

North Yorkshire Strategic Partnerships

REVIEW

UPDATED INTERIM FEEDBACK

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Introduction: Scope and work completed

Purpose and scope

In December 2017, NYCC commissioned Isos Partnership to carry out a fast-paced review of existing partnership structures and plans for the future. The review focused on the following areas:

1. the proposal for a high-level, strategic partnership body, arising out of workshops held in early 2017;
2. the future of the existing four Improvement Partnerships; and
3. how partnerships linked to schools, key partners, regional stakeholders and other groups across children's services.

In undertaking the review, we are seeking to highlight the strengths on which to build, the challenges to be overcome, and the likely conditions for success.

What we have done

We have held face-to-face and telephone discussions with a range of individuals organised by NYCC, including:

- ✓ **Education leaders** – early years, primary, secondary, special schools and colleges;
- ✓ **Chairs of the existing Improvement Partnerships and Education Partnership;**
- ✓ **NYCC senior officers and elected members** – including colleagues responsible for inclusion, the Opportunity Area, skills, and place-planning;
- ✓ **Dioceses** – Directors of both RC and CoE Dioceses of Leeds and York; and
- ✓ **Higher education** representatives.

This report summarises interim feedback following the conversations and discussions to date. We set out at the end of this report suggested next steps.

Our experience and the fieldwork responses

We were able to bring to this review our previous experience of working with NYCC (on SEND reviews) and the Primary and Secondary Improvement Partnerships; and our knowledge of partnership structures in other authorities through our national work (most recently our report for the LGA which can be found at www.local.gov.uk/enabling-school-improvement) and also work directly with other LAs. We found a positive response to the potential benefits of partnership working in North Yorkshire. We are grateful to all colleagues who took part in this review, and have sought to reflect their views and ideas here.

Potential benefits of partnership working – and what is needed in North Yorkshire

What did we hear during fieldwork discussions?

- We heard from all interviewees about the importance of partnership working between LA, schools, EY, colleges, MATs, and other partners.
- What reasons were suggested? As resources reduce, the need to develop system leadership and system-led support capacity. Some of the key strategic challenges for North Yorkshire can only be tackled through working in partnership: the size and geography of the county with the differences between local areas; challenges around special needs and inclusion; challenges for small schools; and mitigating the impact of reduced budgets for settings, schools and the LA.
- But effective partnership working will require LA advisers to work in a different way – facilitating and commissioning rather than advising, perhaps focussed more on localities and less on Northallerton. The LA will need to reach out to settings, schools, academies and colleges with a vision about the needs of all children in North Yorkshire regardless of the structure of their education setting. Several interviewees suggested that the partnerships needed to feel different in how they operated.
- Partnership working will need schools and the LA to jointly develop system leadership capacity, and move away from a reliance on the LA to provide.
- Our recent report for the LGA explained the key conditions needed to develop successful local school improvement systems, and the vital role that needs to be played by the LA (*attached*).
- In doing so, traded services from the LA will need to complement and work alongside the offers from schools and TSAs and not be seen as competition.

North Yorkshire partnerships: current key groups

During our fieldwork discussions in January 2018, feedback concentrated on the following key partnership groups.

1

Four Improvement Partnerships – early years, primary, secondary, special

- Established in 2016
- Small executive-level groups with funding from the LA to establish and deliver specific projects

3

Phase-specific leadership groups (Primary Leadership Network, School Improvement Network, College Principals' Group)

- Primary and secondary groups developed from previous LA /school locality briefings; college group self-led
- For primary, an increasing focus on education and partnership development with opportunities to work in clusters and alliances

2

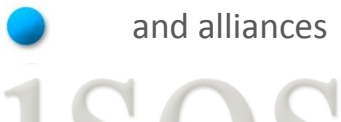
North Yorkshire Education Partnership

- Developed from the Schools Forum with the intention of linking together discussions about finances / budgets with strategic education focus

4

Joint Development Planning Group / School Liaison Group

- 12 primary representatives from across the county
- Focus on school leader health and well-being
- Channel of communication between union representatives and LA



