

**North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement
Response to Consultation
May 2014**

About this document

The North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement brought together school and local authority leaders in the Autumn term of 2013. The Commission was asked to consider how a collaborative system for effective school improvement could be developed, ensuring that every school in North Yorkshire is good or outstanding.

The Commission published its report in January 2014. Its recommendations were opened to a wide-ranging consultation with headteachers and governors across the county.

At the end of April 2014, the Commission met for a final time to consider the results of the consultation. This document is the Commission's report from that session. It summarises feedback from the education community in North Yorkshire and makes specific recommendations for moving forward.

1. The consultation process

- 1.1 As a Commission, we were delighted at the breadth of consultation that took place within the education community in North Yorkshire. Around 1,000 individuals joined a county-wide conversation about our report.
- 1.2 Formal consultation sessions took place across seven school improvement network meetings of headteachers, six network meetings for governors and in a special session of the School Forum. The discussion drew in elected members and local authority leaders, diocesan directors and representatives from the Department for Education.
- 1.3 Feedback was gathered in face-to-face meetings, through written returns and via online contributions.
- 1.4 The consultation process itself – and school leaders' engagement with it – were a positive demonstration of the readiness to develop and deepen school collaboration across North Yorkshire.

2. What you said

- 2.1 Overall the consultation process revealed a considerable degree of consensus across our education community, about areas of agreement as well as about areas where more work is required. There was overwhelming support for the development of collaborative practice – alongside a recognition that finite leadership capacity (in small schools in particular) is often a limiting factor.
- 2.2 There was overwhelming agreement that school-led collaborations (often locally based) are the most effective way to drive local school improvement. These are what we called “organic collaborations” in our report and very many excellent examples exist across North Yorkshire already. They take many forms, bringing different schools together, often across phases. **There was strong support for our proposal that every**

school in the County should be an active member of such a partnership or alliance, and that schools should be free to select their own collaborative arrangements.

- 2.3 There was also strong support for proposals which created the conditions for local collaborations to flourish.
- **Colleagues told us that the “pillars for effective collaboration” that we identified in our report were a sound foundation on which to build wider collaborative practice.** The four pillars were: a collective moral purpose; significant social capital; joint practice development; and robust evaluation and challenges. Suggestions were offered for further enhancing these pillars.
 - **There was strong support for the proposed collective moral purpose** to underpin collaboration – with a suggestion that we illustrate what it means in terms of practical behaviours.
 - **There was consensus for expanding the role and remit of the School Forum to create the proposed Education Partnership** – with a recognition that more detailed work is required to achieve this.
- 2.4 The consultation also offered constructive challenge to the Commission’s proposal for the creation of “Commissioning Groups”. Specifically, colleagues asked for greater clarity on the remit of these groups to sharpen their role as an enabler of local organic collaborations rather than a form of collaboration in their own right.
- 2.5 These challenges were extremely valuable to help us frame recommendations for moving forward as an education community. These are set out in the following sections of this document.

3. Response to consultation

Pillars for effective collaboration

- 3.1 Colleagues made a number of suggestions for enhancing the description of the four pillars of collaboration. In summary, these were:
- that partner schools must demonstrate a high degree of transparency with each other in order to build good quality relationships.
 - that the commitment to a collective moral purpose will involve, in some circumstances, a requirement for greater collective responsibility between school leaders for issues which affect their communities as a whole.
 - that in some circumstances, collaboration can involve sharing resources.

These are welcome suggestions which the Commission endorsed.

- 3.2 Colleagues also confirmed that some of the pillars proposed in our report are more applicable to particular levels of collaborations. The commitment to “joint practice development”, for example, applies to the organic (often relatively small) collaborations between schools. We agree.

3.3 Some colleagues asked how “robust evaluation and challenge” within collaborations dovetails with local school governance. As a Commission, we are clear that nothing in our original proposals should be interpreted as reducing either the autonomy or responsibility of governing bodies. Effective peer group challenge between schools does not undermine individual school governance arrangements – it enhances them. Governors’ roles are strengthened, not weakened, by engaging in external review with critical friends within a local collaboration. Accountability within schools is more robust as a result.

Collective moral purpose

3.4 Whilst supporting the collective moral purpose proposed in our report, colleagues were keen to explore its practical implications. Specifically, it was suggested that as an education community, we suggest some illustrative behaviours consistent with the purpose. The table below sets out some suggestions.

Purpose: We will work together to...	Illustrative behaviours
...deliver the right opportunities and experiences for every child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All schools welcome children regardless of behaviour or level of need • Data on exclusion rates is shared between schools • All schools provide objective information, advice and guidance (IAG) and transition information to pupils • Schools communicate with one another about casual admissions • Schools work collaboratively to enrich their curriculum offer
...create a shared culture of professional development, innovation and transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is both expectation and opportunity for staff to work across schools • Leaders move between schools • There are shared action research projects across schools • An expectation of collaboration is included as a performance target for headteachers
...build an environment of trust for effective challenge and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools celebrate their success but not through the denigration of the performance of other schools • Confidentiality is observed • Data and intelligence is shared and acted upon
...get the right skills in the right place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development opportunities exist across schools • Schools share information about their areas of expertise that other schools can draw on • Staff movement between schools is incentivised

Commissioning Groups

3.5 By far the greatest level of discussion during the consultation process focused on our proposal for Commissioning Groups. Our initial report proposed these as

geographically based bodies, run by small boards of headteachers, with oversight of 70-80 member schools.

