

Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education



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Exploring the roles of National Leaders of Education, using their knowledge and experience of teaching to help address the challenges faced by other schools.

Robert Hill and Peter Matthews

Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education

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Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education

The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) was established to develop and improve the quality and capacity of school leadership in England. Through its training and development programmes and its ground-breaking qualification for headship, NCSL is better equipping each generation of school leaders for their increasingly complex role. Stronger and more effective leadership is resulting in better-led schools and improved performance by pupils.

Dear Colleague

As NCSL's work with schools has moved on, the strengths and benefits that our best school leaders have to offer the wider school system have become increasingly clear. Outstanding headteachers and their schools have the knowledge, the commitment and the capacity to secure the success of schools beyond their own. This, along with the growing evidence of the power of school-to-school support, led NCSL to propose to government that we establish a cadre of National Leaders of Education (NLEs).

In 2006, with support from the then Department for Education and Skills, we started to identify serving headteachers who had achieved excellent results in their schools, both in inspections and in national tests and examinations, and who were committed to sharing their success with others. These headteachers have been identified as NLEs and their schools designated as National Support Schools (NSSs). NLEs, with their schools, are using their knowledge and experience of teaching and learning, and their comprehensive understanding of schools as organisations, to provide additional leadership and capacity for struggling schools.

This booklet summarises the growing evidence that the NLE programme is becoming one of the most effective levers of school improvement in recent years. When accompanied by other changes that are promoting partnerships between federations, academies, trusts and other schools, we potentially have the means to consign mediocre schooling to history and to ensure that every child experiences a good education, wherever they are in the country and whatever school they attend. The NLE programme is showing how it is possible to harness the power and commitment of excellent school leaders to lead and improve the wider school system.

NCSL is grateful to Peter Matthews, who has been evaluating the NLE programme for the last two years, and to Robert Hill, who has researched and written extensively on school leadership and partnership, for their efforts in assembling the evidence presented here in such a cogent way.

I hope that not just school leaders but all those concerned with the future of education will want to read and understand the importance and significance of continuing to use to the full the skills, talents and wisdom of our very best headteachers and their colleagues.



Steve Munby
Chief Executive
National College for School Leadership

Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education

National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and National Support Schools (NSSs) are making a significant contribution to supporting improvement in under-performing schools.

Attainment in schools is rising, but schools vary significantly in how effective they are.

In 2006/07, Ofsted assessed only 60 per cent of primary schools and just over 50 per cent of secondary schools in England as grade 2 (good) or grade 1 (outstanding). This leaves a large proportion in which substantial improvement is needed.

Results for the 2007 Key Stage 2 tests showed that in nearly 1,500 primary schools, fewer than 65 per cent of pupils achieved the expected standard of level 4 in English. In just over 2,000 schools, pupils failed to reach the equivalent level in maths.

In the 2007 GCSE examinations, 638 secondary schools saw fewer than 30 per cent of their students securing at least five GCSEs at grades A* C, including in English and maths.

Every parent wants a good school for their child and every child deserves one. The challenge for politicians and educators is how to ensure that every school is a good school – that is their holy grail. There is no magic solution to this problem. Various initiatives, such as closing a school and giving it a ‘Fresh Start’ and parachuting in a ‘superhead’, have had mixed success. Academies are a more recent vehicle the government has used to raise aspirations and challenge the acceptance of failure.

Increasingly, the evidence from both this country and overseas shows that pairing high-performing schools and their leaders with weaker ones can be a significant and positive force for improvement.

Evaluations of government-sponsored programmes, such as Excellence in Cities, London Challenge and school support federations, show that focusing on improving five factors is at the heart of effective school-to-school improvement: behaviour and attitudes; curriculum; teaching and learning; leadership and management; and the school environment.

School-to-school support usually runs through four phases: a preparatory phase that triggers and sets the scene for support; an initial phase that ensures basic school operating systems (often imported from the stronger school) are in place; a development phase to address underlying weaknesses and build up staff skills; and a final phase in which plans are made for the long-term future of the weaker school.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports that system leadership – where headteachers play a role in education beyond their own school – is becoming an increasingly influential force in school improvement.

Acting on this evidence and the advice of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), in autumn 2005 the government formalised the role of excellent school leaders and their schools in driving school improvement by commissioning NCSL to establish a programme of National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and National Support Schools (NSSs).

NLEs, supported by key staff in their school, are now a growing and powerful force for improvement in the school system. Their numbers are increasing and the use of them is spreading.

The first 68 NLEs were identified in October 2006. Those designated were required to be very good or outstanding leaders of schools, and had to show that their school had a good track record of supporting other schools in difficulty.

A second group of 60 NLEs was designated in July 2007. A third group joined in September 2008 and further designations are due in January 2009. By the beginning of 2009, there will be a total of 200 NLEs.

The longer-term aim is to establish 500 NLEs by 2012 – 300 in primary schools and 200 in secondary schools – to create a critical mass of system leaders across the country.

Local authorities commission NLEs to work with schools that need intervention and support to improve. Individual local authorities are responsible for the costs of any intervention involving NLEs and NSSs.

NCSL provides NLEs with a bursary to cover incidental and set-up costs. NCSL support also offers an induction programme, written guidance, seminars, access to advisors and a network of NLEs and NSSs to provide peer support.

NCSL assures the quality of the programme by reviewing NLE designation annually and by monitoring local authority and Ofsted reports on the schools that are supported through NLE system leadership.

NCSL has worked closely with local authorities to ensure that NLEs and NSSs are deployed to good effect. In May 2008:

nearly 9 out of 10 of the NLEs designated in the first two tranches were actively supporting another school or schools

nearly a third of NLEs were acting as executive heads for another school. Other NLEs were deployed as consultant leaders, associate headteachers or similar non-executive support roles

NLEs and NSSs were supporting approximately 150 schools, of which some 20 were or had been in special measures. The remainder had received either an Ofsted notice to improve or were a source of concern to their local authority

45 per cent of local authorities in England had used an NLE

As we understand more about the potential of school-to-school improvement, and as the need to raise standards becomes more pressing, NCSL is also developing local leaders of education (LLEs). The LLE model builds on the successful role of consultant leaders in London Challenge. LLEs will work in the new City Challenge areas of Greater Manchester, the Black Country and elsewhere to support schools identified through the government's National Challenge.

Partnership initiatives take time to develop and prove their full benefits, but NLEs and NSSs are already demonstrating the value of their support.

By July 2008, the first group of NLEs had helped 19 schools either out of special measures or in having a notice to improve withdrawn. Reports by Ofsted on schools that are in these categories highlight the powerful role that NLEs and NSSs are increasingly playing in helping inadequate schools to improve.

Key stage and GCSE examination results in 2008 show a marked improvement in the great majority of schools with which phase 1 NLEs have worked for a year or more.

Independent evaluation reports commissioned by NCSL over the two years the NLE programme has developed (Matthews 2007a; 2007b; 2008a; 2008b) have found the NLE programme to be effective in selecting, appointing and deploying NLEs, in delivering improvements and in 'pulling a growing number of schools out of Ofsted categories'.

Improving teaching and learning is the crucial area in which NLEs and NSSs add most value. Independent evaluation highlights the key processes that help to make NLE and NSS support effective, including the principle of providing intensive support in the early stage of the working relationship between the two schools.

The role of NLEs as system leaders is growing as they lead groups or chains of schools and play a greater part in local and regional school improvement initiatives.

National Support Schools themselves benefit from their role and continue to improve, as well as adding value to partner schools.

The introduction of NLEs and NSSs is proving a success but there are challenges for NCSL, school leaders, the government and local authorities to consider if the programme is to realise its full potential. It will be important to:

secure better buy-in from local authorities by improving the distribution of NLEs across authorities. NCSL is addressing this in current and future rounds of NLE recruitment. In turn, local authorities need to become more open to using NLEs and NSSs to drive school improvement. And the government for its part should clarify the role of the various school-based improvement initiatives it promotes and make sure that they all follow the principles and practice that make school-to-school support effective.

promote greater commitment among school governors by involving them closely in all stages of an NLE's/NSS's role and in helping to make sure that their school continues to make good progress while supporting other schools

improve how the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and local authorities work with NLEs and governors so that NSSs have the staff ready and available when they are asked to deploy their expertise, while being sure that the cost of investing in this upfront will be covered either by commissions from the local authority to support other schools, or by some other arrangement

consider the merits of NLEs only working with schools with a similar age-group of pupils, and establish whether there are circumstances in which it makes sense for NLEs or NSSs to support schools on a cross-phase or cross-sector basis

ensure that, as some NLEs take on more system leadership responsibilities, a strong link between an NLE and an NSS is maintained. This is important partly because of the added strengths and resources a support school brings but also because leading a high-quality, high-performing school brings authenticity to the NLE in their school-to-school improvement role

ask the School Teachers Pay Review Body (STPRB) to examine and report on how to develop fair and consistent remuneration criteria as NLEs become an established feature of the school system

review the exercise of quality assurance as the NLE/NSS programme expands over the next few years

Too many government and public sector programmes start strongly but then fade or are allowed to wither. NLEs and NSSs are not cure-alls for dealing with underperforming schools, but the evidence shows that they are making a strong contribution to school improvement. School leaders, policymakers and politicians should continue to make sure that NLEs and NSSs are sustained and maintained in the years to come.

Searching for the educational holy grail

There is no single, magic solution to guarantee that a country's school system is constantly improving and can deal effectively with schools that are weak and struggling. However, the evidence from both this country and overseas is that pairing high-performing schools and their leaders with weaker ones can be a significant and positive force for improvement. This section sets out the argument for investing in and expanding school-to-school support.

Parental pressure for good schools

While parents will often have intense discussions with each other about which is the best school to send their child to, the issue that animates policymakers and politicians is how to improve the education system as a whole. How to ensure that every school is a good school: that is their holy grail. As the government puts it in its most recent school improvement strategy:

Our aim now is to make all schools as good as the best, so that every child can have a successful and enjoyable education.

DCSF, 2008a:5 para. 9

Of course, the two concerns are not unrelated. Parental pressure can be a major factor in incentivising schools to improve their performance. Indeed, the government has taken steps to increase the power of parents as consumers – by making inspection results more accessible, publishing performance tables comparing schools' examination results, enabling popular schools to expand more easily and introducing competitions when new schools are set up. There is also a vigorous debate within and between the political parties about whether and how choice-based reforms should be taken further.

Nevertheless, while positive and necessary, parental pressure is not by itself sufficient to solve the conundrum of making every school a good school. Not all communities have high educational aspirations: in some areas, for example, it has been known for parents to resist measures being taken to deal with seriously underperforming schools. But much more significantly, while parental pressure can help create the conditions and incentives for school improvement, it does not necessarily generate the capacity and support that will enable schools to make the scale of change and transformation that is needed.

Autonomy and accountability as the route to school improvement

Empowering parents has gone hand in hand with a policy to make schools progressively more autonomous. School principals and headteachers now have greater financial and administrative freedom to govern their schools, appoint staff and run their affairs. This increased autonomy has been accompanied by greater accountability and an expectation on individual schools to be responsible for adding value and raising the standards of educational attainment. As the government freely acknowledges:

The central principle of our strategy is that each school is responsible for its own improvement and should have, or be able to develop, sufficient internal capacity to deliver and sustain higher outcomes for children.

DCSF, 2008a:5 para. 8

School autonomy has been an important factor in bringing innovation and sustainable improvement to the school system. But the limitations of this strategy, on its own, to drive the improvement of the whole school system have increasingly been recognised, not least because the performance and capacity of schools to improve themselves vary enormously.