North Yorkshire partnerships: feedback on strengths and challenges

STRENGTHS AND BENEFITS

CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1

Four Improvement Partnerships – early years, primary, secondary, special

- Interviewees suggested these had developed positively during 2017
- Examples of projects that had added value
- Significant indication of LA willingness to fund system-led interventions
- EY IP devolved funding to localities to focus on local needs and bring practitioners together
- Serving headteachers as chairs had increased ownership over the groups
- IPs have played an important role in co-ordinating bids to the Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF)

- Some IPs have a narrow focus – right at the time, but now needed to be broadened to areas linked to school improvement
- Special IP is isolated from other IPs; need to keep focus on special school improvement (avoid being drawn into operational SEND)
- IPs not yet consistent enough in demonstrating the impact of their projects
- Lines of accountability not yet fully clear
- Uncertainty about funding next year

2

North Yorkshire Education Partnership

- Maintained a consistent, important and effective focus on financial aspects and technical budgetary issues – this is widely recognised

- Has been unable to have strategic conversations about school improvement and move beyond previous role as Schools Forum
- Lack of clarity about lines of accountability has meant it has not been in a position to exercise accountability over the IPs – is it the right body to do so?

3

Phase-specific leadership groups

- PLNs now offer the opportunity for a locality-based discussion for primary schools
- Discussions beginning to strengthen cluster conversations
- Well-established College Principals' Group

- Important that they engage isolated schools: providing a reason for them to engage and creating links to existing clusters
- Need to strengthen links between phases – through IP / Principals' Group chairs?

4

Joint Development Planning Group / School Liaison Group

- Provided an opportunity for primary school representatives to come together and consider issues affecting school leader workload, mental health and other school issues

- Some suggested this forum provided a useful place to consider issues that weren't discussed elsewhere; others said this could be replaced with other means of communicating with schools or could be disbanded

North Yorkshire partnerships: plans for the future (1)

During our fieldwork discussions, we heard feedback about the possible ways forward for each of the existing partnership groups during 2018/19 and we summarise the potential routes below.

1

Four Improvement Partnerships -

EY, primary, secondary, special

- There was strong support for the continued work of the four IPs
- Interviewees suggested five main areas for development and improvement over the next 12 months:
 1. **Setting clear expectations for the impact and change** resulting from the IP projects. IPs using their core funding to plan their activities (and publish those plans), review impact, and report back on change and results.
 2. Maintaining their important role in **co-ordinating SSIF bids** in response to genuine and identified school-level needs. Ensuring **SSIF funding replaces LA funding** to enable IP projects to be supported, and to enable the IPs to move from temporary funders to become strategic commissioners of support.
 3. **Expanding the remit of the IPs** beyond a narrow focus on school improvement to also enable them to have strategic discussions, for example about place-planning, the challenges facing small rural primary schools, and how to engage isolated schools. Currently, for example, there is no forum for a strategic discussion between schools, MATs and the LA about how to expand provision in an area where pupil population is rising.
 4. **Clarifying lines of accountability** from the IPs and also formalising the relationship between the IPs and the larger groups of their phase colleagues, so that the IPs work as clear executive groups of larger phase networks and schools and settings can understand and see their role.
 5. **Developing stronger strategic connections between the work of the four IPs (and the College Principals' Group?) and linking this to LA strategic leads on school improvement** - to plan cross-cutting work, work on transition between phases, co-ordinate bids and projects, and take a strategic and pro-active view of priorities for school improvement. This could be achieved, for example, through regular discussions between the chairs of the IPs and with the LA.



North Yorkshire partnerships: plans for the future (2)

During our fieldwork discussions, we heard feedback about the possible ways forward for each of the existing partnership groups during 2018/19 and we summarise the potential routes below.

2

North Yorkshire Education Partnership

- Most interviewees agreed that the role of this group should, as planned, revert back to a tight focus on finances and budget planning. This important work would be required while there remains a statutory role for a schools forum. Some interviewees regretted that the EP had not been able to make a reality of joining up conversations about finances and strategic school improvement.

3

Phase-specific networks

- Most interviewees agreed these should be strengthened and, for primary schools in particular, used as an opportunity to develop stronger locality structures. This could be based on the five-locality structure used in other services. Advisers could be based in localities and their support linked to the work of the locality.
- A particular emphasis could be placed on developing leadership capacity across the school clusters, e.g. by promoting the use of peer review between schools.
- From our national research, we would highlight the potential benefits of locality structures in geographically large LAs, working to support the development of smaller school clusters (*the following slide explains this point further*)
- Consider strengthening the links between the secondary IP and the broader group of secondary school leaders.
- Interviewees suggested there was an ongoing role for the College Principals' Group – linked to other education fora.

