

Coherence, Collaboration and Partnership – system leadership

A collection of extracts and resources to support leadership development – Summer 2020

The focus for a growing number of school partnerships, alliances and trusts is how to best establish greater coherence, connection and collaboration across the system, leaving no school behind.

The emergence of new multi school organisations, mini systems, linking groups of schools - MATs and Teaching School Alliances are established and with the proposed shifts in education policy will need to adapt.

This literature summary provides a mix of extracts and resources, some of which, you may wish to reflect upon and use to challenge your own leadership practice and future direction and to support your leadership learning.

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Section 1

Five strategic areas for sustainability (Toby Greany - Sustainable improvement in multi-school groups, 2018)



Five school improvement fundamentals (Toby Greany - Sustainable improvement in multi-school groups, 2018) supported by the five school improvement 'fundamentals' are interlinked and operate in tandem, but are described sequentially



1. Establishing school improvement capacity:

Schools identified the need to have sufficient internal capacity to support underperforming schools. This capacity might be based in the central team or in schools, but always included credible, experienced leaders who could diagnose a school's needs and co-ordinate the improvement efforts of the team. Several MATs had applied a rule-of-thumb ratio (such as 3:1 or 4:1) between the schools in their group that were able to offer school improvement capacity to the schools that needed support.

2. Forensic analysis of school improvement needs

Schools emphasise the need for thorough and precise due diligence of new schools that joined the group, that focused as much on school improvement as other aspects. This forensic diagnosis provided an initial map for the school improvement support that then needed to be put in place.

3. Supporting and deploying leadership

Schools recognised the need for continuity of leadership at school level in order to lead the process of change, secure baseline expectations, co-ordinate the integration of additional sources of support, and build relationships with staff, parents and pupils in the school. Some used heads of school with executive leadership support, while others appointed experienced leaders to substantive roles.

4. Access to effective practice and expertise at classroom and department level

The starting point was to focus on pupil progress and raising expectations, particularly in key year groups (i.e. Years 6 and 11). Schools would monitor pupil progress for these groups regularly to determine whether additional targeted interventions were required for particular pupils. Experienced middle leaders would often be deployed to support staff in the new school, providing a range of support, such as teaching, modelling practice and coaching

5. Monitoring improvements in outcomes and reviewing changes in the quality of provision

Schools undertook regular reviews of progress in the schools they were supporting. These included reviews of pupil assessment data; informal visits and periodic formal reviews. These mechanisms informed the allocation of central resources to schools that required additional support.

Section 2: The Coherence Framework (Michael Fullen)



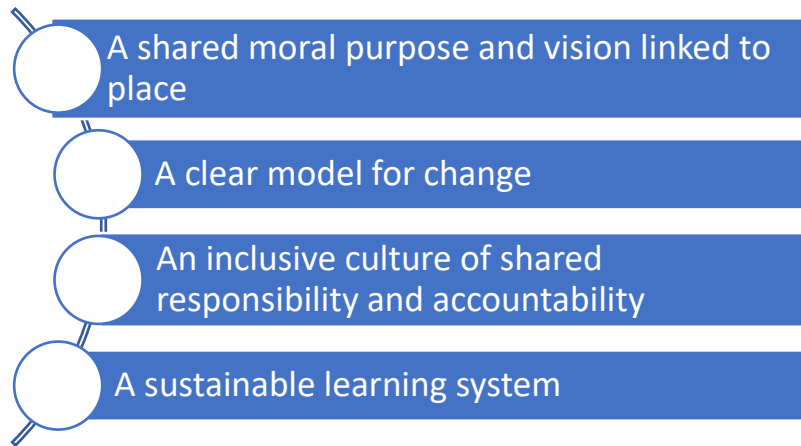
Reference: Coherence: The *Right Drivers* in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2015).

Fullen developed the Coherence Framework to bring together previous work and relevant drivers for system change. The 'right drivers' he identified were capacity building - with a focus upon collaboration, pedagogy and coordinated policies. The Coherence Framework represents going into action with the right drivers as the foundation. The Framework has four components - focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning and securing accountability. Capacity building is integral to all four components and leaders must find the right combination of these four components to meet the varying needs for their organisation and context for change.