Variation in the performance and capacity of schools

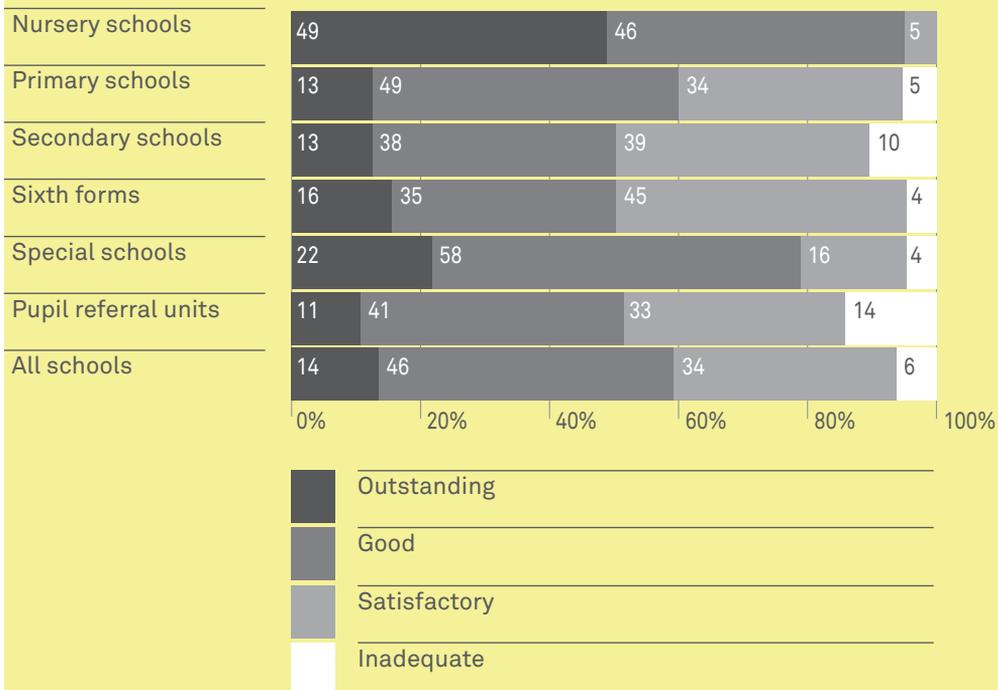
In 2006/07, Ofsted judged 60 per cent of primary schools and just over 50 per cent of secondary schools in England as grade 2 (good) or grade 1 (outstanding) in terms of their overall effectiveness (see Figure 1). This leaves a large proportion of schools where significant improvement is needed. There is particular concern in government about the weakest schools – those assessed by Ofsted as grade 4 (inadequate) – and about three other categories of schools:

nearly 1,500 primary schools where, based on results in 2007, under 65 per cent of their pupils achieved the expected standard of level 4 at Key Stage 2 in English, and just over 2,000 where pupils failed to reach the equivalent level in maths

638 secondary schools where, based on results in 2007, fewer than 30 per cent of students secured at least five GCSEs at grades A* C including English and maths. These schools are the focus of the government's National Challenge programme

a range of schools (both primary and secondary) that are deemed to be coasting, meaning that their pupils are not making the educational progress they might be expected to make, given comparisons with similar pupils and schools

Figure 1: Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2006 and September 2007



Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those schools that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Source: Ofsted, 2007:25 fig. 5

Early attempts to provide external support

An organisation that is struggling, be it a school, hospital or commercial enterprise, will find it hard to turn itself round if it relies solely on its own expertise and resources. It will almost certainly require a degree of external support in some form or another.

Since 1997, the government has tried various ways of intervening in schools in difficulty. Fresh Start, in which the failing school is replaced by a new school, generally on the same site, was much trumpeted at one stage but has had mixed success. Parachuting so-called ‘superheads’ into failing schools may have provided a struggling school with an immediate boost but this approach has rarely provided a path to sustainable, long-term improvement. Another structural solution that has become increasingly common has been to replace a failing or struggling school with an academy, particularly in areas of deprivation.

Consultant leaders and London Challenge

In 2003 the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in conjunction with the government introduced the role of consultant leaders, a part played mostly by serving headteachers with experience of developing and running highly successful schools. Consultant leaders are trained to support the head of another school to develop their leadership capacity so as to make the latter’s school more effective. They act as consultants and as brokers of other services to the school, with a strong focus on improving outcomes for learners. Consultant leaders are thus a combination of coach, mentor, consultant and facilitator, and work with the head and, in most cases, the senior leadership team and middle leaders as well.

Consultant leaders are a feature of London Challenge and the accompanying London Leadership Strategy. Launched in 2003, London Challenge focused on supporting 70 secondary schools which had the poorest results in what were at the time the five lowest performing London boroughs. These schools, termed ‘keys to success’ schools, were provided with specialist consultancy support alongside a bigger package of help covering: a bespoke leadership development programme; assistance from other schools; programmes to develop and attract high-quality teachers; and opportunities for students to participate in wider learning and cultural experiences.

London Challenge and the London Leadership Strategy (led by NCSL), have proved immensely effective (Ofsted, 2006) and consultant leaders have been an important feature of that success. An evaluation of their role found that:

the impact of Consultant Leaders is maximised where their own schools make a commitment and contribution to the partnership with the ‘client’ school.

Matthews et al, 2006:

In other words, as case study 1 below illustrates, school improvement is most effective when an able and committed school leader is paired with the leader of a struggling or underperforming school and involves his or her home school in this relationship and the task of achieving change and improvement. London Challenge signalled that school-to-school support is a critical factor in securing school improvement.

Case study 1: Effective consultant leadership in a London Challenge school

In autumn 2004, London Challenge arranged for a consultant leader to support the newish head of a very challenging girls' school in south London. A high proportion of the students at the school were from socially and economically disadvantaged families with special educational needs. Half of the students spoke English as an additional language and levels of literacy and numeracy on entry were well below average. In addition, the head had inherited a budget deficit and a top-heavy, expensive and ineffective management structure. There were, however, some promising younger staff in a school which students described as "more like a youth club than a school".

The consultant leader, the head of a successful girls' school in a neighbouring borough, was soon involved in facilitating a conference of the new leadership team. The head described the consultant leader as: "very influential in the conference. She worked with the rest of the leadership team in a high-profile way, promoting teamwork and self-sufficiency".

Improving the quality of teaching was a priority. The consultant leader provided her own school as a resource, enabling middle leaders to visit in waves to undertake training and to develop and practise teaching observation techniques and curriculum evaluation in a different environment. The consultant leader herself conducted lesson observations in the struggling school and provided valuable feedback on the standards that should be expected and the improvements that were needed.

After a year, the consultant leader felt things were progressing well: "The head has a very clear view of her priorities. She has clarity of vision and a skilled leadership team and has achieved the hard task of restructuring. It is now time to consider my exit strategy."

These changes were reflected at inspection, with inspectors judging it an effective and improving school with some outstanding features. The inspection report commented: 'The rate of improvement since the last inspection has been rapid, particularly given the challenging environment in which the school works.'

The consultant leader had acted as a wise and professional ally for a capable and determined headteacher, helping the latter to create a purposeful leadership team. Most valuable was the use of the consultant's school as a neutral resource for the evaluation of teaching and learning by staff of the supported school. This created a momentum for rigorous lesson monitoring and evaluation.

The school is now an academy, headed by the same principal. There is much still to achieve but results have improved significantly. In 2007 39 per cent of pupils gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* C, up from 26 per cent in 2002, and the school was above the government's floor target for achieving five good GCSE results, including English and maths.

Source: Matthews et al, 2006, adapted

Support federations

In 2004/05, at about the same time as the consultant leader and London Challenge programmes were getting into their stride, researchers at the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) were busy analysing the impact of other initiatives in which schools worked together on school improvement. In particular, they looked at the evolution of what were termed support federations. These had been stimulated by a number of influences, including changes in education law, government programmes such as Excellence in Cities (EiC), the Leading Edge Partnership Programme and school federation pilots, and local authorities seeking help for schools placed in special measures following an Ofsted inspection.

Support federations covered a number of scenarios in which highly effective schools took over or worked with weak schools that, over a long period, had proved resistant to other efforts to improve them. These scenarios included:

two schools run by a single headteacher, temporarily or permanently

a group of schools, each with its own headteacher, committed to a particular way or ethos of working under the supervision of an executive headteacher

cloning a school by reproducing its methodology and approach in a partner school

extensive support from one school, including the secondment of key staff, often including an acting headteacher, to another school for a fixed period in order to address specific problems

The researchers concluded from the evidence that this model of school-to-school support not only had great potential but was likely to be a more cost-effective way of providing support to struggling schools than previous attempts such as Fresh Start (Potter, 2004).

How support federations work

Crucially, the researchers analysed the key features of support federations to see how they worked. They were able to show how support federations met the criteria for implementing an effective school improvement model, as evidenced by academic studies. Table 1 below indicates that the work of a support federation progresses through four phases: a preparatory phase that triggers and sets the scene for activity; an initial phase focused on making sure that the schools' basic operating systems are in place; a development phase to address the underlying weaknesses and build up staff skills; and a final phase in which the long-term future of the supported school is planned. At the heart of the model is a focus on five factors: behaviour and attitudes; curriculum; teaching and learning; leadership and management; and the school environment.

Table 1: How support federations help weak schools to improve

Characteristics of effective school improvement models as evidenced in academic studies	How support federations help deliver the model
Intolerance of system failure	The stronger school comes in with a culture of high expectations and challenges the acceptance of poor performance across the board.
A clear sense of primary mission with a number of small goals set	A clear mandate or contract (along with governance arrangements) for the stronger school to work with the weaker school is agreed. This includes the problems to be tackled and the improvements to be achieved.
Creation of a critical mass to get a school moving	The stronger school, with its high expectations, proven ways of working, secondment of key staff and access to additional resources, provides the impetus to get the weaker school moving by saturating the school with its approach.
Early identification and tackling of problems	The stronger school confronts the weaker school with the problems and any personnel – be they staff or students – that are blocking progress. The schools agree what action will be taken, including making changes in the leadership of the weaker school where necessary.
Consistent application of standard operating procedures	The stronger school insists on – and if necessary imports – clear rules and procedures for uniform, behaviour, pupil attendance, lesson planning and quality assurance, study leave, course assessment, staff absence etc.
A culture of monitoring, including peer monitoring, to improve teaching and learning	There is intensive observation and monitoring of lessons, including enabling teachers from the weaker school to observe colleagues at the stronger school and vice versa.
Co-construction of support to flexibly meet the precise needs of the weaker school while adhering to the principles of effective school improvement	The stronger school is responsible for maintaining a systematic school improvement model, but enables the weaker school to tailor support to address specific weaknesses and concerns, for example in teaching a particular subject or ensuring a relevant curriculum for a discrete group of students. The weaker school is involved throughout in shaping the work of the support federation.

Extensive training and retraining and very careful recruitment	The results of lesson observations form the basis for a structured staff development and training programme. This may include shared training with staff in the stronger school, one-to-one coaching and mentoring or working with an advanced skills teacher. The stronger school ensures that the right staff are recruited to fill key skill gaps. These are often at the level of assistant head or curriculum leader.
Rich use of data	The stronger school ensures that data systems are in place in the weaker school to track the progress of each pupil, year group and department and to set appropriate targets for improvement.
Simultaneous top-down and bottom-up leadership	The stronger school provides clear strategic leadership but also builds up the confidence and skills of middle, senior and aspiring or potential leaders in the weaker school. The aim is to equip them to take responsibility and be accountable for quality and standards.
Close attention to the quality of resources and the learning environment	Short-term measures are put in place to improve the learning environment, for example by redecorating or refurbishing parts of the school and/or reorganising areas to accommodate different teaching methods. A long-term plan for the development of the school premises is drawn up.
Simultaneous engagement at school and classroom level	The support federation model provides the strong leadership the weaker school needs, but also focuses on improving the quality of teaching and learning in every lesson.
Capacity developed for self-sustaining improvement	As the support federation develops, the relationship between the schools changes to one in which there is mutual learning. What was the weaker school starts to regain the capacity and confidence to conduct its own improvement agenda and/or forms a longer-term partnership with the stronger or another school.
Source: Potter, 2004 and DfES, 2005a, adapted	

The introduction of National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and National Support Schools (NSSs)

The impact of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme, London Challenge and support federations was boosted by two other factors. First came the spread of the school-based improvement work of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and of NCSL's Networked Learning Communities programme, which was in turn supported and promoted by the Association of School and College Leaders. Second, educationalists such as Michael Fullan and David Hopkins were making the case for school leaders to play a stronger role in the school system and for school reform to shift from being based on prescription by national government to schools themselves leading reform. This momentum provided the platform for the government to consider a more systematic approach to school-to-school improvement.

In October 2005, the chief executive of NCSL, Steve Munby, wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills proposing the creation of a cadre of NLEs. This would be drawn from outstanding leaders in the primary and secondary school systems who would be:

willing to involve themselves in system leadership outside their own school, taking lead responsibility for one or more schools in very challenging circumstances.

Munby, 2005:5 para. 17

The Secretary of State accepted the advice and in a white paper published later in autumn 2005 set out the government's commission to NCSL to:

identify, with the help of a range of partners, a new group of National Leaders of Education, drawn from those who are succeeding in our most challenging leadership roles.

DfES, 2005b:101 para. 8.31

NCSL was asked to select a first tranche of approximately 50 outstanding leaders in primary, secondary or special schools who could not only demonstrate excellent leadership in their own school but who would also be able to support schools in challenging circumstances, particularly those in special measures. By October 2006, 68 NLEs had been identified. The capacity of senior and middle leaders in a prospective NLE's school to support wider school improvement was also considered, and alongside the designation of the head as an NLE, his or her school was designated a NSS, thus taking on board key lessons from London Challenge and the research evidence.

The development and deployment of NLEs and NSSs are described in more detail in section 2 but with effect from January 2009, some 200 NLEs will be in place, with approximately 100 in the primary sector, and the rest in secondary and special schools or pupil referral units.

