aware that the report seems to make the point that, geographically, we are going backwards, arguably, in raising attainment and standards. In the other half of the country—and I would say that about London Challenge and City Challenge—we are leaping forwards. While I would not use the Disraeli “two nations” quote, although I have just used it, that Ofsted report seems to demonstrate that we are in danger of that. We have great evidence, of course, of autonomy and partnerships. Who is going to get hold of them in those areas of the country that I will not name again?

Kirston Nelson: Coming from a position where school-to-school support partnerships are working, embedding and beginning to have an impact, I would be very concerned if we entered an arena where that became prescriptive—i.e. the framework and mechanism in which that needed to materialise was imposed on partnerships—as opposed to reflecting the local nature of those partnerships. Coming from Wigan, from a local-authority perspective, we have taken a different approach to our role as a local authority in education, and we are beginning to see the benefits.

Q117 Chair: It can be a temptation for people in Government to reach for levers to pull. Ofsted decided this year to put a lot of pressure on local authorities. Local authorities were kind of fading out of the game. Ofsted has reminded them that they have to continue to be champions. While they will not be able to have the huge services they had before, they can broker and encourage. Do you think that is enough for us to see improvement?

Kirston Nelson: There are two arms to the role of the local authority in the future. I think it is something that, in Wigan, we have already embraced. One is in

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terms of providing and enabling infrastructure, which is about being able to identify, through performance data, the schools that may require support through the partnership. It is a commissioning and brokerage role, but we also have a role in terms of quality assurance. Our school partnership and the model that we have put in place reflects that, but it reflects a collective accountability with head teachers, all on the same driver in terms of moral purpose for system improvement for all children in Wigan. That is why it is beginning to have an impact.

Chair: Ofsted were fairly rude about my local authority, but I was pleased to meet the leader of the authority the other night and he said he thought it was a good thing, and they are getting on with it.

Q118 Ian Mearns: I am just curious as to how we are going to roll out good practice between local authorities if Ofsted, as a national model and overseer, is concentrating at the moment only on what they perceive to be weak local authorities, rather than going in to look at what this Government perceives as being good practice and sharing that across the nation.

Sean Harford: We have a survey that we are about to publish in the autumn. It will identify where we have seen good practice and what that looks like currently, which then balances where we are going to do local authority inspections and, in some cases, not see good stuff.

Q119 Neil Carmichael: I think it is important to define what we think the middle tier is, so I would like you to have a stab at that. Who would like to go first?

Chair: Sir Michael Wilshaw is often talking about the missing middle tier, Sean, so I am going to pick on you.

Sean Harford: I can say that we are not the middle tier at Ofsted. I think the ground, therefore, that occupies the middle tier is now becoming more diverse, clearly, with local authorities playing their part, as Kirston just said—they are key to that. We have multi-academy trusts playing a part in that, and federations picking up where schools are not improving quickly enough and, therefore, applying pressure to do that; and, of course, teaching-school alliances and the teaching schools within them. There are a number of players in this field but the key is that the quality of what they do is right for the situation. It may be more bespoke than we have seen in the past, but that may absolutely be the right thing because it tailors for the particular situations.

Q120 Neil Carmichael: If we do not know what the middle tier really is—and picking up David’s point that it is ad hoc provision and so on—several problems arise. One is its lack of accountability, which I think is something we want to probe in this session. Another one is, at the end of the day, if there is a completely mixed picture, you cannot really make judgments about the performance of schools in certain areas without knowing a little more about the structure. To my mind, then, the middle tier has to be something that does drive standards forward and makes sure that failing schools are identified. We were

talking earlier, in a separate inquiry, about the need, for example, for interim executive boards to be put in place more urgently and so forth. Of course, the middle tier might have a role in that respect. Sir George, would you agree with that?

Professor Berwick: If you ask what the middle tier should be, bearing in mind I was also a senior county education officer as well, there is a basic issue about planning for provision: where does that sit now as this moves away? Talking as a teaching school head as well, that is an issue that surrounds us as these different things disappear. The second thing is about the democratic accountability of the system, which relates to how schools are funded. They are still funded through local authorities, so what is the accountability back to that? The ratepayer pays.

Then we move to the two other areas, one of which Sean and you have talked about, which is about challenging performance; the other area would be about how we spread best practice. It might well be that the roles are not compatible, as they were, for one organisation to carry out as they did in the past. The roles of local authorities encompass all four of those roles. What we are seeing is a change, particularly in the support element, and the challenge element is about the challenge not to have those roles necessarily sitting with the old incumbents. I think it would be a mistake to view this as purely a conversation about accountability for schools in terms of this tier.

Q121 Neil Carmichael: Sir Michael Wilshaw was talking about regional directors within Ofsted and empowering them. Implicitly he is saying, effectively, that there should be some sort of regional structure here. Do you think that the middle tier should be attempting to replicate that kind of style, though with different functions?

Professor Woods: That is possibly the best way to go, but Ofsted is stuck between “You cannot be a gamekeeper and everything else as well”. I think it is stuck with inspection and improvement. You might argue that improvement comes with inspection, but it is difficult for Ofsted, which is regulating the system on a regional basis, to say: “We have just put you in special measures, and we will now switch to improving you through getting the national local leaders or the local authorities onside.” It is not its role. While it is helpful, if we move to a regional model, which I think might be useful, we need something within that region to get the best local authorities onside and also to get the capacity of the system working for us. We have not quite got that.

Professor Berwick: I made that comment about evidence. This is an evidence committee, so I will present one piece of evidence. The evidence from City Challenge and London Challenge is that those two roles need to be divided very clearly.

Q122 Neil Carmichael: Kirston, would you like to see some form of regional commissioner, as has already been mooted?

Kirston Nelson: If we move to that model, we would need to be really careful that we are still engaged with the local intelligence. One of my fears would be the strength of the partnership that we have in Wigan,

which is based on the locality and the family of schools working together, and working with a range of different providers. One of my concerns would be that we are then restricted from working with the large range of providers that we work with, because it becomes more prescriptive in terms of who our schools should or should not work with.

Q123 Neil Carmichael: One last question. Essentially, we are looking at two structures here: the Ofsted inspection, perhaps regionalised, as it is actually being regionalised; and another structure, which may or may not be regional but certainly consistent across the whole area of schools, with the capacity to drive and identify schools and so on. That is the kind of model you would like to see.

Sean Harford: The important thing is that, when we do our work, we have a body that is powerful enough that we can report to it, so that action can be taken. That may differ, depending on the structures within a region. It may be a local authority in some cases, or it may be a multi-academy trust, but we need to be able to use our inspection evidence—and I would argue that it absolutely has led to school improvement over the time Ofsted has been in place—to report to that body and say, “This needs to change now for these young people.” Whatever that structure is, we need that body to report to.

Professor Berwick: I agree.

Professor Woods: I would accept that, but there is a lot of detail to be done on this new structure. I would question whether that is congruent with the free-market economy or free-market ideology.

Neil Carmichael: Even a perfect economy needs some sort of structure.

Professor Woods: It does. That is another debate for another time.

Neil Carmichael: Yes, it is an interesting one.

Kirston Nelson: I would agree that coherence is required, but not necessarily prescription. I think it needs to be flexible.

Q124 Bill Esterson: Talking of coherence, I would like to ask about geographical coherence, starting with Challenge Partners. It is a national organisation with local hubs. Last week, we heard about the importance of geography in supporting partnerships. Do you think that local-hub set-up is important in achieving good partnerships?

Professor Berwick: Challenge Partners was established to facilitate the governance approach to one of its strands for school improvement, which is to use teaching schools. It is also established to try to embed the evidence that we have had from the City Challenge into a system. I also have to say that this is in very early days, so, again, coming back to the evidence, we are talking about an organisation that is only two years old. Over-claiming is one of the problems I deal with all the time. The fact is that we are now slowly reaching the point that it is accepted that London Challenge has had some effect. We are still debating what. That is the first thing to consider. The second thing to bear in mind is that we take £7 per student, so our contribution by schools is extremely small. It is about sharing best practice. Our

interventions in schools are directly related to the school’s ability to function. There are, then, two sections: one where Ofsted would see that, according to their criteria, the schools are self-managing and, therefore, are not concerned. Therefore, they are in a collaboration that shares knowledge, best practice and different techniques. There is another area, called the edge of improvement; schools that fall into that category will be dealt with exactly, as I differentiated, where that intervention exactly exists.

One of the problems is in terms of very small distribution. The first teaching schools were set up by the Cabinet Office. I was asked to create the first one in 2003. We designated the first one in 2008. We got to 48 by the end of the last Government; we are now up to 400. Of those 400, how many can fully function as teaching schools would be interesting. It will emerge, because it takes a long time to build the infrastructure and the trust to do this.

First of all, you need a group of “outstanding” schools. It is, then, inevitable that, as you look at the distribution across the country of “outstanding” schools, there are not going to be a lot of teaching schools in an area where there are not a lot of “outstanding” schools. You have a natural mismatch now between the teaching-school distribution and where the problems are. We are trying to address that in Challenge Partners by the fact that we have put some of our sponsorship money away this year to go into these regions and try to stimulate those schools so that we get hubs in those areas.

What we have identified is that there is an issue, which shows in the figures. In the Manchester area and London, this has been going on for a period of time. The infrastructure and a relationship have been built. Trust has been built with Ofsted. We use all the Ofsted criteria, on which all of our work is based. Where that works, it now has a momentum, and I would argue, although this is not evidence-based, that it is making some contribution to the fact that these regions are moving along. We have whole sections of the country, however, that do not have that infrastructure.

Sean Harford: I would certainly back that up in terms of the two regions that I oversee: London and East of England. There is a clear dearth of teaching schools in the East of England, and what George said is playing out on the ground there. If you compare it with London, however, with a high density of teaching schools, things are moving on.

Q125 Chair: Sir Michael, in his speech the other day on unseen children, said that he would like to see more sub-regional challenges, effectively, built on the City Challenge and London Challenge model. You would expect Norfolk schools, which seem to be struggling a little, to be following that. What is going to turn that aspiration mentioned in Sir Michael’s speech into a reality on the ground in Norfolk, the East Riding of Yorkshire or anywhere else?

Sean Harford: I think the regional structure that Ofsted now has can help that. As a regional director, I am much closer to what is going on in schools and across our other providers as well. The local authority—and you have talked about Norfolk—will

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clearly play its part in that, but it is about going back to what we started with: the schools working with each other in really effective partnerships. The seed of that is around what George said: teaching schools and promoting good practice there.

Professor Berwick: The major issue that we have found with City Challenge is that you are asking schools to take a responsibility, in a teaching school, beyond their school, in an area where they do not own the problem. Without that infrastructure in place and that permission, it is very difficult. In areas like that, it takes time to build the systemic leadership, where people accept that a peer should lead the system. All these teaching schools are led by people who have been accepted by their peers as having some position; they are not accredited in any way, apart from the award. Someone has to stand up in that region and take moral responsibility for a wider base than their school. Rather like a school that is failing, staff take responsibility for their classroom and not the school. The same thing happens in an area where schools are failing, where a head teacher takes responsibility for their school and finds it very difficult to extend that responsibility elsewhere.

Professor Woods: It is not just the teaching-school geographical distribution; it is a pity we do not have a map to show you. The national leaders of education are the other arm of this. Again, they have to be “outstanding”, so, again, they are all clustered. You are, then, back to my thesis of wastelands that do not have this capacity at all. Either you have to come with sub-regional challenges or you have to persuade nearby capacity to come alongside. In my view, if we let this system continue, we finish on teaching schools next year and there will only be a maximum of 500, unless the Government decides to do more. There are a maximum number of national leaders. We could finish by 2014/15, from a geographical view, to get to your point, with distinct, huge parts of the country with no capacity. There will be good schools within them but most will have nowhere to turn to.

Q126 Bill Esterson: What about where you have national chains of academies? Is that a similar problem?

Professor Woods: I do not know what the figures are in primary schools, but I doubt whether we have more than 5% or 6% of primary schools in academies. Andrew might tell us it is 10%, but whatever it is, I am back to my 23,000 schools. We seem to fixate on the 2,000, but 90% of primary schools, or maybe more, are not in academy chains. Probably 60% of secondary schools are, but then you have to ask a question of the variability. They could be the middle tier, but just as local authorities are variable, I can tell you that academy chains are extremely variable in what they can do with their schools. They seem to have escaped inspection so far, but, if they were inspected, I think we would understand that we have some issues there too.

Q127 Bill Esterson: Just on the point about national chains, is the lack of geographical coherence an issue for them as well?

Professor Woods: Yes, I think it is. One of the most successful chain federations is Harris, but it just stays in South London. Some are scattered around the country; many of them are geographically based. There are whole areas, however, where there are none. Take a coastal town with an isolated school in an academy chain: it might as well have been in the old local authority, because it is still isolated on its own, although it is supposed to be in a chain.

Sean Harford: Certainly, the evidence we have is that, as David just said, where they are focused in a geographical area, and if the chief executive does not have too many air miles to clock up in order to go round and see these places and be really in touch with what is going on, they have been more successful in their inspection outcomes and, indeed, their outcomes for children.

Q128 Ian Mearns: I am just not clear in my own mind what the vision here is. For instance, who is going to do pupil-place planning in the future? Will it be an academy chain or a local authority? Will the local authority have the relevant expertise left in order to do that work? Who is going to do that?

Kirston Nelson: From my perspective, I would be looking at it being retained by the local authority.

Ian Mearns: That is the right answer.

Chair: Thank you for satisfying my statist friend.

Kirston Nelson: I think a benefit of the change in the way that the local authority now works with its schools is around more transparency and more co-operation in terms of determining what things like school-place planning need to look like to be fit for purpose for an area. That has opened up a huge debate for us in terms of the local authority not sitting behind closed doors and making decisions around what that needs to look like, but sitting in partnership with its schools to determine what best fits for that locality. That might be a bit of a challenge on a sub-regional level.

Professor Woods: You cannot do pupil-place planning in London now. There are 33 local authorities and hundreds of free schools appearing just like that. I don't know, I am not advocating that Boris takes it on particularly, but I don't know who is going to do pupil-place planning in London. It would be very interesting to find out.

Q129 Chair: Is it necessarily the case that the system cannot work without it? If you were in Soviet Russia, you would wonder who was going to do supermarket planning to ensure that there is one available to everybody and who was going to do that organisation. In a way, once you have enough players, you would expect them to understand the demographics, assuming the data are at least available.

Professor Woods: We have a crisis of primary places in London, don't we? Everybody knows that. I do not see, without planning, that we have a solution. We have an absolute crisis. Even the *Evening Standard*—not a great friend to the Government, maybe—accepts that we have a crisis of places.

Q130 Siobhain McDonagh: The evidence from City Challenge was that expert advisers had an important role in brokering effective school-to-school collaboration. Is there a source of this independent advice for all schools that need it in the new policy environment?

Chair: We know your answer already, David. Maybe you could just say “no”.

Professor Woods: No, there is not, except, of course, in people like George: our very best head teachers. As George has said, however, they are struggling to run their own schools. They are the only resource we have now: the leaders and teachers in our very best schools. In terms of harnessing them and getting them to where they can have an extra impact, we will not rehearse the argument again.

Professor Berwick: It is a very interesting issue, because we have managed to replicate from London Challenge and City Challenge NLEs, national leaders of education, and national teaching schools. We were never able to replicate the adviser role. It is interesting: we do not have the same degree of advisers, for a number of reasons. Maybe they were not accredited, or whatever it is, but they are in short supply, basically because the way they were operated in London required three really important elements. There are lots of people around who can judge where a school is now, and that is done pretty thoroughly and tested in the courts etc. There is a smaller group who can decide what should happen next: “We know you are bad but what are the things you ought to do next to be better?”

The really critical issue, however, is how you lever that from the resources around. Some of that is short tracked in academy chains, because that is already there, but that person has to understand how to lever that. That is quite a sophisticated view of a strategy. In terms of what happened in London, schools were being categorised by Ofsted and they would be identified as failing. Someone like David Woods or George Gyte would go in, and that is the judgment they would make. Therefore, they took responsibility for the solution, but still ring-fenced it as a distinction. We would then come alongside and work, so it was very clear.

Without those three links, however, you are telling people, first of all, just to take the first one: “You have failed but that is your problem.” If you take the second one, you are saying, “This is what you should do next but I do not know how you go about doing it.” You need to have the joined-up bit if you want to rapidly transform the system; otherwise, there is this gap all the time. The gap is the really critical bit because children are suffering at that point in time. We do not have, in this country, enough people with those skills. It is a very small number. Even now, if you look at how the DfE is deploying its experts for academies that are failing, there are only two or three people who they are using consistently to do this work. It is one of the huge issues in the system at the moment.

Kirston Nelson: In addition to that, it probably raises issues in relation to funding, resourcing and sustainability. One of the concerns is the sustainability of the funding in the system to increase that capacity. We have just referenced having those leaders and

advisers, but we have to have the sustainable funding to source the capacity to backfill those leaders to come out and do some of those roles.

Q131 Siobhain McDonagh: Families of schools was a key part of the City Challenge programme, and the Government has stated its intention to release tables of similar schools. Based on this idea, do you agree that this is a useful policy? What aspects of a school’s characteristics and performance would you expect the tables of similar schools to be based upon? What evidence is there that such an approach leads to forms of collaboration that have an impact on children’s learning?

Chair: There is a big one for you.

Professor Woods: In the 2010 White Paper, I was absolutely delighted to see—although it has not come to pass—a recommendation for national families of schools. Ofsted has a quintile thing, but that is far too crude, in my view. If you knew your exact clone in Hartlepool, Blackpool or Bognor Regis, in this age of information transparency, based upon your socio-economic make-up and your prior attainment, which is a fair test, and if you had a family of 40 or 50, occasionally you might visit, but in this age of email and video-conferencing, that would be perfect. That would stop denial, because that school in Hartlepool would be doing three times as well at Key Stage 2 and 4, with the same kids, more or less, and that was the London message. We did not just sit back; the head sorted it out. If you are on the bottom-left hand of the same family, you are drowning, not waving, and you had better get to a school that is walking on water on the top-right hand. It has not come to pass. I am afraid Sean might deny this—what is your system of quintiles called now?

Sean Harford: The governors’ dashboard.

Professor Woods: The dashboard, I think, is not the answer. Statistically, I cannot see the problem. We can put them in. There is no infrastructure needed; the schools will do the work; they will contact each other, and off we go. I cannot see why we cannot set that up.

Professor Berwick: I see school improvement as a knowledge-managed exercise. That has been my work all the time. The biggest issue about transferring knowledge is the contextual one that is put up in the system; in other words, “This school is doing this. I cannot do that; they have nothing to teach me, because it is a grammar school and I am a secondary school,” and so on. Therefore, the family-of-schools work, when it was done, was to try to deal with that issue: to prevent people having this denial by showing a spread, but that is really critical. The more you do not fine-line the context, the more the people involved in it start withdrawing from what they are seeing. What we did in London, first of all, was to identify best practice. In terms of the London solution, although we have this variety of performance, someone in the inner-city family of schools was doing far better than a school that was failing. We trained those people to work with those schools, so there could be no denial of the context.

Siobhain McDonagh: Even in London, that denial is still out there, big style.

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Professor Berwick: Yes, absolutely. I agree, but it is challenged in that sense. It is better than it was but I agree with what you are saying. You will understand exactly what I am saying: if the vehicle is about for accountability, you do not need to fine-tune it. You can use it as a rough guide, if you like. If it is about people sharing knowledge, however—"Why should I go to that school? I have nothing to learn because the context is not the same"—the danger is that you end up with a quite dynamic, tough system, which we have at the moment; in fact no one uses it, apart from accountability, because it does not deal with the context.

Sean Harford: Just to clear up the thing about the quintiles that David mentioned, that is one view of data, naturally simplified for governors to see, so that they can compare themselves. The whole idea of that is to generate and stimulate questions by the governors, so that they can get underneath the data that are rich in what we call the RAISEonline report, which is the full data for each school. They are, within these families of schools, shareable. Therefore, you can get under the data to that extent and see how other schools in your family are doing, if that is how you choose to organise them. The dashboard is just a first look into the data.

Kirston Nelson: From my perspective, I think it can only be a good thing, because it complements what is already there. It offers us additional opportunities in terms of the knowledge base and learning.

Q132 Chair: Has it changed the way you view schools? If you look at schools in terms of that family, you may review their performance in the light of the fact that, compared with the family of schools, although the data are not great in that family of schools, they are well above halfway, say. Does it inform the findings on schools?

Sean Harford: It is a first check, but the point is that an inspection team would use the RAISEonline data, which give the full picture. As I said, to just reiterate, the dashboard is about making sure that the governors can have a quick view and then really ask the school questions to do their job as governors well.

Q133 Chair: Does the RAISEonline data provide the context of families of schools, or is it just the raw data on the performance of the school? It could look very bad in a local area because other schools are doing better, but once you took into account the socio-economic background of the children, coupled with their prior performance, and then in the context of a family of schools, it could be that that school does not look so bad.

Professor Woods: The key thing, which is a principle across Government, is the best benchmarking. We want to benchmark that family who are the most deprived in the country—the 80% or 90% free school meals or whatever—and see what is possible. We also want to benchmark, by the way, our most privileged schools, because some of them should be doing far better, but no one picks on that very often. The key thing is fine-grained benchmarking, which national families of schools would give you.

Sean Harford: We are very clear that benchmarking is done around prior attainment, without taking into account what used to be called contextual value added, which included those socioeconomic factors. You can provide excuses, and London is an excellent example of where those excuses, in many places, have been stripped away. It is about what a child has achieved.

Q134 Chair: Prior attainment, though, is not all that useful. There are so many children at Level 5 now that you cannot differentiate at the top. Also, if you analyse the data on grammar schools, or even faith schools, they do find some subtle forms of selection. They might appear to have children of the same prior attainment as this school, but in fact they have selected out those who are going to do better. There is no way of cutting the data that does not make these schools look as if they are doing better, and that has to be because of the kind of children they get, even though the prior attainment is the same as somewhere else.

Sean Harford: It is more fine-grained than just the single level. At whatever level you cut it, you are going to always have a boundary issue anyway.

Q135 Siobhain McDonagh: Without the guidance and encouragement provided to families of schools in City Challenge, will the tables of similar schools be useful to underperforming schools?

Professor Woods: I think they will be very useful, because they tell us where they are. It is a fair test, isn't it? You are comparing like with like. If you are trying to recruit a head in one of the most deprived parts of the country—and nobody denies that we have proved that you can do it in London and Manchester—what is the point of comparing them against the most privileged? You have to compare, to some extent, like with like. They have to meet a floor target, of course—they have to meet attainment—but let us give them credit for, if you like, success against the odds. We need our schools to prove that deprivation is not destiny. Families of schools prove it for us, which is what Ofsted's *Unseen Children* is showing: unfortunately, in certain parts of our country, deprivation is still destiny.

Q136 Mr Ward: There were a couple of questions on governors, but I have just a couple of questions before the couple of questions. The first one is something that I raised at an earlier hearing: what exactly is new? For 20 or 30 years, I have been used to collaborations, consortia, cluster arrangements and schools working together. What, then, is new? Secondly, a head teacher took a good school to being a very good school in Bradford. They he got a bit bored, I think, so he lent himself out to two schools that were in special measures, which then became successful. One became an "outstanding" school. He then moved on. His original school is now in special measures. Is this just about good people? You cannot beat good staff. The collaborations are really filling a gap that exists because there are just not enough good staff providing this leadership.

Professor Berwick: If you look at London Challenge and City Challenge, the two strands were to improve the quality of leadership and to improve the quality of teaching and learning, running side by side. The children should have a quality experience for the whole time they are in school for that to happen. Teachers need to teach their students well, with purpose. Secondly, we should have the best leadership we possibly can, and there is no doubt that anything would logically say, at the moment, because of the baby boomer situation and so on, we are likely to have less leaders.

Chair: Or even fewer.

Professor Berwick: Thank you. Some of it is quite sensible. Again, the Challenge approach was to reduce the size of the problem, so you do see the same structured arrangements going in, so that there are head teachers now running several schools and so on, because there are just not enough outstanding teachers. As the situation becomes more and more high-stakes, which it is becoming, we know from the facts that fewer people are choosing to do it. It is a very strange profession that you opt to base your career on the fact that you will be judged, within possibly three months, on whether you are a successful participant. If your school goes into special measures, you will be removed. It is quite an interesting risk. I do not know how many other professionals would allow themselves to be in the same position, but that is where we are at the moment.

Mr Ward: Football managers.

Professor Berwick: Football managers are the only other group, yes. It is that profile.

Professor Woods: Their scale of remuneration is somewhat higher.

Professor Berwick: It is a public exercise as well, because it is printed and it goes across everywhere. We are seeing, quite rightly, people becoming extremely nervous about whether they want the job.

Q137 Chair: That is your fault, Sean, because you are rushing to judgment; people go into the toughest schools and they have easily the higher chance of being found wanting by you than somebody who goes to some leafy school and goes along complacently.

Sean Harford: We recognise where leaders have gone into tough situations through the report. The main judgment that George was talking about there is the leadership management judgment, and that is a number. The report itself, however, will of course tease out where a leader has made a difference. If it is a three-month tenure so far, the report will reflect that and look to see what that leader has done in that short amount of time. The judgment as to whether that head teacher is removed or not is determined according to whatever governance arrangements there are. We do all we can to recognise where leadership is having a good impact in tough situations.

Professor Woods: Where I think we could improve the system, however, is to incentivise these people taking on more than one school and taking the higher risk. Many an Ofsted report will not acknowledge that they did that or reward them in terms of that, while inspecting their own school, or indeed inspecting the school that they are taking on. If you are not getting

money, you would at least like some incentive for having said, "I am a system leader. I stood up and I took responsibility for 3,000 or 4,000 children, not my own 1,000," but it is very hit-and-miss.

Sean Harford: What we are doing now, for example, is that Sir Michael writes to every head teacher whose school has been identified as requiring improvement but the leadership management has been judged good to stiffen the resolve of that person.

Q138 Chair: David's particular point was not about turning your own school round but the fact that there seems to be insufficient recognition of the person who steps out of their own school and helps elsewhere.

Sean Harford: I go back to the report. Where we find that is the case and the people are doing a good job, we reflect that in the report.

Kirston Nelson: I have two points. I want to agree with David on one. I was really disappointed that Ofsted decided not to include in the new framework a judgment that was based on a school's capacity to support other schools and a recognition of what had happened. Whether that is something that is in a new framework in the future, I think, needs to be considered.

Q139 Mr Ward: Very quickly, I will clump two together on the role of governors. Where do governors fit in to these collaborative arrangements?

Kirston Nelson: I am going to jump in there, if that is okay. We have invested, within our model, a lot of time in how we develop governance to be part of the school-to-school support system. We now have a mechanism where we identify outstanding governance and those outstanding governors, like the National Leaders of Governance programme, are supporting the governance of other schools. In addition to that, when we look at partnerships of schools, we have also partnered up those governing bodies, so that chairs of governors feel that they have a forum in which they can debate school improvement.

Chair: Thank you. Do you have any thoughts on governance in the new world?

Professor Woods: I am a governor too and I would agree with that. We have the National Leaders of Governance system. Governors are still the unheralded part of the system, and they need to be incentivised. I would agree entirely that we need to get governors' bodies working together. There are some good examples of this happening. We are back to brokerage and commissioning, of course. In Wigan, we have strong brokerage and commissioning, but that is not to say it is elsewhere.

Q140 Chair: We had mixed evidence last week on whether teaching-school funding needs to go on, and we talked about funding a bit earlier. One of our witnesses said, "No, the whole point is that it is pump-primed, and we should be able to fund it from providing services that schools pay for." Does teaching-schools funding need to go on or not—yes or no?

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Professor Berwick: I would love to give you a black-and-white answer, but the answer is that there needs to be a market created where schools trade between each other. It is very early days. This is a very early part. Some money needs to take place because a school cannot take responsibility legally, I would not have thought, for spending its money on supporting another school. That is not how it is given the money. We have an issue if something is not put in place.

Secondly, does a school have a right to create a new enterprise from its existing budget? That is an interesting issue. Who pump-primes any change to move the system forward? Because teaching schools were designed around the system in the health service, there are certain things in the health service that exist to regulate the market, like NICE, but they do not exist, so we have a very immaturely structured market for trading.

Professor Woods: I would say carry it on. It is only £60,000 for an infrastructure of 15 to 20 schools. That is seed-corn funding. I would not say fund the whole thing, but that is more of an incentive to say, "Let us create a bit of a breathing space for our infrastructure for pulling people together." £60,000 sounds like good value for money to me.

Q141 Craig Whittaker: Kirston, I think you said earlier that you would not be in favour of tighter, more formal partnership-working and more localism, but our job as a Committee is to put recommendations forward. What forms of partnership work best, and what would you recommend that we recommend to Government?

Kirston Nelson: I was talking about sub-regional committees at that point. From a local perspective, in local authorities that are effecting school improvement at the moment, there are already formal structures that are in place and operating effectively with school partnerships. It is a case of not throwing that away to implement something new that possibly loses something that is working really well. That was the concern that I was raising.

Q142 Craig Whittaker: As part of your system, which I think is recognised as working quite well, how big are converter academies?

Kirston Nelson: There are very few.

Craig Whittaker: Let me ask you, then: how do those very few fit into your model?

Kirston Nelson: We take a status-blind approach to the way in which we operate as a family of schools. They are all Wigan children and, therefore, we are collectively accountable for children and young people.

Craig Whittaker: So it works well, they fit in and there are no problems.

Kirston Nelson: It works well. They are engaged.

Q143 Craig Whittaker: What about everybody else? In your experience, is there a problem nationally with converter academies not engaging enough?

Professor Woods: I think converter academies are a problem nationally. We are not talking about sponsored but about converted. It is still the policy, I think, that they were supposed to be allowed to

convert—the civil servants might contradict me later—on the premise that they would definitely enter into hard-edged partnerships with support schools. That has happened here and there, and not happened here and there. The Department cannot monitor every one of these and ask what they are doing, so the answer is that we do not know. Some do. Some are incredibly selfish, frankly, and just mind their own place. Some are incredibly full of moral purpose and do help others. Even at the best times of the London Challenge, there was still an element of, "We do not care about London children. We only care about our own." I am afraid that, if we did an evidence trail, we would find that it is a very patchy story about what converter academies are doing in the system.

Q144 Craig Whittaker: Is that no different from the rest of the school system? I could take you to a dozen head teachers in my local authority and region who take exactly the same view, but are not academies.

Professor Woods: Yes, but they did not go to be converter academies on the premise that they would help other schools. They stayed as community schools, and I hope, as community schools, they are community schools. That would be my quarrel, if they had not taken the King's shilling, as it were.

Craig Whittaker: Sean, do you have a different view?