Key points linked to the [Coherence Framework](#) above:

- There is only one way to achieve greater coherence, and that is through purposeful action and interaction, working on capacity, clarity, precision of practice, transparency, monitoring of progress, and continuous correction. All of this requires the right mixture of “pressure and support”: the press for progress within supportive and focused cultures.
- Coherence making in other words is a continuous process of making and remaking meaning in your own mind and in your culture.
- Coherence pertains to people individually and especially collectively. To cut to the chase, coherence consists of the shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work. Coherence, then, is what is in the minds and actions of people individually and especially collectively.
- *Effective change processes shape and reshape good ideas as they build capacity and ownership among participants.* There are two components: the quality of the idea and the quality of the process.
- ... that these highly successful organisations learned from the success of others but never tried to imitate what others did. Instead, they found *their own pathway to success*. They did many of the right things, and they learned and adjusted as they proceeded.
- What we need is consistency of purpose, policy, and practice. Structure and strategy are not enough. The solution requires the individual and collective ability to build shared meaning, capacity, and commitment to action. When large numbers of people have a deeply understood sense of what needs to be done— and see their part in achieving that purpose—coherence emerges and powerful things happen.
- Most people would rather be challenged by change and helped to progress than be mired in frustration. Best of all, this work tackles “whole systems” and uses the group to change the group. People know they are engaged in something beyond their narrow role. It is human nature to rise to a larger call *if* the problems are serious enough and *if* there is a way forward where they can play a role with others. Coherence making is the pathway that does this.

Section 3 Principles of collaborative working:



Principle 1: A shared moral purpose and vision linked to place and community.

Collaborations should develop a compelling and ambitious vision, expressed in terms of making a difference to a place grounded in quite specific missions aimed at enhancing outcomes for children and schools and at making a reality of social mobility. These should be relevant and contextual to their locality and wider than just accountability metrics.

Principle 2: A clear model for change.

Strategy must be coherent across the region and responsive to a forensic analysis of need; practices should be shared and aligned to evidence within an agreed framework of standardised, aligned and autonomous practices. People, communication, learning and capacity become key components to ensuring change is embedded and collaborations will need to develop systems to identify, develop and deploy leadership expertise across a region.

Principle 3: An inclusive culture of shared responsibility and mutual accountability.

Social capital is key. Collaboration between schools and support partners must be built on strong relationships that value openness, honesty and trust driven by aspiration for all. The interplay between curriculum, assessment and pedagogy should be viewed through a lens of mutual accountability built on shared moral purpose rather than competition. Robust, intelligent quantitative and qualitative data should be deployed in learning and developmental contexts.

Principle 4: A sustainable learning organisation.

Driving effective collaborations will be robust governance and logistical systems that support school improvement. Disciplined innovation, partnership, research, evaluation and co-constructive learning with the wider system should allow adaptive practice over time.

Section3: Five practical things all leaders should know about making collaborative leadership work (Education Development Trust 2018)

1. Be data and evidence wise
2. Be skilled and be responsible: build capacity, agency and ownership
3. Be aligned: Think, plan and do together
4. Be sustainable: Attend to culture change and mind-set shift
5. Be connected – design the world you want to live and work in

1. Be data and evidence wise

What do we know?

For any form of review – self review or external, the collation, scrutiny and use of different types of depth of evidence data must inform and drive discussion, giving and receiving feedback and ultimately decision- making about improvement priorities

What is happening?

Partnerships are building an ethos of enquiry and curiosity through data – driven questioning

This encourages improvement planning that is bold and future orientated, and resists the temptation to adopt quick fixes or jump to conclusions when analysing data. Collaborative, data rich conversations allow us to stay in enquiry mode, invite new eyes on our data and resist jumping to quick fix actions.

Partnerships are going beyond the big data to generate transformational insights about learning

It is important to understand the purpose and value of different types of data we collect, analyse and share within and across schools. Big data sets tells us what has happened but not why it has happened and at best can only give us a backward looking ‘rear view mirror’ perspective. They very rarely offer a rich

insight about teaching and learning and the relationships that drive learning in the classroom. This small data comes from professional insights and intelligence about what is going on in our schools and why?

Partnerships are building a culture of openness and transparency

All effective partnerships will commit to data sharing agreement that:

- commits to sharing all the data partnerships hold on themselves
- is discovering about which data really matters to them as a partnership – and this may change year on year as the partnership priorities shift
- gives equal attention to data reflected in numbers and that reflected in observation, surveys, stories, intelligence and common sense
- commits to practice of having data-rich, open and honest conversations.

