



**Office for Standards  
in Education**

## **The primary leadership programme 2003-04**

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## Introduction and evidence base

1. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) introduced the primary leadership programme in the summer term 2003 with the aim of strengthening collaborative leadership and responsibility for teaching and learning in English and mathematics in primary schools. The programme was intended for around 25% of primary schools nationally in its first year (2003-04) and was implemented in every local education authority (LEA) in England. It involved the deployment of trained, experienced primary headteachers, as consultant leaders, to support and provide expert guidance for headteachers and their leadership teams, working closely with LEAs' literacy and mathematics consultants, schools' advisers and other LEA staff. The programme was developed by the DfES and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) working in partnership.
2. Ofsted, through Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), monitored the programme in the late summer and autumn terms 2003 in 14 LEAs. Final visits and meetings took place in the spring term 2004. HMI held discussions with primary strategy managers in LEAs; observed training for the primary strategy consultant leaders (PSCLs), primary strategy managers and school leadership teams; monitored PSCLs' initial work with schools, and held discussions with headteachers and their leadership teams to gain their early views about the impact of the programme.
3. This report provides an evaluation of the earliest stages of the implementation of the programme, based on the monitoring described above. It must be recognised that the situation is a dynamic one where change has already begun. The DfES has already acknowledged and started to tackle many of the issues identified in this report. Specific instances of these responses are identified in the body of the report.

## Main findings

- ❑ The programme has much potential, but it was introduced too quickly. The lack of a pilot was a particular weakness.
- ❑ To date, the programme has had a positive impact in a few schools in highlighting the need to raise standards in English and mathematics, but a limited impact in most, in large part because they have lacked a sense of urgency and have failed to focus on the programme's key aim of raising standards. In its early phase, there was a tension between one of the key aims, namely to raise standards, and the 'client-centred consultancy' model of leadership training advocated by the NCSL.
- ❑ The vast majority of headteachers in the participating schools appreciated the opportunity to work with another headteacher and more closely with their leadership teams. English and mathematics co-ordinators benefited from a greater strategic involvement in improving standards and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. Schools have benefited from the opportunity to bring together key staff to clarify their roles and responsibilities.
- ❑ Almost all the PSCLs committed themselves positively to the programme. However, a small number of them were not fully committed to raising standards. They were unwilling to challenge schools about their expectations and low standards, even when clear evidence was available.
- ❑ Most LEAs were not firm enough in requiring schools to establish clear, rigorous action plans, raise their numerical targets for English and mathematics and, more generally, improve teaching and learning. In the initial stages of the programme, primary strategy managers in LEAs were uncertain about how they might evaluate it.
- ❑ The DfES gave LEAs insufficient direction about the nature, quality and amount of information that PSCLs should receive. The result was significant variation in the ways in which PSCLs were managed and supported, particularly in terms of what they knew about the schools with which they were to work. Consequently, some PSCLs were inadequately prepared to challenge schools to raise standards.
- ❑ Schools rarely raised their expectations of the numbers of pupils who would gain Level 4 or above and a small number of them actually lowered their numerical targets.
- ❑ The range of schools participating in the programme reflected too broad an interpretation by LEAs of schools' suitability. This had a negative impact on the effectiveness of the training and its match to schools' needs.
- ❑ LEAs made significant adjustments to the centrally devised programme for the leadership teams. Consequently, key elements of central training were omitted and occasionally the training lacked coherence.

- PSCLs' attendance at the half-day training sessions was not built into the original training and was not accounted for in resourcing the programme. To tackle this, LEAs had to take the initiative and invite PSCLs to the training held for leadership teams. However, not all LEAs did this.
- Despite the programme's emphasis on the important contribution of LEAs' link advisers and inspectors (LAIs), some LEAs had not done enough to ensure that the work of PSCLs and LAIs was a coherent partnership of support and challenge.

## Points for action

4. To develop the programme further, the DfES and the NCSL jointly should:

- target more accurately the available resource to enhance the quality of leadership and management and raise standards in the lowest-attaining schools nationally, irrespective of their LEA boundaries
- explain how the NCSL client-centred consultancy model should be used by schools and PSCLs together to raise standards
- make more explicit in their training the role of the PSCL in supporting schools to raise standards
- revise the training programmes for school leadership teams in order to:
  - organise more logically the sequence in which the elements of training are presented
  - develop the key skills of leadership and management
  - give more time for discussion and assimilation of the content of the training.