Sean Harford: No, I think it is patchy.

Q145 Craig Whittaker: Could I then just take you back, David? You talked about the isolated school and sponsoring academies sponsoring other schools. On the whole, do sponsored schools receive sufficient support from their sponsors?

Professor Woods: To be absolutely fair, the first philanthropy sponsors put in their £2 million in the old days. They were not in schools' employ; they were philanthropists. They said, "Here is £2 million to get set up." You have, then, a range of very small sponsors—almost one or two schools—who may not be in the business of school improvement but were that. We have others that are in academy chains of 100. In some of the coastal towns, you could trace some—and I have visited some of these—that are very isolated. They are technically sponsored by a philanthropist, although I had better not name them. Good for them, but those people have no capacity to help them improve, and no intention to, in a sense, because that is not what they were doing. We have lots of opposites, I know, but there must be hundreds and hundreds of very tiny sponsored schools that are not getting the benefit of that capacity of improvement.

Q146 Craig Whittaker: Do you have any evidence to support what you said?

Professor Woods: I do.

Craig Whittaker: Could you send that into us?

Professor Woods: I do not have the arithmetical balance but I could quote examples.

Q147 Pat Glass: We have heard about Wigan but, in general, how are local authorities interacting with these new middle-tier organisations that are springing

up around the country? We have heard about Wigan, but what about the generality? Are other local authorities taking a role in the same way?

Sean Harford: I think it is as variable as all the other areas that we have looked at so far. You will also see local authorities that do exactly the same as Wigan but do not have the success that Wigan has had. It is about where the authority has come from, its history, its relationships with schools, and building upon that and making the approach that they then decide upon right for that area. We could easily give evidence to show both sides of that coin, so it is variable.

Pat Glass: So a mixed picture.

Professor Woods: If local authorities are fortunate enough to have a teaching-school alliance—and they may not be; many local authorities do not have teaching-school alliances—they are, in my view, and I travel the country a lot, trying to harness that and the national leaders of education. However, local authorities cannot necessarily persuade academy chains to work with them. The academy chains, quite rightly, want to harness their own teaching schools and leaders, so you then have a bit of a push-pull in the system, don't you?

Professor Berwick: In Challenge Partners, we have the whole range, from hubs working with teaching schools that have no connection with the local authority whatsoever, apart from the provision of places and funding, through to ones that work very closely with the local authority, because it is historical. I think the picture is around the range: there is not one definitive group.

Q148 Pat Glass: Is it about the local authority or is it about the chain?

Professor Berwick: One thing that is happening is that we have moved the whole system to school-to-school support for providing support around how we improve schools. Those local authorities that have adapted to that framework have continued to provide those services, because it is about trust, and they have seen their role as facilitating that. Where local authorities have chosen not to do that in terms of school improvement, they are in that middle ground and are judged purely on the quality of the services they provide. In Bromley, where Ravens Wood is based, we have always used the local authority. We were a grant-maintained school right from the outset, so we have been independent for years. We have used the local authority's HR and finance resources. We would never change that. We would never go there for school improvement. That is what the picture is. I think it is difficult to put kite marking in, but what is definitely happening is that, predominantly in this country, we have moved school improvement to a school-to-school-based service. Where local authorities have learned how to facilitate schools to do that and embrace that and work well with that, it is working fine; where it is not happening, there is this divide occurring, so they are being judged now as a service provider on the quality of services, competing with other people.

Q149 Chair: Was there an evidence base for a move to school-to-school support as being the route to school improvement?

Professor Berwick: I do not know, but the answer is that it is one unique aspect of the British education service that should be celebrated. We are unique in the world that we have embraced this whole area. No one else is at the forefront of this.

Professor Woods: The only evidence base is the three City Challenge initiatives being evaluated.

Q150 Pat Glass: Before we celebrate it, is it working?

Professor Berwick: Yes, it has worked in London. That would be fair but, again, you asked about evidence. If you asked me to bet my family house on it, the answer is no, because I think it is very difficult to prove any impact in education. Secondly, in terms of the timeframe, we have only one that has worked through one generation. Saying that it has clearly worked outside of that would not be ethical. Also, it is extremely difficult in school improvement to prove anything regarding impact, and it is extremely easy to disprove everything. We are, then, on difficult ground.

Q151 Chair: If it is so impossible, we need to put aside all this evidence-based policymaking malarkey and just stick to ideology, because there is no evidence anyway.

Professor Woods: You may say that, but we could not possibly comment.

Professor Berwick: We could not possibly comment on that.

Pat Glass: We have a very mixed picture, then: it is fractured across the system, some things are working well and some things not very well, and we are not really sure what is and is not.

Chair: Sorry to interrupt your flow, Pat, but Bill was desperate to come in.

Q152 Bill Esterson: Sir George, you said that school-to-school improvement was driven by local authorities. Are local authorities in a position to do that and, if not, who does it?

Professor Berwick: No, and that is why I said there was a shift. If you look at the structure before this, local authorities intervened in schools that were failing—that is what they did. They did not facilitate the growth of the system, although some of them did. Over a period of time, some local authorities changed their role. Harrow passed the whole analysis of school improvement and they facilitated that for a long period of time. Wigan would be another example. There are other examples where local authorities have worked to create this environment, and that is why it has worked.

Q153 Pat Glass: Moving back to the role of local authorities, we have heard about the problems with them taking a role in school improvement. We talked earlier about planning school places. What about areas like the pinch points within schools such as special needs, admissions and exclusions? Who is holding the ring around that at the moment, and should that be a role for the local authority?

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Sean Harford: Local authorities still have a statutory duty to do that. The Chair earlier on said that we have been putting pressure on local authorities in the last few months. It clearly remains one of their duties to make sure that happens. The answer to your question, then, is that they hold that ring. Their children are being educated by schools in their area.

Q154 Pat Glass: In my constituency, all secondary schools are academies. They do their own admissions. There are children who end up with nothing.

Sean Harford: It is still the local authority's statutory duty.

Professor Woods: The local authority has a statutory duty for the welfare of children and young people, which encompasses some of those issues you mentioned.

Kirston Nelson: And to commission those places.

Professor Woods: There may well be a push-pull debate going on, and I think there is, but it is still a statutory duty of the local authorities.

Q155 Pat Glass: Does that cover exclusions and special needs?

Kirston Nelson: It still sits with the local authority.

Q156 Chair: Pat's point is whether they have the capacity and the power to intervene, in an entirely academised system, to protect those children?

Professor Woods: That is a slightly different question.

Kirston Nelson: Yes, it is, and it goes back to effective partnerships, doesn't it? It is how, as a locality, you work in partnerships.

Pat Glass: If there are no effective partnerships, kids sink.

Kirston Nelson: One of the things I would like to point out, if that is okay, is that Wigan does not operate as an island. Part of what we are doing is the legacy of the Greater Manchester Challenge. We are one of 10 authorities that work together. We effectively do have a sub-regional school-improvement board. We meet as 10 authorities. We analyse each others' data. We provide challenge to each other. I think there is something about the scope for branching out that role into things like provision-planning and school places. You talked about London and the school-place crisis there. That is happening up and down the country. If localities do not work together to look at what is being provided on either side of the border, we could be duplicating provision.

Q157 Chris Skidmore: To finish off this section, I wanted to focus on the role of Ofsted. In particular, Sean, I wanted to ask you a couple of questions about the concentrated inspection in the Norfolk area in March. What did you learn about local authorities' new roles through your inspection of their school-improvement services? What did you actively discover and what recommendations would you make from that concentrated inspection?

Sean Harford: What we learned, as we set out in the published letter, was that there was some confusion in schools when they were asked about what role the local authority was playing, and they then went on to talk very specifically about certain things. The issue

there, as the letter points out, was that Norfolk had, at that very point, agreed an approach to school improvement through their cabinet, which was just starting to be implemented. Clearly, the outcomes of that are rolling out as we speak.

What did we learn other than that? We learned much of what we have spoken about this morning: that some schools were embracing the school-to-school-support agenda, and others were not. The tipping point probably has not been reached whereby sufficient numbers of those schools are working together for the good of the children across that county.

Q158 Chris Skidmore: In terms of the agenda, and I know we spoke about how we defined that agenda this morning, implicit in that is that, if Ofsted is going in and examining, investigating and checking out whether this agenda is being implemented, what role do you see Ofsted having in actively driving school relationships? As a director yourself, how would you go about implementing and promoting the agenda?

Sean Harford: It is at a number of different levels. We are in dialogue with the local authority. We carried out a local-authority inspection of Norfolk too, following on from the focused inspections in March. We have a team of Her Majesty's Inspectors who are inspecting those schools but also working within groups within those schools. For example, at the ground level, some of my inspectors will be working with a school that is in special measures as well as with the two primary schools that are feeding into that secondary school, and being more coherent in that way. There are then senior HMIs in my team, one of whom is linked specifically with Norfolk and will be in constant dialogue with the local authority about what is going on and what is improving, and testing that out.

The part that we can play is that we bring that objective eye, if you like, through our inspection work and the expertise of our inspectors, to be able to point the schools in a direction, saying, "We are seeing this and you might want to think about doing it this way." The local authority there, and the other people in the middle tier, as we said earlier, are working within that too, because we know that we are clearly not an improvement agency, so we need to give that objective look on this and to give direction, but other people need to do the work. That is the way it should work, and we need to maintain that.

Q159 Chris Skidmore: Just quickly, on that element, you are treading a fine line, aren't you? As an inspection agency, how do you ensure that you maintain your impartiality, having then given advice about what you think should work, if schools are then inspected? You almost have ownership, don't you, going in and taking on this improvement-agency role?

Sean Harford: I understand, absolutely. It comes back to the fact that the advice we give is always through our inspection evidence. Therefore, the inspector who goes back and inspects that school once they have gone through that period of monitoring would not be the same inspector, so we would keep an arm's-length relationship in that way.

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Q160 Chair: Can I thank you all very much indeed? As mentioned by Craig earlier, we conduct our inquiries, write our reports and make recommendations to Government. Following today, if you have any thoughts on recommendations you would like to see in our report, please do write to us and let us know what they are. Thank you very much indeed for being here.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Lord Nash**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, and **Andrew McCully**, Director General, Infrastructure and Funding, Department for Education, gave evidence.

Q161 Chair: Good morning and welcome, to you both, to this meeting of the Select Committee, as we come to the end of our sessions on School Partnerships and Co-operation. I am afraid I missed your last appearance before us, Lord Nash; it is a delight to be here with you this morning.

Lord Nash: It is very good to see you back.

Chair: Thank you. Your vision is for a self-improving school system. Do you envisage this meaning that every school becomes involved in a partnership or federation of some sort?

Lord Nash: I do not know whether it would be every school, but the majority of schools, yes.

Q162 Chair: That leaves room for quite a large percentage of schools not to be part of any form of co-operation or partnership.

Lord Nash: Our vision is for a school-to-school support system with as many schools as possible being “outstanding” or “good”. In theory, you could get to that without having every school involved in school-to-school support but, in reality, virtually every school, all the way through to academies, would be involved in some way—whether that is through peer-to-peer support from one head teacher to another head teacher, sharing subject specialists or whatever. Many schools already are involved.

Q163 Chair: However, many schools are not involved. I was trying to tease out whether your vision is that they all should be. You have the opportunity today to send that signal. We know that signals sent by Ministers can have an impact on the ground.

Lord Nash: Yes, we expect all schools to be involved in some form of peer-to-peer support. You asked whether, ultimately, they would all be. It is unlikely they would all be but, yes, that is the message we want to send.

We trust head teachers and teachers to manage the system. All of the evidence is that autonomous systems work best; we have the best generation of teachers we have ever had; and we believe the system is working.

Q164 Chair: We have had the academics in; we have had practitioners in. The evidence is not necessarily clear that it is working, is it? It is working in some places, but, then again, there is not an initiative in education that we have seen that does not work for the early adopters. You would have to struggle to find one that does not initially succeed, if it has been carried out by people who have overcome an organisation as conservative as the education system. The question is this: when you get out of the first

couple of deciles of implementation, what happens to all of the others? It is not clear yet that it is going to succeed, is it?

Lord Nash: It is still early days, but we have stimulated the system with the academy programme and our dramatic expansion of the NLE programme, the LLE programme and teaching schools. We already have 94 converter academies sponsoring 131 schools.

Q165 Chair: We heard from the previous panel of witnesses how many were converters. They were all pretty much agreed that converter academies were a problem. They may have signed on the dotted line to help other schools but, in reality, they are often not doing it.

Lord Nash: There might be a problem theoretically and academically, but in practice we have 256 converter academies either approved as sponsors or in the pipeline to be approved who are currently not sponsoring any schools at all. We have had a big push to find converter academies—“good” or “outstanding” schools with good results—to sponsor other schools. Frankly, we have been very encouraged indeed by the number of schools that have come forward to say they want to sponsor academies. Our task, at the moment, is to find them enough schools to sponsor.

Andrew McCully: Earlier, I had the privilege of listening to David Woods. He said that we do not know this comprehensively and we do not have a school-by-school tally of what they are doing on a day-by-day basis, but all of our practical evidence from talking to schools is very positive.

Mr Whittaker said that, actually, the variability around academies working with each other could be matched by maintained schools within local authorities. That is a very good point: you will always find some schools that sit on their own islands, but our practical day-by-day evidence is that academies do maintain contacts on an informal basis.

Chair: Some schools stay as islands; most schools in England are islands, in these terms. Most schools in England are not part of any partnership, federation or chain.

Andrew McCully: All the evidence you have been collecting talks about the variety of different partnership models, ranging from the very tightly controlled partnerships—typically in a multi-academy trust, at one end of the spectrum—through to the much looser collaborations.

Q166 Chair: My point was that most schools in England are not part of any of those. Whatever variety there may be, they are not part of it. You said a few schools are staying as islands. As of today—I know it

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is early days—the truth is that most are still in their splendid isolation. Whether they are luxuriating in outstandingness or otherwise, they are by themselves.

Andrew McCully: I am not sure of the evidence that most schools are not in any partnership.

Chair: If you have evidence to the contrary, I would be delighted to see it.

Andrew McCully: We see a variety of evidence for different sorts of relationships.

Chair: So you have evidence that most schools are, in fact, part of a chain, federation or other partnership.

Andrew McCully: Across the full spectrum—ranging from the tightly governed collaborations right the way through to the loosely governed—you will find a wide variety of schools.

Lord Nash: Even if most schools were not, it would not surprise me. It is early days, as you say.

Chair: I was trying to tease that out; Mr McCully seemed to be suggesting I was incorrect to think that most schools were not.

Andrew McCully: We do not have the evidence; we all agree on that.

Q167 Ian Mearns: The problem I have with this is that it sounds like there is a bit of an ad hoc element in terms of how the evidence is collated. What lessons are we learning from the evidence? It seems to me that somebody needs to get their foot on the ball regarding this issue and start some systematic analysis on what the evidence actually is. What is the evidence base? We can then start to analyse that and learn some lessons from it. It is sounding a tad anecdotal at the moment.

Lord Nash: Our evidence is that schools supported by an LE in the 2010–11 academic year increased their Key Stage 4 performance 2.6 percentage points more than a comparator group of schools. Between 2008–09 and 2010–11, the proportion of pupils gaining five A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and maths, increased by 15 points in chains of three or more academies, compared with 12 and 11 percentage points for standalone and two-strong academies.

Evidence from the London School of Economics also supported this and, indeed, showed that, in areas with significant academies, competing schools also had increased performance. The evidence we have is fairly persuasive. Certainly, the evidence on the ground across the country, where we have academy chains taking over underperforming schools, is that we are seeing dramatic increases in performance, sometimes quite quickly, by well organised, tough academy groups in local clusters. We have plenty of evidence from the ground.

Q168 Chair: My opening question was really not trying to say that there is no evidence. We had people in the London Challenge hesitating to say how strongly it had contributed to the improvements in London, but the outlook is pretty good. The chains look pretty good. I suppose, as I said, most initiatives in education are picked up and do quite well in a number of places. The big question is whether you can get that to happen across the whole country.

Lord Nash: We believe we can. There are pockets of areas where it is less easy than in others but, as I say,

in a top-down analysis, we have more sponsors than we have schools that need sponsoring at the moment.

Q169 Pat Glass: Can I ask about the research that has been commissioned by the DfE? What have you commissioned or analysed that throws light on this and shows the importance of school-to-school support?

Andrew McCully: When the National College was the National College for School Leadership, which is now, obviously, a part of the National College for Teaching and Leadership, it commissioned a number of important pieces of research that looked both at the international picture and took evidence on the effectiveness of collaborations and school-to-school support. I particularly point to the work of David Hargreaves, who I know has appeared before this Committee on other occasions, as giving some very powerful evidence of collaboration.

Q170 Pat Glass: Were those only international studies, or do you have anything on how it works within Britain?

Andrew McCully: I point, again, to work commissioned by the National College. I point to Robert Hill's work about the effective impact of collaboration, particularly in academy chains. He drew a number of conclusions, including that the improvement was greater in academy chains than in some of the early sponsored academies, which had lacked the capacity to look across a number of schools. A number of your witnesses in the previous session were making that comparison. There is a good body of evidence there.

Q171 Pat Glass: One of the vacuums or areas of concern that we picked up on was this issue of what works and spreading good practice. Is the Department considering looking at commissioning any further analysis of what is working in school partnerships and disseminating that across what is a very patchy geographical picture?

Andrew McCully: We cannot ever do enough to identify and disseminate good practice. The Department continues to do that, but a lot of our representative organisations also do this. I would point to FASNA, the Independent Academies Association and the Schools Network. They are all organisations that are helping with this growing body of practical evidence and good practice.

Earlier this morning, I listened to Ofsted colleagues talking about their intention to continue polishing their evidence base of good practice. There is a lot the sector can draw upon and will be able to continue to draw on.

Q172 Ian Mearns: What does the Government regard as the main lessons to be learned from City Challenge? How are you taking these forward in your current policy on collaboration and sponsorship?

Lord Nash: City Challenge was very successful, particularly in cities—and London. We think the natural extensions of that are national leaders of education, teaching schools, teaching alliances and academy chains. On a national

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basis, we think the academy programme is the extension of that. However, we still support the London Leadership Strategy and other similar organisations.

Q173 Ian Mearns: In light of that answer, Lord Nash, wasn't it a scary decision to abandon the London Challenge when the new Secretary of State took over?

Lord Nash: Abandon is rather a strong term. We believe, as I say, that the development of the London Challenge was in the way I said: academies, LLEs and teaching schools. They have continued and they have continued well. We recently agreed to support them with money.

Q174 Ian Mearns: What will the proposed tables of similar schools be based upon? Is there any significance to the change from families of schools to tables of similar schools? Why would you ditch a recognisable name and a seemingly successful policy?

Andrew McCully: There is no significance in the change of the name. Families of schools had their particular point of creation in London. We are keen not to take away that unofficial copyright, but there is a commitment to provide that evidence base in the tables this year. That is what the Department will be publishing later this year. It is precisely the kind of information that was so powerful in the London Challenge.

Again, I was able to hear this morning how everyone thought that made such a difference—and we agree.

Q175 Chair: Is it too late to reconsider that? I would have thought that, if they had run the London Challenge and you copied an element and used the same terminology, people would be delighted that such recognition came their way. Did someone threaten you? Did they not want you to do it? Why did you come up with a different terminology that lots of people do not recognise when they have learned about families of schools? I do not understand; is it too late to change your mind?

Andrew McCully: I am happy to look at that.

Chair: That is excellent.

Andrew McCully: I am, however, unsure how much faith you should put in a name.

Q176 Ian Mearns: Will schools be in a good position to use similar schools' information without the expert guidance from an independent standpoint that went alongside City Challenge?

Lord Nash: I would have thought they would. We intend to make sure that, in each comparative similar-schools group, we have a better performing school within a reasonable travelling distance with which they may want to collaborate. As I said, we will be encouraging all schools to collaborate—particularly where they need to do so.

Q177 Chair: What is a reasonable travelling distance? I represent rural East Yorkshire. Reasonable travelling distance from Hornsea or Withernsea is quite a tough concept to deliver.

Lord Nash: It is. A reasonable travelling distance in London might be much closer but, personally, I think—and I have sent this message to all the academy chains—any cluster where people have to travel more than an hour is too far. Much closer than that would be better. However, there are some counties, like Norfolk, in which communities are very geographically dispersed, where one might want to travel further. I still think an hour is probably the maximum, and the closer the better.

Q178 Mr Ward: I do not know if I heard that correctly; did you say that you would be encouraging schools to collaborate where they do not want to?

Lord Nash: If a school is performing poorly, yes.

Mr Ward: The success of collaboration is through a supportive network of schools that want to, isn't it?

Lord Nash: Yes. Sorry, I do not understand the question. We want our schools to improve and, if schools are not performing well, we will do whatever is necessary to encourage them to improve. We are not going to mandate it; we do trust teachers and leaders to deliver the system. However, where there are schools that are unco-operative, because they either have governing bodies that are putting adults ahead of pupils or a few senior leaders who are recalcitrant, we shall encourage them to collaborate in any way we can.

Chair: What does “any way we can” mean?

Lord Nash: Obviously, if they perform really poorly and they go into special measures, we have certain intervention powers.

Q179 Chair: Going back to where I started, the evidence I have seen—despite what Mr McCully says—seems to be that most schools are not in any of these more formal partnerships and are, therefore, sitting in their little islands. If they are not in special measures—most schools do not end up in special measures—I wonder how these schools are going to be brought over. There has been plenty of encouragement so far, and yet most schools are not doing it.

Lord Nash: If you have a system that is populated by a fixed number of excellent people, one of the things you have to do is encourage them to do more. We must continue to send the message that we do expect schools that are not performing well to collaborate. Clearly, there are good models of collaboration and they clearly work, and if schools are not using them, they should be. We should continue to send that message.

Q180 Chair: We heard before that clusters are where these national leaders in education and teaching schools are. If the Government sticks to 500 as the upper limit, we heard, from the last panel, it will leave vast swathes of the country without a teaching-school cluster to help drive improvement; certainly, there will be areas well over an hour's drive from one another. That is what we are concerned about. I know in Yorkshire, Sir Michael Wilshaw has said that all the national leaders in education are in the areas that least need national leaders in education. The areas that need it most tend not to have any.

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Lord Nash: We are looking at that.

Q181 Chair: We would like to find out what you are going to do about it.

Lord Nash: We are looking at incentives to encourage NLEs to go to places where there are currently shortages.

Chair: Do you mean even if it is more than an hour's drive? It will take more than an hour's drive from almost anywhere to get to Withernsea. It takes me an hour to get there from Beverley; I have to allow an hour, anyway.

Lord Nash: You are possibly making a little too much of this hour's drive point. We will get to a point when we have enough NLEs incentivised to do this. We have an 89% geographic coverage from teaching schools. We could do you a very detailed analysis on an hour's drive.

Q182 Chair: Lord Nash, you came up with the idea of an hour's drive. Last week and this week, we have heard about the importance of geographic coherence. I happen to represent a rural area, where we have an insufficient number of good and outstanding schools. I happen to have schools sitting on the coast relatively isolated, and I am struggling to see how this policy is going to deliver the kind of coherent support we all want. I am not trying to mock it or anything; I am not trying to pick on the idea of one hour. I am talking about the realities of getting people to leave schools within the school system. If you have someone in Wakefield whose job it is to go around the whole county of Yorkshire, they can drive miles. However, with someone doing school-to-school support, there are some issues when there is geography such as I have in my constituency.

Lord Nash: We are seeing groups like ARK going to places like Portsmouth and Hastings. When those groups build critical mass in these areas, these gaps where there is more than an hour's drive will reduce. However, we are not talking about a very large number of schools. I am well into the hour's drive model, and we will do whatever we can to encourage NLEs to fill in the gaps.

Q183 Bill Esterson: On this point, you are making the distinction between the academy chains being in a position to travel, whereas the policy is about developing school-to-school improvement. That is the issue: how do you get head teachers and teachers to go and collaborate when there is the big disincentive of the time taken out by an hour in one direction and an hour in the other? That is a huge disincentive to visiting and providing that support. How do you overcome that problem?

Lord Nash: I am talking about academy chains in certain areas. They all tend to have good leaders and they all tend to have clusters of schools together, which must be the only sensible model. The leadership there will be travelling around amongst those clusters.

Q184 Craig Whittaker: Can I talk to you about the subject of incentives to collaborate? It has been said many times: "The mutual suppression of mutual

loathing in pursuit of Government funding." Are financial incentives right—or are they the only way to encourage schools to collaborate?

Lord Nash: They are right, though a lot of what are described as incentives are, in fact, grants. We have grants available for when schools sponsor other schools, because, obviously, it is an expensive job. We have a primary chain grant to encourage primary schools to collaborate, of £50,000. We have the Sponsor Capacity Fund and an NLE development fund.

However, there are many benefits to collaboration: career progression for both schools, for example. The evidence is that both schools—the good school and the poorly performing school—perform well. There can be very good benefits in terms of transition where secondary and primary schools collaborate. There can be benefits in terms of subject specialisation. There are models where secondary and primary schools share sporting facilities. There are a lot of non-financial benefits in the system. If you talk to heads who are involved in this, you get a fairly consistent message: it is a two-way street.

Q185 Craig Whittaker: That is excellent. What other financial incentives do the Government offer, apart from the Sponsor Capacity Fund?

Lord Nash: We have recently improved the amount of the primary chain grant where three or more primary chains cluster together, from £25,000 to £50,000. We have the NLE development fund and, as I say, where a sponsor sponsors an underperforming school, there are various grants available there, because it can be quite an expensive exercise to invest in a school in order to turn it around.

Q186 Chair: If I may, Lord Nash, how successful are you being with the primary schools? Are these grants actually leading to greater take-up? Is it still around 5% or 6% of primary schools that have become academies?

Lord Nash: Just over 10% have either become academies or are in the process of becoming academies.

Chair: Do you feel the policy is working in the primary sector as you hoped it would?

Lord Nash: Yes. It is always going to be the case that primary schools, which are more local schools, are possibly going to be slower to react. That is one reason why we are increasing the incentive.

Chair: Sorry, why would they be slower to react?

Lord Nash: A lot of primary schools tend to be quite parochial. Personally, I think primary schools are sub-critical mass. That is not to say that small primary schools cannot work, but they would work better together in a group: with better financial controls, better processing power and better career structures.

Q187 Chair: Would you consider changing the policy so that primary schools—certainly those below a certain size, for instance—could not become academies without being part of some co-operation or chain?

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Lord Nash: Yes, we would be very reluctant to allow a very small primary to become a free-standing academy, but that is not to say we would not.

Chair: I was asking about more formal rules. Would you consider changing the rules? At the moment, any school can apply, no matter how tiny it is. Is that right? You get small schools, for instance, that are threatened with closure by the local authority because they are seen as non-viable. They could then seek academy status, could they not?

Andrew McCully: Any school can apply, but the Secretary of State makes a judgment about whether or not to enter into a funding agreement with the school. As Lord Nash was saying, we need to look very hard at the capacity of that school to ensure it could take on the expectations of academy schools.

Q188 Chair: Do you expect a school of 50 pupils would have that capacity? You could send out a signal today. They have very little capacity anyway. If they spend their time applying to be an academy—because every school can apply to be an academy—and they all get turned down, it would be a shame that you had not just told them today. We could publicise it; *Times Educational Supplement* could put in next week's edition.

Andrew McCully: Some have.

Lord Nash: We are not exactly inundated with 50-place primary schools applying to be academies.

Q189 Chair: You have 10%. It is possible that you will get to a critical mass and it will become the thing to do and schools will start to apply. I am trying to tease out who you think would be appropriate and who you think would not be appropriate, so that they do not waste their time filling out forms in order to be rejected.

Andrew McCully: It is about the quality of the provision. If the Committee would like an example, Delamere School in Cheshire, an outstanding school in the heart of rural Cheshire, initially only had 70 pupils on its roll. It is now growing and is a victim of its own success. It is at the centre, now, of a teaching alliance in the area. The quality of that provision and the relationships it had enabled it to take on the responsibilities of academy status—and very successful it is. It is a question about the capacity of the school.

Q190 Craig Whittaker: In 2010, the Schools White Paper promised £35 million a year for collaborative working. What happened to that?

Andrew McCully: My memory is failing me. I do not quite recognise that particular bit of the White Paper. There are a variety of pieces of support for collaborative working, and Lord Nash identified a good many of them.

Lord Nash: They would have added up to at least that figure.

Craig Whittaker: Rather than a lump sum being available every year, it is coming in the form of other things.

Andrew McCully: That is precisely it.

Q191 Craig Whittaker: In the past, we have heard from the HMCI about the steps he would like to take to encourage school leaders to work with other schools. Is the Government supportive of Ofsted's plans in this area? Specifically, will the Government support Ofsted's moves to deny an "outstanding" judgment to schools that are not working in collaboration with other schools?

Lord Nash: We have discussed the idea that Sir Michael has of a category five, as it were, for your point. It could be confusing, because parents might see a category four, which is in the current terminology an "outstanding" school, as not as good as category five, when, in fact, it would be providing as good an education for their children. We are considering whether that is one alternative or whether it might be better to keep just four categories and keep "outstanding", but have a star rating for the leadership of the schools involved in system support. Those are the kinds of issues; we do not want to send confusing messages to parents.

Q192 Craig Whittaker: What about the proposal about denying the school an "outstanding" judgment if they are not working in collaboration with other schools?

Lord Nash: That is not our current thinking.

Q193 Chair: That is up to you, rather than Ofsted, to decide, is it?

Andrew McCully: Ofsted sets the framework, but Ofsted, in the way in which it communicates and consults on all of this, would take huge account of things that the Government said.

Chair: What is the answer to my question?

Andrew McCully: Ofsted sets the framework; Ofsted is the ultimate decision-maker on the framework.

Chair: They can decide to go to five, even if the Government does not want them to.

Andrew McCully: Ofsted is independent, yes.

Q194 Ian Mearns: How many applications to become academies are rejected? How many schools are thought to be unsuitable to take on the model? How many formally make an application and have it turned down?

Andrew McCully: We do not keep that data. It is often the case that what we say is, "Go back and think again." It is not, "You shall never darken our doors again." One of the key parts of the information that we look at is the strength of the school and its performance.

Chair: We understand that; stick to the question.

Lord Nash: We do not keep that data.

Chair: That seems extraordinary.

Q195 Ian Mearns: If you do not keep the data, how do you know if a school has previously applied?

Lord Nash: We know all that.

Chair: You must have the data. The central policy of this Government is promoting academies. If they apply, how hard is it to work out to which ones you have said "Yes" and to which ones you have said, "Not now"? It cannot be that difficult.

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Lord Nash: It is not difficult at all; the question is whether it has any validity. We could probably calculate it, if you want the answer. We could probably go away and calculate it.

