**Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives**

Expanding leadership horizons

Leaders learning from practice

NCSL's Leadership Network
regional initiatives 2006-07

Leaders learning from practice

NCSL's Leadership Network exists to support school leaders in finding local solutions to national issues. This series of booklets aims to share what leaders working in regional networks have learnt through some specific initiatives.

NCSL's Leadership Network

The National College for School Leadership's (NCSL) Leadership Network aims to represent school leaders from all phases, as active members of the College, contributing to leadership learning and drawing policy issues from professional practice. Building on its ability to link policy and practice, the Network's aspiration is to bring the best of school leadership into local, regional and national debate. Full membership is open to all school leaders. In addition, others involved in education-related roles, such as local authority officers, education consultants, higher education institution (HEI) staff and those working in an international context, are able to join the Network as associate members. Two regional leaders in each region lead the Network. They are serving headteachers who work part time for two years, promoting the Network and engaging other school leaders.

The Network was established four years ago. Membership has grown dramatically over the past year, rising from 488 to 5,500 between June 2006 and December 2007.

Regional initiatives

Regional initiatives are planned by regional leaders with other school leaders, to explore particular issues or develop specific approaches on locally relevant themes.

This booklet presents material drawn from Leadership Network regional initiatives in 2006-07. It provides project summaries, examples and lessons from practice, and insight into the impact achieved to prompt you to consider the next steps to action in your own situation.

Expanding horizons: lessons from Leadership Network regional initiatives, 2006-07

The initiatives presented in this booklet were developed and delivered by regional networks in 2006-07. They were promoted and coordinated by the Leadership Network regional leaders as part of their role. NCSL has supported activities through provision of research, practice examples and expertise to run training or briefing events.

Each of the nine regional networks received a modest amount of funding to enable them to identify a development theme of local interest or concern and to engage school leaders in relevant activities. In several regions, similar issues emerged and approaches to solutions were shared. The timeframe was tight, but the results demonstrate the potential impact of local action like this.

The evidence on which this booklet is based was drawn from project reports and from interviews with regional leaders and a range of school leaders who participated in the initiatives.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide insight into the regional initiatives. They have been grouped according to three of NCSL's corporate goals (Develop leadership within and beyond the school, Identify and grow tomorrow's leaders, Develop excellent school leadership to transform children's achievement and well being).

For each theme there is a summary of the initiatives undertaken and what prompted participation in them. Examples from practice are presented that give an indication of the kind of activities that were pursued. Area's of impact at individual and school levels are highlighted within this booklet and indicate the key aspects that must be in place to secure success. The 'Next steps…' activity is designed to encourage you to consider relevance to your own situation and needs. References to further resources are provided where available.

The final section pulls together some significant common lessons. These are offered as contributions to help shape current and forthcoming regional initiatives and other projects that share similar processes or themes.

Developing leadership within and beyond the school

Two regional networks tackled leadership learning to explore thinking about the future of schooling and the curriculum. Both initiatives engaged school leaders in research and dialogue beyond their own schools. Participants looked for inspiration and challenge to existing structural models and practice and were introduced to ideas that stimulated them to re-imagine their own school offer.

