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# Mid-point evaluation of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Tranche 1 Pathfinder Project

July 2014



**Evidence for  
Excellence in  
Education**

# Mid-point evaluation of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Tranche 1 Pathfinder Project

## **Audience**

Schools, consortia and other organisations interested in school-to-school collaborative working.

## **Overview**

This report presents the findings of an evaluation carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project. The aim of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project is to raise standards within primary and secondary schools in Wales by facilitating school-to-school support, with the aim of accelerating improvement.

## **Action required**

None – for information only.

## **Further information**

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## **Additional copies**

This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at [learning.wales.gov.uk](http://learning.wales.gov.uk)

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# Executive summary

## Introduction to the research

This report presents the findings from an evaluation carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project. The study also involved equipping participating schools with a standardised self-evaluation tool that would enable them to document and evaluate their journey towards improvement.

Commissioned by the Welsh Government, this report explores why schools became involved in the Pathfinder and the project's early and emerging outcomes. It also explores the factors that have enabled or constrained improvements in schools, and the extent to which participating schools' capability to drive their own improvement has been enhanced.

The aim of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project is to raise the standards within primary and secondary schools in Wales by facilitating school-to-school support, with the aim of accelerating improvement. During the Pathfinder, a Lead Practitioner School works with an Emerging Practitioner School to disseminate and implement best practice on a systematic basis for 18 months as set out in an intervention plan agreed with the Emerging Practitioner School (referred to as the Partnership Plan).

Tranche 1 of the project was launched in May 2013, for 11 matched pairs of secondary schools and also 11 matched pairs of primary schools (43 schools in total – one lead secondary school is supporting two separate emerging schools). The research was undertaken in March 2014. As such, this report provides an interim assessment of the performance of the Pathfinder midway through Tranche 1.

## Research methods

The study comprised three strands:

- a review of school Partnership Plans
- development of a self-evaluation toolkit
- case-study visits to 39 schools comprising interviews with headteachers, deputy/assistant headteachers, subject leaders and classroom teachers in both Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools.

## Experience of the Pathfinder

The main reasons cited by case-study participants for taking part in the Pathfinder varied between schools, with headteachers from Lead Practitioner Schools most frequently reporting that they viewed the Pathfinder as an opportunity to share good

practice and to 'give something back'. By contrast, many of the interviewees in the Emerging Practitioner Schools reported that they joined the Pathfinder because it offered the potential to bring in the support and expertise they needed.

### **Views on partnership relationships**

School-to-school relationships could be grouped into what could be broadly described as relationships that were 'excellent/good', 'mixed' and 'poor/not so good'. The first category typified the majority of relationships between Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools. These partnerships were characterised by schools that were: close in terms of geographical location; committed to the project and shared mutual respect; and similar in terms of characteristics, ethos and priorities. In the minority of partnerships, where relationships were not so good, there were problems of geography (some schools felt their partners were too close, while others were too far away), personality clashes between staff and inequitable distribution of funding.

### **Impacts on teachers' professional practice**

The evaluation evidence revealed that the Pathfinder had impacted on teaching practice in several ways. For example, it had encouraged and supported school staff to reflect on their teaching practice; increased school leaders', teachers' and teaching assistants' awareness of different teaching methods and styles; and it had enabled staff to develop their teaching skills further through the sharing of practice and joint continuing professional development (CPD). Examples of changes and gains in participating **primary schools** included: varying the pace of lessons; gaining a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of using phonics in teaching reading; and developing a more differentiated approach to the teaching of mathematics. **Secondary schools** reported impacts including increased professional dialogue and exchange of practice and developing an extended repertoire of planning, teaching, assessment and tracking skills.

### **Impacts at the whole-school level**

The evaluation also found evidence of school-level changes amongst Pathfinder schools. The impact was mainly on school ethos and culture and staff attitudes to improving performance. However, a few senior leaders said that it was difficult to assess school-level changes as all departments, subject leaders and teachers had not yet participated. Staff in **primary schools** reported several school-level changes which were based on increased professional reflection and benchmarking, while staff in **secondary schools** reported that they had developed a more open culture where staff were willing to share and accept suggestions for improvement.

### **Impacts on pupils and learning**

School staff prefaced their observations and comments on the effect of participating in the Pathfinder on pupils and learning by saying that it was too early to measure impact on educational outcomes such as achievement and attainment. However,

they were confident that there would be some measurable impacts during the next year. Staff maintained that changes to the way teachers were working, particularly their constantly striving for better outcomes, were likely to have an impact on pupils' performance given time. Staff in **primary schools** reported that pupils' expectations of what they could achieve had been raised, and that teachers were delivering better quality lessons which were more effectively challenging and motivating pupils. Similarly, **secondary school** staff reported that there was some evidence that pupils were making more progress due to improved classroom practice, and that pupils were beginning to understand that they were able to do more, and that they could and should expect more of themselves.

### **Enablers and barriers**

Interviewees identified several factors which had contributed to the success of partnership working. These included:

- the careful matching of schools which cross-checked needs with expertise
- both schools coming to the Pathfinder with a positive attitude and an open mind about how to work together and what could be achieved
- the quality of personal relationships, which in the most effective partnerships were built on trust and honesty.

By contrast, a few school staff identified barriers which constrained partnership working to some extent. These included:

- initial staff and governor reservations about partnering, doubts about releasing their best teachers, and the possible negative effect this could have on their staff and pupils
- schools that felt they were not well matched, for example with very different socio-economic characteristics or schools that were geographically far apart
- workload pressures, including schools having already allocated time to implementing other plans and interventions and the added pressure of Estyn inspections.

### **Extent to which impacts will be sustained**

Most staff within Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools agreed that the kind of activities which the partnerships had supported were ones which could be embedded in practice and should not require ongoing support. This included activities in areas such as teaching and learning, assessment, pupil tracking, school management and professional reflection. Within these areas, staff within Emerging Practitioner Schools provided examples such as:

- more focused use of lesson observations to evaluate and reflect on their quality
- specific programmes such as a phonics programme which was introduced in one primary school with the support of a Lead Practitioner School and the Social Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme which was introduced in another

- work with a specific focus such as that designed to promote oral skills in Welsh which was being addressed in one primary Emerging Practitioner School with support from the Lead Practitioner School.

At the same time, staff in the Lead Practitioner Schools believed that the Pathfinder had nurtured a greater willingness on the part of staff in the Emerging Practitioner Schools to engage with other practitioners outside their own school and that they had become more willing to discuss practice and consider issues around standards. There was widespread belief that practices were beginning to be embedded in the way their partner schools worked which would enable them to grow and develop the work further.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The main conclusion from this mid-point evaluation of Tranche 1 schools is that, overall, the Pathfinder model of organising and facilitating national school-to-school improvement has been effective in supporting and accelerating improvement in participating schools. This is true for both the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools which have taken part. Where challenges have been encountered, these can largely be attributed to issues arising from implementation (where the relationship between the schools is not effective for whatever reason) or to a school's need being greater than expected (because the level of support a school needed was more than that which could be delivered by the model adopted for the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools Pathfinder). Although it is too early to identify impacts on pupils' attainment and achievement, this interim assessment concludes that the Pathfinder has yielded early and emerging outcomes for Lead Practitioner Schools and Emerging Practitioner Schools that one would expect to see as an intermediate step towards such improvement.

We present three recommendations for the future development of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project and for school-to-school partnership working in Wales more widely. We recommend that the Welsh Government should:

- extend the learning from the Pathfinder to the National Model to ensure that schools, local authorities and regional consortia are clear about the purpose of and rationale for school-to-school partnership working, the expectations placed on paired schools and what regional consortia and local authorities should be doing to support this school improvement model
- disseminate examples of effective practice in areas where schools have worked together. The examples could include:
  - what represents effective practice in supporting and working with other schools
  - how middle leadership capacity in schools can be built through school collaboration
  - what works in sharing practice on teaching and learning strategies
  - what works in sharing practice on tracking pupil performance and using data to improve teaching and learning
- develop the pool of high-performing schools to help to address some of the practical challenges experienced in the Pathfinder around matching schools.



## Key messages

The research evidence suggests that the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project has already had a meaningful impact on some teachers' professional practice, on some schools' ethos and culture, and on most Emerging Practitioner Schools' capacity to lead their own improvement. For example, it has:

- encouraged and supported school staff to reflect on their teaching practice
- increased school leaders', teachers' and teaching assistants' awareness of different teaching methods and styles
- enabled staff to develop their teaching and leadership skills further through the sharing of practice and joint continuing professional development (CPD).

Moreover, staff in primary schools reported several school-level changes which were based on increased professional reflection and benchmarking, while staff in secondary schools reported that they had developed a more open culture where staff were willing to share and accept suggestions for improvement.

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, most interviewees reported that it was too early to identify impacts on pupils' attainment and achievement. However, our interim assessment is that the Pathfinder has yielded early and emerging outcomes for most Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools that one would expect to see as an intermediate step towards such outcomes. For example, the evidence collected indicates that Pathfinder activities have enhanced teachers' knowledge and skills, and provided significant stimulus and resources which have, in turn, strengthened teaching quality and improved classroom practice.

The research also identified a number of challenges and areas for improvement. These included:

- schools reporting they were not well matched, for example with schools with very different socio-economic characteristics or schools that were geographically far apart
- workload pressures, including schools having already allocated time to implementing other plans and interventions and the added pressure of Estyn inspections.

Despite these challenges, most school-to-school relationships could be described as 'excellent' or 'good', and were characterised by schools that were: close in terms of geographical location; committed to the project and shared mutual respect for one another; and similar in terms of characteristics, ethos and priorities.

Most staff within Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools agreed that the kind of activities which the partnerships had supported were ones which could be embedded in practice and should not require ongoing support. This included activities in areas such as teaching and learning, assessment, pupil tracking, school management and professional reflection. Perhaps, more importantly, most Emerging Practitioner Schools' were building their capacity to lead their own improvement. In short, there is

evidence to suggest that Emerging Practitioner Schools are developing the active ingredients – attitudes, infrastructure, challenge and support – for achieving improved educational outcomes.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project

The aim of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project is to raise the standards within primary and secondary schools in Wales by facilitating school-to-school support, with the aim of accelerating improvement. Funded by the Welsh Government, the purpose of the Pathfinder is to establish and evaluate the effectiveness of a school improvement model whereby schools identified as underperforming are supported by schools already demonstrating excellent practice and outcomes. There have been two tranches of the project to date, and a bespoke programme for special schools is also being developed.

