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National Foundation for Educational Research

Evaluation of City Challenge Leadership Strategies:

Overview Report

**Final Report for the National College for Leadership
of Schools and Children's Services**

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Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Executive Summary	ii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Aims, objectives and hypotheses	2
1.3 Methodology	3
1.4 Leadership provision and activities	6
2. National Teaching Schools	8
2.1 Teacher development provision	8
2.2 Effectiveness of the National Teaching School model	10
2.3 Benefits for schools and school staff	11
2.4 Ideas for improving teacher development provision	14
3. NLE and LLE Support	16
3.1 Models of deployment and forms of support offered	16
3.2 Effectiveness of NLE/LLE support	18
3.3 Benefits for schools and school staff	20
3.4 Ideas for improving NLE/LLE support	20
4. Local Projects	22
4.1 Local projects in London	22
4.2 Local projects in the Black Country	23
4.3 Local projects in Greater Manchester	24
4.4 Overview of local projects	26
5. Overview	27
5.1 General views about leadership provision	27
5.2 The impact of leadership provision	28
5.3 Value for Money	29
5.4 Improvements and suggestions for additional support	33
5.5 Transitions and sustainability	36
6. Conclusions: revisiting the hypotheses	38
6.1 Revisiting the hypotheses	38
6.2 Conclusions	40
Glossary	42
References	43

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Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of findings from the independent national evaluation of the City Challenge Leadership Strategies. The evaluation was carried out between November 2009 and March 2011 by a team from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) with funding from the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (the National College).

Detailed findings relating to the Leadership Strategies in the Black Country, Greater Manchester and London are available in three separate area reports.

Background

City Challenge Leadership Strategies were designed to break the cycle of under-achievement among disadvantaged pupils in primary and secondary schools in the urban regions of London, the Black Country and Greater Manchester. School leaders were seen as central agents for change and, therefore, city-wide Leadership Strategies were a major element of the wider City Challenge initiative. Based on the concept of school-to-school support (system leadership), these strategies promote a more systemic approach to the sharing of expertise and knowledge amongst school leaders, local authorities and other stakeholders through local networks.

Aims and objectives

The central aim of the study was to evaluate the City Challenge Leadership Strategies in order to inform further development of the leadership provision offered by the National College. Associated with this was the key aim of identifying good practice and lessons learned that could be shared between City Challenge regions and, indeed, in future national or regional programmes with similar aims and ambitions.

Within these overarching aims, a number of specific hypotheses were developed at an early stage in the evaluation:

- **Hypothesis 1** – There is clear evidence that the impact high-performing schools with capacity (National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) along with key members of staff) is having on schools at the failing/trailing edge of the system is such that they should play a key role in the post-2011 school improvement and leadership development landscape in City Challenge areas.
- **Hypothesis 2** – The LLE and NLE training and designation system delivers a trusted, high-quality force fitted for its roles in supporting other heads and leading the local system.

- **Hypothesis 3** – Teacher professional development initiatives, including the National Teaching Schools model, within City Challenge areas, deliver high-quality continuing professional development (CPD) with demonstrable impacts on teacher effectiveness, and pupil and school outcomes.
- **Hypothesis 4** – There is clear evidence to suggest that City Challenge system leaders' own schools benefit from their role in supporting the wider system.
- **Hypothesis 5** – School-to-school support work, such as takes place in City Challenge areas, is more effective when working across local authority (LA) boundaries.
- **Hypothesis 6** – Leadership programmes offered through City Challenge are well received by key stakeholders, and are making a difference, in terms of attainment and achievement, in the schools of the participants.

The three key elements of the Leadership Strategies that were evaluated in each area were National Teaching Schools, National and Local Leaders of Education and local projects.

Methodology

A multi-method research design was adopted and three strands of data collection took place:

- initial scoping: desk-based research and initial regional visits
- quantitative data collection and analysis
- qualitative data collection: stakeholder interviews and follow-up.

The main research strand consisted of a detailed collection of qualitative data, mainly by means of interviews with key stakeholders. These included 84 face-to-face interviews conducted in spring 2010 and 60 face-to-face or telephone interviews conducted in autumn/winter 2010.

Key Findings

All of the hypotheses were wholly or broadly supported by the findings from the evaluation in each of the Leadership Strategy areas (see Chapter 6). This demonstrates the value and impact of the Leadership Strategies.

Overall perceptions

Leadership provision was viewed positively by interviewees across the three City Challenge areas (London, Greater Manchester and the Black Country). Elements of the work rated particularly highly were:

- the **bespoke nature of the support** and the brokerage process – careful matching of supporting and supported schools and the provision of ‘tailor-made’ packages of support related to the needs of the schools and the local context
- the **creation of a school-to-school support network** within each area – system leaders working collaboratively, sharing best practice and developed knowledge
- **making use of existing resources and expertise** – providing support from National and Local Leaders of Education and other school leaders allowed recipient schools to access a wealth of experience and expertise reflecting whole school experiences
- **opportunities to work across boundaries** – working across local authority boundaries in all areas (and cross-phase primary/secondary collaboration in Greater Manchester) enabled schools to observe and experience different ways of approaching problems and widened their pool of resources
- the use of **mentoring and coaching** – in particular the opportunities for professional dialogue, joint learning and partnership working within a ‘no blame’ culture
- the **calibre and commitment** of the professionals coordinating and delivering the support.

Leadership Strategies were viewed as representing good value for money, largely related to the mode of delivery (e.g. school-to-school support), the quality of the provision and the impacts of the programmes (e.g. improved leadership capacity and whole-school improvements).

The leadership provision was perceived as having developed and improved over time. A small number of suggestions for improvement were identified, including: better monitoring and evaluation activity; more clarification and consistency in the role of local authorities; avoidance of repetition in the content across programme strands; more opportunities to work across local authority boundaries; more sensitive promotion of the support on offer for recipient schools, and better communication of the impact of involvement on schools providing support.

Impacts

Although interviewees sometimes found it difficult to disentangle the impact of the City Challenge Leadership Strategies from other initiatives supporting school improvement, leadership provision was perceived to have had a positive impact in a number of areas:

- improvements in **pupil attainment** in supported schools
- better **quality of teaching and learning** and increased confidence and enthusiasm of teaching staff
- improved **Ofsted ratings** for teachers and schools
- increased **leadership capacity** in both recipient and supporting schools
- more **collaboration** between schools and school leaders
- access to **high quality Continuing Professional Development** (CPD).

The statistical analysis, which examined the impact of three types of Leadership Strategy support on pupil attendance and attainment outcomes, found some positive associations with attainment in the London Challenge area, mostly for primary schools providing support. The associations in Greater Manchester and the Black Country, particularly those with attendance outcomes, were much more ambiguous. However, the quantitative analysis was limited to one year of data (summer 2010) and it only focussed on pupil outcomes, whereas the qualitative evaluation explored the broader impact of the Leadership Strategies on teachers, school leaders and their schools. As the benefits of developing school leaders may take several years before they are observed in the ‘hard’ pupil outcome measures, it is possible that the impact on pupils may only be beginning to emerge in the 2010 data¹. In view of the limited evaluation timescale, it is recommended that quantitative data analyses over a longer time period would be beneficial to provide further evidence about the impact of the Leadership Strategies on pupil attainment in supported schools.

Overall satisfaction with the City Challenge Leadership Strategies was very high. The approach within each region had been sufficiently flexible to be sensitive to local contexts and local challenges.

The **teaching schools model** was viewed positively by all those involved in it, either as providers or as recipients. This was seen to provide high-quality CPD which often re-energised teachers. The training programmes were also viewed as good quality and good value for money.

NLE/LLE provision was also perceived to be highly successful. Recipient schools were enthusiastic about the bespoke, customised nature of this provision and they were pleased that they were active, reciprocal participants in the school improvement process (it was not ‘done to’ them). They particularly appreciated the school-based nature of the provision, which gave it credibility and grounding.

Sustainability and implications for policy and practice

Interviewees across the Black Country, Greater Manchester and London were positive about the extent to which the Leadership Strategies had sustainable impacts and perceived them as leaving a lasting legacy. Many believed the impact had been equal to a ‘culture shift’; changes in behaviour and mindset amongst school staff and their leadership teams were observed and schools were beginning to see the mutual benefits of looking outside their own institution and sharing ideas, knowledge and capacity. Skills were built, processes revised and relationships and networks established.

¹ This and other important caveats to the quantitative strand are described in the *Evaluation of City Challenge Leadership Strategies: Technical Appendix* (Rudd *et al.*, 2011), available from the National College upon request.

Interviewees celebrated the pool of expertise and experience in school-to-school support that was now readily available across all three areas. However, they questioned the extent to which this could be sustained without both a dedicated centralised team to manage and deploy the support and also the funding necessary to release staff to support others; there was concern that, without these, networks and relationships would inevitably become more informal, and therefore, less effective.

Teaching Schools and **NLEs/LLEs** both featured in the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, in November 2010. The White Paper stated that the Government intended ‘to bring together the Training School and Teaching School models, to create a national network of Teaching Schools’ (DfE, 2010, paragraph 2.24). In addition, in November 2010 the Secretary of State for Education announced plans to more than double the number of National Leaders of Education (NLEs).² City Challenge Leadership Strategies will not continue by name and the structure and funding will also no doubt change, but the NFER research team strongly recommends that these two very successful elements of leadership provision should continue to be included as key parts of future school improvement support programmes.

² Press release [online] Available: <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/pressnotices/a0067808/new-leadership-for-children-in-need> [30 March 2011].

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of findings from the independent national evaluation of the Leadership Strategies (within the City Challenge programme). The mixed-method evaluation was carried out between November 2009 and March 2011 by a team from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) with funding from the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (the National College).

Detailed findings relating to the Leadership Strategies in each area (the Black Country; London and Greater Manchester) are reported separately (Featherstone and Bergeron, 2011; Poet and Kettlewell, 2011; Lamont and Bramley, 2011).

1.1 Background

The City Challenge programme, launched in 2008 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (now the Department for Education), sought to break the cycle of under-achievement among disadvantaged pupils in primary and secondary schools in the urban regions of London, the Black Country and Greater Manchester. The programme aimed to achieve:

- a sharp drop in underperforming schools, particularly focusing on English and mathematics
- more outstanding schools
- significant improvements in educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

The ethos of the initiative was based on a belief that underperformance is related to city-wide concerns which cut across local authority (LA) boundaries and that no institution or LA is able to solve these alone. Therefore, the programme encouraged a strategic approach to school improvement at the city level, providing resources and support that enabled LAs, schools and other key stakeholders to identify and promote solutions to shared problems.

One of the central strands of the City Challenge programme was the Leadership Strategies, run by the National College (other stakeholders had responsibility for other elements of the City Challenge work). Strong 'system-wide' leadership is perceived to make an important contribution to school improvement. There is a wealth of literature in relation to defining leadership³ which cannot be covered here due to limitations of space and time; however, one definition of system leaders offered by Hopkins and Higham (2007) explains that: '*System leaders are those headteachers who are willing to shoulder system-wide roles in order to support the improvement of other schools as*

³ For instance the National College has an online Leadership Library with resources and publications about different approaches to leadership: <http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/leadershiplibrary.htm>

well as their own'. Indeed, the role of school leaders as central agents for change and system leadership is a fundamental part of the Leadership Strategy work in London, the Black Country and Greater Manchester.

The Leadership Strategies aimed to promote a more systemic approach to the sharing of expertise and knowledge among school leaders, LAs and other stakeholders through local networks. The emphasis has been on collaboration rather than competition and in building supportive networks between and within schools across local authority boundaries. This was characterised by school-to-school support and the sharing of practice, ideas and experience between headteachers, senior and middle leaders, and between successful schools and schools in challenging circumstances.

