

School Improvement Performance Report 2013-14
Collaborative Partnerships in Primary Schools

E1. The original Collaborative Partnership initiative was developed to support sustained school improvement in small to medium sized Primary schools within a locality through a formalised approach to collaborative working. Over time, many of the original partnerships have developed further and deepened, some have re-grouped and some have only maintained a superficial contact. We are now seeing larger schools either joining existing partnerships or forging new ones of their own. Some schools have formalised their collaborative working by joining a Teaching School Alliance.

E2. This approach to collaboration for improving school effectiveness has provided many schools with wider opportunities for developing the quality of teaching and learning through joint practice development using the existing strengths within their group or through a more effective use of financial resources to purchase training and support from external providers. CfBT Advisers and Consultants have been proactive in facilitating, identifying and brokering school to school support to improve leadership and management and the quality of teaching. Education Advisers have provided external challenge to partnership effectiveness and have facilitated self and peer reviews to support school leaders in evaluating the impact of their partnerships.

E3. The following 2014 data, based on our understanding of primary schools in formalised partnerships, is an indicator of the impact of schools working successfully together

E4. Key Stage 1

Collaboration Code	Number of Schools*	Number of Pupils	% Level 2+ R, W & M	% Level 2B+ R, W & M	% Level 3+ R, W & M
Lincolnshire (Locally Calculated)	264	7,424	84.0%	64.9%	11.8%
Lincolnshire- In A Collaboration	132	2,174	85.4%	68.1%	12.3%
Lincolnshire- Not in A Collaboration	132	5,250	83.4%	63.6%	11.6%

E5. Key Stage 2

Collaboration Code	Number of Schools*	Number of Pupils	% Level 4+ R, W & M	% Level 4B+ R, W & M	% Level 5+ R, W & M	% Level 6+ R, W & M
Lincolnshire (Locally Calculated)	260	7,054	78.2%	66.8%	22.4%	0.1%
Lincolnshire- In A Collaboration	130	1,990	78.3%	66.9%	23.3%	0.1%
Lincolnshire- Not In A Collaboration	130	5,064	78.2%	66.7%	22.1%	0.1%

E6. There are a number of projects ongoing in groups of schools across the county. Some have been initiated and supported by Education Advisers (EAs), some have been run through Teaching School Alliances and others initiated by schools themselves. Examples of those currently running include:

- Peer to peer school review: facilitated by EAs with school partnerships in the South Holland and East Lindsey districts to enable school leaders to engage in undertaking focused joint evaluation of aspects of school effectiveness
- Facilitated Governor Partnership clusters to utilise Governor expertise to build capacity in individual Governing Bodies
- Setting up pilot schemes within close geographical locations to provide long-term solutions to school leadership and succession planning across school partnerships

- utilising current deputy head and subject leaders level within cross-school moderation and evaluation
- Leadership development within small school partnerships: developed and facilitated by one of the Teaching School Alliances
- The use of digital technology in effective feedback: initiated by a small group of schools, supported by an EA, and now involves approximately 40 schools in a research project to develop learning communities. Professor Steve Higgins from Durham University is involved with this project which has potential for being a case study in a future publication with the London Institute of Education. This is now also being expanded to maintain self sustaining professional learning communities

E7. Partnership working continues to be mentioned in Ofsted reports as a positive factor in good and improving schools.

E7.1 The local authority has given valuable support for improvements in teaching and learning, and the school has engaged in partnerships with other schools in order to share judgements of pupils' achievements and to continue to improve teaching and learning. (Spalding Parish October 2014)

E7.2 Strong collaborative partnership working with seven other schools in the locality has enabled all staff to benefit from a range of training opportunities. Such partnership work is promoted by the local authority, which also keep a watchful eye on the school to ensure high standards are maintained. (Weston Hills January 2015)

E7.3 The local authority has supported the school very well. Officers have supported the executive headteacher through the federation process and also made use of her leadership skills in other schools needing support. (Gedney Drove End January 2015)

E8. In April 2014 a research paper '*Partnership working in small schools: the best of both worlds*' was published by CfBT. The aim of the research was to investigate the most effective ways for small rural primary schools to work together in order to improve provision and raise standards and identified, as an outcome, ten lessons for schools:

1. Build on existing partnerships and relationships – partnership grows out of partnership.
2. Keep partnerships geographically focused – distance inhibits the frequency and intensity of schools' joint work.
3. Develop strong headteacher relationships, shared values and commitment by meeting regularly, visiting one another's schools, phoning and emailing frequently and welcoming new headteachers to a partnership school.
4. Be clear about governance arrangements, funding and accountability, and involve governors in school-to-school development and training.
5. Ensure that the leadership of partnerships reaches down to involve middle leaders and coordinators.
6. Use action plans to prioritise and clarify what partnerships will do together.
7. Focus partnership activity on improving teaching and learning through teacher-to-teacher and pupil-to-pupil engagement and learning – including the use of digital contact between staff and pupils.
8. Focus any dedicated resources on providing dedicated leadership or project management time to organise activity and/or cover transport costs.
9. Be prepared to engage in multi-partnership activity and for the form and membership of partnerships to evolve over time.
10. Monitor and evaluate the impact of partnership activity.

E9. The report gained recognition both within and outside Lincolnshire, and is included within DfE publications. CfBT staff and school leaders have been invited to meet with Headteachers from other Local Authorities to share the recommendations for this approach to facilitating collaborative partnership working between schools.

E10. A further outcome was international recognition with colleagues from Australia visiting Lincolnshire as part of a UK tour. They were interested in collaborative practice as a result of reading the published research and were keen to visit some of the schools involved in the research. They visited 4 schools (2 of which were case study schools for the research project) and a teaching school. Feedback from the group was very positive: “*the two days in the Lincolnshire area provided a fantastic experience for our group - they have come home absolutely buzzing about a whole lot of things that they experienced and observed while in the UK - they were blown away by the experience they had with your schools.*”

E11. The promotion of meaningful collaboration between schools is central to the work of the CfBT Education Services. The Commons Education Committee Fourth Report on Schools and Academies released in January 2015 noted that ‘*collaboration is essential in a self-improving school system in order to provide challenge, support and economies of scale. Harnessing the effectiveness of partnerships to raise school performance is particularly important where schools are autonomous. More needs to be done to encourage collaboration and ensure that it happens. Evidence to the inquiry suggests that collaboration is much more likely to occur and be effective if it is brokered by a third party, such as a trust or local authority. Effective brokering of collaboration between schools must be planned and considered, to ensure that the partnership is advantageous to both parties, rather than cumbersome, and real rather than cosmetic.*

E12. CfBT is working with the ‘design and task group’ of Headteachers on the future sector-led model, utilising our existing bank of knowledge of effective partnerships, to inform their decision making. The school improvement Core Offer has been reviewed to reflect the number of schools now working in groups and is utilising the strengths within these partnerships to build the capacity for sustained improvement across the schools.

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