Lead Practitioner Schools are high-performing primary and secondary schools, with a proven leadership track record that has resulted in high levels of performance and/or improvement over a sustained period. Emerging Practitioner Schools have already shown an early improvement of pupil outcomes, but some of these schools have a mixed record of in-school variability over the last two to three years and the support of the Lead Practitioner School is designed to assist with stabilising this variability<sup>1</sup>.

During the Pathfinder, each Lead Practitioner School works with an Emerging Practitioner School to disseminate and implement best practice on a systematic basis for 18 months as set out in an intervention plan agreed with the Emerging Practitioner School (referred to as the Partnership Plan).

Total funding of £90,000 for Lead Practitioner secondary schools and £30,000 for primary schools (per match) will be made over the duration of the project. Funding is subject to satisfactory evaluation of the Partnership Plan on a termly basis by the Project Champion to ensure that timely and consistent progress is made for each action point in the Partnership Plan against targets at the set milestones.

Tranche 1 of the project was launched in May 2013, for 11 matched pairs of secondary schools and also 11 matched pairs of primary schools (43 schools in total – one lead secondary school is supporting two separate emerging schools).

## 1.2 Aims of the study

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by the Welsh Government in January 2014 to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the Pathfinder and the extent to which the schools identified as

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<sup>1</sup> The criteria to join the Pathfinder as a Lead or Emerging Practitioner School for Tranche 2 are available online:  
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/raisingstandards/practitionerschools/pathfinder-tranche-2-project/?lang=en> [22 April 2014]

underperforming had achieved intended improvements. The study also involved equipping participating schools with a standardised self-evaluation tool that would enable them to document and evaluate their journey towards improvement. As such, this report provides an interim assessment of the performance of the Pathfinder midway through Tranche 1.

## **1.3 Methodology**

The study comprised three strands:

- review of school Partnership Plans
- development of a self-evaluation toolkit
- case-study visits to 39 schools.

Further details are provided below.

### **1.3.1 Review of schools' Partnership Plans**

A rapid review of the Tranche 1 schools' Partnership Plans was undertaken, exploring areas such as:

- the focus of the work proposed in each partnership
- the management and organisational arrangements
- how the funding was to be used
- the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.

The findings from the review helped to inform the development of the self-evaluation toolkit (see below). The template for the Partnership Plans is provided in Appendix 1.

### **1.3.2 Development of a self-evaluation toolkit**

Research evidence<sup>2</sup> shows that the development of schools' self-evaluation capacity can help raise standards by allowing schools to monitor progress and, when needed, respond to school improvement challenges in a way informed by the evidence. With this in mind, the research team were tasked with developing a standardised evaluation toolkit to support participating schools in evaluating the impact and progress of the Pathfinder over five terms (18 months). Drawing on existing toolkits and NFER's experience of constructing toolkits for teachers, the research team created a tool designed to support participating schools in tracking and evaluating their progress. The tool was piloted with a Pathfinder school to check its fitness for purpose and ease of use.

NFER's self-evaluation toolkit comprises three steps:

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Chapman, C. and Sammons, P. (2013). School self-evaluation for school improvement: what works and why? CfBT Education Trust. Available [online]. <http://cdn.cfbt.com/~media/cfbtcorporate/files/research/2013/r-school-self-evaluation-2013.pdf> (13 June 2014)

Step 1: Schools are encouraged to read the ‘Sutton Trust – Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit’<sup>3</sup>. This toolkit is an accessible summary of educational research which provides guidance for teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

Step 2: Schools are then encouraged to familiarise themselves with the ‘DIY Evaluation Guide’, also produced by the EEF<sup>4</sup>. The DIY Evaluation Guide provides advice for schools on how to evaluate whether the approaches they are using are having the desired effect.

Step 3: Once participating schools have familiarised themselves with the first two toolkits, Emerging Practitioner and Lead Practitioner schools need to work together to develop a Partnership Plan. Taking the form of an Excel spreadsheet, the NFER self-evaluation tool was designed to be short and easy to complete. It was designed to help schools to reflect on and capture:

- the outcomes and impacts of their school improvement work at the staff, school and pupil level
- the different types of evidence they could collect to demonstrate these impacts
- the strengths of the outcomes and impacts identified
- what was working well and what additional actions the schools could take to further improve the effectiveness of their school improvement work.

The toolkit was introduced to Tranche 1 schools in March and April 2014 when the partnerships were already half way through the Pathfinder. However, it is hoped that the toolkit will be available to Tranche 2 partnerships from the very beginning of the programme and that the three-step process will help shape and inform their development and evaluation activities. Practitioners need to familiarise themselves with Steps 1-2 before using the toolkit.

An illustrative example of the self-evaluation toolkit is presented in Appendix 2.

### **1.3.3 Case-study visits to schools**

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the impacts of the Pathfinder and to introduce Emerging Practitioner and Lead Practitioner schools to the self-evaluation toolkit, visits were undertaken in March 2014 to all Tranche 1 partnerships which involved 39 different schools. Interviews were undertaken with a total of 37 Headteachers, 20 Deputy/Assistant Headteachers, 36 Subject Leaders/Key Stage Coordinators, 40 Classroom Teachers, one Chair of Governors and two Teaching Assistants/Higher Level Teaching Assistants. The interviews were conducted using topic guides which focussed on a standard set of questions (see Appendix 3: Case-study instruments).

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<sup>3</sup> Available online: <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/> (22 April 2014)

<sup>4</sup> Available online: [http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/EEF\\_DIY\\_Evaluation\\_Guide\\_\(2013\).pdf](http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/EEF_DIY_Evaluation_Guide_(2013).pdf) (22 April 2014)

## **1.4 Analysis and reporting**

This report draws on an analysis of the data collected as part of the visits to 39 schools, supplemented with an analysis of their Partnership Plans. As such, this report captures the perceived impact of the project, as reported by practitioners involved in the Pathfinder. The structure of the report is detailed below:

Chapter 2 explores how and why schools became involved in the Pathfinder, their priorities and expectations, the activities undertaken and participants' views on the effectiveness of their relationships with partner schools and their staff.

Chapter 3 examines the early and emerging outcomes resulting from participation in the Pathfinder. It also explores the factors that have enabled or constrained the effectiveness of the project.

Chapter 4 presents participants' views on the sustainability of the outcomes/changes identified and how, if at all, the Pathfinder could be improved.

The concluding chapter draws together the key messages from the different strands of the evaluation and provides an interim assessment of the effectiveness of Tranche 1 of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project, and the extent to which the schools identified as underperforming have made the intended improvements. The report concludes by presenting three recommendations for the future development of the Pathfinder Project and for school-to-school partnership working in Wales more widely.

## 2. Experiences of the Pathfinder

This chapter explores: how and why schools became involved in the Pathfinder; their priorities and expectations; the activities undertaken; and participants' views on the effectiveness of their relationships with partner schools and their staff.

### 2.1 Reasons for taking part

Headteachers identified a range of issues and needs underlying their decision to take part in the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project. The main reasons cited varied between schools, with headteachers from Lead Practitioner Schools most frequently reporting that they viewed the Pathfinder as **an opportunity to share good practice and to 'give something back'**, as illustrated by the following quotations:

*We felt it was important to support other schools, to share good practice, and to hopefully improve practice in both schools.*

*At the heart of the reasons for taking part in the project was the school improvement journey. As a leadership team, we felt we were in a position to share our good practice with another school.*

Similarly, some of the interviewees reported that being a Lead Practitioner School 'was a boost for everyone in the school' and helped to 'gain recognition' that theirs were leading schools. Lead Practitioner Schools were also more likely to report that they thought the Pathfinder provided **opportunities to develop their staff**, particularly middle leaders, by giving them 'experience of working in a different school with different challenges'. One headteacher explained: 'Schools can be insular and it's always good practice to be aware of the needs of a different school in terms of support, management and governance'. Many of these schools reported having previous positive experiences of working with other schools, and hoped that those mutual benefits would be replicated through the Pathfinder.

Many of the interviewees in the Emerging Practitioner Schools echoed the views of their colleagues in their partner schools that the Pathfinder represented an effective way of sharing good practice. However, the most frequently reported reasons for taking part in the project stemmed from a realisation that they needed help and that **the Pathfinder offered the potential to bring in the support and expertise they needed**, as one headteacher explained: 'We didn't want to overlook any opportunity to improve and increase our capacity'. Similarly, at least one of the Emerging Practitioner Schools had tried other approaches to school improvement, including bringing in independent consultants, but pupil results had still fallen. The Pathfinder offered the potential of helping them to 'get to grips with the situation'.

**Several of the headteachers from the Emerging Practitioner Schools specifically embarked on the Pathfinder to gain a ‘critical friend’ and/or the ear of a more experienced headteacher<sup>5</sup>, as illustrated by the following quotation:**

*I felt that I could really benefit from having a critical friend in an experienced, successful, secondary headteacher who I could learn from and who could support me to address the improvements I wanted in my school.*

A small minority of Emerging Practitioner Schools reported that the primary reason for taking part in the Pathfinder was because their Local Authority had suggested they do so, following either a poor Estyn inspection or as a result of a low score in the banding process.

## **2.2 Expectations and priorities**

### **2.2.1 Schools’ expectations**

Respondents from both Emerging and Lead Practitioner Schools reported having a number of **common expectations** for the Pathfinder. These included that the partnership activities should:

- be based on a foundation of trust and mutual respect
- provide ‘substantial’ and ‘meaningful’ opportunities for staff in the two schools to share and discuss one another’s practice
- lead to tangible results, with a specific focus on improving outcomes for pupils.

In addition, staff in the Emerging Practitioner Schools identified a number of additional expectations, including that the Pathfinder would result in:

- the Lead Practitioner Schools demonstrating what excellent teaching looks like
- the provision of a range of different types of support, targeted at the needs of the Emerging Practitioner Schools and their staff
- improvements in the consistency and quality of their own teaching practice
- opportunities to access and share the Lead Practitioner Schools’ teaching facilities and resources.