Chair: That is excellent. If you do that and get that back to the Committee, we would be very grateful.

Lord Nash: What value will that have to the Committee?

Chair: That will be something for us to decide, Lord Nash. You only need to decide whether you are going to provide the information or not.

Andrew McCully: I am sure we can find that information. The point I was making to Mr Mearns is that sometimes it is not a black-or-white answer.

Q196 Chair: No. There are schools that are very small. If it turned out that 95% of primary schools with fewer than 100 pupils were turned down, I would think that was quite pertinent information for me to have if I were head of a primary school.

If I were another head, I would quite like to know what the chances were of my getting permission or not. Indeed, I might be able to divine from the figures some idea about who got through and who did not, and whether I should bother applying or not or whether I needed to fix myself first.

Lord Nash: That would be extremely valuable information if we did not send out any signals to schools as to the kind of criteria that we would apply in order to decide whether or not they could convert. Given what we do, I personally do not think it will be of much value to you, but we will provide it.

Chair: That is terribly kind of you, Lord Nash.

Q197 Alex Cunningham: I want to go back to the question of the £35 million a year, which was promised in the White Paper to aid or support school collaboration. It appears that the Minister was not aware of the £35 million. I would like to know, now, what is going to happen in the future with that sum of money a year? When is it accounted for? In an answer to a parliamentary question, Minister Laws confirmed that none of it had been spent. He said none of it had been spent “using the model originally envisaged”. What is the new model? Where is that money accounted for? Has it gone, been absorbed or cut? Maybe the Minister could answer the question.

Lord Nash: You are saying that the £35 million we have just heard about—

Q198 Alex Cunningham: You promised an annual sum in the White Paper.

Lord Nash: David Laws has said we have not spent it.

Q199 Alex Cunningham: He said none of it had been spent “using the model originally envisaged”. What I want to know is this: what is the model, now, for spending that money? Does it not exist? Has it been cut considerably? What has happened to the sum of money that was promised in the White Paper?

Lord Nash: We have spent considerable sums of money—I am sure they would add up to more than that—in the way of incentives and grants that we have already discussed.

Q200 Alex Cunningham: You do not know what has happened to this figure of £35 million. You do not know whether that money has been taken from that pot or not. The Minister has said that none of that money has been spent “using the model originally envisaged”, but we do not know what the new model is. Can somebody please tell us what the new model is?

Chair: I am sorry, Lord Nash, but it would be most helpful if you wrote to us and were able to spell out the detail and history of that. If it has been reabsorbed and you have done alternative models, you could lay out the expenditure there as well and we would have a full picture. Would you be happy with that?

Lord Nash: Absolutely, yes.

Chair: Marvellous.

Q201 Neil Carmichael: Good morning. It is nice to see you again. On the question of converter academies supporting other schools, we have had a bit of evidence already suggesting that that is not necessarily going as well as it might and raising the issue of enforcement, if you like. Have you been considering how that might be done?

Lord Nash: We do not think that, as Mr Ward said, enforcement is the way forward in a school-to-school model. Actually, in time, we think we will be able to spread the number of schools that engage in school-to-school support. Teachers are very noble people; they are very public-spirited; and all the evidence is that they are, frankly, up for this.

We do exhort all converters to get involved in school-to-school support. Our survey shows that they all do, in some way. We will continue to exhort them. However, as I say, we already have over 250 converter academies approved or, we believe, in the process of being approved, for which we have not yet found schools to sponsor. At the moment, apart from in particular areas—some of them are remote geographic areas like the Chair referred to—we do not see a big problem with this.

Q202 Chair: Who did you survey?

Lord Nash: We surveyed 21 schools and asked them what they were doing.

Q203 Chair: You surveyed a small number of converter academies and asked them if they were doing what they promised to do.

Lord Nash: Yes.

Q204 Chair: That is the evidence you have that they are doing what they promised to do. Could I suggest that, perhaps, a slightly wider survey of those whom they are supposed to be helping might be more useful? If the recipients of the help were to grade the quality of that help, it might give us a more definitive view. It is very hard to imagine that a school that has signed on the dotted line to help others would say they had failed miserably in doing so. Is that fair?

Lord Nash: It is very fair.

Q205 Neil Carmichael: In your written evidence, you did mention the possibility that you were

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considering putting in place additional monitoring steps, in this regard.

Lord Nash: Yes.

Neil Carmichael: What would they look like?

Lord Nash: Along the lines the Chair mentioned: to survey more widely and to see, in more detail, precisely the kind of school-to-school support there is and the evidence it is working. The evidence we have from the limited survey is that it is working in terms of the improvement in the schools they are supporting.

Q206 Neil Carmichael: In the session before this one, we were discussing the middle-tier concept. We were exploring Ofsted's regional structure. We were saying that it may well be simply the inspection process, if you like, but all four of our panellists basically did agree that it would be useful to have something in parallel to help schools drive standards and monitor what was going on. Have you been thinking along those lines?

Lord Nash: Yes, we are constantly thinking about that. At the moment, the school-to-school support model is working well. I accept that it is early days, but we have only been at this for a limited period of time. As has been indicated, the system has been quite conservative. We are watching closely to see how it develops. If we think it needs more support, stimulus or incentives, we will provide those.

Q207 Neil Carmichael: Broadly speaking, the previous four panellists concluded that the process is a bit ad hoc at the moment. That is what their opinion was.

Andrew McCully: Listening to the evidence, they were all questioning the single idea of a middle tier. All of the colleagues earlier were talking about different roles played by different players. We see that growing all the time. Sir George Berwick was talking about school-based school-to-school support and how this country is leading the world in that—I would certainly agree with that—whereas our colleague from Wigan was talking about how place planning could only be effectively done through a local authority lead. You are seeing a variety of different roles played by different players, and I am sure that must be right.

Q208 Neil Carmichael: You prefer the mixed-economy model, if you like.

Andrew McCully: That is what we are seeing over time.

Q209 Alex Cunningham: What effect will the Secretary of State's plans to privatise state schools to allow them to be run for profit have on collaboration?

Lord Nash: We have no such plans.

Q210 Alex Cunningham: There are no such plans. State schools are not going to be run for profit under this Government's policy.

Lord Nash: We have no such plans for that to happen.

Q211 Alex Cunningham: You are denying the speculation in the newspapers suggesting that Michael Gove has said he wants to move towards a situation where schools can be run for profit.

Lord Nash: We have no plans to do that at the moment, no.

Q212 Ian Mearns: Has there been any policy discussion within the Department about that? I know you are saying there are no proposals at the moment, but has there been any policy discussion about going down that line at all within the Department? Lord Nash, I have actually seen what I believe to be a DfE paper, in which this has been discussed.

Andrew McCully: There was a lot of interest, in yesterday's press, in such a paper. I know what that paper was, because I was part of the discussion. I am going to bore the Committee now. It was talking about the accounting classification of academies compared with further education colleges, universities and other types of school. The accounting classification, which is set by the Office for National Statistics, determines that academies, rather bizarrely, are non-departmental Government bodies, which carries all sorts of strange implications. In that paper, we were discussing whether there was merit in trying to take action there to persuade the Office for National Statistics to have a different classification. That is a very, very long way away from questions of privatisation.

Q213 Chair: Are you are sure you know which paper it was? In the context of what you said about ONS classification, the word profit would not appear.

Andrew McCully: All academies are charities and a charity is private.

Q214 Chair: Did the word profit get used? I know it is a bit of a difficult question to ask, whether the word profit appeared in it, but it seems like an enormous leap for the press to suggest there was a paper looking at the viability of for-profit schools and you are suggesting the paper did no such thing.

Andrew McCully: I do not want to put words in Mr Mearns' mouth, but if it is the paper that was addressed in the newspapers yesterday, it was a paper that examined the accounting classification.

Ian Mearns: Andrew, if you show me yours, I will be able to tell you.

Q215 Alex Cunningham: Lord Nash, when you answered me the second time there you qualified your answer. You said "at the moment"; does that mean it is either a mid-term or a long-term ambition of the Conservative Party in Government to have schools run for profit?

Lord Nash: Demonstrably, I am a capitalist. I spent 30 years in the venture-capital business.

Alex Cunningham: That is a yes.

Lord Nash: I have been in the Department for six months and at no stage have I discussed with anybody the idea of schools being run for profit. I will probably only be in this job for a maximum of two years; I cannot predict what any future Government might say, but we have no plans for the moment at all. I have had no discussions about schools being run for profit.

Q216 Alex Cunningham: I am sure you would agree with me that the danger of a focus on profit might

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result in creditors, rather than collaborators, in the system.

Lord Nash: Actually, I would not. People are quite happy to buy their food from Tesco and go to hospitals that are run by the private sector, even though they are funded by the NHS. We probably should not get into that, because it is not going to happen, as far as I can see, any time soon.

As far as the idea of collaboration not happening because of competition, we see no evidence for that. As I said, the teaching profession seems to be incredibly public-spirited.

Chair: Alex is doing a very fine job of getting as many words as possible that could be used to suggest that it is a future plan. It seems to me that Lord Nash has been quite clear: he has never discussed it; there are no such plans. Could we move on?

Q217 Alex Cunningham: As Lord Nash said, at the moment. We will continue to pursue this at a later date.

Lord Nash: I am sure you will. If we all live 100 years, I would be amazed—unless capitalism collapses, which it might—that we do not have state schools run for profit. However, we have no plans for that to happen at the moment.

Alex Cunningham: That is perhaps a much longer-term view than a shorter one, Lord Nash. We will leave it there.

Q218 Ian Mearns: Seriously, though, for certainty, could we actually see the policy paper that Andrew was talking about?

Chair: Would it be possible for that to be released to the Committee?

Andrew McCully: Given that it is already in the public domain through a leak, lots of people have a hold of it.

Q219 Chair: Please see if you could formally send it to the Committee. Would you be happy for us to publish it, or could you send it to the Committee and we do not publish it?

Andrew McCully: As you know, the policy of leaked papers is not one we want to encourage.

Q220 Chair: Though, on repeated occasions, the Secretary of State has expressed his extraordinary comfort levels with leaks as a fact of political life, which has rather frustrated the Committee on occasion.

Andrew McCully: Comfort is a—

Chair: Will you send us a copy?

Andrew McCully: I do not think I can promise that.

Q221 Chair: After all, you advise; Ministers decide.

Lord Nash: We will consider it.

Chair: Thank you.

Q222 Alex Cunningham: Are you confident that sponsored academies receive sufficient support from their sponsors or are there some you have some concerns about?

Lord Nash: By and large, we believe they do. It is inevitable, when you have a system that has been

opened up to the extent it has, that not everything is perfect. We do have concerns about some, yes.

Q223 Alex Cunningham: What is happening in the system that is giving you those concerns?

Lord Nash: A number of very underperforming schools that have been taken over by sponsored academies have not turned around quickly, which is perhaps not surprising. Where we think it might be due to the academy sponsor, we have active discussions with them, we are aware of where those issues are and we are doing all we can to encourage the sponsors to improve the performance of those schools.

Q224 Alex Cunningham: Can we expect some sort of broad report about where the system is falling down some time in the future?

Lord Nash: We do not think the system is falling down; we think it is doing well, actually.

Q225 Alex Cunningham: Some schools are still vulnerable.

Lord Nash: We inherited a system with a lot of vulnerable schools, yes.

Q226 Alex Cunningham: Can we talk a little bit about academy chains? Michael Wilshaw has indicated to the Committee he expects Ofsted to get the powers to inspect academy chains, rather than individual schools; will they get those powers? If not, why not? If yes, when?

Lord Nash: We are thinking about whether or not Ofsted should have those powers. Right at this moment, we do not feel they would be of any benefit to the Department. We would rather Ofsted focused on its other activities, which are extensive. We have plenty of evidence on the performance of academy chains from Ofsted's detailed inspections of the underlying schools.

We actively are in dialogue with all academy chains and their management on a regular basis. Our education advisers visit schools that are performing poorly, and we have plenty of intervention levers. At the moment, we do not feel that Ofsted inspecting the chain, as opposed to the underlying schools, would give us any information we do not have materially at the moment.

Q227 Alex Cunningham: Does the Chief Inspector not know whether or not he is getting these powers? He seems to think he is going to get them. Do you have any idea why he thinks that? Is he just misguided?

Lord Nash: No, I think he would like to have those powers.

Q228 Alex Cunningham: It is a case of his liking to have them, rather than you being prepared to give him them.

Lord Nash: We are in discussions with him, but, at the moment, we need to be persuaded that they would give us more information than we have at the moment.

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Q229 Alex Cunningham: It certainly sounds as if his expectations are greater than your intention to give way to him. Can you tell me in what circumstances you could see a school within a hard partnership, such as a chain, wanting to leave it?

Lord Nash: We are now in the realms of hypothesis, which, at my age, I try not to engage in.

Q230 Alex Cunningham: I will give you a different question instead. Do you accept the need for schools to be able to leave as well as enter hard partnerships?

Lord Nash: Schools can leave hard partnerships by consent of their partners. If a school is in a hard partnership or an academy group and is failing to the extent where we could use our intervention powers, we may well seek to change sponsor.

Q231 Alex Cunningham: One could also see a very successful school deciding, “We want to leave this partnership, because we think we can work with other schools and maybe create a new group.” They might feel as though they are not able to help to the extent they would like to, because they are tied into a chain.

Lord Nash: That would be unlikely. It might be possible, but, if we are going to hypothesise, we could have a situation where a school comes in to a chain because it is performing poorly. As a result of the support it gets from the chain, it performs well. The chain would then expect it to put back into the system and do just what you have outlined, which it would be perfectly capable of doing within the chain.

Alternatively, you could have a situation where a school was not performing terribly well and the academy chain was trying to get it to do certain things, which it did not like; if it could suddenly walk, this really would not work. We do not have any plans for schools in chains to be able to make a UDI, but they could do it with the co-operation of their partners. Where we had a relationship which was not working, we would seek to broker an improvement in that relationship.

Q232 Alex Cunningham: Does it not fly in the face of the Government’s idea of schools having the freedom to choose and develop in their own way to say, “You are part of that chain; you are staying there”?

Lord Nash: They have joined the chain willingly. It is pretty unlikely that, if a chain was doing well, this would happen. If it was a breakdown and we thought it was caused by the chain, we would try and do all we can to make sure that the chain improved its performance.

Q233 Alex Cunningham: Maybe Mr Wilshaw should have those powers. I’m finished, Chair.

Lord Nash: He could have the power to inspect, but he would not have any power to change our intervention—unless we took it.

Alex Cunningham: I understand.

Q234 Ian Mearns: There is a problem, inasmuch as the chains themselves are an organic process and they grow. When a school joins a chain, it may be at a fledgling stage of the chain. As the organism grows,

they find that the relationship that the school has with the chain itself becomes quite different. That might actually make the school decide they want to change the relationship.

I have already had an example, in my own locality, of a school who decided, having had discussions, that they did not want to be part of the chain they had signed up for. They stood back from the chain, but they were unable to stand back from the contractual relationship they had entered into with the chain on the delivery of a whole range of services. They were very unhappy about that and they wrote to the Secretary of State about it. I am sure that this sort of stuff is happening; I am a little surprised you feel it has not been happening.

Lord Nash: I do not think it is happening to any great extent and, where it is happening, we would see that one party must be at fault. Either the school itself is deluded in some way or the academy chain is not doing its stuff. Where it is the latter, we would expect to discuss that with the academy chain.

Q235 Chair: Lord Nash, I would invite you to give this a bit more thought. I do not think your conclusion that someone is at fault is necessarily true. As Ian has just said, it can change organically.

Last week, we had the example of the Torbay partnership. There were four schools: three grammar schools, if I remember, and one chain school, which had not joined in. At the end of the session, we were told that the chain school had decided that they would come in. If they come in and find the chain is doing great things for, most of all, the schools with the biggest problems—that is where you would hope they would concentrate—and this school is going along very nicely without much intervention and a lot of support in Torbay, why would you not want to allow them to secede from the chain and join and strengthen the Torbay partnership, if that is the right thing to do? I would have thought this was exactly the kind of organic freedom you would want in the system. Neither is at fault, are they?

Lord Nash: You did not like my use of my expression “at the moment” earlier, Mr Cunningham. I will give it more thought, but we have no plans to allow it at the moment.

Q236 Chair: How many new chains are emerging?

Lord Nash: Quite a few.

Q237 Chair: Can you give us any numbers?

Andrew McCully: About 45% of academies are in chains of either a multi-academy trust or what we call an umbrella trust, which a small class are in.

Q238 Chair: How many trusts or chains are there?

Andrew McCully: I do not have that figure to hand; I am sure we could give you that figure. There are 391 multi-academy trusts, and that is a total that climbs all the time.

Q239 Chair: Where do they tend to spring from?

Andrew McCully: The biggest source at the moment is schools: outstanding schools who first convert to become academies and want to expand their

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school-to-school support activities. The biggest source of sponsorship is other schools.

Q240 Chair: To link it back to an earlier point, I can see how, as a particular chain grows, an outstanding school might want to go off and set up a new chain. Again, you would not want to restrict that dynamism by saying, “You guys are together and one of you must be at fault, so I am going to come along and bang the head of the person who is at fault until you go back into your box.”

I would have thought we would have wanted them to come merging out and creating new chains. In business, if a part of the business grows successfully, you do not necessarily see it as a disaster if it goes out on its own, rather than staying as part of the group. Does that not appeal to you?

Lord Nash: I would not want to stretch that analogy too far, but, as I said, we will give it more thought.

Q241 Mr Ward: I think it was the Netherlands where we asked a question about their equivalent of the chains and what would happen if one wanted to leave. The view was that it should not be allowed to happen. I suppose what we are trying to find out is the relationship that exists that between the member of the chain and the chain itself. Could someone say, “Actually, I am doing very well, thank you; I am going off on my own”?

Lord Nash: At the moment, they could not. If we had a situation where we felt that for some reason a school doing very well in a particular area wanted to sponsor schools in the area and was not able to do it as part of the chain—they should be able to do this, which is why it is slightly hard to imagine this happening—I am sure we could discuss it with all parties. In a thriving school-to-school model and with everybody having very public-spirited interests, it may well be possible to break it. However, I do not see how the organisation of the chain group can work if people can, frankly, come and go at their will.

Q242 Siobhain McDonagh: Lord Nash, I am so pleased to see you here this morning and I am very pleased that Alex has let me ask the next question, because you will be looking at something directly of relevance to this question in my constituency in the next few days. We have heard several times in this inquiry that geographical coherence is important for effective partnerships; is this taken into account when academy sponsors are sought?

Lord Nash: Yes. It is not taken into account in the sense of when we approve a sponsor. Somebody has to apply to us to be a sponsor, and that would not be taken into account. If we were then looking at them sponsoring a particular school, we would not want them to be sponsoring a school that was too far from where they are—so yes.

Q243 Siobhain McDonagh: That is great. Can I just ask whether past performance of the chains is taken into account when looking at whether they are the right sponsor for a failing school?

Lord Nash: Yes.

Q244 Siobhain McDonagh: Those chains that perform better get a greater chance of taking over a school.

Lord Nash: Yes, if we are satisfied they can handle the capacity to expand.

Q245 Ian Mearns: You have already touched on this, Lord Nash, to a certain extent, but, just for the record, do you think that schools that are meant to be competing with each other are less likely to co-operate?

Lord Nash: There is no evidence for this. It is a good theoretical argument, but we do not see it in practice. Indeed, there is evidence that, where there are quite a lot of academies in the area, nearby schools have raised their game. The rising tide does lift all boats.

Q246 Ian Mearns: If Tesco, Morrisons and Sainsbury’s are all competing with each other in an area, they say, “I will not go there, because that is your territory. We will not go there.”

Lord Nash: I was not thinking so much of that. I was thinking of the fact that, if Tesco were somewhere, the other shops would have to raise their game.

Q247 Ian Mearns: Do you think there are any inherent tensions between competition and collaboration or is this a false dichotomy?

Lord Nash: No and yes.

Q248 Ian Mearns: If there are tensions, are these positive, negative or can they be eased by the way the system is structured?

Lord Nash: A certain amount of tension is healthy.

Q249 Chair: You just said there was no tension. You are asked about what you would do about the tension and you say it is a very good thing. I am confused.

Lord Nash: I was confused.

Chair: Do you want to answer those questions again?

Lord Nash: I do think there is a tension.

Chair: So there is a tension between competition and collaboration.

Lord Nash: There is a certain amount of tension, but it is not caused by collaboration. The fact that there are schools in the area that are doing better and are collaborating may well cause tension among those schools in the area that are not doing well and maybe not collaborating. That is healthy, because it might encourage them to collaborate. Chair, you should be pleased with that, in view of your drive for greater collaboration.

Q250 Siobhain McDonagh: Do you think those schools that have got attention because others are doing well might try to keep the sponsor out because they are frightened it will show them in a bad light?

Lord Nash: Yes.

Q251 Ian Mearns: The Government is currently undertaking major changes to the school accountability system. As part of this, what steps will you take to reduce the current disincentive for partnership working inherent in individual school-focused accountability measures?

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Andrew McCully: We have a publication forthcoming; I cannot give a date. As you know, we have been consulting on both the primary and secondary accountability measures and, indeed, post-16. The Secretary of State is considering the responses to that consultation at the moment. I would hope that we will be able to publish something very soon.

Q252 Chair: The Government put out proposals and there is nothing in it to reward or incentivise co-operation with other schools. It came up in the previous session, when we were talking about the fact that Ofsted tends not to give any credit—I do not know what form it would take—to people who are collaborating elsewhere. In a co-operative, self-improving system, as schools tend to be driven by the accountability measures, you might think you would create incentives to co-operate within those hard-edged accountability measures. It might primarily be as a helper of others or it might primarily be as a recipient of help, but, either way, you would think you would try and align the accountability with that policy objective.

If there is one thing we have learned in the last couple of years, looking at exams and the way schools behave, it is that they are absolutely driven by the accountability system—particularly the schools that are struggling. The great schools do great things regardless of what we in Government do, but other schools tend to be more driven by it. Does that need to be reflected on more? I do not think we have any idea of what that would look like. Of course, anything you do put in tends to have perverse outcomes as well, but, at the moment, there is no suggestion of doing

anything in that accountability system to encourage the very co-operation that you think is fundamental to school improvement across the board.

Andrew McCully: I agree very much with some of the statements made this morning about the whole variety of different ways. Mr Chairman, you talked about both levers and incentives. The Minister has already talked about a range of incentives—and there may be more—to collaborate. Our Ofsted colleague was talking about the importance of how the inspection reports flag up the role of leaders. That is something Ofsted want to do more of; I think that would be very powerful, too.

We talked about the families of schools, if we are using that phrase. In the information and performance tables, there is another piece of information that serves as both a check and an incentive to think about the relationships with other schools. There is a whole variety of different incentives.

Q253 Chair: That is a fair point. Obviously, Ofsted have a critical part to play in accountability, but there is nothing in the league table measures and the minimum thresholds and the like, at the moment, specifically about co-operation. I wondered whether the Department had considered it. Are there any models you have thought of?

Andrew McCully: We will keep on considering it. The accountability system develops over time, but, as you said, there are downsides to making the accountability system too complex. It can stop having the incentive effect.

Chair: Fair enough. Thank you both very much for giving evidence to us this morning.

Written evidence

Written evidence submitted by Cabot Learning Federation (CLF)

INTRODUCTION

The Cabot Learning Federation (CLF) was first established in September 2007 when John Cabot City Technology College became an Academy at the same time as becoming the educational sponsor of Bristol Brunel Academy, the school that replaced the failing Speedwell Technology College. This was the beginning of a journey that has culminated in 2012 with a multi academy trust that comprises 11 Academies, five of which are primary and six are secondary.

The initial structure for the relationship between John Cabot and Bristol Brunel was a soft federation where both Academies were independent trusts linked by the appointment of David Carter as Executive Principal and an overarching group of trustees who supported the initial collaboration. Whilst the period between 2007 and 2009 was crucial in terms of creating trust and identity, it was not a comfortable model for delivering change at a rapid pace as most new initiatives were reviewed by both academy trusts as well as the overarching group. In 2009, following discussions between the DFE and Bristol CC, it was agreed that a third academy would join the federation and at that point David Carter persuaded the trustees to create a multi academy trust, under a single governance arrangement with the MAT assuming single employer status for a workforce that today exceeds a thousand adults. In September 2009, Bristol Metropolitan Academy was opened and became the third member of the CLF. At the same time, a new board was created with equal representation from our co-sponsors the University of the West of England (UWE) and Rolls Royce PLC.

BUILDING A GOVERNANCE MODEL THAT PROVIDES CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT

The CLF governance model is inevitably different to that of a single school model. Our CLF Board is in effect the “governing body” and the sponsors have the majority of places on the board. We have then added specific professional skillsets to fill the remaining places, and many of these colleagues also chair an Academy Council. An Academy Council is a sub group of the main board but it is the means by which we ensure that there is local accountability for each school. The majority of the 13 places on an Academy Council are appointed by the board, including the chair, but the remaining 6 places are reserved for the Principal, a LA representative and elected staff and parents. In addition to the Board and Councils, we also have four other sub groups that work to provide the board with opportunities for challenge and support. There are two sub groups focused on “Achievement, Teaching and Learning” and “Leadership, Ethos and Behaviour” which reflect the four main areas of an OFSTED inspection. There is also a “finance and general purpose” group and a forum where the 11 Chairs of Academy Council meet with the chair of the Board and the Executive Principal. Standardised agendas ensure fluidity and consistency of communication and gives ample evidence of the ways in which the federation is held to account by the trustees.

EXPANSION AND GROWTH

The CLF has grown incrementally since 2009. We resisted the temptation to grow at the same pace as other similar organisations and also made sure that our commitment to Bristol and the local authorities that border with the city were our priority. The CLF Leadership team and Board have always been secure in their focus that our collaboration is about doing something extraordinary and sustainable for our region. The protocol that the board have written that sets out the criteria for the admission of new academies to the CLF, places locality and ease of access for staff to travel between the academies as a priority.

CLF PROTOCOL FOR NEW JOINERS TO THE FEDERATION-KEY QUESTIONS

What will be the benefit for current CLF students and will there potentially be any adverse impact on current students and schools within CLF?

1. Is the rationale for a new partner based on any of the following?
 - (a) Link(s) with existing schools as a feeder or partnership school via a NLE arrangement?
 - (b) Geographic proximity to allow staff and possibly students to exchange?
 - (c) CLF actively inviting a new partner because of a feature of the new school that the federation needs or is seeking?
 - (d) Does the new partnership further the aims of CLF and fit the ethos of the federation?
2. Have the following been made explicit?
 - (a) Strengths, capacity and benefits that the new partner offers CLF?
 - (b) The costs of support, especially in years 1 & 2 of the new partner joining CLF?
 - (c) New partner’s needs and the extent to which CLF could meet these?
3. Do the new partners meet the following expectations?
 - (a) Recognise the value of collaboration and the federation?
 - (b) Currently demonstrate a readiness to give and receive support?

- (c) Have governors and leaders who support the development, especially if a “converter” academy?
 - (d) Have the support of parents/carers, community and other stakeholders?
4. Has the decision to propose a new partnership to the CLF Board been informed by any or all of the following?
- (a) Robust due diligence
 - (b) A thorough SWOT analysis and risk assessment
 - (c) Local authority attitude to the development
 - (d) Views of the sponsors

This protocol was used on each occasion that we chose to admit a new academy to the federation. The result of this is that from the three academies that were part of the CLF in September 2009 we now have an additional eight schools in our “family”:

2011-Hans Price Academy in Weston super Mare joined the CLF taking the place of Wyvern Community School

2011-King’s Oak Academy in South Gloucestershire joined the CLF taking the place of Kingsfield School

2012-Bath Community Academy in BANES joined the CLF taking the place of Culverhay School. The academy is also co-educational whereas the predecessor school was a boys school.

Also in September 2012, four of the Primary Schools with whom the CLF has had a particularly close relationship joined the trust. This was the point at which we became an organisation educating children from the age of 3 to 19.

- Begbrook Primary Academy, Bristol CC, converted to join us.
- Frome Vale Academy, Bristol CC, became a sponsored academy and joined us.
- Summerhill Academy, Bristol CC, converted to join us.
- Minerva Primary Academy, Bristol CC, became a sponsored academy and joined us.

Finally, in September 2013, we are opening a brand new academy in South Gloucestershire with 60 reception students, that will serve a brand new community that is being built adjacent to the site of the UWE. This is our 11th school and has been named Wallscourt Farm Academy.

In September 2011, the Cabot Learning Federation became a National Teaching School, and this initiative has been invaluable to us as it has enabled us to “glue” together a number of strategies that together provide out schools with the support that they need to sustain improvement.

How does the CLF Support the Academies in the Federation?

Implicit within the protocol for new academies, is the expectation that the CLF can build a strong team to support its schools to become outstanding as quickly as possible. It would be hard to outline every single aspect of school to school support but the areas outlined below give a clear indication of how this happens:

1. Each year, each Academy Principal will “commission” a review from the CLF of an area of school performance that they want to improve or develop. This is one of the best examples of how the partnership takes responsibility for challenging itself. In addition to this, each Academy Principal leads a commission in another Academy so that the critical friendship model becomes reciprocal between the leaders in the federation. The review is followed up after 6 weeks and 12 weeks to monitor the actions that were identified as needing to take place.
2. Because of the close geographical proximity between our academies, there are many opportunities for shared training, best practice networking and staff exchanges and secondments. For example:
 - (a) Federation Network Night (FNN) Meetings-one meeting for every curriculum team per term to bring CLF staff together to share effective practice led by leaders from across the CLF
 - (b) Two CLF Conferences each year-held at UWE in November and attended by every CLF employee-workshops led by CLF staff for CLF staff followed by a teaching and learning seminar for all employees in July to share the best practice that has evolved throughout the FNN sessions and the academic year
 - (c) Staff exchanges & secondments across the federation happen on both a formal and informal basis. Sometimes a member of staff who has taught in one school for a long time requests the opportunity to move to another academy for a specific time period or the CLF may ask that person to move to another academy because the skillset they possess is one the federation wants more students to be able to benefit from
3. Through the teaching school, we have built a team of over 30 Specialist Leaders in Education (SLE) who provide capacity for the CLF to support staff and teams in each academy. The minimum time per week that a SLE offers is 0.1 and the maximum is 0.6 which provides a significant volume of high quality expertise to support across the 11 Academies. Our teams support classroom practice,

middle leadership, behaviour and engagement, SEN and Inclusion as well as the induction of new staff and Initial Teacher Trainees.