1.2 Aims, objectives and hypotheses

A central aim of the study was to evaluate the Leadership Strategies in order to inform the further development of the leadership provision offered by the National College. Associated with this was the key aim of identifying good practice and lessons learned that could be shared between the three regions and, indeed, in future national or regional programmes with similar aims and ambitions.

One challenge for the research team was to keep a focus on the Leadership Strategies specifically rather than on the overarching City Challenge programme⁴. At the same time it was important to consider the impact of the leadership activities *within* schools, *between* schools and *beyond* schools.

For the purpose of this research we used the National College's leadership activities as defining elements:

- **National Teaching Schools and Facilitation Schools.** These schools offer quality-assured courses such as the Outstanding Teacher Programme (OTP) and the Improving Teacher Programme (ITP).
- **National Leaders of Education (and Local Leaders of Education (LLEs)).** NLEs are nationally outstanding school leaders who can provide additional leadership capacity for schools in challenging circumstances. LLEs are experienced headteachers who can work as coaches and mentors to other school leaders within a locality or LA.
- **Local projects.** This third strand covers new or local projects or activities, such as the emphasis on Middle Leaders of Education (MLEs) and special schools in Greater Manchester, the 'Good to Best' initiative in the Black Country and the Primary Challenge Group Programme and the VIP Sixth Form programme in Greater London.

⁴ A separate evaluation of City Challenge as a whole, conducted by a team from London Metropolitan University, and led by Professor Merryn Hutchins, overlapped with the Leadership Strategies evaluation reported on here. The research teams kept in close contact in order to share findings and to avoid duplicating demands on research participants.

These three elements formed a key organising principle for the evaluation as a whole, for the content of the research instruments, and for this report, and there is a chapter presenting the research findings for each of these elements. The Leadership Strategies include other programmes and initiatives in addition to the three elements identified above but it was beyond the aim of this study to look at all of the mechanisms of support offered.

In addition to these aims, a number of working hypotheses were developed at an early stage in the evaluation. These were framed at a project set up meeting with contributions from key personnel at the National College as well as the research team. Six final hypotheses were agreed:

- Hypothesis 1 – There is clear evidence that the impact high-performing schools with capacity (NLEs and LLEs along with key members of staff) is having on schools at the failing/trailing edge of the system is such that they should play a key role in the post-2011 school improvement and leadership development landscape in City Challenge areas.
- Hypothesis 2 – The LLE and NLE training and designation system delivers a trusted, high-quality force fitted for its roles in supporting other heads and leading the local system.
- Hypothesis 3 – Teacher professional development initiatives, including the National Teaching Schools model, within City Challenge areas, deliver high-quality CPD with demonstrable impacts on teacher effectiveness, and pupil and school outcomes.
- Hypothesis 4 – There is clear evidence to suggest that City Challenge system leaders' own schools benefit from their role in supporting the wider system.
- Hypothesis 5 – School-to-school support work, as takes place in City Challenge areas, is more effective when working across LA boundaries.
- Hypothesis 6 – Leadership programmes offered through City Challenge are well received by key stakeholders, and are making a difference, in terms of attainment and achievement, in the schools of the participants.

The methods used to address these aims and hypotheses are detailed in the next section.

1.3 Methodology

This section sets out the methodology used for the evaluation. A multi-method research design was adopted and three strands of data collection took place:

- initial scoping: desk-based research and initial regional visits
- quantitative data collection and analysis
- qualitative data collection: stakeholder interviews and follow-up.

The **initial scoping** strand of the work was carried out in the first four months of the project. This strand enabled the research team to develop a full understanding of the leadership activities taking place within each area and to establish contacts in relation to each of the major leadership themes (Teaching Schools, NLEs and LLEs and local projects). Two researchers were assigned to each of the three regions and they conducted initial regional visits, collected internal evaluation data and liaised with local Programme Managers regarding the evaluation activities.

Strand 2, the **quantitative data collection and analysis**, was ongoing, with the statistical analysis conducted mainly in the later stages of the evaluation. This analysis combined data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) with data collected during the evaluation concerning the extent and characteristics of different Leadership Strategies within City Challenge schools.⁵ This analysis required ‘Leadership Strategies’ to be classified into a number of categories (please see the next section). Multi-level regression models were then used, where possible, to identify any improvement in outcomes associated with a particular leadership strategy. The models enabled the research team to control for pre-existing differences that might exist between pupils experiencing different strategies (though it should be emphasised that the results of such models do not necessarily imply a causal relationship between Leadership Strategies and any improvement in outcomes). The outcomes used were:

- key stage 2 attainment
- key stage 4 attainment (both capped KS4 points score and five A* to C grades including English and mathematics)
- total absence
- unauthorised absence⁶.

Details of the analysis and outcomes of the quantitative data are presented in the *Evaluation of City Challenge Leadership Strategies: Technical Appendix* (Rudd *et al.*, 2011 (available from the National College upon request)). This report predominately focuses on the qualitative data collection.

Strand 3 consisted of a detailed collection of **qualitative data**, mainly by means of **interviews with key stakeholders**. Interviews were carried out with a wide variety of individuals who were either involved in, or influenced by Leadership Strategy activity. The main challenge for the research team with regard to this strand of the work was to collect and coordinate the views of individuals with a vast range of roles related to the Leadership Strategies, from national and regional Programme Managers through to LA officers, supporting headteachers and recipient headteachers. The research team had to be creative and flexible in the design of the interview schedules, allowing for the diversity of perspectives while enabling the use of a comparative framework across all of these roles and three regions.

⁵ We are grateful to the area Programme Managers for collating and providing the data to allow this analysis.

⁶ For a discussion of the relationship between absence and attainment see *Analysis of Pupil Attendance Data in Excellence in Cities (EiC) Areas: An Interim Report* (Morris and Rutt, 2004).

In order to obtain a longitudinal perspective on the implementation of the Leadership Strategies, as far as the evaluation timescale would allow, key stakeholders were interviewed at two key points in time. We refer to these interview phases throughout this report as the **spring** interviews (May to June 2010) and the **autumn** interviews (November 2010 to January 2011). In September 2010, interviewees were sent an interim update proforma by email. This enabled key stakeholders to provide us with any new information, for example details of any new leadership initiatives commenced at the start of the 2010/11 school year.

The sample of interviewees was developed to reflect those with managerial or strategic responsibility for the Leadership Strategies, plus those involved in the three key evaluation themes (as set out in Section 1.2 above):

- **Leadership Strategy activities:** To provide an overview of Leadership Strategy activities, interviews were carried out with strategic personnel with a broad overview of the different activities in each region. These included Challenge Advisers and/or senior Programme Managers for each region.
- **National Teaching Schools:** Leaders and staff from National Teaching Schools and Facilitation Schools, and from schools in receipt of these forms of support, were invited to participate in interviews. These interviews explored how this model was working and the perceived benefits of courses offered by Teaching Schools.
- **NLE/LLE support:** A sample of National and Local Leaders of Education, as well as their client schools and relevant teaching staff, were asked to participate in interviews in each region. Strategic leads for the NLE/LLE programme were also interviewed where appropriate.
- **Local or new projects within each region:** In each region, key stakeholders involved in any ‘local’ Leadership Strategy projects were interviewed. The purposes, delivery, impact, good practice and sustainability of the projects were explored.

Originally, the aim was to interview ten stakeholders involved in leadership programme activities in each City Challenge area, and five key stakeholders for each of the three themes (National Teaching Schools, NLE/LLE and local projects), giving a total of **25 interviewees** in each region (**75** for the evaluation as a whole) for each of the rounds of interviews. It was, however, soon evident, from discussions with regional Programme Managers that it was difficult to fit key stakeholders into these headings because of their diverse and overlapping roles. For example, it was perfectly possible for a headteacher to be both an NLE and the head of a National Teaching School. For this reason the sampling approach was kept flexible and interviewees were asked about all the aspects of the programme with which they were familiar.

A total of 84 face-to-face interviews were carried out in the spring and 60 face-to-face or telephone interviews in the autumn across the three regions. These numbers were sufficient to enable overarching key issues to be explored in depth and for comparisons to be made across regions.

The **spring interviews** were partly exploratory in nature because the Leadership Strategies activities were often quite new to both respondents and researchers. An adaptable interview schedule was used so that the questions could be kept relevant to the nature of the involvement of the respondent. Interviewees included those who provided support to schools and those who received leadership support. These interviews were updated, as noted previously, by means of an **interim proforma** sent out in September. By the time of the **autumn interviews** it was evident that the respondents had in-depth experience of the development of the Leadership Strategies, and they provided evaluative comments on a range of aspects of these strategies. These second round interviews included additional questions on sustainability in order to help inform an exit strategy for the National College's Leadership Strategies and to help ensure sustainability in the long term, as well as questions about the learning points of the initiative.

The qualitative data was systematically coded and analysed using a qualitative software package (Maxqda). A database of all of the interviews was built up enabling analysis by (for example) role, level of involvement in different aspects of the Leadership Strategies (e.g. support from National Teaching Schools or receipt of support from NLE/LLEs), time point, as well as other factors. The data and analysis was quality assured within the team to ensure accuracy.

1.4 Leadership provision and activities

The leadership activities that were in place across the three areas had much in common, particularly in relation to NLEs/LLEs and teaching schools. These were the core 'national' elements of City Challenge leadership provision. This was reflected in the fact that interviewee comments made in one area were often repeated, echoed or supported in interviewee comments made in the other two areas. This suggests that these Leadership Strategies had strong direction, important core dimensions and a clear structure, and had relevance and applicability across the three different urban contexts.

At the same time, of course, there were some very important variations in local context and in the delivery of these activities. Most obviously, London had already experienced a challenge programme and was building upon this previous experience. London as a challenge area was also considerably larger than both Greater Manchester and the Black Country (the latter consisting of just four boroughs). The numbers of NLEs, LLEs and teaching schools reflected these differences, and there were also variations in emphasis, reflecting not just historical and geographical differences, but also local priorities and the fact that the Leadership Strategies provision intentionally had bespoke and customisable elements.

The following three chapters provide an overview of the three key elements of the Leadership Strategies provision – National Teaching Schools, NLE and LLE support, and local projects. Following these chapters, there is a chapter on the key successes

and lessons learned from the implementation of the Leadership Strategies, including value for money and sustainability issues. A short final chapter reviews the evidence presented throughout the report and revisits the project hypotheses.

2. National Teaching Schools

This chapter outlines the findings related to National Teaching Schools (and other Facilitation Schools), one of the substantive strands for the evaluation in the three Leadership Strategy areas. It describes the teacher development provision offered by such schools, the perceived benefits for schools providing and receiving support and some suggestions for minor improvement to current provision. It also considers the hypothesis that the National Teaching School (NTS) model provides high quality Continuing Professional Development (CPD) with positive demonstrable impacts.

It has been made clear by the Coalition Government that the teaching school model will continue beyond March 2011. The White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, states that:

The network of Teaching Schools will include the very best schools, with outstanding and innovative practice in teaching and learning and significant experience in developing teachers' professional practice. These schools are best placed to lead system-wide improvement in an area (Para. 7.8).

2.1 Teacher development provision

National Teaching Schools offer a variety of programmes to support other schools, often working across LA boundaries as part of wider Leadership Strategies provision. By offering professional development training courses to teachers, the aim has been for these schools to make a major contribution to school-to-school improvement and to raise standards and close the attainment gap.