5. LEAs should:

- ensure closer co-ordination between the roles of PSCLs and LAIs
- ensure that all PSCLs are committed to the aims of the programme and are able both to support and challenge the headteachers and leadership teams of the participating schools
- ensure that PSCLs receive sufficient and appropriate information about the schools they support.

6. LEAs and schools jointly should:

- improve their monitoring and evaluation procedures to measure outcomes accurately, accounting for the resources used and judging the value for money of the actions taken.

7. Schools participating in the programme should:

- commit themselves more whole-heartedly to the programme through clear action planning focused on raising standards and through developing a sense of urgency about the actions needed to meet the programme's objectives.

8. PSCLs should:

- exploit the client-centred consultancy model and other models of support, committing themselves to the objectives of the programme, including raising standards in schools other than their own.



## Establishing the programme

### The aims of the programme

9. In the information provided for participating schools, the DfES set out four key aims for the programme:

- to strengthen collaborative leadership and responsibility for teaching and learning in primary schools
- to equip leadership teams with an understanding of expectations and standards in English and mathematics and the expertise needed both to identify where improvements should be made and to take appropriate steps towards bringing about those improvements
- to develop and extend the use of management tools to inform effective leadership and to contribute towards improvements in the teaching and learning of English and mathematics
- for participating schools to make significant improvements in Key Stage 2 results in English and mathematics over the period 2004 to 2006.

10. The programme was intended to provide schools' leadership teams with opportunities for out-of-school training, visits to other schools and support from an experienced headteacher, namely a PSCL.

11. The programme's design focused on developing the knowledge and skills of school leadership teams in order that they might improve standards in English and mathematics through the observation of teaching, giving feedback to teachers and analysing information about their own schools. The programme emphasised collaboration within the leadership team, referred to as 'distributed leadership'.

12. The programme set out to meet the needs of the participating schools through:

- an emphasis on collaboration, using the subject leadership of literacy and mathematics to provide a model and support for collaborative approaches to school improvement
- a balance of central training and individual school-focused support from a PSCL, enhanced by support from the LEA's national literacy and numeracy strategy (NLNS) consultants
- a focus on improving rates of progress in literacy and mathematics

- the use of leadership approaches established and developed by the NLNS and the NCSL
- sustaining and embedding good leadership and management so that schools might apply their learning in these areas to improve teaching and learning in other subjects and aspects.

13. Regional directors from the Primary National Strategy and the trainers from the NCSL provided the training jointly for PSCLs. The role of the PSCLs in the programme was drawn from the NCSL's concept of a consultant leader. The DfES intended that the PSCLs would be current serving headteachers with a successful background of improving standards in English and mathematics in their own schools.

14. The DfES also intended that LAIs in LEAs should play a role in supporting schools, by preparing them for the programme and enhancing its benefits. The DfES regarded the involvement of LAIs as crucial to schools gaining maximum benefit from the programme in the longer term. It made it clear that LAIs needed to understand the intended outcomes of the programme. It also expected them to monitor the extent to which these were achieved.

15. In the early stages of the programme, there was little evidence in the schools visited in the survey that this was happening. Headteachers of participating schools noted a clear difference between the role of their own PSCL and their school's assigned LAI and did not fully appreciate that the two roles should be complementary in terms of the support and challenge the school was receiving. Despite the programme's emphasis on the important contribution of LAIs, some LEAs had not done enough to ensure that the work of PSCLs and LAIs was presented as a coherent partnership for schools.

16. The training for the PSCLs placed a strong emphasis on 'client-centred consultancy', setting out six stages of consultancy that PSCLs might use with the schools they were to support. These were listed as:

- exploring problems and opportunities
- new perspective and ownership
- creating a new scenario
- choosing goals
- planning for action
- implementing change and monitoring.

17. However, the disadvantages of the consultancy model within the programme were:

- the short timescale for raising standards

- the danger of schools being diverted to tackle issues in their own schools which were not central to raising standards in English and mathematics
- insufficient opportunities for expert headteachers in their roles as PSCLs to use their own knowledge and expertise to give enough direction to schools facing problems which they recognised from their own experience
- the lack of a sense of urgency from the participating schools.

18. The client-centred consultancy model was by no means appropriate for all the schools in the programme: weak leadership and management in some of the participating schools meant that they simply did not have the capacity to work effectively with the PSCLs to identify accurately their own needs and to make progress in raising standards. The difficulties were exacerbated in LEAs where PSCLs were given insufficient information about the schools they were supporting.