Futures thinking in the East Midlands

The Futures project with the East Midland Leadership Centre grew out of an aspiration to help school leaders shift into a more creative and dynamic approach to curriculum thinking. The concept was developed by the regional leader with one head who had been extensively involved in the FutureSight project with NCSL and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The idea was to take school leaders beyond "cosy conversations" with their peers and into a "depth of debate not normally possible".
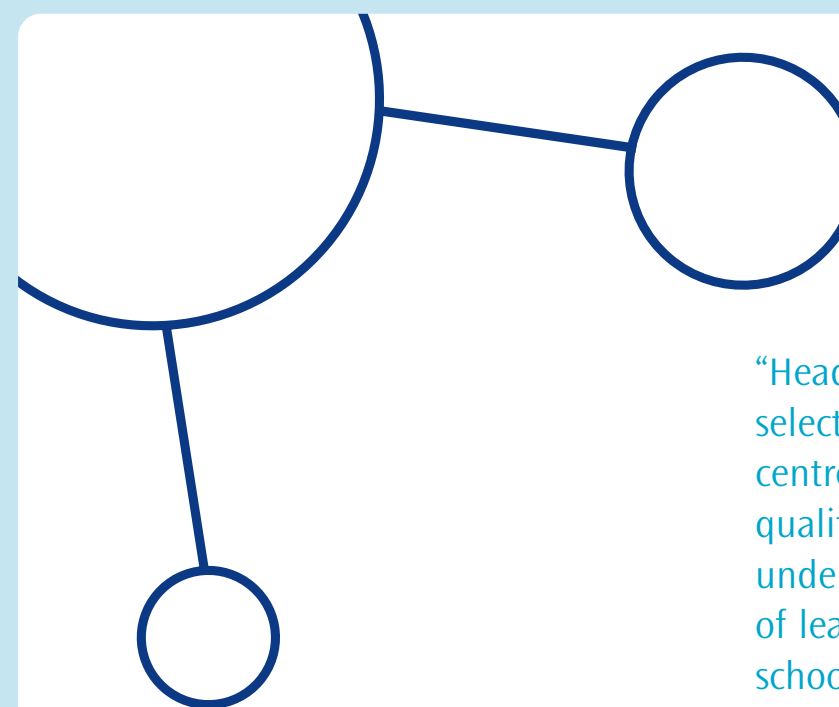
Dialogues were set up, each between a school leader and a noted leader from another field – public, private, religious, community – with the aim of producing a structured think piece sharply focused on the future of learning. A training session used OECD scenarios to familiarise heads with the concepts and generate individual interests. A business consultant sourced and matched 'partners'. Frameworks were produced as guides to ensure the conversations and think pieces reflected the dual perspectives. Dissemination so far has been through publications and events.

Example from practice

The head was already sharing leadership practice and thought this sounded like a good idea. "It makes the job exciting – leaders should be engaged like this."

The head and a colleague from the senior leadership team (SLT) attended the training day. The briefing and activities enabled them to identify a focus: "we wanted to go into a business, look at what they thought were important areas to invest in to do with environmental change, bring it back to education, see how it relates and what we should be doing to respond".

They agreed to participate as a pair. This meant that they could share preparation and interviewing. Once their 'partner' organisation had been identified, they researched it on the internet, checked with contacts for their views, held discussions within school and then thought about "what we wanted to know: our agenda". At the interview, the head led and her colleague acted as scribe and asked any follow-up questions. He helped with writing and dissemination.
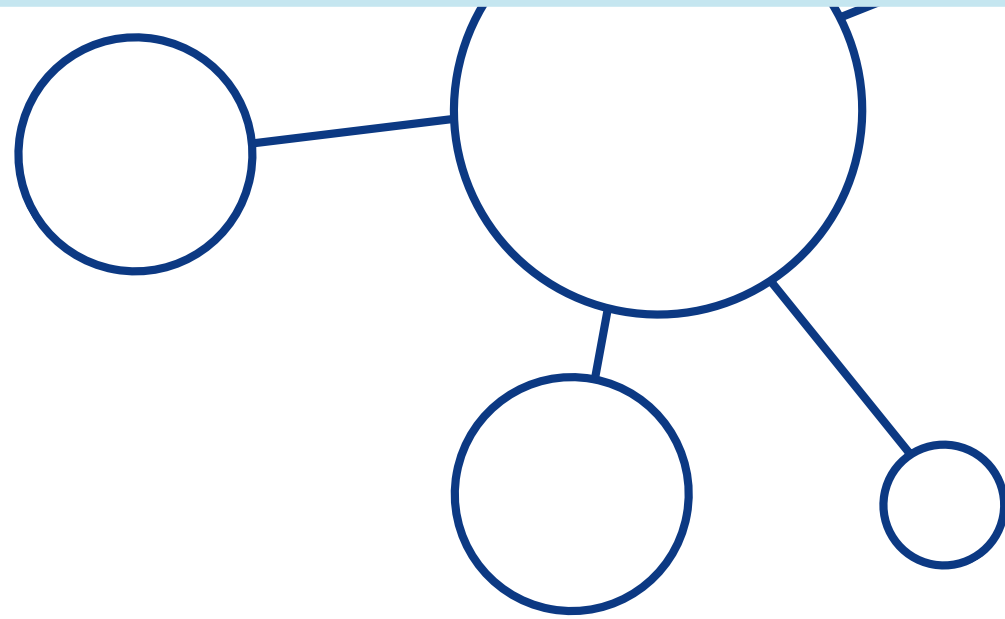
South East leaders of a 21st century curriculum

The initiative in the South East was designed to build on NCSL's joint 2005 project with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Presentations from participating schools in the region had generated substantial interest in creative approaches to curriculum design and delivery within schools for whom this was a fresh departure and those that had already identified development needs. This positive experience linked powerfully for the regional leader with her desire to work proactively with teachers and middle leaders early in their careers. Via the Leadership Network e-newsletter, she invited schools to contact her, followed this up and then sought 'host' schools with innovative practice beyond respective local authorities for the visits.