Schools that want to become National Teaching Schools have to meet set criteria including high performance, continued improvement and a commitment to work with other schools in a collaborative and supportive manner. The designation of National Teaching Schools is the responsibility of the National College; schools that have been nominated within each area may become a Facilitation School, a Teaching School Designate or a National Teaching School.

Facilitation Schools are approved to deliver at least one of the NTS programmes described below and have at least two staff who have successfully completed training (the Outstanding Facilitation Programme) to enable them to deliver the programmes and who have been approved as facilitators.

National Teaching Schools are National Support Schools, led by National Leaders of Education (NLEs). They will have outstanding Ofsted grades (on their most recent inspection) for pre-defined categories (including leadership and management), a strong track record in improving outcomes for young people in at least one school beyond their own, been approved as a Facilitation School, and have significant and

successful experience of operating as wider system leaders for a minimum of one year. National Teaching Schools can be primary, secondary or special schools, including Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), that have been recognised nationally as being outstanding in their context.

As part of the evaluation, information was sought from respondents about how the National Teaching Schools programme operated in their area. In many respects, the organisation of the programme had common features regardless of locality. All three Leadership Strategy areas offered the following programmes:

- **Outstanding Teacher Programme (OTP).** This programme aims to move teachers who have been rated as ‘good’ by Ofsted into the ‘outstanding’ category.
- **Improving Teacher Programme (ITP).** The ITP targets teachers who have been rated as ‘satisfactory’ by Ofsted, and aims to move them onto a ‘good’ rating.
- **Teaching and Learning Immersion Programme (TLIP).** This intensive programme works with groups of middle leaders from within a school, e.g. heads of departments. The supported school is matched with a partner NTS school to help them to deliver against jointly developed key priorities around teaching and learning.

An important aspect of the NTS programmes was that participants spent time in the host schools observing other teachers. The observations enabled participants *‘to see what good looks like, in an appropriate context’* (Programme Manager). Where possible, courses were run in ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ schools experiencing challenging circumstances, in order to demonstrate to participants that it is possible to teach well despite challenges and difficulties. Between sessions, attendees returned to their schools, carried out prescribed tasks and had the opportunity to reflect on their practice. Coaching and facilitating, and continuing the work after the courses had finished, were also key features of the NTS programmes.

NTS programmes were nationally organised and quality assured, and of similar formats, though there could be local variations in school numbers, forms of delivery and course emphases.

In addition to the main programmes listed above, other courses were offered by National Teaching Schools in specific Leadership Strategy areas. For example, the London LS provision included a one-day course, **Students Leading Learning** and a **Beyond Monitoring** course. In the Black Country, a pilot course was provided, **Supporting Outstanding Teaching**, aimed at empowering Teaching Assistants. (See area reports for more details).

Although the main focus of the National Teaching Schools was to develop and support teachers attending the development programmes, another key element of the work was to build the capacity of the staff within the National Teaching Schools. As well as the facilitator training they received, those involved in the delivery of the NTS programmes were encouraged to critically evaluate and develop their own teaching

and learning skills and take on more responsibility within the NTS, for example continuing to support other schools to help them improve.

2.2 Effectiveness of the National Teaching School model

Interviewees involved in the evaluation included senior staff based in National Teaching Schools, who were able to explain in some detail how the professional development programmes were delivered. With respect to the OTP especially, they tended to stress the importance of capacity building and of making all teachers ‘leaders’: *‘They are trained to be facilitators, but also to build capacity in their own schools – this is the move from teacher to facilitator’* (deputy headteacher of a National Teaching School). The same respondent emphasised that: *‘The key approach is to ask: how do you get teachers to recognise that they are leaders in the classroom? They are leading learning’*.

Respondents across all three areas with a range of senior roles related to the Leadership Strategies emphasised the effectiveness of the National Teaching School model. For a large number of respondents this effectiveness was largely due to the school-to-school nature of the support on offer and the use of local contexts and local solutions. This meant that participants could easily take ideas away and apply them to their own school context.

The real strength is that they are delivered by a school to people from other schools, so it feels like you are learning from teachers. You’re not going on a course then being told something and going away and forgetting it; you’re learning through practising and observing and a lot of teachers say that has a really profound effect (Programme Manager).

In many respects the NTS model was about sharing good practice and stimulating ideas about what ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ teaching and learning looks and feels like. As a consequence of the school-based nature of the NTS model, these programmes, especially the OTP and ITP, were said to have helped to change the culture of school improvement. For example one NLE commented that there was far less tolerance of poor practice. Several interviewees also suggested that these programmes built capacity in their own schools rather than relying on external agents for change: *‘One of the best things about these [programmes] is that your change agents are internal, and therefore you are building in permanent capacity’* (deputy headteacher of a Teaching School).

A number of interviewees also commented on the importance of ‘follow-up’ within these programmes; there were mechanisms in place to support staff in their schools following their attendance on the teaching school programmes. This was viewed as an innovative form of CPD, giving the programmes an important element of sustainability:

That is the huge benefit of the Teaching School programmes - it's not just coming on CPD and that's it, they go back into their own school, it's that sustainability and ensuring that it's being cascaded down (Assistant Headteacher of a Teaching School).

2.3 Benefits for schools and school staff

Interviewees in the three Leadership Strategy areas were asked what they felt the benefits of the NTS programmes had been for schools, staff and pupils. In all three areas, the programmes had led to a wide range of benefits, not only for the attendees and their schools, but also for the staff and schools that had facilitated and delivered the programmes.

The main benefits for recipients of the NTS programmes across the three Leadership Strategy areas can be summarised as follows:

- **Improved teaching and learning.** Interviewees spoke of teachers '*raising their game*' and '*sharpening their practice*'. In particular, it was felt that teachers who had attended NTS courses were taking greater ownership of their teaching and becoming more evaluative of their practice. The programmes encouraged participants to re-think their approaches to teaching and learning, challenge some of their preconceptions and focus on what makes outstanding practice.

The first thing it does is challenge people's ideas of normal and challenges their complacency...it makes them much more analytical about what is happening (deputy headteacher of a Teaching School).

- **Increased confidence and motivation.** Many interviewees believed that one of the main benefits of the NTS programmes was that teachers gained greater confidence and self-esteem and felt re-energised or re-invigorated by their experiences Furthermore, some London interviewees reported that participants had received greater respect from colleagues following attendance on an NTS programme.

Through teaching schools you can re-enthuse some teachers, you can re-focus them, you can see them blossoming and coming alive again. You remind them about why they went into the job (headteacher and NLE).

- **Promotion/career enhancement.** A number of interviewees gave examples of individuals who had gained promotion after attending one of the NTS teaching and learning programmes. Some training recipients also commented that it had helped them to see potential for future career progression.

In addition to the individual benefits for staff attending NTS programmes, interviewees in all three areas reported school-level benefits for those schools whose staff had participated. These included:

- **Overall improvements in the quality of teaching and learning** throughout the school. Across the three Leadership Strategy areas, Programme Managers

indicated that their own monitoring of teaching standards had revealed improvements in overall quality. Feedback from participants on the courses suggested that on returning to their schools they were sharing ideas, leading by example and mentoring other teachers in their schools. They emphasised that there had been an: '*impact on progress, challenge and engagement across the school*' and that '*[OTP course participants] were playing a leading role in driving teaching and learning*'.

- **Improved Ofsted grades for teaching and learning.** Although there was no direct evidence, many interviewees believed that the attendance of staff on programmes such as the OTP and ITP had contributed to participating schools receiving improved teaching and learning ratings from Ofsted.
- **Enhanced leadership capacity.** Providing teachers with coaching and mentoring skills enabled them to pass on improvements in teaching, learning and leading to their colleagues. Many interviewees commented that the NTS model resulted not only in better teachers but better leaders. It was felt that the OTP in particular had resulted in schools having more leadership capacity.

It's certainly provided the opportunity to move teachers on in terms of their professional development, to retain some excellent teachers who've become so energised and enthusiastic... it's provided us with additional capacity in terms of leadership (headteacher and LLE).

There were also some benefits mentioned by each of the different areas:

- **Better retention of teachers.** For some London schools, offering their staff opportunities to attend such courses had enabled them to improve job satisfaction and staff retention. However, a very small number of London interviewees also reported losing staff because teachers who had attended the OTP had subsequently been head-hunted by other schools involved in the programme.
- **More cohesive teams.** In Greater Manchester a number of interviewees reported that groups of staff that had been involved as a team in a TLIP continued to work together collaboratively. Their participation had resulted in opening up a forum for '*professional discussion*'.
- **More engaged pupils.** In the Black Country, many teachers commented that the programmes had challenged them to think about pupil engagement, resulting in the delivery of more '*interactive*' and '*imaginative*' lessons.

Benefits for pupils? I think the engagement... you are constantly bringing in the engagement side and the challenge and questioning which makes it immediately more interesting, which then impacts on the children. (secondary school teacher in receipt of support)

Development opportunities for staff within National Teaching Schools

There was clear evidence from the interviews in all three areas that the NTS model had benefited National Teaching Schools and their staff as well as recipient schools. For example, involvement in the delivery of the programmes provided development opportunities for staff within the host schools. Facilitators received high quality training as well as benefiting from delivering the programmes to others. Indeed, as a

consequence of participating in regular discussions around effective teaching, they became more analytical and evaluative of their own practice: '*It makes hosting schools "up their game" and be more critical of their own performance*' (LLE). The transferable skills they developed could be used for the benefit of their own schools as well as the recipient schools.

Some facilitators in the host schools experienced career development or enhancement, and in some cases, high quality staff had been retained as a result of the satisfaction they had gained from being involved in programme facilitation. Other benefits for National Teaching Schools highlighted by individual headteachers included increased staff confidence, and a culture of more open classrooms within the school because staff were more used to visitors from other schools.

Teacher development as high quality CPD?

After interviewees had discussed their experience and views of the National Teaching School programmes, they were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statement:

'Teacher professional development initiatives, including the National Teaching Schools (NTS) model, within City Challenge areas, deliver high-quality Continuing Professional Development (CPD)⁷.'

The aim was to explore the extent to which this model delivered higher quality CPD than other models of delivery, such as more 'traditional' training courses. Not all respondents were able to make an assessment of this hypothesis. All of the interviewees who expressed a direct view of this model, agreed with the statement; all but three commented positively (or very positively) and the remaining three expressed a mixed view or added caveats to what was primarily a positive view.

Explanations as to why interviewees held such positive views were linked with the benefits described above. In particular, a number of key factors of the NTS model were highlighted:

- **It is delivered by teachers⁸ for teachers.** Participants liked the fact that the facilitators were teachers from other local schools (often dealing with similar issues in similar circumstances). They found other teachers far more credible than external consultants or experts. This encouraged them to share ideas and develop new ways of teaching.
- **No separation of theory and practice.** Teachers were learning through observing and then practising what they had observed. Observing teaching and learning in real school contexts (the host schools) enabled teachers to apply those ideas in their own schools.

⁷ This statement formed one of the evaluation hypotheses and is re-visited in Chapter 6.

⁸ In this context the term 'teachers' includes deputy head teachers and middle leaders.

The power of sharing practice: certainly when we do our teaching school courses, one thing that all of our delegates say is how powerful it is to actually be in a school and to actually go into a classroom to see good practice, and how much better it is than just talking about it, or being told about it, or reading about it. Being able to research and look at the theory, but then actually go and see it practice is extremely powerful (headteacher and NLE).

- **Non-judgmental approach to CPD.** The NTS model was based on coaching and mentoring with those delivering the programmes acting as facilitators rather than ‘experts’. There was plenty of time for reflection, self-evaluation and planning. Teachers were not told what to do but encouraged and challenged to develop their own ideas and thinking and to reflect on their own practice.
- **Quality assured.** The facilitators were trained to deliver the programmes and the programmes were rigorously monitored and quality assured.