In a matter of a few years, school-to-school support has moved from being a relatively peripheral factor in school improvement to being integral to it. It is at the heart of the National Challenge target for every secondary school to have at least 30 per cent of students achieving five GCSEs at grades A* C including English and maths:

school-to-school support and leader-to-leader support will be the foundation of our whole school improvement strategy

DCSF, 2008a:8 para. 23

NLEs and NSSs have received less publicity than academies or trust schools but their influence on the English education system is likely to be just as great. Indeed, the academy and trust school model is increasingly being modelled on the school-to-school improvement approach. The government is urging high-performing schools and colleges in both the maintained and independent sectors to use academy and trust status as a means to work with and support weaker schools because, to quote the former Schools Minister Andrew Adonis, “the evidence is that forming a lasting relationship with a weaker school gives the strong school an ideal platform to share its ‘educational DNA’ for success” (DCSF, 2008b).

System leadership

What is happening in England is of a piece with trends in other countries. Governments throughout the developed world are recognising the value of empowering headteachers to become what are termed system leaders. In May 2008, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published a pair of reports on improving school leadership (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008; Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008). These highlight many of the trends that have been described above and explain how system leadership is transforming the role school leaders play in the education system:

Schools and schooling are being given an ever bigger job to do. Greater decentralisation in many countries is being coupled with more school autonomy, more accountability for school and student results, and a better use of the knowledge base of education and pedagogical processes. It is also being coupled with broader responsibility for contributing to and supporting the schools’ local communities, other schools and other public services.

As a result, there is a need to redefine and broaden school leaders’ roles and responsibilities ... One of school leaders’ new roles is increasingly to work with other schools and other school leaders, collaborating and developing relationships of interdependence and trust. System leaders, as they are being called, care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own. Crucially they are willing to shoulder system leadership roles because they believe that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way.

Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008: 9

England is singled out as one of the countries at the forefront of these developments, and the role of NCSL in facilitating the growth of system leadership is welcomed. The OECD says that system leadership will contribute significantly towards building education capacity as it encourages the sharing of expertise, facilities and resources; fosters innovation and creativity; improves leadership and spreads it more widely; and strengthens the development of skills. It predicts that NLE-style system leadership will:

**create much richer and more sustainable opportunities
for rigorous transformation than can ever be provided by
isolated institutions.**

Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008:3

In short, system leadership, in concert with parental pressure and school autonomy, is that elusive element that can help to deliver the holy grail of system-wide improvement and help make every school a good school.

Rolling out the NLE programme

National Leaders of Education (NLEs) are a growing and powerful support force in the school system. Their numbers are increasing, the use of them is spreading and expectations of the value they provide are rising. This section summarises the development of the NLE and National Support School (NSS) programme over the past two years. It describes how NLEs are designated and deployed and how the quality and integrity of the programme are being maintained.

The appointment of the first NLEs

When the first 68 NLEs were designated in October 2006, NCSL was looking for serving headteachers who were outstanding leaders of schools where excellence had been achieved by all the staff working together. NCSL required each NLE to:

show extensive evidence of successful school leadership, achieving sustained high standards and significant added value

be a leader in a school that had been judged in its most recent Ofsted inspection as having at least very good, or outstanding leadership and management¹

have a strong track record of providing effective support to other schools in difficulties

have current experience of leading a school that demonstrated:

consistent high performance

strong senior and middle level leadership

a range of staff at all levels with coaching and mentoring skills, and experience of helping other schools in difficulties

Applicants were required to provide evidence, including third-party references, to demonstrate that they met these requirements. The evidence was assessed by a panel convened by NCSL.

There was also an independent evaluation of the NLE designation process. The evaluator reviewed the data supplied by the successful NLE applicants and visited 28 of them. The analysis of the characteristics possessed by NLEs (see Table 2) provided not only an endorsement of the process through which phase 1 NLEs had been selected, but also confirmed that high-quality system leaders with the right motivation and skills were being recruited to the programme.

A similar evaluation was conducted for the second round of NLE appointments (Matthews, 2007b). This concluded that the quality of applicants and schools was 'as strong or stronger' in the second round compared to the first.

¹ In September 2005, Ofsted reduced the number of grades used to report the outcomes of inspection from seven to four. To apply for the NLE programme, heads of schools inspected after September 2005 had to have an overall classification of their school as 'outstanding', and those inspected before that date had to have their schools classified as 'very good' or 'excellent'.

Table 2: Conclusions of an independent assessment of the first tranche of NLEs

The findings of this study of the first group of NLEs provide an evidence-based profile of what sort of leaders they are. Several compelling and largely common characteristics emerge. NLEs:

show strong and principled moral purpose in reaching out to help other schools, sharing what they have learned, from highly credible foundations

are motivated by the challenge of providing the best possible educational experience for young people

are thoughtful and systematic in the way they work, diagnosing the challenges and finding workable solutions

earn the trust they receive through consulting, valuing and developing the people with whom they work, and having belief in them

build confidence, capability and self-esteem in the people with whom they work as well as institutional capacity through growing other leaders

have inordinately high expectations, great optimism and believe in success. Nothing less than excellence is good enough for them

are not daunted by problems that would defeat many heads, will find innovative and often unorthodox solutions to both systemic and more localised problems and will not always follow expected patterns and rules

are decisive and prepared to take unpalatable decisions if this is the way to provide what children and the community deserve from their school

are admired and respected by their colleagues in the school, providing excellent role models

Source: Matthews, 2007a

Growth of NLEs

A second tranche of 60 NLEs was designated in July 2007 and a third cohort takes on the role in September 2008. In response to the demands generated by the National Challenge and its focus on supporting those secondary schools in which fewer than 30 per cent of pupils are achieving five passes at grades A* C in GCSEs (including English and maths), NCSL plans to designate a further group of NLEs from January 2009. By the beginning of 2009, it is anticipated there will be a total of 200 NLEs.

The longer-term aim is to establish 500 NLEs by 2012, with 300 in primary schools and 200 in secondary schools, so creating a critical mass of system leaders across the country.

The NLE programme has been built on the premise that the criteria for becoming an NLE should be challenging. As the programme has developed, the criteria have been amended slightly but the changes have had the effect of raising rather than lowering the bar². In particular, the National Support School led by the NLE has to have achieved a grade 1 (outstanding) in its most recent Ofsted inspection for the school overall, for capacity to improve and for leadership and management³.

There is little point in having demanding criteria if compliance with them is not monitored. NCSL reviews NLE designation annually and if necessary revokes it in order to safeguard the quality of the initiative. NLE status can be removed if, for example, the NLE fails to undertake work as an NLE or there is a decline in the quality and standards at their own school. If an NLE changes job or ceases to be the head of the NSS, he or she can normally expect their NLE status to be revoked, such is the importance of the umbilical link between an NLE and a National Support School (NSS). The fact that an excellent head also brings the resources of his or her own school is one of the key elements that distinguishes this programme from the 'superhead' approach. It is this factor that provides an important catalyst for improvement.

Local authorities are responsible for funding the cost of NLE and NSS interventions in schools, although NCSL provides a bursary to NLEs that ranges from £5,000 to £15,000, depending on the size of the school and whether the NLE is being deployed. This covers the costs of visiting and assessing potential client schools, liaising with the local authority and attending training events and conferences. NCSL support includes an induction programme, written guidance, seminars, access to advisors and a wider network of NLEs and NSSs to provide peer support.

How NLEs have been used

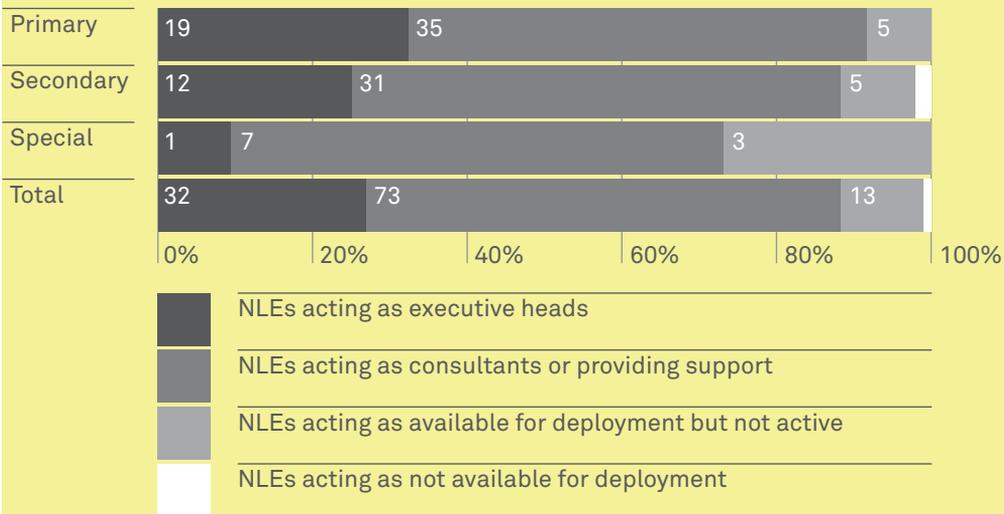
It is one thing to have NLEs and NSSs designated and available but quite another to ensure that they are used effectively. NLE designation does not carry with it an automatic right to be assigned a particular school to work with. Relationships and partnerships have to be constructed and negotiations have to take place in order to bring an NLE into play when a school needs support to improve.

NCSL has worked hard to make sure NLEs are deployed to good effect. By May 2008, nearly 9 out of 10 of NLEs designated in the first two tranches were supporting another school or schools (see Figure 2). Nearly a third were acting as executive heads for another school although the number – which is growing – changes frequently. NLEs are also deployed as consultant leaders, associate headteachers or in similar non-executive support roles. Table 3 describes the typical features of deployment as an executive head.

² The current NLE selection criteria can be accessed at www.ncsl.org.uk/nle

³ If one of the grades for these three key areas is a 2 (good), the application will still be considered, with the issue(s) explored through a school visit.

Figure 2: Deployment and availability of NLEs, as at May 2008



Source: Matthews, 2008b

Table 3: Executive headship in action

An executive headteacher often takes over when the leadership of a school is in a crisis. It is important for the executive head to avoid the trap of doubling his or her workload as a result of leading two schools. NLEs typically support the weaker school for between a fifth and half of their working week and so must make sure there is appropriate back-up leadership both in their own school and in the client school. Three typical scenarios are as follows.

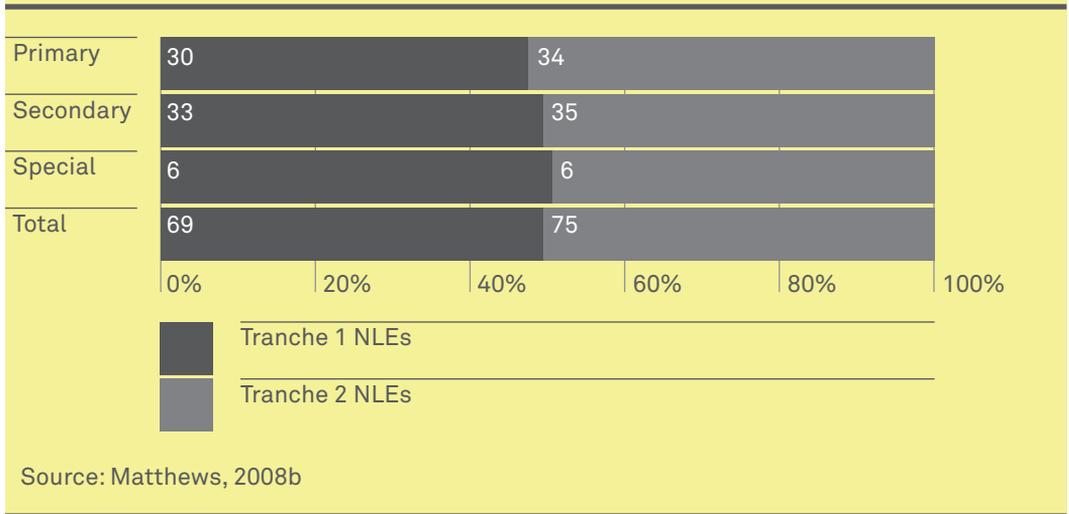
The NLE becomes acting head of the weaker school for a set period, making arrangements for the NSS deputy head and the rest of the school leadership team to take responsibility for the home school on a day-to-day basis.

An acting head is identified for the client school, either from within the staff, or by seconding a member of the NSS' senior leadership team (usually a deputy head) to lead the client school under the guidance of the NLE as executive head. If secondment is used, the resulting vacant post in the NSS is normally filled by appointing a senior leader from within the school on an acting basis, so aiding leadership development.

The NLE works with a new head of school in the client school in a federated arrangement and arranges for the leadership team in his or her home school to take on extra responsibilities. This frees up the NLE's time, which is used to support the client school's new head.

In May 2008, NLEs and NSSs were supporting at least 144 schools⁴ (see Figure 3). Of these, 18 were or had been in special measures. The remainder had received either an Ofsted notice to improve or were a source of concern to their local authority. Nearly half of local authorities (45 per cent) had used an NLE. In all, NCSL calculates that during 2007 and 2008, some 50,000 students in struggling schools benefited from the NLE and NSS programme. Case study 2 below describes the fairly typical deployment of an NLE.

