

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31 JANUARY 2014

PROPOSALS FROM THE NORTH YORKSHIRE COMMISSION FOR SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT**1.0 Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report asks the Committee to:

- a. note the information in this report
- b. note and comment on the information provided in the North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement report attached as Appendix 1.

2.0 Background

2.1 On 18 June 2013 the Executive Member for Schools approved the establishment of a North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement and agreed to receive a report on its findings at the conclusion of its work.

2.2 The Commission was established to address the following question

How can we develop a collaborative system for effective school improvement that ensures that every school in North Yorkshire is good or outstanding?

It brought together leaders from primary, secondary and special schools, academies and federations, teaching schools and local authority teams with a clearly defined purpose:

- to consider how school leaders and local authority colleagues in North Yorkshire can best take advantage of new opportunities for collaborative and partnership working to support one another effectively.
- to explore potential models and ways of working (appropriate to the context of North Yorkshire) which ensure that every school is able to work collaboratively to get the support it needs - and/or support others.
- to build on what already works effectively within the County, and to develop an approach to school improvement which is shaped by school and LA leaders working collaboratively for the common good.

2.3 The Commission completed this important stage of its work during the autumn term and attached at **Appendix 1** is the Commission's final report. The report has been endorsed by all members of the Commission.

2.4 Approval was given on 14 January 2014, by the Executive Member for Schools, to undertake formal consultation with the wider education community on the recommendations contained in the Commission's report.

3.0 Next Steps

- 3.1 This has been a remarkable piece of collaborative work: collaborative between school and local authority leaders, between schools leaders and each other and between the county and national thinking. The report provides clear evidence on the essential importance of organic collaborations between schools as the route to overall improvement. It also recognises that such collaborations need to be allowed and encouraged to flourish through the devolution of resources and within the context of an ambitious and shared moral purpose.
- 3.2 The report recognises that the interests of children and young people necessitates positively challenging performance through those collaborations and implementing the support required to drive improvement. It also recognises that for schools already judged inadequate or below national floor standards of performance, the local authority needs to retain a particularly direct and highly targeted involvement.
- 3.3 The work of the Commission is now out to consultation with the wider school community and will be discussed at a series of meetings with head teachers, governing body representatives and members of the existing local authority school improvement service. An opportunity for written contributions on the work of the Commission will be afforded either through these meetings or through separate representation (either online or via email). Given the nature of the specific recommendation relating to the work of the current School Forum, that body will also be afforded full opportunity to consider the Commission's recommendations.
- 3.4 The Commission will reform, following this period of consultation, for a further day session in April 2014. The purpose of this further session will be to reflect on the feedback received, review the recommendations in the light of that feedback and agree next steps in the implementation of Commission proposals.
- 3.5 A report on the outcome of this consultation and on implementing a new approach to school improvement will be brought to Members later in the year.

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 The Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note the information in this report and in the report on the North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement.
- 4.2 The views of the Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are welcomed as part of the consultation with the wider North Yorkshire education community.

Pete Dwyer
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County Hall, Northallerton

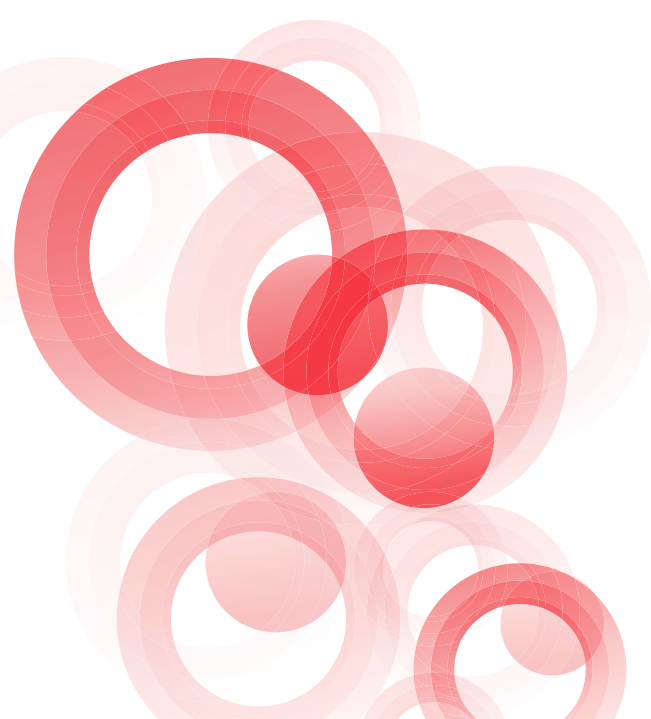
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Date:	January 2014
Background Documents:	None
Appendices:	Appendix 1– North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement report