By contrast, the headteachers in Lead Practitioner Schools most frequently reported the expectation that the Pathfinder would provide them with opportunities to develop their own staff, and specifically their middle leaders, by giving them a leading role in managing the partnership work.

**The extent to which staff had been made fully aware of the Pathfinder appeared to vary from school to school.** For example, in what appeared to be the minority of cases, all staff had been made aware of the purpose of the Pathfinder, and their school’s role within it. The headteacher of a Lead Practitioner School explained that this had been done by:

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<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that at least nine of the Headteachers from the Emerging Practitioner Schools reported being relatively new to their posts.



*...dissemination of information during heads of department meetings...and direct communication with those individual teams who have been asked to work collaboratively with colleagues in the other school.*

In the majority of cases, however, awareness of the Pathfinder – at least any detailed understanding of it – appeared to be restricted to those individuals who were most closely involved. This reflects the targeted nature of some schools' priorities – for example on English and mathematics (see Section 2.2.2 below) – and the fact that some schools were yet to expand their partnership activities to involve staff more widely (see Section 2.3 below).

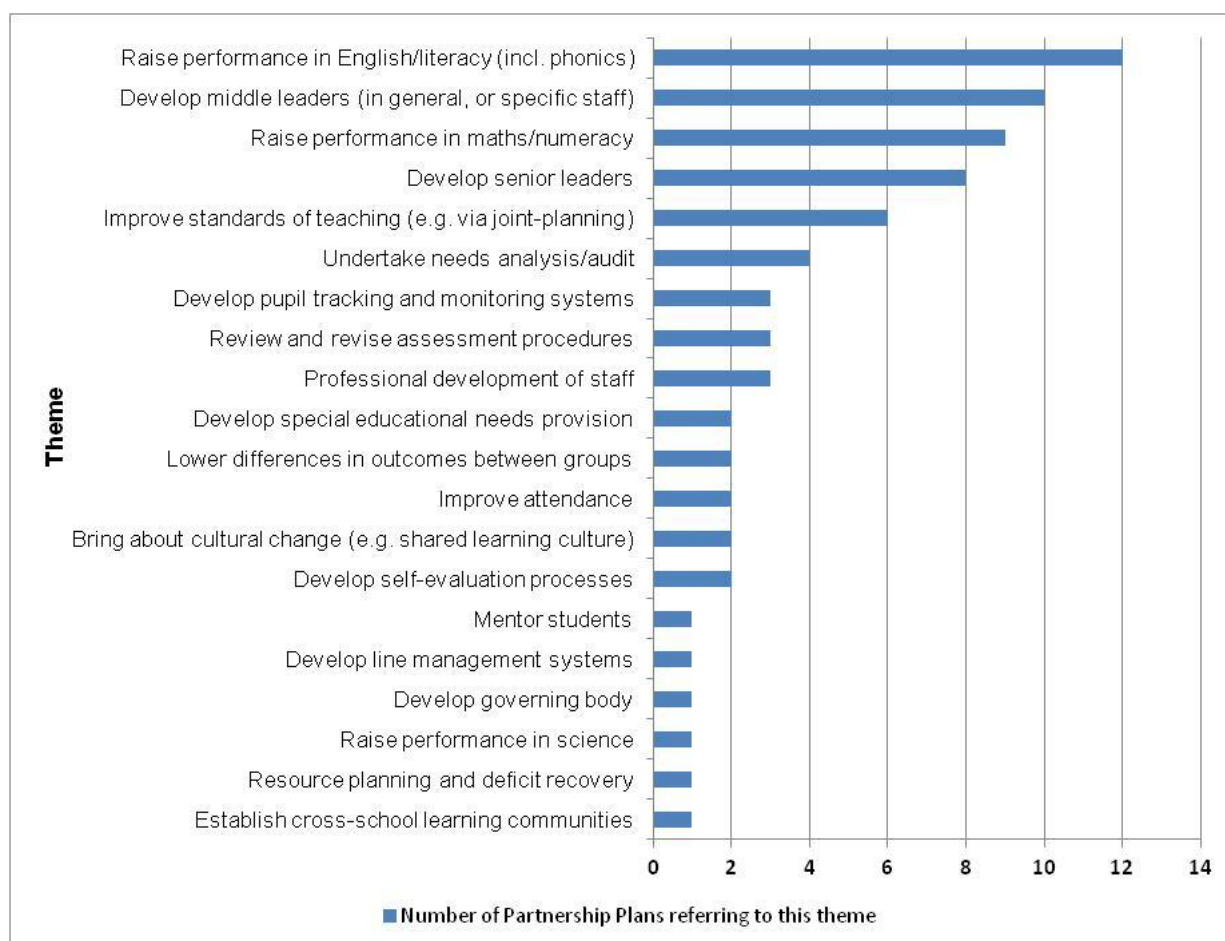
### **2.2.2 The priorities for school partnerships**

In order to better understand schools' priorities for the Pathfinder and to check whether the NFER self-evaluation toolkit could be used by every partnership we analysed a total of 21 Partnership Plans from across 39 schools. Specifically, we codified the partnerships' priorities for improvement, as listed in Section 2.1 of the Partnership Plans. As shown in Figure 1, the five most common themes and topic areas covered by schools' priorities included:

- **raising performance in English/literacy** (including use of phonics)
- **developing middle leaders** (sometimes as a general goal, sometimes with specific roles in mind, most notably Heads of Mathematics and English)
- **raising performance in mathematics/numeracy**
- **developing senior leaders**
- **improving standards of teaching** (through a range of approaches, including joint-planning, target setting and/or monitoring).

It is notable that the **development of governing bodies** was stated as a priority by a relatively small number of partnerships, as was the development of **self-evaluation processes**.

**Figure 1 Analysis of priorities covered in school Partnership Plans**



Source: NFER Evaluation of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools Pathfinder Project, 2014

### 2.3 Activities undertaken

A broad range of activities were undertaken as part of the Pathfinder. These usually fell into the categories of teaching and learning, leadership development, work around assessment systems and data analysis, joint practice development, pupil support, self-evaluation and systems review, and financial management.

**Teaching and learning:** schools used the Pathfinder as a means of reviewing their teaching and learning strategies, to share good practice, and to explore how different methods could be used to meet the needs of identified groups of pupils. Others looked at specific areas such as the use of phonics, levels of writing, and boys’ reading.

**Leadership development:** schools investigated how to develop leadership capacity with a specific focus in some on the role of middle leaders that included establishing clearer definitions of the role and expectations of post-holders. Some schools looked at leadership capacity (for example, whether the structure of the senior leadership team was appropriate) and considered what the priorities were in terms of developing leaders for the future.

**Assessment systems and data analysis:** partnerships examined how schools' assessment arrangements could be developed to ensure greater consistency (both in terms of when and how assessments were used and also how data could be used to inform teaching and learning). Schools looked at cohorts of pupils to understand the ability profile, learning needs, and whether the curriculum was delivered in a way that met their needs. Others discussed target setting and the extent to which schools' expectations were appropriate. This linked to work related to Assessment for Learning, standardisation and moderation, marking and feedback, learner profiling and tracking, data analysis, and target setting.

**Joint practice development:** examples included bringing practitioners together as professional learning communities to focus on a specific aspect of a school's work such as how to improve the delivery of a particular subject or curriculum area, support for pupils with additional learning needs, target setting, how to improve assessment and monitoring, or how to strengthen a school's pastoral system. Others looked at how staff could use ICT and e-learning more effectively.

**Self-evaluation:** partnerships' work included a strong focus on self-evaluation for example embedding self-evaluation processes and ensuring that this focused rigorously on raising standards. In some instances this work led to greater consistency in the way lesson observations were being undertaken and how teaching and learning was assessed, in order to reduce variation within schools.

**Review of school systems:** school systems were reviewed, for example to identify whether ICT could be used more effectively to support teaching and learning or how schools could report information more effectively, both internally and to parents.

**Financial management:** school leadership teams worked together to identify how resources could be managed more effectively. Some placed a specific focus on issues such as financial recovery and how to move out of a deficit budget.

## 2.4 Views on partnership relationships

As might be expected, a variety of consultees, but particularly headteachers, reported a range of views on the quality and effectiveness of their working relationships with their colleagues in their partner schools. These views could be grouped into what could be broadly described as relationships that were 'excellent/good', 'mixed' and 'poor/not so good' (see Figure 2 below).

- **Excellent/good relationships** – these typified the majority of relationships between Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools and were characterised by schools that were:
  - close in terms of geographical location (described by one school as being of 'paramount importance')
  - committed to the project and shared mutual respect for one another

- similar in terms of characteristics<sup>6</sup>, ethos and priorities
- where the Lead Practitioner School was prepared to learn from and with the Emerging Practitioner School
- where the Emerging Practitioner School was open to new ideas and ways of working.
- **Mixed relationships** – capturing a minority of schools, where the relationships between some staff and departments were reported to be good, but where relationships between others were reported to be poor or still developing. Other challenges included:
  - geographical location (some schools felt their partners were too close, and so in direct competition with them, while others were too far away, making face-to-face meetings difficult)
  - personality clashes between some staff
  - the complaint, particularly from Emerging Practitioner Schools, that the Lead Practitioner School shared different characteristics to theirs (e.g. in terms of size, intake and priorities) which, in their eyes, made them less suitable partners.
- **Poor/not so good** – a small minority of schools appeared to have poor working relationships. The problems facing these schools included:
  - inequitable distribution of funding, resulting in, for example, a dominant Lead partner and an Emerging Practitioner School with little or no dedicated resources to engage in partnership activities
  - being geographically far apart, making face-to-face activities difficult/impractical; Estyn inspections which added additional pressure to schools
  - and the perceptions of at least one Lead Practitioner School that the support needs of their partner Emerging Practitioner School were too great for the Pathfinder to address.

While most consultees were positive about the quality and effectiveness of their working relationships with their colleagues in partner schools, **one of the challenges facing the Pathfinder appears to be the range of the types of schools involved**, which encompasses schools in different bandings and with different Estyn designations. This has implications for the **support needs of the Emerging Practitioner Schools**, and in at least one partnership, these were regarded by the Lead Practitioner School as being too great for them to address.