It's targeted. It's based on leadership, it's based on pedagogy. The people delivering the work are trained and quality assured. It is school-based. It is accountable and monitored (Leadership Director).

Other reasons why the NTS programmes offered such high quality CPD included: a focus on developing the skills of individual teachers; successful matching of partner schools; the development of collegiality in attendees from a school; and the benefits for staff in host schools. Unlike many other CPD opportunities, these were not one day courses; they took place over a period of time and included follow-through activities.

It should be noted that no major differences in views towards National Teaching Schools were detected across the three Leadership Strategy areas. The general pattern was that the provision of these schools was viewed very positively and only a small number of weaknesses were identified (covered in the following section). The peer-to-peer nature of the training, the school-to-school and local contexts that were used, along with the capacity-building and follow-through elements, were undoubtedly fundamental to the positive views.

2.4 Ideas for improving teacher development provision

Interviewees found it difficult to identify gaps and possible improvements in the NTS programmes. Indeed some explicitly said ‘*there are no gaps that I can think of*’. Several noted that there is rigorous quality assurance of the ITP and OTP programmes and that feedback is taken into account and improvements are made wherever possible. A few, however, were able to identify possible refinements to the programme. The main issues identified came under three headings: the terminology used to describe the programmes; the logistics of hosting and attending the programmes; and the amount of follow-up available after programmes ended.

- **Terminology and marketing.** One issue of terminology was mentioned in all three Leadership Strategy areas. The issue centred on ‘*negative connotations*’

around the ‘label’ of the *Improving Teacher Programme*. It was felt that the name could affect how well teachers engaged with the programme: ‘*We did make the comment that the name didn’t sell itself well... I think that could be worded a bit more sensitively*’ (supported headteacher). Another issue related to the information provided to teachers prior to attendance on the courses. A few interviewees felt that teachers were not always well informed about what the courses would involve and that giving delegates a better understanding of the course in advance could help engagement with the programme from the outset. It was felt that more information and better understanding of the potential benefits could result in a higher initial level of commitment and engagement with the programmes.

- **Logistics and resources.** Several respondents felt that there were some logistical difficulties with hosting and/or attending the teaching courses. These mostly involved finding space to hold the courses (for example, a small primary school) or obtaining funding to cover attendance at the courses or to cover for staff delivering the courses.

An issue in the future will be whether schools are able to host and attend courses... They do have some funding but it will be tricky. Primary schools don’t have much extra funding or capacity (LLE).

The problem of finding high calibre teaching cover for staff delivering the courses was also mentioned. Some interviewees felt that these logistical problems could be minimised by running the programmes on different days each week or by having fewer teachers from the same department/school attending programmes at the same time.

- **Follow-up.** Although the follow-up support for teachers attending the programmes was considered to be an important and effective feature of the NTS model, some interviewees in the Black Country and one London interviewee felt there should be even more dedicated time to follow-up learning points with participants. One Black Country facilitator commented that the pressure to provide more courses and get more people onto the courses was restricting the time available to support previous attendees.

In addition to these three main issues, there were a number of other points that were either raised in one Leadership Strategy area only or were made by individual interviewees. For example, as noted previously, some London interviewees were concerned about losing staff who had participated in the courses. One of these, a headteacher, described how a colleague of hers went on the OTP, and was then ‘*poached by the school who ran the course*’. Another headteacher, made a similar point: ‘*the awkward thing about that is you send your staff on that, they get good and then they leave*’.

Several individual interviewees suggested developing more personalised programmes to meet particular developmental needs. One, for example, felt that although the courses were very good they were based on a ‘*secondary model*’ and were ‘*not really written for primary practice*’. Similarly, another would have liked some course content on ‘*how to improve teaching in the Foundation stage*’ and a third interviewee suggested providing similar programmes for non-teaching staff.

3. NLE and LLE Support

This chapter outlines the findings related to National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) and the support that they provided to schools and headteachers in the three Leadership Strategy areas.

NLE and LLE support for schools was one of the approaches included in the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, as part of the new Coalition Government's aim to support strong and confident leadership in every school: '*We will work with the National College to double the number of National and Local Leaders of Education by 2015.*' (Para. 2.44).

3.1 Models of deployment and forms of support offered

The roles and eligibility criteria of NLEs and LLEs are different, as is the training and support afforded to headteachers in the respective groups. The National College website outlines the main differences between the roles, shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: The roles of national leader of education (NLE) and local leader of education (LLE) differ in the following key areas.

NLE role	LLE role
An NLE is likely to provide intensive support for schools in an Ofsted category, needing an interim headteacher or moving through federation or trust status.	An LLE is more likely to support schools around the floor standards or those needing to maximise progress (satisfactory schools needing to move to good).
NLEs are available for deployment outside their own local authority and are brokered into an appropriate client school with support from a National College broker.	LLEs are more likely to work within their own local authority as part of a networked team, being called on directly by the local authority to support a particular school.
NLEs can access additional support for the client school through the staff of their own school, the national support school (NSS).	LLEs can "swap" their contracted days with other members of their staff to buddy up with the partner school's equivalent staff member in a more informal way.
An NLE is more likely to lead an outstanding school or have been rated outstanding in leadership by Ofsted.	An LLE will have a successful track record of leadership with Ofsted judgements of at least good and will lead a school that is judged as good overall.
Recruitment of NLEs is managed by the National College team twice a year with induction events held centrally.	Recruitment of LLEs is managed by the National College for participating local authorities on local authority timetables. A four-day training programme held jointly with the LAs is included.

Source: National College website: <http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/professional-development/national-leaders-of-education/nle-who-for/nle-lle-differences.htm> Accessed on 3 March 2011.

Despite these differences, across all three areas, we found that there was little or no distinction between the ways in which NLEs and LLEs were deployed to support schools. In London and the Black Country NLEs and LLEs were all part of the same pool of support available for schools in need. This was also true to some extent in Greater Manchester, although interviewees here noted that NLE deployments tended to provide more intensive support.

Across the three areas, the emphasis was more on using a **bespoke** approach to the deployment of NLEs and LLEs and to matching them to schools needing support. The designation of the headteacher providing support was only one of many factors considered when matching NLEs/LLEs to schools needing support. The teams responsible for this matching reported that, in fact, the most important things to consider in order to maximise the chances of a successful partnership were, the:

- specific issues that the school in need of support required help with
- experience of the NLE/LLE
- personality of the headteachers
- context of the supported school (e.g. location, performance, characteristics of the intake of pupils, and challenges faced by the school, such as level of deprivation)
- location of the two schools relative to one another.

The location of the schools was taken into account, although mainly to arrange partnerships between schools at manageable distances from each other. There was a general (but not exclusive) view that partnering schools from different LAs was preferable because this allowed a neutral relationship from the start. This relationship then usually developed into a supportive coaching model with opportunities for the NLE/LLE to challenge the school when appropriate.

In all three areas, the team involved in matching the support to the schools in need included individuals with a mixture of roles: Challenge Advisors, Leadership Directors (who were also NLEs) and other senior NLEs and LLEs involved in the strategic direction of the work. As such, this team included current headteachers with ‘on the ground’ knowledge of the challenges faced by schools, and of the networks already in place. Interviewees also indicated that there was also some LA input to this group. In London, there were two separate teams, one for primary schools and one for secondary schools, in part because of the size of the area and in part because the work at secondary level started several years before the primary work was introduced.

Types of support

Reflecting the bespoke approach to matching support described above, the support provided by NLEs/LLEs was tailored to the needs of the recipient school and headteacher. Consequently the nature of the support varied considerably between schools and within areas. In each case the package of support was developed by the recipient school and the NLE/LLE working in partnership. Examples of support included:

- mentoring and coaching headteachers (including those new to headship)
- acting as a ‘critical friend’
- acting as an interim or executive head
- support with strategic tasks including:
 - budgeting
 - staffing
 - performance management
 - completing the Self Evaluation Form (SEF)
 - use of data
- opportunities for staff at other levels to work with staff in the NLE/LLE’s school
- staff observations and feedback.

The level of support and the amount of time dedicated to such partnerships varied depending on the intensity of help needed by the recipient school. On the whole, it averaged out at about one day per week, with more support being provided at the outset.

Relationship between NLEs/LLEs and the School Improvement Partner

The roles of the School Improvement Partner (SIP) and NLEs/LLEs were felt to be separate but complementary. Whereas the SIP worked with schools on behalf of the local authority and therefore had a set agenda, the NLE/LLE role was more of a ‘critical friend’ to support and challenge the headteacher in all aspects of the school. Supported headteachers generally felt that there was little overlap between the input of the SIP and the NLE/LLE. In addition, the relationship and communications between SIPs and NLE/LLEs were reported to have improved during the course of the development of the Leadership Strategy work in the Black Country and London.

3.2 Effectiveness of NLE/LLE support

Support from NLEs and LLEs was generally felt to be very effective for a number of reasons, as outlined below.

Firstly, the nature of the relationship between the NLE/LLE and the supported headteacher was seen as very important for the effectiveness of the support. Both the headteachers receiving support and those providing support viewed it as a partnership. Although the NLE/LLE retained a mentor role, supporting headteachers also learned from the experiences of the other. Supported headteachers appreciated that the NLE/LLE did not tell them what to do or undermine them, but that instead they gave advice through coaching. Interviewees felt that it was important that those involved in the support were open to joint learning, and not restricted by any perceptions as to the direction the support should flow. Some headteachers noted that their role could sometimes be a lonely and isolated one, and they therefore valued the collaborative support and professional dialogue this opportunity afforded them.

Where possible, NLEs/LLEs were matched to supported schools with similar backgrounds and contexts as the schools they worked in, so that they were likely to support a school facing similar challenges. Interviewees felt that it was important that the person providing support was able to understand, and in some cases have experienced, the problems faced by the supported headteacher. Examples were given where the strategic teams doing the matching felt that NLEs/LLEs with experience of leading a school in a leafy area would not be the best person to support a school located in an inner-city area, because of the different challenges faced by each of them.

The fact that the NLE/LLE was also a current headteacher meant that the NLE/LLE had a wealth of real experience to draw from when giving advice and practical help. In addition to their experience of similar challenges, NLEs and LLEs were able to make use of expertise *within* their school. For example, subject teachers or middle and senior leaders sometimes worked with their counterparts in the supported school. Supported headteachers valued the current experience that the NLE/LLE had in leading their own school – NLEs and LLEs were viewed as more credible, and better value for money, than external consultants who might well have no experience of leading a school.

In most cases partnerships were formed across local authority boundaries and this meant that there were no preconceptions from either party. Some headteachers felt that they were able to be more open from the beginning when working with someone independent from their local authority. This was useful later in the working relationship too because internal politics from local authorities did not come into play. Trust between the headteachers was reported to be integral to an effective relationship between the supported headteacher and the NLE/LLE, and this was helped by working with a colleague from another authority:

He was very useful in the sense that I could sound off to him, not compromising myself or anyone within the school because he doesn't have a direct link to the school or the authority and that's been very useful because I could just talk ...and not get worried about 'am I saying it in a politically correct way?' or not to offend anyone within my staff (headteacher).

Interviewees felt that the support from NLEs/LLEs was effective because it represented a different approach to other things ‘out there’. The support and development took place directly within the school, in the ‘real’ school environment, and could be applied directly to areas of concern. Furthermore, the support was tailored to the needs of the recipient school.

3.3 Benefits for schools and school staff

A number of benefits of the NLE/LLE support were identified by interviewees from all levels.