**Report of the North Yorkshire
Commission for School Improvement**
January 2014



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Foreword



We hope our report provides the first steps towards a collaborative approach to school improvement



Our Commission represents a new approach. It has enabled us to consider the future of school improvement in North Yorkshire in a different way. Headteachers, governors and local authority leaders have had the opportunity to consider the future of school improvement *together*, in a spirit of genuine openness and partnership.

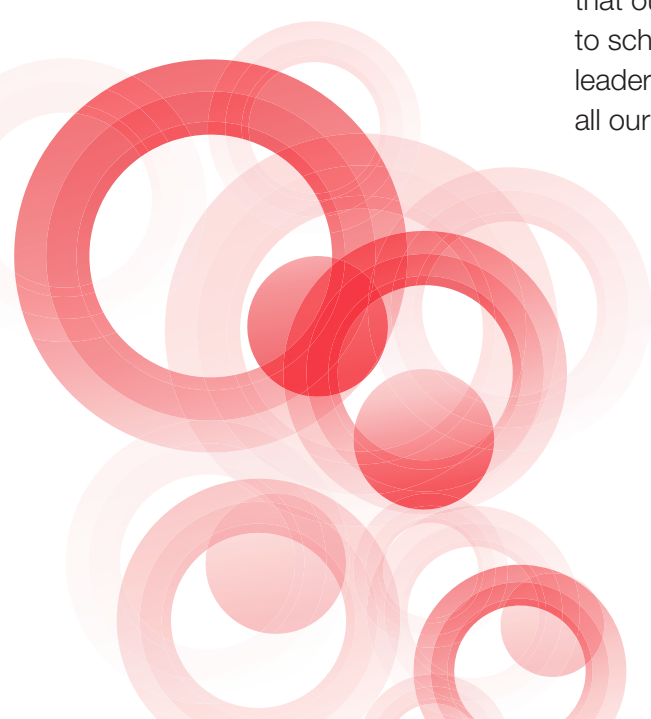
Over the course of three Commission sessions, we have weighed the evidence, discussed the options and developed conclusions for how best to move forward together as an education community in North Yorkshire.

We have not always agreed with one another. Our debates about how best to secure school improvement have been lively and robust. But we have returned always to the common purpose that unites us as an education community: to enable more children and young people to achieve more – much more, across the whole of our County, regardless of their circumstances or background.

From this igniting purpose, we forged the recommendations in this document.

As a Commission, we all are agreed on the content of our report. We know that it is only a first staging post in a wider debate that must now engage schools and education leaders across the whole of North Yorkshire.

As an education community, we have much more to do. But we hope that our report provides the first steps towards a collaborative approach to school improvement – a journey on which school and local authority leaders step forward together to secure the best possible outcomes for all our young people.