Requirements for each school included:

- two teachers as 'initiative leaders' to undertake a focused/research visit;
- a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) to act as a mentor throughout, including supporting accreditation by the Teacher Learning Academy (TLA) of the General Teaching Council for England (GTC);
- a meeting with the SLT to agree the focus; liaison with the host school to agree the agenda for the study visit;
- a day visit to include observations and discussions about leadership issues in leading and implementing curriculum development;
- time to prepare a presentation for the SLT and staff to share practice and leadership principles; trialling of practice and application of leadership ideas;
- time to write up a short case study evaluating the impact on self and school to contribute towards TLA accreditation;
- support for NCSL evaluation.

Impact on developing leadership within and beyond the school

The Futures project

- "The impact on heads was profound and immediate." Heads could also see that the business leaders felt constructively challenged.
- It questioned one school's thinking on sustainability activities, and required it to reason things through differently. "It was a real challenge, even for an experienced head."
- "It encourages you to think outside the norm – in a wild way. Consideration of time versus experience was one significant point… learning can't be delivered in timed boxes in a linear way."
- The project updated the OECD scenarios. The dimension of sustainability was not identified in 2001. This is an arresting change.
- Wider impact is planned through a launch conference and development of a process toolkit that will support and prompt effective usage of the think pieces.

21st century curriculum

- All schools intend to draw on the learning as a basis for developing their own curriculum initiatives and most have already trialled changes to powerful effect.
- There has been a demonstrable impact at early/middle leader level. Staff have reflected on the leadership practice observed and this has strengthened their own confidence and influenced career decisions. Some have already been promoted.

Lessons from practice

- The need for curriculum development and change is probably one of the most powerful levers in engaging headteachers and other school leaders in sharpening their thinking and practice.
- A coordinator to research, match and broker potential partners or hosts is useful as this process is time-consuming and requires independent, critical analysis.
- Frameworks, guidance and protocols are essential tools to ensure participants stay on track and can more easily share outcomes.
- It is good to work with a colleague as a learning partner.
- Preparation, recording and reporting are also essential and time needs to be specifically allocated to these tasks.

Next steps to developing leadership within and beyond the school…

To what degree do you recognise and share these issues and needs?

What are the next steps to action for you and your school?

Use this space to record your thoughts and ideas.

Information and resources

1 An overview and toolkit about the 2001 NCSL and OECD project can be found under 'FutureSight': www.ncsl.org.uk/publications
2 Seven think pieces from the Futures project are available on www.ncsl.org.uk Type 'Futures project think pieces' into the search box.

Identifying and growing tomorrow's leaders

About half of the regional initiatives focused on this theme. Regional and school leaders are clearly concerned about building leadership capacity in their schools and succession planning, not only to serve the interests of individual institutions but as part of action to address a national priority. Many school leaders were keen to participate and trial solutions that would benefit both the individuals involved and their own schools, and to contribute to wider learning about strategies that would work.

Succession planning and capacity building in Yorkshire and Humberside

Regional leaders in Yorkshire and Humberside wanted to apply a systems approach. They were acutely aware of capacity as a common problem, but also that there were some models already being tested in the region. The purpose agreed was to investigate, trial and analyse a range of solutions. Schools were invited to attend an introductory workshop.

There were four stages to the process adopted:

1   An initial 'data capture day' was structured around discussion in small groups according to school phase. In the morning, SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis and 'As is' / 'To be' activities generated a gap analysis and identified barriers that prompted ideas for research. In the afternoon, schools planned the investigative work that would help them to get to the 'to be' phase and agreed a format for record keeping.

2   School actions extended for about two months. Focuses included:
   • examining the impact of co-headship;
   • leader shadowing to achieve a better understanding of role;
   • peer coaching for assistant heads;
   • mini-internships within a school;
   • a task group to review succession planning related to their own head;
   • developing policies and structures for leadership support.

3   At a follow-up day, issues and progress were shared. Everyone gave feedback on what had and what had not worked, with fuller contributions on some of the projects.