Figure 3: Number of schools supported by NLEs, by tranche, as at May 2008



⁴ Some NLEs were involved in assisting more than one school. The figure of 144 is an under- rather than an over-estimate of schools being supported; for example, it excludes NSSs with multiple connections such as an NSS which is a partner school to eight primary schools in the Keighley Challenge.

Case study 2: NLE and NSS involvement in Werneth Junior School, Oldham

Werneth Junior School served pupils entirely from minority ethnic backgrounds. Nearly all the pupils spoke English as an additional language. An executive headteacher (NLE) and lead deputy head were appointed to the school for two years in September 2006. In September 2008, the school amalgamated with the on-site infant school to form a new primary school for pupils aged 3 to 11.

A notice to improve had triggered the involvement of the NLE, who was head of another Oldham school, as executive headteacher. Reinspection in January 2008 found the school to be good with outstanding features.

Outstanding leadership and management have rejuvenated the school and are bringing about rapid improvement ... Standards have risen rapidly; the quality of teaching and learning are good, outstanding in Year 6; and the outstanding care, guidance and support provided by the school underpin pupils' sense of well-being and their good achievement.

Ofsted, 2008a:4

The inspection report praised the overall impact of NLE and NSS support, which saw the school gain a grade 1 (outstanding) for leadership and management:

The outstanding leadership of the executive headteacher, most ably supported by the lead deputy headteacher, has been instrumental in bringing about such rapid improvement. Their focus has been unceasingly on raising standards and achievement by improving the quality of teaching and learning. This has been done with both tenacity and sensitivity. Both the executive headteacher and the lead deputy headteacher are particularly skilful in identifying latent talent and encouraging it to bloom. Teachers, in particular, have responded with great enthusiasm to this challenging yet nurturing approach.

Ofsted, 2008a:6

The inspection report acknowledged specific strategies that had been used to improve teaching and learning:

The executive headteacher (NLE) and lead deputy headteacher have identified very quickly what needs to be done to bring about improvement. At the heart of their work has been a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. To this end they have not only conducted excellent staff training but have introduced highly efficient and effective procedures for demonstrating and encouraging good teaching.

Ofsted, 2008a:4

The process for deploying NLEs

It is normally local authorities that broker the formal involvement of an NLE and NSS, either from within the local authority or from a neighbouring authority. Approximately one third of NLEs have been commissioned to provide support by a local authority other than the one in which they are situated.

Quite often, an NLE will be asked to go into a school at very short notice. This might happen, for example, after a school has received a very poor Ofsted inspection report. In these circumstances, the local authority concerned may want to act quickly and will talk to the chairs of the governing bodies of both the NSS and the client school to get an arrangement up and running. Even when involvement starts in this abrupt way, NCSL recommends that local authorities and NLEs follow a structured process for formalising the situation, as described below and summarised in Figure 4.

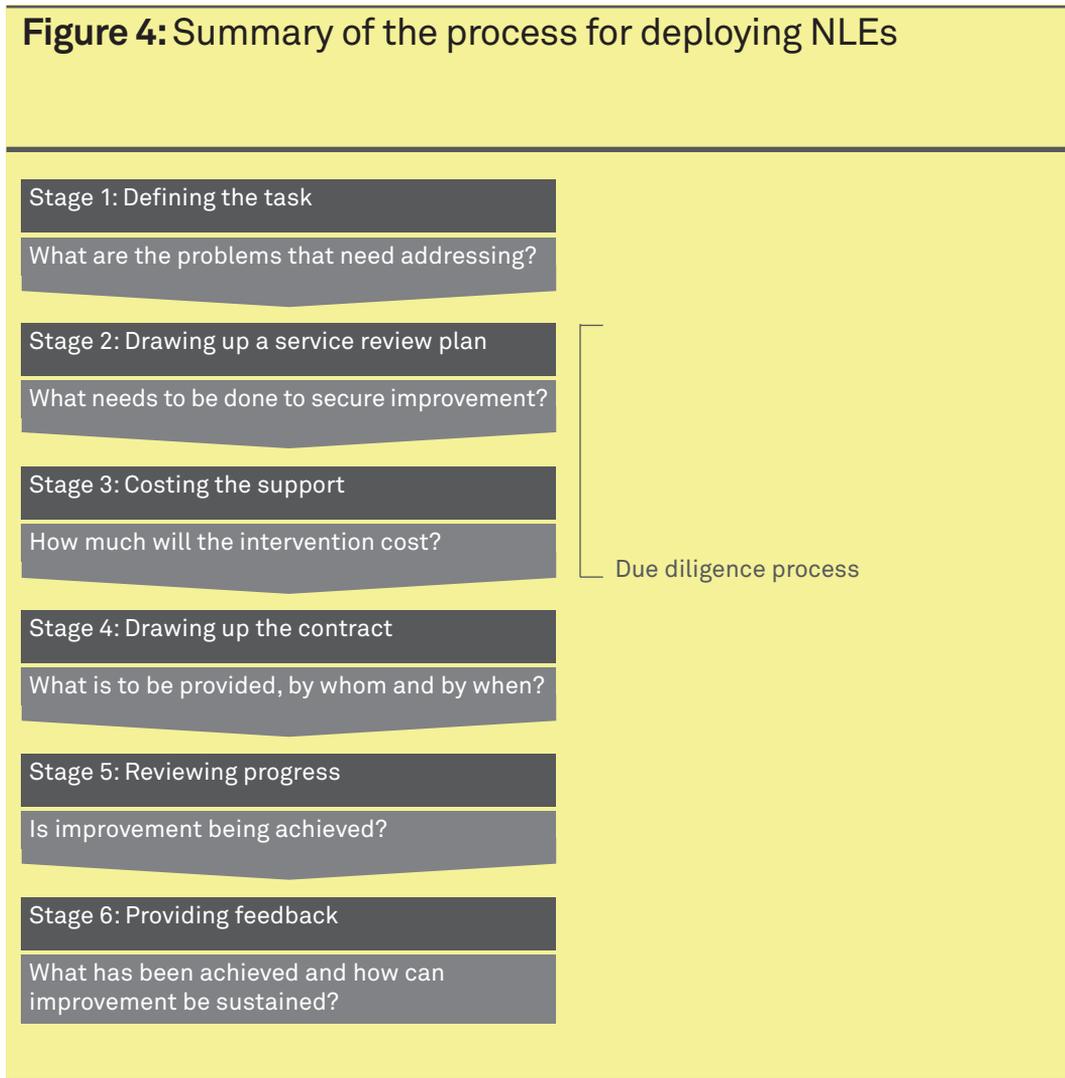
The process starts with defining the scope and nature of the problems that need to be addressed by the NLE in the client school. If this involves the NLE effectively taking over the running of the client school or making a significant time commitment to it over an extended period, NCSL suggests that a full due diligence process is followed, which forms stages 2 and 3.

In stage 2, the NLE and NSS will conduct an audit and assess the areas of performance that need improvement and these will be shared and agreed with the client school and the local authority. This plan then becomes the basis for the NLE and NSS to calculate the projected costs of their intervention (stage 3), including the cost of backfilling leadership posts in the NSS in order to free up resources to assist in the client school. The cost of an NLE/NSS support package naturally depends on the level of support offered. It can range from £4,000 for a series of consultancy visits to £400,000 for providing long-term executive headship and other staffing support. Local authorities are responsible for meeting these costs. For schools falling within the remit of the City Challenge and National Challenge, funding is available from government to help pay for intervention and support.

At stage 4, the NLE and NSS and the local authority agree a contract that defines who is to deliver what, for how much and by when. NCSL has provided a model contract that local authorities can use or adapt.

Stage 5 is all about the NLE and NSS getting stuck into their core role of helping to tackle underlying problems and make improvements in the client school. Progress is systematically and frequently monitored and the results shared with the client school and the local authority. At the end of an assignment (stage 6), an NLE is expected to provide a summary report listing the activities of the NLE and NSS, a description of what has been achieved and what needs to be done to sustain the improvement in the client school.

Figure 4: Summary of the process for deploying NLEs



Case study 3 opposite follows the life-cycle of an NLE/NSS intervention commissioned by a local authority.

Case study 3: Local authority-led deployment of an NLE

North Yorkshire County Council was concerned that one of the schools in its area, Harrogate High School, was at risk of being classified grade 4 (inadequate) by Ofsted. The council approached an NLE, principal of Outwood Grange College, Wakefield, to explore the possibility of support. The concept of executive headship held some appeal because the authority was concerned about the leadership of the client school. After discussions with the NLE and governing bodies of both schools, the authority commissioned and paid for a due diligence report.

This report was considered by the local authority together with the costings for the proposal. A meeting of the local authority, the NLE and the chairs of governors reached agreement to commission the project. A contract specified the objectives, issues that needed addressing, the length of the assignment, the services that would be provided by the NSS and those to be provided by the authority. The specific items covered in the contract included were: educational standards; quality of teaching and learning; curriculum; behaviour; exclusions; leadership and management and overall effectiveness. In the event that the client school were to be inspected during the period of NLE leadership, the contract specified that it should be judged 'at least satisfactory and improving, with good capacity to improve'.

The contract allowed for the NSS to provide considerable level of support, involving not only an executive headteacher but also an associate head, considerable financial expertise and the involvement of a number of other key senior and middle leaders, all of whose time was planned, timetabled and budgeted.

The client school was in due course inspected by Ofsted just before the end of the contract and was judged 'satisfactory, focused on improvement, and with a good capacity to improve'. The inspection report concluded:

The school has experienced considerable change and turbulence over the last few years, resulting in low achievement and standards for students and their reported poor behaviour. The local authority worked with the governing body to enter into a partnership with a National Leader in Education support school to bring about significant change and improvement. The school now has a clear focus on improvement that is shared by students, staff and governors. Change is proceeding rapidly under the determined leadership of the executive principal and acting headteacher. They work as an effective team to bring a clear vision for improvement to fruition.

Ofsted, 2008b:4

The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A* C rose from 44 per cent in 2007 to 70 per cent a year later. The contract with Outwood Grange College was renewed for a further year, although a new headteacher has been appointed to take up post during the year. The executive principal and Outwood Grange College have also taken on the improvement of another school in north Doncaster.

Role of National Support Schools

One of the fundamental differences between the NLE/NSS programme and earlier school improvement initiatives is that a headteacher is not, as it were, sent over in a lifeboat to rescue a school single-handed. Rather, the NSS is more like a supply ship moored alongside a client school to provide integrated support and help.

So, for example, in almost all cases where NLEs are acting as executive heads of underperforming secondary schools, the acting or associate head is drawn from the NLE's own school. Other key staff from the NSS may lead core subject areas and or work as specialists in matters ranging from assessment and pupil support to school business management. Support from the NSS may also involve receiving visits from the client school to observe classroom practice, mentoring new or inexperienced colleagues, joint planning of teaching and learning, coaching, sharing ideas and resources, lesson observation and facilitating one-to-one or group training. In addition to all this, an NLE's colleagues have a crucial role in sustaining and continuing to improve the work and standards of the NSS itself during the period of providing support to the client school.

Introduction of local leaders of education

As the potential of school-to-school improvement is better understood and as the need to raise school standards becomes more pressing, NCSL is developing local leaders of education (LLE). The LLE model is an extension of the approach adopted by consultant leaders in the London Challenge and London Leadership Strategy. LLEs are expected to meet rigorous criteria, although these are not as demanding as those for NLEs.

The working model for LLEs is being developed in the Greater Manchester and Black Country City Challenge areas. LLEs will be supporting schools identified through the City Challenge and National Challenge in a pilot programme involving a small group of local authorities. The LLE model is similar to the NLE programme in that it provides school-to-school leadership support, but there is no formal requirement for an NSS. Consequently, the work focuses on providing coaching, mentoring and access to leadership development programmes, rather than individual heads taking on a significant leadership role within the client school.

Conclusion

This section has demonstrated that the influence and impact of the NLE programme are growing. But is there tangible proof that the NLE programme is adding value? Is it fulfilling the claims made by proponents of school-to-school support and can it be shown to be turning failing schools around in a sustainable way? Section 3 addresses these questions.

How much value are National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and National Support Schools (NSSs) adding?

The NLE programme has a lot going for it. It is based on the evidence of what works and built on the skills and experience of some of the most able leaders in the school system. But is it actually adding value? Can it be shown to be making a difference? The NLE/NSS initiative is a relatively young programme and therefore evidence of impact at this stage is limited. This section examines the evidence and data that are available.

Assessing the value of partnership working

Experience from both the commercial world and from public services demonstrates that the benefits of partnership working normally take time to come through. It requires patience – often as long as three or four years – before the full value of collaboration starts to be realised (Hill, 2008). The same is true in education. Studies of school federations, the Excellence in Cities programme and other partnership initiatives show that the value of these programmes grew as they matured (ibid).