4. Again, due in part to the close proximity of the schools to each other, we are able to create Managed Moves between the Academies in order to give students in the CLF the chance of a “fresh start”. Permanent exclusion are very rare and since 2007–08 have numbered less than 25 across the whole organisation
5. The “top slice” (see below) enables the CLF to run an engagement centre that we have called “The Studio”, which is staffed by teachers and mentors from our Bristol based Academies and students from our academies benefit from this additional layer of support
6. Succession Planning and Talent management is critical to our sustained success. David Carter as Executive Principal appoints, mentors and line manages the Principals and Finance Director and has designed and built a delivery team of leaders who support leadership development across the federation. This in turn is supported by the monthly Leadership Forum where all CLF Principals meet to share leadership strategy and gather feedback from their peers. The teaching school has been awarded a license by the NCTL to deliver nationally accredited leadership programme which are the basis for much of this work

BUILDING A CENTRAL TEAM TO CREATE CAPACITY TO SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

In 2009 when the hard federation was formed, it was clear that as a single employer we needed to centralise our finance and HR systems to ensure parity for every employee past, present and future. The academies pay a contribution of 2.85% to the centre to enable the Executive Principal and Finance Director to build a team of high quality experts to provide educational, finance, HR, ICT and project management support for the academies. Each Academy also has its own Academy Business Manager who whilst based in the school are line managed centrally. The impact has been significant. Centralising the systems has enabled us to achieve better quality, value for money in terms of procured services and product, a consistent approach to recruitment, employment policies and practice and one relationship with professional associations to save each Academy from replicating the same communication strategies.

In Conclusion-How to encourage high performing schools to work in collaborative partnerships:

- The majority of the CLF Academies are schools who have become sponsored academies due to previous poor and weak performance. Nevertheless, the benefits we enjoy are applicable to high performing schools in different contexts. We have been debating what we mean by world class schools. Schools that go beyond outstanding. We cannot conceive that a definition of this does not involve a world class school helping other to become outstanding. Our most successful Academy is John Cabot Academy, which has built on the success of the former CTC. What is clear to us is that Cabot has remained outstanding in part because it has reflected on how it shares with others and also what it learns from being part of a formal partnership.
- One of the threats that is perceived by high performing schools is the notion that more will be given than received and that what made the school outstanding might be under threat. This does not have to be the case but you need a strategy to create resource that provides backfill of the same quality as the person leading the collaborative practice brought to the school.
- The matter of competition and collaboration will raise its head at some stage. The solution for the CLF has been straightforward. Competition is healthy and the CLF Principals feel this deeply. However, as a leadership team we take responsibility for all 6000 children in the federation. We publish our data to the board and academy councils on a federation wide basis. We take no pleasure in any of our Academies being in difficulties and are used to responding quickly to staff and student matters, decline in performance and the joint recruitment, deployment and development of staff. We want the best for every child we are responsible for and working in competition in the same geographical area helps this but we never lose sight of the need to see the bigger picture.
- There are incentives that could be applied. For example, can you be judged outstanding for a second or third time if you have not helped another school to improve? Can a partnership grant, perhaps equal to a percentage of the budget allocation of the partner schools be added for two years to start the collaboration?

Has Collaboration Improved the CLF Academies?

We have little doubt that this model of working has been beneficial and significant in terms of school improvement. Writing this in May 2013 it is too soon to make claims about our Primary Academies but we are sure that our secondary schools have improved significantly:

- John Cabot Academy-outstanding in 2007 and 2009 and has never been below 1022 VA score or 72% 5 A*-C including English and Maths since it became an Academy in 2007.
- Bristol Brunel Academy-5 A*-C including English and Maths results have improved from 12% to 46% between 2007 and 2012 and are predicting to exceed 50% in 2013 for the first time.
- Bristol Metropolitan Academy was judged “good” by OFSTED in June 2012 having been satisfactory on three occasions in the ten years before it became an Academy.

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- Hans Price Academy—the predecessor school Wyvern Community School was the 13th lowest performing school in England in 2011 with 23% of the students gaining 5 A-C grades including English and Maths. In 2012, this improved to 45% and the school was judged to be making “good” progress in the section 8 inspection in June 2012.
 - King’s Oak Academy—the predecessor school Kingsfield School has a notice to improve which has now been removed and closed with 32% of the students gaining 5 A-C grades including English and Maths. This improved to 51% in 2012 and will exceed 55% this summer.
 - Bath Community Academy—the predecessor school, Culverhay School closed in special measures in the summer of 2012. In February 2013 OFSTED said the school had improved sufficiently for it to no longer require this judgement.

Our mission statement is “Collaboration for Outstanding Achievement”. In a school system where the accountability rests within schools and between partnerships, there can be no better way for a group of motivated and talented leaders, sponsors and community representative to take responsibility for the educational standards in the towns and cities where they are based. This is the challenge for the remainder of this parliament and the next, and we have a model that contributes to this debate.

October 2013

Written evidence submitted by the Department for Education

INTRODUCTION

1. The Government recognises the value of school¹ partnerships and cooperation and the role they play in achieving a high performing, self-improving education system. The Government welcomes this inquiry as an opportunity to present the contribution these partnerships and collaborations are making towards improving standards in education performance and teaching.

THE GOVERNMENT’S POSITION ON SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION

2. High performing international systems ensure schools and leaders themselves have capacity to deliver improvement and reform² and, as the Secretary of State made clear at a recent conference for outstanding head teachers, creating a school-led education system is central to the Government’s vision:

“my aim during my time as Secretary of State is to see the Department for Education reduce in scope, reach and interference... we should withdraw so that you (school leaders) can innovate with the curriculum, train teachers in the way you believe is right, provide the right level of professional development, shape collaboration in a way that suits you.....and it is for that reason I believe that over time we can move towards what my goal is, a self-improving system.”

3. Partnership and collaborative working between schools is an essential requirement for realising this vision. It enables schools to work together to identify successful models and to tackle issues based on their shared expertise and experience of local circumstances. The evidence indicates that collaborative working leads to an increase in performance for all schools involved in partnership working; even, it should be noted, high performing schools which support weaker schools benefit from an improvement in their own results³. There are further benefits for staff development, continuous professional development and, crucially as we move towards creating a self-improving system, developing leadership. Schools involved in collaborative arrangements recognise these benefits of working together. As the CEO of an academy trust recently said on the decision to become an academy sponsor:

“We took the decision to sponsor because it was the right thing to do and because it is itself a great school improvement strategy. By working together all partner schools improve⁴”

4. The Department has learned from the experience of the London and City Challenge leadership strategies run by the then National College of School Leadership and applied this learning to its current policies: we are increasing the number of National and Local Leaders of Education, developing a network of Teaching Schools and encouraging high performing academies to take on the role of academy sponsor to empower and enable high performing schools and leaders to support underperforming schools. However, while we can provide the structures through which formal partnerships can be established, collaboration in a self-improving system should be “driven by school leaders and teachers—not bureaucrats⁵”. To impose a requirement on unwilling schools would be in contradiction to creating a self-improving system. Recent sector led-initiatives such as Challenge Partners and Bradford Partnership, voluntary organisation in which member schools support each other, demonstrate that the sector recognises the value of joint working in improving the school system and is

¹ Unless otherwise stated, “schools” should be taken to mean both maintained schools and academies.

² McKinsey & Co, 2010, *Capturing the Leadership Premium: How the worlds most improved schools systems keep getting better* and also Jensen & Levin 2013 *Confident school leadership: An East Asian Perspective* and *Confident school leadership: A Canadian Perspective*, National College.

³ Chapman et al, 2011, *A study of the impact of school federations on student outcomes*, National College.

⁴ Dr Gary Holden, Chief Executive of The Williamson Trust.

⁵ The Importance of Teaching, The School White paper 2010

driving forward solutions. High performing schools and leaders are almost always at the forefront of these developments.⁶

5. Most schools engage in collaboration to some extent and there is a variety of different mechanisms for this, with varying degrees of formality. These can range from an informal agreement between schools to a structure that is formalised through legislation or academies' funding agreements. While there is value to schools in engaging in informal partnerships, more formal partnerships (for example a merged governing body) have a greater impact.⁷

6. It is the Government's view that many of the advantages of collaborative working can only fully be realised through establishing formal partnerships in which all those involved make a long term commitment to the partnership and in which the lines of accountability are clear. Hargreaves acknowledges many of the less formal arrangements are too superficial to yield much in the way of benefits⁸; formalising partnerships ensures that the different strands within the partnership share a vision and purpose.

TYPES OF SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION

7. Schools can work with each other in a number of ways ranging from formal partnerships that have their basis in legislation for maintained schools and the funding agreements for academies, to less formal arrangements agreed at a local level between schools. The following paragraphs provide an overview of these differing forms of collaboration with further details available at annex A.

Academies

8. Collaboration is a defining feature of the academies programme. Academies can establish formal partnerships via their funding agreements by establishing a multi-academy trust (MAT) or an umbrella trust (UT) (see annex A for details). Single Academy Trusts⁹ can work together in locally agreed collaborations which do not have their basis in the funding agreement but which can nonetheless allow single academies to work in partnership to, for example, share resources. 1,334¹⁰ academies are part of either a MAT or a UT.

9. The formal partnership arrangements for both academies and maintained schools (detailed below) provide a framework for joint working in which the lines of accountability remain clear. That these are recognised in funding agreements for academies and legislation for maintained schools signals a commitment to the partnership from those involved and provides a foundation on which effective joint working can be built. The less formal arrangements, while giving schools opportunities to work together and not in isolation, may not always have the same clarity in terms of accountability and, as they can be dissolved easily, may not always result in long lasting partnerships.

Maintained Schools

10. Maintained Schools can work together formally through a federation¹¹, through which a single governing body governs more than one school, or through collaboration¹² in which schools retain their own governing bodies and establish joint sub-committees. Regulations enabling federation and collaboration reflect the Government's ambition to increase flexibility and encourage joint working between providers of education through creating a legal framework in which to establish strong partnership arrangements. Between September 2009 and December 2012 393 schools informed the Department that they had joined a federation.

11. Outside of this framework, many "single" schools (that is schools with a single head teacher and governing body) work together informally. For example, this may involve job shares, flexible headship, creating all-through schools with a single leadership structure through all phases, by sharing business managers or teaching staff across schools, or even a joint breakfast club. Academies working in locally agreed informal collaborations may also work together in these ways.

School to School Improvement

12. In addition to the models discussed, which are available to either maintained schools or academies, all schools can participate in school to school improvement models managed by the National College for Teaching and Leadership. Outstanding schools can become Teaching schools, leading alliances of schools focused on ITT, CPD and school to school improvement; excellent head teachers can share their expertise through becoming National or Local Leaders of Education (NLEs, LLEs), while effective chairs of governors can

⁶ The CEO of Challenge Support is Professor George Berwick, Principal of the Ravens Wood School, one of only a few secondary schools to be rated "Outstanding" by Ofsted five times. Nick Weller, the former Principal of Dixons City Academy, is the chief executive of Bradford Partnership. Dixons City Academy is also rated "Outstanding" by Ofsted.

⁷ Chapman et al, 2011

⁸ David H Hargreaves, 2010, *Creating a self-improving school system*, National College.

⁹ The single academy governance model is straight forward. There is only one school in a single academy trust which is governed by one set of articles and a funding agreement between the academy and the Secretary of State.

¹⁰ As of 1 May 2013

¹¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/1035/made> The School Governance (Federation) (England) Regulations, 2012.

¹² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2007/1321/contents/made> The Collaboration Arrangements (Maintained Schools and Further Education Bodies) (England) Regulations 2007.

become National Leaders of Governance (NLG). As of May 1 2013 there are 360 Teaching Schools representing 301 Teaching alliances, 804 NLEs, 2,055 LLEs and 152 NLG. These forms of partnership working recognise the valuable contribution school leaders, governors and schools themselves have in establishing a self-improving system in which solutions are found from within the school system. Additionally, high performing academies can also support weaker schools through academy sponsorship arrangements.

Other examples of joint working

13. As part of the Independent and State Schools Partnership, Independent Schools form partnerships with State Schools that are focused on supporting gifted and talented young people. Activities are centered on increasing attainment in, and the take up of, science, mathematics and modern foreign languages at GCSE, A Level and university level, particularly from communities where aspirations are low. Further, the Independent Schools Council reported in their 2013 Annual Census that over 92% of its members, 1,126 independent schools, were involved with partnership activities including sponsorship or co-sponsorship of academies, open access for to pupils from maintained school to attend certain lessons or other educational events, preparation for A level pupils at maintained schools for entry to Higher Education and secondment of teaching staff to maintained schools.

14. Increasingly, schools are also coming together to work in sector-led voluntary groups. An example of this is “Challenge Partners”, a collaborative group of over 180 schools focused on school improvement. The Partnership was founded by schools that wanted to retain their individuality but recognised that they were stronger together and could learn from each other. The organisation is built around a network of hubs, complemented by centrally run activities. Provision is made for schools seeking to improve and all schools are encouraged to innovate and share their learning. The Bradford Partnership is a not-for-profit organisation consisting of schools from the city who work together to improve outcomes for your people. Member pay an annual subscription to join the partnership in which schools work together to provide challenge and support to one another as part of a self-improving system. The Partnership supports its members by sourcing and brokering high quality school improvement services. The Partnership also helps member schools to build capacity through effective professional development for staff.

15. Schools can also work together through forming School Companies. These are local limited companies that enable schools to create formal structures to appoint staff, share resources and work together to achieve economies of scale. This model allows for different types of schools (academies, community schools, faith schools) to create formal partnerships.

THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND INCENTIVES FOR SCHOOLS TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY

16. The research into academy chains and federations suggest that these models do drive effective school improvement. Robert Hill’s research into academy chains found that academies in chains comprising of three or more academies are improving faster than other academies. Between 2008–09 and 2010–11 the proportion of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, increased by 15 percentage points in chains of 3 or more academies, compared with 12.2 and 11 percentage points for standalone and 2-strong academy chains, respectively.¹³

17. The findings from the chains research chime with the National College’s research into federations¹⁴. This found that becoming a federation positively impacted on student outcomes and that federation/collaborative schools start to outperform non-federation/collaborative schools after approximately two to four years. The report found four key factors were associated with the improved performance of federations:

- Purposeful leadership;
- Increased collaboration;
- Improved efficiency; and
- High quality Continued Professional Development.

Collaboration is therefore central to school improvement as, in addition to being listed as a key factor, it also contributes to the other three factors identified.

18. School partnerships focused on achieving improvement are shown to have a significant impact in raising standards. On average, schools supported by an NLE in the 2010/11 academic year increased their KS4 performance 2.6 percentage points more than a comparator group of schools between 2010 and 2012. 78% of schools supported by an NLE saw an improvement in their KS4 performance between 2010 and 2012 as compared with 67% of the comparator group.¹⁵

19. This pattern is repeated in federations. In a study by Ofsted¹⁶, teaching, learning, achievement and behaviour had all improved in those federations where a school previously judged to be weak had been

¹³ Hill et al, 2012.

¹⁴ Champan et al, 2011

¹⁵ National College analysis 2013.

¹⁶ Leadership of more than one school, an evaluation of the impact of federations, OFSTED 2011

federated with a successful school. The quality of provision of outcomes had been maintained in all of the successful schools.

20. The research is clear; schools that are working in partnership arrangements are raising standards and improving at a faster rate. There are several other advantages that act as incentives for schools to develop joint working relationships:

- Developing Leadership: The biggest contribution to school leadership development lies in providing rich and varied opportunities to lead, innovate and take responsibility.¹⁷ Collaborative working therefore provides a broader base for developing leaders and greater opportunity for leaders to learn from one another.¹⁸
- Staff Development: Collaborative working increases the scope for shared learning and continuous professional development (CDP) while improving the capacity of small schools by creating a greater pool of resources and expertise that can be shared more flexibly between schools.¹⁹
- Retention of Staff: Leaders have identified the benefits to the retention of staff by providing them with professional challenge and support in working with other schools.^{20,21} Academy chains provide more opportunities for staff deployment and promotion within the chain²². Warden Park Academy Trust, for example, have introduced staff partnerships across their two schools to increase opportunities: “A fact that we are all particularly pleased with, is that no staff left Warden Park Primary Academy in summer 2012. Previously the turnover of staff was disruptively high” (Steve Johnson, CEO).
- Improved governance: One major advantage of federation governance has been the improvement in the governance of weaker schools as a result of having shared arrangements.²³ It is typical for governing bodies of sponsored chains to be supported in their monitoring role not only by training but also by receiving data that is collated and presented to main boards and local governors in a standard format. The format will typically report on progress against targets and previous performance, comparisons with national benchmarks and the performance of other academies in the chain.
- Financial benefits: Central costs can be shared across a larger number of schools and the schools have greater purchasing power in partnership than they would as standalone schools. They can also benefit from economies of scales and from pooling resources. The use of shared business management resource across schools has been shown to lead to improved efficiencies (a projected saving of around 7% of non-salary related costs per school per year) and more effective use of resources across schools²⁴. As Helen Nicholls of the Devon Primary Academy Trust notes, these efficiency savings can then be re-invested in the delivery of education.
- Ability to impact on the wider school system: Academies that have taken on the role of sponsor have an opportunity to raise standards in the local area, which not only benefits the weaker school but can also benefit the sponsor school. For example, when Hummersknott Academy helped raise standards in a feeder primary through sponsorship, this not only benefitted the primary school but also the sponsor as pupils “will then join Hummersknott at a higher starting point” (Pat Howarth, Head teacher).
- Opportunities to build new primary/secondary curricula and transition models: Joined up working in this area also opens up new opportunities to adapt the primary and secondary curriculum to meet local needs and allows schools to put in place stronger academic transition procedures between different phases of school²⁵.

WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE TO ENCOURAGE HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOLS TO COOPERATE WITH OTHERS

Ensuring schools have both the opportunity and the support to work with others

21. Amongst high performing schools there is a desire and motivation to extend their school improvement model and expertise to more schools in order to provide the best educational experience for a wider range of pupils. Research into academy chains²⁶ and the experience of National Leaders of Education have shown that this is the greatest motivation for high performing schools to undertake this work. We must therefore ensure that it is easy for high performing schools to work with others, by ensuring the right incentives and necessary structures are in place. We will do this through:

¹⁷ Matthew et al, 2011, *Prepare to lead: how schools, federations and chains grow education leaders*, National College

¹⁸ In “*Developing leadership: National Support Schools*”(2010, Ofsted) Leaders in National Support Schools noted how much they learn from one another because, despite their differing contexts, their schools often face similar challenges.

¹⁹ Leadership of more than one school, an evaluation of the impact of federations, OFSTED 2011

²⁰ *Developing leadership: National Support Schools*, Ofsted, 2010)

²¹ Leadership of more than one school, an evaluation of the impact of federations, OFSTED 2011

²² Hill et al, 2012

²³ Leadership of more than one school, an evaluation of the impact of federations, OFSTED 2011

²⁴ School Business Managers: A quiet revolution, part 2 (Oakleigh Study, 2009) 2011.

²⁵ Leadership of more than one school, an evaluation of the impact of federations, OFSTED 2011

²⁶ Hill et al, 2012

- Continuing to encourage high performing academies to take on this role (over half of approved sponsors are high performing academies). When high performing schools convert to become academies we identify those who we believe have the potential to become sponsors. Ministers are also writing to high performing schools who are not yet sponsors to encourage them to take on this role. We hold monthly recruitment events in different regions, which provide information on sponsorship to head teachers and governors in high performing schools and academies. National and Local Leaders of Education and National Leaders of Governance will also be invited to these events.
- Supporting academies in their role as sponsors. The Department provides both financial support and expertise to support the strongest academies to become sponsors. Any high performing school who registers an interest in becoming a sponsor will be allocated a Sponsor Development Adviser to discuss their plans, capacity and capability. A Sponsor Capacity Fund was launched in June 2012 which supports the best new organisations to become sponsors and to grow sustainably. In total the fund supported 61 Academy converters in 2012–13 to develop their capacity as sponsors). A new fund for 2013–15 opened on 15th May which will again support and incentivise academy converters to sponsor.
- Doubling the number of National Leaders of Governance by 2014 and of National and Local Leaders of Education by 2015. We have also continued the National Leader of Education deployment fund for a second year. This provides grant funding to NLEs and LLEs to support schools below floor standards. The funding will support under-performing schools and increase the supply of good academy sponsors by providing opportunities and funding for NLEs to be deployed to under-performing schools. In 2011/12, the National College used the first £5m NLE deployment fund to enable 228 schools in challenging circumstances to receive support from 215 system leaders and their staff. A study by Sheffield Hallam University study found that 78% of inspected schools supported by an NLE or LLE using the NLE Deployment Fund had seen their overall Ofsted grade had improved.
- Creating a network of Teaching Schools—national coverage has increased by 16% to 89% and there are now 360 Teaching Schools with 136 LAs now seeing a Teaching School operating within their boundaries. In March the Department announced a further £10 million funding for Teaching Schools.

Supporting Schools to become Academies

22. Head teachers have an important role in the wider school system and are able to take on a wide range of opportunities presented by a school-led system (such as high quality initial teacher training and continuous development, shared professional expertise and access to school-led research and development). The academies programme encourages school leaders and governors to take on a more autonomous and strategic role; 350 convertor academies have taken on the role of sponsoring an underperforming school and research has found that 25.4% of academies have seen their relationship with other schools improve since they have become academies²⁷. Over half of secondary schools are now academies or in the process of conversion and primary schools too are joining the programme at an increasing rate.

23. To support primary schools, the Department recently introduced a Primary Chains Grant (PCG). This provided £25,000 of financial support to primary schools converting as part of an academy chain. This grant was created in recognition of both the benefits of academy chains and the particular challenges primary schools face when managing conversions. The grant assists primary schools in the initial stages of chain formation—ensuring they can put in place the required infrastructure in the short term to enable them to benefit from new economies of scale in the longer term.

24. 33 Primary Chains (made up of 133 primary schools in total) to date have applied for the PGC. This includes the Northampton Primary Academy Trust (NPAT), a group of five primary schools converting as a MAT. The NPAT used some of this grant to develop the Trust's strategy; helping to define the purpose of the MAT at the outset and into the future. They also spent time undertaking a detailed audit of the needs of the five schools and how they could develop common responses to a range of issues, such as attendance and standards. In this way the grant supported these primary schools to establish a MAT with a shared vision.

25. The Department is also adapting its models to allow for the creation of local Multi-Academy Trusts between different types of schools in response to feedback from the Church of England. Many of their Primary schools are small, rural, maintained schools that do not have the capacity to convert as standalone institutions without the support of the Local Authority. They would like to convert as part of an academy chain with other local Church of England Schools but the different governance arrangements of the types of schools (Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided) did not previously allow these schools to convert as part of a MAT. The Department is currently working with the National Society to put in place a model through which these schools can form MATs.

26. Both the PCG and mixed MATs will enable primary schools to convert as part of a formal partnership arrangement. This will enable the sharing of good practice and expertise across schools in the MAT.

²⁷ Basset, Lyon et al, 2012, *Plan A+ Unleashing the potential of academies*, The Schools Network.

If and how the potential tension between school partnership and cooperation, and school choice and competition can be resolved

27. James O’Shaughnessy²⁸ argues that within public sector markets, just as in private sector ones, collaboration is a more important feature than competition and that the true nature of successful markets is that they are defined as much by collaboration as they are by competition—or “co-opetition²⁹. Competition and collaboration within the school market should therefore not be thought of as an either/or but recognised as essential components for creating a self-improving successful education system.

28. At the heart of this Government’s reforms is the belief that school leaders and those working in schools are best placed to make effective decisions regarding schools. Giving schools more freedoms through the academies programme and increasing the number of NLEs and LLEs creates a shift in the perception teachers have of their role in the education system; they see themselves as “system leaders”³⁰ contributing to the wider school system:

“Governors embraced the principles of system leadership; of schools supporting other schools in their drive to improve” Dr Gary Holden, CEO of The Williamson Trust”.

“I feel strongly that Academies should enhance the education provision of an area, drive up standards, particularly for the most vulnerable, and play a central role in the regeneration of communities. I believe that improving young people’s life chances is essential to developing a strong local economy. Being an Academy allows us to do this” Michael Wilkins, Principal and Chief Executive of Outwood Grange Academy”.

29. The continued increase in the number of teaching schools, NLEs, LLEs and schools taking on the role of academy sponsors is an indication that teachers in our school system are embracing this view. School leaders recognise the benefits of collaboration. In a recent survey³¹ 87% of head teachers and 83% of governor respondents believed that partnership with other schools was critical to improving. This indicates that there is no tension between competition and collaboration.

Whether converter academies’ requirements to support other schools, included in their funding agreements, are sufficient and are effectively policed.

30. We expect schools that wish to convert to academy status to support another school. The application form to convert to academy status asks converting schools to name the school or schools they will be supporting, and the guidance attached to the form says:

“Schools that are performing well and wish to convert as a single academy are expected to support one or more other schools to help improve their standards. Please name the school(s) you will be supporting.”

31. The Department is currently considering putting in place additional steps to monitor academies’ support for other schools and how best to monitor and review this more closely. In doing so we are mindful of placing unnecessary bureaucracy on schools. Findings from an early sample showed that all of the academies we spoke to either had or were supporting other schools.

Whether academies sponsored by another school receive sufficient support from their sponsor

32. Evidence has shown that underperforming schools that are sponsored by strong organisations can secure rapid improvement:

- The proportion of pupils in sponsored academies that achieved 5+ A*-C GCSE (including equivalents) including English and mathematics increased by 3.0 percentage points between 2011 and 2012. This is faster than across all state-funded schools (which improved by 0.6 percentage points).
- The performance of pupils in sponsored academies in the English Baccalaureate increased by 1.3 percentage points between 2011 and 2012. This is compared to an increase of 0.8 percentage points in all state-funded schools.
- Amongst sponsored primary academies, the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 or above in mathematics increased by 7 percentage points between 2011 and 2012. This compares with a 6 percentage points increase across all state-funded schools.

33. The Department does not prescribe the levels or forms of support sponsors must give to the schools they sponsor. Sponsors are clear with schools from the outset what services they can expect. Whilst we are clear that the sponsor will be held to account for the outcomes of the schools they sponsor, we equally want to ensure sponsors are given the autonomy to innovate and use the academy freedoms to secure transformation in their schools.

²⁸ O’Shaughnessy, 2012 “*Competition meets Collaboration—Helping school chains address England’s long tail of educational failure*”, Policy Exchange

²⁹ This term was coined by Harvard and Yale academics Adam Brandenburger and Barry Nalebuff

³⁰ Hargreaves, *A Self-Improving school system in international context*

³¹ Earley, P, Higham, R, Allen, R, Allen, T, Howson, J, Nelson, R, Rawal, S, Lynch, S, Morton, L, Mehta, P and Sims, D, 2012 *Review of the school leadership landscape*, National College. In this

34. The Department is committed to ensuring that those approved as sponsors are of sufficiently high quality to support and effect change in the schools they are matched with. We scrutinise the vision, business plans and expertise of potential sponsors through our sponsor approvals process and on-going assessments of capacity and quality, and look at the value for money of the support they provide. We also look at how sponsors structure their organisations to ensure effective oversight of their Academies as well as their operational delivery so that sensible and sustainable clusters of schools can come together, sharing services and creating economies of scale. This allows us to ensure that sponsors have a clear plan about how they will support and refresh the schools they work with.

35. Where an Academy's outcomes are weak and demonstrate a lack of support from the sponsor, the Department will take action to secure improvement and the necessary changes. This is via a process of warning notices, support and intervention.

36. Sponsors have demonstrated that they can provide a wide range of support to the schools they sponsor, achieving increased educational outcomes, as well as providing economies of scale. Services commonly provided by sponsors include uniform data systems that track the progress of children; shared financial systems (meaning personnel like a bursar can be shared across a number of schools in the chain) and sharing specialist staff between schools eg employing an advanced skills teacher across a number of schools, which otherwise may not have been affordable in a single school. In addition, chains can provide wider CPD opportunities than single schools meaning staff can develop and progress quickly and share their expertise.

May2013

Annex A

FURTHER DETAILS ON TYPES OF PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION IN SCHOOLS

1. MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Governing bodies of maintained schools are able to collaborate in different ways, ranging from joint committees and joint governing body meetings to federations under a single governing body. The regulations on federation and collaboration are part of the government's intention to increase flexibility and encourage joint working between providers of education. The federation provisions apply to maintained schools only, while the collaboration provisions apply to maintained schools and FE institutions. Ofsted inspects each school within a federation or collaboration individually. It is for schools to choose whether partnership is right for their school. They may work together to gain efficiencies of scale, for example with smaller rural schools. They may also elect to partner to raise attainment.

Federation (statutory federation)

This is a statutory arrangement in which a two or more maintained schools create a single, federated governing body. A maintained school cannot federate with an academy. The federated governing body membership reflects the model that would apply to the individual schools. Schools may have shared management positions and appointments, agreed by the federated governing body. Schools sometimes opt to have one head teacher. The federated governing body receives and must account separately for the budgets of each of the federated schools. It is, however, able to use them across the schools in the federation. See the School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/960) and the School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/1035). The DfE have published guidance on maintained school federation its website. Between September 2009 and December 2012 393 schools informed the Department that they had joined a federation.

Collaboration (statutory collaboration)

Again, this is a statutory arrangement. Each school has its own governing body but the federation has a joint governance/strategic committee with delegated powers. Schools share common goals through Service Level Agreements and protocols, which may include shared management positions and appointments. Since May 2007, maintained schools have been able to enter into collaborative arrangements with FE colleges through joint committees. See the School Governance (Collaboration) Regulations 2003 (SI 2003/1962) and the Collaboration Arrangements (Maintained Schools and Further Education Bodies) (England) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/1321). Guidance is available the DfE website.

Trust School

A trust school is a maintained school supported by a charitable foundation (often called the trust). The trust appoints some of the governors. By involving partners in the trust the aim is to use their experience and expertise to strengthen the leadership and governance to help raise standards. The trust may support a number of schools and schools within the trust will work together to drive improvement. There are 534 trust schools in total and of these 384 work in cooperation as part of 85 school trusts.

Although there are various forms of trust model, the Co-operative Trust Model has become very popular. 234 of all trust schools are part of this model.

Co-operative Trusts adopt a co-operative model for their structures and governance. This usually involves adopting co-operative values and principles and ensuring that the key stakeholders such as parents, staff, learners and members of the local community have a guaranteed say in the affairs of the organisation.

The model is a membership based model with people from the stakeholder groups becoming members of the “educational co-operative” for the school or cluster of schools.

Informal, loose collaboration (non-statutory)

This model does not need to follow regulations. Each school has its own governing body. The schools share common goals and work together through joint committees on an ad hoc basis and through informal agreements. This form of partnership is unlikely to have shared management positions. The schools may have joint governance or strategic committees with no delegated powers. The joint committee can only make recommendations. Schools have and are accountable for their own budgets.