4   School pairs kept records and produced short summaries or a case study for dissemination.

An external consultant was involved at all stages with a remit to keep and review records and critique developments.

Researching SLT secondments in the West Midlands

In the West Midlands, the Leadership Network initiative offered the chance to research the use and value of secondments as a succession planning tool. One senior leader in the region sent out a questionnaire to the membership and followed up some of the responses that indicated innovative practice with telephone calls and visits.

As a strategy, secondments can powerfully combine a very real need that a school may have for an interim leader with an opportunity for individual professional development that tests leadership potential.

Research identified two scenarios:

• New part-time roles for headteachers, to work with NCSL for example, are offering temporary vacancies within schools. There is a chance for those already in the SLT to step up.

• Schools that have an SLT vacancy and a number of good internal candidates who may be unsure about their capabilities can hold back from an immediate appointment and enable individuals to sample the role for the short term.

Example from practice

In one school, four middle leaders were invited to take on some SLT responsibility for one term each, while still maintaining their head of department role. They saw this as a great opportunity for gaining a whole-school perspective and for self-development. Candidates applied by letter, outlining what they hoped to achieve.

One clarified SLT expectations with the head. The response was refreshing: "Come and be part of the team and expect to make a contribution". He has attended SLT meetings, undertaken some administration and lunchtime duties and has represented the school on a number of external groups.

He has kept notes of key points and is intending to write these up and share observations with the head.

Five regions trialled internships as a solution. The model was developed from experience in the South West of job swaps within SLTs to inform and facilitate a post-16 schools merger. The regional leader felt that a similar approach would help address the issues related to succession planning, particularly that of changing the perceptions about the headteacher or SLT role through allowing the intern to "get into the molecular structure of leadership teams".

The internship process model

Most regions used a similar process model:

1   Regional leaders contacted schools to gauge interest or used intermediaries as advocates, such as regional leadership centres or headteacher groups.

2   Regional leaders responded to interested heads and asked them to identify a potential intern based on certain criteria. Some heads also offered to act as hosts.

3   Regional leaders planned by writing protocols, designing an introductory session, sourcing host schools and matching interns with hosts.

4   Regional leaders held a workshop to launch the initiative with the prospective interns and heads. In several regions, use of the National Standards for Headship was proposed to help shape interns' research focuses. Many placements were to operate on a 'swap' basis so pairs of interns met each other and agreed the next steps.

5   Interns visited their host school to talk to the head and/or their 'partner' about their aims and aspirations for the project, to discuss programme options and meet key contacts.

6   Dates and a programme were agreed. For the majority, learning was framed at three levels: for the individual intern, for the host school and for the intern's school. Programmes sought to reflect these intentions.

7   Interns prepared by reading key documents, constructing enquiry questions and, in some cases, drafting an information sheet or intranet page for staff in their host school.

8   Internships were generally 4-5 days, mostly consecutive. Interns kept reflective notes and some had report writing time incorporated. At the end of the placement, some interns gave feedback or presentations to their hosts.

9   In most regions, there was a final conference for interns and heads to share their experience and learning outcomes.

10 Interns followed up on individual and school level actions.

Internships for senior leaders in the North East, East and the South West

SLT interns were commonly on or coming to the end of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) but were unsure about their readiness to take the next step. Some had been at their school for a substantial time (two for 20+ years), and wished to test out if their skills were transferable. All wanted to experience how another school's leadership worked and the impact of a different vision and school community on practice. Most were also seeking ideas on specific themes they could evaluate for their own school's context.

Common activities were: discussions with the head and accompanying her/him on duties, to meetings with parents and to external meetings; attending SLT and staff meetings; participating in any staff strategy events; and interviewing key senior staff.

