



CREATING CONNECTIONS: LEARNING FROM SUCCESSFUL TEACHING SCHOOLS

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Summary

Background

This exploration of practice results from a deep dive examination into successful Teaching Schools, focusing on eight illustrative regional examples recommended by Teaching Schools Council representatives. The research explored the approaches, behaviours and relationships of successful Teaching Schools, and the role of the Teaching Schools Council in leading, steering, facilitating and augmenting successful connections.

Findings

- **Seven interconnected ingredients of successful Teaching Schools:** These weave throughout their activity in relation to the Big 3: Initial Teacher Training (ITT), Continuing Professional and Leadership Development (CPLD) and school-to-school support – and other activity. They are: growing and drawing on collective capacity, targeting sustainability, investing in and nurturing relationships, tailoring approaches, ensuring quality, being adaptive, and connecting capacity.
- **Five connected areas of the Teaching Schools Council's role:** These areas emerged in the context of its national and regional role in leading, steering, facilitating and augmenting successful connections. Successful Teaching Schools and their partners are seeking a purposeful communicator, an influential voice, a facilitating connector, a guardian for accountability, and a collaborative system partner.

Implications for policy and practice

- **Teaching Schools and other 'informal' networks, collaboratives and partnerships in this country and elsewhere:** Findings can be used as an external lens to reflect on current practice and consider future implications. Questions invite readers to compare their own approaches, behaviours and relationships with those of these successful Teaching Schools.
- **Unique features of successful Teaching School system leadership:** In considering future system reconfigurations, successful Teaching Schools are unique in: their ability to make connections in a self-improving school-led system; their outward-facing moral purpose to improve the system through collective responsibility; their amassing and connecting of a unique, accredited set of highly skilled workforce leaders; and their major contribution to and connection of career progression within the school-led system. These four features are underpinned by passionate and forward-looking leadership based on creating connections to grow collective teaching, leadership, organisational and system capacity and commitment. The features have to be considered alongside the seven interconnected ingredients of successful Teaching Schools.
- **The Teaching Schools Council's leadership role:** To realise its three commitments to every school in England around their entitlement to relevant and timely support, their readiness and willingness to give support, and their involvement in an effective partnership, through the five identified leadership areas, the Teaching Schools Council needs to: continue its key role alongside other system players, such as Multi-academy Trusts (MATs), to ensure that all schools in England have access to and contribute support; enhance individual and collective responsibility; mobilise knowledge about successful Teaching Schools; know the whole Teaching School system well; and lead system connectedness.





"Successful Teaching Schools and their partners are seeking a purposeful communicator, an influential voice, a facilitating connector, a guardian for accountability, and a collaborative system partner."

Introduction

Since 2011, Teaching Schools have been a major player in a school-led system where schools are empowered to make decisions about how to improve and to work collaboratively to support each other to do so. Internationally, collaboration is now seen as essential to success¹ and Teaching Schools are one piece in a much larger jigsaw puzzle. This is a fast-changing world where schools need to prepare children and young people both for existing system needs and for an unpredictable future. Their teachers, leaders, schools, communities and partners have to be able to move fast, together, confidently, while facing local, societal and international challenges.

This exploration of practice results from a deep dive into the elements of successful Teaching Schools. Commissioned by the Teaching Schools Council (TSC), the project's aim was to investigate and expand on the idea of the Teaching School as a key enabler of improvement², while stimulating thinking around 'What next?' and 'What could be?'³. It also aims to draw and build on the findings of a number of studies examining Teaching Schools⁴, including the national Teaching Schools Evaluation, published in late 2015⁵. That study focused on the first three cohorts of Teaching Schools. Findings included compelling evidence of strides made by Teaching Schools and their alliances in developing the essential relationships, social and intellectual capital and collaborative activities for improvement of teachers' and school leaders' practice within and beyond Teaching School

Alliance (TSA) partnerships. In a time of policy change, with an announcement of new regional Teaching School Hubs while this project was underway⁶, it is important to have current understanding about the contributions of Teaching Schools and unique strengths they can offer to larger local and regionalised partnerships.

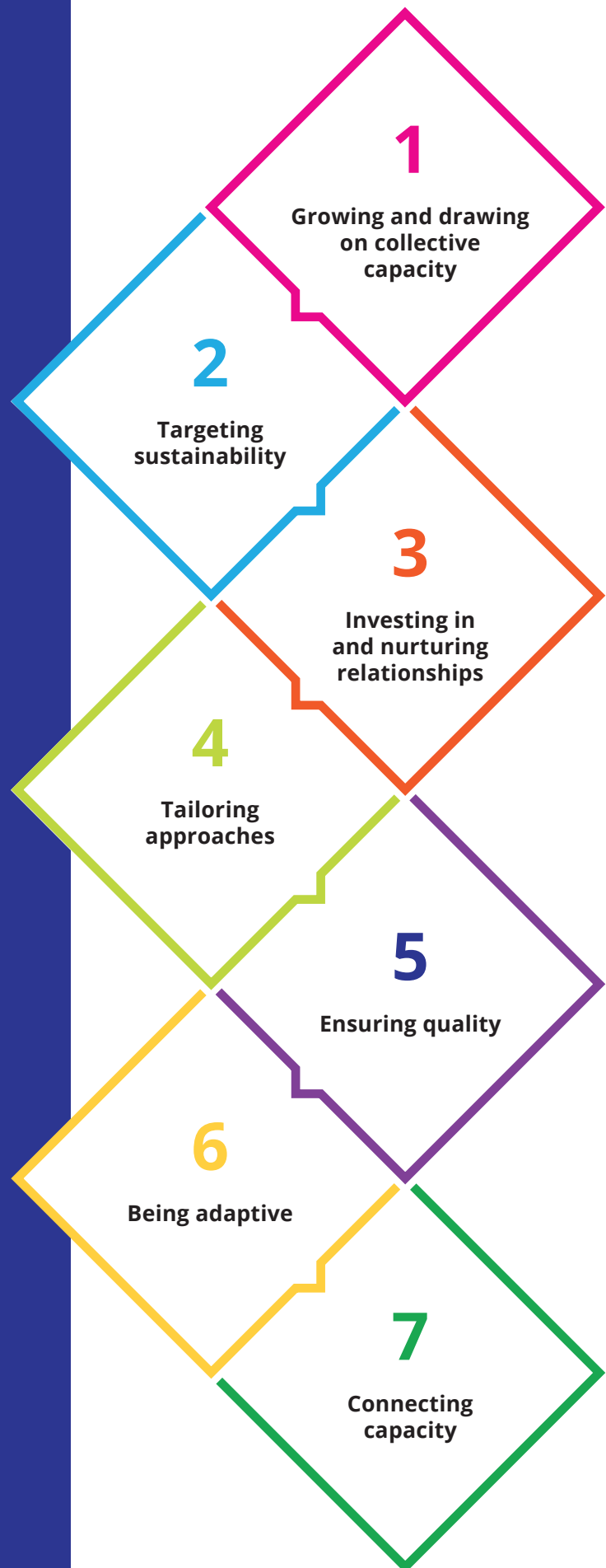
The project examined the way successful Teaching Schools make connections to achieve the aims of a school-led self-improving and sustainable system, focusing on eight illustrative examples recommended by TSC representatives, one from each region. These eight cases⁷ were chosen to exemplify the practice of successful Teaching Schools around the country. Broadly, they have a strong reputation among peers for school, teacher and leadership development, including ITT, across a region. Also, those from earlier cohorts have grown and maintained their success over years⁸.

The research explored the approaches, behaviours and relationships of Successful Teaching Schools, and the role of the TSC in leading, steering, facilitating and augmenting successful connections. Here, we present our findings, with questions for reflection and recommendations. We conclude with implications for moving forward, highlighting unique features of successful Teaching School system leadership.

- 1 Schleicher, A. (2015) *Schools for 21st-Century Learners: Strong Leaders, Confident Teachers, Innovative Approaches*, International Summit on the Teaching Profession. OECD publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264231191-en>
- 2 Cruddas, L. (2018) *Where next for the self-improving school system? Getting System Governance Right*. FASNA.
- 3 Warren, A. (2018) *Foreword* in Cruddas, L. (2018).
- 4 Greany, T. (2018) *Sustainable improvement in multi-school groups*. London: DfE; Greany, T. and Higham, R. (2018) *Hierarchy, Markets and Networks: Analysing the 'self-improving school-led system' agenda in England and the implications for schools*. London: IOE Press; Stoll, L. (2015) *Three greats for a self-improving school system – pedagogy, professional development and leadership*. Nottingham: NCTL; Sandals, L. and Bryant, B. (2014) *The evolving education system in England: a "temperature check"*. London: DfE.
- 5 Gu, Q et al. (2015) *Teaching Schools Evaluation: Final Report*. Nottingham: NCTL.
- 6 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-schools-to-improve-through-shared-expertise>
- 7 One of the eight was an early years setting. Throughout the report, when we refer to school, this term may also apply to settings, and when we refer to teachers, the term also may apply to practitioners.
- 8 Further details of the methodology, including criteria for sample selection, are given in the Annex, along with acknowledgements.

Seven interconnected ingredients of successful Teaching Schools

The research highlighted seven 'ingredients' of successful Teaching Schools, drawn from across the eight cases. The ingredients are interconnected and weave throughout successful Teaching Schools' activity in relation to the Big 3 – Initial Teacher Training (ITT), Continuing Professional and Leadership Development (CPLD) and school-to-school support – and any other activity.



1. Growing and Drawing on Collective Capacity

Growing and drawing on collective capacity is core to the vision of successful Teaching Schools. It is a feature of success at two levels: ensuring the TSA's capacity to provide high quality provision and, through this, growing individual and organisational capacity to support a self-improving school system. Partnership working is at the heart of collective capacity.

Knowing and growing alliance capacity to 'give' – Securing Teaching Schools' own capacity is achieved through identifying individuals with existing skills and expertise, and talent-spotting those with potential. Identifying Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) is central to this endeavour, but successful Teaching Schools also identify and nurture others, as well as recognising opportunities for contributions of those not officially designated by the system.