We should, therefore, be cautious about expecting too much too soon from the NLE/NSS programme, not least because by its nature the programme is targeted at underperforming schools where improvement is hardest to achieve and sustain. Nevertheless, we do have evidence from three sources that enables us to reach preliminary conclusions about the impact and influence of NLEs and NSSs on the school system as a whole:

Ofsted inspection and reinspection reports of schools that have been put in special measures or received a notice to improve, and have been supported by NLEs/NSSs

two independent reports on the progress of the NLE programme, commissioned by NCSL (Matthews, 2008a; 2008b)

data on attainment in key stage tests and GCSE examinations

What do Ofsted inspection reports tell us?

Many of the schools being supported by NLEs and NSSs had been assessed overall as grade 4 (inadequate) by Ofsted and had received a notice to improve or been placed in special measures. When Ofsted takes such a step, it conducts regular monitoring visits and a follow-up inspection before the school is taken out of the category into which it has been placed. NLEs and their schools come in to assist at various points in the improvement process and, as we have seen, their roles vary depending on the circumstances of the client school.

Ofsted reports do not necessarily reflect in full the work of NLEs and NSSs in helping these schools, and rarely capture the contribution NLEs and NSSs have made when they work alongside a school to prevent it from slipping into being 'inadequate'. Nonetheless, as Tables 4 and 5 show, there is a growing volume of evidence from Ofsted of the value of NLE/NSS intervention and support for struggling schools. NCSL reckons that phase 1 NLEs had, by July 2008, been instrumental in helping 19 schools either out of special measures or in having a notice to improve withdrawn.

Table 4: Examples of Ofsted identifying NLE and NSS input as significant in supporting primary schools

**Beechview Junior School,
Buckinghamshire**

The local authority arranged for NLE/NSS support for the school, which was underperforming and needed leadership support.

Effective support from the leaders of a nearby NSS, a National Leader of Education, and from the local authority has reversed the decline and standards are now rising. Staff from the NSS have introduced effective procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress.

Ofsted inspection report, June 2008

**Green End Primary School,
Manchester**

The school was placed in special measures in November 2005. In April 2007, it became part of a federation with Ladybarn Primary School, with the head of Ladybarn (an NLE) also becoming head of Green End. In December 2007 the school was judged 'satisfactory' and taken out of special measures.

The new headteacher [an NLE] has successfully harnessed the hard work of staff and created a renewed sense of commitment and clarity of focus. There is a greater sense of urgency about the pace of change, and this is complemented by an ambitious but realistic plan of action ... Other leaders are responding enthusiastically to the increased opportunities to develop their leadership and management skills.

Ofsted inspection report, January 2008

**Kingsley Primary School,
Northamptonshire**

This school was placed in special measures in May 2007. A year later, it was judged 'satisfactory' and taken out of special measures.

The school has particularly valued the advice, practical support and resources provided by the headteacher and staff from its partner school that is linked through the National Leader of Education programme.

Ofsted inspection report, June 2008

**Tame Valley Community School,
Birmingham**

Tame Valley school was placed in special measures in July 2006. In January 2008 it was judged 'satisfactory' and taken out of special measures.

The headteacher has been ably supported by the local authority (LA) through its effective deployment of a team led by two headteachers in the National Leaders in Education scheme. This team has allowed expertise to be shared and effective long-term collaborative arrangements to be built up. Teaching staff have greatly benefited from these arrangements, which have helped raise their own professional standards and re-establish confidence.

Ofsted inspection report, February 2008

**Upton St James Church of
England Primary School, Torquay**

This school was placed in special measures in November 2007 and has been receiving NLE/NSS support. In its most recent Ofsted monitoring visit in May 2008, the school was judged to be making 'satisfactory progress'.

Governors recognise the good support they have received from the National Leader of Education and his staff, as well as from the local authority ... The school has clearly benefited from the support of the National Leader of Education in terms of the improvements to teaching through visits made by teachers to see good practice and in increasing the effectiveness of the governing body.

Ofsted monitoring visit letter May 2008

Table 5: Examples of Ofsted identifying NLE and NSS input as being significant in supporting secondary schools

Central Technology College, Gloucester

This college was given a notice to improve in March 2006. In May 2007 the notice was removed and school was judged 'good'.

The improvement since the last inspection has been outstanding. This remarkable improvement has come about as a result of the outstanding leadership of the executive headteacher [an NLE] and the new headteacher. This leadership has put in place a substantial improvement programme that has led to a dramatic turnaround in the school's performance. Central to this improvement has been the collaborative work with advanced skills teachers and middle leaders from Ninestiles [an NSS].

Ofsted inspection report, May 2007

Crofton School, Lewisham

Crofton School was given a notice to improve in September 2006. This was removed in November 2007.

The local authority, London Challenge and partner schools have worked together creatively and with clear direction and very good coordination. Very good longer-term plans for the school are close to final agreement... The improvements to learning are partly attributable to the exceptional monitoring and support programmes [led by the NSS] to improve the quality of teaching.

Ofsted inspection report, January 2008

Debden Park High School, Essex

Debden Park was placed in special measures in January 2007. In October 2007 it was judged 'good' and taken out of special measures, having made 'outstanding progress'.

The partnership with Kemnal Technology College [an NSS] working with the staff and governors of Debden Park has brought outstanding leadership to the school. ... Excellent leadership and management have had a significant

impact in raising achievement and supporting all learners because of particularly well-judged use of challenging targets to raise standards.

Ofsted inspection report, November 2007

The Grays School Media Arts College, Thurrock

This college was placed in special measures. In June 2008 it was judged to be making 'satisfactory progress' since its previous monitoring visit.

A consultant headteacher [an NLE] has been supporting the acting headteacher and the senior management team since April this year... The work of the consultant headteacher, since the previous monitoring visit, has been well received by staff. It is strategic as well as pragmatic and provides good levels of support.

Ofsted monitoring visit report, July 2008

Longspee School, Poole

Longspee School is a special school and was placed in special measures in November 2007. At its most recent Ofsted monitoring visit it was judged to be making 'good progress'.

The NLE who is working with the school has an expertise in supporting children and young people designated as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). The school has benefited greatly from his support and from the School Improvement Partner who also has expertise in this area of special educational need.

Ofsted monitoring visit report, May 2008

Rhodesway School, Bradford

Rhodesway School went into special measures in September 2005. In December 2006 Ofsted moved the school on to a notice to improve. This was withdrawn in January 2008 when the school was judged 'satisfactory and improving'

Leadership and management are good. Under the resolute and expert guidance of the executive headteacher [an NLE] and acting headteacher, a solid and effective senior leadership team is steering the school away from underperformance to success. Each has a clear remit as to their role in raising attainment and improving provision.

Ofsted inspection report, June 2008

These reports cited in Tables 4 and 5 certainly indicate the crucial role that NLEs are playing in helping to turn schools around. However, the real test of effectiveness is whether such schools are left with the capacity to sustain their improvement: to move from satisfactory to good and beyond, and to put standards on a sustained, upward trajectory. It is too early in the life of the NLE programme to reach firm conclusions on this point, but the signs are good (Matthews, 2008b). Some good schools are even jumping straight from being judged 'inadequate' to 'good'.

What do the independent evaluation reports tell us?

The independent evaluations of the NLE/NSS programme (Matthews, 2007a; 2007b; 2008a; 2008b) complement the Ofsted reports because they identify how NLEs and NSSs are being effective: the processes and procedures they are following in order to achieve improvement. The evaluation reports also look at the extent to which system leadership is taking root in the English education system.

NLE work covers a spectrum of approaches to intervention and support, which are tailored to the specific needs of individual schools. The style of individual NLEs is also different so it is not possible to describe a standard form of NLE intervention. It is, however, possible to identify the characteristics of effective NLE/NSS support.

NLEs have well-developed and reliable systems, procedures, expectations and operating standards in their own schools that encourage initiative and empower staff to innovate. These systems are sufficiently robust to sustain the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the school's work, even if staff are moved to new roles or there are other changes.

NLEs focus relentlessly on the quality of teaching and learning, inclusion and raising achievement.

The systems and practices used by NLEs and NSSs are operated with a high degree of consistency.

NLEs focus relentlessly on the quality of teaching and learning, inclusion and raising achievement, data on attainment in key stage tests and GCSE examinations.

NLEs distribute leadership well, ensuring that all leaders work to common principles and procedures.

Staff training and development are given a high priority.

The NSS's systems, procedures and practices are largely transferable or adaptable to other schools and contexts.

At the heart of an NLE's mission is improving the quality of teaching and learning. In the early days of an NLE and NSS working with a client school, the measurable improvements are more likely to relate to improved inputs (better lessons, better teaching etc) than to improved outputs and outcomes. Figure 5 captures the key elements of the main ways in which NLEs and NSSs are helping client schools raise the quality of their teaching and learning across the board. The interventions, not surprisingly, correspond closely with those described in section 1 where the research evidence on how stronger schools help weaker schools to improve was summarised.

Figure 5: Examples of interventions by NLEs and NSSs to improve teaching and learning in client schools

Monitoring performance	Appointing executive head, promoting able leaders, seconding in deputy and assistant heads and curriculum leaders
Developing leadership	Supporting senior leaders and working with middle leaders to address their weaknesses and improve leadership capacity
Modelling	Hosting visits and using advanced skills teachers to enable the client school to see good practice in teaching and lesson observation
Coaching	Working with subject leaders and providing feedback on the quality of classroom teaching and learning
Training	Holding shared inset days and other training sessions focused on delivering high-quality lessons
Mentoring	Supporting a newly appointed or inexperienced teacher or subject leader on a one-to-one basis
Planning	Assisting with reviewing curriculum plans and schemes of work, and policies for behaviour and inclusion
Monitoring performance	Checking regularly on the progress of individual teachers and subjects
Using data	Helping to analyse the performance of pupils, year groups and departments and setting targets for improvement
Evaluating progress	Assessing and reporting overall progress to pupils, staff, governors and the local authority

Source: Matthews 2008a, adapted

The independent evaluation also identifies another key area of learning for NLEs in relation to beginning their engagement with a client school, concluding that it is better to think in terms of a concentrated injection of resources rather than just drip feed support. From visits to a wide range of NSSs and conversations with NLEs and local authorities, the evaluator distilled the following 10 tips for NLEs planning their support strategy.

1. Dig deeply and make sure you really understand the needs of the school you are going to support – otherwise you will under-estimate the resources and the budget you need to effect improvement.

2. Be clear about objectives, early gains and sticking points.

3. Plan and prepare as much as possible and set an ambitious but deliverable timeframe for improvement.

4. Make sure both sets of governors as well as the local authority are signed up.

5. Assess behaviour, curriculum, ethos, quality of leaders and quality of teachers early.

6. Find the good leaders (and teachers) and keep them at all costs. If leadership is dysfunctional, bring in leaders you know and trust.

7. Make expectations clear and be prepared to use appropriate capability and personnel procedures where performance is completely unacceptable and/or there are significant issues with staff on long-term sick leave.

8. Better to coach and prepare others than try and take it all on yourself.

9. Rate everything on a 'traffic light' or grading system.

10. Engage everyone, including pupils, staff, parents and governors.

Source: Matthews, 2008a

As we saw in section 1, the NLE programme did not invent an entirely new concept. Rather it is drawing on the best of school-to-school improvement initiatives that have preceded it with the aim of extending the impact of high-quality school leaders across the school and college system in a more systematic manner. There is increasing evidence of how, in addition to acting as consultant leaders or executive heads to individual schools, NLEs are fulfilling the aspirations for them to take on wider system leadership roles: Table 6 contains some examples. As the City Challenge and National Challenge develop, it is likely that more and more NLEs will take on these wider system leadership roles.

Table 6: Examples of NLEs taking on wider system leadership roles

System leadership role	Example
Leading a group or chain of schools	An NLE acts as chief executive to a group of schools that are linked together and governed through a federation, trust or a group of academies with the same sponsor. All the schools in the group work to the same school improvement model. For example, the Ninestiles federation of three Birmingham schools has effectively partnered schools in Gloucester, and the chief executive of Ninestiles has also become the executive leader of the Hastings federation of three secondary schools. The principal of Greensward Academy in Essex is also the chief executive of a trust responsible for Greensward and two other local academies.
Leading or supporting area-wide school support teams	On behalf of the local authority, an NLE brokers partnerships between consultant leaders and schools that need support, providing any necessary mentoring or coaching for the consultant leaders as well as monitoring the progress of the school and the effectiveness of the partnership. In London, for example, one NLE liaises with London Challenge advisors, local authorities and schools to undertake precisely these roles. In addition, the NLE is consultant leader to two schools and is closely engaged in providing support and intensive professional development to a third, whose partnership board she chairs. Her own school, Lampton, has become a teaching school, providing a range of programmes for improving teaching to other schools. Her wider leadership support role averages a day each week and the consultant leader work another day a week. An Ofsted inspection report in summer 2008 judged her own school to be 'outstanding'.
Leading regional initiatives	The Black Country Challenge and Greater Manchester Challenge are both using NLEs to fulfil system leadership roles. These designated part-time directors are playing an important role in the recruitment, training, deployment and support of other leaders and in this way expanding the capacity to provide school-to-school improvement. The model derives from the highly successful example in London, where the NLE-led Leadership Strategy of the London Challenge oversaw the consultant leader programme and, through one particular school (Ravens Wood), pioneered the development of intensive, high-quality, school-based training to encourage teachers to improve their practice.