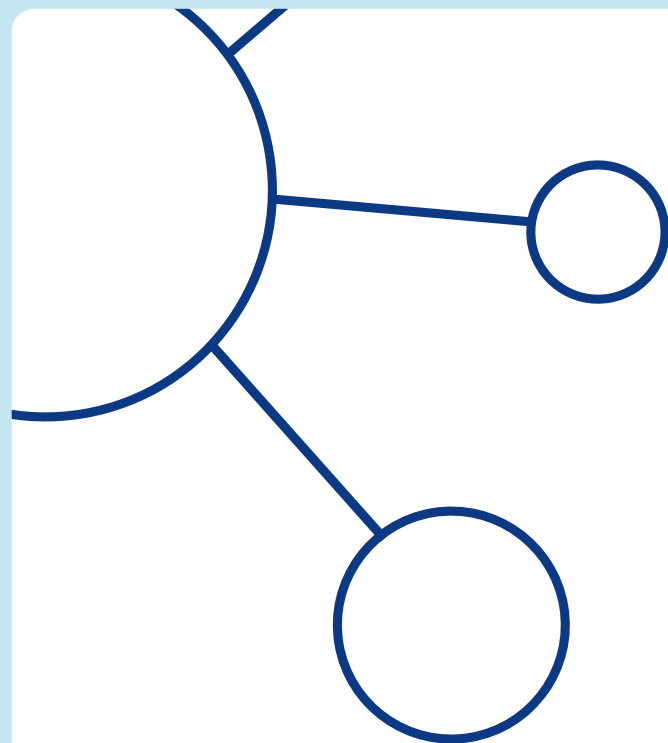## Internships for middle leaders in the West Midlands and London

Heads were briefed to select interns with leadership potential who had not yet started NPQH. Example focuses were:

• How a new initiative could be sustained in a school.
• How leadership values are reflected and the sort of community that creates.
• The relationship between leadership styles and being a successful school.

Example from practice

The intern kept a logbook. This "worked really well". She checked that staff observed felt comfortable about note taking and she shared her notes as she went along. "I tried to imagine how I would feel with someone writing notes. I wasn't going to keep anything a secret". She used these at her daily and final meetings with the head.

In the West Midlands, the TLA criteria provided a structure for the final report. This gave the option of accreditation.

Impact on tomorrow's leaders

- All the schools involved in the capacity building analysis and trialling have experienced benefits of individual relevance. The project has confirmed that there is an issue and that the solutions are many.
- Staff participating in shadowing, secondments and internships have all reported an impact on their aspirations, confidence and sense of capability: "It's been positive in persuading me to see my own potential". For many, it has "brought horizons forward"; several have already achieved promotion to more senior positions or have signed on for NPQH.
- Local authorities can play a useful facilitative role, for example through training, advising or brokering.
- Staff reported leadership learning related to insights into the philosophy, values, strategy, operation and practice of schools; broader awareness of whole-school issues; deeper understanding of leadership practice; and changed perceptions about SLT roles and the way they might undertake their own existing roles.
- Some schools have maintained their links and are initiating similar learning opportunities for staff based on an exchange principle.

Lessons from practice

- The best experiences took staff "out of their comfort zone". The message was: "Challenge yourself".
- Choose a week or timings when key staff are there and things are happening, and to accommodate pressures in both schools, if required.
- Preparation is important: for the individual involved and for shaping expectations at the host school that "doors should be open".
- It is critical that the host headteacher is fully committed and prepared to dedicate time for reflective discussion, daily if possible.
- A clear focus is necessary in order to stay on track and make the most of opportunities. However, it is useful not to be too rigid.
- Protocols must be agreed related to aspects such as staff selection, poaching of staff, confidentiality and feedback: "it was not our place to change things".
- Reflection and recording are necessities: "this is as important as the experience".
- This is powerful CPD. Schools are particularly enthusiastic about internships and would like to use this approach again.

Next steps to identifying and growing tomorrow's leaders....

To what degree do you recognise and share these issues and needs?

What are the next steps to action for you and your school?

Use this space to record your thoughts and ideas.

Information and resources

1 For more information about strategies and tools related to this theme, check: www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday
2 For more information about the General Teaching Council for England's TLA and its framework, see: www.gtce.org.uk/tla
3 National Standards for Headteachers can be found at: http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk

Transforming children's achievement and well-being through excellent school leadership