Individuals are identified from across the TSA and where greater collaboration occurs, across TSAs. The Teaching School Director (TSD)⁹ plays a critical role in identification, although they also draw on TSA members' collective knowledge so that, between them, they are acutely aware of who might fulfil roles or might succeed to these in the future. This knowledge centres on individuals' expertise but also interpersonal skills, which are particularly crucial in school-to-school support roles. Connecting individuals to roles and responsibilities in which their contribution might be maximised is carefully considered and might combine a range of these.

Supporting colleagues to achieve role proficiency is a significant investment, not least by the TSD. Preparatory training for school-to-school support roles centres on the importance of coaching, the skills required for this such as effective questioning, and protocols and processes that provide a basis for successful deployments. For aspirant SLEs, planned opportunities, such as shadowing another SLE or co-deployment alongside a National Leader of Education (NLE), support learning and requirements in the field.

An aspirant SLE programme has been successfully developed to support potential applicants to gain expertise and experience in providing school-to-school support that meets SLE designation criteria. When a deployment request is received, aspirant SLEs are considered and, if appropriate, deployed. The TSA's strategic partners have actively created such deployment opportunities so that they are corporately supporting the initiative as part of their 'moral code', supporting capacity and succession.

In-role support is ongoing and centres on enabling those deployed to carry out each aspect of the role to a high standard. For those new to the role, this typically comprises initial modelling and guidance from an experienced colleague.

Training opportunities help those who are supporting schools to consider potential deployment scenarios, confidentially discuss live issues and receive inputs that aid understanding and fulfilment of the role. Opening up Teaching School CPLD to SLEs and signposting opportunities such as becoming a Maths Hub SLE also aids development and reach of offers.

In one Teaching School, SLE meetings always include a CPLD element so they have an up to date understanding of, for example, Ofsted expectations, guidance materials such as the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) *Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation* and pedagogy such as metacognition and self-regulation. These draw on the Teaching School's Research School status and enable support provided to strengthen, for example, pedagogical expertise.

Similarly, support for those leading CPLD is also evident to ensure success and quality. The design of CPLD programmes draws on TSAs' collective capacity and practitioner expertise with cherry picking of individuals involved, often by the TSD. Where appropriate, provision also draws on external partners' capacity to meet demands and requirements of specific expertise.

In one Teaching School, deployment of expertise is fluid across the Big 3 offer, meaning that 30 SLEs are available to provide CPLD in ITT, leadership development through the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML), school-to-school support as well as, for example, running a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) programme for Local Authority (LA) schools. This multiple use of SLE expertise helps the Teaching School gain knowledge of their strengths so these might be drawn on.

Using collective capacity to grow individual and organisational capacity – Teaching Schools draw on their collective capacity – from within the TSA, as well as with external partners – to connect with individuals and teams. Critically, these connections centre on growing individual and collective agency, to engage, empower and sustain.

More broadly, they facilitate the movement of professional knowledge, research and effective practice between individuals and organisations, contributing to systemic learning and improvement and modelling *'professional altruism: why wouldn't you share?'* (Teaching School Leader - TSL¹⁰). A powerful desire to connect schools locally and more widely drives them, and they work to stimulate a similar desire among other schools to learn with, from and to challenge each other.

9 This term is used throughout the report, although in some cases a different role title existed.

10 This term covers several different role titles i.e. Headteacher, Executive Headteacher and Chief Executive Officer. The generic term has been used to aid anonymity.



Initial Teacher Training (ITT) – Growing collective capacity in ITT centres on commitment to the ITT programmes that the Teaching Schools either run or in which they are lead partners. It is focused primarily on serving the recruitment needs of the TSA, but sometimes also the local area. Making use of the TSA's collective capacity is geared towards training drawing on the 'Best people; best schools' (TSD), with best people including SLEs and best schools those with particular strengths or specialisms; for example, early years and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Teaching Schools not only engage with research but in research and practice innovation, developing evidence- and research-informed resources and materials with a core focus on strengthening subject and pedagogical expertise. In one case a Teaching School's innovative developments formed part of the ITT programme for trainees within a particular phase. This was considered to be a: 'benefit of working with a school that is looking at innovation and improving practice...essential for ITT as you don't want the training for the curriculum to ossify; you want it to be dynamic' (External Partner - EP).

Training is both an opportunity to learn from these best practitioners in centre-based sessions, or to visit schools to see practice in action. One example of this was primary ITT trainees carrying out a science learning walk as part of their training offer in a TSA partner three-form entry school. This had both a strength in science as a subject, as well as a relatively high proportion of SLEs.

Continuing Professional and Leadership Development (CPLD) – Active engagement with the educational community, locally, nationally and internationally means Teaching Schools can serve existing needs for professional development and anticipate future ones. Leaders are committed to their own professional interests and 'keep their eyes and ears open to relevant research' (EP) so evidence underpins CPLD with respect, for example, to improving subject and pedagogic expertise. Connections with Research Schools, subject hubs and national Teaching School networks and other national organisations and individuals support the development of this knowledge base. This is drawn on to connect members to the external landscape, informing and helping them maintain outward-facing perspectives and potentially reducing the effects of isolation.

A new headteachers' programme was fundamental in leading one participant to revise their school's leadership structure, investing in senior and middle leadership, supporting greater distribution and accountability. Facilitated sessions and visits to schools with strong structures enabled the application of principles and practice, supported by a NLE and a headteacher of an outstanding school: 'We had got stuck in a rut here...we didn't realise the rest of the world was moving on' (Headteacher of a supported school - HT SS).



Forums such as headteacher and deputy headteacher meetings aid such connections and reduction of isolation: *'to keep the finger on the pulse of what is happening... head above the parapet, getting excited about it'* (HT SS).

TSDs are at the forefront in such a role, signposting members to CPLD within and beyond the TSA based on their knowledge of organisational and/or leaders' needs for example, directing a school to an English Hub to support a specific reading need. National priorities are reflected in these, such as retention and wellbeing as key features of, for example, Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) and Recently Qualified Teacher (RQT) programmes.

CPLD offers in teaching and learning and leadership reflect a growing emphasis on extended, developmentally-oriented courses. These are seen to support greater depth of learning within and between sessions and offer enhanced connections between participants from different schools.

School-to-school support – Schools supported are often vulnerable or in need of additional support because they do not have the internal capacity themselves. Being skilled in diagnosing need is central to effective provision so that actions are specifically targeted where it matters most. This draws on initial discussions with senior leaders, emphasising *'listening not judging'* (SLE) and might also draw on observational and documentary evidence such as Ofsted action plans. Initial set-up focuses primarily on brokering clear, specific targets to achieve expected and realistic outcomes and is followed by preparation for engagement.

Once on the ground, successful system leaders acknowledge the importance of not making assumptions, and drawing on their expertise and interpersonal skills in being prepared to engage in honest dialogue over any misconception of priorities found: *'Actually this is the issue; that's priority number four'* (Deputy Headteacher - DHT). Deployment length shapes provision and system leaders are adept at looking holistically at the school's needs and addressing these at different levels, focusing minds on what will make the most difference in the time available.

In one case, extended support focused on changing classroom practice through promoting a learning culture. Based on the Teaching School's own successful CPLD model, this reflects the TSL's core belief that: *'If you're going to drive a school forward, it has to happen in the class first'*. Modelling evidence-informed strategies that secure pupil engagement and motivation was the main starting point, followed by small groups of teachers trialling these in their own classrooms and returning to share what had been achieved, encouraging a culture of learning. The Teaching School also used its purpose-built observation room so that visiting teachers could directly observe practice in adjacent classrooms and engage in professional conversations with its lead trainer, highlighting effective practice and hosting a coaching dialogue around this.

Support reflects a positive, developmental approach that challenges any notion that its aim is about *'fixing us'* (SLE) but grounded in a genuine desire to help which encourages buy-in and mitigates resistance. This reflects system leaders' strong belief in what can be achieved: *'Empowering teachers to know what they can do [as] something has gotten in the way...when they come up with the ideas, you know it's in there... being able to see the mist lifted'* (TSD). It is underpinned by an understanding of how to use 'soft levers' to achieve strong outcomes. This includes being prepared to be: robust – *'We still have those tough conversations, even though we've got no right really because we've got no power'* (TSD), responsible for impact – *'People might like you but it's about pupil outcomes'* (SLE), and not getting drawn into a *'poor me'* culture (TSD). Soft levers might also be used in delivering a message to staff about the need for change that supports what the headteacher has been stating – adding external credence.

Coaching is to the fore in this model, encouraging supported staff to identify their own solutions and play their part in decision-making: *'How do you see this working? What issues do you see with it?'* (SLE). This includes providing challenge where appropriate to explore perceptions and calls for critical insight, including seeing beyond what is openly communicated to understand the situation encountered.

Moving professional knowledge between schools goes hand-in-hand with creating ownership. Sharing resources, co-development of materials and co-working all support such movement, alongside breaking down the improvement process so that is clear. This is not a donor model in which there is presumption about transferring existing practices. Rather, it both encourages critical thinking about how practice might be applied to specific contexts and pushes the thinking of those receiving support.

Professional behaviours are critical to success, with modelling these a priority, such as ensuring agreed actions are fulfilled to a high standard within the expected timeframe. Resilience, persistence, such as in checking expected actions, and positivity are key characteristics shown in deployments with the last of these helping instil a sense of *'I can do it'* in those supported (HT SS).

SLE factors for success

- Having role credibility: a track record of success and knowing and, usually doing, the job
- Possessing expertise in their subject/area and pedagogy and being able to apply these
- Being skilled in coaching, including knowing what to ask, when and how
- Using critical insight
- Engendering responsibility and ownership – doing *with*, not *to*
- Modelling professional behaviours and being resilient, persistent and positive – can do
- Maintaining a focus on outcomes and assessing progress towards these
- Demonstrating strong interpersonal relationships, including humility

2. Targeting Sustainability

The bottom line for successful Teaching Schools – and a driving force – is ensuring that the learning and wellbeing of all children across the alliance and other collaborating schools is improved. They are determined that their efforts lead to improved outcomes. With this end constantly in mind, their focus is on ensuring and retaining a committed and continuously developing profession of teachers and leaders who possess the will and capability to support and challenge each other's growth. This tough endeavour leads them to prioritise sustainability, highlighted as a challenge in the Teaching Schools Evaluation¹¹.