2. ACADEMIES

Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)

The strongest and most formal type of collaborative structure is the multi-academy trust model (MAT). This model can be used for both sponsored and converter academies, although as it is the most formal of governance structures it is most commonly used in a sponsored arrangement. Within a MAT all schools are governed by one trust and board of directors. By becoming one legal entity with one board, a MAT ensures there is a strong and clear collaborative link between the schools involved. There is a master funding agreement and a supplementary funding agreement for each academy between the MAT and the Secretary of State. If there is a sponsor they will almost always have a majority on the MAT. 1192 academies are part of a MAT and there are 370 MATs in total.³²

This model offers academies a structure within which to form a strong collaboration and MATs usually provide a clear and consistent strategy across all of their academies. The link to governance and accountability helps drive forward school improvement, as does challenge and support between academies and from the MAT. The model offers the MAT the flexibility to delegate where it would be appropriate to do so to meet the needs of each academy. MATs also offer academies an opportunity to make financial savings through economies of scale on procurement and shared services.

Umbrella Trust

The umbrella trust (UT) model allows schools of different category (eg former community, VA, VC schools) to have their own individual academy trusts and funding, but to create an UT which can provide shared governance and collaboration for the schools within it. The UT may have majority, minority or no control over governance in the individual Academy trust. This is usually decided on the basis of school performance and the Department would only allow an UT to “sponsor” a school where it had majority control. 142 academies are part of a UT and there are 38 UTs in total.

For some schools autonomy is important and an umbrella trust allows schools to maintain their own academy trust. This model is useful for mixed groups of schools such as voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools which may have varying levels of diocesan control therefore allowing the church to have representation on their own trust. An umbrella trust can join a group of schools together but still allow them to either have their own or shared governance arrangements (this is usually dependent upon school performance). An umbrella trust can have a shared ethos for their academies.

Collaborative Partnership

The collaborative partnership is the most flexible arrangement. In this model the schools convert as single academy trusts and there is no shared or overarching governance structure as in the case of a MAT. The schools determine the terms on which they work together and can leave the arrangement at any time. This model was developed by strong schools who wanted to convert to academy status and continue existing collaborations, but who did not want to be tied into formal chain arrangements like MATs. These arrangements can be very effective, ensuring academies do not work in isolation after conversion and can pool resources. However, as set out, the evidence strongly suggests that more formal arrangements generate even better results.

3. SCHOOL TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES

Teaching Schools

Teaching schools are all judged as “Outstanding” by Ofsted and have a strong track record of working with others to bring about improvement. They work with their alliance partner schools to: ensure high quality school-led Initial Teacher Training; offer professional development opportunities for teachers and leaders; identify and develop future head teachers; undertake school to school improvement; designate and deploy Specialist Leaders of Education; and undertake research and development.

³² The number of academies in each model is correct as of 1 May 2013

Following the designation of cohort 3 Teaching School Alliances, 45% of teaching schools now represent the Early Years and Primary sectors. In terms of access to Teaching Schools within individual local authorities, national coverage has increased by 16% to 89%, with 136 LAs now seeing a Teaching School operating within their area.

A detailed analysis of those teaching school alliances operating in summer 2012 (based on their second key information form returns) found that 10% of all schools in England are now involved with teaching school alliances, and there are 1.25 million children attending these schools. It also found that the percentage of schools engaged with teaching school alliances varies. There are 360 Teaching Schools representing 301 Teaching alliances³³.

National and Local Leaders of Education

National Leaders of Education (NLEs) are leaders of outstanding schools who, together with their leadership teams, support other schools in challenging circumstances to improve. Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) are successful head teachers who work alongside other heads to drive forward improvements and also provide mentoring support for newly appointed head teachers. There are 804 NLEs and 2,055 LLEs.

Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs)

SLEs are outstanding school leaders in positions other than headships, such as deputy heads, subject and behaviour specialists and business managers who have the skills to support individuals or teams in similar positions in other schools. The role is not limited to those operating within a Teaching School Alliance. It is the responsibility of Teaching Schools to designate and deploy SLEs based on the evidence demonstrated in their application, as well as their understanding of how best other schools can benefit from the individual's specific area of expertise. There are 1984 SLEs.

National Leaders of Governance

National Leaders of Governance are highly effective chairs of governors, who use their skills and experience to support chairs of governors in other schools and academies. They work to increase leadership capacity to help raise standards so that improvements can be sustained. Those eligible for the role are experienced chairs of governors with excellent leadership skills, and a proven track record of contributing to school improvement through the effective leadership of a governing body. There are 152 National Leaders of Governance.

4. SCHOOL COMPANIES

A school company is a company set up by one or more local authority maintained schools exercising their statutory powers under Section 11–13 of the Education Act 2002. To exercise this power, maintained schools need the consent of their local authority.

This power is given to schools maintained by the local authority for specific activities, including: to provide services or facilities for other schools or academies, eg providing ICT services or specialist curriculum support, to provide functions that local authorities can contract out eg running a pupil referral unit (PRU) and to purchase goods or services for schools that are members of the company

Academies can also participate in school companies if it furthers their objectives and they have been given the power to do so by their governing body.

This model has been used to form The Partnership of Nottingham City Secondary Schools. Maintained schools and academies who had been collaborating and working together in the city of Nottingham for two years wanted to secure and formalise their current partnership working but needed a model able to embrace several different categories of schools which was quick to establish and also capable of adapting to future needs. Choosing a company model allowed the three academies, three voluntary aided schools, one foundation and six community schools to come together as Nottingham City Schools and Academies (NCSA) Limited, becoming an incorporated company in late December 2010. NCSA Limited was commissioned by the local authority through a service level agreement to support an inclusion project focussed on Year 11 students.

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³³ The number of Teaching School, Teaching alliance, NLEs, LLEs, SLEs and National Leaders of Governance referred to are correct as of 1 May 2013

Further written evidence submitted by the Department for Education

I am writing to you further to the Education Select Committee Oral hearing on 3 July on Schools Partnerships and Cooperation. The Committee asked for additional information on a number of areas discussed at the hearing and this letter will respond to each of these points.

THE EXTENT OF SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

The Committee asked about evidence around the extent of partnerships, federations and chains. As stated both in the Department's written evidence and at the oral hearing, there is a wide spectrum of models through which schools and academies are working together. These range from formal partnerships of common governance through to collaboration at local level for local purposes. I am clear that the strongest and best form of collaboration is found in the strong governance of a multi-academy trust. Most school partnerships, however, should be down to local determination. They evolve over time and the Department for Education is not persuaded of the benefits of monitoring the extent to which more than 20,000 schools are engaged in each and every different form of partnership and collaboration.

The decision to work with others is taken by school leaders and it is interesting to note the evidence on their attitudes towards partnership working. As detailed in our written evidence to the Committee, in a recent survey the majority of head teachers (87%) and governors (83%) questioned were of the view that partnership with other schools was critical to school improvement. Therefore, while the Department has not collected details of precisely who is in what partnership, the fact that school leaders recognise the importance of joint working suggests that we should not assume schools are not working collaboratively.

The Department for Education was pleased to note that those giving evidence to the Committee recognised the importance of school to school support and collaboration whether it is for curricular support, sharing services or continued professional development. Many initiatives around school improvement, curriculum development, sports, culture or other school priorities have involved the formation of partnerships through pump priming funding, and where these are successful and supported by schools they continue to live on without central funding or direction. That is precisely how it should be.

What we do know, and detailed in our evidence to the Committee, is that 45% of all academies are part of either a multi-academy trust (MAT) or an umbrella trust (UT). 1,235 academies are in a MAT and there are 391 MATs in total. 151 academies are in a UT and there are 42 UTs in total. The number of academies in chain arrangements is higher when we look at primary academies with 55.2% of all primary academies being part of a chain. Between September 2009 and December 2012 393 schools were in federations and we know that 358 schools are Teaching Schools and there are 301 Teaching School Alliances.

Our discussions with individual academies which are not part of formal partnerships indicate that most are involved in some type of informal collaboration. In the small sample of converter academies we spoke to in 2013, the majority were not part of a MAT or UT. However, a//the converter academies we spoke to were involved in collaborative arrangements. In autumn 2013 we will be conducting a wider survey of open academies that will be more extensive and provide further information on this area.

THE NATIONAL LEADER OF EDUCATION DEPLOYMENT FUND

The Committee requested further information on the National Leader of Education (NLE) Deployment Fund. The Secretary of State has provided at 5m NLE Deployment Fund for 2011–12, 2012–13 and 2013–14. This Fund has been granted to 1) increase the supply chain of outstanding schools becoming academy sponsors and 2) deliver immediate school improvement.

The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) works in partnership with local authorities, Teaching Schools, NLEs, diocesan boards and Ofsted to deliver this work. NCTL anticipate that the Fund has increased attainment in schools supported during 2012/13 by 3.1 “/” on average more than schools that were not supported by NLEs. 40”h oI supported schools from 201 1112 are p rogressin g towards becom in g sponso red academies.

NCTL has used the NLE Deployment Fund to match NLEs with areas of need. This has involved some NLEs volunteering to travel from London to parts of the South East and East to meet local needs, because locally based NLEs were already deployed at capacity. Similarly in the North West, NLEs from Greater Manchester are supporting schools in Merseyside where there is less capacity. NCTL Associates have a good awareness of local needs and NLEs in their areas: associates identify NLEs from other areas who could meet unfulfilled needs in an area without available NLE capacity.

ACADEMY CONVERTER APPLICATIONS

The Committee asked for details of the number of schools that have unsuccessfully applied for an academy order. The eligibility criteria for schools wishing to convert to academy status are contained in guidance on the Department's website. The criteria involve high standards of pupil attainment, pupil progress, Ofsted judgements and other factors the school relies upon to demonstrate it is performing well in its social context. Schools will apply when they consider they meet the criteria, which we then assess when we receive the

application. Where we consider that a school needs support in order to take on the additional responsibilities that come with academy status, we suggest these schools consider alternative models of conversion, for example as part of a MAT. We would generally not issue an academy order for weaker schools to convert as standalone academies. Our reasons for declining to issue an academy order include Ofsted judgements, levels of attainment, or because of financial problems at the school. Schools that apply without meeting the performance criteria but with the potential to do so in the future are asked to defer until the next performance results, at which time the Department will re-consider their application.

To date, 88 applications have been refused of which 56 are primary, 31 secondary and 1 special. This is 3% of the 3,156 total converter applications that have been received. Where applicable, the Department works with applicants to match them with sponsors with the result that they do not convert as standalone academies but within the stronger partnerships of sponsors. 38 schools that were declined an academy order have subsequently opened as sponsored academies.

£35 MILLION COLLABORATION INCENTIVE

The Department has not made a specific allocation to a collaboration incentive. The Department funds a number of initiatives that facilitate school to school collaboration. As mentioned in our oral evidence, this has focused on using inspirational leaders to build capacity, as well as on our hugely successful sponsored academy programme which uses strong partnerships to turn around failing schools. Since 2010 the Department has spent far more than £35 million per annum on supporting school collaboration.

TABLE OF SIMILAR SCHOOLS TOOL

The Committee also asked the Department to consider if the Table of Similar Schools could be referred to as “Families of Similar Schools.”

“Families of Schools” was used by headteachers as an aid for collaborative approaches to school improvement. Similar Schools shares this aim but uses a different methodology and, through being presented on the performance tables website, also provides parents and others with a comparison of similar schools’ relative performance.

Under Families of Schools methodology, schools were placed into one of a number of fixed “families” on the basis of prior attainment and pupil context data. Similar schools does not group on the same basis of school characteristics but instead, places each school in its own unique group on the basis of prior attainment and how this relates to expected outcomes. Given the technical differences between the methodologies, it would be confusing to previous users if we used the same title. The Department made this information available on Monday 15 July.

Sharing DfE Board Paper with the Committee

At the hearing the Committee asked about the Department’s plans to allow schools to run for profit. This was in response to a media story which claimed that such plans had been discussed in a document apparently leaked to the media. I made clear in my response that the Department does not have any such plans. The Committee requested to see the document in question and I said at the hearing that I would consider this.

The report referred to by the committee in the evidence session was confidential advice to ministers and I consider that sharing more widely would compromise the important principle that civil servants need to be able to give free and frank advice to ministers. I can confirm that the report considered options for the future manageability of the academies system, including the option of securing a different accounting classification for academies as private, rather than public sector bodies under the Office of National Statistics classification. Such a change would mean that academies’ accounts could be treated in the same way as Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges. That option is not being pursued. And for the avoidance of doubt I can confirm that the document in question did not mention the possibility of profit making, or indeed mention profit at all. The Department’s position is and remains very clear that people cannot and will not be able to profit from the academies programme.

I hope the Committee finds this further evidence of use. Thank you for your inquiry into this important area, I look forward to the findings of your report.

October 2013

Written evidence submitted by St Peter's School, York

INTRODUCTION

St Peter's School in York provides day and boarding education for boys and girls age 3—18. The School was founded in 627AD, and has a long history of working with the local community. The School is involved in formal partnership working through the Independent State School Partnership, and through numerous informal partnerships and arrangements.

St Peter's School encompasses Clifton School and Nursery for children aged 3—8, St Olave's School for children aged 8—13, and St Peter's School for children aged 13—18. For ease, the School is referred to as St Peter's School or the School throughout this submission.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Partnership working is fundamentally of benefit to all schools, and to the development of education as a whole.
- There is enormous variety in the types of partnership that may be pursued. It is important to avoid a rigidly prescribed structure for partnership or collaboration—the most successful projects will have the scope to adapt to the needs of both partners, and react to opportunities as they arise.
- It is vital to demonstrate the benefit of partnership working before schools can be expected to embrace it. Some benefits may be intangible or unmeasurable—this does not decrease their value, particularly in the medium to long term. Measurement of, and targets for, the outcome of partnership working are likely to be counterproductive by stifling innovation and risk-taking, especially as schools first embark upon partnerships. Case studies and qualitative results are likely to prove the most effective means of demonstrating value.
- Extremely high-performing schools should already realise that collaboration leads to inspiration and an increase in quality, and are most likely to be involved in and promoting the benefit of partnerships.
- Not all schools have sufficient understanding of the benefits of partnership working to have a natural incentive to pursue it.
- Competition between schools should never be a reason to preclude partnership or collaboration.

WRITTEN EVIDENCE

The differing forms of school partnership and cooperation, and their particular advantages and disadvantages

St Peter's School is involved in several different types of partnership working.

Formal partnership for specific projects

The City of York Independent State School Partnership (ISSP) has been running since 2007. There are currently ten schools actively involved (five Local Authority maintained, two academies, three independent), who jointly fund the scheme. One example of a formal project is the provision of GCSE Latin classes free of charge at St Peter's, attended by seventeen pupils from five state schools, who would not otherwise be able to study the subject. The ISSP also arranges masterclasses in a wide variety of subjects which allow pupils from different schools to work together, and access some of the best teaching and resources available in the city regardless of which school they attend. State school pupils have also had the opportunity to try rowing at St Peter's. Outside the ISSP, formal collaboration takes place in a wide variety of forms, such as hosting or organising CPD events for staff from specific regions or areas of expertise.

Advantages of this kind of partnership include:

- direct benefits for the pupils undertaking such courses and activities, in accessing subjects, teaching and resources that would not otherwise be available to them;
- benefits to the teaching staff in gaining wider experience and building knowledge through collaboration and the exchange of ideas; and
- benefits to pupils not directly involved, who are exposed to positive examples of pupils learning for learning's sake.

Disadvantages:

- The host school incurs minor costs, and staff involved are expected to give up time in support. Participating schools incur costs and staff time in transporting and accompanying pupils. These should be balanced against the resulting benefits.

Shared access to events

St Peter's opens a wide variety of events to pupils and staff from other schools, including careers talks and advice sessions, public lectures and author visits.

Advantages:

- Pupils have access to a much wider range of events, speakers, ideas and information than can ever be possible within the confines of a single school.
- Larger audiences in turn make it easier to attract high-quality speakers, benefitting all members of the partnership.

Disadvantages:

- The host school incurs minor costs, and staff involved are expected to give up time in support. Participating schools incur costs and staff time in transporting and accompanying pupils. These should be balanced against the resulting benefits.

Informal collaboration

Staff and pupils collaborate on numerous informal projects each year at all levels, sharing knowledge and information. As an example, the Marketing department at St Peter's School was approached by a local primary school to provide advice on establishing a social media presence, and spent several hours providing advice and support. In return, St Peter's School gained direct knowledge of the systems and practices in place at the primary school, and the benefits and drawbacks of a different approach.

Advantages:

- Direct benefit for all involved as a result of sharing information, ideas and opinions; and
- Builds links which can strengthen future partnership working.

Disadvantages:

- Schools must adopt a pragmatic and diplomatic approach in seeking help and sharing expertise where competition exists between schools.

Encouraging highly performing schools to cooperate with others

St Peter's is an extremely high-performing school. Pupils passed 87% of A-levels at A*—B in 2012, achieving some of the best results in North Yorkshire.

The principle reasons why high-performing schools may not wish to cooperate with others are likely to be an unwillingness to share information or resources that are felt to be directly linked to their own performance, a feeling that they have little to learn and therefore that they are less likely to benefit from collaborative working and, in the case of fee-paying schools, that it is not appropriate to give away any product or service that customers are generally charged for.

These reasons should be addressed through robust evidence demonstrating the benefits, and by fostering an attitude that collaboration is a positive and fundamental facet of education.

However, evidence suggests that the best-performing schools already support and encourage partnership, perhaps because they are by nature more likely to pursue innovative techniques in the pursuit of improvement.

Do schools have sufficient incentives to form meaningful and lasting relationships with other schools?

It is our view that too few schools are forming meaningful, lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with other schools. This indicates either that the incentives gained through partnership working—pupil and staff development, breadth of opportunity, exchange of ideas and cultures—are deemed insufficient, or are insufficiently understood.

Research would be necessary to explore this in more detail, but we believe that staff in both state and independent schools are generally well-motivated, keen to develop and seek new opportunities. If beneficial relationships are not being developed, it is more likely to be because incentives are lacking (or perceived to be lacking) than because of apathy or disinterest.

Can the potential tension between school partnership and cooperation, and school choice and competition be resolved?

Partnership working has been in operation between schools for hundreds of years. The tension generated by competition between schools cannot and should not be resolved, because it leads to an appetite for improvement across the sector as a whole. However, such tension does not preclude partnership and co-operation—schools must exercise tact, diplomacy and understanding, as is true of any partnership.

Are converter academies' requirements to support other schools, included in their funding agreements, sufficient and effectively policed?

Not qualified to answer this question.

Do academies sponsored by another school receive sufficient support from their sponsor?

Not qualified to answer this question.

Do school partnerships drive effective school improvement?

Partnerships drive improvement in a number of ways: by creating greater opportunities for formal shared CPD; by promoting the informal sharing of ideas and best practice, leading to an increase in the quality of teaching and of the learning experience; and by enabling the pooling of resources and thus increasing access to minority and shortage subjects.

Are there additional upsides or downsides for highly performing schools supporting others through partnerships?

Partnerships involving one highly performing school must be handled carefully to avoid any suggestion that they are patronising their partner, and there must always be value on both sides.

No matter how well a school performs, there will always be benefits to partnership working. No school is perfect—staff can always be developed and inspired, and pupils can always learn and benefit in ways that are impossible within the closed culture of a single school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Schools should be encouraged to explore partnership working in ways which suit their circumstances. Guidelines should offer inspiration rather than impose limitations.
- Schools should be encouraged to value the intangible benefits as much as the tangible. Head teachers must have the confidence that they are trusted to assess the benefits without necessarily completing formal processes. Partnership working has an incremental value based on growing trust and a spirit of shared vision.
- Schools should not worry unduly about tensions caused by competition. These can be addressed by open, diplomatic and honest communication, and an understanding of the realities from both sides.
- Partnership working should be in place with the aim of benefitting pupils, and not as a political or point-scoring exercise.
- Local political will is important, and should be encouraged.
- It should be recognised that the most successful partnerships will inevitably require some resources. The benefits of partnership working should be made clear so that schools are willing to commit the staffing and finances that may be required.
- In order to have the confidence to innovate, and therefore realise the greatest benefit, schools must encourage a belief in, and demonstrate the value of, partnership working to the whole school community—pupils, staff and parents.

October 2013

Written evidence submitted by Challenge Partners

SUMMARY

1. Challenge Partners is a group of autonomous schools and academies, based on the principles of the London Challenge and Teaching School Alliances, who work together to lead school improvement both locally and nationally. The organisation:

- Has an all-embracing, unrelenting desire to ensure that all the students in our system gain the best possible education.
- Is underpinned by a strong sense that people who want to achieve excellence need to be sharing and developing their practice constantly.
- Has agreed principles of collaboration, accountability, openness and trust at its core.
- Aims to raise the bar of professional excellence, and believes that it is excellence that gives the profession the right to speak and be heard.
- Impacts. Between 2011 and 2012 schools in Challenge Partners:
 - improved pupils' exam results at a rate above the national average; and
 - improved the quality of their teaching.

 THE PRINCIPLES AND ETHOS BEHIND CHALLENGE PARTNERS

2. Over the last 10 years, results in London have increased at an unprecedented rate. London has moved from the worst performing region in England at Key Stage 4 in 2002, to the best in 2009. The capital now leads the rest of the country in all of the key pupil outcome indicators. Research has consistently cited that the main reason for this was the London Challenge programme. This government funded programme ran from 2002 to 2011 and was focused on making London the place where the link between deprivation and poor educational outcomes could be broken. When the programme ended many of the school leaders who played an important role in that work committed to developing a self-funding and sustainable way, through Challenge Partners, to continue and develop this approach to school improvement.

3. There were a range of very practical educational difficulties in London's schools when London Challenge started in 2002 which meant that standards were poor across London. There were problems with the quality of teaching and school leadership, as well as difficulties for communities (and thus their schools) which were disproportionately affected by poverty. Teachers did not want to teach in London and the challenges of headship in many of the city's schools were not attractive.

4. However, it was clear that there was great practice around and high levels of expertise within London's school system, but too much was trapped within the boundaries of single schools or local authorities. London Challenge developed models of school-to-school support which demonstrated that it was possible to break through some of those boundaries and share knowledge and practice between schools and local authorities.

5. This analysis of the situation from a knowledge management perspective meant that the theory of action needed to:

- Create the moral climate for knowledge sharing between schools and leaders.
- Identify those that have the knowledge of effective school leadership and capture it.
- Train the effective school leaders to share their knowledge.
- Set up the organisational systems for them to share this knowledge with those who need to learn.

6. It was these four foundations of knowledge management, based on the "capitals"—moral knowledge, social and organisational (Berwick, 2010), which drove the school improvement approach to the London Challenge and now underpins Challenge Partners. In more detail these are described as:

Moral

Without moral purpose, and a culture of openness and trust, knowledge collection and its transfer is impossible. Simply put it raises the question: are those who teach and lead and manage willing to learn together for the greater good of their students' learning? It requires a commitment from leaders and schools to care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own.

Knowledge

Knowledge is the collection of qualities required to be an outstanding teacher, leader and manager. These individuals and schools demonstrate their outstanding practice by achieving high relative outcomes for students. Being able to capture, through an audit, where the knowledge and best practice exists both locally and nationally is the first stage. This then provides for colleagues a demonstrable and accessible source of outstanding knowledge. Challenge Partners has 25 Teaching Schools, over 80 outstanding schools, and scores more schools with identified excellent practice. Every school has something to contribute to the knowledge economy, and no single school, no matter how highly performing, has a monopoly on all knowledge and expertise, and so can learn from its peers.

Social

Merely having the knowledge is not enough. Establishing the social skillset is necessary to enable the effective transfer of this knowledge. Challenge Partners, and the London Challenge before it, draws on the Olevi Adult Learning Model, which illustrates a sustainable cycle for sharing and learning. If the knowledge lies within the school or local system then the skills required will be role modelling, coaching and mentoring, and importantly learning together whilst solving common problems. The latter, also known as Joint Practice Development, ensures that highly performing schools benefit educationally, not only financially, from supporting other schools through partnerships, and is fundamental to ensuring a sustainable improvement system.

If the knowledge lies outside of the community then the skills required will also include networking with those outside who have the knowledge and are undertaking research.

Organisational

Organisational infrastructure is required to create the opportunities to move knowledge around. This requires a focus on building capacity (and ultimately sustainability):

- locally, at the outstanding school level to allow them to develop their own knowledge and to share it with other schools, especially those with disadvantaged catchments; and
- nationally, to facilitate the development of systemic effective knowledge management across the entire education system.

The Teaching School model was developed from London Challenge. Together with strategic partners—other high quality schools, higher education institutions and other organisations—teaching school alliances have the networks to identify, demonstrate and disseminate best practice.

This infrastructure requires funding to ensure stability in a school’s functions and allow for the release of capacity to support others.

7. Based on the underpinning of these four foundations, it was the reconnection of London practitioners with each other across a system which had become disconnected which is recognised by schools as the most important part of the London Challenge.

8. This approach resulted in improvements in the system being led by practitioners—school leaders and their schools—to create the transformation from within. Through this they produced a culture change within the system. London became a self-sustaining, more collegiate system with a commitment to school-to-school support for the benefit of all London’s children.

9. The model attracts attention because it demonstrated clearly and conclusively that it improved teaching, learning and educational outcomes in London:

- Attainment at both primary and secondary has moved to being the highest in England.
- The performance of disadvantaged children is better than in any other region in terms of the “gap” in attainment between FSM and non-FSM pupils. The poorest pupil in London now performs at the national average.
- In terms of progression, disadvantaged children in London do markedly better than any other area, and are more likely to make expected progress whatever their starting point.
- There is now a greater proportion of outstanding schools in London than in any other region.

10. The evaluation by Ofsted of the programme (December 2010) showed that early improvements were not only consistently sustained but that they were accelerated. Other evaluations of the improvements made in London have been undertaken by Centre Forum (Wyness, 2011), and the Department for Education (Hutchings, 2012).

11. The London Challenge also saw a re-balancing of roles between policy-makers and practitioners in the policy process, which permitted practitioners to lead the system whilst accepting accountability. Practitioners had the power to exercise increasing control over the shape and character of the London Challenge as they implemented it. This allowed practitioners to develop the strategy themselves, leading to a stronger possibility of lasting change: in 2012 London was the only region which saw gains for all its pupils (low performing through to high performing).

12. The Teaching Schools model encapsulates the four principles of knowledge management at a local level, and through Challenge Partners is given a national coherence. The great strength of Challenge Partners is in the moral unity, and in the coming together of effective local networks of schools to pool their knowledge, wisdom and resources.

CHALLENGE PARTNERS—EXEMPLIFYING COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP

13. Following the London Challenge, Challenge Partners was named quite deliberately to illustrate two key factors required for effective collaboration and school improvement.

“Challenge” indicates the rigour that is built into the organisation through strong quality assurance measures, self-regulation and accountability to the whole system. Challenge is required to the status quo, and current definitions of excellence, if all schools are to improve pupil outcomes.

“Partners” indicates a compelling and inclusive moral purpose and strong, shared values, principles and beliefs. It shows that it is a partnership owned and led by its members who decide together how they want to shape its activity and direction ensuring a sustainable and effective approach to collaborative improvement.

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School performance data is from the Department for Education:

- Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above in both English and mathematics in Key Stage 2 assessments.
- GCSE and equivalent results of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4.

- Percentage of pupils making expected progress in mathematics¹ between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Percentage of pupils making expected progress in English¹ between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Percentage of pupils in state-funded schools¹ making expected progress² in English and mathematics between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.

Annex

DETAILS ON THE CHALLENGE PARTNERS ORGANISATION

AIMS OF CHALLENGE PARTNERS

To make every teacher and school effective by sharing the best of what exists. The group has four aims:

1. Improve pupils' examination results at a rate above the national average.
2. Enable all schools to improve at a rate above the national average.
3. Create more outstanding schools that reach the Teaching Schools criteria with national leaders in school-to-school work.
4. Develop a world class, self-improving and sustainable system that contributes to national research and policy making.

STRUCTURE

Challenge Partners is a charity and company limited by guarantee, registered with the Charities Commission, accountable to a board of trustees. The Senior Partners (serving head teachers) are the company members which ensures that Challenge Partners remains a genuine school-led collaborative, and all of the financial benefits from the group's activities are reinvested into the charity.

The structure of Challenge Partners draws upon those developed by groups like the John Lewis Partnership. Their structures provide the management the freedom to be entrepreneurial and competitive in the way the business is run, while giving the company's members, the Partners, the rights and responsibilities of ownership through active involvement in the organisation.

All schools are linked to a "Hub". These are the teaching school alliances in Challenge Partners which are responsible for co-ordinating the Challenge Partner activity in their area. Senior Partners are the head teachers of the teaching school alliances.

PARTNERS

Partners are full member schools. They participate in an annual school review and assessment; contribute to, and benefit from, learning and best practice from within the Partnership; and take part in local programmes and activities within their Hub.

SENIOR PARTNERS

Senior Partners are the representative voice of the Partners. Senior Partners have governance responsibility for the organisation; they control entry into the Partnership and provide strategic leadership. Each Senior Partner is responsible for a Hub of Partner schools, and is appointed to the position either through proven experience as a Teaching School (or other significant contribution) or as an elected representative from within the Hub of schools.

Senior Partners provide the structure for knowledge to be mobilised widely within the network. Their role is to act as an enabling centre which draws on some of the best expertise around, and take advantage of the strength of outstanding schools in the system to support others. This movement of knowledge around the system is regardless of school governance type.

The organisation also has a small central team which supports the running of Challenge Partners by providing administrative functions and facilitation.

THE MEMBERSHIP

A national network of local partnerships

Every school pays in £7 per pupil into the organisation to fund its activity. The organisation initially began with 71 schools in 2011. It now contains over 200 schools, across all phases and school types.

Each Hub consists of schools at different stages of development, and has grown organically, such that each is unique, with its own history, focus and ways of working. The Hubs form out of relationships rather than any prescribed criteria and may be same-phase, cross-phase, rural, urban, academy chains or local authority schools.

Many of the founding Partner schools were outstanding schools who recognised that external challenge was necessary for them to stay on top of their game. Others joined because they were ambitious and wanted to improve to reach good or outstanding.

Each Hub leads their own local agenda and programmes which may cover everything from Initial Teacher Training to headship development; and have put in place their own resources and systems to coordinate these activities in order to become self-sustaining.

This model means that Challenge Partners can have strong sense of shared purpose which recognises unique local factors and emphasises working in partnership.

What Challenge Partners does

Challenge Partners groups its activity into areas.

NETWORK OF EXCELLENCE

A school improvement network, led by schools, which improves performance through effective learning partnerships and rigorous quality assurance processes. The network forms the main focus of the Partnership's activities across three areas.