Executive summary



We were invited to consider how a collaborative system for effective school improvement could be developed



1. The North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement brought together school and local authority leaders to consider the future of school improvement.
2. As a Commission we were invited to consider how a collaborative system for effective school improvement could be developed, which ensures that every school in North Yorkshire is good or outstanding.
3. We took evidence from expert witnesses; we considered written material; and we examined how other organisations, nationally and internationally, have enabled schools to lead school improvement collaboratively. We also brought our own experience to the challenge, as leaders in education.
4. Throughout, our work as a Commission was driven by an over-riding common purpose: to enable every child in our County to achieve their best, regardless of their circumstances or background. We believe that this demands a transformational approach to school improvement – a step change in how we work together as an education community. That means every school leader has a part to play. No school, no child, should be left behind.
5. **Section two** of this report summarises the key evidence that we considered.
6. From our review, it was clear that no single model exists for collaboration within autonomous school systems. We concluded that whilst structures and resources are important *enablers* of change, culture and ways of working are more significant *drivers*.
7. We found that effective collaborative school systems exhibited some common features. These were:
 - *A collective moral purpose* that is shared by all the parties to the collaboration.
 - *Significant social capital* – that is good quality relationships between the main stakeholders with high levels of trust, honesty and mutual respect.
 - *Joint practice development* – that is a shared commitment to go beyond simple information sharing and to commit to learn together.
 - *Robust evaluation and challenge* between partners, so that collaborations are meaningful rather than “cosy”.

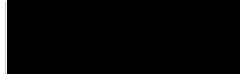
8. In **Sections three, four and five** we explore these themes in more detail and set out our proposals for nurturing effective school-led collaborations in every part of our County. Put simply, we believe that every school in North Yorkshire should be an active member of a school improvement alliance or collaboration.
9. **Section three** lays the foundation for this approach by proposing a declaration of our collective moral purpose as a whole education community. It describes our mission to transform outcomes for young people and articulates values and behaviours that we share as effective partners and collaborators.
10. **Section four** describes the practical steps that we can take to transform the way school improvement is designed and led. It is based on a three-part approach.
11. **First**, we see **school-led collaborations** – in all their diversity – as the engine of a self-improving school system. At their most effective, such collaborations create the space and opportunity for creative and innovative working between schools. They are how schools take ownership of school improvement.
12. Many such collaborations exist already across our County and more are under development. That growth must continue.
13. **Second**, to encourage that growth and to create the environment in which school collaborations can flourish, we believe a small number of school-led “**Commissioning Groups**” is needed across the County.
14. Commissioning Groups will extend and facilitate school collaborations; they will provide (or facilitate) effective challenge within collaborations; and they will commission and/or broker support for those schools that need it.
15. Each Commissioning Group will be run by headteachers, appropriately supported.
16. **Third**, we believe school leaders must be able to influence policy and resource decisions that affect the whole system at the strategic level. To achieve this, we propose a sector-led “**Education Partnership**” at County level which brings together the leaders of the Commissioning Groups with local authority leaders and others. Such a partnership would assume and fulfil the current statutory responsibilities of the Schools Forum.

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17. The Education Partnership will ensure the principle of “sector-led” is applied to the whole system, locating the education agenda within wider partnership arrangements. Crucially, it will continue to build coherence in a collective approach to school improvement, school organisation and school funding.
 18. **Section five** considers the resource implications of our proposals. Implementation of our report requires much greater devolution of resources closer to schools themselves. We think that is the best way to unlock the potential of school collaboration and secure greater impact for every pound invested in school improvement.
 19. Finally, we invite every school leader in our County to join this discussion. We look forward to hearing colleagues’ views on our report and continuing the journey together to ensure every young person in North Yorkshire has access to the right opportunities, experiences and support that they need to succeed.

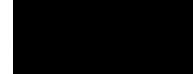
Commission members



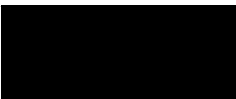
Simone Bennett
Headteacher, Christ Church CoE VC
Primary School



Gail Brown
Headteacher, Crayke CoE VC Primary
School



Paul Bowlas
Headteacher, Holy Trinity CoE Junior
School



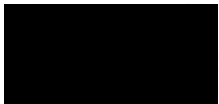
Diana Clegg
Chair of Governors, Askrigg VC Primary
School



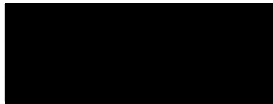
Jane Douglass
Headteacher, Castleton and Glaisdale
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Kathy Thompson
Headteacher, Kellington Primary School