The North West region was interested in extending implementation of the within-school variation (WSV) project begun by NCSL in 2003. The participating schools were well aware of their own issues, had undertaken research and most had begun to address inconsistencies. The initiative gave them the opportunity to learn about new strategies and to trial approaches stimulated by the NCSL WSV model.
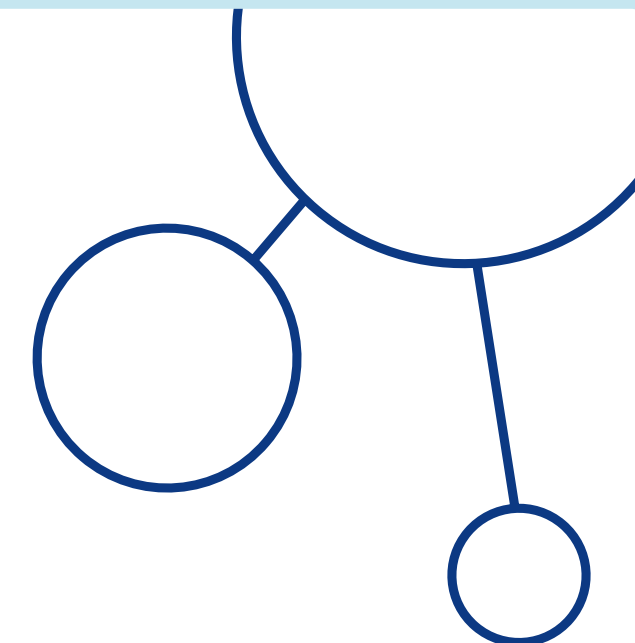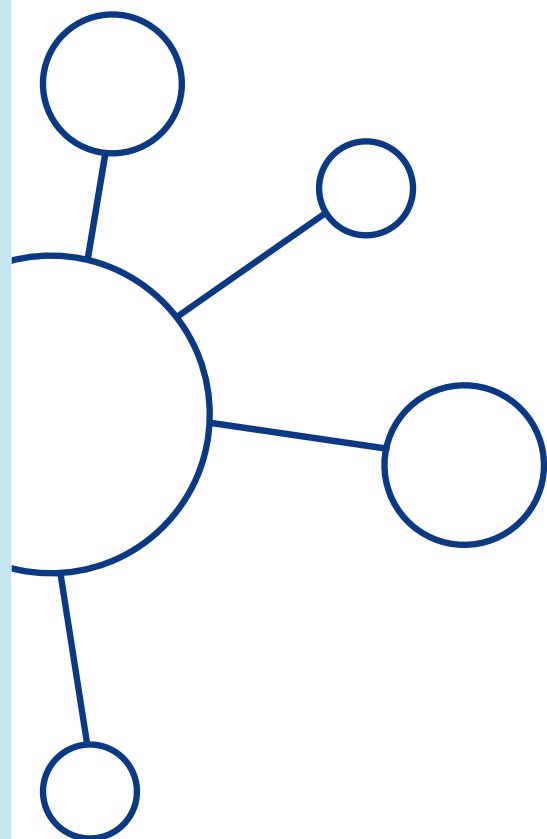
The WSV model

Four levers emerged from the initial Leadership Network projects to achieve reductions in WSV:

- a specific focus on the collection, analysis, interpretation and use of data;
- a focus on the development of middle leaders and learning from the innovative practice of others in the school;
- a consistent application of standard operating procedures;
- the central importance of creating opportunities for children and students to offer their ideas about how teaching and learning could be improved.

Developing leadership to address WSV: two examples

School 1: previous strategies included use of staff development time to share practice and talking to children about their learning. The school has adopted a combination of WSV levers. A learning action team of curriculum middle leaders and pupils is fact-finding through a survey of pupils, observing lessons and conducting enquiries as a prelude to giving feedback. The team has met regularly with the SLT and presented to governors. A second focus has been to standardise operating procedures related to data analysis to ensure staff are clear on purpose and to improve understanding and usage. Priorities are now incorporated into the school development plan.

School 2: this school had started to undertake analysis on the range of performance levels across subject departments. The initiative encouraged the school to concentrate on two priorities: Mathematics to be as good as English and the boys to perform as well as the girls. Elements included data analysis, peer observation, examining the quality of teaching and learning, the development of a coaching model utilising staff with demonstrable strengths and reviewing the coherence and consistency of policies.

Impact on children's achievement

- "Best ever SATS; we are reducing gaps in children's learning… children are operating more effectively and consistently."
- "Improved entry levels to Maths tests and results improved significantly; we have narrowed the gap between boys and girls."

…But heads cautioned that it is difficult to separate out the variables.

Impact on systems and processes

- Pupil voice: "There is a real focus on asking children their views – asking them to feed back on where they see good teaching happening…. Staff have had an open attitude towards that – it's the start of a culture change".
- Continuous professional development (CPD): one school has changed the way it thinks about professional development. There is much more emphasis on identifying effective in-house practice and enabling it to be shared through workshops. This has "raised the sense of esteem in the school". Coaching is receiving positive feedback and this is being built into CPD. It is encouraging a more cross-departmental approach focused on shared themes and issues.
- Use of data: "We have a clear idea of where pupils are". Staff now recognise this is key.
- Learning: "We have agreed a consistent strategy around language learning. This provides resources with a common structure as a prompt in each classroom that can extend to become more complex".