### **The role of primary strategy managers**

19. Most primary strategy managers had taken up their role with the launch of the programme. All of them carried significant other responsibilities within their LEA's school improvement or school effectiveness service, but not all of them held a strategic senior post within the LEA. Those who did not were at a disadvantage and had to convince more senior colleagues about the range and importance of the role.

20. The strategy managers worked hard, at short notice, to implement the leadership programme: recruiting and appointing PSCLs; selecting, informing and briefing participating schools; familiarising themselves with the programme and providing training for school leadership teams, as well as attending training themselves. The challenge was to absorb the extra work created by the post of primary strategy manager without losing their focus on other areas. The extent and expectations of their additional responsibilities became clear only gradually, with the launch of the Primary National Strategy and further information about the leadership programme. Many strategy managers felt that initial information from the DfES suggested a minor role for them in overseeing the programme rather than the much broader set of responsibilities that ensued.

21. The DfES organised national training sessions and briefings for strategy managers. Most found these informative, particularly in clarifying the role of the PSCLs. Some strategy managers, however, were concerned about not being sufficiently informed about the programme before the training for the PSCLs; they found themselves unable to answer questions PSCLs raised or to respond to criticisms of the programme. Many strategy managers felt that their attendance only at the third day of the initial training for PSCLs was insufficient and had not allowed them to counter the sense of confusion about key messages. A number were frustrated at trying to manage and develop a programme of locally based support for schools as well as matching it to a national programme which they felt was being developed in a piecemeal fashion without a clear, long-term overview.

22. All strategy managers believed that the leadership programme was a useful, additional vehicle for school improvement and most assimilated the programme into the LEA's own support for schools. Several strategy managers welcomed the programme as an opportunity to develop coherent teamwork across the LEA in order to tackle underperformance in schools. They took the opportunity either to initiate or to formalise meetings between the different branches of their support services, for example, between LAIs and curriculum support staff.

23. However, providing additional support from NLNS consultants, to which schools in the programme were entitled, created some difficulties for NLNS teams that were already working at full capacity. This required some LEAs to review or reallocate provision. A significant number, but not all, of the participating schools had already received substantial support previously. A few strategy managers expressed concerns about the amount of limited resource made available to a minority of schools and the impact this had on LEAs' ability to ensure a good enough service for the rest.

24. For many strategy managers, the main issues in challenging low attainment and underperformance were:

- schools' weak leadership and management
- schools that had stalled in their progress and were unable to see what to do next
- headteachers' low expectations of what pupils could achieve
- the effectiveness of middle management.

Strategy managers, therefore, considered the programme's focus on developing leadership capacity to be appropriate and timely.

## **Selection of schools**

25. From the 14 LEAs in the survey, nearly 450 schools were participating in the first year of the programme. In all these LEAs, a range of information was used to select schools:

- national test data at Key Stages 1 and 2
- schools' performance and assessment (PANDA) reports
- Ofsted's section 10 inspection reports
- the LEAs' own knowledge of the schools (such as the quality of the schools' leadership and management, and experience of the headteachers), derived from LEA officers and advisers.

26. The range of schools finally selected by LEAs to participate in the leadership programme reflected a much broader interpretation of their suitability than that intended by the aims of the programme. As a result, they were at very different

stages of development, which had significant implications for the effective training of the leadership teams. In practice, the implications were not recognised and the training was not always sufficiently well matched to the schools' needs.

27. Almost all the schools selected were receiving, or had recently received, additional support through the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies. In most LEAs, the group of schools included ones deemed by Ofsted to require special measures or to have serious weaknesses.

28. In inviting schools to join the programme, not all LEAs highlighted explicitly the programme's focus on raising standards; rather, they emphasised the value of the opportunities that would arise from the additional support that the programme was able to provide. Some LEAs invited all schools to participate and then used their own background information to select the participating group. Others were more specific in identifying low-performing schools: there was an open invitation and schools nominated themselves but, in order to make sure that certain schools that would benefit from the programme were included, LAIs or primary strategy managers met the headteachers to encourage them to participate. In most LEAs there were a few schools that refused to take part. Such disagreements were resolved, in most but not all cases, through LAIs' or the primary strategy managers' direct contact with and encouragement to the schools concerned. Several LEAs were unwilling to insist that schools participated in the first year, being aware that the second year of the programme would provide a further opportunity to involve such schools.

29. There was sometimes initial antagonism from a small number of headteachers, especially where there was a difference of opinion about the school's performance. Sometimes difficulties arose where schools' section 10 inspections had reported positively on leadership and management. Most schools, however, saw the additional resources and support as a benefit and, therefore, most participated willingly. This was particularly so where a new headteacher had been appointed.