- Leadership in schools had improved; this was mostly the case in supported schools but some of the headteachers providing support also reported this benefit.
- There were benefits for the whole school, particularly when the relationship grew to be greater than the two headteachers and into school-to-school partnership working, and sharing of knowledge across departments.
- The nature of the partnerships meant that both the supported and the supporting headteacher were exposed to new perspectives and ways of working. It broadened the horizons of senior leaders in schools.
- It was reported that examination results had improved in supported schools and in some cases these schools had moved up Ofsted categories.
- Interviewees reported that the retention of staff was better. In part, this was related to many of the other identified benefits such as improved opportunities within the school and improved results, but also, in some cases because they had access to better CPD.
- The benefits were not confined to the recipient school: as suggested above, NLEs and LLEs felt that their own schools had also benefited from the work. In particular, NLEs and LLEs identified benefits for their staff in terms of increased confidence and pride in their own school. Their staff also had opportunities to learn from other schools, to provide CPD (particularly in schools that also held teaching school status) and in some instances to ‘act up’ and take on more responsibility while the NLE/LLE was spending time supporting the other school.

3.4 Ideas for improving NLE/LLE support

Overall, the support provided by NLEs and LLEs was viewed very positively, and the suggested areas for improvement were comparatively few. In part, this was because in some areas the work had been established for a number of years and had evolved and improved as the work had developed.

Slightly different areas for improvement in NLE/LLE provision were identified in the three different Leadership Strategy areas, although the issues highlighted in London and Greater Manchester were similar.

- The training of LLEs was identified as a potential area for improvement in both London and Greater Manchester.
 - In London this mostly related to the induction training provided to LLEs. The training provided at induction was predominantly about coaching skills, which some LLEs were already experienced in. Interviewees that identified this as an area for improvement would have liked to see more information about the nature of the role and what would be expected of LLEs once they were

providing support. (It should be noted that the ongoing training and support for LLEs in London was more positively viewed).

- In contrast, in Greater Manchester, LLEs would have liked better training in coaching and mentoring skills, particularly related to how to engage and work with headteachers who were reluctant and/or defensive.
- Greater Manchester interviewees also suggested that other staff in the schools of NLEs/LLEs could have also benefited from training about how to facilitate school-to-school support.
- Pressure on NLEs/LLEs and cover for teachers were issues identified by interviewees in London and Greater Manchester, particularly in the schools providing the support. Interviewees in Greater Manchester suggested that this could be a useful area in which to provide training for LLEs to help them manage and make the most of the opportunity in terms of staff development. In London, the suggestions related to providing practical support in terms of trying to relieve administrative or bureaucratic pressures.
- Another issue identified by some Greater Manchester interviewees related to the pressures faced by NLEs and LLEs as a result of their workload. In particular it was felt that it was important to ensure that the number of schools that any one NLE or LLE supported at any time was realistic and manageable, with particular consideration of the fact that most NLEs and LLEs were current headteachers with the responsibility of running their own school first and foremost.

Greater Manchester interviewees also suggested that some of the procedures used as part of the NLE recruitment, training and support programme could be adopted for the LLE programmes locally. In particular the NLE programme was felt to have a better approach to quality assurance, with, for example, the possibility of headteachers losing their NLE status in cases where the NLE no longer met the criteria to hold the role.

Few interviewees from the Black Country Challenge identified areas for improvement. Suggested changes included:

- better support for NLEs and LLEs about when and how to withdraw support from schools. Some felt that there was the potential for confusion, for example, about what to do in supported schools that experienced a change in headteacher
- less overlap in the content of training for NLEs and LLEs
- more opportunities for NLEs/LLEs to meet with their peers to share their experiences of providing support and to discuss ideas. One of the interviewees felt that the knowledge of NLEs/LLEs and their experiences of working in this way could be collated and developed into a strategic resource
- better communication between the Black Country Leadership Strategy (BCLS) and local authorities in the area, (e.g. more local authority involvement in brokering the support). Interviewees from both BCLS and LAs felt that their respective work could be more ‘joined-up’.

4. Local Projects

As noted in the introductory chapter (Section 1.4), there was much in common in relation to the Leadership Strategies across the three areas. Where there were differences these were part of the ‘bespoke’ nature of these strategies, or local projects reflecting local policies and emphases. For this evaluation we focused on two leadership-related projects from each area. This chapter briefly examines these six local projects; addressing their impact, factors contributing to their success, and ideas for improvement. For further information on these local programmes, please see the separate Leadership Strategies area reports.

4.1 Local projects in London

Primary Challenge Groups

Primary Challenge Groups (PCGs) involved three primary schools working collaboratively with the aim of improving each school. Each PCG was led by an NLE/LLE who worked with headteachers from two other schools in moderate need of support: ‘*it’s not just me telling them what to do, it’s us working together*’ (LLE).

The schools in the PCG identified a common area for improvement (such as literacy at key stage 2); and were given a relatively free reign over this, which enabled them to target areas of need: ‘*the successful groups have focused on one or two issues*’ (Programme Lead). They then agreed a joint action plan, and used a grant to achieve the actions set down in the plan. Team leaders monitored spending and progress against the action plans: ‘*there is some accountability there*’ (LLE).

The majority of schools involved in PCGs were positive about their involvement in the programme, and reported improvements to school leadership and pupil attainment. Interviewees felt that the main factor behind the success of PCGs was the collaborative nature of the programme (sharing knowledge and giving all three headteachers ownership of the direction of work). In instances where formal PCG work and funding had ended, the triads had often continued collaborating informally, indicating the success and sustainability of the programme.

Although views on the PCGs were generally positive, suggestions for improvements included:

- aligning action plans to other work
- LLE training tailored to working in a triad of schools
- more links to other schools outside of the triad.

VIP (Sixth Form) programme

The VIP programme was introduced in September 2009 to address a need to work with school-based sixth forms. It was felt that sixth forms had been previously neglected in school improvement work and this was reflected in examination results: post-16 attainment in London overall was below the national average, despite London achieving higher than average GCSE attainment.

The VIP programme was delivered through school-to-school support. The programme had a particular focus on analysing school performance data. Within each partnership the heads of the sixth forms and the two headteachers (one being a NLE/LLE) from the partner schools worked together:

We were clear that if we wanted transformational change post-16, the work had to be with the headteacher, because sixth forms are not an island...you have to look at the quality of learning and teaching, guidance and support which are whole school issues, and not issues the head of a sixth form can usually do something about' (VIP Programme Lead).

The Building Capacity programme was recently introduced as an extension of the VIP programme. This was a three-day course (spread over a term) which aimed to provide heads of sixth forms with the skills (such as coaching), to enable them to strengthen and develop practice in their sixth forms.

The VIP programme has been well received by headteachers and heads of sixth forms, who valued the increased amounts of partnership working. It was also reported that sixth form students themselves were responding positively to increased attention given to them and their academic progress. Interviewees considered it too early to measure impact of the programme, and felt that the main area for improvement was to allow the programme to develop and reach its full potential in the future.

4.2 Local projects in the Black Country

Families of Schools

Families of Schools was an initiative that used centrally available data to create clusters or ‘families’ of schools based on shared characteristics, usually including pupils’ socio-economic status. Although the Families of Schools programme was not in the initial remit of the Black Country Leadership Strategy, the Leadership Directors took the initiative to lead, drive and improve it. The Black Country Challenge set up a number of ‘family focused’ conferences which provided headteachers with opportunities to identify issues and share areas for development. Institutions selected an area of focus, and could access £3000 to put towards this on completion of an action plan.

The main factors that contributed towards the success of the programme included sharing learning between schools, establishing networks, and allowing headteachers

to identify and drive their own agenda for change. The programme was viewed positively by interviewees, who valued the opportunity to collaborate and network with other schools as a means of driving change.

Headteachers had some suggestions for improving Families of Schools:

- arranging for additional support from Black Country Leadership Strategy (as some headteachers found it challenging to lead change themselves)
- allowing networks of schools to develop naturally, rather than being clustered by similarities in their data
- monitoring and evaluating use of the funding.

In addition, some headteachers felt that the relationship between schools had weakened since the additional programme of activities had been completed. The majority of these issues were already identified by the leadership director in the Black Country, who was looking to address them by increasing accountability. Additionally, he commented that schools were able to choose their own groups (*'it's not our gift, we can only support it'*), and membership of families would always be '*transient*'.

Good to Bostin

Good to Bostin aimed to raise the status of schools graded 'good' by Ofsted to 'outstanding' ('bostin' is the Black Country term for 'outstanding'). Particular areas of focus were Self-Evaluation Forms, School Improvement Plans and preparing for Ofsted inspections. Good to Bostin provided a series of conferences and workshops and consultancy support to schools to strengthen school self-evaluation.

Interviewees were positive about the programme; in particular about gaining access to information provided by expert speakers and consultants, and having the opportunity to focus on strategic priorities. As with Families of Schools, the conferences and events were well attended, which strategic interviewees felt indicated good buy-in. There were no suggested improvements to the programme.

4.3 Local projects in Greater Manchester

Middle Leaders of Education

The Middle Leaders of Education (MLE) programme was introduced in January 2010 in order to develop middle leadership and to support NLEs/LLEs in their work. The programme had similar principles to the LLE programme: outstanding middle leaders were recruited to support their peers in developing leadership skills and improving their departments. The programme focussed on recruiting, training and deploying MLEs in the core subjects (English, mathematics and science) at secondary level, with a small number of MLEs at primary level. MLEs were either deployed alongside an NLE/LLE, or were deployed to provide support on a specific subject expertise. They provided a range of practical support: *'The MLE undertook lesson observations,*

feedback, [brought] resources. She focused on teachers who had been on the ITP and worked with them on action plans and success criteria and giving feedback' (headteacher of school supported by MLE).

At the time of the evaluation, the MLE programme had only had a short time to become established. However, interviewees reported improved teaching as a result of shared practice, and improved school environments, and felt that the foundations were set for improvements in pupils' language, communication and thinking. The programme provided useful CPD opportunities for middle leaders, especially for those who had limited opportunities within their own school. Success factors included the development of a support network for MLEs, enabling them to share experiences, and MLEs being able to balance coaching and practical support.

There were three main suggestions for improving the MLE programme:

- providing MLEs with practical advice (such as on how to invoice their time)
- ensuring that all MLEs have the opportunity to reflect on their first deployment with other MLEs
- developing the capacity within MLEs' schools to enable them to be released more frequently for deployment.

Development of benchmarking in Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The Greater Manchester Leadership Strategy (GMLS) included the development of systems leadership for SEN and Pupil Referral Units through the appointment of a leadership director for SEN, and the formation of a strategic group of special school headteachers across the ten LAs in the GMLS. There were two headteachers from each LA in the group, who planned activities including an annual conference.

The group decided to purchase CASPA (Comparison and Analysis of Special Pupil Attainment) which is a data system that collates information on pupils with SEN. CASPA enabled LAs within the GMLS to compare attainment of pupils with SEN in their schools against similar schools in the other nine LAs; and also enabled the identification of schools that were performing well, which allowed them to share good practice.

Impacts of the SEN programme included: breaking down boundaries between mainstream and special school sectors, a reduced sense of isolation for SEN schools as a result of being able to work across LA boundaries, and more informed teaching and learning and target setting due to improved data. There were no suggestions for improvements to the programme, but it was suggested that CASPA could be extended to mainstream schools to enable them to benchmark provision for their pupils with SEN.

4.4 Overview of local projects

The local projects were varied, and designed to meet local needs. For instance, in London there was a need to raise post-16 attainment, and in Greater Manchester there was a need to develop middle leadership. In this way, these local programmes allowed some flexibility by area, and programme participants valued this.