Of course, the relationships between staff in different schools are not static; they are constantly developing and changing and are likely to continue to do so over the remainder of Tranche 1. **Several interviewees discussed how their relationships had already developed over the first few months of the Pathfinder**, with several reporting moving from a position of resistance and challenge in the first few weeks of the Pathfinder, to a more collaborative and supportive relationship now, as the following headteacher from a Lead Practitioner School described:

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that in at least one highly successful partnership the two schools had very different socio-economic backgrounds.

*The relationship with the partner school has been good. There were early resistances and some difficult initial meetings [but] following [these] earlier complications and set-backs, the relationships have now begun to develop and will continue to grow after the partnership work finishes.*

Similarly, the headteacher of another Lead Practitioner School described how relationships can take time to develop, particularly where schools have had little or no prior contact:

*The key for us in the beginning was trust and we are now in the situation where we are very open with each other, friendly...it was about developing relationships, going slowly, getting to know each other and having the confidence to be open and honest.*

Where partnerships appear to have been most successful, both parties have made efforts to ensure that the benefits are two-way, as the Headteacher from a Lead Practitioner School explained: 'From the beginning we made sure that there was an equal partnership, it was not about us telling them, it was two-way with joint working'. Similarly, both schools needed to be willing participants, which was identified by the headteacher of an Emerging Practitioner School as the basis for success: 'As long as both schools are willing partners, then you're on to a winner'.

**Figure 2**      **The factors underpinning headteachers' views on the quality of their school's relationship with their partner school (grouped into relationships that could be described as 'excellent/good', 'mixed' and 'poor/not so good').**

Excellent/ Good	Mixed	Poor/ Not so good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEAD PRACTITIONER SCHOOLS               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead school prepared to learn from and with Emerging School</li> <li>• Close geographical location allowing for regular face-to-face visits</li> </ul> </li> <li>• EMERGING PRACTITIONER SCHOOLS               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two-way relationship (Lead Practitioner school prepared to learn from Emerging school)</li> <li>• Lead school committed to sharing practice</li> <li>• Lead school shares Emerging school's ethos and priorities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEAD PRACTITIONER SCHOOLS               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships with some staff/ departments good, others poor or developing</li> <li>• Personality clashes between some staff</li> </ul> </li> <li>• EMERGING PRACTITIONER SCHOOLS               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some of Lead school's characteristics are different (e.g. in terms of size, intake, priorities)</li> <li>• Geographical location (too far or too close)</li> <li>• Schools at different stages of the 'improvement journey'</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEAD PRACTITIONER SCHOOLS               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intractable differences in views on how funding should be used</li> <li>• Timing of Estyn inspections (particularly in Emerging Schools) has added additional pressure</li> <li>• Emerging school's needs too great for the Pathfinder to address</li> </ul> </li> <li>• EMERGING PRACTITIONER SCHOOLS               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal distribution of funds has soured relationships and curtailed activities</li> <li>• Lead school's characteristics completely different (e.g. in terms of size, intake, priorities)</li> <li>• Geographical location (too far or too close)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Source: NFER Evaluation of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools Pathfinder Project, 2014.

## 3. Early and emerging impacts

This chapter presents evidence from the evaluation of the early and emerging outcomes of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project. Specifically, it focuses on early and emerging outcomes relating to teaching practice, whole school change, and pupils and learning, each of which are discussed in turn. It also identifies the enablers of and barriers to the success of the Pathfinder. The evidence draws on the interviews and focus groups conducted with staff in participating Tranche 1 schools. It should be noted that, as the Pathfinder Project has only been operating for a few months, staff were able to provide observations on, and examples of initial outcomes rather than final or definitive impacts on their schools. The chapter presents evidence at three levels: Pathfinder; phase (primary and secondary); and type (Lead Practitioner School and Emerging Practitioner School).

### 3.1 Teaching practice

The evaluation evidence revealed that the Pathfinder Project had impacted on teaching practice in several ways:

- it had encouraged and supported school staff to reflect on their teaching practice
- it had increased school leaders', teachers' and teaching assistants' awareness of different teaching methods and styles
- it had enabled staff to develop their teaching skills further through the sharing of practice and joint CPD
- it had helped to increase staff confidence in their teaching and to adopt new methods and technologies.

A number of phase- and school type-specific impacts were identified. These are discussed below and in the following sections.

#### Impacts on primary schools

The evidence collected from primary schools showed that they considered that they had benefitted from participating in the Pathfinder through staff developing a **better understanding of what makes an excellent lesson**. They had gained this understanding through joint training sessions (e.g. on subject-specific teaching and performance management) and classroom observation of best practice lessons with their partner schools. 'Stepping out of the culture zone' was how one teacher characterised this process. Another teacher observed a **transformation in professional dialogue**: 'It has raised the conversations on lessons, 'this has worked really well or have you tried this?''

Most staff reported that they were looking at their work differently, gaining fresh ideas about pedagogy and developing the confidence to implement teaching and learning approaches that had been shown to work effectively in other schools. They



were **increasing their awareness of different teaching methods** through doing more classroom observation, as this headteacher remarked: 'The observation lessons the staff have delivered have been the best – the sharing has made us look more closely at what we are doing before we share – self-evaluation'. Another headteacher observed that staff had been given the opportunity to understand why their practice is often excellent which had boosted their confidence and morale. A teacher identified the value of conferring with colleagues about teaching methods saying that 'It has been good to talk to other people just to ensure you are doing the right things the right way and to improve'.

Examples of the changes and gains made to date identified by school staff include:

- varying the pace of lessons
- gaining a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of using phonics in teaching reading
- developing a more differentiated approach to the teaching of mathematics
- using a drama strategy for enhancing pupils' writing
- increasing skills in planning and implementing interventions (give examples) to prevent pupils falling behind
- developing coaching and mentoring skills
- the production and/or purchasing of additional teaching and learning resources.

### **Impacts on secondary schools**

The evidence collected from secondary schools indicated that most senior leaders and teachers considered that participation in the Pathfinder was having a **positive effect on teaching practice** in their schools. This early and emerging impact was encapsulated by a headteacher who explained that his staff had embarked on a 'journey of improvement' adding that the Pathfinder had facilitated a quicker pace of working towards change and improvement.

Staff thought that changes were being made to teaching and learning through their exposure to improvement opportunities. These included having a **professional dialogue and exchanging practice** with staff in partner schools and participating in joint training. For example, a headteacher pointed out that the Pathfinder had given his staff time to reflect on their practice and enabled them to access best practice elsewhere.

Having **space to self-evaluate** was appreciated by several interviewees such as the teacher who remarked that: 'The opportunity to self-evaluate my own practice was the most significant impact for me'.

Most staff reported that they were **developing an extended repertoire of planning, teaching, assessment and tracking skills**. This emerged from one or more of the following experiences:

- discussing different methods and approaches
- sharing schemes of work
- lesson observations



- team teaching with a teacher from the partner school
- joint training on subject-specific teaching methods and assessment practices
- sharing methods of pupil tracking and using data to target interventions.

Illustrations of the changes and gains made by secondary schools include:

- the skills to teach smaller classes
- allowing more time with individual pupils to motivate them and identify areas for improvement
- the production of a portfolio of pupils' work at each level in both Lead Practitioner Schools and Emerging Practitioner Schools
- the development of more formal pupil performance recording and tracking methods focused on examination requirements.

Most senior leaders and teachers considered that **classroom practice was improving as a result of the increased interaction between staff within and between schools** which had raised staff awareness of alternative approaches when planning, teaching and assessing. For example, a deputy headteacher noted that staff gained from each others' strengths and experience and that their confidence had increased as a result: 'The quality of teaching and learning has improved. The staff have a belief in their own capabilities'.

### **Impacts on Lead Practitioner Schools**

Staff in Lead Practitioner Schools reported that participation in the Pathfinder had yielded gains for their schools as well as for the Emerging Practitioner Schools. The gains included:

- positive outcomes in relation to the way staff now perceived their school
- the development of skills
- general outlook.

Changes in perceptions were illustrated by the headteacher who declared that working in a Lead Practitioner School had **created expectations and the challenges that come with this which had raised staff self-esteem**. This meant that staff felt that they had something to live up to by being in a Lead Practitioner School.

As regards skills development, staff considered that the Pathfinder had offered them good professional development. The coaching and mentoring that staff in Emerging Practitioner Schools had received had extended the skill sets of those in the Lead Practitioner Schools who had helped to deliver it.

Several senior leaders also drew attention to the **valuable development opportunities that had been offered to middle leaders** as this deputy headteacher commented:

*The project has provided a wonderful opportunity for middle leaders who have been involved. What a wonderful professional development opportunity this has provided. A sort of CPD that money can't buy.*

In addition, middle leaders had gained from working with their teams in identifying good practice within their school to share with their partner school. This included clarifying the criteria for what constitutes an excellent lesson and the skills needed to deliver an excellent lesson.

The impact on outlook involved **staff becoming more willing and open to discuss and share teaching, assessment and tracking methods**. This was illustrated by the school which had now operated an 'open door' policy for staff to observe each others' lessons as a result of staff from the Emerging Practitioner School visiting its classes. Only one school reported negative attitudes amongst staff regarding adopting new ideas and approaches.

### **Impacts on Emerging Practitioner Schools**

Emerging Practitioner School staff identified several benefits resulting from their involvement in the Pathfinder. The main benefits were:

- enhanced consistency of lesson planning
- application of successful teaching strategies
- development of leadership capacity.

Staff said they were reassured that a variety of teaching strategies, not just one accepted method, were used in both their schools and the Lead Practitioner Schools. This was illustrated by teachers within a teacher focus group who reported that participation in the Pathfinder was spurring improvement through observing good practice, producing resources to help teaching and then trialling new strategies in the class. They said that now staff were more willing to talk to each other, were more open. In another school, teachers valued the help they had received from the Lead Practitioner School which they said had **enhanced their knowledge and understanding of controlled assessment, schemes of work and teaching skills**. Elsewhere, a teacher noted the support she gained on the application of Assessment for Learning strategies from a teacher in the Lead Practitioner School who she said was an excellent practitioner.