30. In too many instances LEAs took care to avoid any stigma being attached to schools. However, this often backfired: schools agreed to participate because of the additional funding and support rather than because they acknowledged explicitly that they needed to raise standards. As a result, schools were included whose headteachers were not clear about why they had been chosen and, in the programme's early stages, did not understand its aims, expectations and outcomes.

### **Selection of primary strategy consultant leaders**

31. Most LEAs wrote to all schools inviting headteachers to consider applying for the position of PSCL. A minority of LEAs identified suitable candidates and then asked them to apply for a position. In one or two LEAs, the direct targeting of headteachers resulted in the appointment of high-calibre consultant leaders who possessed the necessary interpersonal skills and leadership qualities required.

32. Some LEAs created difficulties for themselves by inviting all headteachers to apply; this resulted in responses from unsuitable candidates who discovered later that their schools were to be supported by the programme. On occasions, applications were received from headteachers who did not have the necessary

knowledge and understanding of the national strategies to enable them to support schools effectively. In many LEAs in the survey, strategy managers reported that several headteachers who possessed the skills to undertake the role of consultant leader had decided not to apply.

33. Prospective applicants were usually provided with details of the characteristics of consultant leaders identified by the DfES and a copy of the booklet about the programme that had been provided for participating schools. Some LEAs provided candidates with detailed job descriptions. Most LEAs received a suitably positive response to enable them to select PSCLs from a field of applicants, although some had a limited number of applicants, which reduced or eliminated any possibility of choosing the very best candidates and meant the selection of all, or almost all, of those who applied. During 2004 the criteria for selecting PSCLs have been refined in preparation for a second year of recruitment and expansion of the programme.

34. Once applications were received, LEAs determined applicants' suitability in a variety of ways, through:

- a letter of application in which candidates expressed their suitability
- their own school's inspection report, particularly to assess the quality of leadership and management
- recommendations from schools' LAIs
- discussion between primary strategy managers and other key personnel.

35. After the initial screening and (where relevant) shortlisting, LEAs usually held formal interviews involving senior LEA personnel, including strategy managers and heads of school effectiveness divisions. In spite of the small number of applicants for some posts, most LEAs managed to select a team of consultant leaders that could be matched appropriately to the schools in the programme.

36. All LEAs gave careful consideration to matching schools and PSCLs. Strategy managers and members of the school improvement and NLNS teams discussed 'best-fit' solutions. In larger LEAs, geography and travel were determining factors; others matched PSCLs to schools of similar size and type to their own. In some LEAs, the PSCLs themselves were involved in the matching arrangements, using their own knowledge and that of inspectors and advisers to agree on pairings. One LEA decided to allocate PSCLs to a cluster of schools supported by a single LAI.

37. Many LEAs gave schools the option of negotiating or declining the match with a PSCL and, in one LEA, schools were asked to state a preference, but very few changes were made to the pairs originally suggested. Where LEAs had recruited from a small number of applicants, the task of matching PSCLs to schools was more difficult. In one LEA, many PSCLs came from small schools when most of the schools to be supported were much larger and, in some cases, of a different type. The matching of schools with consultant leaders was successful in the vast majority of cases, but not all the PSCLs were sufficiently committed to the programme.

38. Once LEAs had appointed PSCLs, most ran a briefing session to explain the role of consultant leader and to establish working protocols. PSCLs gained useful contextual information at an appropriately early stage in those LEAs that gave them information on the quality of leadership and management of the participating schools.

### **Training of primary strategy consultant leaders**

39. All PSCLs undertook three days of training before beginning their work with schools. The training was led by the regional directors from the Primary National Strategy, supported by experienced headteacher trainers selected by the NCSL. The training was organised regionally, with PSCLs from several LEAs attending a single venue. Most of the three-day training was completed in the summer term 2003, but not all; this meant a late start for support for some schools.

40. Overall, the leadership and presentation of the training by the regional directors and NCSL trainers were good. The first three days of training focused predominantly on the NCSL's model of client-centred consultancy. PSCLs had opportunities to explore the model, for instance through role play and observation, and gained a good understanding of its elements. A significant positive outcome was the improvement in PSCLs' understanding of leadership and management in their own schools – a direct consequence of the opportunity to work in groups practising client-centred approaches. Their commitment, enthusiasm and high levels of motivation were very positive features.