There was also some evidence, however, of leadership programmes being shared between the areas: for instance London's *Building Capacity* and *VIP* programmes had subsequently been introduced in Greater Manchester.

All local programmes aimed to raise school standards, and common elements were shared between them, which included:

- schools collaborating at senior leadership level, and sharing practice
- conferences, events and networking opportunities
- using data on school performance
- headteachers setting their own agendas and driving change
- headteachers gaining new skills from training
- systems leadership.

The local projects have been well received, and the opportunities that they provided for collaboration and networking were particularly valued by interviewees. However, apart from PCGs, there has been little evidence of impact in terms of raised pupil attainment and achievement, largely because many of the programmes have not been in place for long enough: '*it's too early to say*' (Programme Manager).

5. Overview

This chapter pulls together the findings from the three Leadership Strategies areas in order to present an overview of the evaluation findings. There are five sections to this chapter: the first assesses general views of the quality of leadership provision; the second looks at the impact of these Leadership Strategies and, in doing so, identifies some of the key strengths of the programme; the third looks at the value for money (VfM) aspects of the Leadership Strategies; the fourth considers the lessons learned from participation in these activities and programmes (along with suggestions for improvement); and the fifth looks to the future and examines the transferability and sustainability of the Leadership Strategies.

5.1 General views about leadership provision

Leadership provision was viewed positively by interviewees across the three areas. This was apparent from both sets of interviews and from the proformas (sent to respondents in between interviews). Interviewees described the provision as ‘outstanding’, ‘excellent’ and ‘very good’, and the proforma returns corroborated this view, with almost all respondents rating the provision as ‘very good’ or ‘good’ (on a scale from ‘very poor’ to ‘very good’). Views about the provision were related to the programmes and support that interviewees had been involved with, as few interviewees in each area had an overview of all of the Leadership Strategy programmes in the region. The increase in the number of headteachers and schools involved in the work, and the repeat custom for initiatives such as teaching school programmes also supports the positive views held by interviewees.

Some elements of the work were rated particularly highly in all three areas, and were perceived to be integral to the success of the programmes, as set out below.

- **The bespoke or ‘tailor-made’ nature of the support.** The needs of individual schools and headteachers were identified and packages of support were created in relation to the need, rather than provision of a generic form of support.
- **The brokering process.** Support was identified for schools, following the tailor-made approach described above and using the criteria outlined in Chapter 3, by NLEs/LLEs with extensive experience of working in the current education system. Interviewees felt that this was a key factor in establishing successful partnerships between schools.
- **The creation of a network of headteachers.** This had encouraged sharing of best practice and developed knowledge at the system level, rather than keeping pockets of expertise within schools. Collaborative working and learning was a key feature of the programmes. However, the networks were still only within each Leadership Strategies area and it was felt that there had been little sharing of learning across the regions.

- **Making use of existing resources (schools) and expertise (headteachers).** Using NLEs and LLEs to support other schools allowed recipient schools to access support from entire schools. For example, staff in supported schools were able to observe and work with their counterparts in the NLE/LLE's school. NLEs and LLEs were viewed as more credible than external consultants who were not school-based.
- **Opportunities to work across boundaries.** In all areas there was an emphasis on working across local authority boundaries, and Greater Manchester interviewees also gave examples of cross-phase working (e.g. primary and secondary schools working together). Working across geographical areas and school phases facilitated the open and honest collaborative working mentioned above, because there was no history or rivalries between schools or headteachers. It also allowed schools to observe different ways of approaching problems they encountered, thereby widening their pool of resources.
- The use of **mentoring and coaching** was valued by headteachers. This was true in all three areas, and Black Country interviewees highlighted that the 'no blame' culture contributed to the success of the work because those receiving support did not feel judged, and were able to be honest and open with their NLE or LLE.

5.2 The impact of leadership provision

Interviewees across the three areas were asked what the impact of the Leadership Strategies had been. A variety of impacts were identified across the three areas in relation to the work of the Leadership Strategies. However, in most cases these were accompanied by caveats relating to the difficulty in disentangling the direct impact of the work from that of other initiatives also supporting schools to improve. Indeed, most schools receiving support from the Leadership Strategies programmes were also receiving other support from their local authority and the wider City Challenge programmes. That said, interviewees felt that the Leadership Strategies had at least contributed towards the overall improvements that were, for example, observed in terms of performance across the London region:

You can never say that it's just because of what you've done, but if you look at the schools that haven't been supported by the strategy, their increase is less than the schools that have been supported (Programme Manager).

In some of the areas, and in the case of some of the newer programmes, interviewees felt that it was too soon to be able to identify impact, particularly because of the emphasis on achieving sustained improvement rather than 'quick-win' changes:

We have seen some tangible improvements, but we don't want quick wins, we want long-term sustainability. There are some times that you need quick wins, but we need to embed the legacy of outstanding practice (NLE).

In light of the conditions above, interviewees were able to identify some areas where they felt the Leadership Strategies had made a positive impact. The areas of impact were similar across the three regions.

- Supported schools reported **better attainment**:

Our SAT results are rising year on year and it has embedded good practice (supported headteacher).

- **Better quality of teaching and learning**, particularly in schools that had sent teachers on courses offered by National Teaching Schools. Headteachers had also noticed increased confidence and enthusiasm in their staff.
- **Improvements in Ofsted grades**. Headteachers gave examples of schools moving up an Ofsted grade, as well as improvements in the ratings of individuals' teaching skills.
- **Leadership had improved** in both recipient and supporting schools: '*Every day we are hearing from the LLEs that, 'Being a systems leader helps me reflect on my own structure and makes me a better Head'*' (Senior Leadership Director).
- There was **more collaboration** between schools and school leaders in the three areas. This had impact because schools were sharing best practice and learning from each other:

...my link school provides [an] excellent model of practice. Staff at the school have had the opportunity to visit the link school and have worked with their teachers in planning, teaching and observing good practice (supported headteacher).

- Positive impacts had also been observed in **staff in schools providing support**. Interviewees felt that staff working in schools providing support had access to better CPD, and it had improved the confidence of staff and their involvement in the school.

In addition, Black Country interviewees reported that their analysis of attainment data showed that disadvantaged students had experienced improved educational outcomes.

5.3 Value for Money

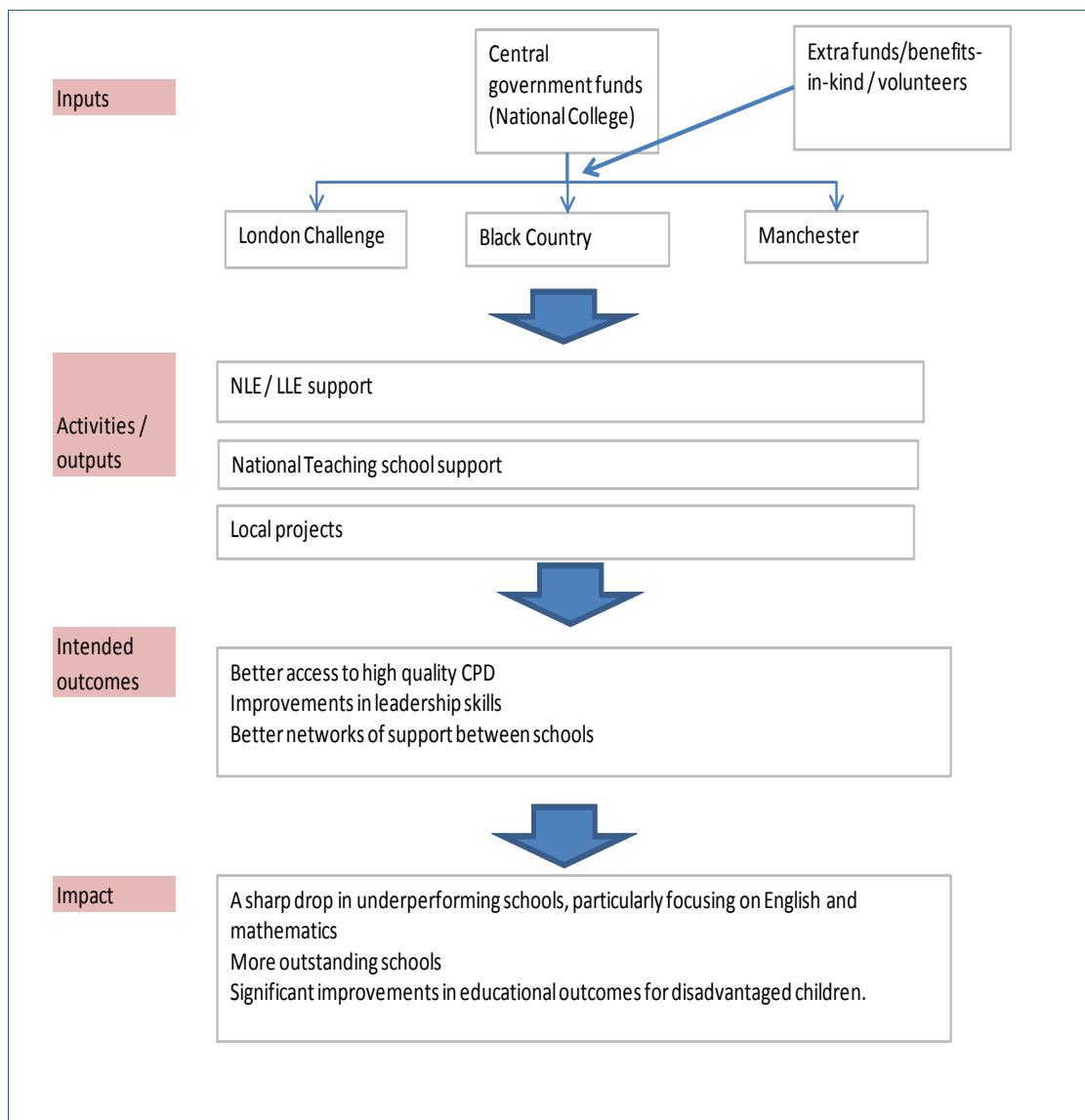
One strand of the evaluation examined the value for money aspects of the City Challenge Leadership Strategies. This was not straightforward, for a number of reasons:

- There were limited resources available for this part of the work (preventing, for example, a detailed examination of the programme budget).
- The outcomes analysis was subject to various caveats and limitations (including timescale constraints).
- Many of the inputs and expected outcomes, or 'costs' and 'benefits', were difficult to define or measure. Leadership provision, for example, is a very broad concept and such provision is designed with many aims in mind, not just the improvement

of leadership (and therefore of school and pupil performance outcomes). Similarly, outputs, such as attainment indicators, and the influences upon these, are complex and difficult to quantify.

The research team, however, felt that it was possible construct a basic conceptual framework within which the Value for Money (VfM) of the Leadership Strategies can be understood. This conceptualisation is illustrated in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1



The data collection then attempted to seek information which would elaborate the costs and benefits described in this framework. For example, the quantitative strand of the work, which involved the filling in of a proforma about Leadership Strategies activities by senior managers in each area, provided useful information on the frequency of these activities and on the outcomes for young people; and the qualitative strand included direct interview questions about various activities related to VfM.

Stakeholder perspectives can be an important indicator of views about VfM, and having a range of such perspectives is important. The interviews (totalling 144 in number) covered a broad range of perspectives, including those of providers of Leadership Strategies activities, recipients of these activities, and others who may have had a particular perspective on VfM, such as programme managers and LA officers. This sample reflected well the range of cost-benefit type experiences that we wished to cover.