4

Joint Development Planning Group / School Liaison Group

- From our fieldwork discussions, the purpose of this forum was not entirely clear. There were mixed views about its benefits. Several interviewees suggested it provided a useful channel of communication between union representatives and the LA; others said that it had limited strategic value.
- Colleagues involved need to be clear about the purpose of these meetings, and determine whether this purpose is best fulfilled by the JDPG in its current form, wrapped up in other discussions, or through other means of communication.

Learning from other local authorities

One of our key pieces of learning from our recent national report for the LGA is the importance, particularly for geographically large LAs, of layered opportunities to engage in partnership activity. A summary of a case study on Cumbria's partnership structures - which illustrates these points further - is included at the end of this report.



1. SCHOOL-LEVEL CLUSTERS

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 ALLIANCE / CONSORTIA

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. LOCAL AUTHORITY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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

Source: Isos report *Enabling School Improvement*, LGA, Jan 2018; pages 32-33

High-level strategic partnership group: laying the ground

Our learning from other authorities and the consultation already undertaken by NYCC earlier in 2017 both suggest that it will be important to have, in some form, a strategic, high-level partnership group.

Isos' national learning

- As set out in the previous slide, our research report for the LGA published in January 2018 highlighted the work of partnerships at a range of levels in different local authorities across the country.
- One of the consistent themes was the need for a high-level local authority-wide group that was able to inhabit the strategic space, work with stakeholders both within the LA and outside, and bring together the LA, schools and key partners in a strategic dialogue.
- The form that this group took, its membership, and its roles and responsibilities varied in different authorities.

NYCC workshops 2017

- We recognise from our fieldwork discussions that the LA, schools, settings, colleges and other partners undertook workshops earlier in 2017 to consider the idea of a “North Yorkshire Learning Trust”.
- The workshops were undertaken in a collaborative spirit and there was much support for the notion of developing the strategic partnership between the LA, education settings and other partners.
- Our fieldwork discussions raised two caveats: that the term “Learning Trust” was potentially confusing given its use by other formal, legal entities (multi-academy trusts, the Hackney Learning Trust etc.); and that the ideas discussed in early 2017 were of a point in time and were seeking to respond to the specific national policy direction at that time.



High-level strategic partnership group: three potential functions

This potential function was raised during the 2017 NYCC workshops

1 “the Expert Coalition”

Opportunities

- High-level, expert challenge group
- Members would have an interest in the North Yorkshire education system and be able to bring relevant national research to inform policy decisions
- Non-representative
- Opportunity to connect economy, skills and education

Challenges

- Risk of a “done-to” model of challenge that could disempower system leaders
- Perhaps more appropriate for a weaker education system (see the “Challenge Boards” in other LAs)?
- How would it drive action?

This potential function was suggested during our fieldwork discussions

2 “the NY System Leader Partnership”

Opportunities

- System-led, using the excellent capacity from within North Yorkshire, engaging those education leaders with passion for change
- Strategic engagement between LA and system leaders to co-develop solutions to difficult issues or take advantage of strategic opportunities
- Could play a role in re-orientating existing LA funding
- Demonstrates LA desire to work strategically with school-led system

Challenges

- Risk of most vocal stepping forward?
- How to ensure equity in representation and transparency of discussions?

This potential function arises from Isos’ comparisons with other LAs

3 “the Strategic School Improvement Executive Group”

Opportunities

- Link together the work of the four individual Improvement Partnerships and look at transitions
- Drive forward and join up strategic school improvement work across the county
- Co-ordinate and overview of SSIF
- Link up the work of TSAs
- Strategic meetings with the chairs of the Improvement Partnerships

Challenges

- Risk of duplication with work of individual IPs
- Narrow focus on school improvement – other issues facing the education system? Other phases?

High-level strategic partnership group: issues to consider (1)

The three potential functions set out on the previous slide are not mutually exclusive and could potentially be combined or could exist in parallel and complement each other ...

Regardless of the function, the group(s) would need to ...