41. The training, however, placed too little emphasis on school improvement and raising standards in English and mathematics. The imbalance between the client-centred consultancy model and the roles and responsibilities of the PSCLs, considered as expert headteachers, meant that many of them left the training confused about their role in supporting the participating schools. As a result, some of them were not fully committed to one of the key aims of the programme. In response to early feedback, training for PSCLs has been modified to include a greater balance between the client-centred consultancy model and other models of support. Briefings for PSCLs have also begun to reinforce the programme's central role in raising standards in English and mathematics.

42. On the last of the three days there were useful opportunities for strategy managers to work with the PSCLs from their own LEA to plan for and discuss the support programme for schools. Separate discussion groups also allowed strategy managers to report on their own LEA's progress in introducing the programme. They drew attention to important organisational issues, such as the need to provide PSCLs with a 'tool kit' of resources published by the NLNS to use when supporting schools.

43. A fourth day of training was organised in the autumn term 2003 to give PSCLs and strategy managers a chance to develop approaches to working with school leadership teams and to discuss the work undertaken to date. This took place after the PSCLs had made their first visits to schools. Information was also provided about the training for the school leadership teams, a significant omission from the first three days, and on monitoring and evaluation procedures.



## The programme in action

### Training for school leadership teams

44. All schools were funded to allow the leadership team to attend three half-day out-of-school training sessions led by LEA teams. These were intended to complement school-based activity being supported by PSCLs. Most LEAs provided the training sessions over a number of days to ensure that all schools could participate, especially where it was not possible for all members of a leadership team to attend on the same day. One LEA arranged its training for the early evening so that the whole leadership team could attend.

45. Leadership teams who did not attend the training events on the same day limited disruption in their own school but missed good opportunities to share ideas. One school reported that because staff attended on different days they received different messages and this led to confusion about the aims of the programme. Not all schools were aware that they were participating in a nationally devised training programme.

46. The quality of the training in most sessions was at least satisfactory and was good or very good in several LEAs. Overall, the quality of the second half-day's training was better than the first. In a small number of training sessions on the first half-day, objectives were unclear, issues were glossed over and there was a lack of focus on school improvement and raising standards.

47. Many trainers and leadership teams found the half-day events too short to give adequate time to the activities in the centrally devised training and meet the demands of the programme. As a result, trainers had to omit key elements on some occasions or adjusted the training to present elements in a different order. The key principles of effective leadership were not effectively established in the first half-day's training before other topics were introduced on the second half-day.

48. Leadership teams responded positively to the training. They particularly valued the opportunities to discuss the issues raised in the training and how they applied to their own schools. However, many considered that the first half-day lacked focus and presented confusing messages. Most schools found the second half-day more pertinent because it concentrated on school improvement, assessment for learning and effective leadership. Most LEAs used additional materials or substituted activities in order to make the training more relevant to the local context. However, this sometimes exacerbated the sense of fragmentation and lack of clarity in the training.

49. The training was most effective where the tasks were clear and the discussion groups were encouraged to focus on well-defined issues. Good teamwork between the primary strategy manager, the NLNS consultants, PSCLs and LAIs characterised some of the most effective training. Strategy managers who understood the leadership programme well and who were able to quote current, relevant examples also enhanced the quality of the training.



## Information provided for primary strategy consultant leaders

50. The DfES gave LEAs insufficient direction about the nature, quality and amount of information that PSCLs should receive. As a result, the LEAs took widely differing approaches to providing PSCLs with information about the schools they were to support. All LEAs acknowledged the need for PSCLs to be prepared and briefed effectively before their first meetings with the headteacher and leadership team but, in practice, this was not always the case and some were, therefore, inadequately prepared to work with schools to raise standards.

51. In the best examples, the LEAs ensured that the PSCLs had full access to all records held on the school and its performance. For example, in one LEA, PSCLs received an informal briefing on their schools from the LAI and a detailed background file on each school including:

- a fact sheet on the school with details of the headteacher's experience
- results at Key Stages 1 and 2
- a value-added grading (1–7)
- a commentary on issues and barriers to progress
- judgement on the quality of leadership
- information about the leadership team's level of ICT competence
- pupil mobility and the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals
- grades from section 10 inspection reports
- additional information such as quality marks, achievement awards, healthy school awards, arts marks and sports marks.

52. This initial background material was supplemented by further discussions between the strategy manager and the PSCLs and, where necessary, by access to the visit notes written by LAIs.

53. In contrast, other than a briefing meeting with the strategy manager or an LAI, some LEAs gave PSCLs very little information. A small number gave nothing at all, requiring the PSCLs to glean all necessary information and request pertinent documentation from the schools themselves. A number of LEAs were reluctant to provide PSCLs with the participating schools' PANDAs, because they were confidential to the school and the LEA; this meant that some PSCLs found it difficult to move headteachers and their leadership teams towards discussing standards.