Lessons from practice

- The launch conference engaged schools through providing examples from the research projects and enabling exploration of the levers and their application to the schools' own context.
- It encouraged schools to be more analytical.
- The initiative gave impetus and opportunity to network locally on a common focus. It would have been beneficial to have shared outcomes at the end of the initiative.

Next steps to transforming children's achievement and well-being...

To what degree do you recognise and share these issues and needs?

What are the next steps to action for you and your school?

Use this space to record
your thoughts and ideas.

Information and resources

1 Narrowing the gap. Reducing within-school variation in pupil outcomes, March 2006
A guide to WSV that draws on the NCSL research projects.
See www.ncsl.org.uk/publications Search for the above title under 'N' in the A-Z listing.

Lessons from practice

Sharing leadership learning

It is evident from the activities reported that existing and potential school leaders see huge value in working together on learning about leadership. Collaboration that was focused on a shared purpose acted as a motivator and stimulated enthusiasm and commitment. A process that drew on the ideas, research and exemplars of others served to further energise and inform this sense of joint enterprise and collective progress. The community thus generated also appreciated the opportunity to come together and share the outcomes of learning. This provided a fruitful arena for celebration of achievements, analysis of success factors and exchange of practice.

One aspect that was under-developed within the initiatives was the dissemination of experiences and lessons beyond the immediate community group. This was generally not discussed or planned adequately, perhaps because the outcomes were relatively uncertain and the time frame short. NCSL might play a more proactive role here.

Shaping an initiative

A number of key features emerged as important, even critical, for an initiative to be successful:

- selection of an issue that has meaning for a large enough number of potential participants and about which learning matters to the whole regional and national network;
- a dedicated coordinator with sufficient time to lead and manage;
- an adequate timescale and some financial resources;
- events to mark and inform the beginning and the close of the project;
- frameworks and/or protocols to guide participation and help with management and monitoring;
- a dissemination strategy to ensure that learning is formally shared;
- an evaluation that is designed at the same point as the initiative and that has both formative and summative elements.

Individual involvement and responsibility

Many of the initiatives described in this booklet offered personal benefits to the individual participants, sometimes greater than those for their organisation. All of the school leaders took their responsibilities seriously and sought to identify where their own leadership learning could contribute to institutional development.

Aspects that optimised individual value were:

- thorough preparation that sought to foresee experiences and address any ethical issues as well as practical matters;
- individuals stepping out of their comfort zone and challenging themselves;
- clarity of focus on leadership learning, with activities determined by this;
- a reflection, recording and reporting process that ensured lessons were not lost and thinking and outcomes could be shared.

Context matters

All of the initiatives included a powerful component that consisted of evaluating research, models or practice, followed by consideration about what was transferable, why and how. In some projects this happened through hearing about research or descriptions of experience and in others it was through individual, personal immersion. What emerged as key was the importance of developing an understanding of both the 'unknown' context in order to appreciate what had been attempted and learned and the 'home' context to enable assessment of the potential for application and fit with an institution's own goals.

One critical factor that facilitated learning of this sort was the preparedness of the school leaders participating to be open and honest and to share and question their own values, strategies, rationales and experiences.

Publications and resources also available from NCSL

- **NCSL programmes** for school leaders at all levels. **www.ncsl.org.uk/programmes**

- **Publications and resources** available to download and order. **www.ncsl.org.uk/publications**

- **The Leadership Network** brings together the experience and ideas of school leaders across the country to create a powerful focus for change and development in school leadership. **www.ncsl.org.uk/leadershipnetwork**

- **The Leadership Library** is a free unique resource bringing together some of the best leadership and management thinking from around the world. **www.ncsl.org.uk/Leadershiplibrary**

- **The Learning Gateway** is a single access point to all NCSL's online learning tools and resources. It provides access to talk2learn, a vibrant online community of over 120,000 members. **www.ncsl.org.uk/learninggateway**

- The **Tomorrow's Leaders** Today campaign is about finding, developing and keeping great headteachers.**www.ncsl.org.uk/tomorrowsleaderstoday**