

# Gaining and sustaining momentum: obstacles and springboards for accelerating school improvement for vulnerable communities

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# This session

- Context/evidence – and the role of researchED
- Examples of key practices from strong schools serving vulnerable communities
  - what might make them exceptional what might schools needing to gain momentum do to get to strong? An activity
- How do practices in schools wanting to gain momentum compare with those in strong and exceptional schools?
- Strategies for developing momentum/questions, answers and discussion

[http://www.curee.co.uk/files/shared/GSM\\_report\\_public\\_version.pdf](http://www.curee.co.uk/files/shared/GSM_report_public_version.pdf)

# The evidence base

The framework came from systematic reviews of research with impact data re school improvement leadership, teaching and learning and re vulnerable communities

The in depth school data came from ( in 26 schools):

- Extensive analysis of progress data & school documentation
- Interviews with teachers
- Observation of e.g. classes, CPD sessions, meetings
- Group interviews with members of the SLT
- Focus groups with teachers; and
- Analysis of an online student survey



# Key dimensions of the framework

- Reviews in 2 waves; one re Strong and Exceptional schools, one re school improvement
- Revealed 4 key dimensions common to both waves
  - Quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum
  - Professional learning environment
  - Leadership - systems and big picture
  - Partnerships and networks including but extending beyond relations with parents and the community



# A bird's eye view of Phase 2

- At core – 360° diagnostic of individual schools needing to gain momentum
- Compared with each other and with Strong and Exceptional Schools
- Plus supported action research for leaders, to address emerging issues
- Huge diversity - schools struggled on many fronts
  - A lot going on: *many* priorities need addressing
  - Development priorities differed between schools *but* issues clustered in groups / themes



## Some headlines from phase 2

- Schools needing to gain or sustain momentum fell into 3 groups:
  - *Gathering momentum* – a trajectory of improvement beginning to show in progress & clarity re what *and* why
  - *Approaching momentum* – have recently made high impact changes linked with a sustainable momentum for which there are leading indicators but not yet progress
  - *Seeking momentum* – have identified some but not all key building blocks and started to implement them but still face significant obstacles that need to be identified and removed





# What are the differences?

- With a partner take 1 cell from table of strong practices and identify what you think the Strong Schools could do to push their practice towards being Exceptional
- What might a GSM school not yet be doing/ doing enough?
- Here is an example:
  - Specific teams in SS focus on involving parents
  - In ES it is every one's job to spot possible opportunities for drawing on parents' knowledge & expanding their input
  - GSM schools focus hard on recruiting parents to supporting the school and teachers & teaching them re curriculum





# Characteristics of schools seeking momentum.

## What might be next steps in achieving it?

Coaching & mentoring only used remedially, also variable, usually done by SLT as part of performance management	Support for new teachers variable. Mentors usually those with free time	<b>Leaders focus on monitoring quality/ consistency, fire fighting on many fronts</b>
Remedying requires improvement teaching is urgent improvement priority along with creating critical mass of good teaching	Performance management extensive and focussed on raising the floor	Senior leaders new in post and responding to external pressures – sometimes with extensive support
<b>One or two pockets of excellence exist and are celebrated</b>	Curriculum development is “beyond reach”	Systems patchy, often new, disconnected. Use just beginning to be monitored. Key gaps in intelligence as a result





# Creating a strong learning environment - 1

- Approaching or Seeking Momentum Schools
  - Understand CPD as “instruction for fixing teaching”
  - Remedial CPD done to staff V building capacity
  - E.g. large scale, intense, long-term, external intervention
- In SS and GM Schools CPD
  - more distributed
  - but still focussed firmly on raising the quality of teaching



# In Exceptional schools

- But Exceptional Schools focus on CPD and learning – (CPDL) organised around:
  - Deepening colleagues' content knowledge to enable them relate the curriculum to pupils' lives beyond school
  - A shared model of pedagogy that..
    - helps embed and sustain deep professional learning; and
    - supports identifying and removing barriers to learning



# Creating a strong learning environment - 2

- Practice and CPDL best when developing curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching and learning are all ***aligned***
- ES schools put professionalising this at the centre
- Strong/GM schools making increasing links eg at level of schemes of work or a set of principles/ prompts
- Approaching and Seeking Momentum Schools
  - focused on securing consistent behaviour and teaching
  - Developing curriculum – seen as a luxury not quality driver
  - Positioned CPD as an executive arm of senior leadership