1. QA Review which lays the foundation for sharing and collaboration

The Challenge Partners Quality Assurance Review is a peer-led review undertaken by outstanding practitioners from Challenge Partner schools alongside an Ofsted-accredited Lead Reviewer. The tone of the review is developmental in approach; relying on a collaborative dialogue between the school being reviewed and the review team. In this sense the strength of the QA Review lies in how it allies the rigour and professionalism of Ofsted with the care and collaborative approach of a partnership. Each school undertakes one of these a year.

2. Teaching and Learning programmes delivered through local Hub networks

The quality of teaching and learning is crucial to how well children perform at school.

For this reason we invested heavily to subsidise teacher training courses in each Hub to ensure that our schools have access to the very best teacher training opportunities. The two training courses which are subsidised are:

- The “Improving Teacher Programme” which gives improving teachers a set of skills and strategies to deliver consistently good lessons.
- The “Outstanding Teacher Programme” which works with teachers who demonstrated they have the potential to be excellent teachers to equip them to be consistently and sustainably outstanding.

3. Subject networks driven by schools to share effective practice and raise standards locally, nationally and internationally

These communities (in English, maths, science and early years) aim to capture and share the best practice that already exists in our schools. If Challenge Partners is to embrace a school-led system then the best schools and teachers much share their ideas if professional autonomy is going to work. Many outstanding schools are going above and beyond what the Ofsted framework defines as outstanding and these communities are tasked with articulating what that practice looks like. These outstanding practitioners are also encouraged to lead debate and innovation.

ENGINE OF IMPROVEMENT

This is the vehicle that will be used to draw on the strength of the Partnership to turn failing schools around and bring improvement where it is most needed.

Challenge Partners will broker relationships, pairing schools and heads for improvement activities, making best use of the broad geographical reach and the skills across the Partnership. Challenge Partners will agree an improvement package of proven learning activities with appropriate outcome measures to drive whole-school improvement. Where appropriate, Challenge Partners will provide a vehicle, through the Challenge Partners Multi Academy Trust, for weaker schools to convert to academy status.

SOURCES OF EFFICIENCY

We recognise, given the number of schools in the Partnership, that through collaboration, sharing of resources and group purchasing; we will be able to secure significant savings for our schools. Responsibility of their budgets will remain with the individual schools, however Challenge Partners expects to be able to negotiate rates and terms that would otherwise be unavailable to individual schools, and therefore anticipates that in time some schools will centralise some of their back office and bought-in functions.

PROJECTS

Our flagship project is Challenge the Gap. More projects are in development.

Challenge the Gap programme

This programme, funded by the Education Endowment Fund, is nearing the end of its first year and is well on track to deliver a strong uplift in attainment for children from low income families. The programme is delivered through “Trios” of schools. A Lead school, which has demonstrated excellence in leadership and teaching across the board, is connected with two Accelerator schools that are aiming to boost the academic attainment of their FSM pupils.

October 2013

Written evidence submitted by Dr Caroline Kenny Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Collaboration is seen as one of the principal ways to achieve school improvement and there is now significant political emphasis given to encouraging partnerships between schools and other types of organizations. Within this, schools collaborating or partnering with each other has been particularly highlighted. School-to-school partnerships are seen as an important way for schools to learn from one other, share best practice and raise educational performance. Often missing from this discussion however, is the role that research evidence can play in improving school performance and, in supporting partnerships between schools. Four points are of relevance here:

- Reliable and robust research that builds upon previous knowledge explicitly (such as systematic reviews) can be just as effective, if not more so, than school-to-school partnerships for school improvement. There are now a number of services and organizations that can assist teachers and schools in finding, understanding and using research for their management decisions.
- Taking a research-informed approach can support school-to-school partnerships by asking critical questions and “holding up a mirror” to existing practice. This approach has been found to be effective in other work with practitioners in education and health and as has been recognized in a recent report by the National College for Teaching and Leadership.
- A research-informed approach can also assist schools to identify the core components of what makes a particular practice or teaching strategy successful in another school or classroom. Understanding what makes something work in one context and for one group of students is fundamental to ensuring that it is implemented effectively elsewhere. Taking such an approach can help prevent against unnecessary wholesale root and branch reform.
- By and large, we need more reliable and robust evidence about the effectiveness of school partnerships and collaborations and particularly, what is it about school-to-school partnerships that make them effective and do different approaches or models of partnership work better than others? This is related to a wider point about the need to try and untangle what is meant by partnership, collaboration and interaction and what effective methods or approaches to these terms look like in practice.

INTRODUCTION

1. School partnerships are seen as an important way for schools to learn from one other, share best practice and raise educational performance (Arnold 2006: i-ii. See also DfES 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2006, Kampfner 2005). Such partnerships can involve a range of organisations including, federations and trusts, faith schools, teaching schools and alliances, academy groups, subject associations, local partnerships and trusts, unions and professional associations, higher education institutions (HEIs) and partnership schools (both within and outside the state-sector), and major national organisations such as the Cambridge Primary Review and Whole Education. One type of partnership that has been particularly advocated is for schools to collaborate with one another. The existence, maintenance and indeed encouragement of what David Hargreaves terms a “self improving system has been celebrated most recently in the edited collection published by the Royal College of Surgeons *Towards a Royal College of Teaching: Raising the stats of the profession* (Peacock 2013: 37) and the Pearson/RSA Academies Commission Report which believes that schools work best when connected to the rest of the system.

(i) *These schools would work with one another to accelerate school improvement, in particular the quality of teaching and its impact on learning and the achievements of children and young people (Academies Commission 2013: 5)*

2. Two developments have sought to expand the number of schools collaborating with other schools. These are the establishment of The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) and the development of National Teaching Schools. The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) was established after the merging of the National College for School Leadership and the Teaching Agency. The NCTL is a

government agency that has been created to enable and support the development of a self-improving, school-led system. One of the two aims of the NCTL is to help schools to help each other to improve by encouraging schools to develop their own local networks of high-quality, school-to-school support (DFE 2013a). Similarly, the idea of school-to-school collaboration is embedded in the National Teaching Schools model:

(ii) All teaching schools will be expected to work with a number of schools and other strategic partners to form a teaching school alliance. Working together, the alliance will deliver support for other schools in their wider network to... lead peer-to-peer professional and leadership development (continuing professional development) [and]... provide support for other schools (DFE 2013b)

3. The idea that schools working together can improve educational performance is a convincing one, particularly when involving schools at different performance levels. Indeed, partnership and collaboration is often held up as a key means to achieve change (references?). Research can also assist school improvement when conducted using reliable methods and explicitly building upon existing knowledge in the area. Despite the often cited difficulties that teachers and other practitioners face when trying to access and use research, there are now many organisations and services to assist them in doing so. Services such as these offer schools a route into what is known about how other schools or organisations have addressed similar issues and the effectiveness of the practices or strategies used. Knowledge of this type, where multiple sources, cases and examples are brought together, can provide schools with information that is of equal usefulness to that gained through partnerships with other schools, which can only offer recommendations on the basis of a successful practice in one classroom or school.

4. Using research approaches and techniques can also facilitate successful school partnerships. First, in a recent report, the National College for Teaching and Leadership advised that “getting underneath the obvious and really developing a good understanding of the school’s strengths and weaknesses” was imperative to successful partnerships (Rea et al 2013: 6). Critical questions and honest answers are essential here to provide a good understanding of the specific context, a thorough clarification of the issue to be addressed and an honest assessment of the school’s capacity to effect change. This process of “holding up a mirror” or “being a critical friend” has been highlighted as a crucial aspect by several different organisations with experience of working with practitioners in both the health and education fields.

5. Second, approaching school improvement as a researcher should lead us to investigate why a particular practice or strategy is successful in a school or classroom. Copying and pasting from other schools is unlikely to be successful without understanding why something works in one school and for certain students. Examining and identifying the core components and mechanisms of change of a practice that is successful in a particular school or classroom should be the first step for any school partnership.

6. Finally, research can tell us more about whether, and to what extent, school partnerships are achieving what they set out to. There is evidence to suggest that partnering schools in this way does have some positive effects (for example Hutchings 2012; Hill and Matthews 2010), but as yet we do not know why such partnerships work or whether certain models of partnership work better than others or for particular clients. Given that the present Government has committed itself so publicly to being informed by the best available evidence with the recent decision to build on existing evidence-based policy making to guide decision-making with a £200 billion investment in a series of “what works centres” (Cabinet Office 2013; see also Willetts 2012), answering this question should be the first job before further partnerships are put in place.

MAIN POINTS

7. The overriding objective of most school-to-school partnerships is school improvement. There are two ways that research can assist school improvement:

Research as an alternative to school-to-school partnerships

8. Initiatives such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit³⁴ (www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit) demonstrate the impact that research can have upon school improvement. The Toolkit’s success is grounded in its adherence to systematic review principles in bringing together existing, reliable research on specific topics and, its presentation of this research in an accessible and easily understood way that gives a clear indication about practical matters such as cost effectiveness and average impact. Bringing together what is known about a particular topic in an explicit way that outlines how the literature was found, what is included and why, protects both against decisions being made on the basis of single pieces of research that may give unrepresentative or inconclusive findings and, reviews that put forward only a selection and/or biased account of the existing literature on a given topic.

9. Rather than making recommendations on the basis of a successful practice in one classroom or school, systematic reviews can draw together what is known about the effectiveness of a particular practice from many different classrooms and/or schools. Adopting a practice that has been shown to be effective elsewhere is of course no guarantee of success. However, it makes sense for us to base our decisions on those practices that

³⁴ The EEF/Sutton Trust Toolkit is an independent and accessible summary of educational research which helps teachers and schools identify the most promising and cost-effective ways to support their pupils.

have been shown to be effective in a number of different contexts rather than one and this is something that systematic reviews can help us with.

10. Using research for school improvement is not without its problems. Research is often not communicated clearly to non-academic audiences or easily available to them. Academic research is often not relevant to the needs of non-academic audiences because of its focus or methods for example and, in some cases, teachers and other practitioners do not have the time or skills to be able to use research effectively. Although there is now more awareness about this and greater pressure upon academics to address these gaps, we are still a long way from a situation where research can be used directly by teachers and schools. A number of attempts have been made to “bridge the gap” between academic research (both how it is undertaken and communicated) and its use. The EEF Toolkit is one example but there are many others that include organizations specifically set up for this purpose for example, the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) as well as specific services being offered to support teachers and other users to find, understand and/or use research such as the consultancy service delivered through the European Commission funded “Evidence Informed Policy and Practice in Education in Europe” (EIPPEE) project and now being offered through the Institute of Education (IOE). The existence and popularity of these initiatives illustrate the need and demand for this type of service. Yet this should not be seen as an endorsement of those initiatives to connect schools with HEIs. Such partnerships, as with school-to-school partnerships, have the same risks about informing decision-making with knowledge that is not grounded in what is known or perhaps, may not be the best available knowledge we have.

Research approach before school-to-school partnerships

11. A research-informed approach can provide a solid foundation for school-to-school partnerships to build upon. Asking a series of critical questions about existing practices, the nature of the goals trying to be achieved and why these are the goals being focused upon is a useful exercise in itself. Such questions will provide a good understanding of the specific context that trying to improve (for example nature of the student profile, areas of strengths and weaknesses), a thorough clarification of what we are seeking to change (educational attainment? In what subjects and for which students?). They can also provide an honest analysis of the school’s willingness and capacity to change. Experience of working with practitioners in both the health and education field (for example work undertaken as part of the European Commission funded “Evidence Informed Policy and Practice in Education in Europe” [EIPPEE] project³⁵ and that undertaken in the health field in Canada by John Lavis³⁶) has shown that asking these types of questions at the start of the process can be enormously beneficial to all participants. Indeed, in supporting schools and other practitioners, clarifying the issue under concern (including how it is understood, what the goals are and why it is of interest) as well as what is already happening to address this issue is of the most importance and usefulness to practitioners.

12. This is something that has been recognised as fundamental to school-to-school partnerships by the National College for Teaching and Leadership. In its recent report summarising the outcomes from an action research project with national leaders of education (NLEs) and teaching school alliances to examine how they could work with and support other schools to close gaps in attainment, they report that the advice from NLEs’ advice was:

(iii) [T]hat the important skills were in getting underneath the obvious, and really developing a good understanding of the school’s strengths and weaknesses as this would have a strong bearing on its capacity to close gaps... NLEs would begin to role model the behaviours of collaborative enquiry, talking to staff about their successes and barriers, and enable opportunities for staff from the schools involved to have a genuine peer engagement about learning and the barriers faced by specific pupils (Rea et al 2013: 6)

Research approach during school-to-school partnerships

13. Taking a research-informed approach during school-to-school partnerships can also be beneficial. Too often in education, solutions are looked for on a grand scale (class sizes etc) and in addressing school improvement, it is easy to look to large-scale programmes which reform on a whole-school level, for example Assessment for Learning. These programmes work because of the care and attention given to implementation fidelity to ensure every part of the process is geared towards the same end. Adopting these types of programmes is often not an option for most schools given their resources and capacity and even when it is, buying in such programmes is largely useless unless the same level of care and attention to fidelity is given. Aside from this, what this type of approach also overlooks is what already maybe happening in a school which does work and/or is being effective. It may be that in such circumstances a school may just need to tweak their existing practice rather than wholesale root and branch reform.

14. Adopting a research-driven approach to school improvement can also assist school-to-school partnerships. Copying and pasting practices that are successful in one school or classroom overlooks the

³⁵ The “Evidence Informed Policy and Practice in Education in Europe” (EIPPEE) project a two-year project, from March 2011 to August 2013. The project aims to increase the use of evidence to inform decision-making in education policy and practice across Europe. The EIPPEE project is funded by the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture under the Lifelong Learning: 2020 strategy (Agreement number EAC-2010-1395) with additional support from the Institute of Education, University of London.

³⁶ John Lavis is a Professor in the Department of Clinical Epidemiology & Biostatistics at McMaster University in Canada.

important detail that what works in one context and for one group of people may not work in another. We also need to understand why something is working in a particular school and/or for a particular group of students before we can try and transfer this to other contexts. Practices that have been shown to be effective in particular schools should be examined in order to identify the key mechanisms that are behind the success of these practices and furthermore, the extent that such mechanisms are specific to that school or context and therefore, the degree that they can be transferred to other contexts. In other words, taking a research-informed approach can help us to determine “what practices work for who and in what contexts and why?”

Research on school-to-school partnerships

15. Related to the point above is the role that research can play in evaluating school-to-school partnerships. We need to know more about the impact of school-to-school partnerships; are they achieving what we want them to, and we should seek such knowledge both during active partnerships and after, once they have been completed. Just as chefs need to constantly taste their food to see if it needs more seasoning, so do teachers need to check that their teaching approach/methods are working with their students. In relation to School-based interventions on alcohol, NICE recommends that “[h]ead teachers, school governors, healthy school leads, school nurses and extended school services should monitor and evaluate partnership working and incorporate good practice into planning” (NICE 2008). In the same way that we should try to understand why particular learning or teaching practices work in a school and/or for a particular group of students before we try to transfer to another context, we need to know what is it about school-to-school partnerships that make them effective if they are shown to be so? The knowledge we gain from this type of investigation can then inform our development and roll-out of partnerships in the future. At the moment we are faced with a situation where school-to-school partnerships are being promoted and advocated on the basis of very little robust evidence (Hutchings 2012; Hill and Matthews 2010). This is despite such evaluations being a central role of local governments;

(iv) *[H]olding school improvement partnerships to account should continue to be a key part of the council role in education, backed by a continuing council role in tackling underperforming schools (see Education Committee 2013: 39)*

16. The factors, components or mechanisms that make school-to-school partnerships effective raise some important and very interesting issues about what is it about partnerships more generally that is effective. Collaboration and interaction is frequently held up to be the essential requirement for successful partnerships but we are rarely told what these terms mean in practice: how should we collaborate, in what ways, with whom in order to maximize our effectiveness? Do different approaches or models to collaboration, partnership or interaction have an impact on effectiveness or success? Do particular models of partnership work better for certain people, schools, organizations or when focused upon particular goals or outcomes than others?

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Further written evidence submitted by the Institute of Education, University of London

INTRODUCTION

1. The Institute of Education (IOE) is a college of the University of London that specialises in education and related areas of social science and professional practice. It is one of the leading graduate schools of education internationally. This evidence—on the importance of partnerships and collaboration for 14–19 education and training—is provided by Professors Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours. It offers background information on partnership working issues that pertain to 14–19 provision, as context for the inquiry. The IOE has undertaken a considerable amount of research and development work on 14–19 partnerships since 1997. During the Nuffield Review of 14–19 Education and Training in England and Wales (2003–09), researchers from the Centre for Post-14 Research and Innovation at the IOE developed a framework—“weakly” and “strongly collaborative local learning systems”—for analysing the extent of partnership working between schools, colleges and work-based learning providers.³⁷ This has been followed by research and development with local authorities in developing new types of “vertical partnerships” focused on 14+ participation, progression and transition to further/higher education and the labour market for all young people in a locality. These 14–19 networks are now known as 14+ Progression and Transition Boards (14+ PTBs)—see <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/64363.html>. A further research study focused on 14–19 partnership working in London was carried out during 2012/13, and much of the detailed evidence in this submission is drawn from this recent work.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF 14–19 PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

2. Partnership arrangements between different providers have been a feature of 16–19 and, more recently, 14–19 education and training over the past three decades. Originally, schools and schools/colleges collaborated over the offer of minority subjects at A Level to maximise learner choice. Over the recent period, 14–19 institutional partnerships appear to have developed through several phases:

- (a) Pre-Learning and Skills Council (LSC)—pre-2000.
- (b) The period of LSC area-wide inspections—2002–04
- (c) The development of 14–19 Diplomas—2005–10.
- (d) Cutbacks and confusion—2010–12.
- (e) Reinvention and recovery—late 2012 onwards.

3. During the period 2002–10 the focus of partnership working expanded principally as a result of area-wide approaches to planning 14–19 provision under the Learning and Skills Council and the offer of 17 Lines of

³⁷ Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2006) The organisation of 14–19 education and training in England: beyond weakly collaborative arrangements. *Journal of Education and Work*, 19 (4) pp. 325–342.

14–19 Diplomas in each local authority area. Since 2010, 14–19 partnerships have been subject to pressure, either as a result of cuts to local authority expenditure or through Government policy and the increased autonomy of and competition between schools and schools/colleges.

14–19 PARTNERSHIP WORKING IN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC AND POLICY CONDITIONS

4. However, research across London boroughs in 2013 has suggested that incentives for partnership working have continued in the period of austerity and greater institutional autonomy. These include the raising of the participation age and the need to organise local responses to issues related to post-16 performance highlighted by Ofsted and changes to 14–19 qualifications.

5. London borough-based partnerships have dealt with these conflicting pressures in different ways, depending on their history or the particular context in their local authority. Some have thrived more than others, although the majority of 14–19 partnerships across London appear to be recovering after a turbulent period of change.

THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

6. As the education and training system has been gradually centralized since the 1988 Education Act, the role of local authorities in relation to their education providers has changed considerably. There has been constant debate around what functions they should have and how much should be devolved to individual institutions. However, local authorities appear to be vital to 14–19 partnership working because they employ the people who co-ordinate the actions of the various social partners and can provide the fora for their participation.

7. Since 2010 and the acceleration of the academies programme, the issue of what role the local authority should play in relation to the education and training providers in their area has been hotly contested. Borough 14–19 lead officers in London suggested that local authorities were now seeing themselves in a set of diverse ways. They used the following terminology to refer to their functions in 2013:

- “The champion of young people”—with the idea of education providers taking “collective responsibility for young people in the local population”.
- “Education champion for choice, quality and support” with a focus on the needs of parents and their children.
- “Hands off with institutions” but facilitating “provider-to-provider support”
- Only able “to focus on the vulnerable”.
- Building individual relationships with institutions and establishing networks.
- “Shaping and influencing” 14–19 providers and provision.
- “Knowledge broker” and “connector”.
- “Even-handed broker” and “provider of data”.
- “Institutional challenger”.

14–19 PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY

8. In London, researchers identified 16 areas of partnership activity that appeared to be meeting the needs of schools, colleges, work-based learning providers and the young people in the locality. The degree to which these were being pursued varied from borough to borough:

- (a) *Information sharing*—holding policy fora to help institutions to keep pace with and make sense of local and national policy developments.
- (b) *Collecting and sharing data* on student performance in examinations, destinations data, and figures for those not in employment, education and training (NEET) as a stimulus for discussion and improvement.
- (c) *Raising the Participation Age*—recognition of the need for a collaborative local strategy to develop adequate and appropriate provision for all young people up to the age of 18.
- (d) *Careers education, information, advice and guidance*—a vital area of work in relation to the raising of the participation age and helping all young people to become fully aware of the range of options available to them.
- (e) *Shared course information/prospectus*—the production of borough-wide course information or a prospectus about what is offered in terms of 14–19/16–19 provision in the locality.
- (f) *Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)*—work focused both on effective ways of gathering data and ensuring early identification of those young people who are at risk of dropping out of education and training.
- (g) *Shared 14–19 provision and curriculum development*—while this declined following the demise of Diplomas, collaboration has continued, often on an institution-to-institution basis, around areas such as A Levels, Key Stage 4 vocational options and vocational progression pathways.

- (h) *Provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD), students with special educational needs (SEN) and looked after children (LAC)*—many boroughs are co-ordinating the development of shared provision for LLDD, SEN and LAC as part of their statutory duties and using 14–19 partnerships as a way of supporting this work.
- (i) *Work experience/work-related learning*—despite national policy change, work experience and work-related learning are often seen as central areas of activity for 14–19 partnerships or for dedicated borough working groups.
- (j) *Vocational provision and apprenticeships*—while there is much less 14–19 partnership work dedicated to the discussion of vocational provision than there was during the development of Diplomas, there is some evidence of the promotion of apprenticeships and discussion of progression pathways through to apprenticeship.
- (k) *Progression to higher education (HE)*—again this area of work has diminished greatly since the demise of the Aimhigher initiative, but there were one or two boroughs who still had active participation in partnership activity by local HEIs.
- (l) *Economic development and regeneration*—a small number of London local authorities involve or are considering how to involve those from economic development/regeneration in their 14–19 partnership because of concerns about youth unemployment and a desire to see stronger relationships between education and employment.
- (m) *Introducing new providers*—in a small minority of authorities, there has been discussion and joint decision-making by the 14–19 partnership about the introduction of a new provider, such as a University Technical College (UTC) or Studio School, as part of an attempt to make a comprehensive offer of provision in a particular locality.
- (n) *Quality assurance and peer-to-peer support*—quality assurance of provision and the facilitation of peer-to-peer support while often not seen as mainstream activities of the 14–19 partnerships visited in London were viewed as important in a minority.
- (o) *Continuing professional development (CPD)*—the regular meetings of 14–19 partnerships were seen as a useful form of CPD in terms of their information and data-sharing functions and in some cases additional CPD events were being arranged.
- (p) *Shared resources*—14–19 partnerships can be seen as a useful mechanism for sharing resources, either in terms of personnel or facilities/equipment. Although this aspect of collaboration does not appear to be happening to a great extent under the current policy climate, there were a couple of examples of schools and colleges jointly funding posts and activities and bidding collaboratively for both funding and the introduction of a new provider.

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION AS A PRE-REQUISITE FOR IMPROVING 14+ PARTICIPATION, PROGRESSION AND TRANSITION

9. As the post-compulsory education system has expanded and participation beyond age 16 becomes increasingly the norm, so collaboration between providers has become a necessity. This is particularly the case for those young people who leave schools at 16 (or even earlier) to move to other education and training institutions in order to have a greater choice of general education subjects, to undertake broad vocational education or to enter apprenticeships or other forms of work-based training.

10. Partnership working has moved through several stages of development—limited to sharing academic provision; broadening to vocational provision; top-down diploma developments and the development of “forced partnerships” and now voluntarist arrangements with weak but, nevertheless, important frameworks such as Raising the Participation Age. Even when collaboration has not been a focus of government policy, most providers in 14–19 education and training have understood the need for partnership working.

11. There is now a need for a new phase of partnership working in which government provides stronger incentives and frameworks (neither top-down nor voluntarist) that helps to create a “culture of collaboration”. This could include a new emphasis on the “area” or “locality” in terms of inspection; elements of funding being offered on an area basis; a focus on progression and transitions where a wide range of social partners are expected as a social duty to collaborate to ensure that more young people emerge from the 14–19 phase with the best possible education and greater opportunities to make a transition to further study or the world of work.

Written evidence submitted by Policy Exchange

SUMMARY

1. The report, *Competition Meets Collaboration—Helping school chains address England’s long tail of educational failure*, written by James O’Shaughnessy and published by Policy Exchange in October 2012, underlines the need for the DfE to formulate a new industrial policy for schools, using the growth of Academy chains and the expertise of the private sector to drive up standards in the worst performing schools in the country.

2. Domestic and International evidence shows the effectiveness of Academy chains in improving results through the spreading of effective educational practice and delivery of economies of scale, and the report recommends a number of policy changes to encourage the growth of Academy chains in the UK. It also argues that chains should be used to deal with the huge number (up to a third) of coasting schools in England, recommending the introduction of a new failure regime based on Ofsted’s inspection regime. Under this regime, failure to achieve an Ofsted “good” rating or better would lead, in stages, to a school being turned into an Academy, being handed over to a successful chain, or—as a last resort—being run on a performance-related contract by an educational management organisation. This failure regime would be applied by a beefed-up Office of the Schools Commissioner and a network of new local school commissioners, appointed from the centre.

Differing forms of school partnerships and co-operation, and whether they have particular advantages/disadvantages

3. The report focuses on Academy chains as a solution to tackling the rise in weak schools, presenting evidence which shows that not only do Academies work when it comes to raising standards, but that Academy chains can be even more effective at improving results than single Academies. For this report, Academy chains are defined as three or more Academies.

4. Below is a list of the many advantages of expanding Academy chains:

- (a) Extending the chain’s impact in terms of raising standards of education for more young people
- (b) Creating a broader base for developing leaders
- (c) Increasing the scope for sharing learning and subject specialism
- (d) Building school improvement expertise
- (e) Providing more opportunities for staff deployment and promotion within the chain
- (f) Increasing economies of scale in the running of central services and providing greater purchasing power
- (g) Opening up new opportunities to build new primary/secondary curriculum and transition models
- (h) Providing a bigger platform for supporting innovation and providing a stronger brand to attract parents and applications for admission
- (i) Providing opportunities for joint CPD, enabling a group of schools to engage in CPD activity that would have been problematic as a single school.

How highly performing schools could be better encouraged to cooperate with others and whether schools have sufficient incentives to form meaningful and lasting relationships with other schools

5. The adoption of a new, tougher inspection regime by Ofsted could potentially lead to a large increase in the number of schools being told they need to improve. The problem of coasting schools is one which has lasted for many years and now that the issue is finally being addressed, action needs to be taken to ensure that these schools tackle their failures through cooperation and partnership. The incentive for this action should come from a new, universal, rules-based failure regime which clearly highlights the consequences for underperformance. A first “requirement to improve” means the school has to become an Academy. A second “requirement to improve” means the school or Academy must join a successful chain. The Office of Schools Commissioner should also apply the failure regime directly to larger chains, with local school commissioners appointed from the centre applying the regime to the “ones and twos”. These commissioners should maintain a list of successful chains and sponsors in each region that are prepared to step in and rescue failing Academies.

6. More generally, we believe a new “industrial policy” is needed for the school market to promote quality. To this end, the report gives a number of proposals regarding the creation of a new industrial policy:

- (a) The report recommended the creation of a new School Chain Growth Fund (modelled on BIS’ Regional Growth Fund) whereby chains apply for additional investments of matched funding in return for commitments to take on a certain number of failing schools and improve standards in them by a specified rate. This proposal has been taken up by the DfE and we recommend further investment in the School Chain Growth Fund.
- (b) The DfE should base new chains around Teaching Schools with at least half of newly designated Teaching Schools being chains. To complement this, from now on, for successful leaders to be re-awarded Local or National Leader of Education status, they should have to show systemic leadership

across a chain of schools. This should also be the case for a school to be awarded the “outstanding” grade for leadership and management for a second consecutive time from Ofsted.

- (c) Fund a “Collaborating Schools Network” to promote best practice and work with schools that are proactively looking for an Academy, chain and other collaborative solutions. The aim should be for all schools to convert to Academy status and join some form of collaborative partnership, with weaker schools encouraged towards harder forms of federation like multi-Academy trusts.
- (d) The DfE should allow Academies to experiment with new forms of governance, including allowing the best Academies and chains to pilot smaller remunerated governing bodies that mirror boards of private companies.

If and how potential tension between school partnership and cooperation and school choice and competition can be resolved

7. The report argues that this is a false dichotomy based on a deliberate misreading of the nature of successful markets. Although competition and choice are the factors most associated with markets, in reality all markets have high degrees of collaboration which takes place within firms. This is how most innovation is created—by co-operative behaviour within organisations, rather than competition between them. The role that competition plays is to ensure that the innovation that results from intra-firm collaboration is relevant to the needs of the user, in this case parents and pupils. This combined approach of competition and collaboration is sometimes referred to within market theory as “co-opetition” and is a successful model for driving innovation. The report argues that this is the right model for the school sector to follow, and Academy chains are ideally placed to deliver it because they provide collaborative multi-institution networks that compete with other networks for pupils.

Whether converter Academies’ requirements to support other schools, included in their funding agreements, are sufficient and are effectively policed

8. The impulse to decentralise power to governing bodies, heads and teachers within a properly constructed social market is the right one. However, a suitable new regulatory regime is needed both to ensure the successful continued development of Academies and school chains and to point effective interventions at the problem of coasting schools. The most important feature of any new regime is that it is proportionate and predictable. By and large it should leave well alone, only seeking to intervene where there is sustained evidence of weakness.

9. In this report, a beefed up Office of Schools Commissioner (OSC) is proposed, which would be responsible for ensuring as many schools as possible become Academies and move into collaborative arrangements like chains. They should also take on explicitly some of the other functions that a genuine regulator would be expected to fulfil, such as looking out for local dominance and other market failures and ensuring parents’ interests are not being harmed.

10. There should also be more powers to regulate the quality of sponsors. With some chains growing dramatically, it seems reasonable to require the higher regulatory barrier for sponsors wanting to create chains of three or more schools. Setting a higher quality bar for sponsors would also allow the OSC to be more assertive in imposing sponsors upon discredited governing bodies, thereby ending the “beauty parades” that are a waste of time and money.