2. Be skilled and be responsible: build capacity, agency and ownership

What do we know?

Leading within and between collaborative, organic systems requires leaders to develop a very different skill set and approach to that which they have honed in leading a single organisation. Creating the conditions in which diverse networks of people can learn and improve together, and can commit to set of common priorities, in an atmosphere of risk taking, innovation, trust and safety requires a set of skills that can be best learned on the job and with a healthy dose of reflection and feedback.

What is happening?

Maturing partnerships are engaging all members of the school community in the work of the partnership

This includes setting vision and values, agreeing purpose and priorities and providing opportunities for partnership activities. Where improvement planning and activity is purely owned and led by the senior team, it will always fall short of its ambitions. Effective partnerships are building a sense of ownership across the entire partnership where conversations about what needs to improve, and how, can happen at multiple levels. Teacher and leader agency means teachers and leaders having the collective agency to take meaningful action and see the results of their decisions

Leaders invest in collaborative professionalism

This means creating and sustaining a community of expertise, reciprocal feedback and collective responsibility amongst teachers. Recent evidence from John Hattie suggests embedding collective efficacy across your schools can be the BIGGEST lever for delivering impact on pupils.

Leaders sign up to school led improvement systems.

3. Be aligned: Think, plan and do together

What do we know?

Maturing from collaborative activity to collaborative culture relies on a shared purpose; it is crucial for any organisation to articulate a compelling core purpose for being. Having this focus is also crucial for partnerships wanting to make the shift from exploring 'what we are going to do?' to 'why do we exist?' and 'how will our partnership culture support this?'

What is happening?

Thriving partnerships spend time agreeing their 'why'

They know their collective common purpose. This builds ambition and motivation to engage. These partnerships they look to the future and to addressing sometimes deep-seated intergenerational challenges engage children, their families and the wider community in this dialogue

They have a small number of shared priorities for improvement

Partnerships are more effective where the agreed priorities for improvement are those that no individual school can achieve alone. This builds motivation and a need to work together to meet both self-and collective interests. This strategic alignment strengthens shared purpose and provides goal clarity, making the aspirations and ambition of the partnership appear more credible and achievable.

They build consensus from the bottom up

Just as teachers should participate in and take ownership of school improvement planning and action-taking, they should also be involved in the setting of improvement priorities. Research evidence demonstrates that the extent to which there is staff consensus about school goals is a significant discriminator between otherwise similar high and low performing schools where the goal focus is not only articulated by leaders but embedded in school and classroom routines and procedures.

4. Be sustainable: Attend to culture change and mind-set shift

What do we know?

Putting in place the systems, structures, processes and people to support effective collaboration is not easy, but it is do-able. The tougher challenge is enabling culture change, and experience tells us that this is by far the most difficult to achieve.

What is happening?

Partnerships are working to secure collective commitment within and between schools, between MATs - to work for the improvement of self and others

This are not words but deeds, and is demonstrated by the willingness to:

Share data and intelligence – an agreement of ‘what we hold in common’

Be honest about weakness – an open door, ‘access to all areas’ approach to peer review and scrutiny

Share the best practitioners so they can have the greatest impact on the maximum number of teachers and children

Hold each other to account for better outcomes and continuous improvement – the conversations that matter

Without this, a partnership-based and self improving system could very easily become a complacent and cosy system, a self deluded system and disconnected system – with some clusters and alliances deliberately distancing themselves from others in a desire to retain their ‘competitive edge’ or through fear of exposing their inadequacies in a market led competitive environment.

Partnerships are embedding our sense of collective commitment through the modelling and practise of ‘open learning’ conversations.

Partnerships simultaneously strengthen challenge whilst deepening relationships. They have conversations that develop our ability to address issues of performance, listen to others’ views, and both detect and challenge our own and others’ assumptions. These conversations are challenging, given that they often present us with a dilemma that is either ‘pursue the change agenda’ or protect the relationships. In mature partnerships, we do both – we have the conversation and in doing so strengthen the relationship

5. Be connected – design the world you want to live and work in

What do we know?