# Consistently good v pockets of excellence?

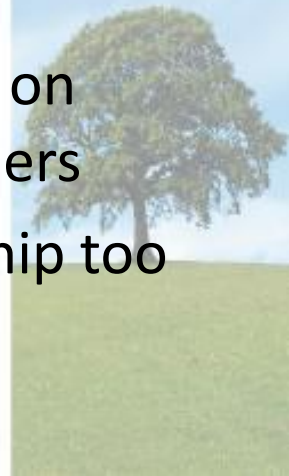
- Approaching and Seeking Momentum Schools, and to a degree, Gathering Momentum schools had:
  - 1-2 areas of significant improvement/ excellence
  - e.g. links with parents and the community, student behaviour, one of the core subjects, coaching for staff, etc
- But in Approaching and Seeking Momentum Schools these risked working as a distraction rather than springboard for further improvement

***What might be a hindrance and a help here?***



# Exceptional Schools

- By contrast, in Exceptional Schools – all practices were consistently:
  - good and linked with each other
  - designed to be cumulative for learners; and
  - organised through the lens of pupils' learning experiences and identifying and removing, one-by-one, barriers to their learning
- Other schools were at risk of
  - being bedazzled - focussing on practice - rather than on pupils in the round and identifying & removing barriers
  - Concentrating capacity building /distributed leadership too narrowly



# Subject knowledge

- In phase two (and Strong) Schools, noticeable lack of emphasis on depth of subject knowledge as a driver
- Pedagogic knowledge and skills were the priority and there was some active concern re over emphasising depth in subject knowledge
- Little emphasis on contextualising these for different subjects or developing specialist expertise in subjects



# Depth in Subject Knowledge

- *Exceptional Schools*, saw depth in subject knowledge as more important and key to developing
  - Capacity to improve
  - Clarity about why curriculum matters for staff and for pupils
  - Working with pupils in the round
  - Enabling teachers to see the curriculum in pupils' lives beyond schools and make strong links between the two – in partnership with others
  - Coherent, cumulative learning experiences



# Monitoring

- In Exceptional Schools monitoring, systematic, relentless and forensically focussed on identifying and *removing barriers to learning for staff and pupils*
- Problems led to intense, state of the art support – and rapid consequences if this didn't work
- In other schools there was a continuum but monitoring was
  - slower,
  - less focussed on removing barriers; and
  - linked less strongly with support which was also less structured/ professionalised





# Consistency and coherence

- Seeking and Approaching Momentum Schools:
  - prioritised consistency in some areas - either via compliance to weak approaches or unsuccessfully
- Gathering Momentum Schools
  - Celebrated differences e.g. between departments and often lacked understanding of principles underpinning strategies
- Exceptional Schools:
  - Emphasised systems for ensuring consistency organised around a shared model of teaching and learning e.g. Behaviour incidents = *trigger for learning intervention*
  - Shared model and purpose creates **coherence**.



# Fighting on multiple fronts

- Our GSM Schools faced multiple priorities and external pressures/prescriptions
- Lack of depth in capacity and systems to make changes stick, for incremental progress often obscured possibilities for alignment/ big picture
- An external, in-depth, formative, evidence based analysis and comparisons with exceptional and strong schools to support leadership enquiry
  - helped SLT make evidence informed choices about alignment and priorities and build coherence/**momentum**



# Raising the floor *and* the ceiling

- Need for systems e.g. measurement in PR to secure consistency ties practices to *raising the floor*
- *Raising the ceiling* means balancing a unifying goal (e.g. identifying and removing barriers to learning & a model of pedagogy) with open ended factors e.g. depth of PL, developing theory



# Questions

- Can/should GSM schools move directly from CPD to CPDL?
- What might the be the effect of focusing on identifying and removing barriers to learning?
- What creates stepping stones to coherence?
- Would reconceptualising what depth in subject knowledge is for help expand capacity?
- What role could an evidence based bird's eye view of the school rather than a performance snapshot play?





# Contact details

**Find the full report and blog and the CUREE ASCL partnership to take this work forwards here**

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