Teaching school sustainability – At one level, sustainability is a question of the Teaching School's own capacity to provide support that will, in turn, aid sustainability in other schools. Consideration is given consequently to sourcing capacity across the TSA and beyond, both to mitigate potential negative impact on an individual school and its pupils, and to draw on the collective expertise available. Sustainability is also built in through role progression and succession eg a SLE may become a headteacher who then may become a NLE.

A key question Teaching School leaders might ask is: *'what collaborations do we need . . . to draw on for it to have a lasting impact?'* (TSL). Such collaborations might require a particular provider skill set or recognise that collaboration rather than competition will create the required capacity to support provision. This is evident in collaborative arrangements for ITT, including two TSAs offering training in a subject that was not offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) locally.

Sustainability is also, of course, about financial sustainability and its associated challenges, an aspect all leaders engaged in addressing. There is a keen emphasis that Teaching School provision is not aimed at profit but making all revenue work for members and the pupils they serve. The core grant is generally seen as essential support for maintaining critical central capacity, such as the TSD role, particularly when significant unpaid time is committed by a range of leaders to, for example, co-designing CPLD provision. Charging per-pupil subscriptions is evident but not universal within these TSAs.

In all cases, leaders consider how they can maximise their impact within budgetary constraints. This includes bidding for external grant funding, both national when available and local, such as match-funded school improvement grants through the LA or a local trust to which schools allocate a small portion of their budgets to support those most in need. Where partnership-working and collaboration are not hampered by competition, or steps have been taken to overcome this, these are often central to efforts made so that combined resources are drawn upon to address priority needs and duplication avoided.

Strategic consideration is also given to what Teaching Schools might do differently to reduce costs to schools. This

includes reconfiguring delivery models such as reducing face-to-face elements of CPLD and increasing after-school twilights, as well as marketing promotional offers for multiple bookings. Leaders are mindful that in managing costs they cannot afford to compromise quality. Underpinning the wider group of successful Teaching Schools is the notion of reviewing provision to identify what one might do *'more of, less of, better of'* (TSL).

In targeting sustainability, leaders desire some financial surety so that they can strategically plan for workforce capacity to be able to engage in provision, particularly school-to-school support. In one case, the financial model is based on the concept of investment.

With the desire to move from being a service provider to service creator and broker, one Teaching School changed the language it uses. Schools *'become an investor, which means you have to bring in your own leadership and give into the pot so everyone else can benefit from that and you can benefit from it as well. It's a real shift towards reciprocity. . . It's not just about token sign on the dotted line and pay and that will give us some protection. It means an investment. Being an investor means it's also their responsibility to make the most of this relationship'* (TSL). The Teaching School has a portfolio leadership model, where different schools take responsibility for different aspects: *'we'd prefer your time, expertise and leadership than your money'* (TSL).

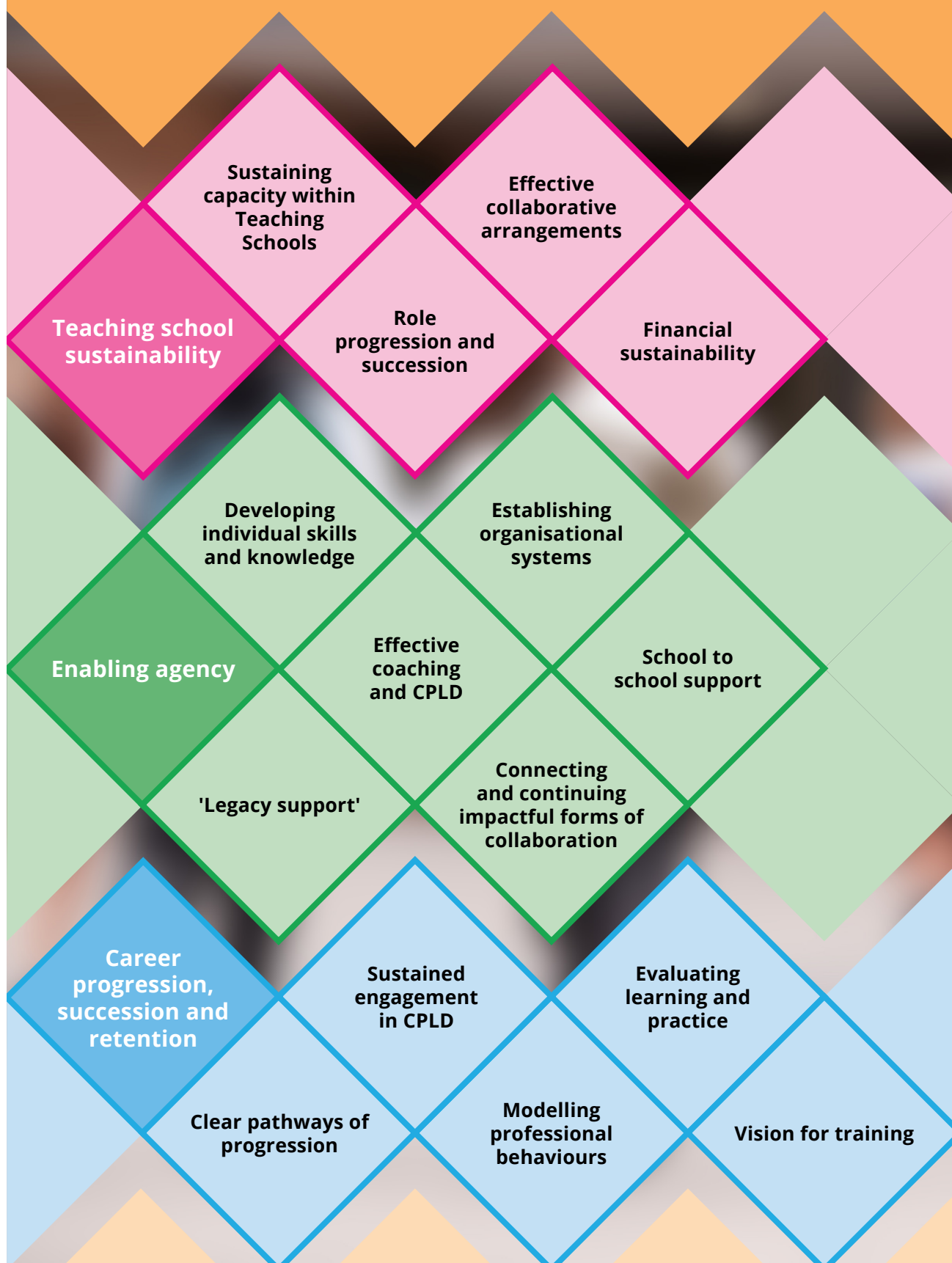
Enabling agency – Both in CPLD and school-to-school support provision, sustainability is focused on agency and empowerment: developing individuals' skills and knowledge and establishing organisational systems that will secure self-sustaining improvement. With school-to-school support, system leaders' clear remit is to consider how best they can enable this. Thinking about *'What does it look like at the end?'* (Local Leader of Education - LLE) in exit planning is a key element for this, with reference made to the EEF's *'Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation'*: *'sustainability... has to be looked at the planning stage'* (NLE). Creating sustainable solutions also often requires challenging the use of short-term fix strategies. Planning for externally-funded projects involving groups of schools is geared to thinking about how this can be used to build commitment to staying connected and continuing with impactful forms of collaboration. In this way, projects build collective responsibility as schools more actively seek other ways to connect.

The focus on coaching when growing collective capacity aims to develop the skills and knowledge that will enable teachers' and leaders' practice to be sustained and built upon, including how the latter will, in turn, use it with those they lead and manage. Coaching from a LLE was suggested by a TSD for one school which the headteacher stated

11 Gu, Q et al. (2015) *Op. cit.*



Targeting Sustainability



'got me thinking but was just right in terms of timing' as the school needed to move to its next stage of development. With a history of 'riding the good/RI line', it needed to further develop its change culture: 'belonging to the TSA has given perspective and helped maintain the broader vision' (Partner Headteacher in the TSA - TSA HT).

- Support also places substantial emphasis on modelling and undertaking collaborative activities so that the steps to be taken are explicit, shared and replicable. The extent to which these activities occur within the supported school, in the supporting school, or both, is matched to need but in all cases is focused on highlighting what is possible and achievable: 'As a one-form entry primary, staff can become insulated and isolated. It's important for staff to see and hear different messages – a broadening of horizons. Seeing different schools and settings, learning walks in schools with similar challenges led to sustainability' (HT SS). Critically, those supporting schools do not go in 'with set ideas or a "we know what to do" attitude as that does not bring sustainability as it's not owned' (TSL).
- A crucial factor is that those supported are critically engaged in evaluating learning and practice and considering the extent to which this might translate to their own context and any implications for this to be effective. This includes implications for leadership if the support is initially for teachers.
- While context-specific, development of the strategic skills of middle and senior leaders is frequently emphasised in support to secure ownership, collaboration and sustainability.

In one case, tailored support for subject leadership development in a primary school was provided by the TSD and another SLE, combining group training, 1:1 support and ongoing dialogue with the headteacher. These developed individuals' capacity to lead effectively, and resulted in a strategic shift to team-based subject leadership as a more sustainable approach, supporting sharing of expertise, succession and workload: 'Although there was a lot of input from [name - the TSD] and the SLE, what was far more impactful was that we were then able to have the capacity and foresight to think: "now we can do it this way". The support was the catalyst for this thinking. What's important is the bit that comes after – what's the impact of that going to be? That's very much about how [name] works' (HT SS).

A key focus for school-to-school support at another Teaching School is leadership development, particularly to secure 'a group of good, well-trained middle leaders who are strategic and with a good vision' (DHT). Enabling supported schools to attend the Teaching School's middle leader training, conferences and meetings promotes modelled strategies that they can apply. One school has drawn on such an offer to develop its own training model, supported by the Teaching School's lead trainer.