Although the interview questions were about *perceptions* of VfM, and many of the stakeholders were involved in the delivery of the Leadership Strategies provision (and were therefore likely to take a positive view anyway), we were able to build some safeguards into the VfM questioning. For example, where respondents said that Leadership Strategies activities were good VfM, they were then asked to provide evidence of this, and to give examples of why this was the case. There was also a specifically-constructed question which asked about the added value, or additionality, of the Leadership Strategies.

With these data collection methods and basic conceptualisations of costs and benefits in mind, we felt that it was reasonable to make links, though not causal links, between school leadership and school and pupil outcomes, and to make some assessment of value for money (VfM) from the Leadership Strategies programme.

Across all three areas there was a general consensus among interviewees that Leadership Strategies activities represented **good value for money**, and the reasons for this were largely to do with the modes of delivery and the impacts of these programme activities. The three most prominent reasons for taking this view (each mentioned in one form or another in all three areas) are listed below.

- **School-to-school support by means of an existing resource was considerably less expensive than paying for an external resource**, such as a consultant. Also, not only was the daily rate of a headteacher NLE or LLE often less than that of an external consultant, but also having an NLE or LLE provided the recipient school with access to a wealth of support from a whole school, not just one individual.
- There were considerable benefits from **sharing good practice**, and this prevented the costs of '*reinventing the wheel*'. The brokering and matching aspects of the Leadership Strategies activities (for schools, areas of expertise and personalities) were an important part of this and were also mentioned as being very cost effective.
- The Leadership Strategies had an element of **sustainability** and led to **whole-school improvements**, including in the quality and capacity of leadership in schools.

In order to assess the added value provided by the Leadership Strategies, in the autumn interviews, we asked, '**Do you think it would have been possible for you to have put together an equally effective package of support from other provision in the absence of the Leadership Strategy support?**' Most interviewees thought

that this would not have been possible, although between one-quarter and one-third across the full sample (across all three areas) felt that they would have undertaken similar actions and activities, but that this would have happened to a lesser extent and not as quickly. The responses suggest that:

- schools would not have received as comprehensive and tailored support in the absence of the Leadership Strategies
- the quality of provision is seen as contributing to the high-level of take-up by schools in each of the three areas, and as contributing to improved pupil outcomes
- schools would not have been able to engage in the same level of improvement activity, at this pace, without the funding provided.

The statistical analysis examined the impact of three types of Leadership Strategies support on key stage 2 outcomes, key stage 4 GCSE points scores and key stage 4 attainment at five or more grades A*-C. It is worth noting that, although limited to one year of data (summer 2010), the analysis found no negative effects on attainment and, in some cases, statistically significant positive improvements. (However, the important caveats identified in the *Evaluation of City Challenge Leadership Strategies: Technical Appendix* (Rudd *et al.*, 2011 (available from the National College upon request)) must be taken into account: and note that the associations with attendance outcomes were much more ambiguous.)

Positive associations with attainment were most evident in the London Leadership Strategy area, mostly for primary schools giving support, so it was not surprising that London interviewees were the most positive about the VfM of the Leadership Strategies (though it should also be stressed that there were also only a handful of comments that were not overtly positive in the Black Country and Greater Manchester, and even these were usually qualifying comments about how it was difficult to assess VfM). Without exception, all London interviewees who expressed a view about the cost effectiveness of the work felt that the Leadership Strategies provided good value for money, with some going so far as to describe them as: ‘great’, ‘excellent’, and ‘exceptional’.

Recommendations

Were a more detailed retrospective analysis of the Value for Money of the Leadership Strategies programme undertaken, we would recommend the following⁹:

- undertaking a budget analysis for the programme, acknowledging resource types which cannot be included
- analysis of variations in the views of different stakeholders regarding VfM, and investigate whether these can be explained by respondents’ roles or perspective on the programme

⁹ The NFER research team are indebted to Kevin Marsh, Chief Economist at the Matrix Knowledge Group, for his advice with regards to these recommendations.

- estimate the value of positive impacts in terms of improvements in future employment, earnings or well-being, and use these estimates to conduct a break-even analysis
- investigate variations in the costs of programme delivery. This could be achieved through further analysis of data on frequency and volume of programme activity in conjunction with data on programme costs.

5.4 Improvements and suggestions for additional support

From the start, this evaluation included a formative element, and emerging findings and suggestions for improvement, based on the evidence collected, were compiled whenever possible: these were shared with National College staff and the area Programme Managers. All three programmes were perceived as having developed and improved over their lifetime.

Monitoring and evaluation activity was cited by interviewees in all areas as under-developed, but nevertheless some important lessons appear to have been learned. A small number of unresolved weaknesses were identified, and a few suggestions made for additional support. These issues were particularly relevant and pertinent to programme transition arrangements which are discussed in Section 5.5.

The role of strategic partners

Interviewees in all three areas made observations about the role played by different strategic partners, questioning in particular whether local authorities had an appropriate level of involvement. In the Black Country, for example, it was suggested that an initial lack of local authority involvement in brokering the support may have lead to some duplication of activity, and to the creation of additional layers of bureaucracy. It may also have been a factor in the reported surplus of LLEs in this region. Other interviewees advocated for a more substantial role for local authorities in the coordination of support, in order to avoid over-burdening schools with interventions. For example, one LA Officer in the Black Country commented that '*underperforming schools can be overburdened with the amount of support on offer and so it is important that we are there to coordinate that support*'.

Interviewees in Greater Manchester drew attention to the variable level of local authority engagement in the programme, and its implications for the engagement of schools, some of which may have, as a consequence, 'missed out' on the programme.

Promotion and recruitment

Access to the Leadership Strategies was, overall, considered to be good, but interviewees' comments drew attention to the need to make sure that the right message was sent out about the support on offer (and that it actually got through to schools). Interviewees in London reported that over the life of the Leadership Strategies the significance of terminology had been recognised, with it becoming

quite clear that schools could be deterred from participating, because they '*didn't want the label*' (Programme Manager, London).

However, comments from interviewees in all areas suggested that there continued to be scope for improving the messages going out to schools invited to receive support. In particular, respondents drew attention to the need for complete clarity about what was involved, and how the support provided to schools was distinct to that already on offer from their local authority.

Interviewees from all three regions emphasised the importance of communicating sensitively and effectively with participating teachers, so that they understood fully the rationale for placing them on a programme, and 'signed up' to achieving the programme aims. As one NLE interviewed in connection with the Greater Manchester programme put it: '*Teachers need to be very clear about what they are coming out of school for, and why*'.

Programme content

Whilst the consensus appeared to be that the model of the Leadership Strategies work was a good one, offering an impressive continuum of professional development activities with few significant gaps, comments from some interviewees (largely from Greater Manchester) suggested less than complete satisfaction with the detail of some strands. Interviewees, for example, noted repetition of content across programme strands – understandably frustrating to people moving from one to another. Reports also suggested that the programmes delivered by some external providers would in some cases benefit from further development, i.e. being '*realigned or revamped*'. Other comments suggest some provision was insufficiently tailored to local needs and circumstances: '*A lot of it is wonderful, but being critical, the quality of provision from external providers is like a one package fits all, but it doesn't and we are looking for bespoke programmes*' (NLE, Greater Manchester). The lesson here is perhaps that careful selection and direction of external providers is important, if local needs are to be fully met.

Brokerage of relationships

The successful brokerage of relationships was portrayed as a critical pillar of the programme. In London, these brokerage arrangements were perceived as very successful. However, in the other two regions there was some variation in the extent to which interviewees considered their brokerage arrangements to have been effective. Some interviewees in the Black Country, for example, saw the lack of involvement of local authorities as a weakness, while others saw the failure to involve serving headteachers (as brokers) as a missed opportunity. These were people, it was argued, with unmatched knowledge of the local educational landscape and the potential to be great advocates: '*They know the patch, they know the people, and they can also be quite persuasive*' (Leadership Director, Black Country).

Brokerage was recognised as demanding of both time and resources and doubts were expressed by some interviewees as to the extent to which it might be sustainable beyond the life of the Leadership Strategies. Moreover, it seemed likely to become more difficult as the pool of available NLEs and LLEs was depleted: '*Outstanding leaders are always in short supply*' (LA interviewee, Greater Manchester). In a similar vein, an LA interviewee from the Black Country posed the following question: '*Have we got a big enough cohort of outstanding and good leaders to be able to drive the system upwards?*'

School-to-school support

The school-to-school support which was central to the Leadership Strategies was widely liked. Interviewees made it clear that they welcomed the chance to break out of the 'silos' in which they were accustomed to working: '*We are much stronger when we work together*' (LLE, Black Country). Some suggested that the programme could be enhanced by providing more opportunities for LLEs to work across local authority boundaries. Interviewees in London said they would like to see more work spanning different types of institution (i.e. taking the programme beyond the maintained sector)¹⁰.

School-to-school support was perceived as having a value which (potentially) extended well beyond leadership development. Interviewees in London said over time they hoped to see what tended, initially at least, to be head-to-head support, developing into more genuine whole-school collaboration. In the Black Country interviewees drew attention to the impact of enabling teachers to see good practice 'in action' through peer observation arrangements: '*Being able to ... actually go and see it [in] practice is extremely powerful*' (NLE, Black Country).

Some interviewees expressed the belief that school-to-school relationships were mutually beneficial, with learning taking place by both parties: '*LLEs learn a lot from the schools they have supported*' (programme manager, London). However, others were of the opinion that taking staff out of high performing schools could have a negative impact on those institutions: '*We need to be ... with our children first and foremost, otherwise the standard of our own schools will fall*' (NLE, Black Country). This concern was thought by some interviewees in London to be behind some leaders' reluctance to commit to the programme. This was something which, it was surmised, could be addressed with more effective communications: '*It's how we ... convince them and their governing body that they can do it without hurting their own school, and that it helps their own school to improve*' (member of strategic team, London). Interviewees in the Black Country argued that there was a gap in understanding and that in-depth research was needed to understand fully the impact of this sort of arrangement on schools involved in partnerships as providers of support.

¹⁰ Up to the end of the academic year 2009-10, London Leadership Strategies had involved only local authority maintained schools. However, some (supporting) schools opted to become academies in September 2010.

5.5 Transitions and sustainability

Interviewees across the Black Country, Greater Manchester and London were positive about the extent to which **leadership programmes and strategies had been designed to make sustainable impacts**. The perception was that the infrastructure for school improvement that had been established would leave a lasting legacy. As demonstrated throughout this report, many believed the impact had been equal to a '*culture shift*'; changes in behaviour and mindset amongst school staff and their leadership teams were observed and schools were beginning to see the mutual benefits of looking outside their own institution and sharing ideas, knowledge and capacity. Skills were built, processes revised and relationship and networks established.

Despite the strong legacy of these programmes, however, interviewees across the three areas said that they **would like to see the programme of support continued in some form**. Key to this concern was the need to maintain the momentum of the programmes and better realise their potential. One strategic interviewee in the Black Country said, for example,

I was involved in a local authority in London when City Challenge started and clearly there have been benefits for running for six to seven years. I can feel the momentum building and the pool of expertise improving [in the Black Country], and a degree of frustration that in April 2011, it might all finish.

A strategic interviewee in London highlighted a concern that, without some kind of investment in maintaining the system, schools would retreat back to their old ways of working:

London heads now believe that they are system leaders as well as school leaders. There has been a big change in their outlook. Whether we can maintain that identity in the future, because obviously it's tempting to go back and say "I'm going to pull up the drawbridge because there's not much money about, I'll just concentrate on my school because that's what I get paid to do".

