NCAS CONFERENCE 2017

*Enabling School Improvement*: research into the role of local authorities in supporting local school improvement systems

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Bournemouth, 12 October 2017
Our Isos Partnership evidence base

• Work with 30+ local authorities, including developing school/LA partnerships

• 2012 report for DfE and LGA on the future role of the LA

• 2014 follow-up ‘temperature check’ for DfE

• Reports for DfE and National College - leadership of teaching school alliances, primary system leadership, SEN funding, A-level class sizes, post-16 funding, and how schools work together to close gaps in attainment

• Three-year National Teaching School evaluation (led by Nottingham University). Robert Hill’s national academy chains report 2011/12
2012 – three responsibilities for the local authority in education

- **Champion** – of educational transformation, moral purpose, democratic mandate to ensure good outcomes, vision
- **Convenor** – bringing leaders together, connecting to best practice within and beyond the system, facilitating partnerships
- **Commissioner** – bringing the strategic picture, intelligence and data, enabling and commissioning support and development

Champion of children, families and communities

Convenor of partnerships

Commissioner of services
2014 - three types of transition that local systems were experiencing

Leadership approach

- Passive
- Active
- Directive

Engagement approach

- Piecemeal
- Broad and deep
- Superficial

Types of Transition:

- Slow mover
- Timely adapter
- Sudden reactor

Leadership approaches:

- Passive
- Active
- Directive

Engagement approaches:

- Piecemeal
- Broad and deep
- Superficial
AIMS OF THE PROJECT

1. summarise **key issues** for local school improvement systems

2. describe **different local approaches** to school improvement and partnerships

3. explain the **conditions** that the research team believe are necessary to develop effective local school improvement, and **how LAs can help to develop**

4. **share learning** with authorities, partners, schools, and academies

5. provide a **contribution to the current debate** about the future role of LAs in school improvement
2017 - LGA-commissioned research project on the role of the LA in school improvement

1. Visit 1 to sample of 8 local systems across the country
   Discussions with schools and academies, LA staff and elected members, and other stakeholders

2. Team reviewed lessons and learning. Development of interim messages

3. Visit 2 to sample of local systems: test interim messages; pursue specific issues in more depth; gather further evidence

4. Case studies on 8 local systems
   Developed main report for October publication
Context of participating local areas

- **Cumbria**
  - Number of nursery, primary & secondary schools: 314
  - Percentage pupils claiming free school meals: 9.2%
  - Percentage good or outstanding primary schools: 61%
  - Percentage good or outstanding secondary schools: 93%
  - Ratio of Teaching Schools to all nursery, primary and secondary schools: 1:39

- **Wigan**
  - Number of nursery, primary & secondary schools: 124
  - Percentage pupils claiming free school meals: 13.7%
  - Percentage good or outstanding primary schools: 35%
  - Percentage good or outstanding secondary schools: 94%
  - Ratio of Teaching Schools to all nursery, primary and secondary schools: 1:41

- **Liverpool**
  - Number of nursery, primary & secondary schools: 156
  - Percentage pupils claiming free school meals: 23.6%
  - Percentage good or outstanding primary schools: 55%
  - Percentage good or outstanding secondary schools: 90%
  - Ratio of Teaching Schools to all nursery, primary and secondary schools: 1:22

- **Somerset**
  - Number of nursery, primary & secondary schools: 253
  - Percentage pupils claiming free school meals: 10.2%
  - Percentage good or outstanding primary schools: 24%
  - Percentage good or outstanding secondary schools: 76%
  - Ratio of Teaching Schools to all nursery, primary and secondary schools: 1:51

- **Tower Hamlets**
  - Number of nursery, primary & secondary schools: 95
  - Percentage pupils claiming free school meals: 35.3%
  - Percentage good or outstanding primary schools: 9%
  - Percentage good or outstanding secondary schools: 32%
  - Ratio of Teaching Schools to all nursery, primary and secondary schools: 1:14

- **West Sussex**
  - Number of nursery, primary & secondary schools: 272
  - Percentage pupils claiming free school meals: 7.5%
  - Percentage good or outstanding primary schools: 18%
  - Percentage good or outstanding secondary schools: 45%
  - Ratio of Teaching Schools to all nursery, primary and secondary schools: 1:23

- **Hampshire**
  - Number of nursery, primary & secondary schools: 497
  - Percentage pupils claiming free school meals: 8.0%
  - Percentage good or outstanding primary schools: 3%
  - Percentage good or outstanding secondary schools: 43%
  - Ratio of Teaching Schools to all nursery, primary and secondary schools: 1:31

- **Dorset**
  - Number of nursery, primary & secondary schools: 163
  - Percentage pupils claiming free school meals: 12.0%
  - Percentage good or outstanding primary schools: 29%
  - Percentage good or outstanding secondary schools: 53%
  - Ratio of Teaching Schools to all nursery, primary and secondary schools: 1:20
Our report highlights some key messages from our visits