- Create stronger links with the work of other groups across children's services
- Have clear and proactive leadership to drive work forward
- Set a clear vision, agree an ambitious work programme, and have clear priorities
- Have a proactive support function / business unit / secretariat to drive action from meetings and make things happen – this is crucial and was emphasised by the vast majority of colleagues to whom we spoke
- Communicate effectively with the education system and key partners
- Be able to engage with a diverse system and drive action that will bring on board isolated schools
- Have external challenge – a NY strategic group could still invite external experts to challenge and provide perspectives from outside North Yorkshire on particular themes or on an ad hoc basis
- Demonstrate impact and show results

The group(s) would need to demonstrate impact on some key cross-cutting priorities

Four were suggested to us during the course of our conversations, but there may be others to consider.

- Enhancing social mobility, continuing to develop employment pathways, and strengthening connections between the education system and the needs / opportunities of the local economy.
- Ensuring there is a clear and strategic plan for the education provision in local areas in general, but also that there is a clear plan in place concerning the future of small, rural schools.
- Ensuring the local education system works for all children – a strong focus is needed on inclusion in general (special needs support, tackling exclusions), but also on meeting social, emotional & mental health needs.
- Strengthening the connection between cutting-edge research and local school and classroom practice.

High-level strategic partnership group – issues to consider (2)

Some key questions for whatever strategic partnership group(s) considered ...

- **Leadership** – is the group to be chaired externally, by North Yorkshire education leaders, or by the LA?
- **Capacity to drive action and achieve success** – from where does this come? Is this from commissioning TSAs, utilising existing LA services? But who else will provide capacity? What capacity is needed to co-ordinate the group's activity?
- **Ways of working** – there was a strong message that this needs to feel new, dynamic and action-focused – not “business-as-usual under a different name” – how will it achieve this?
- **Impact and accountability** – how will this be demonstrated and to whom?
- **Links to other structures** – how will the group link to other strategic bodies (Children's Trust Board, Local Safeguarding Children Board, Health & Well-Being Board)? Will the group's members represent the local education system on these bodies?

Whatever decisions are taken about the form of the partnership, a key requirement will be the ability to demonstrate quick practical wins on both the priorities identified and other issues. The partnership group will need to be clear about its mandate, where its authority and funding come from, and how it can drive action. It may need to set priorities, allocate resources, and unblock problems, and do so in a way that makes a clear and demonstrable difference to school, setting and college leaders.



Proposals for a way forward

1) High-level strategic partnership groups

The Expert Coalition?

Opportunities

- High-level expert challenge group
- Members could raise the profile of the county's technical and educational system and lead to joint activities
- Bring relevant external expertise together to share experience
- Non-representative opportunity to convene expertise, skills and education

Challenges

- Risk of a "blame" model of challenge that could dampen morale
- Partners more representative of a wider education system (not just other LA's) or non-representative

The AD System Leader Partnership?

Opportunities

- System led, using the expertise of senior leaders within North Yorkshire, engaging those who are most closely involved with educational change
- Strategic engagement between LA and system leaders to develop solutions to difficult issues or to share expertise
- Could play a role in co-ordinating existing LA funding
- Deliverance LA agree to work strategically with other LEAs

Challenges

- Risk of non-representative group
- Risk of non-representative group
- Risk of non-representative group

The Strategic School Improvement Executive Group?

Opportunities

- Link together the work of the local educational improvement partnerships and look at cross-cutting issues
- Strategic engagement between LA and system leaders to develop solutions to difficult issues or to share expertise
- Could play a role in co-ordinating existing LA funding
- Deliverance LA agree to work strategically with other LEAs

Challenges

- Risk of non-representative group
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- One potential way forward would be to combine our functions 2 and 3 – the “System Leader Partnership” and the “Strategic School Improvement Executive Group” on slide 10 - to form a **single high-level strategic partnership**. Membership could be the **Chairs of the Improvement Partnerships and the LA**. Regular meetings of such a group could be split into two and cover:

- First part** could be a review and monitoring discussion between the AD School Improvement and the Chairs of the IPs to look across all phases and consider common issues; review progress against each of the IPs’ plans, consider challenges, and share impact and learning; co-ordinate work on funding bids and with TSAs; and consider engagement with the system and regional players;
- Second part** could be a more wide-ranging and informal discussion with the DCS to consider issues such as place-planning, SEND, social care, finances etc; with a focus on tackling challenges, taking advantage of opportunities, and developing innovative solutions to key problems.