54. Between these two extremes, LEAs eased communication with, and the transfer of relevant information to, PSCLs in a variety of ways. In most LEAs, the LAI was the hub for information, co-ordinating the PSCLs working with participating schools and,

in some instances, the linked NLNS consultants. Some established regular meetings with PSCLs, but in a small number of LEAs, LAIs were not sufficiently engaged with the programme and the work of the PSCLs.

### **Primary strategy consultant leaders' work in schools**

55. The DfES expected that PSCLs would work with each of their schools for four days over the academic year and provided funding accordingly. In practice, LEAs allocated more days than this to some schools. The PSCLs' training suggested a pattern of intervention for them to follow in their initial contacts with schools. The training also clarified the expected outcomes, including helping schools to devise an action plan to raise standards in English and mathematics and developing the capacity of the leadership team. PSCLs were given guidance on 'getting to know you' meetings with schools and 'getting started' activities.

56. From the beginning all PSCLs established good working relationships with headteachers and their leadership teams. They discussed with them what the school itself saw as the issues and barriers to progress. Most PSCLs adopted the client-centred consultancy model well to engage the headteachers. However, in the first meetings, few progressed beyond discussing general information and onto actions to improve standards. There were several reasons for the lack of progress in discussions:

- confusion and lack of clarity about their role inhibited some PSCLs from pursuing discussion of standards
- the lack of information available to some of them, especially the school's PANDA, meant that some PSCLs had no knowledge of the school's comparative performance and relied on headteachers to volunteer it
- a minority of PSCLs were hostile to the emphasis on raising standards, a key objective of the programme, but one which emerged clearly to them only during the latter stages of their three-day training
- the slow start to the programme, in a few LEAs, meant that some PSCLs were late in making contact and, as a result, in establishing the programme in their schools.

57. A key aspect of the PSCLs' role was as a 'broker' within the LEA. Through this role it was intended that the PSCLs agreed with headteachers and LEA staff how additional support from NLNS consultants should be used. However, as most PSCLs had been selected on the basis of their own success in headship, many had only limited experience of working with literacy and numeracy consultants and were unclear about how consultants might support school improvement most effectively.

58. During the first meetings with leadership teams it was intended that the focus should be on agreeing and drawing up an action plan to raise standards. This aspect of the programme was almost universally weak. Too few schools produced clear,

focused plans. Many produced plans that were too ambitious to be achieved within the duration of the programme. Others drew up plans that bore little relation to the main factors of underperformance in the school. For example, one school listed several long-term aspirations to promote pupils' independence and creativity, but omitted to mention improving the teaching of reading in Key Stage 1 where standards were too low. The issue of reading had not been discussed by the PSCL and the leadership team, despite the fact that the school had yet to establish even elementary systems to monitor and improve the quality of provision. In contrast to the 'raising attainment plans' in the DfES's 'Intensifying Support' pilot programme (2002-03), there was too little emphasis, in this programme, on requiring schools to establish clear, focused action plans directed to raising attainment and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Part of the reason for this lay in the adoption of the client-centred consultancy model by the PSCLs.

59. Further, a small number of PSCLs were unwilling to challenge schools about their expectations and low standards even when clear evidence was available to them that this was the case. In effect, they colluded with the headteacher and leadership team rather than provided challenge. Others found themselves supporting schools that had better results than their own.

60. There were, however, effective PSCLs who focused on standards and made explicit to schools their role in raising standards and their responsibility to pupils. These PSCLs were clear about what was manageable within the time available and where the focus of their energy, and that of the leadership team, should lie. Leadership teams who welcomed such expertise made good progress in tackling their school's priorities. One headteacher said: 'The PSCL challenged the school's way of doing things and thinking about things. He is clever at asking pertinent questions and forcing us to face up to it.' Another said that the PSCL 'asked some really searching questions ... and asked these of members of the leadership team'. As a result, the team had found the visits 'quite difficult' because there was 'a lot of emotion there and they'd never been asked some of the questions before'. Nevertheless, the PSCL's sensitive and intelligent questioning helped the school to make progress and, in the school's words, 'gave the whole thing legitimacy'.

## **Schools' responses**

61. Broadly, four categories of school emerged within the programme. Each required some form of additional support, but the nature and extent of that support, as well as the ability of the leadership teams to make effective use of it, differed widely. The leadership programme was not necessarily the right form of support for all the schools involved during its first year.