11. The time has also come for Ofsted to start inspecting school chains for their effectiveness and financial sustainability. A light-touch inspection regime with frequency linked to quality is a feature of more mature public sector markets and should be utilised in this sector, as long as such a regime is proportionate. Coupled with this, there should be sharper accountability for failing Academies and chains. The DfE should adopt a new style of funding agreement (applied retrospectively) which ensures that any school that goes into special measures is automatically removed from governing body, sponsor or chain’s control and handed to a new operator of the OSC’s choosing. Sponsors and chains which have had an Academy go into special measures, and therefore lost control of it, should not be allowed to take on a new school until they have demonstrated their capacity to raise standards among their remaining schools.

12. For single and groups of two schools, local school commissioners should be appointed by the DfE to perform the role of the OSC at a local level. The fulfilment of this role should be put out to tender, and as the regulator of the market, the OSC would take responsibility for ensuring these local regulators are complying with their responsibilities and the prescribed process for dealing with failure. The essential point must remain that any creation of a regulatory middle tier must be proportionate to the task in hand, which is school failure.

13. Data must be used to improve accountability. Introducing sophisticated annual performance reports for each school that include comparative data, as suggested recently at a Fellowship Commission meeting at the National College, would help parents push schools harder to improve.

14. Vitally, the DfE needs to consider the level of funding it makes available to support turning around weak schools. By diverting 0.3% of the schools budget for each of the next three financial years, the DfE could provide an adequate level of financial support to help turn around the new flow of weak schools. In addition to implementing the proposals in this report, that would all but guarantee the success of the Academy programme.

Whether Academies sponsored by another school receive sufficient support from their sponsor

15. Simply, many do and some don't. One argument in favour of inspecting sponsors and the HQs of Academy chains is to ensure that they are providing the right level of support.

Whether school partnerships drive effective school improvement

16. Case studies from around the world demonstrate the contributions made by competing multi-school organisations in some of the most successful school systems in the world. They have all embraced some form of school-based management on the grounds that increased autonomy at the school level encourages innovation, heightens responsiveness to student needs, empowers parent and community involvement and increases overall efficiency. But they have also produced multi-school collaborations that lead to productivity gains. The evidence from the countries profiled (such as Canada, the US, Hong Kong and Sweden) strongly suggests that systems are most effective when there is a balance of competition and collaborative relationships within the system.

17. Bassett, Lyon et al find that school-to-school collaboration is a vitally important mechanism for improving the quality of teaching. Collaboration is necessary for this because the highest quality continuous professional development is essentially collaborative, involving lesson observation, mentoring and sharing of best practice. CPD of this nature is at its most effective across schools, and many schools work together on CPD for staff. The most effective collaboration goes further than simply sharing best practice, and involves richer joint development of practice.³⁸

18. Some Academy sponsors saw large improvements across their schools. Between 2009–10 and 2010–11, Harris Academies saw an average improvement of 13.1 percentage points, ARK 11 percentage points and Oasis 9.5 percentage points in the proportion of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C including English and Maths (across all state-funded schools, the rate of improvement was 3.1 percentage points). Hill et al also finds tentative evidence that chains of three or more Academies made greater progress between 2008/09 and 2010/11 than standalone and two-strong Academies (average rate of improvement was 15 percentage points compared with 12.2 and 11 percentage points for standalone and two-strong Academy chains). Ofsted found that the fact that schools had federated was a contributory factor to their improvement.

Whether there are any additional upsides or downsides for highly performing schools supporting others through partnerships

19. Chapman et al for the National College in 2010 found that performance and Academy federations both have a positive impact on student outcomes. Performance federations have a positive impact on both the higher and low performing schools in the partnership. The report does not say so, but the clear implication of this is that Academy chains featuring both strong and weak schools could be even more effective.³⁹

20. However, the report also highlights five potential issues associated with the growth of school chains:

- (a) Over-expansion and local dominance. It is reasonable to ask at what point any school provider should no longer be allowed to expand in a given area for fear of market dominance.
- (b) Lack of capacity or financial sustainability. An important issue about the growth of school chains is not their ultimate size but the rate at which they expand and their ability to sustain a successful school improvement model. A further concern relates to chains where an individual philanthropist may have played a vital role in the injection of funding (if funding stops, schools will become financially vulnerable).
- (c) Concerns over chains' accountability. Critics have spoken of a democratic deficit because there is no direct involvement of locally-elected bodies in the management of the school.
- (d) Problems with the appointment of sponsors. Hill et al report that some chain CEOs considered certain LAs to be ideologically opposed to the Academy programme and used their powers to award Academies to sponsors that shy away from confronting authorities with the hard actions that may be needed to turn a school around. Part of the issue is that governing bodies lack the ability to access data on the performance of different chains, which weakens the ability of the DfE to impose effective sponsors on recalcitrant schools.
- (e) Applicability for primaries. There is little appetite for Academy status among most primaries and many might see moving to Academy status, and leaving the support of the LA, as too risky.

October 2013

³⁸ Bassett D et al, *Plan A+ Unleashing the potential of academies*, The Schools Network, 2012

³⁹ Chapman C et al, *A study of the impact of school federation on student outcomes*, National College for School Leadership, 2011

Written evidence submitted by the National Foundation for Educational Research

INTRODUCTION

1. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Education Committee's New Inquiry: School Partnerships and Cooperation and to contribute to policy thinking for this priority area of the Coalition Government. School partnerships and cooperation are increasingly prominent in the education landscape in England which is undergoing major transformation and becoming more complex and diverse owing to the growth of Academies and the introduction of free schools and University Technical Colleges. In this submission we address three of the issues identified by the New Inquiry and provide a summary of evidence.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. School partnerships and cooperation play an important school improvement role within the changing education system. Schools are balancing increased autonomy with working in partnership with other schools to augment their capacity and capability to improve performance.

TYPES OF SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

3. There are three main types of school partnership and cooperation which aim to lead and support school improvement:

- formal networks such as Teaching School Alliances, Academy chains and school federations which lead and manage school improvement through developing and applying collective capacity and capability;
- informal and organic collaborations which grow out of local need such as facilitating primary-secondary transition; and
- specific focus partnerships where schools focus on particular issues (eg attainment, behaviour, subject-specific improvement, or qualification-specific delivery).

Each type of partnership has both advantages and disadvantages. Any evaluation of the fitness for purpose of school partnerships involves assessing the trade-off between the opportunities and limitations they offer.

How highly-performing schools could better be encouraged to cooperate with others

4. The provision of system leadership support and a framework for school-to-school collaboration can encourage highly-performing schools to cooperate with others. System leadership support involves leaders from highly-performing schools—National Leaders of Education (NLEs), Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) and Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs)—disseminating outstanding practice through working with a range of schools. The Department for Education (DfE) is increasing the number of these leaders of education over the next two years.

5. The middle tier of diverse bodies such as local authorities, school clusters, Academy chains, Teaching School Alliances, education trusts and partnerships provides the strategic and operational framework which enables, encourages and supports school-to-school collaboration. Collaboration involves sharing innovative and effective practice in teaching and learning including utilising highly-performing schools' expertise.

Whether school partnerships drive effective school improvement

6. Schools' improvement journeys are increasingly driven with support from school partnerships. Schools recognise the benefit of partnering with other schools and drawing on a larger range of experience and resources in order to increase the quality of teaching and learning and raise progress towards educational standards. Whilst schools value partnership working for the access it gives them to what works in other school contexts, there is as yet no rigorous longitudinal empirical evidence that partnering has a positive impact on educational outcomes.

EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

The differing forms of school partnership and cooperation, and whether they have particular advantages and disadvantages

7. There are three main types of school partnerships: formal networks; informal and organic collaborations; and specific-focus partnerships.

Formal networks

8. These types of partnerships include Academy chains, school federations and Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) where partnering is a defining requirement and is often led by senior staff with dedicated time. For example, in TSAs Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) have a key role in coordinating continuing professional development (CPD) and leading peer-to-peer learning across groups of schools. In their study of

school federations, Chapman *et al.* (2011) observed that, to improve school performance, federations recruited high-quality staff across the federation and facilitated the sharing of best practice in areas such as leadership and teaching and learning. Varga-Atkins *et al.* (2010) reported that as a result of the introduction of learning networks teachers “felt that they were now a member of a “family of schools” with like-minded professionals who had similar issues and similar successes” (p.254).

9. The potential for these changes to lead and drive innovation in teaching and learning is highlighted by the Academies Commission (2013): “Networks of schools, such as chains, federations and Teaching School alliances should become the hub of innovative teaching and learning. They should undertake disciplined innovation through practising action research and joint professional development across schools” (p.59). This will keep England in step with international improving school systems reviewed by Mourshed *et al.* (2010) who reported that the best systems in the world rely on peer-to-peer support as the source of innovation and deep improvement.

Advantages: formal networks provide a framework of support, and in some cases accountability, to assist schools working together to improve their school improvement capability.

Disadvantages: externally-sustained networking could limit individual schools taking the initiative to introduce and implement change.

Informal and organic collaborations

10. These partnerships grow organically where schools see a need to partner and gain mutual benefit in working together. For example, secondary schools often link with one or more local primary schools to help manage primary-secondary transition. Research by the National Audit Office (NAO) (2009) found that schools’ most effective partnership was often one which supported primary-secondary transition. The review revealed that there are two forms of collaboration at work: networking across schools and collegiate working within schools. In her study of learning communities for curriculum change, Edwards (2012) observes that these learning communities can contribute to building schools’ capacity which includes “motivation, skills, dispositions and knowledge of teachers, individually and collectively, as well as the culture of the school, including its organisational conditions and infrastructure of support” (p.27).

Advantages: these collaborations grow out of local need and can be set up or terminated at short notice in response to changing circumstances.

Disadvantages: there are few or no ways of ensuring accountability for actions and interventions.

Specific-focus partnerships

11. These include partnerships which specialise in enhancing modern foreign languages joint-delivery of a qualification, improving attainment and behaviour, promoting creativity across the curriculum, improving access to high-quality science education and strengthening integration and cohesion. Examples of these partnerships are provided below:

- The Languages Support Programme was delivered by the CfBT Education Trust on behalf of the Department for Education which funded it from January 2012 to March 2013. CfBT worked with 34 Teaching Schools as well as over 300 primary, secondary and special schools in these Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) to deliver the programme. Sainsbury *et al.* (2013) found that partnership working was a major success of the programme, valued by primary and secondary teachers.
- Diplomas were delivered by consortia partnerships. NFER research (Lynch *et al.*, 2010) found that collaboration was working well and that expertise and facilities were being used collectively to meet the needs of students and give them the best learning experience.
- The NAO (2009) identified attainment partnerships, where schools work together to find ways of improving 11–14 year old pupils’ attainment, and behaviour partnerships, where schools collaborate in sharing strategies and practices to improve 11–14 year old pupils’ behaviour.
- Daniels *et al.* (2007) reported on professional learning in schools which focused on creating cross-school partnerships to promote the use of creativity across the curriculum. They reported that working together enabled the formation of new professional identities: “With these newly formed identities the coordinators were and will be able to work on transforming learning cultures in their schools” (p.139).
- Science-focused partnerships are illustrated by Gatt and Costa (2009) who reported that the Hands on Science (Hi-Sci) network, which comprised institutions across ten European countries, aimed to improve in-school scientific education by encouraging pupils to “do” science through the use of inquiry-based learning and experimentation. Teachers shared of ideas and state-of-the-art pedagogies through an open web-based network and conferences.
- The Schools Linking Network developed a model of school linking to support and strengthen integration and cohesion through pupils exploring their identity, celebrating diversity and developing dialogue. Kerr *et al.* (2011) found that the key determinant of the impact and outcomes of school linking for pupils is the intensity of the school linking experience.

Advantages: these partnerships stimulate improvement by drawing together ideas and good practice focusing on a single issue.

Disadvantages: the gains made through this type of partnering may not be matched by improvements in other areas of schools' planning, support and performance.

How highly-performing schools could better be encouraged to cooperate with others

12. The provision of system leadership support and a framework for school-to-school collaboration can encourage highly-performing schools to cooperate with others. These play an enabling and brokering role as described below.

13. System leadership support involves National Leaders of Education (NLEs), Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) and Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) disseminating outstanding practice through working with a range of schools. Earley *et al.* (2012) point out that the DfE, via the National College, plans to increase the number of NLEs from about 400 in 2010 to 1,000 by 2014, and the number of LLEs from 1,400 in 2010 to around 2,000 by 2014. The SLE role will enable outstanding teachers to share knowledge and practice with colleagues in other schools. Furthermore, Teaching Schools, which are high-performing schools, will lead local school alliances to co-ordinate the training and development of teachers and provide school-to-school support for improvement. The National College plans to designate 500 Teaching School Alliances by 2014/15 and announced the first 100 in July 2011. This increased capacity and capability help to encourage highly-performing schools to cooperate with others.

14. The middle tier offers a framework for school-to-school support where schools support each other and where outstanding practice can be shared. The middle tier refers to the diverse range of bodies (eg local authorities, school clusters, academy chains, Teaching School Alliances, education trusts and partnerships) that operate between schools and central government to support school-led improvement. Recent research by the NFER (Aston *et al.*, 2013) found that schools were choosing to belong to a range of middle tier bodies which between them provide strategic and operational functions, and a local and national perspective. Strategic partnerships generally:

- brought together stakeholders;
- carried out long-term planning;
- established a framework for robust school-to-school support;
- commissioned appropriate support; and
- held schools accountable for their performance.

15. Operational networks focussed on brokerage and ensuring delivery to agreed aims as well as sometimes simply providing a supportive local environment for sharing experiences. Some middle tier bodies fulfil both strategic and operational functions; others do not. Other middle tier bodies which originally carried out an operational function were becoming more strategic as they found their feet.

16. Local strategic partnerships, which embody a sense of place, were important to schools. Schools also looked to national middle tier bodies, for example, national collaborations of school leaders, such as the Whole Education Network and the PiXL Club.

17. The research (Aston *et al.*, 2013) found that local authorities were repositioning themselves to put schools in the lead, while securing delivery of their statutory duties through education partnerships. They were adopting a more adaptive style of leadership, and were prepared to move radically to enable school-to-school support. Many schools wanted local authorities to remain players in school improvement.

18. National Teaching Schools were increasingly important and their work seemed to be enhanced by working with other middle tier bodies.

19. NFER's rapid review of school-driven leadership (Smith *et al.*, 2012) found that in the most successful education systems in the world, school improvement activity is focused on the work taking place in schools. The middle tier successfully harnesses the capacity and professional expertise on the ground for the benefit of the education system as a whole. This requires a school-led model of school-to-school support which is characterised by a number of key features, in particular:

- there is a clear and shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities confronting schools, based on thorough monitoring and a rich evidence base;
- there is strong leadership that respects practitioners' professionalism and motivates their enthusiasm, that is provided by school leaders and the middle tier;
- schools take responsibility for the education system as a whole and do not confine their attention to their own specific institution; and
- all staff contribute to the process of school improvement through distributed leadership.

20. This requires the middle tier to adopt specific practices and behaviours that are designed to maximise the impact of the work on the ground. These include:

- brokering school-to-school collaboration, facilitating initial discussions and working with schools to help them as they respond to challenges or seek to develop new approaches;
- nurturing a sense of collaboration and responsibility for the system as a whole through effective system leadership;
- helping to embed and sustain the work in individual schools and across school-to-school networks;
- disseminating effective practice; and
- being open to innovation and new ways of working.

21. The Gaining Ground Strategy (2009–2011) funded by the DfE provided a framework for school-to-school support for school improvement where successful schools worked with secondary schools that had reasonable-to-good GCSE examination results but poor progression rates in English and mathematics defined as having a significant proportion of pupils not making the expected three levels of attainment in English and/or mathematics over Key Stages 3 and 4. Local authorities were asked to prioritise schools which had such results for three consecutive years or more. Research by NFER and SQW (Walker *et al.*, 2012) found that Gaining Ground schools considered school-to-school support to be beneficial due to the exposure to new ideas and approaches, for giving staff the opportunity to learn from a high-performing school’s experiences and due to the perceived value of a mentoring-type relationship. The research showed that school-to-school partnerships are more likely to be effective if the schools have shared goals and ambitions for development and are broadly similar in terms of socio-economic context and pupil intake.

Whether school partnerships drive effective school improvement

22. A review of the school leadership landscape by Earley *et al.* (2012) found that schools were committed to driving school improvement through and with partnerships. For example, 80% or more of headteachers, middle/senior leaders and chairs of governors who were surveyed considered that that working in partnership with other schools was critical to improving outcomes for students. Around two-fifths (43%) of headteachers and a third (34%) of chairs of governors and middle/senior leaders felt encouraged to make decisions that would support the progress of other schools.

23. Research by Matthias (2012) reported that the top three school improvement priorities identified by the headteachers and deputies of the primary and secondary schools surveyed as part of an investigation into school improvement needs and practices in London were: raising standards and participation in core subjects; raising teaching performance; and addressing the underperformance of specific pupil groups or underperformance generally. In order to achieve these priorities, headteachers and deputies wanted to increase their knowledge of effective school improvement strategies, including finding out what works for other schools. They thought that they could learn from other schools’ expertise and Matthias (2012) noted that younger and newer headteachers were more likely to partner with other schools for support. Similarly, Chapman *et al.* (2011) found that: “There was a strong sense among staff interviewed that all schools benefited from the wider collective pool of expertise and resources made available through federation” (p. 24).

24. As regards the impact of school partnerships on school improvement, Earley *et al.* (2012) comment that: “There is also emerging evidence that system leadership can support school improvement, although longitudinal data to test the sustainability of such interventions is not yet available” (p.28). This assertion is echoed by the NAO (2009) which stated that: “It is difficult to demonstrate a direct, quantifiable impact of partnering on attainment and behaviour across schools nationally because other factors are likely to have substantial effects” (p.8). However, the report noted significant benefits: “Our qualitative evidence indicated that partnering has wider benefits, such as sharing resources, energising teachers to review their practice, and helping schools to identify and tackle their most pressing problems. In addition, where teachers are facing particular challenges, partnering can be a source of practical and moral support” (p.8). Chapman *et al.* (2011) provided some evidence that certain types of federations, had a positive impact on student attainment at GCSE reporting that most federation effect on pupil attainment at GCSE occurs in school federations where higher-performing schools partner lower-performing schools. They point out that there is a time-lag of two to four years between the formation of a federation and when its performance overtakes non-federated schools. In their evaluation of High-Performing Specialist Schools (HPSS), whose role included disseminating good practice to partner schools, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2009) found that although a majority of headteachers reported that their school’s attainment profile had improved since participating in the HPSS programme “there appears to be some general reluctance to attribute success solely to HPSS status” (p.4).

25. The Gaining Ground Strategy (2009–11) comprising school-to-school partnership working; additional support from School Improvement Partners (SIPs); additional training in Assessment for Learning (AfL); and study support achieved positive outcomes. Walker *et al.* (2012) found that Gaining Ground consistently had a positive effect on pupil attainment and attendance. Over the course of the strategy, compared to similar pupils at a comparison school, a typical pupil at a Gaining Ground school:

- made an additional 0.22 levels of progress in English and mathematics;
- was 13 percentage points more likely to achieve five GCSEs graded A*-C including mathematics and English;
- achieved an additional 21 points at Key Stage 4;

- experienced a reduction of 0.7 percentage points in the total number of lessons missed; and
- experienced a reduction of 0.19 percentage points in the total number of lessons missed due to unauthorised absence.

26. School-to-school support was considered beneficial due to the exposure to new ideas and approaches and for giving staff the opportunity to learn from a high-performing school's experiences.

October 2013

Written evidence submitted by the Local Government Association (LGA)

The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We work with councils to support, promote and improve local government.

We are a politically-led, cross party organisation which works on behalf of councils to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government. We aim to influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils so they are able to deliver local solutions to national problems.

The LGA covers every part of England and Wales, supporting local government as the most efficient and accountable part of the public sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The LGA supports a greater role for "school-to-school" improvement in driving up educational standards. However, councils retain important statutory duties to promote high standards in education and to intervene where schools are underperforming. The council role in school improvement was given a renewed focus by Ofsted's decision to introduce a new framework for the inspection of local authority services for supporting improvement in schools and other providers, set out in its consultation document "*A good education for all: inspection of local authority services*", issued in February 2013.

1.2 Councils are proactively promoting and supporting local school improvement partnerships. Convening and holding school improvement partnerships to account continues to be a key part of the council role in education, backed by a continuing council role in tackling underperforming maintained schools. We have also strongly supported the focus in the 2010 Schools White Paper on the role of councils and councillors as "champions of educational excellence".

1.3 As champions for children and parents, councils agree that persistent under performance from any school is unacceptable and failure to tackle this risks letting down a generation of children and young people. So councils want to be able to intervene more quickly in underperforming schools where formal intervention is the most appropriate course of action.

1.4 However, decades of giving schools "greater freedom" and "protecting" them from council interference means that local authority intervention powers are now hedged round by bureaucracy, including the requirement to seek permission from the Secretary of State to replace the governing body of a school judged by Ofsted to be in a category of concern. The LGA would like to see more freedom for councils to use their intervention powers without having to ask permission from DfE or Ofsted, to allow them to quickly turn around underperforming schools.

2. THE DIFFERING FORMS OF SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION

2.2 Councils are proactively promoting and supporting local school improvement partnerships and there are many examples of the forms this can take. Set out below are a few examples taken from a forthcoming "best practice" guide on school improvement that the LGA will be publishing later in May. We will be happy to send a copy of the report to the committee when it is published. It will feature a wider range of case studies of how councils are supporting school improvement partnerships and how they are holding such partnerships to account.

2.3 In *Durham*, the county's school improvement service has been run as a traded service for more than 10 years and 95% of schools buy services from it. At the centre of the improvement offer is a team of Education Development Partners to provide challenge and support and broker additional support as necessary. It has formed strategic partnerships with virtually all the teaching schools in the North East, providing them with additional capacity when needed. It supports schools involved with Teach First and provides support and guidance to school improvement clusters and school federations. It has a particular specialism in leadership support and has worked with the National College for School Leadership in this area.

2.4 *Wigan Council's* school-to-school improvement support has been established for more than two years. The foundation of its approach is strong and well-embedded school-to-school collaboration. This is combined with strong partnership and shared accountability between schools and the council for maximising the educational outcomes of children and young people in Wigan. Schools work together in 8 autonomous consortia (3 secondary, 5 primary) to support self-improvement in all schools and share expertise. The structure of the consortia is not uniform and one has been established as a company. They are accountable to a phase-specific

School Improvement Board which monitors the effectiveness of consortia and makes sure that all schools are receiving appropriate support. The Primary and Secondary School Improvement Boards also support the council in its school improvement functions. All parts of the system draw on other sources of support including two teaching schools.

2.5 The arrangements for identifying and supporting “at risk” schools underline the centrality of school leadership in the model. The council works with the School Improvement Boards and consortia to categorise schools. But it is the responsibility of the lead head teacher of the relevant consortium to work with a school deemed to be at risk to identify areas for development and the support needed. And if a school is not improving quickly enough, the School Improvement Board and relevant consortium has the option of asking the council to use its formal intervention powers to secure more rapid improvement.

2.6 *Hertfordshire County Council* is working with schools to establish “Herts for Learning” (HfL), a “schools’ company” in which schools will have an 80% share. HfL has been created after 2 years of close working with head teachers and governors in the County. The council will commission core statutory services from the company and will be its single biggest customer. The company will also trade with Hertfordshire schools. The key benefits from the point of view of the Council are:

- It gives schools a majority share in the school improvement service—a political priority for Councillors.
- The company supports and formalises the concept of a Hertfordshire “family of schools”. It cements a new vision and relationship with schools.
- It gives the council greater flexibility in the current financial context.

3. *Whether school partnerships drive effective school improvement*

3.1 As the examples above show, school partnerships can drive effective school improvement and the more detailed report we will be publishing will give figures about the effectiveness of school improvement in the case study areas. However, the councils we have spoken to see a continuing council role in holding school improvement partnerships to account, backed by a continuing council role in tackling underperforming schools. The importance of this “convening” and “accountability” role for councils has been underscored by Ofsted’s decision to inspect council school improvement services.

3.2 Councils have a range of statutory powers to turn around underperforming schools and they employ a range of strategies, both voluntary and statutory, to support and challenge maintained schools to improve their performance. They are increasingly using school-to-school support as the key means of driving sustainable long-term improvement. The current suite of statutory intervention powers available to a council (but only in relation to maintained schools, not academies) include:

- Requiring a school to work with another school (or college or named partner) for the purposes of school improvement.
- Appointing additional governors.
- Applying to the Secretary of State to replace an entire governing body with an Interim Executive Board (IEB).
- Taking back a school’s delegated budget.

3.4 However, the use of these powers is restricted by “protections” for schools which hamper councils from acting quickly and decisively when evidence of school underperformance starts to emerge. The DfE and academy sponsors have much more direct and effective powers to turn around academies that are underperforming. We have pressed the DfE to release councils from these restrictions so councils have the powers they need to fulfil their statutory school improvement duties effectively.

October 2013

Written evidence submitted by Dr John Dunford

1. The knowledge and skills to improve schools lies within the school system. There is, therefore, no point in pretending that there is some magic solution to a school’s problems waiting in County Hall or in the private sector. What is required is a strategic approach to identifying problems and brokering partnerships that can deliver improvement. There is evidence in many schemes, from the London Challenge onwards, that school-to-school support works. Indeed, the evidence is that, in well planned partnerships, the supporting school continues to improve at the same time as the supported school.

2. There are four stages to supporting a school in difficulty:

- (a) Identifying the problem.
- (b) Brokering a solution.
- (c) Commissioning support.
- (d) Delivering support.

3. The identification should statutorily be done by the local authority, but not all are good at this. The brokering has always been the hardest part of these four steps, as there is not always the knowledge of where the good practice lies. The commissioning stage requires a body with funding to pay for support. The delivery stage has been proved to be effective where successful schools that have built capacity to support others are given the task.

4. On brokering, it should be possible to compile a database of excellent practice, using data from local authorities and from headteachers. One organisation that has hitherto played too small a role in encouraging school-to-school support is Ofsted, which has the biggest database of all, but does not put it to sufficient use. That could be the starting point for a comprehensive database of excellent practice.

5. The main incentives for partnership working are funding and accountability, although these incentives are not currently well aligned. In terms of accountability, Ofsted inspections are still focused on individual schools, providing little incentive for schools to develop relationships that inspectors won't necessarily give them credit for. Likewise, the funding system is focused on the individual school, with little incentive for partnership working built in.

6. The funding that is provided to teaching schools declines over time in order to ensure that schools build financially sustainable models, but this can act as a disincentive to take on the additional tasks the role involves.

7. Teaching school alliances represent a good way forward for school-to-school support and other collaboration, such as professional development and leadership development, and the funding to these partnerships should be maintained into the future.

8. A key question is understanding how (rather than whether) collaboration and competition between schools can exist in harmony to improve school performance. They are not mutually exclusive.

9. An important area, not directly raised by the terms of reference, is the inter-relationship between partnerships/cooperation for school improvement and the local authorities' role in school improvement. There are examples of very productive interplay between the two. For instance, a successful school that is supporting a weaker school (as a result of local authority or DfE brokerage) can ask the local authority to consider the use of its statutory powers to act to remove blockages that are preventing improvement.

10. Teaching schools are key to successful school-to-school support in the current model and a great deal of effective work is being done by teaching schools. They have six areas of responsibility: initial teacher training; CPD and leadership training; succession planning and talent management; research and development; school-to-school support; specialist leaders of education. These are sensibly often grouped as four by the teaching schools: initial teacher training; development and succession; school-to-school support, including the deployment of specialist leaders of education; and research.

11. It is early days in the development of teaching schools and too early to come to a judgement about the effectiveness of the model (I am part of a research team engaged in an evaluation of teaching schools for the National College), and there are many productive ways in which alliances are organising their collaboration. Financial sustainability for the teaching schools will not be easy as the central grant diminishes. Other than form-filling for the DfE, accountability is unclear.

12. Small primary schools should collaborate more, both for economic and educational reasons. The government should provide stronger financial incentives to small primary schools to federate. Governing bodies of individual primary schools do not always see the advantages of partnership working, preferring to remain as separate (albeit financial difficult to manage) entities.

13. As partnership working between schools has grown and there has been a welcome shift from the culture of competition that pervaded government policy in the 1980s and 1990s to a culture of collaboration now, there has never been a fully strategic approach to partnership working. The role of local authorities is unclear; field forces of the DfE and other organisations overlap; sticks and carrots are not always used appropriately; policy on teaching schools is in the early stages of development. There is an opportunity for the Select Committee to advocate a more strategic approach and set out some of the principles of how this should operate.

October 2013

Written evidence submitted by OFSTED

This submission is Ofsted's response to the Committee's call for written evidence on school partnerships and cooperation.

It draws upon published findings from the Annual Reports 2010/11 and 2011/12 of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, and Ofsted's best practice reports *Developing leadership: National Support Schools* (2010) and *Leadership of more than one school* (September 2011). It also references internal analyses of samples of Ofsted inspection reports and further survey evidence.

Section 5 and Section 8 inspection reports mainly focus on judging the performance of individual schools. However, where a school is part of a partnership, they do also refer to the effectiveness of those arrangements,

although this aspect is not separately graded. The evidence presented here does not cover all the issues raised by the Committee.

THE DIFFERING FORMS OF SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION AND WHETHER THEY HAVE PARTICULAR ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

1. The different forms of schools partnerships and cooperation include: federations, trusts, learning networks, teaching school alliances and academy chains.

Federations

2. In a federation, the leadership and governance arrangements of more than one school are shared. There are three main reasons for federating:

- An effective school is approached, often by the local authority, to federate with a school causing concern because standards and quality of provision in the latter are not good enough.
- Small schools that are in danger of closing or cannot recruit high quality staff form a federation, in order to increase capacity and protect the quality of education that they provide.
- Schools across different phases federate in order to strengthen the overall education of pupils in a community.

3. Ofsted survey evidence shows that all three types of federation can lead to improved outcomes. Where schools causing concern collaborate with stronger schools, they adopt more systemic approaches to teaching and assessment which lead to more effective learning, higher achievement and better behaviour. Governance is also strengthened. In schools that federate to protect the quality of education, pupils are provided with an enriched curriculum and a wider range of opportunities within and outside the classroom. Through the pooling of resources and expertise, there is also greater capacity to meet the needs of pupils—particularly those with special needs and/or disabilities—more flexibly and swiftly. Cross-phase federations—especially those that adopt a common approach to teaching, learning and assessment—ensure continuity in children’s experiences and enable them to make a smooth and successful transition from primary to secondary school. In all three types of federation, the benefits are most clearly felt where the leaders are of high quality and set ambitious aims which they pursue systematically and rigorously. However, there is no evidence to indicate that one type of leadership structure is more effective than another.

4. Survey findings show that the move to establish a federation can lead parents and staff to express concerns about how the new arrangements will affect them and their children. The distances between schools, especially in rural areas, can limit the flexibility in the use of expertise and resources and therefore detract from the potential advantages of federation. Where schools enter into a federation in order to avoid closure, there is no guarantee that any one of them will be able to provide strong leadership and direction across the partnership. Again, this is potentially a greater problem in isolated rural areas.