Aiding sustainability in many cases is what is termed 'legacy support': an extended professional relationship following school-to-school support, notably between teachers and SLEs. Supported schools also express a desire to remain connected, not through dependency, but in a continuing relationship, with the opportunity for them to give back to the wider community: 'We're in constant conversation about what we can do. Offering a pastoral workshop to ITT was at request from [the Teaching School]. They had seen areas of excellent practice and thought it can feed into their training programme' (HT SS). Sustainability can also be supported by the involvement of teachers' line managers in school-to-school support meetings so they can follow up on practices post-deployment.

Benefits for those providing support – An important benefit of providing school-to-school support is the professional learning system leaders take from their deployments, feeding this back into their own schools and aiding their own sustainability: 'You learn as much from those supported – we don't know all the answers' (TSL). This mutual benefit also extends to the importance of staff retention through their undertaking SLE roles, particularly in smaller primary schools. Such win-win situations reflect mutuality: 'Other people get something, we get something, we're sustaining and we're allowing careers to develop' (TSL).

Career progression, succession and retention – In providing CPLD, individuals' sustainability in their roles is a clear focus, particularly in NQT, RQT and new headship programmes that make personal resilience a feature.

One Teaching School is including a focus on workload and resilience in its RQT programme, using coaching and neuro-linguistic programming techniques which teachers can draw on when the going gets tough. This is evident also in its focus on wellbeing in its headteacher induction programme. Another Teaching School views the RQT programme as coming at a critical stage in workforce development as RQTs move into middle leadership positions: 'We invigorate to help them understand why they are in the profession and how they can develop' (TSL). The focus is on developing 'golden threads of leadership' into a different setting, emphasising the importance of pedagogical and early leadership skills required to take on a middle leader role, which might be in a new area.

Clear pathways of programmes that support career progression from trainee to headteacher and on to executive headship are also evident, with home-grown provision often successfully interspersed and complementing National Professional Qualifications (NPQs). CPLD also emphasises sustained engagement over extended periods so that learning is deepened, practice explored and implemented, and resources developed or provided to apply in participants' own context.

In ITT, sustainability is configured in terms of retention: 'We are putting NQTs into our schools and they are staying' (TSL) and career progression into, for example, middle leader roles. The vision for training is that it will create a pipeline of high-quality teachers, primarily for the TSA's schools: 'We want to support, to develop... teachers who are going to be here for the distance and create something that is self-fulfilling' (TSA HT).





3. Investing in and Nurturing Relationships

Quite simply, successful Teaching Schools are exceptionally attentive to relationships with and between very diverse schools and external partners. Drawing on prior relationships when they started up, they constantly work at them with existing and new partners, to establish, nurture and maintain relationships in a complex, crowded and often competitive environment. This exploration of relationships highlights three connected features: underpinning values; actions and interactions; and mutual trust.

Underpinning values – Strong relationships between Teaching Schools and their partners, including those they support, are built on underpinning values of inclusivity, equity, integrity, transparency, collegiality and optimism: *‘The mindset that anything is possible is in their gift. I often walk into a room to a set of faces who think they can’t believe they can make a difference. It’s about ...helping them to see themselves differently’* (TSD). Indeed, TSA members subscribing to the vision and values espoused by Teaching Schools has previously been identified as a crucial factor¹².

Mutual learning is the emphasis, not dominance, and everyone is seen as having something to offer. A strong moral purpose around collaboration to improve teaching and children’s learning, wellbeing and life chances guides alliance members.

Teaching School moral ‘code’ statements

- *‘custodians that want to leave education in a better place than when they found it’* (NLE)
- *‘we’re all wanting the same thing – as many good teachers as possible as NQTs’* (EP)
- *‘when we say collaborate, we mean it; we don’t shut the door and be competitive’* (TSL) *‘there’s a moral purpose that supersedes the idea of any one organisation growing, any one person; we take expertise from where it is’* (TSD)
- *‘it’s about relationships and a sense of community; a whole ethos of trying to work together for a common purpose is what drives us’* (TSA HT)
- *‘there’s a moral imperative for the work, as we don’t do it for the money’* (TSL)

The same is true where TSAs have formed partnerships with each other to further their aims and extend their reach: *‘(Partnership) is very relationship-based, and the whole model is relationship-dependent for buy-in and focus, wanting the whole system to be better’* (EP).

Actions and interactions – Successful Teaching Schools express their values and principles through what they say

12 Gu, Q et al. (2015) *Op. cit.* and Greany (2018) *Op. cit.*

and do. Key leaders do this notably through investing in and nurturing relationships, connecting extensively to achieve this by having *'eyes and ears everywhere'* (TSL). They visit schools, attend headteacher meetings, set up or participate in local events, attend national events and create meetings with anyone who may be able to join with them in pushing forward their agenda.

Relationships are built through repeated, meaningful, focused and 'honest' conversations. Getting it right in brokering support for schools and teachers is skilled work requiring careful attention to the specifics of each situation, sensitivity and diplomacy: *'whether you're a NLE or a Teaching School, it really does not matter; it's about that relationship'* (TSL). Ongoing dialogue helps to maintain relationships when conflicting ideas surface: *'we have to find a common ground and ways to resolve it'* (EP).

Successful relational behaviours

- Listening, showing respect and openness to ideas and offers
- Working through issues
- Emphasising others' contributions – *'everyone has something to offer'*
- Trust and confidence in others
- Professionally generous
- Publicly acknowledging others
- Attention to understanding people's motivations
- Accentuating the positive and communicating successes to celebrate
- Being honest but non-judgmental, and demonstrating humility
- Showing a lack of ego

All of these are highlighted in the frequently reported phrase associated with school-to-school support: *'done with, not done to'*. Headteachers of supported schools value the appreciative stance taken by system leaders, focusing on development rather than judgement – *'it's all about relationships and not being confrontational'* (HT SS) – and system leaders are forceful about the importance of such an approach: *'Most people are in teaching for the right reasons...if people are going to improve, it's a developmental process...it's not about judging...How many people genuinely improve when they're told how bad they are?'* (DHT).

Language is important in conveying vision and purpose. It is used differently by successful Teaching Schools, both in their verbal communications and on websites. All promote collaboration and partnership, but some emphasise mutual 'giving' in relationships more strongly, as in the 'investor' example. Teaching school leaders' values and behaviours are particularly important when dealing with reticent schools and potential competitors. Great efforts are made to connect with those who are hard to reach, both those difficult to engage and/or geographically distant.

Mutual trust – While trust weaves its way throughout relationships, we highlight it separately because it is at the very heart of these Teaching Schools' success, and is a word much used but all too frequently not given credence. Teaching School leaders are exceptionally aware that they have taken on this role for the system and their members,

not for their own empire building: *'If colleagues trust you and that you are not a threat, taking over, stealing staff, but acting with integrity, then that goes a huge way to supporting collaboration'* (TSL).

Trust is essentially reciprocal, requiring commitment from and bringing benefits to both partners. Developing strong relationships with vulnerable schools is often difficult, but underpinning values, actions and interactions help, as do competence, reliability, credibility, quality, value for money and dealing with issues promptly (see also *Ensuring quality*). Successful Teaching Schools generally find that providing a safe environment, along with the expertise of a partner working alongside a colleague, can stimulate significant change: *'If there's anything I've learnt, it's look to other schools Being open and honest about your areas of weakness, and there's often people that are close that might support and that you might be able to reciprocate'* (HT SS).

Where trust needs to be built quickly, this can be a challenge, but investing in it is essential. With reductions in funding, trust in relationships is also seen as critical to sustainability of connections: *'Trust is key and relationships. It will make it sustainable. . . . We will maintain it through dialogue and we will work together in whatever way. . . . We will be a supportive partner to other schools'* (HT SS).

External partners, whether from ITT organisations, LAs, consultancies, MATs, or other Teaching Schools also seek and value relationships that are both: *'mutually respectful and mutually beneficial'* (ITT Lead). Here, a *'very strong alignment of visions'* (ITT Lead) supports trust building and sustainability, with care taken not to step on each other's toes or 'dilute' what each partner offers to the collaborative relationship. Such relationships can be tested when TSAs that have been collaborating find themselves competing for national funding, likened by one person to animals around a watering hole looking at each other differently when it's running dry.

"If there's anything I've learnt, it's look to other schools... Being open and honest about your areas of weakness, and there's often people that are close that might support and that you might be able to reciprocate"

(HT SS).



4. Tailoring Approaches

Successful Teaching Schools are absolutely committed to making provision bespoke within their networks. They achieve this through leaders' emphasis on forensic understanding of needs, the matching process and needs-led design.

Forensic understanding – Being closely connected to local context is a touchstone for successful Teaching Schools. In school-to-school support, individuals are highly skilled in carefully analysing context, needs and identifying priorities and specific actions required to address these and secure sustainable improvement. More broadly, maintaining constant dialogue with teachers and leaders, and drawing on continuous feedback from alliance system leaders and supported schools enables them to gain a strong appreciation of current and future needs. For example, a Teaching School consults alliance members on what they are looking for from teaching post applicants and feeds this back to trainees in preparing them for the recruitment process as part of high-quality employability programmes.

Such understanding also requires thinking about the big picture as well as the intricate contextual details of schools: *'We're serving schools and individuals at different stages and gaps. When we're facilitating, it's not "stand and deliver" but knowing what the national picture is, what's on the horizon, what an individual school might be needing, what the Maths Hub might offer. It's strategic thinking to cater for complexities. We do our alliance a disservice if we're not thinking in that way' (TSL).*

The perfect match – Matching those giving and receiving support is taken extremely seriously, to ensure the right people are connected with each other in each location: *'It's like a dating agency. S/he [The TSD] knows who s/he's matching and it's done with sensitivity' (NLE).* Factors they consider include expertise, contextual fit, emotional intelligence and, where appropriate, personalities. Successful Teaching Schools know themselves really well, enabling them to make the call: *'I can't help you, but I know someone who can'. And they do. Through networking and endless conversations, understanding strengths across a TSA and their capacity to deliver is part of the intricate jigsaw pieced together by many successful Teaching Schools to address individuals' and schools' needs effectively: 'I can tell you who I'd put in front of them and who I wouldn't. That's the most important thing to get right. Making sure we know our own skill set' (TSL).* At times this requires difficult conversations with SLEs who believe they are the right person to support someone: *'it's being really honest with people sometimes which makes it a bit difficult but, in the end, they appreciate it because you don't send anyone off to fail' (TSD).* Inevitably, it is also important that schools are specific in their support requirements so that matching is well-informed.