Senior leaders in the Emerging Practitioner Schools observed that **the Pathfinder had helped to develop leadership capacity** in their schools. This was noted by a headteacher who valued the 'incredible leadership expertise shared'. Another headteacher explained the mutual benefits that had been gained:

*The Lead School headteacher and myself have been monitoring books and staff planning in both schools and this was good for me and for the Lead School head because we saw things that were evident in both schools that needed developing and this has gone back to staff in order to improve planning and activities in the classroom.*

## **3.2 School-level changes**

The evaluation also found evidence of school-level changes amongst most Pathfinder schools. **The impact was mainly on school ethos and culture and**

**staff attitudes to improving performance.** A few senior leaders said that it was difficult to assess school-level changes as all departments, subject leaders and teachers had not yet participated. Others pointed out that it was difficult to isolate the distinctive impact of the Pathfinder as there were other factors at work such as local education authorities' support to improve literacy and numeracy.

Several schools reported that their **ethos and culture were becoming more open**, in the sense that there was more sharing of practice and trying out of new approaches. Teachers noted that partnering with other schools had given them more confidence and made them more willing to take risks. They said that the partnering experience created a more open culture through undertaking lesson observations and team teaching which they felt was part of an improvement process. Teachers considered that this encouraged them to reflect on their own practice and helped to remove insular thinking by enabling them to compare their practice more broadly with that in other schools.

**Schools noted that the Pathfinder had given them opportunities to reflect on and revisit school-level policies, practices and systems.** This was illustrated by a staff focus group who explained that their school was becoming a learning community where collective thought on teaching and learning was developing and best practice was discussed and shared more than before.

It should be noted that the Pathfinder's contribution to CPD can play a role in helping to meet the need, identified by the OECD (2014), for 'high-quality provision of continuous professional development to keep adding to teachers' knowledge and skills, and to develop their decisional capital to be able to use these higher levels of knowledge and skills with different students in different contexts' (p.75).

### **Impacts on primary schools**

Staff in primary schools reported several school-level changes which were based on **increased professional reflection and benchmarking**, as this teacher observed: 'It has opened doors to understanding your own practice and not in a negative, insular way but until you see the wider picture, you are not sure of your own standards'. A headteacher in a school which aimed to address variation in the quality of teaching stated that the Pathfinder had given an opportunity to work with staff in a partner school which had been:

*...soul-bearing and painful but it has been therapeutic. It has been a relief for staff to get things off their chest and has given staff time to discuss serious weaknesses and air their views in a different forum.*

Another headteacher made the point that teachers were performing as effectively as ever but had **developed an understanding of what made their practice effective**. Teachers who had been reluctant to be observed were now aware that classroom observation was a process of improvement.

Primary schools identified other school-level changes which they had made as a result of participating in the Pathfinder. These included:

- introducing a school-wide marking policy

- implementing a standardised ‘traffic light’ system for tracking pupils’ progress
- devising teaching resources which teaching assistants had been trained to use which helped assist with their development.

### **Impacts on secondary schools**

Staff in secondary schools reported that they had developed a **more open culture where staff were willing to share and accept suggestions for improvement**. This was encapsulated in the experience of a school where visitors coming to the school to see good practice had raised the confidence of all. Staff also reported that there was now more focus on accountability for performance through a climate of challenge. They referred to the increased role of middle leaders in taking responsibility for helping to drive school improvement.

Another school-level change reported related to **staff now taking more control of their CPD as part of the self-evaluation cycle**. This included staff exchanging practice, reviewing lesson plans and considering differentiated approaches to teaching. Other school-level changes included the introduction of plans for producing revision materials and a focus on extended writing across the curriculum which had impacted on all staff.

### **Impacts on Lead Practitioner Schools**

Most school leaders noted that partnering with Emerging Practitioner Schools had been beneficial. For example, this headteacher thought that partnering had benefitted her school by: ‘Raising the self-esteem and the professional development of the staff, knowing they are sharing their expertise. Giving staff the opportunity to build new relationships; everyone has been involved in the process’. In another Lead Practitioner School, staff referred to the importance of peer review noting that working together ‘has confirmed practice and fine- tuned it’.

Staff within Lead Practitioner Schools reported that working with Emerging Practitioner Schools had highlighted a need to look more closely at their own planning and performance and, in some cases, this had led to the identification of areas in which they needed to be clearer about their priorities. This was reflected in the observations made by a teacher group who said that **partnership had increased performance management and brought about more in-house training involving team teaching**. Teachers in another school commented that participating in the Pathfinder had led to the introduction of a more formalised system of staff mentoring and coaching to develop leadership capacity at all levels within the school.

**School staff identified an increased focus on teaching practice as a major school-level change**. This is illustrated by a headteacher’s comment that teachers had become more aware of the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and ‘the journey a teacher needs to go on to help them understand what makes their practice excellent’. Another headteacher related his experience where: ‘I overhear conversations amongst my teachers now about best practice within their teaching, what would make my lessons better ... what would make my lesson best practice ... sharing of ideas’. This was echoed by a headteacher who noted that his staff ‘have

excellent subject knowledge but now they want to talk about pedagogy'. Elsewhere, a teacher explained that senior leaders of both schools had examined extended writing which had provided a focus for development: 'It provided us with the opportunity to study our teaching and learning in the classroom'.

School staff also noted that there had been a **whole-school effect on assessment**. This is illustrated by a headteacher who reported that the assessment system in both schools had been discussed in terms of standards, tracking and the identification of what works well. Staff had participated in joint training on lesson criteria. Similarly, another headteacher remarked that: 'The impact has been on the standards of assessment, the tracking systems in both schools ... features of an excellent lesson'.

### **Impacts on Emerging Practitioner Schools**

Most staff within Emerging Practitioner Schools reported a **school-level impact on the culture and ethos within their schools** where senior leadership teams had a better understanding of the current position of the school including how far they had travelled and where they needed to get to. In turn, staff also had a better idea of where they needed to be and how to get there, as this headteacher commented: 'Their eyes have been opened a little bit more, I think, to what has been going on and they have been out and seen good practice in lots of places'. Another headteacher noted the change of culture in her school to a position where all staff are capable of good lessons and know what a good lesson has to include.

Staff within Emerging Practitioner Schools also reported a **more structured approach to school improvement**. Examples given were:

- improved tracking systems
- allocating performance targets to teachers
- changing lesson structures
- instituting lesson observation
- making teaching assistants more aware of what their role entails.

Referring to teaching and learning in his school, one headteacher commented that **partnering had enhanced the speed of change**: 'Without the project, perhaps, I don't think we would have reached this point as quickly. I think the work we have done together has truly helped the process'. He added that teachers were now more willing and confident to ask for help.

### **3.3 Pupils and learning**

School staff prefaced their observations and comments on the effect of participating in the Pathfinder on pupils and learning by saying that **it was too early to measure impact on educational outcomes such as achievement and attainment**.

However, they were confident that there would be some measurable impacts during the next year.

Senior leaders and teachers emphasised that **the Pathfinder had helped them to strengthen the infrastructure for achieving positive educational outcomes** so, although it was too soon to claim 'hard' impacts, 'everything points to improvement',

was a typical comment. Staff maintained that changes to the way teachers were working, particularly their constantly striving for better outcomes, were likely to have an impact on pupils' performance given time. The following teacher's comment illustrates this: 'If our standards of teaching are better then it definitely influences pupils' progress, one is dependent on the other'.

### **Impacts on primary schools**

Staff in primary schools reported that the essentials for improving pupils' educational outcomes had been developed as a result of participating in the Pathfinder.

**Expectations** were one of these essentials as this comment indicates: 'Our expectations of the pupils have risen and the way we teach and the way we plan – all aspects have had an impact'. A teacher focus group thought that using different teaching methods had **raised the level of pupils' expectations of what they could achieve**.

Teachers also identified effective lessons as essential to improving performance. They noted that **better-quality lessons were challenging pupils and motivating them** at the same time. Teachers reported that asking pupils 'how' questions was contributing to improving learning. Elsewhere, teachers said **more focused lessons were increasing pupil engagement in learning** and, in some cases, improving pupil behaviour.

In one partnership, an innovative approach to sharing practice was said to be yielding benefits. The schools were using remote teaching for the first time. This involved observing and filming each other's use of a phonics programme for teaching reading. Teachers noted that: 'Pupils have enjoyed remote teaching, this has engaged and motivated them' and 'the feedback from pupils has been positive. Pupils were excited and open to learning this way'.

Staff in schools reported that they were helping to improve pupils' learning experience by providing more support. The reason for this was that teachers had a greater understanding of their broader support role in addition to teaching such as encouraging more able pupils to perform better and fulfilling their cross-curricular responsibilities, for example, for enhancing numeracy learning.

Providing clear feedback to pupils on their progress was another essential identified by teachers. Teachers said that they were now giving **more detailed feedback to pupils** which helped them to know exactly what the next step in their learning involved. Some also explained that improvements were being made by aligning marking more closely with targets which enabled them to provide more informed feedback to pupils.

### **Impacts on secondary schools**

Secondary school staff reported that there was some evidence that **pupils were making more progress due to improved classroom practice** but, as one headteacher pointed out 'it is an embedding process' and therefore impact on outcomes would take some time to materialise. Some staff said that participating in the Pathfinder was inspiring them to strive to maximise educational outcomes. Others said that they were clearer about which interventions were the most effective



in enabling excellent teaching and learning and were promoting parental involvement in pupils' education.

Teachers noted that **pupils were beginning to understand that they were able to do more, that they could and should expect more of themselves**. Others noted that their pupils' attitudes and confidence in exams had improved. At one of the schools we visited, teachers reported that pupils welcomed the positive change in the school and being pushed harder. All pupils were now given targets to achieve which was improving their motivation.

Teachers also said that **partnering had provided another dimension to their pastoral work**. This included one-to-one mentoring of the pupils in 'the hidden middle' who have under-achievement issues. Teachers explained that mentoring was part of a preventative approach and was being used to understand under-achievement and its contributory factors.

### **Impacts on Lead Practitioner Schools**

Staff in Lead Practitioner Schools indicated that their **involvement in the Pathfinder was helping them to support pupils' progress** in their own schools as well as in Emerging Practitioner Schools. A headteacher emphasised the centrality of pupil progress in the partnering activities with the Emerging Practitioner School stating that: 'At the heart of the project is the impact on the pupils'. A similar point was made by a teacher who said that teachers in her school were focusing more on the pupils and how they learn: 'The role of the teacher is more about what learners are doing ... facilitating learning'. In another school, teachers explained that they were being more selective in the use of technology to enhance learning. A teaching assistant noted the positive impact on pupils of being a Lead Practitioner School: 'The pupils enjoy sharing their work, they are proud of their work. The project has meant many visits to the school which has given the pupils the opportunity to share in the process'.