Trusts

5. A trust school is a maintained school, supported by a charitable foundation which appoints some of the governors. The involvement of partners is intended to draw on their experience and expertise to strengthen leadership and governance and to help raise standards. A trust can involve one school or a number of schools. Some have been set up by local groups. Others are part of a national arrangement, such as the Cooperative trust.

6. This approach offers the opportunity for the wider community to contribute to the running the school. Representatives of the local business community, voluntary groups, charities, parents, pupils and staff are able to do this through membership of a “Council” or “Forum”. The latter appoints trustees who, in turn, appoint governors. Schools that enter into this type of arrangement retain their independence but have the potential benefits of being able to share expertise and resources with others in the cluster.

7. Ofsted has insufficient evidence to make definitive statements on how well trust arrangements work in practice. It would need to conduct further surveys of inter-school partnerships to make such a judgement.

Learning networks

8. Local authorities have a history of organising their schools into “clusters” or “pyramids” for ease of communication and cooperation, particularly between secondary schools and their associated primary schools. These clusters have tended to be organised by school improvement officers. However, with the increasing emphasis on school-to school support, they are now frequently run by the schools themselves, with a headteacher or consultant headteacher taking responsibility for facilitating the work of the group and brokering additional support from other sources. Academies are often part of these clusters and, in some instances, they are organised by academy heads.

9. These arrangements can be an effective means of maintaining regular communication between schools within and across phases, as well as between schools and the local authority. They can allow for sharing of expertise and the efficient pooling of resources, particularly where staff development is concerned. They can also foster greater continuity in the educational experiences offered to pupils across phases and help to develop

a systematic response to a shared local concern, such as the need to raise standards of literacy. They can be less effective in helping to tackle a problem that is specific to an individual school or small group of schools within an area. This is because that particular concern might not be given equal priority by other members of the group.

Teaching school alliances

10. These are outstanding schools that take lead responsibility for providing and assuring the quality of teacher training in an area. They are also funded to offer professional development for teachers and leaders. The government's intention is that there will be 500 designated teaching school alliances by 2014–15.

11. Teaching schools can make an important contribution to improvement, particularly in terms of raising the quality of leadership. For example, in one local authority visited recently, the teaching schools provided a "leadership curriculum" that was designed to strengthen capacity in all schools in the area and to help identify leaders for the future.

Academy Chains

12. In an academy chain, academies make a commitment to support each other. They can focus on one phase or involve academies from across phases. They can vary in size and the arrangement between schools can be a formal or informal one.

13. Any school can apply to join an existing academy chain. Alternatively, a group of schools could apply together to join the academy programme. They would not have to be working as a federation before doing so.

14. Academy chains are based on types of collaborative structure:

- the multi-academy trust (MAT) where all the schools are governed by one trust and a board of directors;
- an umbrella trust (UT) where each school sets up its own individual academy trust but nominates a representative to sit on a UT which provides shared governance and collaboration between the schools; and
- a collaborative partnership, where there is no formalised governance structure and the schools between them decide on the terms and formalities of any agreement to work together.

15. The advantages of academy chains are similar to those already identified for other forms of collaboration between schools, such as shared resources and expertise, and the resulting increased capacity and economies of scale.

16. As below, Ofsted's inspection evidence on academies indicates that those that belong to chains tend to perform better than stand-alone academies.

How highly performing schools could be better encouraged to cooperate with others

17. Highly performing schools could be incentivised to support, or even take over, weaker schools. This should be a "hard" not a "soft" federation where the lead school takes responsibility for outcomes. Incentives could be financial.

18. Highly performing schools could be encouraged to cooperate with other schools by emphasising the following advantages:

- Evidence gathered by Ofsted shows that collaboration leads to improvements in the higher as well as the lower performing schools in a partnership.
- Leading a partnership gives headteachers and senior and middle leaders increased opportunities to extend their experience which, in turn, lead to greater motivation and the retention of able staff.
- Such an arrangement gives greater kudos and enhanced local reputation for the school providing the support.
- A highly performing school can also learn from the school that it is supporting, as in a recent survey where the assessment arrangements developed by a school requiring improvement were adopted by staff in the "lead" school.

Whether schools have sufficient incentives to form meaningful and lasting relationships with other schools

19. Evidence shows that many schools are ready to form relationships with other schools in order to support improvement. They are motivated to do so by:

- the desire to contribute to raising educational standards and the standard of provision for all children in the local area;
- the opportunities for staff at all levels to share and extend their knowledge, skills and understanding;
- the realisation that collaboration can lead to improvements in the schools that provide, as well as receive, support; and

- the recognition that sharing resources, expertise and training between schools can lead to efficiencies that offset any additional financial pressures resulting from collaboration.

20. In local authorities, the most successful strategies are based on long-term aims to improve outcomes for all and are not simply confined to reducing the number of schools in a category of concern. Therefore, schools that have been helped to improve often continue the partnership with the supporting school, even when they have become good or better. In some instances, that continued collaboration is formalised through membership of federations, trusts, or academy chains.

21. The above evidence comes from evaluations of good practice. It is not possible to generalise from it and to determine whether the incentives for these schools to work in partnership would be sufficient for all schools.

If and how the potential tension between school partnership and cooperation and school choice and competition can be resolved

22. The main vehicle for school improvement is the support provided by one school to another. Strong headteachers, who are often national or local leaders of education:

- provide mentoring and advice to colleagues in other schools;
- take over the leadership of a school in addition to their own; and
- arrange for successful teachers from their own schools to share good practice with the schools requiring improvement.

23. This school-to school support is provided through networks or clusters, federations, trusts and teaching school alliances, which enable the most effective headteachers, teachers and governors to share their practice and raise the standards and quality of provision in an area. Local authorities also play an essential role in supporting and maintaining these partnerships and in establishing strong and effective relationships.

24. Where executive headteachers provide support for weaker schools, there is a danger that the “donor” school could be adversely affected. One strategy to avoid this is to set up an executive governing body, with representatives from the governors of both schools, to monitor the impact of the arrangements and to modify them if necessary. This approach also helps to allay the concerns of teachers and parents of children in the stronger school who might be concerned about the possible deleterious effect of the partnership arrangements.

25. A notable feature of effective partnerships is a shared commitment to ensuring that all children in an area have access to high quality education, regardless of the type of school they attend. As a result, in several instances, academies and faith schools work very closely with schools that are still under the direct control of the local authority.

26. The above evidence shows that it is possible to resolve the potential tensions between partnerships and competition where:

- relationships between schools are strong and mature;
- there is a shared focus on, and commitment to, ensuring that every child in an area has access to high quality education; and
- partners are open and honest about emerging problems and work together to resolve them.

Whether converter academies' requirements to support other schools, included in their funding arrangements, are sufficient and are effectively policed

27. Converter academies are expected to serve their communities. Although not a condition for receiving the grant, each converter academy is asked to name a school that it will support and to identify the type of help it will provide.

28. Ofsted has introduced a programme for inspecting academies, the findings of which have been reported in the last two Annual Reports of HMCI. However, it does not yet have evidence that relates to this question.

29. It may be helpful for Ofsted conduct a detailed survey of the characteristics of effective school-to-school support, including academies, in order to gain greater insight into the issues raised here and in the next question.

Whether academies sponsored by another school receive sufficient support from their sponsor

30. Evidence gathered to date from the inspection of academies indicates that the creation of sponsor-led academies has been largely successful. Many of the schools they replaced were seriously underperforming. However, through strong and rigorous leadership, clear improvements have been achieved. This is particularly the case in those academies that belong to chains. These tend to perform better than stand-alone academies because of the high level of governance, leadership and managerial oversight of the schools in a chain.

31. The most successful chains have robust systems for appointing staff and managing their performance. Monitoring procedures focus very clearly on the quality of teaching and the progress made by pupils. Member academies benefit from the expertise and support of other schools in the chain and from the opportunities for joint professional development and for sharing the most effective practice. The chains enable staff to develop

their leadership skills in a number of ways, including working in other schools in the group. There is unacceptable variation between the performance of different chains.

Whether school partnerships drive effective school improvement

32. As indicated above, partnerships can lead to improvements in:

- teaching and learning;
- achievement and behaviour;
- governance;
- the extent and quality of curricular and extra-curricular provision;
- the arrangements for transition between phases of education;
- the quality of leadership and management of weaker schools; and
- tests and examination results.

33. In all forms of partnership examined, effective leadership was critical to establishing good capacity for sustained improvement.

34. The above evidence comes from good practice surveys. It cannot be assumed that partnerships will inevitably lead to the improvements outlined, though we do have evidence of partnerships supporting better performance.

Whether there are any additional upsides or downsides for highly performing schools supporting others through partnership

35. The advantages and disadvantages of collaborative work have already been discussed. One point to be emphasised is that collaboration will not, in itself, provide a panacea for the problems faced by any school. The success of the collaboration will ultimately depend on the quality of the leadership in identifying an ambitious vision for improvement, a clear strategy for its implementation and a rigorous system for monitoring its effectiveness.

October 2013

Written evidence submitted by Peter Maunder

I offer some brief points following a request by Professor David Hargreaves to describe the nature of our school partnerships in Torbay.

1. PARTNERSHIPS IN TORBAY

1.1 Oldway Primary School is a Cohort 1 National Support School and Cohort 1 National Teaching School. It is a maintained school within Torbay, a small unitary authority.

1.2 Oldway is the lead school for Torbay Teaching School Alliance, encompassing the majority of schools, primary, secondary and special, across Torbay—including converting and sponsored academies that are keen to sustain their relationships with the other schools.

1.3 The Alliance's remit includes providing support for other schools. The initial impact has been very positive. In fact, all schools that were below category have experienced significant improvement and have moved above floor targets.

1.4 The local authority has continued to play an active and supportive role throughout, which has contributed to a sense of collective mission to improve the life chances of pupils in Torbay.

1.5 The initial success of the Teaching School stems from a recently strengthened collaborative relationship between the local authority and schools—which both sides have ensured is sustained.

1.6 Torbay Local Authority was quick to recognise the capacity of the schools not only to deliver improvement but to shape and inform a school-led system in Torbay.

1.7 Prior to designation as a teaching school, Torbay DCS at the time invited a primary headteacher and secondary headteacher to form a "joint" post of Head of School Leadership (each seconded from school for 0.5) and to become part of the Senior Leadership Team.

1.8 With decreasing funding levels and the termination of the National Strategies, the construction of a new policy and direction for school improvement was particularly influenced by David Hargreaves' publication, "Creating and Leading a self-improving system".

1.9 The shift away from a traditional “authority delivered” model of school improvement, predominantly through the use of advisers and consultants, wasn’t easy and clearly not popular with those staff. However, on the back of evidence of already established successful school-to-school support initiatives, combined with well developed relationships between headteachers, the shift was received more enthusiastically than it might have been.

1.10 The success of the Alliance is built on a range of expertise and knowledge across the schools. The local authority used the money saved from employing large numbers of advisers and consultants to commission work from system leaders in schools eg NLEs, LLEs, SLEs

1.11 All school improvement work and leadership development now comes from schools through the Torbay Teaching School Alliance, in partnership with the local authority. The Alliance operates through a Strategic Board and 4 Operational Boards: Leadership Development/Initial Teacher Education/School to School Support/Continuing Professional Development.

1.12 The one adviser from the LA chairs the Teaching Alliance School-to-School Board. This enables a coordinated approach to monitoring performance of schools and the provision of appropriate support.

1.13 The commitment of schools is characterised by the number of headteachers and staff willing to engage in system leadership and collaborative work. There are 5 National Leaders of Education in Torbay, 4 Local Leaders of Education, and 1 National Leader of Governance and 9 Specialist Leaders of Education.

1.14 Different schools lead Teaching & Learning Networks offering leadership development and training in Mathematics, English, Special Educational Needs, ICT, Early Years and Curriculum Development.

1.15 A Leadership Academy provides training and support for serving headteachers, new headteachers and leaders at all levels within schools. A talent register and systematic approach to leadership development and succession planning is in place to support the supply of future headteachers and senior leaders.

1.16 Research and development is core to the work of the Networks, leading as it does to joint practice development. Teachers at all stages of their careers, and including ITE trainees and NQTs, work alongside each other. Findings are disseminated widely across the Alliance

2. CHALLENGES

2.1 Clearly, the success of the Alliance depends upon maintaining high social capital and high levels of trust with all partners : schools, academy chains, federations, HEIs, local authority. There is no long term security.

2.2 The criteria for securing National Teaching School status includes direct references to the headteacher. When a head retires/leaves it places the whole alliance in an uncertain position.

2.3 The funding for Teaching Schools is very low. Additional funding should be made available to fund extra staff to build capacity for school-to-school support work.

2.4 Capacity

(i) All schools must buy in to a collective moral purpose to improve outcomes for all Alliance pupils and not just those in their own school, a stance in sharp relief when placed against competition as presented by performance tables. We want all schools in the area to improve, not at the expense of schools down the road.

(ii) For schools supporting other schools and networks, there is a constant tension between having the best teachers teaching pupils and supporting/coaching in the home school and involvement in outreach work.

(iii) The impact on schools of developing leadership at all levels, being committed to motivating, networking, collaborating, supporting, analysing, challenging, coaching, mentoring at the same time as focussing on pupil improvement: what pupils are learning in a lesson and how they are making progress.

3. IMPACT DATA

OFSTED DATA VIEW AT 31/12/2012

<i>Overall Effectiveness</i>	<i>National 2009</i>	<i>Torbay 2009</i>	<i>National 2010</i>	<i>Torbay 2010</i>	<i>National 2011</i>	<i>Torbay 2011</i>	<i>National 2012</i>	<i>Torbay 2012</i>
<i>All schools</i>								
Good & Outstanding	66	64	68	68	70	70	74	80
Outstanding	16	14	18	19	20	21	21	33
Good	50	50	50	49	50	49	53	47
Satisfactory/RI	32	33	30	28	28	26	23	19
Inadequate	2	3	3	4	2	4	3	0

<i>Pupil Attainment Key Stage 2</i>	<i>National 2009</i>	<i>Torbay 2009</i>	<i>National 2010</i>	<i>Torbay 2010</i>	<i>National 2011</i>	<i>Torbay 2011</i>	<i>National 2012</i>	<i>Torbay 2012</i>
KS2 Lv 4 & above English	79	77	79	x	80	79	84	84
KS2 Lv 4 & above Mathematics	79	77	79	x	80	79	84	84
KS2 2 Lvs Progress English	81	81	83	x	84	81	89	88
KS2 2 Lvs Progress Mathematics	80	80	82	x	83	82	87	88

<i>Pupil Attainment GCSE</i>	<i>National 2009</i>	<i>Torbay 2009</i>	<i>National 2010</i>	<i>Torbay 2010</i>	<i>National 2011</i>	<i>Torbay 2011</i>	<i>National 2012</i>	<i>Torbay 2012</i>
GCSE 5+ A* to C	70	66.8	75.4	75.1	79.5	80.9	81.8	82.4
GCSE 5+ A* to G	92.3	93.1	92.7	94	93.5	95.2	94	96.1
GCSE—Any passes	98.9	99.1	99	99.2	99.2	99.1	99.5	99.8
GCSE 5+ A* to C + Eng & Maths	49.8	53.7	53.5	54.1	58.9	57.2	59.4	60.5

	<i>% Schools below Floor Targets</i>	<i>Torbay 2011</i>	<i>Torbay 2012</i>
Primary		23%	0

October 2013

Written evidence submitted by The Co-operative College

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The education system in England is undergoing the most profound structural change since the passing of the 1944 Education Act. The rapid growth of academies and academy chains has been accompanied by concern about a growing democratic deficit, with the loss of Local Authority (LA) control and weakening of accountability to local stakeholders.

1.2. The Co-operative College has been at the heart of the recent rapid development of co-operative schools. This response helps explain why co-operatives are proving so popular and are so relevant into today's fast changing education landscape. We believe that co-operative schools (trust schools and academies) provide a democratic community based alternative for schools wishing to genuinely partner with other schools within a formal legal structure.

1.3. Despite all-party commitment to co-operatives and mutuals in the public sector, co-operative schools have to work around existing legislation as no provision is made in the relevant acts for Industrial & Provident Societies, the usual legislative form for co-operatives. Recently a 10 minute rule bill introduced by Sheffield MP Meg Munn attempted to rectify this by ensuring any future legislation provides a level playing field for co-operative schools.

1.4 In making this response it is important to note that co-operative schools in England are new. Few more than 3 years old, so evidence of the impact on standards is only now starting to emerge, except for the Co-operative Business and Enterprise School Network, which demonstrates strong performance improvement since 2004.

2. REDUCING THE ROLE OF LAS

2.1. Today's developments in England follow a series of reforms that are fundamentally changing the nature of the education system. Successive governments have substantially reduced the role of LAs in education provision, since the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) in 1988. The 2006 Education and Inspections Act (E&IA), was a key part of that process. It envisaged much more formal collaboration between schools by introducing Trust Schools, encouraging strategic partners to work with schools and bring about a more diverse system.

2.2. The Co-operative College developed a co-operative model for Trust Schools under the Pathfinder programme with the first, Reddish Vale in Stockport, implementing in March 2008.

2.3. Co-operative schools share a number of key characteristics:

- An ethos drawn from the globally shared co-operative values. These are formally recognised in the trust constitution.

- Governance mechanisms that directly engage key stakeholder groups—parents and carers, staff, learners and the local community through membership.
- A curriculum and pedagogy that embraces co-operation, using the global co-operative sector as a learning resource and drawing on co-operative approaches to teaching and learning.

2.4. Most Co-operative Trusts are clusters of schools, providing a legal framework to embed a commitment to improvement through co-operation and collaboration.

2.5. Co-operative school clusters are becoming the predominant model in a number of areas, including West Yorkshire and Humberside as well as in the South West. Many of the larger trusts have grown from existing well established local partnerships. As of 1 May 2013 there are 426 co-operative trust schools with approximately 100 more in the consultation stage.

2.6. In Devon 10 special schools have recently formed a co-operative trust. The Plymouth Association of Primary Headteachers (PAPH), has a co-operative Community Interest Company to deliver a portfolio of services locally and sub-regionally.

2.7. Co-operative Schools have formed a national network, the Schools Co-operative Society (SCS), and it is developing a regional structure.

2.8. “We see this as a stark contrast to the emerging academy chains. SCS is a network owned and directly controlled by co-operative schools. It does not top slice budgets of schools, as is the practice of most of the chains, and even more importantly schools retain their own autonomy and identity.” comments Dave Boston, Chief Executive of the Schools Co-operative Society.

2.9. Today co-operative schools offer a distinct “values driven but faith neutral” contribution to diversity of provision in a rapidly changing education environment.

2.10. The Coalition Government’s emphasis on free schools and academies initially seemed to threaten the development of co-operative trust schools. The Co-operative College responded by working with the DfE to develop a co-operative model for converter academies. The current 31 co-operative academies share many of the characteristics of trust schools, with parents/carers, staff, learners and the local community engaged through membership. The Swanage free school, scheduled to open in 2013, is committed to using a co-operative model building on the active community engagement that led to the successful proposal for the school.

3. IN SUMMARY THEREFORE TO ANSWER THE PARTICULAR QUESTIONS POSED BY THE COMMITTEE WHEN IT INVITED SUBMISSIONS

3.1. *The differing forms of school partnership and cooperation, and whether they have particular advantages and disadvantages?*

3.1.1. There is a need to define what is meant by “school partnerships”—simply calling it this doesn’t mean it is. This was particularly true of the various top-down funded “partnerships” introduced from 1997 onwards. These included Education Action Zones (EAZs) in deprived urban areas, replaced by the Excellence in Cities (EIC) programme and innovations such as Excellence Clusters and later Education Improvement Partnerships (EiPs)

3.1.2. All these models had major flaws however; their legal status was uncertain and access to funding was a prime motivator, rather than the benefits of co-operation and collaboration. A former schools minister summarised such collaboration as “The suppression of mutual hatred in the pursuit of Government money”.

3.1.3. One of the advantages of the post 2006 E&IA foundation trusts was that they conferred a distinct legal structure which protected the governing bodies and other partners who had come together to create it, ensuring they were not liable for the activities which were delivered through the Trust. Vitally the Trust was created as a charitable company limited by guarantee (CLG) and registered as such at Companies House. It also held in trust the land and assets of any school which had made it its legal foundation.

3.1.4. Academy Trusts, including multi- academy and umbrella as well as single school, also have a distinct legal status through their trust, although the vast majority do not hold their land and assets freehold as foundation trusts do.

3.1.5. Perhaps the oddest creation of the last Government affecting education were the “Children’s Trusts”. In many LAs they were a “shotgun marriage” between Education and Social Services Departments leading to the creation of a “one size fits all” model for Children’s Trusts which were often over-sized and bureaucratic, rarely delivering on the vision of the Children’s Plan they were supposed to develop and oversee.

3.1.6. The Co-operative Response:

3.1.7. There is now an opportunity for a much more successful bottom-up school owned and led, “mini and micro” co-operative children’s trust with a real community eye view of their communities. Such models, building membership in their communities could be much more effective in delivering the vision of the Every Child Matters agenda, impacting on every aspect of a child’s life in the community. The 8 strong Brighshaw

Federation in Leeds, one of the country's longest established co-operative trusts, is now delivering with the help of its LA, a growing range of children's services previously provided centrally by the LA.

3.1.8. Through a focus on school to school models of school improvement, a local "community eye" view of how to more effectively (via commissioning) deliver on the Every Child Matters Agenda against a local "Children's Plan," and by virtue of growing increasingly strong local roots through membership engagement, we would expect to see aspiration and achievement improve, particularly so in more socially deprived communities. Being school owned and run, the services brokered and provided via these co-operative school trusts, will make money go further (very important in a time of declining resources) as well as being more effective in terms of impact. Vitality school owned co-operatives provide what schools need, not what someone else thinks they need—and co-operatives will not seek to "short change" their schools. And any savings via joint procurement etc, will stay in the local school system, not be extracted from it by the market/private sector.

3.1.9. *"The benefit of the trust is to work collaboratively and support each other to ensure the best outcomes for children, as well as utilising the strength of numbers to procure products and services more competitively which will enable funds to be reinvested into positive activities for children and young people"*—Incoming NAHT President, Bernadette Hunter, Headteacher of Shakespeare Primary School in Burton on Trent, Staffs, a key driver in the creation of an eight strong local co-operative trust.

3.2. How highly performing schools could better be encouraged to cooperate with others?

3.2.1. From the days of the Pathfinder programme trust schools were supposed to demonstrate how forming a trust partnership would further assist the raising of standards. OFSTED were belatedly asked to report on the impact of being within a trust structure, but not much evidence seems to have been produced.

3.2.2. Many of the pathfinder secondary schools went on to become academies and some became the hub of a local improvement network, or part of one of the new chains. However it would seem that many convertor academies have not taken up the Secondary of State's desire to help raise standards at "weaker" schools.

3.2.3. The Co-operative Response:

3.2.4. Co-operative models are based on mutual aid, sharing responsibility for working with other schools, especially those under some pressure. "We're all in this together"; "mutually we are stronger together" are typical of the reasons given by co-operative school leaders for deciding on the model. This includes a view that schools should work together and take responsibility jointly for securing school improvement. There is also a recognition that working co-operatively helps to avoid duplication and distractions allowing school leaders especially to better focus on the effective leadership of teaching and learning. All schools have strengths as well as weaknesses and a range of development needs, and much to learn from each other.

3.2.5. "What results from working co-operatively", schools often tell us "is generally greater than the sum of its individual parts".

3.2.6. There is no doubt that co-operative schools are increasingly seeing the potential of working together on "school to school" school improvement and supporting schools facing short term difficulties. This provides a co-operative alternative to the "forced take over" model causing alarm in many parts of the country. The Pioneer Co-operative Academy Trust (PACT) in Barnsley became a MAT to sponsor another local school in special measures.

3.2.7. The work of SCS in brokering improvement support and becoming an academy sponsor to formalise this is an example of such co-operation in action.

3.3. Whether schools have sufficient incentives to form meaningful and lasting relationships with other schools?

3.3.1. A key driver has to be strengthening and "future proofing" local partnerships which have often taken years of effort to build. Without a formalised structure built around a clear vision and ethos, successful partnerships can often dissipate with the departure of key figures. Part of the original driver of many foundation trusts was to formalise such partnerships as well as giving it new energy and vitality by bringing in new partners.

3.3.2. The last Government's Trust programme provided up to £10k per school to cover the costs of becoming a foundation school within a trust. The new Government withdrew this, deciding only to fund academy conversions. Many felt this withdrawal and the new Secretary of State's academy policy would see the ending of new trust schools, The consequent surge in Co-operative Trust Schools has surprised almost everyone.

3.3.3. The incentives are not just about funding. The perceived vacuum emerging with the rapid shrinkage of LAs has led many schools especially primary, to look at how and who will fill the gap. Many school leaders are realising that staying as they are—and particularly on their own, is increasingly not an option. Co-operative clusters provide capacity not available to a single school.

3.3.4. The Co-operative Response:

3.3.5. Who is better placed and motivated to fill this vacuum—ethically and mutually, than schools themselves, working to co-operative values?

3.3.6. The common characteristic is a multi-stakeholder co-operative membership structure, an emphasis on co-operative values and principles, plus a strong mutual dimension. We are seeing is the organic creation of a new education sector within the public sector, state funded but school owned and directed; in essence schools formally co-operating through legal mutual structures.

3.3.7. This is genuine localism and many LAs seem to be increasingly appreciating this. It is becoming one of the largest networks of state schools in the country. A major incentive appears to be being an alternative to the loss of sovereignty in Sponsor Academy chains.

3.3.8. “The membership based model, community stake-holding, is about safeguarding these assets for communities in the long term. Co-operative trusts are about mutualisation and not privatisation, groups of schools working strategically together”, states Dr Pat McGovern, Head Teacher, Helston Community College, part of the 18 strong Helston and Lizard Peninsular Trust in Cornwall.

3.4. *If and how the potential tension between school partnership and Co-operation, and school choice and competition can be resolved?*

3.4.1. The Co-operative Response:

3.4.2. “I want to see my school do well but not at the expense of ‘doing down’ someone else’s.” Brett Dye, Headteacher of Parc Eglos Primary School Helston, an outstanding school in the local co-operative school trust.

3.4.3. This does come down to values and ways of working. Obviously competition of a kind will exist between schools, especially when parental choice remains at the core of admissions policies. However we are finding that co-operative schools are thriving in all kinds of contexts.

3.4.4. Plymouth provides some good examples here. The secondary market is very competitive but Lipson Co-operative Academy’s recent OFSTED makes for inspiring reading particularly its work in developing its young people as fully rounded citizens. In nearby Devonport, Pilgrim Primary School has gone from “satisfactory” to “outstanding” in just over 3 years, whilst “across the water” in East Cornwall, Torpoint Community College heads the Financial Times top 50 most improved secondary schools.

3.5. *Whether academies sponsored by another school receive sufficient support from their sponsor?*

3.5.1. The funding agreements brokered by the DfE/OSC often seem to lack transparency with the sponsor able to make additional charges for discrete items. The “levy” on the sponsored school’s budget also seems to vary greatly.

3.5.2. The Co-operative Response:

3.5.3. There are a steadily growing number of co-operative converter academies and SCS itself has become an accredited academy sponsor. There are also a small but growing number of locally based co-operative multi-academy trusts (MATS).

3.5.4. Support should be properly brokered and based on mutual respect not imposed. There is also an issue about capacity. Taking support from one sponsor academy only, particularly where it is supporting a number of schools, often drains capacity, However if a number of schools are working mutually together to support a school with a lead school overseeing delivery of the support, in consultation with the school being supported and the other schools involved, provides much greater capacity—and much less “doing to”.

3.6. *Whether school partnerships drive effective school improvement?*

3.6.1. The Co-operative Response:

3.6.2. The most effective school improvement work we believe comes from situations where schools mutually respect each other, work co-operatively and take responsibility for their own improvement and associated development. Its sustainability is strengthened immeasurably in the medium to long term, by the positive impact the stakeholding model has on aspirations and thereby attainment.

3.6.3. The co-operative trust model adds another dimension by allowing the trust to grow strong local roots by being itself a membership based co-operative. This provides a unique aspect in that as its membership expands over time and levels of engagement, particularly parental engagement grows. It impacts positively on levels of aspiration locally, particularly where they are low and/or differential across an area. This formal stakeholder engagement aspect, especially of parents, is a special feature of co-operative trusts and definitely a vital element in helping to make school improvement strategies much more sustainable in the medium to long term.

3.6.4. We believe there is no evidence to date, particularly in the primary sector, which indicates that a sponsored academy model is the only valid means of securing rapid and sustainable school improvement, in

schools facing performance pressures. Federations and foundation trusts are not mutually exclusive and certainly both offer valid school improvement models.

3.6.5. A good example of this is the work being done within the Tiverton Co-operative Learning Partnership in Devon with a local primary school which “requires improvement”. Similar work is going on in other co-operative trusts including St Clere’s in Thurrock, the Wednesbury Learning Partnership in Sandwell which has got a very strong Teaching and Learning Focus as well as the 11 co-operative secondary schools in Devon who are now pooling aspects of their school improvement work.

3.6.6. The following quote from recent OFSTED monitoring visits demonstrate the role of mutual support via trusts:

3.6.7. *“The school is part of a collaborative trust comprising several local primary schools and the local high school. Collectively, they are providing some effective leadership, teaching and learning and assessment support, advice and guidance which are helping to accelerate the school’s improvement. By pooling resources, they have made a number of joint appointments, including literacy and numeracy strategy leaders to embed excellent practice across the trust and boost pupils’ achievement”.* (Great Preston VC 26/3/13)

3.7. *Whether there are any additional upsides or downsides for highly performing schools supporting others through partnerships?*

3.7.1. Questions need to be asked as to whether the expectations on converter academies to support other schools, included in their funding agreements, are being delivered.

3.7.2. The Co-operative Response:

3.7.3. As many headteachers will state: “we are just one OFSTED away from being under pressure, particularly under the new Framework”. There are also too many instances of “under-performing” schools which are being supported by highly performing schools as part of an intervention programme, slipping back when after having made the desired progress in the requisite time-scale, the intervention package ceases. Sustainability is a huge factor. We believe that the stake-holding nature of co-operative trusts assists such sustainability as do the co-operative ways of working and associated values—everyone has to contribute and all take responsibility.

4. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON CO-OPERATIVE SCHOOLS

4.1. <http://www.co-op.ac.uk/schools-and-young-people/co-operative-trusts-academies/>
www.cooperativeschools.coop or email schools@co-op.ac.uk.

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