Keeley Ungerechts
Headteacher, Alanbrooke CP School



Ian Yapp
Headteacher, Riverside CP School



Yvonne Limb
Headteacher, Springwater School



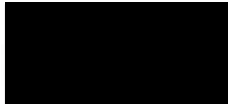
Catherine Brooker
Headteacher, Stokesley School



Andrew Cummings
Headteacher, South Craven School



David Read
Headteacher, Scalby School



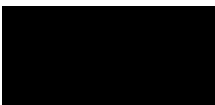
Rosemary Rees
Chair of Governors, Settle College



Richard Sheriff
Headteacher, Harrogate Grammar
School (Teaching School)



Carl Sugden
Headteacher, King James's School



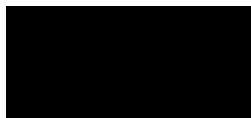
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1. About the Commission

- 1.1 The North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement was set up in June 2013. At the invitation of the County Council, the Commission was asked to undertake an evidence-based inquiry into collaborative models of school improvement and to make specific recommendations to shape future policy.
- 1.2 As Commission members, we were asked to consider the following question:

How can we develop a collaborative system for effective school improvement that ensures that every school in North Yorkshire is good or outstanding?

- 1.3 Our Commission brought together leaders from primary, secondary and special schools, academies and federations, teaching schools and local authority teams with a clearly defined purpose:
- to consider how school leaders and local authority colleagues in North Yorkshire can best take advantage of new opportunities for collaborative and partnership working to support one another effectively.
 - to explore potential models and ways of working (appropriate to the context of North Yorkshire) which ensure that every school is able to work collaboratively to get the support it needs - and/or support others.
 - to build on what already works effectively within the County, and to develop an approach to school improvement which is shaped by school and LA leaders working collaboratively for the common good.

A full list of Commission Members is at Appendix 1

- 1.4 Other than to report by the end of the Autumn Term, no limits were placed on our work. We had complete freedom to address this question in whatever way we wished. The Commission was supported by external facilitators and provided with sufficient resources to undertake its work.
- 1.5 The Commission held three formal sessions, in September, October and November, questioning a series of external witnesses and considering a wide range of published evidence. A list of the witnesses who met the Commission is included in Appendix 2.
- 1.6 This report is the result of the Commission's inquiry. It provides an overview of the issues that shaped our discussions and makes recommendations on the basis of our findings. It sets out proposals for further consultation within the wider education and school community of North Yorkshire.



2. Collaboration and school improvement: assessing the evidence

Our challenge

- 2.1 Schools in North Yorkshire provide a good education for the majority of our children and young people. Around 80% of all schools are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted and the results achieved by students in our secondary schools in particular are amongst some of the best in the country.
- 2.2 Several of our headteachers have been recognised as National Leaders of Education, we have a number of designated Teaching Schools and there are beacons of outstanding practice across our County, recognised nationally by Ofsted and the Department for Education.
- 2.3 As an education community in North Yorkshire we have achieved a lot - but we know that we have a lot more still to do.
- 2.4 Overall results in our primary schools at Key Stage 2 are below those of some comparable local authorities - and in our primary and secondary schools alike, students from poorer backgrounds achieve less than their peers from more affluent homes.
- 2.5 Even though less than a quarter of our schools are rated as requiring improvement, the scale of our County – the largest geographically in England – means that over 70 schools fall into that category. And whilst we have seen improvement in those schools most in need of support, at the same time we have seen other schools fall into difficulties. This raises questions about whether the current system is best organised to identify vulnerable schools and prevent their decline.
- 2.6 This context sets a clear challenge to our Commission: to develop proposals that deliver long term and sustainable improvement in school performance, enabling every young person in North Yorkshire to achieve more, regardless of their background or where they live.



The primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools, and the wider system should be designed so that our best schools and leaders can take on greater responsibility



Background

- 2.7 The Schools White Paper published in 2010, “The Importance of Teaching”¹, set a clear direction of travel for a more autonomous school system in which greater responsibility for school improvement is passed to schools themselves. The White Paper put it simply:
- “The primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools, and the wider system should be designed so that our best schools and leaders can take on greater responsibility”.
- 2.8 There is compelling international evidence that such school autonomy can lead to improved performance and enhance student outcomes when it takes place within a school system with high professional standards and clear accountabilities.
- 2.9 McKinsey’s examination of the world’s best performing education system confirms this view – and goes further². Researchers suggested that a common feature of schools systems that showed sustained improvement was a so-called “mediating layer”. This took different forms in different systems, ranging from geographical clusters in Singapore and Boston, to subject based networks in Chinese jurisdictions. Researchers stated:
- “...the mediating layer fortifies system improvement efforts by opening up channels between schools to share learning, standardize practice, and support each other”.
- 2.10 In other words, school improvement is more likely to be lasting when it takes place within some form of co-ordinating or collaborative structure.
- 2.11 This has been visible in the rapid pace of change in the schools sector in England since 2010. As schools enjoy ever greater levels of individual autonomy, so schools are *choosing* to join an increasing variety of collaborative structures which meet their needs and local circumstances.

¹ Department for Education, The Importance of Teaching - The Schools White Paper 2010 (Cmnd 7980)

² McKinsey, How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better, 2010

2.12 As a Commission, we reviewed a number of new school collaborative arrangements, which have emerged since 2010, including those in Hertfordshire, York, Brighton and Southend³. In addition, we took oral evidence from National Leaders of Education in Bradford, Birmingham and Greater Manchester⁴ and also from the former Director of Children’s Services in Wigan⁵ about the development of school partnerships and collaborations in those areas.

2.13 From our review, it was clear to us that no single model exists for collaboration within autonomous school systems. Different approaches have been developed in different areas, each tuned to the needs of their local context.

2.14 We noted that researchers from the NFER reached the same conclusion in their analysis of local arrangements for organising school to school support. Acknowledging the diversity of local arrangements, however, researchers were able to discern “common features” of apparently different local approaches. These were³:

- a shared moral purpose within local partnerships
- a vision and strategy for teaching and learning
- clear roles and accountabilities between parties
- an agreed framework for school to school support
- processes for evaluation, challenge and accountability in respect of school performance

2.15 As a Commission, we found these features to be a useful checklist to guide our investigation. We also recognised these features in many of the successful local collaborations already occurring within the County. [See next page: Esk Valley Alliance].

³ National Foundation for Educational Research, What works in enabling school improvement? The role of the middle tier, April 2013

⁴ See list of expert witnesses at Appendix 2 for details of contributors to the Commission.

⁵ Crossley, What works in enabling school improvement? The role of the middle tier report on the research findings from the Wigan Local Authority case study, 2013



The Esk Valley Alliance (EVA)

EVA is a long standing alliance of eight schools. It emerged from a recognition that schools could be stronger, more sustainable and provide better outcomes and opportunities for everyone if they improved their work together. It is modelled on the six key focus areas of a Teaching School Alliance.

The Alliance has NLEs, LLEs, SLEs and Professional Partners within the group who are involved in school to school support and CPD delivery.

The Alliance attributes its success to the excellent relationships between headteachers which is based on trust and mutual respect.

The Alliance has a joint long term plan, development plan and shared subject leaders who work in partnership across schools. Data is collected and analysed in all subjects with moderation being part of each subject leader's action plan. Staff across the Alliance have two shared performance management targets; one is for leadership development at all levels.

The Alliance also works on a number of joint research projects including reading forums, Talk4Maths and a programme on writing. The latter involves teachers of all subjects from primary and secondary working together to develop high quality writing across the curriculum.



We believe in North Yorkshire, like Government, that the primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools.