### **Impacts on Emerging Practitioner Schools**

Staff in Emerging Practitioner Schools indicated that **teacher and pupil expectations were being raised**. One teacher reported that a more positive outlook was being developed: 'I think the children generally are realising that our expectations are higher and we are not going to accept any old standards. We raise our game; they have to raise their game'. Headteachers explained that teacher standards had improved and raised the performance bar which had impacted on pupils who generally were responding positively to the higher targets they were being set. Other interviewees noted that there was more continuity in the way pupils were treated in the sense that pupils knew what was expected of them by all teachers and they understood the meaning of the marks they received for their progress and where they had to improve.

**School staff reported that pupils were more engaged and motivated by the challenging and interesting lessons being provided**. Schools were doing this by:

- working with smaller groups of pupils which had increased pupils' enthusiasm and confidence in their abilities and fostered a more 'can-do' attitude

- making mathematics lessons more interactive which had increased the enthusiasm of pupils who had more of a ‘give it a go’ attitude
- sharing practice in the use of phonics which was helping to improve children’s reading
- organising intervention groups to provide additional support for some pupils.

Overall, staff reported that these changes had yielded several gains including more engaged and motivated pupils, improved standards of work produced by pupils and, in some cases, improved pupil behaviour and attendance.

### 3.4 Enablers and barriers

The final section of the chapter presents an analysis of schools’ views on what had facilitated or constrained the impact of their involvement in the Pathfinder.

#### Enablers

Interviewees identified several factors which had contributed to the success of partnership working. An important enabling factor was the **careful matching of schools** which cross-checked needs with expertise. Evidence from the Pathfinder suggests that schools with different characteristics can work together effectively. Interestingly, one Lead Practitioner School headteacher remarked that the selection of Emerging Practitioner Schools should not include those at ‘a stage of crisis’ because they were not in an appropriate situation to make best use of this type of support.

Another enabler was **both schools coming to the Pathfinder with a positive attitude and an open mind about how to work together and what could be achieved**. Schools considered that the willingness of both schools to work together was an active ingredient in effective partnering. Schools also thought that the development of effective working relationships between the headteachers of the Lead Practitioner School and the Emerging Practitioner School was key to the success of their involvement in the Pathfinder. This was exemplified by teachers we interviewed in one of the partnerships observing that both headteachers ensured that there was not a ‘them and us’ scenario and the focus was placed on learning together.

Staff noted that the **quality of personal relationships**, built on trust and honesty, supported the development of links that worked. Some interviewees also highlighted the important contribution that the working relationship between subject and curriculum leaders from partner schools made to the improvement process.

Schools reported that an **appropriate level of funding** had given them time to work together, to plan and undertake improvement activities. A deputy headteacher summarised the importance of funding, saying: ‘For these projects to work, they have to be funded. Funds provide the capacity for partnership work’. This point was augmented by a headteacher of a Lead Practitioner School who commented:

*[the experience has been] totally positive – it could not have been done in such depth and quality without the funding ... releasing the teachers from the classrooms could have led to disrupted learning, however the funding meant I*



*could employ a permanent supply who got to know the school and its expectations.*

Other headteachers said that Pathfinder funding had been useful for purchasing teaching and learning resources and paying for external experts to deliver training, for example on the use of phonics, self-evaluation, use of data and performance management.

Staff in Emerging Practitioner Schools identified the **expertise of teachers** in the Lead Practitioner School and their willingness to share their expertise and resources as significant enablers. These were valued by this headteacher who said that: 'The personalities and the approach of the Lead School has been key to it being successful because it was clear from the word go that it was an equal partnership'.

Staff noted that **seeing and sharing best practice was valuable**: 'a universally positive experience', as one headteacher expressed it. Another headteacher from a Lead Practitioner School emphasised the mutual benefits of the working relationship, saying 'we want to make our practice better too', which gave a challenge to his staff.

A teacher highlighted the value of partnering, saying that in her experience it had more impact than CPD: 'Involvement with another school is far more beneficial than any course'.

### **Barriers**

A few school staff identified barriers which constrained partnership working to some extent. These included **initial staff and governor reservations about partnering, doubts about releasing their best teachers, and the possible negative effect this could have on their staff and pupils**. However, there were no reports that such concerns had been realised and, in most cases, consultees instead reported experiencing positive benefits from working with an Emerging Practitioner School (see Chapter 3). These concerns were addressed by schools agreeing a mutually beneficial, tailor-made approach and careful resource management as this headteacher explained: 'The importance of careful timetabling in the release of excellent teachers is crucial, so that pupils do not lose out'.

A teacher focus group pointed out that, although there had been **some reluctance at the outset**, this had been overcome by the helpful and professional attitude of the staff from the Lead Practitioner School. The teachers said that they had benefitted from their help and support and from the candour of the relationship, as this interviewee commented: 'They were going out of their way in not taking a supercilious, paternal attitude. They were there to help and share and to give a warts and all honest picture'. In contrast, staff in an Emerging Practitioner School believed that its partner school had not taken adequate account of what it was good at and that the model had been too focused on the Lead Practitioner School's areas of strength.

Several schools felt that there was **a need to match schools more closely so as to avoid partnerships of schools with very different socio-economic characteristics or schools that were geographically far apart**. However another

view, expressed by a primary Lead Practitioner School emphasised the value of having two schools with different intakes working together.

**Some schools believed that the Pathfinder should be extended over a longer period and that 18 months was too short for the project to make an impact.**

One interviewee suggested starting in September to avoid clashing with busy periods for schools.

Another barrier mentioned by interviewees was **lack of funding which was said to limit the amount of time schools had available for working together**. A Lead Practitioner School Headteacher said that his school had used some of its own financial resources to fund training courses. A second issue was **disproportionate funding** where the Lead Practitioner School received the largest part of the Pathfinder funding. The headteacher of an Emerging Practitioner School drew attention to this, expressing surprise that the school in the greatest need was in effect having to fund themselves through the project.

**Workload** was another barrier and was sometimes related to schools having already allocated time to implementing other plans and interventions such as additional support for literacy. Such competing priorities were illustrated by the experience of this Emerging Practitioner School headteacher: 'I agree with the Lead School headteacher in that he says that the partnership plan has often had to play third fiddle to other plans and that has been a real shame and disappointment'. Other examples of workload pressures included:

- a Lead Practitioner School which noted that its partner school was implementing five interventions at the same time which made it difficult to achieve a clear improvement focus for school improvement
- the timing of Estyn inspections, especially in Emerging Practitioner Schools. Schools preparing for an Estyn inspections reported finding it difficult to balance this requirement and partnering with the Lead Practitioner School.

Some partnerships observed that the **geographic distance between schools had inhibited regular contact**. A Lead Practitioner School reported that, although the partnership had worked well, closer proximity between the schools which were 40 miles apart would have increased the effectiveness and benefits gained. The school concluded that it could have offered a better model of improvement had they been nearer to their partner school. Elsewhere, schools had used technology to minimise the effect of distance working.

## **4. Legacy of the Pathfinder**

This chapter presents evaluation findings on the extent to which the progress made by schools participating in the Pathfinder is likely to be sustained and embedded in practice in the future. The chapter also presents views on improvements and suggestions for the future.

### **4.1 Plans for the future**

Most staff within Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools agreed that the kind of activities which the partnerships had supported were ones which could be embedded in practice and should not require ongoing support. This included activities in areas such as teaching and learning, assessment, pupil tracking, school management and professional reflection. At the same time, these activities included the introduction of specific programmes (such as a phonics programme which was introduced in one primary school with the support of a Lead Practitioner School and the SEAL programme which was introduced in another). Interviewees in Lead Practitioner Schools referred to changes that had been made to working practices in their partner Emerging Practitioner Schools. They described how practices were beginning to be embedded in the way their partner schools worked which would enable them to grow and develop the work further. Interviewees believed that the Pathfinder had helped to develop the leadership skills that were essential if such practices were to become embedded. At the same time, staff in the Lead Practitioner Schools believed that the Pathfinder had nurtured a greater willingness on the part of staff in the Emerging Practitioner Schools to engage with other practitioners outside their own school and that they had become more willing to discuss practice and consider issues around standards.

The messages about the way new practices were becoming embedded in primary schools were echoed in the discussions in the secondary schools. Staff in Emerging Practitioner Schools referred to the way that structures had been put in place to enable work to progress in future. The secondary school partnerships had sought to review practice and this had been a way of providing an independent peer review of practice and strategies. Secondary Lead Practitioner Schools reported that work which had become embedded would be sustained especially where this related to areas such as pupil learning, classroom practice, the management of teaching and learning and monitoring and tracking and the use of data, which related to operational practice. They believed that while the funding was required to support the initial work, it should not be needed to sustain such changes.

In contrast, a small number of schools believed that the type of work that had been supported by the Pathfinder needed to be sustained beyond the 18-month period for which it is scheduled. For example, a primary Lead Practitioner School felt further support would be needed to enable its partner school to move from good to outstanding. Another Leading Practitioner School intended to bid for funding to enable staff to provide more long-term support for the Emerging Practitioner School.

A secondary Emerging Practitioner School noted that the links with the Lead Practitioner School were likely to be sustained 'as long as we want to work together'.

## **4.2 Views on how the Pathfinder could be improved**

Most of the teachers interviewed as part of the case-study visits to schools were positive about the Pathfinder. However, as one would expect with any large-scale school improvement programme, there were aspects of the project that some consultees felt could be improved and enhanced. The most prominent of these was **changing the labels of 'Lead Practitioner' and 'Emerging Practitioner' schools**, which a small number of schools suggested was a negative appellation for Emerging Practitioner Schools. One alternative suggestion included using the labels 'partnership school 1' and 'partnership school 2'.

Some schools considered that there was a need to ensure that all staff were committed to working in partnership with other schools. This meant that adequate time was needed to explain to staff the rationale for the project and how it could contribute to their work. Some felt that this requirement had been underestimated in some instances. Others considered that there was a need for more opportunities for all schools to share ideas and discuss experiences. The potential role of local authorities and regional consortia in supporting this and helping to sustain the Pathfinder's initial achievements is worth considering.