As well as ensuring breadth of training experience, which Teaching Schools with diverse alliance schools can offer, trainees with particular needs are located in schools with strengths in that area. Trainees may also be strategically placed where appropriate. If ITT leads know that a school is struggling for staff, they can put a strong trainee in there: *'so we can use placements to support schools, although we*

won't put weaker trainees into a school experiencing challenges' (ITT lead). In some cases, School Direct has also supported schools struggling with recruitment where trainees on placements have subsequently been hired: *'There are some fabulous new teachers in RI [Requires Improvement] schools' (TSD).*

In one case, a supported school needed help with middle leadership and special needs. While the Teaching School provided some leadership support, because of the other school's high number of Free School Meals (FSM) pupils, the Teaching School recommended a NLE on the Teaching School's steering group from a school in a similar context. The headteacher explained how: *'The support would be specific to our need and governors were keen'. The school has since experienced positive pupil academic outcomes, but also a 'broadening of horizons' and sustainability: 'The live coaching we did in the teaching and learning walk across the entire school. Watching a lesson and looking at what's happening live and giving teacher coaching during it, with the teacher addressing it there and then. In terms of success, we now do it routinely when we do lesson observations' (HT SS).*

Needs-led design – Skilful design and brokerage of appropriate support packages and development opportunities comes from this nuanced intelligence gathering and matching. This design is connected to TSA knowledge and skills gained through: keeping abreast of national and international trends, policy changes, research evidence and best practice in facilitating initial teacher training, professional learning, leadership development and school-to-school improvement. TSA strategic groups or boards have conversations around what the immediate community needs are, also taking account of broader needs regionally and nationally, and in many cases *'keeping an eye to research' (TSL)* so that Teaching Schools' key focus on strengthening subject expertise and pedagogy can be achieved. Connections with a diverse range of external partners – including in some cases other Teaching Schools and their alliances – enables them to extend their reach and ability to design, and often co-design, impactful learning and improvement experiences.

Bespoke support is developed from an in-depth initial meeting, resulting in a clear contract with specific outcomes: *'a really, really good meeting...they knew exactly what we wanted: no surprises, and that's what we've come to experience' (HT SS).* This leads to precise tailoring and adaptation where needed. Revisions are made on the basis of ongoing monitoring, with speedy action if issues arise. All supported school headteachers we spoke with greatly valued their experiences: *'I've learnt from this that it's not as difficult as you think to get bespoke support and it's a very good investment. I would definitely do it again. It was particularly brilliant in terms of improving teaching and learning' (HT SS).*

Similarly, professional and leadership learning and development can be tailored to meet identified needs: *'We wouldn't have got this elsewhere'* (HT). Feedback from participants helps modify programme content, for example adjusting an RQT programme to include a session with a headteacher and deputy head to promote greater awareness of leadership progression pathways.

A 10-week bespoke support programme for a teacher, directly funded by the school, comprised eight visits and meetings either end of the deployment, including a visit by the teacher to observe the SLE. Support included advice on the learning environment, modelling of teaching strategies, co-planning which enabled the supported teacher's good ideas to be drawn out, and production of a photographic record of provision to support sustainability. Time between visits allowed for implementing agreed actions. Although a significant investment, in the headteacher's view the change could not have been achieved through course attendance as it combined a focus on increasing accountability and rapid improvement. This was enabled by very high quality provision from an experienced member of staff who *'didn't come in to be judgemental but supportive'* (HT SS).

There is a willingness and ability to respond to requests to develop bespoke CPLD to suit a school's or number of schools' requirements, for example a local group of schools that want to work on curriculum development together. Special school and early years Teaching Schools are able to draw on their specific expertise in supporting schools and settings, for example the former being able to help schools find ways to be smarter in their provision in a time of funding cuts. Others draw on alliance members or other Teaching Schools: *'everyone brings something a little different with them. If you don't know, you ask one of those people - they will'* (TSD). Partnership with other providers also enables the co-design

and provision of bespoke CPLD, for example working across an area with a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) to address identified behavioural management needs.

As well as addressing schools' articulated needs, successful Teaching Schools also bring and have access to a wealth of knowledge and skills around needs that they perceive. One Teaching School, attentive to rural isolation and not wanting to be *'an ecosystem that's a bubble'* (TSD), focuses on ensuring that the best of national CPLD in, for example the field of pedagogy, is made accessible to members. Research evidence about powerful professional learning also influences design: *'It will be bespoke and longstanding'* (SLE).

In all these efforts, TSDs and ITT leads play particularly important roles: *'The TSD is very quick in response to needs. S/he either has a good memory or a good database! S/he knows what we've done and what we might need. S/he works the job and the relationships. S/he remembers what's happened'* (LLE).

One bespoke approach supported a school's SEND provision through: supporting leaders' skills and knowledge at a strategic level, leading whole staff CPLD, working with TAs as a group, and targeting quality first teaching for SEND pupils across Key Stages 1 and 2. This last aspect involved working alongside each teacher to plan and deliver lessons recognising the class context, such as mixed-age classes and range of pupil needs, as well as the teacher's own skills and experience in managing these needs. Support drew on the SLE's own substantial experience as well as research evidence on TA deployment. Where specialised CPLD was needed, for example on autism, the SLE signposted this from external agencies. Targeting impact and sustainability, the school's headteacher viewed the support as *'not a not a one-off piece of work but a change in culture.'*



5. Ensuring Quality

Substantial commitment and investment of time focuses on ensuring that high quality is a hallmark of successful Teaching Schools. Great practice here is categorised into four main themes: setting high standards and expectations, quality assurance and evidence of impact, continuous learning and credibility.

High standards and expectations – These are central to what is seen as a continual drive for high quality provision. This focus is underpinned by leaders establishing and expressing clear values centred on: moral purpose, being a responsible service provider and ensuring offers are considered good value for money. Only doing something if it will likely have a positive effect on pupil outcomes and when it is considered it will be done well are both core principles. Capacity and expertise are key factors in deciding this: *'the capacity to be able to do it in the way we want to do it'* (TSL). Successful Teaching Schools are consequently cautious about not taking on too much activity in order to maintain quality and, importantly, a reputation for this. Teaching School leaders filter opportunities that arise against these criteria and state that if they are not met then they will signpost another TSA that might fulfil the request as *'It's not about holding the badge'* (TSL).

High expectations of quality mean drawing on the best practice and thinking within the TSA(s) and more widely with respect, for example, to pedagogy. This relies in part on maintaining an outward-facing perspective, including connecting with organisations and individuals that might add value to the quality of offer. This aims to ensure that provision is shaped not only by local need but set more broadly within a regional, national and international context. Leaders are key figures in maintaining such an informed and forward-thinking outlook, with the TSD in particular knowing *'the best person and best practice'* (EP).

High expectations are central to all offers, for example, partner schools' provision for and commitment to ITT programmes: *'The quality of the provision is critical'* (TSD) as well as maintaining high standards in trainee recruitment to secure the *'right people for the right reasons'* (HT) because *'we are the guardians of our profession'* (DHT). This means making sure: *'that people we are interviewing are people we would be happy to put in any of our alliance schools and put our name on them'* (TSL).

Quality Assurance (QA) and evidence impact assessments – These enable systematic and careful assessment of the desired quality and its outcomes. In CPLD, examples of gaining impact evidence include end of programme impact statements, 'before and after' self-assessed skills audits completed by middle leaders participating in a development course, and written case studies. Tracking of individuals' career progression is also referred to in connection with a moving to headship programme from which nearly 40 per cent had already become headteachers. In addition, moves are being made to assess the impact of CPLD more longitudinally; both in terms of professional impact and pupil outcomes (while in the latter case acknowledging likely association rather than causality).

High standards and expectations

- High quality provision
- Clear values
- Moral purpose
- Capacity and expertise
- Best practice

Quality Assurance and evidence impact assessments

- Skills audits
- Written case studies
- Tracking career progression
- Evaluation reports
- Feedback
- Cultural shifts

Continuous learning

- Peer review
- CPLD reviews
- Operational and strategic reviews

Credibility

- Research
- Best practice
- High level of skills
- Expertise
- Credibility of personnel

In one TSA's region, tackling disadvantage was an identified priority and sub-regionally the attainment gap was wider than it was nationally. In the absence of a specific programme of CPLD for Pupil Premium leads, a year-long, six-session programme has been created, drawing on the expertise of leaders from two schools praised by Ofsted for their grant use and a partner Teaching School which is also a Research School. It has included peer-to-peer review and is seen to have impacted on the skills and confidence of post holders: *'A really high quality piece of work...done with peers visiting schools – proper critical analysis'* (HT SS).

On a wider scale, cross-area Quality Assurance (QA) of NPQs occurs across a national partnership for the provision of these with an external partner playing an integral role. In training courses and ITT taught sessions, QA is evident in designated leads sitting in on these to ensure quality.

One Teaching School seeks out particular specialisms and best practice examples from alliance schools. Colleagues from these schools train ITT students, along with Teaching School staff. In the first year, the Director of School-centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) sat in on every session. She also observes every new person leading training: *'she marks you on how well you're doing'* (TSD). The Teaching School has also selected an *'amazing'* external moderator, with credentials in school inspection and university SCITT moderation: *'He will tell us if he thinks we're a millimetre out. That's why we employed him. He's challenging'* (TSD). This investment in ITT is seen to create strong NQTs whose career progression is tracked, with many moving into leadership positions.