3.6 Through the consultation process, colleagues told us that the proposed remit for these groups needed to be much sharper. Colleagues told us that:

- the groups must not become “mini local authorities” which add bureaucracy;
- groups should be focused on school improvement, and that their most important function should be to facilitate effective challenge and support;
- groups should not necessarily become providers of services (eg designing and delivering development programmes), but rather than they should facilitate the delivery of support through others;
- the primary objective of groups should be to promote improvement and prevent decline in schools’ performance, wherever the school is on its improvement journey, rather than functioning as a reactive body.

We accept all these suggestions. Building on this and other constructive feedback, we have six recommendations for moving forward.

3.7 **Recommendation 1.** We recommend re-naming commissioning groups as “Improvement Partnerships” – signalling that they are clearly focused on school improvement. It is clear from the consultation process that the term “Commissioning Group” has proved confusing.

3.8 **Recommendation 2.** We recommend that Improvement Partnerships have a sharper remit than that proposed for Commissioning Groups. Then, we proposed ten functions. In light of consultation, we propose reducing these to five. These are:

- to facilitate challenge and support to ensure that all schools are good and outstanding. Improvement Partnerships review school performance data and ensure that every school in their area benefits from external challenge, ideally through robust arrangements in a school-led collaboration.
- to ensure that every school in their area is an active member of a school improvement alliance or collaboration.
- to commission and/or broker the support that the schools in their area need to become (or remain) good and outstanding.
- to engage with schools facing challenge, working with the local authority to deploy specialist support to secure rapid improvement.
- through their membership of the Education Partnership, to influence school finance and organisation policy so that it is compatible with school improvement planning.

3.9 **Recommendation 3.** We recommend that five Improvement Partnerships are formed on a geographical basis, each covering the primary schools in their areas. A sixth

Improvement Partnership will cover all the County's secondary schools in a single group.

- 3.10 As a Commission, we are deeply committed to effective cross-phase working. We set out the benefits of this in our report. However, we are convinced that the most effective place for such collaboration to take place is in local, organic collaborations. With their revised, sharply focused remit for school improvement, we believe that the Improvement Partnerships will work more efficiently as single phase bodies. This also addresses points made during the consultation that cross-phase bodies may not sufficiently address particular school improvement needs.
- 3.11 This changed position from the Commission should not be viewed as a weakened commitment to the importance of cross-phase working. Commission members were keen to see this embedded in organic partnerships and demonstrated through the work of the overarching Education Partnership. In addition, opportunities for cross-phase solutions to improvement challenges should be recognised and taken by all Improvement Partnerships.
- 3.12 As an interim measure, we propose that special schools form a shadow Improvement Partnership of their own, pending further discussion about how they might be integrated with wider service structures to support their needs.
- 3.13 **Recommendation 4.** We recommend that Improvement Partnerships are made up of a Chair who must have experience as a headteacher; five serving headteacher members; and a governor. (In most cases, we would expect Chairs of Improvement Partnerships to be serving headteachers; in some cases, we accept that it may be appropriate to consider a former headteacher for the role). Local authority officers will be deployed to work with each Partnership. Existing local authority school improvement support will either be brokered by Improvement Partnerships, or traded directly with schools.
- 3.14 **Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the local authority is charged with the responsibility for drawing up an implementation plan for the creation of Improvement Partnerships, reporting to the School Forum (and its replacement Education Partnership) to ensure school leaders have sign off on proposals. The implementation plan should include a model role description for Chairs of Improvement Partnerships and a proposal for the recruitment of headteacher members.
- 3.15 **Recommendation 6.** We recommend that the Education Partnership is in place by December 2014 and Improvement Partnerships are in place before the end of the Spring term, 2015.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 The response to our report has demonstrated the depth of school leaders' commitment across the County to work collaboratively to improve performance. There is much still to do, of course, but the core idea of our report – that organic collaboration between schools is the engine of school improvement – can already be seen in action across North Yorkshire.

- 4.2 We know from reaction to our report, that many schools have taken the opportunity of the Commission to review the robustness of their current collaborations. The ideas we have developed together for “pillars” of collaboration and a collective moral purpose provide a ready checklist to test local partnerships. In that sense, the Commission’s report is already being implemented.
- 4.3 In the next phase of implementation, we would expect to see:
- the proposed Education Partnership established by the end of the calendar year;
 - Improvement Partnerships established by Spring 2015; and
 - completion of planning work for the transfer of resources from the local authority to Improvement Partnerships as described in our initial report, together with clarity on the nature of the local authority school improvement service in the future.
 - an accountability framework explaining how the local authority can hold Improvement Partnerships to account for the impact of their work using allocated funding and how the local authority fulfils its statutory responsibilities for school improvement
- 4.4 This consultation process has confirmed that, as an education community in North Yorkshire, we have a solid foundation of shared values on which to build. In the words of our collective moral purpose, together we are determined that every young person in our schools should have access to the right opportunities, experiences and support that they need to succeed. That is why we are committed to working together to ensure that every school in our county is good or outstanding.