Source: Matthews, 2008a, adapted

The white paper that announced the creation of NLEs said that the system leadership role of the best school leaders would be encouraged by enabling them to ‘advise Ministers on the future direction of education policy on the basis of their expert experience’ (DfES, 2005b:101 para. 8.32). This is being achieved by ministers meeting regularly with groups of NLEs. NCSL is also bringing NLEs together to share the lessons from a wide variety of engagements in client schools and to review the progress and development of the NLE programme.

NCSL is further encouraging the development of system leadership by piloting a Fellowship Programme with 18 NLEs. It includes a place on a top leadership programme offered by other leadership centres or business schools. In the final phase of the pilot, all 18 NLEs will work together intensively for a week on a major national educational challenge. This challenge will be presented by ministers or senior civil servants and will be real – in other words, it will address a complex problem with which they are grappling. The participants will draw on their experience and recent learning and undertake rapid research and development work in order to present credible proposals that can be put into practice.

What do results in key stage tests and GCSE examinations tell us?

The ultimate test of the effectiveness of NLEs and NSSs has to be whether over time they can be shown to contribute to measurable improvements in school performance. The majority of NLEs were only deployed during the 2006/07 or 2007/08 school years, though a few had been supporting a school before being designated as NLEs. These are thus relatively early days for the programme and we need to beware of reading too much into trends at this stage. **However, there are clear signs of an association between NLE intervention and improved results.**

This is a provisional conclusion, and the evidence below needs to be seen alongside the evidence already discussed. We have generally used 2006 as the baseline year and focused our analysis on the impact made by the first group of NLEs to be appointed. We have examined validated data for 2007/08 and unvalidated 2008 results⁵ for all the schools that were either phase 1 NSSs or were supported by phase 1 NLEs/NSSs, where the results were available at the time of publication. In interpreting the data, we have taken account of the following.

Not all the effect, whether positive or negative, is necessarily due to NLEs and NSSs.

The nature of NLE interventions varies from consultancy to executive control, making it difficult to generalise about a generic effect.

All schools in Ofsted categories are subject to focused school improvement efforts of various kinds. At this stage it has not been possible to assess the value of NLEs by comparing their impact with that of a control group of schools supported by non-NLE means. As the programme grows, this option should be explored.

Most schools experience some fluctuation in results from year to year. The smaller the class in a primary school, or the year group in a secondary school, the greater the effect a small group of pupils has on the overall results.

Despite these caveats, the figures below do show that in most cases NLE involvement is associated with improvement in the client school, and with continuing improvement in the NSSs themselves. This holds good in both the primary and secondary sectors.

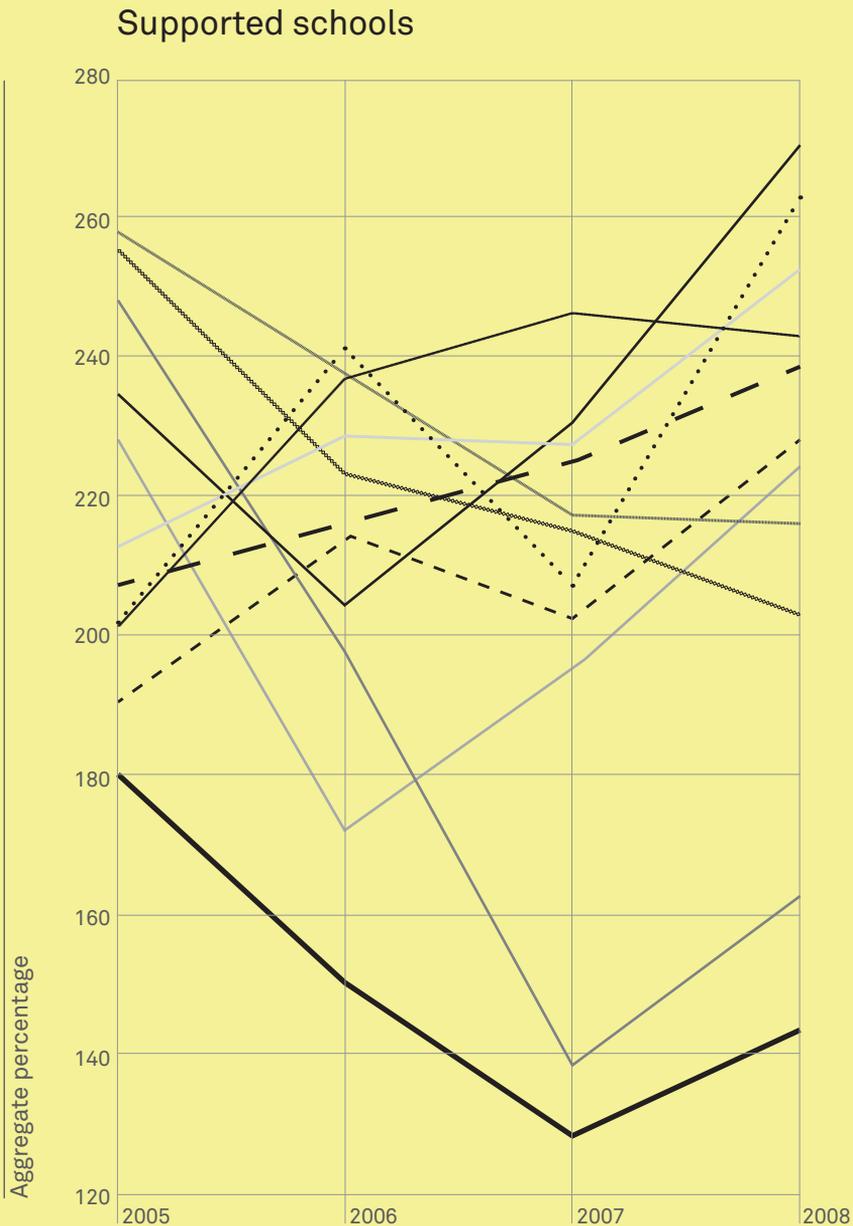
⁵ Unverified results are likely to present the worst scenario since schools are awaiting the outcome of grading appeals which, if accepted, tend to have the effect of improving the results.

Primary sector

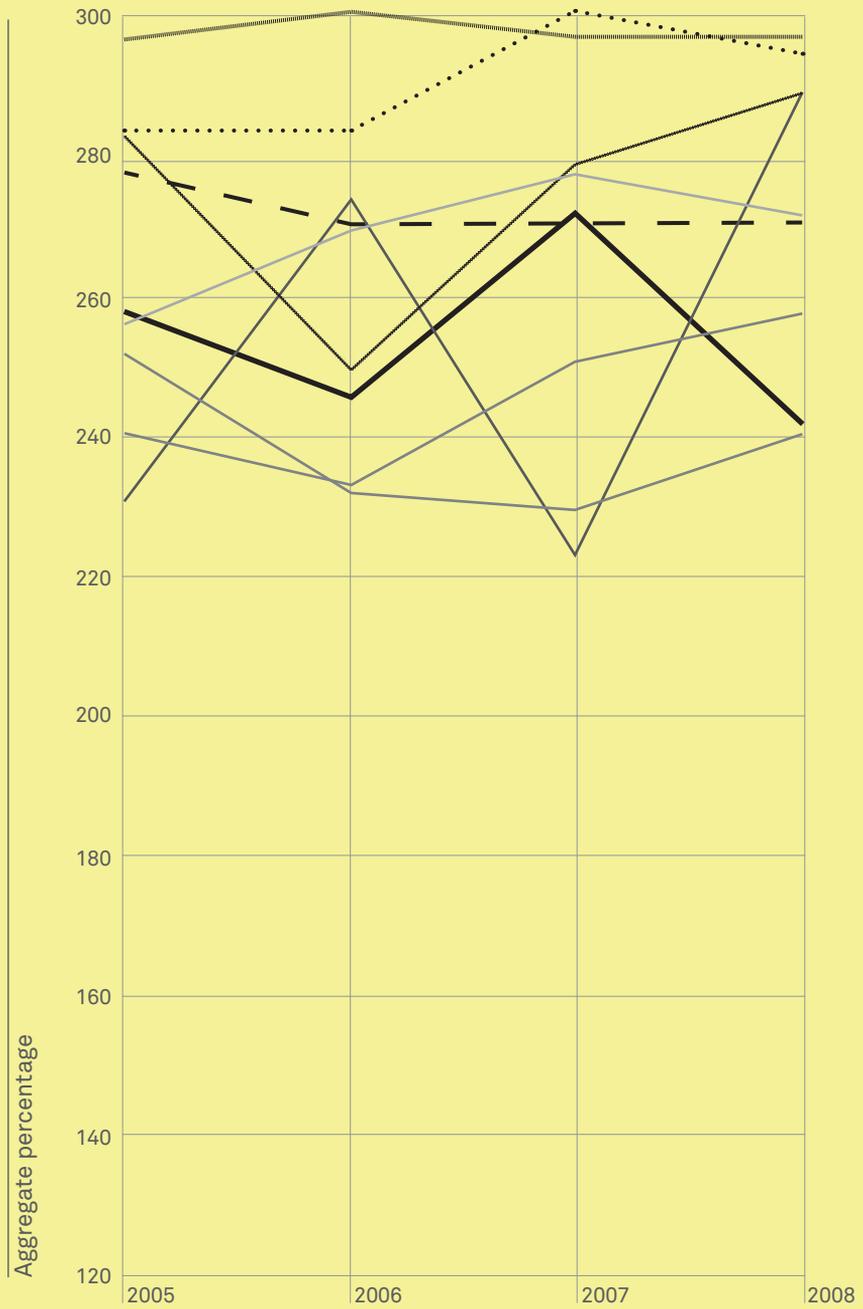
Primary NLEs have in general engaged very effectively with partner schools, many of them in an executive headship capacity. The 2008 Key Stage 2 results, (where available⁶) show an encouraging pattern (Figure 6). The majority of supported schools that had been on a downward trajectory before the involvement of an NLE/NSS in 2006/07 were improving by 2008, and sometimes earlier. The associated NSSs have continued to perform well.

⁶ A number of the primary schools supported by NLEs had not received Key Stage 2 provisional test results for 2008 at the time of publication.

Figure 6: Aggregate percentages of pupils achieving level 4 in English, maths and science at Key Stage 2 in 12 schools supported by phase 1 NLEs/NSSs (before and since receiving NLE/NSS support)



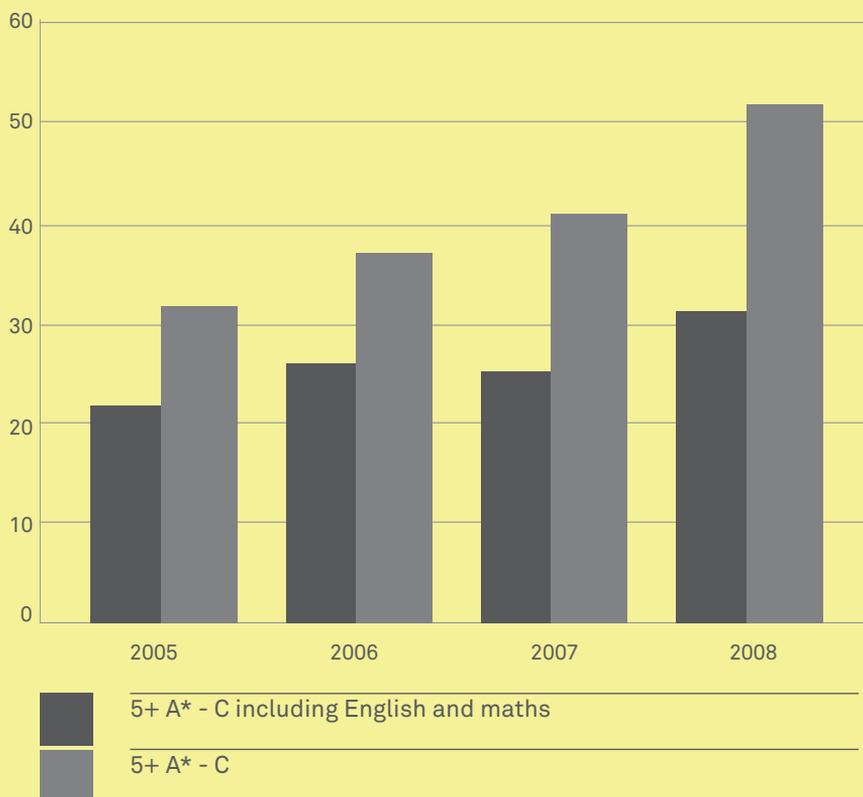
NLEs / NSSs



Secondary sector

The average progress of 17 secondary schools supported by phase 1 NLEs and NSSs is shown in Figure 7. This indicates that improvement in supported schools overall accelerated between 2007 and 2008. It also corroborates case study evidence that it takes longer and is more challenging to raise performance when this is measured by the achievement by students of five GCSEs at grades A* C, including in English and maths. Even so, the number of supported schools with results below the government's 30 per cent floor target almost halved in this period, from 13 schools to 7.