1 Proposal for a System Leader Strategic Partnership Group

The Expert Coalition?

Opportunities

- High-level expert challenge group
- Members could raise the profile of the county's technical and educational system and lead to joint activities
- Bring relevant external expertise together to share experience
- Non-representative opportunity to convene expertise, skills and education

Challenges

- Risk of a "blame" model of challenge that could dampen morale
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The AD System Leader Partnership?

Opportunities

- System led, using the expertise of senior leaders within North Yorkshire, engaging those who are most closely involved with educational change
- Strategic engagement between LA and system leaders to develop solutions to difficult issues or to share expertise
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- Deliverance LA agree to work strategically with other LEAs

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- Risk of non-representative group
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The Strategic School Improvement Executive Group?

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- Link together the work of the local educational improvement partnerships and look at cross-cutting issues
- Strategic engagement between LA and system leaders to develop solutions to difficult issues or to share expertise
- Could play a role in co-ordinating existing LA funding
- Deliverance LA agree to work strategically with other LEAs

Challenges

- Risk of non-representative group
- Risk of non-representative group
- Risk of non-representative group

- In addition, the aims of our function 1 – the “Expert Coalition” - could be achieved through the establishment of an advisory **Expert Consultative Group**.
- Rather than regular meetings with the same attendees, these might be ad hoc discussions (perhaps twice a year), focussing on a different key issue each time
- Attendees would be invited for each discussion, drawn from education leaders from within North Yorkshire and external experts from outside the county.
- The purpose would be to test and challenge thinking, generate potential solutions, and share learning from other regions. The outcomes from the discussions would then be fed back into the work of the System Leader Strategic Partnership Group to action.
- A formal relationship with the EEF and relevant HEIs might be developed so that they¹³ could contribute to relevant discussions, either by being invited to attend in person or providing evidence and information in advance.

2 Proposal for an Expert Consultative Group

Proposals for a way forward

1) High-level strategic partnership groups – additional issues

Representation, leadership and capacity...

- Neither group would necessarily be representative of the whole North Yorkshire system. But it would be important to ensure that each of the IPs going forward had representation from different types of schools and settings.
- The chairs of both groups could be drawn from those that attended (“anybody around the table”).
- In terms of capacity to move things forward, the System Leader Strategic Partnership Group would have the individual IPs to take actions forward. As previously explained, the Expert Consultative Group would feed its discussions back into the Strategic Partnership Group for consideration and action.
- An additional idea to consider could be to establish specific task and finish groups to sit under the Strategic Partnership Group, perhaps co-sponsored by the LA and one of the IP Chairs. The role of these groups could be to advance thinking on a particular issue or further develop some of the ideas generated by the Expert Consultative Group. Membership could be drawn from interested school leaders and LA officers.
- LA officer support would be needed for all groups to plan and co-ordinate discussions, invite individuals to the Expert Consultative Group, work with HEIs/EEF, and join up and drive work forward.

Some risks to manage...

- A key risk to these proposals is by extending the role and responsibilities of the Chairs of the Improvement Partnerships, the roles become onerous and difficult to manage. The Chairs of the Improvement Partnerships have only limited time to give to the roles and the proposals will need to be considered carefully with them to discuss opportunities and challenges, including practical issues such as ensuring discussions are organised as efficiently as possible, meetings locations are as accessible as possible, and the potential of virtual discussions is fully explored.



Proposals for a way forward

2) Phase learning networks and district-level meetings

Opportunities to focus on district level activities and outcomes

- A potential way forward would be to strengthen the **primary learning networks** as planned by the LA and set out earlier in this pack, aligning them as appropriate with SEND structures.
- In addition, there could be benefits in bringing together a **cross-phase group of system leaders** at district level to consider outcomes across the district, transition issues, and social disadvantage.
- Learning about the benefits of this approach from the North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area and the district-level focus in other authorities (for example, Cumbria as explained on slide 17) suggests this approach might bring advantages.
- This new cross-phase group might meet in-between the primary network meetings with representatives from EY, primary, special, secondary or post-16 provision. They could focus on support for disadvantaged pupils across the district – “a district-wide conversation about the support for disadvantaged pupils” - outcomes and school level results, transition issues, school improvement needs across the district and how these might be supported.
- Membership of the district level group could be drawn from champions for partnership working in the different phases.
- Important **issues to explore** would be to clarify overlapping roles and responsibilities at district level to avoid duplication and ensure there was no confusion about how any new district groups related to existing structures.