Connectedness and coherence are of vital importance to education systems. Education policy, in the last eight years particularly, has led to a fragmented and loosely connected school system. The focus for a growing number of partnerships now is how best to establish greater connectedness and coherence across the system. They don't want to work as single, isolated groups of schools, however effective they might be at the moment. New forms of mini systems linking Local Authorities, groups of schools, MATs and Teaching School Alliances are beginning to emerge.

What is happening?

System-led improvement systems and the growth of MATs:

Larger counties are exploring governance systems that engage representatives from all key constituencies across the school system. In some cases, this has meant building support for school partnerships to mature through commissioning of peer reviews and establishing the roles of more local partnership leadership. Local school improvement is owned and led through smaller, quadrant type approaches that take responsibility for the monitoring, review and support of schools.

Local learning partnerships

Other areas have set up local learning partnership bound by a common commitment to work for the benefit of all schools across a geographical area. All schools in the Lincolnshire learning partnership, for example, agree to ‘commit and contribute, build networks and welcome challenge’ with the understanding that ‘all children and schools in Lincolnshire are a collective responsibility and no school is more important than an individual child’s needs’

School led curriculum hubs, alliances, companies sometimes within trusts

Many local areas want to remain a ‘family of schools’ culture and to build a way of working that sustains and deepens this approach. School-led companies are a growing feature of the education landscape. They increasingly deliver statutory services on behalf of the local authority and in partnership with local school collaborative, teaching schools and their organisations. They provide the ‘hub’ to support, broker and commission services across a school led system.

Partnership strategy for success	
Vision, values, strategy & culture	Alignment around shared practice that supports a clear change model tracked to evidence
People, learning and capacity	Systematic ways of deploying expertise and moving knowledge and evidence around within and between schools
Principles, programmes and pedagogy	Agreement and commitment to shared principles for quality standards and success
Quality assurance & accountability	Appropriate challenge and support that is fit for purpose across all schools based on an inclusive culture of trust and mutual accountability

Section 4: Resources : in support of school system improvement for effective coherence, collaboration and partnership

Confederation of School Trusts

Future shape of the education system in England

A sector-led 'white paper'

"There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children."
Kofi Annan, *The State of the World's Children*, 2000

Institute of Education
London Centre for Leadership in Learning

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Optimism of the will: the development of local area-based education partnerships.
A think-piece

Christine Gilbert
Visiting professor, UCL Institute of Education
Chair, Camden Learning

THE LONDON CENTRE for Leadership in Learning

Department for Education

What works in delivering school improvement through school-to-school support

May 2019

Prof David Greatbatch and Sue Tate

CSR
Local Science in Government



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Sustainable improvement in multi-school groups

Research report
December 2018

Professor Toby Greany
UCL Institute of Education/University of Nottingham

CSR
Local Science in Government

Department for Education

School improvement systems in high performing countries

July 2019

Prof David Greatbatch and Sue Tate

CSR
Local Science in Government

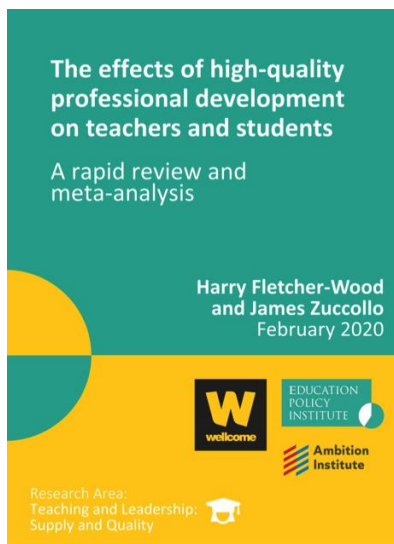
Section 5: Developing great leadership of CPLD and Coaching in Schools - sustaining the profession



This research, undertaken by Professor Rachel Lofthouse and Ruth Whiteside, demonstrates that specialist coaching can make a real difference in the professional and personal lives of headteachers. As such, amidst the growing recruitment and retention crisis amongst headteachers and school leaders, the research also provided evidence that coaching could be an effective strategy for helping to keep headteachers in the profession and create greater sustainability in the school workforce.