Figure 7: Average percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A* C (excluding and including English and maths) in 17 schools supported by phase 1 NLEs/NSSs (before and since receiving NLE/NSS support⁷)

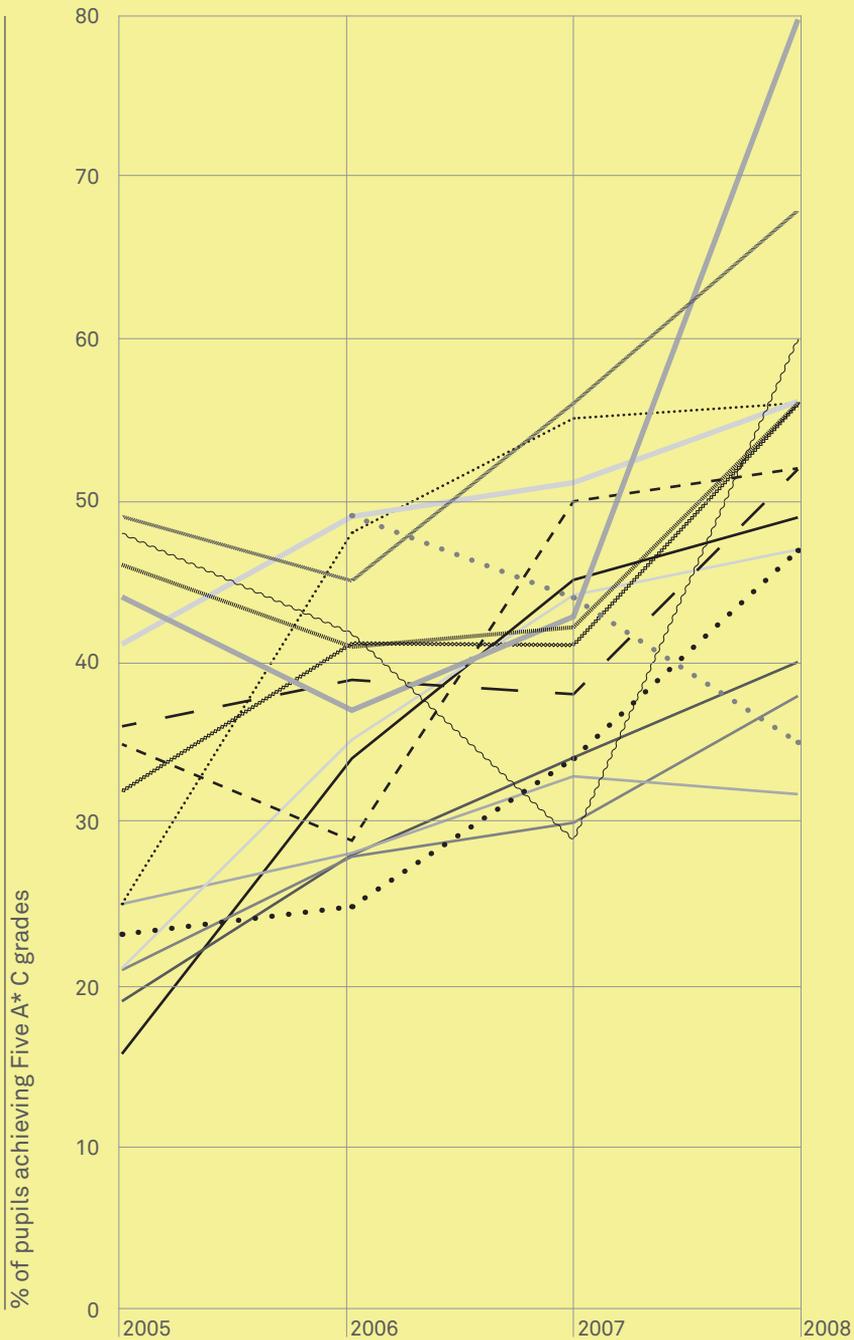


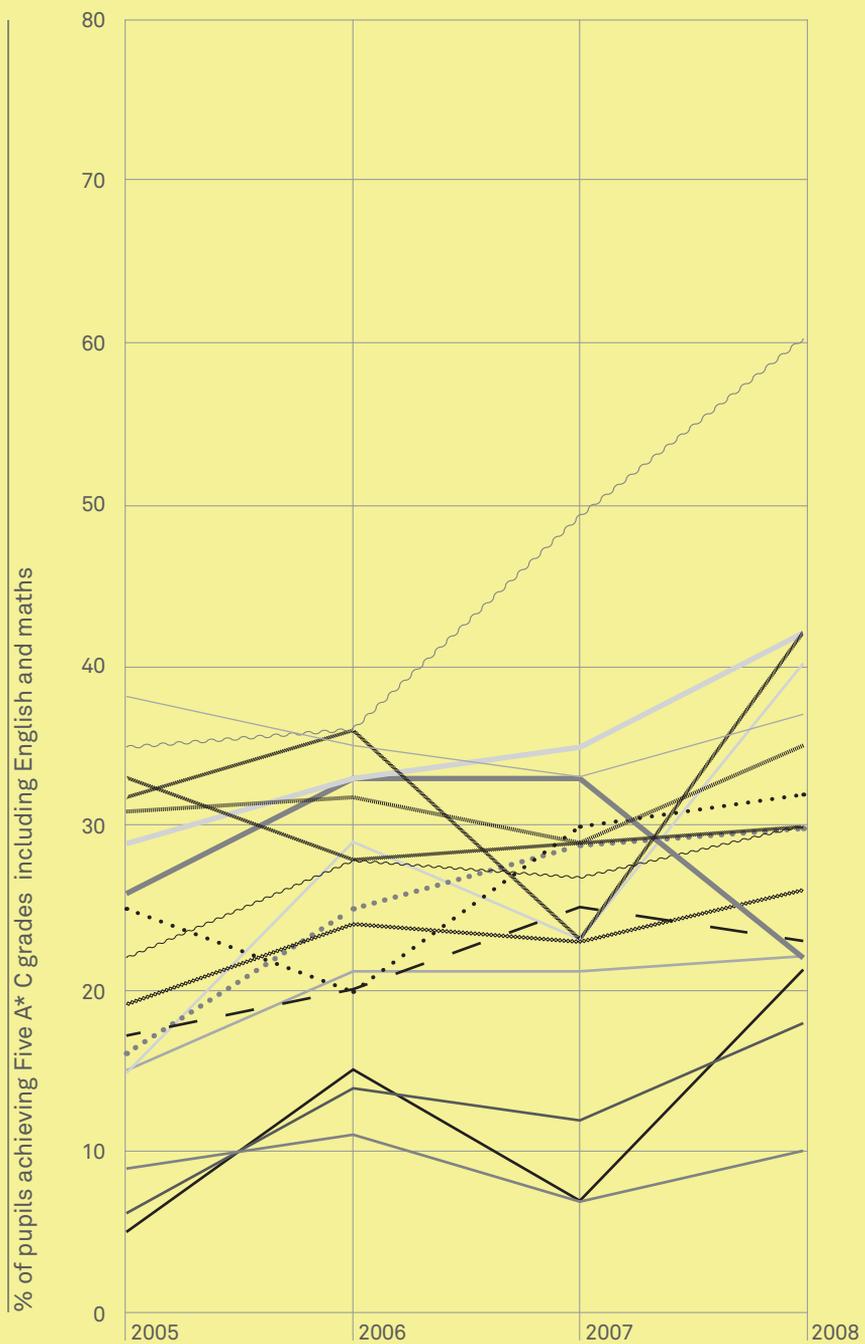
⁷ Figures 7, 8 and 9 exclude schools where there have been other significant changes, for example, where the NLE moved to another school during the first two years of the programme or where a supported school underwent a major reorganisation. Such events tend to have a detrimental effect on the school improvement processes, at least in the short term, and make comparisons over time problematic. Figures 7 and 9 are averages of the average performance of the pupils in the schools in the sample.

Looking only at overall averages can disguise what is going on in individual schools. Figure 8 shows the results for each of the supported schools featured in Figure 7. While there is still a great deal still to be achieved at these schools, half of them recorded gains of nine percentage points or more in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving five good GCSEs, and in some cases the increases were dramatic. In other schools, the 2008 results resulted in more modest increases but marked the reversal of a downward trend or the consolidation of an upward one. Results fell back in just two schools.

Even on the more challenging measure (five GCSEs at grades A* C including English and maths), all but two of the schools recorded an improvement between 2007 and 2008, and in a third of the cases there has been an improvement of 10 percentage points or more during the last year.

Figure 8: Percentages of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* C (excluding and including English and maths) in 17 secondary schools supported by phase 1 NLEs/NSS⁷





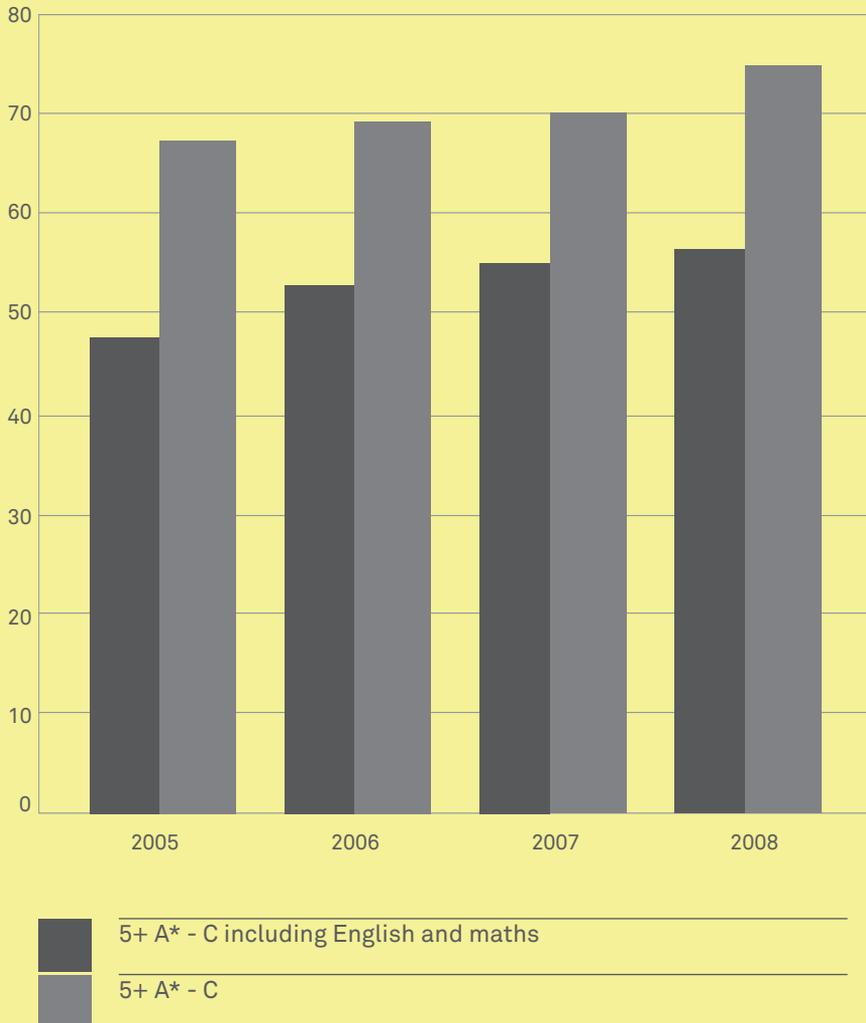
The picture is also positive in terms of exam results for NSSs: there is no evidence that their performance is generally suffering as a result of their engagement with underperforming schools. In fact, Figure 9 shows that the overall average performance of phase 1 NSSs (which supported the schools in Figures 8 and 9) continued to improve in the period after they started providing support, with results only declining in three schools. This evidence suggests that school improvement partnerships can create a win-win situation in which both partners benefit.

Overall these results also provide evidence that the work of NLEs has a differential impact on the performance of supported schools: some are making much faster progress than others and in some cases the value of the NLE/NSS link has yet to come through in terms of improved levels of attainment. These are early days and we know that partnerships yield value over time. However, further case studies and analysis are needed to help identify the most effective form and duration of arrangements between NLEs/NSSs and weaker schools.

In the case of one partnership, for example, the NLE became executive head and the school's results at GCSE (including English and maths) doubled after only seven months' intervention. However, the local authority terminated the partnership, appointed a new head and the improvement has not been sustained. The NLE has subsequently achieved pronounced improvement with a second school.