The Local Authority role

- 2.16 Our review of models of collaborative school improvement also focused on the role that local authorities play in such arrangements. We examined case studies from eighteen other local authorities, including Gloucestershire, Devon and Suffolk⁶.
- 2.17 Announcing the creation of our Commission in June 2013, County Councillor Arthur Barker, North Yorkshire's Executive Member for Schools said this⁷:
- “We believe in North Yorkshire, like Government, that the primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools. But we also believe that a local authority has a key leadership role in developing effective partnership working, building relationships between schools, sharing knowledge, facilitating peer learning and upholding accountability”.
- 2.18 As a Commission, we welcomed this clear expression of the shared moral purpose that exists between schools and local authority to enable more children to achieve more in every part of our County.
- 2.19 Indeed, the 2010 White Paper⁸, which accelerated the trend towards increased greater school autonomy, also described a key role for local authorities:
- “In a more autonomous school system, local authorities have an indispensable role to play as champions of children and parents, ensuring that the school system works for every family and using their democratic mandate to challenge every school to do the best for their population”.

⁶ LGA/SOLACE, The council role in school improvement: Case studies of emerging models, June 2013
⁷ North Yorkshire County Council Press Release, North Yorkshire targets school improvement, June 2013
⁸ Department for Education, The Importance of Teaching - The Schools White Paper 2010 (Cmnd 7980)



At the heart of collaboration is the challenge of transferring knowledge and practice around the system – between individuals and between organisations



2.20 More recently, the House of Commons Education Committee has considered the role of local authorities in a school-led system. The Committee conducted its own inquiry into school collaborations and partnerships⁹, taking evidence from a wide range of witnesses, concluding:

“Local authorities still have a critical role to play in a school-led improvement system, in particular through creating an “enabling environment” within which collaboration can flourish.... We also support the new system which is emerging with recognition that the expertise lies within schools but with local authorities as part of the picture”.

2.21 Taken together, the original White Paper and the recent Education Committee report express concisely two of the key functions of local authorities: to challenge (and intervene where necessary); and to enable. These are important themes that we took forward in our discussions as a Commission.

A Culture of collaboration

2.22 We took the sheer diversity of models of school partnerships that we encountered as proof that structure (whilst important) is far less significant than culture as a foundation for effective collaboration. In his oral evidence to the Commission¹⁰, Professor David Hargreaves, summed it up like this:

“At the heart of collaboration is the challenge of transferring knowledge and practice around the system – between individuals and between organisations. Most “sharing of good practice” is ineffective because it takes no account of culture and fails to recognise that new practice needs to be learned afresh to be adopted and sustained”.

2.23 As a Commission, we agreed strongly that collaboration is most effective when it takes place within a culture of positive relationships based on trust and a shared sense of purpose. Within the County, we were able to examine examples of where this is happening already in school partnerships which have grown organically to improve outcomes by developing practice jointly.

⁹ House of Commons Education Committee, School Partnerships and Cooperation, Fourth Report of Session 2013–14, October 2013

¹⁰ Professor David Hargreaves, oral evidence to the Commission, 20 September 2013.



The new world needs more than the good intentions of ‘sharing good practice’, namely the demonstrable movement of practice that improves teaching and learning.



2.24 Professor David Hargreaves makes a powerful argument for such “joint practice development” at the heart of effective collaboration¹¹.

“The new world needs more than the good intentions of ‘sharing good practice’, namely the demonstrable movement of practice that improves teaching and learning. As has so often been found in the business world, the best way to move practice is to move those who practise it close to the site to which it is to be moved... When such peer-to-peer sharing takes place it is not a matter of unilateral practice transfer, important as that can be. Rather, through mutual observation and coaching the donor reflects further on the practice that is being shared and explores ways in which it can be improved further.”

2.25 This approach, best described as joint practice development (JPD), lies at the heart of many of the most powerful collaborations we examined. It has a firm evidence base. Research tells us that professionals’ behaviours change when we build competence at local level, where practitioners see what the best practice looks like and are able to practice new skills with support from others¹². That is how sustainable improvements in practice are most likely to happen.

Joint Practice Development at Stokesley School

The Deep Learning Team is a voluntary group of teachers and support staff which meets at least three times every term to develop practice through exploration, action research and feedback.