**Category 1** Relatively high-performing schools: characterised by the recent appointment of an experienced headteacher, with a strong track record, who recognises what needs to be done to develop the current senior management team; alternatively, an established, successful school with a significant change of senior staff.

Neither type of school within this first category actually needed the support of the PSCL, but recognised the potential benefit of having the support of another

colleague to coach and develop the leadership team. Such schools valued the additional funding, especially because it provided the opportunity for the leadership team to meet together during the school day. These schools were very clear about how to integrate the leadership programme into their overall school improvement plan to raise standards.

**Category 2** Schools with a new and inexperienced headteacher: LEAs used the leadership programme to provide the headteacher with a mentor, usually a well-established, successful colleague.

The new headteacher valued highly the support, knowledge and expertise of the PSCL in the role of mentor. Some regarded this mentoring as more effective than the traditional induction arrangements made by their LEAs.

**Category 3** Schools with weak headteachers: in these cases, the headteacher was the main stumbling block to progress, often not able to exploit the potential of the programme and harness it to improve their own situation. Frequently, their staff, or the literacy and numeracy consultants, were left to carry the responsibility of managing the initiative. Plans, if produced, were weak and unfocused, ignoring fundamental priorities within the school; any targets set were vague or unrealistic.

In such cases, the LEAs had frequently skirted around the challenge of either formally notifying governing bodies of their concerns or pursuing capability procedures with the headteachers.

**Category 4** Schools for whom the programme was appropriate: in these schools the senior staff acknowledged that standards needed to improve and were committed to making a difference. Sometimes, recently removed from Ofsted's 'special measures' or 'serious weaknesses' categories, these schools had recognised the need to develop all staff and work collaboratively to make progress as quickly as possible. There was a strong sense of urgency in their discussions and a tangible sense of seizing the opportunities provided by the programme.

62. All schools mentioned several features of the programme which they valued highly:

- the time available for leadership teams to meet together within the school day to discuss strategic issues, and for individuals to carry out specific activities such as the observation of teaching
- the 'mentoring' aspect for new headteachers or the insight gained from 'a fresh pair of eyes' for more experienced colleagues
- the training for English and maths co-ordinators and their involvement, in some schools, in discussions with PSCLs. This provided them with a strategic overview of teaching and standards and useful professional development.

63. In contrast, negative aspects perceived by schools included:

- the lack of direct advice on what works in particular circumstances (rather than the ‘Let’s work it out together approach’, as described by one headteacher)
- the amount of money provided to schools to support the project when they would have preferred the funding to be given directly to them to fund their own development.

Unrealistically, a minority of headteachers expected the PSCLs to effect the necessary changes.

64. All schools in the programme received funding to cover the cost of sending their leadership team on the half-day training events and to provide cover for them to undertake activities in their own schools. However, not all schools used the money for the intended purpose. One school, which normally budgeted £8,000 for supply cover, instead budgeted £5,000 and augmented the figure with the £3,000 grant, because ‘funding is difficult this year’. However, the headteacher then explained that staff had not been able to attend some of the training because the school did not have enough money in the supply budget. Such misuse of the funding was limited, but too few schools could account clearly for the funding provided and certainly were not able to make judgements, in most cases, on value for money.

## **Impact of the programme to date**

### **Impact on leadership and management**

65. Most schools believed the greatest impact, so far, to be the bringing together of key staff to reach a common understanding about their roles and responsibilities. A few leadership teams reported that they felt that they had got to know each other better. Some felt that their ability to evaluate the school’s strengths and weaknesses had improved. English and mathematics co-ordinators particularly gained from the programme, many of whom became involved in strategic discussions with their headteachers and deputy headteachers for the first time. Involvement in discussions with the PSCL heightened further their understanding of leadership. As a result, many schools reported that their English and mathematics co-ordinators worked more collaboratively to raise standards. One mathematics co-ordinator felt she was ‘a better model of leadership for staff’, and others reported that colleagues now looked to them for support on pedagogical issues and not just administration.

66. The opportunity for professional dialogue within schools increased. Several English and mathematics co-ordinators benefited from paired coaching in lesson observations from NLNS consultants, PSCLs or, occasionally, LAIs. Some schools used part of their funding to establish a timetable to monitor English and mathematics across the school. In a small number this led to the co-ordinators, for the first time, becoming aware of, and raising concerns about, the quality of some of the teaching and learning in their own school. In one case, the leadership team had to be ‘brutally frank’ with staff about the need for a culture change within the school. In another, the more open discussions amongst the team had led to the leadership deficiencies of the deputy headteacher being exposed. Only a small minority of

headteachers felt that the programme had had little impact so far. These heads reasoned that most, if not all, that they were doing had already been planned for and recorded in the school's development plan and that the programme was simply providing additional resources to enable them to move forward more quickly with developments.