“Coaching isn’t a shiny solution, in fact it can take the gloss off the stories we tell ourselves about our wellbeing and our reality, and show us the raw underbelly, but this can allow us to take positive action.” (Professor Rachel Lofthouse January 2020)

New research by ***CollectivED***, a research and practice centre in Leeds Beckett University Carnegie School of Education, demonstrates that coaching can provide an effective approach to support headteachers’ wellbeing and their capacity to manage the complexity of their roles. The research was a year-long study of headteacher coaching provided by ***Integrity Coaching*** and was funded by the National Education Union (NEU). It was undertaken by ***Professor Rachel Lofthouse*** and ***Ruth Whiteside***. The research highlights the vulnerability that some headteachers feel and was the first of its kind to explore the relationship between coaching, wellbeing and leadership effectiveness amongst senior school leaders in an English context.



. *Despite widespread support for the value of professional development in improving student learning, until recently, quantifiable evidence of its impact has been limited. While professional development is usually viewed favorably by teachers (Opfer and Pedder, 2010) and policy-makers (Department for Education, 2019), it has proved difficult to reach unambiguous conclusions about its impact on student learning or the features that matter most*



Systematic research reviews are starting to build a newly detailed textured picture of the kinds of support school leaders need to provide to secure and maximise the benefit of high quality CPDL and link it effectively with school improvement. This evidence suggests several priorities and activities and two core CPDL principles for effective school leadership. The principles are that school leaders should:

1. Model and orientate CPDL systems and activities towards building shared accountability for pupil achievement and well-being; and
2. Model and use openness to professional and leadership learning as a way of securing this and ensuring that CPDL, similarly focuses on teacher development *and* well-being.

Key priority	Achieving this through example
Promoting and modelling evidence-rich professional dialogue which is open to the learning in day to day activities	Engaging with – and seeking to align – the underpinning beliefs and values we all hold about teaching, learning, professionalism and education throughout, for example, the process of -eveloping new policies
Reinforcing openness to professional learning in school systems and routines	Setting at least one goal for performance review as an enquiry question and or making it clear how enquiry-oriented goals for teachers relate to enquiry oriented goals for leaders
Emphasising shared accountability in day to day accountability processes	Organising phase and/or departmental and staff meetings work as collective enquiries designed to evaluate planned activities together, debriefing what has been learned by all group members, <i>as well as</i> what has been achieved
Focus on accelerating pupil progress <i>and</i> well-being side by side	Ensuring that planning for CPD events, schemes of learning or phase or departmental development has specific pupil well-being goals alongside achievement goals
Focus on enhancing teachers’ development, professional growth <i>and</i> well-being when planning CPDL	Ensuring that the design and or commissioning of CPDL events, processes and tools for embedding learning help teachers to navigate complexity and take account of the cognitive, practical and emotional demands that those tools and activities make on teachers

Section 6: Final comment on research informed leadership:

What is the role of leadership in creating an-evidence informed school?

Day et al. describe the core practices of leaders in successful schools. They actively set directions, develop people, and engage in organisational redesign. They create the conditions that allow improvement to be sustainable and they are able to develop and adjust their leadership practices to align with the needs of the organisation.

*The importance of using research evidence to inform professional practice and organisational decision-making is increasingly recognised across a range of contexts. Studies comparing research use by professionals have tended to conclude that educationalists are less likely to use research literature than other professional groups. Other researchers have pointed out that teachers and school leaders **do** use research provided it is relevant to their needs. Not all research addresses the same kinds of questions, and different kinds of studies provide evidence relevant to different aspects of school improvement.*

One key driver for research led intervention in schools is the role of The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>) which is dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. The EEF is not just a grant-funder, nor just a research organisation. Its remit is to support teachers and senior leaders to raise attainment and close the disadvantage gap – which roots its response to this educational challenge in the best available evidence, by:

- *raising the attainment of 3-18 year-olds, particularly those facing disadvantage;*
- *developing their essential life skills; and*
- *preparing young people for the world of work and further study.*

and

- *summarising the best available evidence in plain language for busy, time-poor teachers and senior leaders. The **Teaching and Learning Toolkit** is now used by 70% of secondary schools.*
- *generating new evidence of ‘what works’ to improve teaching and learning, funding independent evaluations of high-potential projects, by testing over 190 high-potential programmes with over 1.3 million children and young people, and **the most promising programmes** have enabled students to make +3 months of additional progress in a year.*
- *supporting teachers and senior leaders across the country in using this evidence to achieve the maximum possible benefit for young people. EEF works in partnership with a network of 39 **Research Schools** across the country.*

With thanks to Yvonne Gandy for compilation of the above references and resources, May 2020.