- Local systems at different stages
- All developing local strategic partnerships
- Critical period for funding
- Importance of the LA role
“In education, ‘what works?’ is not the right question because...

everything works somewhere and nothing works everywhere

...So what’s interesting, what's important in education is

‘Under what conditions does this work?’ ”

Dylan Wiliam (2006)
### Nine conditions to develop an effective local school improvement system

1. A clear and compelling vision for the local school improvement system
2. Trust and high social capital between schools, the local authority, and partners
3. Strong engagement from the majority of schools and academies
4. Leadership from key system leaders
5. A crucial empowering and facilitative role for the local authority
6. Sufficient capacity for school-to-school support
7. Effective links with regional partners
8. Sufficient financial contributions (from schools and the local authority)
9. Structures to enable partnership activity
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nine key conditions</th>
<th>How can the LA help to develop these conditions?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Clear and compelling vision</td>
<td>LA needs to co-ordinate and provide strategic push. Role for the LA as objective facilitator. Opportunity to focus on place and local context. LA can help to get roles clear.</td>
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<td>2 Trust and high social capital</td>
<td>LA needs to model effective relationships and partnership working. Local democratic mandate can help to sustain relationships founded on shared desire to find solutions.</td>
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<td>3 Engagement from majority of schools and academies</td>
<td>LA needs to be the honest broker. Compelling vision can get schools on board. LA role to reach out to schools, academies and MATs with offer for all local children.</td>
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<td>4 Leadership from key system leaders</td>
<td>LA has opportunity to engage key leaders and facilitate discussions. Development of system leadership capacity can be a key purpose of local school improvement system.</td>
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<td>5 Crucial convening and facilitative role for the LA</td>
<td>LA able to bring the intelligence from across the local school improvement system, utilise existing expertise and capacity, and support evaluation processes.</td>
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<td>6 Sufficient capacity for school-to-school support</td>
<td>LA needs to support the local partnership to identify local capacity and broker from outside where needed. LA can help map future capacity, encourage school leaders, and commission system leader development programmes.</td>
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<td>7 Effective links with regional partners</td>
<td>LA needs to engage effectively with regional and sub-regional partners on behalf of and alongside the local school improvement system.</td>
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<td>8 Sufficient financial contributions</td>
<td>LA needs to support the development of the partnership with funding and/or capacity.</td>
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<td>9 Structures to enable partnership activity</td>
<td>LA needs to work with schools to develop a multi-tiered structure that will work in their local context. LA can ensure that local school improvement system is high quality and credible.</td>
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What do we mean by “an effective local school improvement system”?

- Engage all players
- High quality SI capacity
- Engage all schools and academies
- Focus on context and place
- Evidence of impact and evaluation
- Clear local priorities
- Supporting all children in local area, including more vulnerable
- Clarity about roles and responsibilities
- Utilising school capacity

“Effective local school improvement system”
What are the key challenges we have seen to the development of effective Local School Improvement Systems?

- **Lack of confidence of LA** to take on and claim this new role
- **Lack of LA capacity**, or advisory capacity already diminished beyond the point of no return
- **Fragmentation has taken place and suspicion engrained**, key players looking after their own organisations
- **No driving force of school leaders with LA to develop a new vision for this changed landscape.**

**Supporting conditions not in place**

- **School level capacity stretched beyond acceptable levels** to be able to work with others
- **“schools-led” being defined as “schools-only”** with resulting pressure on schools

**Lack of capacity to work with schools**

- **Lack of finances** to co-ordinate support and support schools
- **Lack of capacity and time** to make the partnership structures work
- **Lack of quality assurance and evaluation**, uncertainty about what works and why

**Lack of partnership capacity or activity**
Partnership structures at three different levels

1. **School-level clusters**...for peer review, mutual support, joint practice development and moderation, leadership and staff development opportunities, and to enable efficient procurement of school improvement support.

2. **Local area or district-level alliances**...co-ordination across a number of clusters, sharing data and intelligence, reviewing the health of clusters, support and challenge, brokering and deploying support for vulnerable schools, system leader development, monitoring and evaluation.

3. **Strategic partnership**...to co-ordinate and identify area-wide priorities, develop a shared vision, involve key players, promote effective communication, develop system leader capacity, link to other key priorities, and promote sustainability.
## Positive reasons for considering school-owned companies...

- Hard-wires partnership working into a formal structure
- Partnership should endure beyond existing personnel and relationships
- Formal status can bring credibility with schools and external partners
- Creates an entity to employ staff and enter into contracts
- Enables more transparent conversation with schools about what it costs to deliver certain services

## Potential challenges to consider...

- Apparent complexity of transition process
- Whether new formal structure will deliver transformation in school improvement support or end up being ‘more of the same’
- Future costs of school improvement support – will schools be willing to pay?
- Will local system have the capacity to deliver the support and have credibility with schools?
Thank you

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