### **Impact on standards**

67. In the first two terms or so of the programme's first year, the vast majority of schools had focused on raising the quality of teaching, with a few linking this to teachers' performance management. Generally, schools that had focused on raising standards had established or strengthened systems for:

- auditing teaching and learning within the school
- monitoring pupils' work
- monitoring and improving the quality of teaching
- tracking pupils' progress and attainment
- analysing data
- setting targets and reporting these to pupils and parents
- clarifying which groups of pupils required specific intervention programmes for literacy or mathematics
- improving pupils' self-assessment
- improving the monitoring and management of pupils' behaviour.

68. Most schools thought that standards would rise as a result of their actions, but only in the longer term. A few hoped to see some improvements in test results, but not necessarily for pupils currently in Year 6. Others expected to see general improvements in the quality of pupils' work or specific improvements in areas that had been a focus for attention, such as writing. Most schools, though, felt that it would be difficult to isolate the particular impact of the programme from the impact of other initiatives. Very few schools in the survey had raised their numerical targets for Year 6 pupils as a result of the programme; a minority had lowered them because, as a result of the support they had received, they had gained a more secure understanding of pupils' progress and attainment and a better foundation from which to plan for improvement.

69. Too many schools in the programme had weak action plans and focused their attention on long-term aims that were difficult to achieve in the timescale. A small number of headteachers failed to complete tasks agreed with the PSCLs and thus jeopardised the momentum for improvement. Others distracted themselves by focusing on what they perceived to be more appealing topics, such as developing creativity and investigating learning styles at the expense of ensuring that pupils

were making good progress in English and mathematics. This was sometimes encouraged, albeit implicitly, by the client-centred consultancy model adopted by the PSCLs.

## **Monitoring and evaluation**

### **Monitoring and evaluation by LEAs**

70. At the start of the programme, LEAs were unclear about the DfES's expectations for monitoring and evaluation and, in the early stages, most LEAs concentrated on establishing procedures to monitor the work of the PSCLs rather than developing criteria to measure the impact of the programme on schools' performance.

71. The work of the PSCLs was monitored in a variety of ways, but most frequently through:

- the sharing and discussion of notes of visits between LAIs, PSCLs and NLNS consultants
- joint visits to schools, for example by an LAI and a PSCL
- meetings between strategy managers and senior education staff as part of an overall LEA process of school monitoring
- written evaluations from schools of the support received.

72. Some LEAs were planning to monitor test results but, with the exception of one LEA, there were no specific expectations of schools about additional or higher performance targets. One LEA expressed the view, rightly, that it would be difficult to evaluate the impact of this programme in those schools that were part of other national initiatives such as Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones.

### **Monitoring and evaluation by schools**

73. Many schools had not begun to consider how they might monitor and evaluate the success of the programme. Those that had were able to point to clear success criteria in an action plan. Some headteachers believed that the leadership teams in their schools would have a clearer understanding of school improvement and an increased confidence to perform their management roles. One or two referred to an increase in expectations amongst all staff.

74. Many schools indicated that they would be able to measure success by scrutinising end-of-year test results. Few schools, however, had raised their targets for English and mathematics, most headteachers being reluctant to commit themselves to predicting an improvement in results in 2004. They preferred to be cautious and predict that results were more likely to have improved by 2006.

75. In a small minority of schools monitoring and evaluation procedures were identified clearly and an integral part of the programme. In these schools, the following elements were included:

- precise and quantifiable success criteria identified in an action plan
- rigorous monitoring of pupils' achievements by tracking progress through the year
- precisely focused scrutiny of pupils' work to moderate standards between and across year groups, ensuring progression from one year to the next
- feedback shared between a co-ordinator and the headteacher, deriving from focused observations of teaching
- regular fortnightly leadership team meetings to evaluate progress
- progress reports shared with all staff
- periodic discussions led by the PSCL, focusing on the extent to which outcomes were being achieved.

76. Headteachers in these schools were able to identify positive outcomes. They expected standards to rise in all year groups, shown in improving results from National Curriculum end-of-Key Stage and optional tests. They expected to observe improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and felt that teachers and teaching assistants would accept greater responsibility for the progress of pupils in their classes, holding themselves accountable for this.