In school-to-school support, system leaders' reports of action and impact centre on 'what' happens in a deployment but also the *"so what" factor* (TSL), with supported schools' evaluation reports also providing evidence for these. This is in addition to any external QA conducted by commissioning bodies, such as a LA. One example highlighted a very experienced SLE accompanying a leader and governor on a learning walk to evaluate practice once support had been provided to assess impact. Unplanned or unsolicited feedback also provides evidence of impact such as: statements about the successful influence of school-to-school support in Ofsted reports, LA reports and email feedback from schools. Moves are also being made to consider impact of participation, as this vignette highlights.

In one Teaching School, a spreadsheet approach is used to map the participation and contribution of all the TSA's schools in its activities. This generates average scores for participation. Headline analysis shows that in the 60 per cent of schools that participate the most, progress measures at Key Stage 2 are double that of others. While it is recognised that this not an exact science and does not accurately represent causality, the working hypothesis is that participation/contribution are contributory factors.

Impact is not always easily quantifiable, however, and some spoke of cultural shifts that were critical to the school's improvement and pupil outcomes: *'An element is outcomes, outcomes, outcomes – it has to be. It's about accountability. But from our point of view, it was the attitudes of staff. They were disappointed with the Ofsted outcome . . . It was about staff morale and picking staff up in the right way'* (HT SS) or what an SLE described as a teacher who had *'fallen back in love with teaching'*.

Continuous learning – This sits centre stage in successful Teaching Schools' strategy so that evidence collected through QA systems is used to further refine and develop provision, for example drawing on CPLD reviews to aid continuous improvement. Some are using forms of peer review, with children peer reviewing each other's schools in one, with external perspectives from partners also supporting improvement, such as the TSC's recommended peer review system between triads of Teaching Schools.

Operational and strategic review of provision with relevant parties is a clear focus with an emphasis on: *'really strong dialogue on what works well and what doesn't'* (EP). Governance structures and TSA strategic groups enabled critical reflection on QA evidence to secure further improvements to quality, for example a shift to developing multi-session CPLD programmes that enabled participants to deepen learning over an extended period. In one case, the structure is described as: *'Our forum mentality is "let's reach out and bring people in, give them what we've discovered they want, then get them in and ask more questions" which leads to the next step which is what might it look like for different people? So a significant amount of evaluation and reflection is designed into the system'* (TSL).

Credibility – Teaching Schools are committed to providing offers that draw on, and are supported by, research, best practice and individuals with high level of skills and expertise in, for example, subjects and pedagogical practice. School leaders connect to Teaching School provision because they trust its quality.

The credibility of personnel is keenly felt with regard to school-to-school support with, for example, very selective recruitment and deployment of SLEs who combine expertise with good levels of emotional intelligence. One SLE described their selection process as *'gruelling'* but this gave a sense of earned status. De-designation of SLEs sometimes follows because of the quality of their classroom practice or pupils' performance dipping below the expected standard.

Credibility of system leader support was founded on such factors as currency in their role, track record of their own school and the type of school in some instances, for example whether it faced similar levels of disadvantage to the one they were supporting. Additionally, one SLE identified how their track record of support was important: *'You're only as good as the last piece of work you did'*. Other indicators of credibility were also found, for example, in commissioning of Teaching Schools by the LA to provide CPLD programmes for NQTs and/or new headteachers.





6. Being Adaptive

Being receptive, responsive and flexible is part of successful Teaching Schools' DNA. They are ambitious in maximising their system influence, thereby addressing challenges, flexing provision and horizon scanning to keep evolving: *'Nothing stands still. Every week it feels like the ground is shifting. Our ability to stay standing requires us to be agile, responding, horizon gazing'* (TSL).

Addressing challenges – Successful Teaching Schools are by no means immune to challenges. Problems are wide-ranging, operational and strategic, involving specific individuals or schools, or connected with the local area, national policy changes, as well as societal issues and, indeed, international challenges.

Some of the challenges and pressures faced by Teaching Schools

- Getting leadership through influence 'right'
- System leader and a teacher or headteacher relationship not working
- The system still being ill-informed in places about Teaching Schools and roles eg SLEs
- Supporting schools targeted through multiple initiatives
- Teacher recruitment – fewer applicants, shortages of teachers for certain subjects
- Teacher retention issues
- Addressing isolation
- Competition affecting trust and willingness to engage in collaborative activity, and other risks in collaborating eg not duplicating
- Maintaining a separate identity externally when they have both Teaching School and MAT status
- Financial pressures – schools spending less, covering costs, expectation of doing more for less
- Devoting significant amounts of system leader time putting together national funding bids
- A constantly shifting landscape affecting

- forward planning and short timeframes for bids
- Never forgetting their own school's development ie concerns around de-designation

At multiple levels, successful Teaching Schools reflect critically on challenges and seek positive solutions, being prepared at times to be brave in managing risks. Operationally, if something isn't working as it should, they quickly address the situation to bring about necessary changes. Barriers are acknowledged alongside a focus on their mitigation to achieve maximal success with available resources. What might be seen as missed opportunities are frequently creatively turned into further opportunities.

A TSA-LA collaborative project to improve reading stemmed from an unsuccessful Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) bid. Part-funded by each and led by SLEs, who co-designed it with a LA school improvement lead, it was seen as a loss leader so that the selected schools could engage with the Teaching School that, in turn, led to future engagement. Its multi-session approach (six sessions over a year) combined inputs and inter-session tasks, including encouragement to research elements such as reading for meaning. At the end of the project, a portfolio of case studies showing the impact of involvement was produced for participants to share in school and clusters.

With access to external CPLD proving difficult due to financial pressures and the geographical isolation of some schools, reshaping provision includes creative use of technology. This enables CPLD to take place in schools' classrooms during the day, as well as offering online training packages. This also fits with many Teaching Schools' understanding and use of research evidence around effective CPLD, enhanced by connections with Research Schools¹³, HEIs and other research brokers.

13 Two of the Teaching Schools in the sample are also Research Schools.

An external information technology (IT) CPLD provider is supporting a Teaching School to develop its ITT and NQT programmes. They are applying research-informed technology to support lesson observation, including in remote areas where it is a challenge to visit them. This gives them greater capacity to work with a larger number of NQTs and schools. They have also been working on a maths and science project with 10 secondary schools, providing remote coaching to schools that recorded lessons then shared them across the group.

Another response to extending provision to hard-to-reach areas involves growing satellites. One Teaching School 'plants' sister alliances, sponsoring and providing resource for small, isolated schools. Small clusters of schools want to replicate what they are doing. Following a 'non-negotiable' memorandum of understanding, and supported by a TSA leader, the leadership and vision come from the new hubs: 'they make it their own and provide for themselves' (TSL). The following vignette describes another example.

Due to demand for provision both within the LA in which it is located and from a neighbouring LA, one Teaching School has created three hub 'offshoots' for providing support at a more immediately local level with leaders in these trained by Teaching School leaders. These hubs are seen as developing staff in other schools and growing capacity for collaborative support and the TSA's potential impact: *'Some work on one thing, some another. It's fluid. From our perspective it makes it stronger. One model made to fit everyone isn't the solution. There's so much available to them, this has to fit in with the other things they've got, and we needed to be flexible enough'* (TSD).

Flexing provision – Agility around adjusting provision is a strength. Where staff changes occur, planning ensures that school-to-school support deployment is modified, and SLEs revise their support as and when priorities alter, Teaching School leaders agreeing necessary adaptations with headteachers, even when this makes for a challenging conversation: *'Sometimes their big picture isn't quite the same'* (TSD).

One School Direct (SD) leader works closely with their external partner to adapt provision: *'With this particular Teaching School, one of the things I notice every year is the flexibility of provision and the ability to respond very directly to individual trainees' needs'* (EP). A pattern is laid out around which school trainees will go into for their placement but they never stick to it rigidly. In ongoing dialogue, the School Direct (SD) leader highlights that a particular trainee needs more support with planning so it would be better if s/he could go to a different school. *'It's a strength because they can respond to training needs very quickly'*. If the ITT external partner feels it would be valuable for all trainees to see an aspect of practice, the SD leader also arranges and coordinates this.

Horizon scanning to keep evolving – Strategically, Teaching Schools are alert to regional, national or societal changes eg curriculum change and wellbeing or to their position in a changing landscape of middle tier organisations and partnerships. They are constantly 'future gazing'. Indeed, they sometimes see themselves as crystal ball gazing around future roles and needs of system leaders and school improvement: *'a lot of our time is spent trying to guess what is coming next'* (TSD). In this way, they aim to ensure that they are 'ready with courses or support that schools don't even know they need' (TSL). Consequently, they keep their ears to the ground and stay close to people 'in the know' including local regional and national TSC representatives and a wide range of colleagues in other middle tier roles (see also *Connecting capacity*).

The question 'what do we need to change and why?' is key for them and regularly asked. Through this, they seek, assess and seize opportunities, refine and evolve their Big 3 activities and develop new partnerships. The probing questions in one Teaching School's extensive opportunity decision checklist highlights constant attention to ensuring that children flourish and their outcomes improve, as well as capacity, sustainability, collaboration, financial viability, and benefits outweighing risks, among others. In this way, they co-design and offer fresh, relevant and powerful development experiences with partners that will support individuals, teams and schools in ensuring wellbeing and great learning experiences and outcomes for all of their pupils.

Many feel it is essential to go beyond their remit to ensure that they have a diverse offer that is not limiting, although changes are made thoughtfully and strategically. One Teaching School holds an annual two-day meeting for key strategic partners, evaluating and reviewing its provision, successes and thinking forward about opportunities and challenges to inform priority development areas that it can fulfil within its role. Although a significant investment, it is considered incredibly powerful, valuing different perspectives, cementing relationships and providing a clear steer.

In all of this, what comes across are exceptional optimism, persistence and resilience: *'It's about being resilient as a team, as a group of leaders and trying to do that with the people we work with'* (TSL). They are excited by their brief and its challenges: *'This new framework is a real opportunity to look at the offer we are making. It's going to be an exciting time for wider CPD'* (NLE). TSDs and TSLs of these Teaching Schools are good at selling proposals and their benefits to other schools, partners and even policymakers, including pushing beyond their specific Big 3 remit where it will further their vision:

"There are a million other things we are doing that could be transformational for schools in terms of curriculum even if they don't fit into our Big 3 remit"

(TSL).