## **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter presents conclusions from the evaluation of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project. The conclusions are referenced to the aims of the evaluation which were to provide an interim assessment of the effectiveness of the Pathfinder and the extent to which the schools identified as underperforming had achieved intended improvements. In addition, the chapter provides evidence-based recommendations for organising and supporting school improvement in Wales in the future.

### **5.1 Overall conclusions**

The main conclusion from this mid-point evaluation of Tranche 1 schools is that, overall, the Pathfinder model of organising and facilitating national school-to-school improvement has been effective in supporting and accelerating improvement in participating schools. This is true for both the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools which have taken part. Where challenges have been encountered, these can largely be attributed to issues arising from implementation (where the relationship between the schools is not effective for whatever reason) or to a school's need being greater than expected (because the level of support a school needed was more than that which could be delivered by the model adopted for the Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools Pathfinder).

Although it is too early to identify impacts on pupils' attainment and achievement, this interim assessment concludes that the Pathfinder has yielded early and emerging outcomes for Emerging Practitioner Schools and Lead Practitioner Schools that one would expect to see as an intermediate step towards such improvement. For example, the evidence collected indicates that Pathfinder activities have enhanced teachers' knowledge and skills, and provided significant stimulus and resources which have, in turn, strengthened teaching quality and improved classroom practice. Moreover, there is evidence that Emerging Practitioner Schools have made progress towards achieving their intended improvements. These positive steps include improved awareness and application of effective teaching methods; the development of leadership capability and a more positive and structured performance culture; and raised staff and pupil expectations of what can be achieved. In short, there is evidence to suggest that Emerging Practitioner Schools are developing the active ingredients – attitudes, infrastructure, challenge and support – for achieving improved educational outcomes. Importantly, Lead Practitioner Schools have also benefited, notably by: gaining insights into effective practice through self-reflection; by raising staff self-esteem through shared teaching, tracking and assessment methods; and by gaining development opportunities for middle leaders.

It should be noted that the outcomes of the Pathfinder are similar to the achievements of other school-to-school models of school improvement. For example, NFER's evaluation of the Department for Education's Gaining Ground

Strategy (Walker *et al.*, 2012), which aimed to improve the performance of secondary schools in England through school-to-school working and other forms of support, found that Gaining Ground enabled schools to share and observe practice on planning and managing school improvement interventions, developing and using systems for pupil tracking, teaching and study support. There was evidence of a positive change in school ethos and culture, with more motivation amongst staff and pupils to focus on progress and achievement, and evidence of impact on school leadership, particularly on the role of middle managers. Similarly, NFER's evaluation of the City Challenge Leadership Strategies, which were designed to break the cycle of under-achievement among disadvantaged pupils in primary and secondary schools in the urban regions of London, the Black Country and Greater Manchester (Rudd *et al.*, 2011), found that several factors accounted for the effectiveness of the strategies. The factors included the creation of a school-to-school support network within each area, system leaders working collaboratively, the careful matching of supporting and supported schools, the sharing of best practice, and opportunities for professional dialogue, joint learning and partnership working within a 'no blame' culture.

Many of the features identified in the Pathfinder reflect the kind of practice identified by NFER in previous reviews of school partnerships in high-performing systems (Smith *et al.*, 2012). For example, the evaluation of the Pathfinder found that, where relationships worked effectively, school partnerships were based on mutual respect with both the Lead Practice and Emerging Practice schools benefitting from their involvement. The Pathfinder enabled schools to develop work that drew on the capacity and professional credibility of leaders and practitioners and to address identified challenges. In common with the kind of approaches evident in high-performing systems in other parts of the world, the activities undertaken through the Pathfinder focused on creating practical responses to schools' needs (around teaching and learning, assessment, school leadership, monitoring and self-evaluation) building on the experience of those which had adopted successful approaches.

The Pathfinder partnership model was found to be appropriate as a means of supporting schools which require support for a fixed period of time. It therefore offers a basis for future collaborative work, not least in the Schools Challenge Cymru programme: the challenges facing those schools are likely to be more acute and the level of resource required may need to be on a different scale. However, the notion of school collaboration and the lessons learned from this Pathfinder about the key ingredients of success are transferable and could inform the design of programmes such as School Challenge Cymru.

While the Pathfinder evaluation has not looked specifically at issues concerning the extent to which there is a feeling of responsibility for the whole school system in Wales, it is clear that much of the success of the Pathfinder can be attributed to a willingness on the part of schools to share and learn from each other. The Pathfinder can therefore be judged to have harnessed a sense of responsibility for the school system as a whole, an important feature identified by Smith *et al.* (2012).

The messages from the Pathfinder suggest that school partnerships offer a means by which schools in Wales can be supported to raise standards through a focus on teaching and learning and on creating the environment in which children and young people can fulfil their potential. This mid-term evaluation suggests that further work is needed to explore how school partnerships can be sustained and supported in future. This will need to include how school support services should work and how their role can be defined as that of enabling services, possibly focusing on brokering support and harnessing the expertise that rests within the classroom. The Pathfinder suggests that such reform of working practices will be as important as changing the way education support services are structured, and therefore chimes with important aspects identified by recent work, including the Robert Hill Review (2013).

## **5.2 Key features of effective partnerships**

The evaluation has identified a number of pre-requisites for effective school-to-school partnership working. Foremost among these is that both schools have to be convinced they can learn from each other. At the same time, Lead Practitioner Schools need to be prepared to contribute to the success of others and Emerging Practitioner Schools have to be convinced of the case for change.

Specific elements of effective partnership working relate to the attitudes that school staff need to display when starting the work, the focus of the work at the developmental stage, and the programme of work which is subsequently delivered.

The characteristics which underpin effective partnership working include:

- a shared commitment to the success of the partnership
- a willingness to share practice and learn from each other, both on the part of the Lead Practitioner School and the Emerging Practitioner School
- a willingness among staff to learn from other practitioners coupled with mutual respect for each other
- a recognition of the challenges that each school faces
- a willingness to be challenged by a 'critical friend' and to be prepared to engage in sometimes difficult and challenging discussions
- a whole-school commitment that starts at the headteacher level and which operates among senior leadership teams and convinces the staff as a whole.

These attributes need to exist alongside practical features such as appropriate geographic location (examples were found where partnerships had experienced difficulties both where the schools were too far apart and where they were too close together). Moreover, schools which share similar characteristics find partnership working easier and more fruitful, and some schools find it easier to convince staff to become involved in the work if the two schools have a similar background. However, we also found evidence that schools with different characteristics can have an equally fruitful relationship which suggests there is not a 'one size fits all' solution in this regard.



At the same time, it is essential that senior leaders, particularly headteachers, support the work. This does not mean, however, that they should micro-manage each activity. Instead, they need to provide sufficient leadership to release the creativity and detailed knowledge of individual practitioners.

Considerable care is required at the developmental stage of a partnership and the time this requires (and the work of developing a Partnership Plan) should not be underestimated. The essential features identified in the evaluation are that:

- there is a need for an honest appraisal of a school's need which stems from robust and open professional dialogue, underpinned by qualitative and quantitative data where appropriate
- partnerships require robust in-depth understanding of a school's needs that go beyond the overall picture and focus on the micro level (for example, the performance of individual departments, pastoral or support systems, assessment arrangements, or reporting procedures)
- participants need to agree a plan of action in response to the shared understanding of what is required
- the assessment of a school's performance needs to be undertaken jointly and will not work if a Lead Practitioner School arrives at its own diagnosis, nor if an Emerging Practitioner School adopts a highly defensive attitude
- it is important to identify indicators by which progress will be measured, and to ensure rigorous self-evaluation is undertaken to ensure that improvement activities are having the intended effects
- there is a need for both partners to agree how resources are to be used and schools should not regard participation in partnerships as a means to generate additional revenue.

Moreover, it is important that the work is not seen as a way of deploying on-going support from one school to another. Instead, the focus should be on capacity building and developing a school's capability to lead its own improvement following a period of collaboration with another. In terms of the work at the practitioner level, this can help to break down the isolation which some staff report they have experienced.

The evidence emphasises the importance of nurturing reflective practice. This involves practitioners avoiding an approach based on transferring practice from one school to another and working more deeply to translate practice into different contexts, thinking 'how can this be applied in my school'. This offers valuable CPD around teaching and learning. For example, practitioners define 'excellence' (for instance when assessing a lesson) and consider issues such as how to vary learning activities, how to ensure more exciting activities in class, how lessons can be made more interesting, how the use of ICT can enrich the work, and how to achieve consistency in lesson planning. This leads to a more penetrating level of discussion about issues such as pedagogy and genuine, professional discussion of teaching and learning, focused around questions such as 'how can learners be supported to achieve?', and 'what makes an excellent lesson?'

At the same time other issues related to how a school works or organises the teaching and learning are evident in effective partnerships. These aspects of the



work concentrate on features such as accountability, the role and expectations of middle leaders (not least building leadership capacity), and helping to define what are appropriate expectations of staff working at different levels within a school. School systems for tracking pupil performance and assessment practice, for instance, have also been examined. For example, partnerships can focus on areas such as how to get greater consistency in approaches across a school, and how subjects should be taught effectively. In each case the approach to improvement is grounded in an open and honest discussion among staff at both schools and a willingness to consider alternatives to established ways of working.

In terms of outcomes, our findings indicate that the Pathfinder's school-to-school model can be used effectively to help address schools' development and performance needs and can be a powerful vehicle for building staff capacity to address schools' specific challenges. However, it should be remembered that, at the time of our visits to schools, the Tranche 1 school partnerships were at the mid-point stage of the Pathfinder. Although the early signs are promising, it remains to be seen whether the Pathfinder will fulfil its potential and whether the kind of changes in outlook and practice which it can promote will become embedded in schools.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The report concludes by presenting three recommendations for the future development of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder Project and for school-to-school partnership working in Wales more widely. We recommend that the Welsh Government should:

- extend the learning from the Pathfinder to the National Model to ensure that schools, local authorities and regional consortia are clear about the purpose of and rationale for school-to-school partnership working, the expectations placed on paired schools and what regional consortia and local authorities should be doing to support this school improvement model
- disseminate examples of effective practice in areas where schools have worked together. The examples could include:
  - what represents effective practice in supporting and working with other schools
  - how middle leadership capacity in schools can be built through school collaboration
  - what works in sharing practice on teaching and learning strategies
  - what works in sharing practice on tracking pupil performance and using data to improve teaching and learning
- develop the pool of high-performing schools to help to address some of the practical challenges experienced in the Pathfinder around matching schools.