Interviewees celebrated the pool of expertise and experience in school-to-school support that was now readily available across all three areas. However, they also questioned the extent to which this could be sustained without both **a dedicated centralised team to manage and deploy the support** and **the funding** necessary to release staff to support others. In addition, interviewees across all areas were positive that networks and relationships would continue to some extent, but were concerned that, without funding and coordination, these would inevitably become more informal, and therefore, less effective.

Although some interviewees in the Black Country were confident that schools could take forward the management of the National Teaching Schools programme, the general feeling across the three areas was that **schools were not experienced commissioners** and that they may not have the time or capacity to give to the initiative.

Interviewees were **keen that support continued to be deployed locally or regionally** by professionals that '*know their patch*'. For some, local authorities were well placed to fulfil this role but the general feeling was that they, also, may not have the capacity in the current economic climate. Their willingness to work across LA boundaries was also questioned by some, although LA interviewees in the Black Country felt that their work as the Black Country Children's Services Improvement Partnership (BCCSIP - a partnership of LAs) demonstrated their commitment to both this and school-to-school work.

For many, the involvement of the National College had bought with it an '*independent*' viewpoint, capacity, knowledge and perspective from outside the area and combined this with area-based expertise, e.g. by deploying experienced heads as NLEs/LLEs. Interviewees felt, that should programmes continue, they would ideally be managed by a body or organisation that could also perform these functions.

At the time of the autumn interviews, staff in all three areas were awaiting the publication of the schools White Paper which was to outline the future direction of schools policy and the status of school-to-school support. Despite this lack of clarity about what the future might hold, strategic staff in all three areas had proactively sought to identify transition solutions and plan their legacy. To this end:

- staff in the Black Country Leadership Strategy had held a number of legacy planning meetings. The BCCSIP had also held meetings to identify how they might begin to implement lessons learnt.
- the Greater Manchester Leadership Strategy had put in place processes to enable a central team to exist and for their expertise to be transferred and maintained within the system. To this end, nineteen outstanding headteachers had been selected as Operational Leads who would be responsible, as a partnership, for developing a strategy to sustain activities post April 2011.
- the London Leadership Strategy had put forward a proposal to the DfE on how best to replace the London Challenge. This suggested that strategic and operational boards were retained, that funding was put in place and that schools were able to access the support through a subscription-based service.

6. Conclusions: revisiting the hypotheses

This chapter reviews the evidence presented throughout this report. It draws out some overall conclusions and revisits the key evaluation hypotheses, as set out in the introductory chapter (see Section 1.2).

6.1 Revisiting the hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 – There is clear evidence that the impact high performing schools with capacity (NLEs and LLEs along with key members of staff) is having on schools at the failing/trailing edge of the system is such that they should play a key role in the post-2011 school improvement and leadership development landscape in City Challenge areas.

For all three areas and for the Leadership Strategies overall our analyses supported this hypothesis. There was evidence that the NLE/LLE model had both helped to develop leadership capacity and raise standards at the failing/trailing edge of the system. Interviewees supported the continuation of the NLE/LLE programmes, with their successful brokerage processes, and considered them to be good value for money and an important resource that should not be lost.

Hypothesis 2 – The LLE and NLE training and designation system delivers a trusted, high-quality force fitted for its roles in supporting other heads and leading the local system.

Our analyses partially supported this hypothesis, with some variations by region. As suggested in the previous paragraph, NLEs and LLEs were trusted and valued for their support and their support had been extremely effective. There were a few queries, however, about their initial training and designation. In London, it was felt that the induction and training of LLEs could have been improved by including more information about what the role would involve. Furthermore, some LLEs in London suggested that the training could have been differentiated to take account of attendees' previous experience (for example previous experience of coaching colleagues). However the ongoing training and support provided to NLEs and LLEs in the region was more positively received. In Greater Manchester there were also initial concerns around recruitment, training and the quality assurance of LLEs, but in later interviews, it was reported that these issues have largely been addressed.

In both London and the Black Country, there was little or no differentiation in the deployment of NLEs and LLEs. There could therefore be an argument for closer alignment of the training and application/designation processes for NLEs and LLEs in these regions. None of these minor issues relating to the training and designation system should detract from the key finding that the success of NLEs' and LLEs' achievements was widely acknowledged.

Hypothesis 3 – Teacher professional development initiatives, including the National Teaching Schools model, within City Challenge areas, deliver high-quality CPD with demonstrable impacts on teacher effectiveness, and pupil and school outcomes.

Our analyses strongly support this hypothesis in each of the three areas and across the Leadership Strategies as a whole. All those that expressed a view agreed that the teaching schools model delivered high quality CPD. The training was highly regarded by schools who sent staff on the programmes, and by the teachers who participated in them. The courses were often reported to have re-energised or re-enthused teachers. Improvements in teaching quality have also been evidenced by Ofsted inspections, and some schools also reported improved examination results which they attributed to the Leadership Strategy's programmes.

Hypothesis 4 – There is clear evidence to suggest that City Challenge system leaders' own schools benefit from their role in supporting the wider system.

This hypothesis was broadly supported by the evaluation findings. The Leadership Strategies provided NLE/LLEs with many opportunities to reflect on and improve their own practice. Staff in schools whose headteacher was deployed as an NLE/LLE had access to professional development opportunities that they would not have otherwise have had, including 'acting up' to provide cover and support for the headteacher and other senior managers. This provided opportunities for succession planning and capacity building within system leaders' own schools. Also, inviting staff from other schools to visit the 'host' schools encouraged constant self-evaluation and a more critical appraisal of the processes and teaching approaches they used.

Hypothesis 5 – School-to-school support work, as takes place in City Challenge areas, is more effective when working across LA boundaries.

This hypothesis was supported in principle, but there were some variations in practice across the three areas, probably due to historical and geographical factors. The majority of interviewees reported more school-to-school support work across the LA boundaries and there was evidence that they were committed to doing this more in the future. School-to-school support work across LA boundaries, where it had taken place, had been very powerful, as it brought new perspectives and breadth of experience. In addition, schools in different LAs were not viewed as being in direct competition with one another and this made it easier for best practice to be shared. Supported headteachers often valued having a source of support that was independent from their LA.

There was also, however, some within-LA working and this appeared to be seen by some as being equally as effective as across-LA working. Indeed, a small number of interviewees from local authorities felt that within-LA support was better, because the headteacher providing support had a better understanding of internal processes and policies.

Hypothesis 6 – Leadership programmes offered through City Challenge are well received by key stakeholders, and are making a difference, in terms of attainment and achievement, in the schools of the participants.

This hypothesis was supported to a considerable extent. It was supported, for example, in London where the statistical modelling¹¹ demonstrated some statistically significant associations with (but not causality for) pupil attainment, particularly in schools providing support. (The Black Country and Greater Manchester Leadership Strategies were newer and smaller in terms of school and pupil numbers, and these factors may help to explain why the modelling found only one positive statistically significant association with pupil attainment. Note also that the modelling findings on absence-related outcomes were somewhat ambiguous.)

However, in all three areas the hypothesis was strongly supported by the qualitative data: the Leadership Strategies programmes had been well received by key stakeholders and had been seen to make a positive difference to how school improvement has been implemented. The programmes had been particularly effective in outreach to schools, gaining buy-in and engaging, and energising school leaders, middle managers and teachers.

6.2 Conclusions

In conclusion, the evidence collected for this evaluation indicates that the Leadership Strategies were contributing to raising standards in schools in City Challenge areas; had led to improved leadership and teaching and learning; and had built a culture of collaborative working across school and geographical boundaries. In each region, an effective infrastructure had been established that was sensitive to the local context and local challenges. It also appears that what might be described as the two most ‘innovative’ aspects of City Challenge, the **Teaching Schools model** and the use of **NLEs/LLEs** were also the two most successful.

In some ways the Leadership Strategies represents a new form of school improvement. Previous models have tended to rely, at least in part, upon an outsider’s input, a consultant or an expert advising the school on how to improve. There was a tendency for initiatives to be ‘done to’ schools rather than to be ‘done with’ them. The key change, evident in both Teaching Schools and NLEs, has been the importance of peer-to-peer relationships and a stronger emphasis on ‘real’ practitioner-based school contexts, with school staff responsible for the delivery of school improvement strategies at all levels.

The Teaching Schools model was viewed positively by all those involved in it, either as providers or as recipients. This was seen to provide high-quality CPD which often

¹¹ See *Evaluation of City Challenge Leadership Strategies: Technical Appendix* (Rudd *et al.*, 2011), available upon request from the National College.

re-energised teachers. The training programmes were also viewed as being of good quality and good value for money.

NLE/LLE provision and school-to-school support was perhaps perceived to be the biggest success within this range of Leadership Strategies. The school-to-school relationships developed under this model were reported to be, largely, very successful. Recipient schools were enthusiastic about the bespoke, customised nature of this provision and they were pleased that they were active, reciprocal participants in the school improvement process (it was not ‘done to’ them). They particularly appreciated the school-based nature of the provision, which gave it credibility and grounding. School improvement support was being provided not by external consultants, disconnected from the school’s issues and circumstances, but by real headteachers and their colleagues, who had been in similar positions and had encountered and addressed similar issues.

NLEs and LLEs have been at the heart of developments in systems leadership, and this NFER finding is consistent with those from other evaluations carried out at similar times. For example, one of the main findings of an Ofsted report into London Challenge was that: ‘*Networks of experienced school leaders from the London Challenge Leadership Strategy... provide much of the expertise to tackle the development needs within supported schools and drive improvements in progress*’ (Ofsted, 2010a, p. 6). Another Ofsted report entitled *Developing Leadership: National Support Schools*, based on a study of 24 support and 20 client schools, stated that: ‘*All the client schools visited were positive about working with National Support Schools and how it had contributed to developing leadership skills in their schools*’ (Ofsted, 2010b, p. 45). We would agree with Hill and Matthews, writing in *Schools Leading Schools II*, that: ‘*the NLE programme, supplemented by the work of LLEs, is developing and becoming the core of systemic school improvement work in schools in England*’ (Hill and Matthews, 2010, p. 47).

Teaching Schools and **NLEs/LLEs** both featured in the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, in November 2010. The White Paper stated that the Government intended ‘to bring together the Training School and Teaching School models, to create a national network of Teaching Schools’ (DfE, 2010, paragraph 2.24); and in November 2010 the Secretary of State for Education announced plans to more than double the number of National Leaders of Education (NLEs), meaning that the number of NLEs will rise from 393 to 1000 by 2014.¹² City Challenge Leadership Strategies will not continue by name and the structure and funding will also no doubt change, but the NFER research team strongly recommends that these two successful elements of leadership provision should continue to be given serious consideration as being key parts of future school improvement support programmes.

¹² Press release [online] Available: <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/pressnotices/a0067808/new-leadership-for-children-in-need> [30 March 2011].

Glossary

BCCC	Black Country City Challenge
BCCSIP	Black Country Children's Services Improvement Partnership
BCLS	Black Country Leadership Strategy
CASPA	Comparison and Analysis of Special Pupil Attainment
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EAL	English as an Additional Language
FOS	Families of Schools
GMCC	Greater Manchester City Challenge
GMLS	Greater Manchester Leadership Strategy
ITP	Improving Teacher Programme
KTS	Keys to Success (schools)
LA	Local Authority
LC	London Challenge
LLE	Local Leader of Education
LLS	London Leadership Strategy
MLE	Middle Leader of Education
NLE	National Leader of Education
NTS	National Teaching School
OTP	Outstanding Teacher Programme
PCG	Primary Challenge Group (London)
SEF	School Evaluation Forms
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SLE	Specialist Leader of Education
TLIP	Teaching and Learning Immersion Programme
VIP	Sixth Form Programme (London)

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¹³ Available from the National College upon request.

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