7. Connecting Capacity

A broader vision drives some successful Teaching Schools. Collective capacity in these cases is represented by close connections with a wider range of system players. This outward-facing approach is evolutionary, incremental and negotiated, utilising members' strengths. It is underpinned by common purpose and aims to foster coherence in a complex landscape. Spanning boundaries, the successful Teaching Schools here potentially play an influential role as a connector in a fragmented landscape: *'The possibilities for working together coherently are enormous but the system must drive this. The expertise in schools is amazing; it's how we're harnessing that to benefit schools across the system'* (TSD).

Common purpose – Teaching Schools emphasise collaboration over competition to realise their commitment to a self-improving school system. Although at times competition might prompt collaboration, so that local offers do not overlap or a national organisational status is achieved, the overall focus is connecting to make provision work for the combined schools served. A sense of 'better together' steers a vision of complementary working which ranges from collaboration at a smaller scale, such as between two Teaching Schools, to a far larger scale in which a number of partners create, and operate as, a collective whole. Success in such cases is perceived through a collaborative lens – it's

not about who provides the offer but that it meets needs and has a positive impact.

Common purpose requires, among other factors, a willingness to engage with others for a wider benefit and strategic foresight as to what such benefits might be and how they might best be achieved: being *'wired together with a long-term strategy'* (EP). It signifies an evolutionary shift from isolation to collaboration.

Successful Teaching Schools are able to make sense of the developing landscape and partnerships within this and utilise or operate within these as best they can to serve system needs. Where competition is a barrier, they navigate ways to help mitigate this, such as entering into joint bids for programmes and projects.

Coordinated provision within some localities reflects the evolutionary creation of bodies that represent different partners, such as the LA, Teaching Schools, subject hubs and Research Schools. These might share knowledge and/or take an active role in identifying area needs for school-to-school support and CPLD and how each might contribute to meeting these.



'Collectively, we can do more' (EP) represents the thinking behind a highly coordinated approach in one LA in which all eight Teaching Schools have formed a body which works closely with the LA school improvement team and a representative board of elected system stakeholders. The body provides a corporate, comprehensive offer, including a research-informed teaching and learning CPLD programme which moves knowledge of effective practice across schools alongside SSIF-funded improvement projects, a peer-review programme and access to a substantial directory of system leaders. The vision is to coordinate the Teaching Schools' offers into a complementary, one-stop shop for high quality improvement support which respects the uniqueness of each Teaching School, combines their breadth of collective expertise and capacity and is built on the concept of reciprocity – giving to receive.

System leaders frequently have to navigate their place within a complex system. They may 'wear more than one hat' and have to be clear about their particular focus: *'where you've got MATs, single Teaching Schools, collective Teaching Schools, regional areas; there's a point where I was asked by the locality lead to assess the needs of two schools. LLEs were there. They were going through academisation. I was talking to the head of the MAT. I was there from another MAT but working for a Teaching School'*. The bottom line, however, is working together to ensure that the needs of pupils, teachers, and leaders in supported schools are met: *'It didn't really matter because we were focusing on the needs of the school'* (NLE). Where Teaching Schools are also in MAT arrangements, there is an appreciation that they are complementary, such as a MAT using the Teaching School as its school improvement arm, offering an alliance-wide range of expertise from which it can draw for its specific needs. Successful Teaching Schools that are MATs hold fast to their system-orientation, managing a dual focus on both internal accountability and wider, outward-facing, responsibility.

Connecting provision – Provision is connected across the Big 3. In ITT, as in CPLD, in some cases collaborative arrangements are created in response to market forces with leaders thinking about *'not saturating the market and being sensible and reasonable'* (TSL). However, overall, generating connected capacity centres on maximising complementary strengths to create a greater whole, such as accessing specialist pedagogical expertise in the early years.

Teaching Schools make links with subject hubs and Research Schools to ensure provision is informed and accessible at a local level, such as providing satellite Maths Hub training or developing an early years-focused maths programme. Joint development and provision of training events and programmes also connect collective capacity across Teaching Schools, utilising expertise and potentially securing efficiencies.

The coordination of three Teaching Schools' CPLD offers is supported by the development of a joint website. In a largely rural area, this helps staff from the combined 180 schools to access events closer to home, supporting workload. It also supports viability of individual offers, such as an early headship programme, as combined uptake is likely greater. Joint conferences, in areas such as SEND, bring together hub leaders to plan these and support knowledge exchange, while combined purchasing power enables these to draw in national speakers to more remote areas.

Partnerships work at substantial scale also.

A partnership of around 80 Teaching Schools and MATs, with the support of an external provider, develops and coordinates NPQ provision at a national level. This enables it to draw on the extensive professional knowledge of leaders across this partnership to design programmes and materials as well as facilitate and share practice, such as through case studies and assessed project reports.

School-to-school support benefits are substantial in recruitment, training and deployment. Joint training of system leaders creates efficiencies and supports collective quality. Breadth of capacity, such as 20 LLEs across a sub-region, supports the targeting of these to meet specific deployment requirements as there is a wider pool to draw from.

Collaboration also means that requests for support that one Teaching School received can be offered to another if it is in a better position to meet need, either as a result of capacity or needs assessment. Cross-TSA deployments of system leaders can similarly mean a coordinated approach focuses on getting the best support to meet the identified need, locally and sub-regionally. Connecting knowledge of where effective practice lies across an area also supports needs. For example, in one collaborative of three Teaching Schools pupil performance data provided by schools on an invitational basis have been centrally analysed by a jointly employed data lead. Sharing these has enabled schools to, for example, identify where there are particularly strong subject departments and has been a catalyst for collaboration.





Questions for Teaching Schools and other 'informal' partnerships

The research highlights and unpacks seven interconnected 'ingredients' of successful Teaching Schools. Unlike MATs, they are not single legal entities¹⁸ but much looser partnerships of like-minded professionals¹⁹. In this sense, they have much in common with other less formal networks, clusters, alliances and informal partnerships. We have aimed to provide some, but not too much detail, as well as vignettes and quotations from leaders, members of alliances and other partners. These findings can be used as an external lens by leaders of Teaching Schools, Alliance partners and other leaders of informal networks, collaboratives and partnerships in this country and elsewhere. The following questions are intended to aid reflection on your approaches, behaviours and relationships compared with those of these successful Teaching Schools, and to consider future implications.

- Do the seven ingredients resonate? To what extent do you recognise them?
- Where are your greatest strengths? What is your evidence for your answer? How can you share your knowledge about these and great practice more widely to achieve greater benefit across the system?
- What ingredients need further work in your context? Where might you get support for this? Who else in your locality or region has strengths in this and might become a partner? Who do you need to connect with (more)?
- Are there any other ingredients that you think influence success in your context?

18 DfE (2017) *Governance Handbook. For academies, multi-academy trusts and maintained schools*. London: Department for Education p. 47. Updated DfE (2019) p.46; Greany, T. and Higham, R. (2018) *Op. cit.*

19 Gu, Q. et al. (2015) *Op. cit.*

Role of the Teaching Schools Council

The Teaching Schools Council (TSC), an elected and seconded council of headteachers from Teaching Schools, MAT CEOs and TSDs, represents Teaching Schools and their alliances throughout England. Its overarching aim is 'to play a key role in ensuring that every child and young person, in every part of the country, has access to a place in a great school'¹⁴. It aims to do this by seeking to ensure three commitments:

- That every school in England is entitled to relevant and timely support
- Every school in England is prepared to be a giver of support
- Every school in England is in an effective partnership¹⁵

Five connected areas emerged around the role of the Teaching Schools Council nationally and regionally in leading, steering, facilitating and augmenting successful connections. The following were expressed variously as existing strengths and hopes for further development. Broadly, successful Teaching Schools and their partners are seeking:

A purposeful communicator

Maintaining clarity of purpose in a fast-moving landscape is challenging. With changing expectations and many players now involved – *'the messy, messy, messy middle tier'* (TSD) – understanding what Teaching Schools can and can't do, the benefits they offer and what is distinct about them is seen as essential, but in places is still not yet fully understood. This could involve more active encouragement of Teaching Schools to share their case studies and further development of the TSC newsletter. Along with this is the importance of ongoing communication about national changes through regional leads: *'If there's a bigger picture that we're not aware of, it needs to be communicated... rather than (Teaching Schools) double guessing what's going on'* (TSA HT). Two-way communication with strategic partners is also valued to ensure involvement and commitment: *'If it's a partnership, then all partners need to be involved together'* (EP).

An influential voice

Affording Teaching Schools a strong profile and professional voice that is heard by the Department for Education (DfE) the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is viewed as critical, working the politics at national level: *'they play an absolutely integral role'* (TSL), along with ensuring recognition and acknowledgement of their contributions: *'It validates what you do but encourages you to do more'* (TSL). This is enabled through a platform to feed back into the TSC on planned future developments, including ensuring equity, parity, no 'side-lining' and that any new model is inclusive, not exclusive.

A facilitating connector

Having a regional structure to help, support and guide TSAs and help them build relationships with one another is valued and could be extended to ensure active networking, given the move towards larger hubs. In this, a fine balance is sought between getting external and national partners to understand what the landscape looks like in each area to ensuring regional and other contextual variations are addressed – *'one plan doesn't fit all, look at how it fits us'* (EP), and offering greater consistency both across the piece and across the country also viewed as important.

A guardian for accountability

Ensuring good governance in its broadest sense is valued, through structure and integrity eg its role in designation and de-designation. Also, some desire exists for clarity around accountability for success, being sure that KPIs are *'really clear, realistic and are being met'* (TSD) – while making sure that measures are broader and more nuanced: *'KPIs can't just be numbers. There must be other ways to demonstrate impact'* (TSD).