## References

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## Appendix 1: Template for Partnership Plans

### Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Partnership Plan 2013-2014 (PART ONE)

Schools in partnership	HT contact numbers	Plan agreed by

#### 1. LEAD SCHOOL

##### 1.1 Lead School and Emerging School costs against Partnership Grant

LS & ES or other personnel	Time in ES for project	Time in LS for project	Cost up to checkpoint1	Cost up to checkpoint2	Cost up to checkpoint3	Cost up to checkpoint4	TOTAL
<b>TOTAL</b>							

##### 1.2 Existing Lead School Targets

<b>2013 5A*-C inc E/W &amp; M</b> (Level 2+ Threshold)	
<b>2013 5A*-G</b> (Level 1 Threshold)	
<b>2013 E/W A*-C</b>	
<b>2013 M A*-C</b>	
<b>Project specific target:</b>	

<b>2014 - 5A*-C inc E/W &amp; M</b> (Level 2+ Threshold)	
<b>2014 - 5A*-G</b> (Level 1 Threshold)	
<b>2014 - E/W A*-C</b>	
<b>2014 - M A*-C</b>	

## EMERGING SCHOOL

### 2.1 ES Partnership Project specific targets (in addition to 2.2.):

<b>ES Partnership Project specific objectives</b>	

### 2.2 Existing Emerging School Targets

<b>2013 5A*-C inc E/W &amp; M</b> (Level 2+ Threshold)	
<b>2013 5A*-G</b> (Level 1 Threshold)	
<b>2013 E/W A*-C</b>	
<b>2013 M A*-C</b>	

<b>2014 5A*-C inc E/W &amp; M</b> (Level 2+ Threshold)	
<b>2014 5A*-G</b> (Level 1 Threshold)	
<b>2014 E/W A*-C</b>	
<b>2014 M A*-C</b>	

## 2. CHECKPOINTS

	Date	Date Funding for next period agreed
Plan submitted		
Plan agreed		
Checkpoint Report 1 (by 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2013)		
Checkpoint Report 2 (by 31 December 2013)		
Checkpoint Report 3 (by 31 March 2014)		
Checkpoint Report 4 (by 31 July 2014)		
Checkpoint Report 5 (by 31 December 2014)		



## Appendix 2: Self-evaluation toolkit – illustrative example

	ES Partnership Project specific targets	IMPACTS ON SCHOOL STAFF (INDIVIDUALS OR SMALL GROUPS)					IMPACTS ON WHOLE SCHOOL				
		a) Achieved	b) Evidence collected of impacts on school staff			c) Rating of impacts on school staff	d) Evidence collected of school-wide impacts			e) Rating of school-wide impacts	
		<i>Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box</i>	<i>Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box in column 1. If you have collected more than one type of evidence, please also select from columns 2 and 3.</i>			<i>0 = no impact and 3 = high impact. Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box</i>	<i>Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box in column 1. If you have collected more than one type of evidence, please also select from columns 2 and 3.</i>			<i>0 = no impact and 3 = high impact. Please choose one of the options from the drop-down box</i>	
		1	2	3	Description	1	2	3	Description		
1	0										
2	0										
3	0										
4	0										
5	0										
6	0										
7	0										
8	0										
9	0										
10	0										

Drop down options from:

- Your perceptions/ reflections
- Feedback from colleagues/ line manager
- Changes to resource use/ deployment
- Grading and/ or feedback from lesson observation/ video

Drop down options from:

- Feedback from colleagues
- Changes to school plans/ policies
- Grading and/or feedback from lesson observation/ video
- Other primary evidence (e.g. from action research, surveys, interviews, videos)
- Increased uptake of target subjects pre/post 16
- Improved pupil progress/ achievement
- Changes to resource use/ deployment





## Appendix 3: Case study instruments

### Headteacher or other member of school senior leadership team – Topic guide

Interviewee:	
School:	Partner school:
Researcher:	Date:

#### Introduction

- The Welsh Government has commissioned NFER to undertake an independent evaluation of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project.
- NFER researchers are visiting schools across Wales to ascertain schools' experiences of participating in the Pathfinder project and what they think the impact and outcomes have been to date.
- We are aiming to interview headteachers, other senior leaders and a range of teachers.
- Please note this is not an audit or assessment of schools. No individuals or institutions will be identified in our reports. But to ensure the accuracy of our notes, we would like to record the interview. Is this OK?
- The interview should take about 1 hour to complete.
- Note to interviewer: please read the Partnership Plan before the school visit and refer to it in the interview

#### BACKGROUND, INCLUDING REASONS FOR TAKING PART

	<b>1. What were the issues, or needs, underlying the decision to take part in the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project?</b>
	<b>2. What did you expect to get out of the Pathfinder project?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of support</li> <li>• Types of improvement</li> <li>• Impact on practice</li> <li>• Impact on educational outcomes</li> </ul>	
	<b>3. What, if anything, is it about the features of this particular Pathfinder project that you think might meet the needs of your school?</b> <i>Probe: what, if anything, is different about this programme from other types of support you may have received?</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N.B. Researcher to check whether priorities have changed from the plan. If they have, explore how and why.</li> </ul>	<p><b>4. Could you briefly summarise what has been the main focus of your partnership work?</b>  <i>Probes: Partnership Plan as a delivery framework – fixed/evolving</i>  <i>Practical links – communication, time invested</i>  <i>Allocation and use of project funding</i>  <i>Extent to which Partnership Plan will help to create new activities or help deliver more of existing provision</i></p>
<p><b>PROCESSES</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitability of partner school</li> <li>• Location and proximity</li> <li>• Relevant experience and expertise</li> <li>• Overall effectiveness</li> <li>• What has worked well and why</li> <li>• Challenges</li> </ul>	<p><b>5. How effective is your working relationship with your partner school? (Please provide examples)</b></p>
<p><b>EARLY AND EMERGING IMPACTS OF THE PATHFINDER PROJECT</b></p>	
<p><b>On staff</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedagogy/teaching</li> <li>• Subject knowledge</li> <li>• Leadership expertise</li> <li>• Assessment</li> <li>• Pupil support</li> <li>• Staff development</li> <li>• New practices</li> <li>• Practice transfer</li> </ul>	<p><b>6. What has been the impact to date of participating in the Pathfinder project <u>on staff</u> in your school, including on you personally?</b>  <i>(Evidence: please provide examples of progress, improvement and impact)</i>  <i>Probe: which activities have had most impact and why?</i></p>
<p><b>On the whole school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress in Partnership Plan work</li> <li>• Culture/ethos</li> </ul>	<p><b>7. What has been the impact to date of participating in the Pathfinder project <u>on the whole school</u>?</b>  <i>(Evidence: please provide examples of progress, improvement and impact)</i>  <i>Probe: which activities have had most impact and why?</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership (senior/middle)</li> <li>• Quality of teaching</li> <li>• Quality of learning</li> <li>• Using data to monitor and track pupils' performance</li> <li>• Activities to improve achievement</li> <li>• Study support</li> <li>• Assessment – new types</li> </ul>	
<p><b>On pupils</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Behaviour</li> <li>• Achievement and attainment</li> <li>• Enthusiasm and engagement</li> <li>• Motivation</li> </ul>	<p><b>8. What has been the impact to date of participating in the Pathfinder project <u>on pupils</u>?</b>  <i>(Evidence: please provide examples of progress, achievement and attainment)</i>  <i>Probe: which activities have had most impact and why?</i></p>
<p><b>Overall reflections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other funding or in-kind resources</li> <li>• Internal or external relationships</li> <li>• Other agendas</li> </ul>	<p><b>9. Is there anything that you feel either has enhanced or constrained the impact of your involvement in the Pathfinder project?</b>  <i>Probe: how, if at all, could the Pathfinder project be improved?</i></p>
	<p><b>10. Is there anything else you would like to say about your involvement in the Pathfinder?</b></p>

Thank you and close interview.

## Teacher focus group - Topic guide

<b>Number of teachers and roles/subjects</b>	
<b>School:</b>	<b>Partner school:</b>
<b>Researcher:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

### Introduction

- The Welsh Government has commissioned NFER to undertake an independent evaluation of the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project.
- NFER researchers are visiting schools across Wales to ascertain schools' experiences of participating in the Pathfinder project and what they think the impact and outcomes have been to date.
- We are aiming to interview headteachers, other senior leaders and a range of teachers.
- Please note this is not an audit or assessment of schools. No individuals or institutions will be identified in our reports. But to ensure the accuracy of our notes, we would like to record the interview. Is this OK?
- The focus group should take no more than 45 minutes to complete.
- Note to interviewer: please read the Partnership Plan before the school visit and refer to it in the interview

### Awareness of the Pathfinder

**1. How much do you know about the Lead and Emerging Practitioner School Pathfinder project your school is participating in which involves a link with a partner school?**

(Probe: aims of the Pathfinder project why do you think your school decided to be involved?)

### Resources used

**2. What resources have you had access to through the project, and how have they been used?**

(Probe: staff worked with in the partner school, purpose and usefulness, training received)

**3. How, if at all, could the Pathfinder be improved?**

(Probe: better or different types of support?)

### Early and emerging impacts

**4. How, if at all, has the Pathfinder project impacted on you and your practice as a teacher?**

(Probe: changes in practice, enhancement of existing knowledge/skills, development of new knowledge/skills)

<p><b>5. Have there been any school-wide changes that have been introduced as a result of the Pathfinder?</b>          (Probe: changes to policies and processes, ethos and culture, training received)</p>
<p><b>6. What impact, if any, do you think the Pathfinder project is having or will have on pupils?</b>          (Probe: pupil enthusiasm and engagement, attainment and progression, behaviour)</p>
<p><b>7. To what extent do you expect these impacts to be sustained?</b>          (Probe: What, if anything, has been put in place to support this?)</p>
<p><b>Other comments</b></p>
<p><b>8. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience of being involved in the Pathfinder?</b></p>

Thank you and close