Sustaining improvement remains the acid test of the effectiveness of any school improvement programme. Several NLEs have moved on to work with one or more further schools. Most of these sequential partnerships have been successful to date, but again raise the question of whether sufficient capacity and resources are being invested in sustaining improvement in schools that have been supported to ensure that their progress is maintained over time. Future data will provide further evidence on this in due course.

Figure 9: Overall average percentage of students achieving five GCSEs at grades A* - C (excluding and including English and maths) in 17 phase 1 NSSs (before and since providing support⁷)



Conclusion

NLEs and NSSs are making a substantial impact on individual schools and on the wider school system. Their full potential has yet to be realised but as the independent evaluation concludes:

There is certainly evidence that NLEs help schools improve. Their deployment has been a key instrument in pulling a growing number of schools out of Ofsted categories. There is growing evidence of an association with raising standards in more schools than not. This suggests that NLEs are also the most likely agents to raise the standards of National Challenge Schools above floor targets, and the decision to expand their ranks is well justified... The programme is making a major contribution to leadership development and succession planning. NLEs' deputies are being blooded as heads of school and are being appointed to the headships of the schools they have supported. Other leaders are rising through the ranks to take their place. The value of these supplementary benefits is considerable.

Matthews, 2008b

However, it would be naïve to suggest that there are no lessons to be learnt from the way the programme has developed. There are still challenges to be tackled. These are described in section 4.

Some issues for the future

Section 1 described how the National Leaders of Education (NLE) programme has taken off and gathered momentum in the context of other developments of the school system in England. The use of NLEs and National Support Schools (NSSs) needs both to draw on lessons from the first two years of operation and ensure that it takes account of these developments. This section sets out the main challenges for NCSL, local authorities, school leaders and the government to consider.

Securing better buy-in from local authorities

NCSL has worked hard with local authorities to make them aware of the services and support that NLEs and NSSs provide. As well as regional briefings, NCSL has regularly approached local authorities with a school in special measures or given a notice to improve to discuss with them the availability of NLE and NSS capacity and support. This has helped to deliver the high level of NLE deployment described in section 2: as at May 2008, 45 per cent of local authorities had used an NLE.

There is, however, still greater scope for local authorities to draw more heavily on NLEs. This is particularly the case now that the government expects authorities to be the main vehicle for transforming results in National Challenge schools by 2011. Moreover, the government is proposing to strengthen the duties of local authorities in relation to schools whose performance is causing concern. There are three main areas, where action is either being taken or is needed, that would help to embed the growth and use of NLEs.

The **geographical spread** of NLEs should be increased. As at September 2008, some 88 local authorities had an NLE/NSS in their area. However, within that total, some large authorities (for example, Hampshire) had only one NLE, while smaller boroughs (for example, Oldham) had several. NSCL is planning to target those areas where there is a demand for NLEs in future rounds of recruitment, and has asked local authorities to suggest NLE candidates. This may mean that NCSL has to review its current practice of designating all heads who meet the NLE/NSS criteria, even if they are in authority areas where there are already more than enough NLEs.

The government should consider issuing guidance to local authorities to set out the expectations in relation to school-to-school improvement support. As the two examples in Table 7 below show, the attitudes of individual local authorities can vary markedly. Some authorities remain defensive about their in-house school improvement service, while others are more imaginative and positive about using NLEs.

There needs to be greater clarity about the **respective roles of different school-to-school support schemes**. For example, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust operates the Leading Edge Partnership Programme. In this programme, high-performing specialist schools work with underperforming schools using the raising achievement and transforming learning (RATL) methodology. RATL shares some similarities with the NLE approach but the relationship between the schools is looser and it does not involve the local authority. In addition the government has introduced a scheme – separate from the NLE programme – that encourages local authorities to consider bringing National Challenge schools under the wing of a ‘strong’ school in a Trust or hard federation, with funding of up to one million pounds over three years for each merger that is approved. This is not to say that the NLE programme should be the only means of providing school-to-school support but there needs to be greater clarity about the respective roles of the different schemes and how they relate to each other, as well as an understanding of the principles and practice that make school-to-school support effective.

Table 7: Examples of contrasting attitudes to school-to-school support in two London boroughs

In borough A, there is little understanding of the support available under London Challenge (after five years), or the NLE programme (after two). The local authority is currently writing National Challenge improvement plans for three schools without taking account of the fact that they have available two NLEs based in secondary schools within the authority boundary. Instead, they are continuing to rely on advisors and strategy managers who 'have been flooding the schools for a long time'. The view of heads in the borough is that more school-to-school support is needed.

In borough B, the four NLEs were proactive and let the authority know of their appointment. They met the head of school improvement, agreed to develop local leaders of education (LLEs) and formed a leadership group to take the proposal forward. This has been successful and each member of the leadership group, which numbers between six and eight LLEs, is deployed in other schools in the borough. The authority has provided £80,000 to assist capacity building and support in client schools. The authority has a strong advisory team, but at the same time recognises the value of heads supporting other schools.

Source: Matthews, 2008b

Securing stronger support from governors of NSSs

The early days of NLE and NSS engagement with a client school can be tricky for the NSS. The role has to be communicated clearly to parents, pupils and staff, who may otherwise think the head's absence means he or she is leaving the school. Governors, who will have agreed in principle to the head's application for NLE designation and to the school becoming an NSS, may need reassuring that the assignment will not jeopardise the school's performance. The main means of bringing governors on board are as follows (Matthews (2008b).

Involve them – particularly the chair of governors – in the due diligence exercise and make sure they understand the implications of the contract for supporting the client school and that they support the objectives of the proposals.

Discuss and agree arrangements with them for filling leadership positions made vacant in the home school as a result of redeployment in the client school. Delegated powers may need to be agreed for areas such as staff appointments, finance and exclusions. If necessary, provide training for governors and the leadership team to support the implementation of any revised leadership arrangements.

Consider how far to anticipate gaining NLE work by building up staff and leadership resources within the school to meet the expected demand. For example, some more entrepreneurial NLEs, mainly in the secondary sector, have taken on extra staff in the expectation that they will be engaged in NLE deployment, which will then provide them with the income to cover the costs of these additional staff. There is clearly some risk in this approach – particularly for primary schools – but it has generally worked well. Another way of ensuring that NLEs and NSSs have the resources to help when support is needed is for a local authority to fund an NSS upfront to take on extra staff, as has happened in one case, and then for the authority to draw down that support from the NLE and NSS during the course of the financial year. DCSF and local authorities need to work with NLEs and governors so that NSSs have the staff ready and available when they are asked to deploy their expertise, while being sure that the cost of investing in this upfront will be covered either by commissions from the local authority to support other schools, or by some other arrangement.

Report regularly to them and encourage them to review and challenge the rate of progress in both the NSS and the client school.

Use the expertise of the NSS's governing body to support the governors of the client school by holding joint meetings or strategy sessions.

Keep the total volume of support activity provided by the NSS under review. For example, where an NSS is involved with two or three schools, it might be appropriate for the governors to establish a company under the Education Act 2002 in order to manage the scale of management activity and the financial risk involved.

If these steps are followed, the evidence is that being actively involved in the NLE and NSS programme brings very real benefits to the NSS in terms of leadership development and, in due course, by bringing in ideas, challenges and learning from the client school. Governors are typically pleased by the recognition achieved by their head and school, which they often feel reflects well on them. As one NLE explained:

Support from the governors has been magnificent once they had accepted that there was something in it for our school. The real crunch came as our assistant head moved after 16 years to be associate head of the other school in the partnership. However, they are still going to support her MBA to the tune of £7,000 and have built an amount for leadership development into the contract.

Matthews, 2008b

Governors' biggest anxiety is that performance in the NSS will slip back because resources and attention are focused elsewhere. As section 3 showed, this is only known to be happening in a very few cases. Indeed, in the great majority of NSSs, improvement is continuing. But governors are right to be vigilant and NCSL should monitor the position carefully and take appropriate action if the performance of an NSS does seem to be slipping as a result of the deployment of an NLE.

Addressing the cross-phase and cross-sector issue

One unresolved issue for the NLE programme is whether the role of NLE is phase- and sector specific – in other words, should primary NLEs only support primary schools, secondary NLEs only work with secondary schools and colleges and special schools only with special schools? Some NLEs are already working cross-phase and are valued in doing so. For example, secondary NLEs are partnering middle and primary schools; primary (including infant) school NLEs are working with middle schools; and NLEs based in special schools are partnering first and middle schools. These partnerships tend to be of the consultant leader type and involve a good deal of coaching.

Some NLEs are eager to take on a different phase or sector but not all NLEs share this view. While some argue that the principles of school improvement are generic, others contend that the challenges faced by primary and secondary schools are different and require specialist expertise. There is at this stage no right or wrong answer to this issue, though an NLE thinking of acting as an executive headteacher in a school from another phase needs to be aware that they will probably encounter more resistance at the client school, at least to start with, because staff will need to be convinced of their ability to take on the role of head in a different phase. Another influencing factor is the growing presence in the school system of cross-phase trusts and all-through schools with pupils aged 3 to 18. NCSL and its advisory group – which includes representative NLEs – should keep this aspect under review and monitor the experience of NLEs working in a cross-phase capacity.

Maintaining an active headship role

A condition of becoming an NLE is that the candidate be a serving headteacher leading a very effective school. Former or retired heads and heads who no longer have operational responsibility for a school are not normally considered for NLE status. However, as system leadership develops and chains of schools and trusts grow, as described in section 3, it is likely that there will be heads who become relatively distant from the active leadership, organisation and management of a school. Such leaders may move into different roles – becoming, for example, executive director or chief executive of a federation, a trust or a group of academies, or working full time as school improvement experts.

These are valuable contributions and proof of the development of system leadership. However, it is right that the NLE programme continues to insist on a strong link between an NLE and an NSS. This is important partly because of the added strengths and resources a support school brings, but also because leading a high-quality, high-performing school brings authenticity to the NLE in their school-to-school improvement role.

Creating an alumni network may be one way of continuing to tap into the expertise and experience of former NLEs while maintaining the integrity of the NLE/NSS link.

Rewarding NLEs appropriately

NLEs and their colleagues in NSSs are motivated by a range of factors in taking on their extended role: a commitment to securing the best education for all young people in their area, an ambition to develop professionally and a desire to share their practice with others for the benefit of learners. Most who engage in NLE/NSS work recognise the benefit in terms of their own thinking, development and practice.

However, relying solely on non-financial rewards for leaders who take on significant extra responsibility (such as when a deputy or assistant headteacher becomes acting head, or an NLE becomes an executive head as well as retaining responsibility for a home school) is not sustainable. Local authorities and governors have accordingly adopted arrangements for providing extra payments to school leaders who have significant extra responsibilities. These range from paying honoraria to middle leaders to awarding extra points on the leadership pay scale to NLEs, to extending the top of the leadership scale. As NLEs become an established feature of the school system, the question of how to develop fair and consistent remuneration criteria is an area that the School Teachers Pay Review Body (STPRB) should examine and report on.

Reviewing quality assurance methods

As the NLE programme expands towards its target of 500 headteachers and their schools, NCSL will need to consider how to manage the programme and maintain its quality and integrity. Local authorities will continue to agree local contracts and monitor that what is agreed in terms of local school improvement is delivered in practice. But local authorities will look to NCSL to validate and guarantee the quality of NLEs and NSSs and to ensure that they have the right skills for the tasks assigned to them. The scale of undertaking this function for 500 NLEs and NSSs will require a different form of programme management, and new ways of working with, using and learning from NLEs.

Persisting with the NLE programme

The NLE and NSS initiative is a relatively young programme. It has received strong and able sponsorship from NCSL and consistent support and advocacy from government. It has captured the vision and expertise of many of our best school leaders. It is vital that these elements continue. Too many government and public sector programmes start strongly but then fade or are allowed to wither. NLEs and NSSs are not cure-alls for dealing with underperforming schools, but they are making a strong contribution to school improvement. NLEs are developing into system leaders.

A framework has been established through which NLEs are expanding leadership from schools to systems and taking ‘professionalism’ to new heights. The benefits to children and young people are accruing rapidly.

Matthews, 2008b

Patience and persistence are the keys to reaping the full value of the NLE approach. The challenge of raising standards across the board will not be achieved without harnessing the innovation, commitment and passion of school leaders. NLEs represent a great – arguably our best – opportunity for realising the aspiration for every school to be a good school. School leaders, policymakers and politicians should continue to make sure this programme is sustained and maintained in the years to come.

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Schools leading schools: the power and potential of National Leaders of Education

National Leaders of Education are outstanding school leaders who, together with the staff in their schools, use their knowledge and experience of teaching, to provide additional leadership capacity to schools in difficulty. Although the NLE programme is run by NCSL, this first book in the new series will explore the broader issues around the role of NLEs. The book is intended for use by local authorities, the DCSF and the wider profession. It will also be used to attract NLEs and as part of their induction process.



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