A collaborative system partner

Teaching Schools are one of many players in the system. The TSC is seen as having a crucial role in feeding into other national initiatives and partnerships, with the understanding that this essential partnership working and associated communication can be challenging. This needs knitting together through a national strategic approach to school improvement, with the TSC playing a key role. Concerns exist that any such approach may be rushed, and also may not take account of situations where colleagues have already *'done a lot to seize the moment'* (TSD) and move forward, launching and developing partnerships that then are superseded by similar but competing national initiatives.

'Nationally, we have to be that professional voice. We – Teaching Schools and the Teaching Schools Council – have to speak with and for schools and leaders. We are a huge resource and a huge capacity. We have this incredible network. If it's working as it should do, through the Teaching Schools Council and Teaching Schools in every region we should have reach, connections to and relationships with every single school. The power in that, the transformation – because theoretically that means we could touch the lives of every leader, every teacher and every child' (TSD).

¹⁴ Teaching Schools Council Press Kit 2017

¹⁵ *ibid*



Recommendations for Teaching Schools Council leadership

The Teaching Schools Council has an important role to play now and moving forward. To fulfil the five areas of its leadership role to best effect in realising its commitments, the Teaching Schools Council needs to:

Continue in its key role, alongside other system players, to ensure all schools in England have access to and contribute support:

- support Teaching Schools in continuing to connect with those already engaged and develop capacity and commitment in and across alliances to give as well as receive
- help to broker Teaching Schools' connections with those yet to be engaged, including the vulnerable and isolated
- assist and speak out for successful Teaching Schools in overcoming barriers

Enhance individual and collective responsibility:

- support Teaching Schools in developing their organisational learning capacity¹⁷ and meaningfully evidencing progress and success in relation to the Big 3
- actively promote peer reviews within TSAs as well as continuing cross-TSA reviews
- report on its progress toward its three commitments

Mobilise knowledge about successful Teaching Schools:

- celebrate Teaching Schools' practice and success and communicate it clearly, widely and through diverse strategies
- articulate the unique benefits of Teaching Schools in enhancing the self-improving school system within its vision
- engage policy makers and practitioners with findings, implications and questions, in order to feed into thinking about Teaching School Hubs and enhance existing Teaching School practices

Know the whole Teaching School system well:

- have good intelligence about progress and risk – addressing both as necessary
- be able to identify expertise, emerging capacity and innovative practice
- horizon scan to spot changes and opportunities

Lead system connectedness:

- take a lead in making connections work between networks and councils overseeing national hubs and other system players to ensure that the system is joined up for schools wishing to be in and contribute to an effective partnership
- collaborate with these partners in promoting excellent, evidence-informed collaborative practice, career progression, development and retention in order that every child and young person, in every part of the country, has access to a place in a great school



¹⁷ Kools, M. and Stoll L. (2016) *What makes a school a learning organisation? OECD Working Paper, No. 137*. Paris: OECD Publishing. And associated writing: OECD (2016) *What makes a school a learning organisation: A guide for policymakers, school leaders and teachers*. Paris: OECD Publishing

Moving forward

So 'What next?' and 'What could be?'¹⁶. While policy changes introducing Teaching School Hubs may have overtaken the commissioning of this research on successful Teaching Schools, Teaching Schools and other more 'informal' networks, collaboratives and partners in this country and elsewhere can use the findings to reflect on their current

practice. Second, the Teaching Schools Council has an important role to play moving forward. Finally, the research highlights unique features of successful Teaching School system leadership that can inform any future system reconfigurations.

Unique features of successful Teaching School system leadership

In a complex landscape where leaders and schools are frequently involved in a multiplicity of formal and informal partnerships wearing several different hats, it is not easy to disentangle what is unique to each partner, even when people are clear about and working towards the same end. However, in looking across the successful Teaching Schools, alliance members and partnerships in this research, the following four unique features stand out and hold implications for the wider school system. All are underpinned by passionate and forward-looking leadership based on creating connections to grow collective teaching, leadership, organisational and system capacity and commitment. Of course, these features have to be considered alongside the seven interconnected ingredients of successful Teaching Schools.

- 1. The connector in the self-improving school-led system** – Teaching Schools have created an established web of connections and have an acute awareness of the expertise that lies within this. Rich in intellectual capital, they are uniquely placed to harness and draw on this extensive expertise, from within, across and beyond TSAs, acting as a conduit for, and enabling the movement of, knowledge so this serves and fulfils the purpose of their work, influencing and impacting on school improvement and teacher training: *'At the heart of Teaching Schools is connecting up the professional capital of our members and partners and what we're able to do is make links, see potential links, make networks and see a climate for collaboration that other organisations might not be able to'* (TSD). This includes a focus on, and engagement with, research and making links with and between: maintained schools and settings, system partners – such as LAs, subject hubs, Research Schools – and MATs, particularly smaller ones. Theirs is a collaborative endeavour and the importance of relationship-building to develop and nurture social capital cannot be underestimated. Leaders forge and invest in positive relationships as they know that while often hard-won, they are central to success at all levels.
- 2. An outward-facing moral purpose to improve the system through collective responsibility** – Teaching Schools' vision is centred on professional altruism and provision focuses on promoting system responsibility outside of hard accountability structures, through exercising 'soft' levers. They set the conditions for, and means to achieve, improvement through

exercising these levers promptly and responsively to meet members' needs. They operate within an inclusive environment that, for example, connects with the isolated and vulnerable: *'Connecting those who are isolated and creating a safe space and connecting with best practice locally and nationally'* (TSD). This environment emphasises mutuality – *'other people get something, we get something'* (TSD) and a potential shift towards reciprocity where each member contributes to the system – we give, you give, the system gains.

- 3. Amassing and connecting a unique, accredited set of highly skilled workforce leaders** – Within a self-improving school system, NLEs, LLEs and SLEs are crucial in meeting school improvement demands. Successful Teaching Schools ensure that they are rigorously designated and deployed in schools, targeting support at different levels but frequently acting in combination to meet schools' improvement needs. Adept at analysing context, diagnosing specific needs and action-planning, they deliver bespoke and fit for purpose support to impact on leadership and teacher development and, through these, children's and young people's outcomes. Such leaders, particularly SLEs, are used extensively in CPLD programmes, including for ITT, ensuring that provision draws on their skills and knowledge. Those receiving support recognise and value the impact of such distinctly tailored provision that is 'done-with' and not 'done-to', supporting sustainability.
- 4. Major contributors to and connectors of career progression within the school-led system** – For ITT, Teaching Schools work in partnership with a SCITT or HEI. They draw on best practices and research within their networks, as well as more broadly, to provide trainees with high-quality programmes. They are similarly significant contributors to CPLD, devising programmes and training events in response to local and sub-regional needs, as well as broader developments. These too may be bespoke. Importantly, they provide a pathway of support and development from, for example, ITT trainee to executive leadership, combining programmes designed by their own outstanding leaders to sit alongside NPQs.

16 Warren, A. (2018) *Op. cit.*



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**The connector in
the self-improving
school-led
system**

2

**An outward-facing
moral purpose to
improve the system
through collective
responsibility**

3

**Amassing and
connecting a unique,
accredited set
of highly skilled
workforce
leaders**

4

**Major contributors
to and connectors of
career progression
within the school
led system**

Annex

Methodology

The initial review to inform the study was of research literature, national policy documents, thinkpieces and websites. These included national policy on Teaching Schools and system leadership, thinkpieces and research on the self-improving school system, reviews, eg of Initial Teacher Training, the evaluation of Teaching Schools, related national and international literature on system leadership and successful collaboration. We updated the review at the time of writing.²⁰

To get beneath the surface of what it means to be 'successful', the criteria included:

- a strong reputation among peers for school, teacher and leadership development, including ITT, across a region
- growing and maintaining success over years if designated in an earlier cohort
- known for developing good relationships, including with initially reticent schools
- having developed interesting collaborations with alliance partners
- collaborating with other Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) to extend their reach and share expertise
- being creative around attracting funding and dealing with funding cuts
- developing interesting ways to track processes, progress and impact, going beyond pupils' results
- with diverse offerings to meet different needs and stages of development
- thinking creatively about sustainability of Teaching Schools in a self-improving school system

The eight Teaching Schools were selected from a larger sample recommended by the Teaching Schools Council, to represent a breadth of geographical coverage and context, length of time as a designated Teaching School, phase of lead school, and number of schools represented. Of the eight lead schools, three were primary, three were secondary, one was nursery and one was special. Other contextual criteria reflected in selection included designation as or connection with other centres of excellence and networks eg subject hubs or Research Schools, and that some should have partnerships with other Teaching Schools.

Between March-April 2019, we visited each Teaching School where we carried out individual, paired or group interviews with key strategic leaders, other leaders, and groups of associated National, Local and Specialist Leaders of Education facilitating support and, in one case, a number of partners in a wider alliance of several Teaching Schools, including Teaching School leaders and directors. From April-June 2019, these visits were followed by telephone interviews with colleagues recommended by the leaders of the Teaching Schools. These included headteachers of alliance and other local schools successfully supported by each Teaching School, other headteachers providing support, and external partners recommended by the Teaching Schools as contributors to the TSA's success. These partners included representatives from a Local Authority, university, SCITT, national leadership development provider, technology-focused professional learning provider, leaders in several other connected Teaching Schools, including one's business manager, and two external consultants (former headteachers). In all, we interviewed 70 people and also spoke with the chair of the Teaching Schools Council.

We are most grateful to the Teaching Schools for arranging our visits and responding to follow up queries, and to the teaching school leaders and all of their colleagues and partners who kindly gave their time to be interviewed. The TSA's are named below, although we do not cite any names of Teaching Schools or individuals in the main text.

- Boldmere Teaching School Alliance
- Dartmoor Teaching School Alliance
- Kyra Teaching School Alliance and Lincolnshire Teaching Schools Together
- Ladywood Teaching School Alliance
- LEARN Teaching School Alliance
- West Hertfordshire Teaching School Alliance
- West Ipswich Teaching School Alliance
- Whitley Bay Teaching School Alliance

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²⁰ Sources used but not cited previously are cited at the end of the Annex.



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