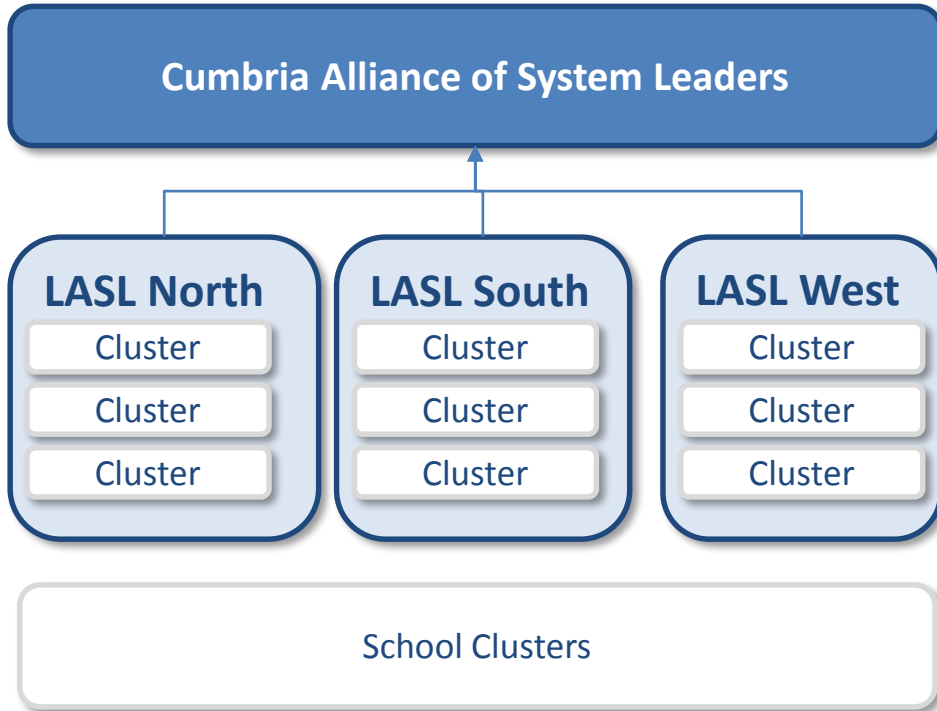


Next steps

- This short pack summarises the feedback we have gathered to date (through discussions on 8, 9 and 12 January) and discussions with LA officers in early February
- We suggest that the next step is to arrange a further conference call with Paul Brennan and Andy Lancashire to:
 - discuss the updated report – specifically the proposals for the way forward on slides 13-15; and
 - consider how to seek the views of others on the emerging proposals (school leaders, senior local authority officers, and other partners).

Cumbria relies on a strong central board (CASL) with local area alliances (LASL) to drive school improvement and link up local school clusters

Cumbria Alliance of System Leaders – a system-led approach



The LA have a critical role to play – “we had to be confident enough to say ‘we have a role’” (LA senior officer)

Type

- Three tiers of engagement:
 - School clusters of informal partnerships that undertake peer review
 - Local Alliances of System Leaders (LASLs) x3 that bring together numerous clusters, review school improvement needs in their area, monitor data and broker support
 - Cumbria Alliance of System Leaders (CASL) – county-wide company limited by guarantee

Motivations

- Strong culture in Cumbria to work across schools and closely with the LA and other partners. Reducing capacity of LA. Co-ordinate support from TSAs

Role of the LA

- LA plays a key coordinator role
- LA provides funding to release key headteachers to take on part-time chairing roles
- 3x LA advisers provided for each of the LASLs

Main partnerships

- School clusters – informal clusters and partnerships that conduct peer reviews, share data and provide S2S support
- LASLs - review school improvement across clusters, engage TSAs, and broker support
- CASL – sets the vision and overall priorities, brings together key players (including Dioceses and HT associations) and has county-wide strategic conversations



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**

Source: Isos report *Enabling School Improvement*, LGA, Jan 2018; pages 19-26



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