Team members bring practices or techniques that they have found to be effective. The whole group experiences the strategies or activities and discuss how and when they might use them.

After trialling the activities in their own classrooms, the team comes back together to report impact. At this point, modifications may be made to the strategy to improve its effectiveness.

¹¹ Professor David Hargreaves for National College for School Leadership, *Leading a self-improving school system*, September 2011.

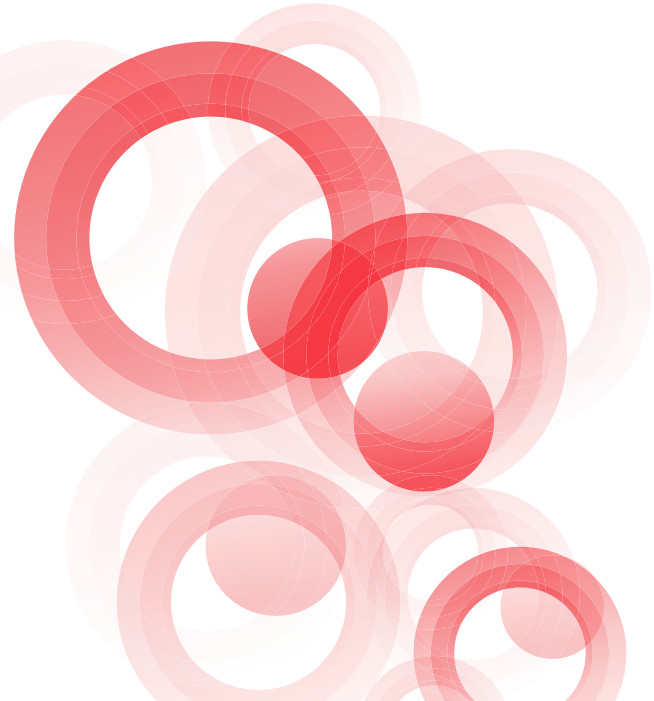
¹² See systematic reviews from the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre (EPPI) at the University of London Institute of Education. Relevant reviews include: What do teacher impact data tell us about collaborative CPD? EPPI; How do specialist inputs in CPD affect teachers, their learning and their pupils’ learning? Cordingley, P et al, EPPI; How do collaborative and sustained CPD and sustained but not collaborative CPD affect teaching and learning? EPPI; How does collaborative CPD for teachers of the 5-16 age range affect teaching and learning? EPPI

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- 2.26 We noted that where such collaborative practice is already taking place (in North Yorkshire and elsewhere), it is often to be found in isolated pockets. The challenge, therefore, is to create an environment in which such collaborative working flourishes across a whole system, so that no school is left behind.
- 2.27 This requires an understanding of the processes that underpin effective collaboration. Simply, what are the tools and techniques that leaders employ to create successful partnership?
- 2.28 A wide range of research evidence was available to the Commission to explore the nature of partnership and joint practice development¹³. Overall, we found the evidence presented by Professor David Hargreaves to be the most useful summary of the characteristics of effective collaboration. Reflecting the available evidence, Professor Hargreaves suggested to the Commission that successful collaborative school improvement requires the following.
- **A collective moral purpose** that is shared by all the parties to the collaboration. This informs the direction and development of collaborative activity.
 - **Significant social capital** – that is good quality relationships between the main stakeholders with high levels of trust, honesty and mutual respect.
 - **Joint practice development** – that is a shared commitment to go beyond simple information sharing and to commit to learn together.
 - **Robust evaluation and challenge** between partners, so that collaborations are meaningful rather than “cosy”.
- 2.29 From our experience as leaders as well as the wider evidence, we agreed.

¹³ See, for example, Sebba et al, Joint practice development (JPD): What does the evidence suggest are effective approaches?, for National College of School Leadership, 2012

Shaping the approach

- 2.30 From our review of the evidence and inputs from expert witnesses, as a Commission we formed a clear view of the principles that should underpin our approach and recommendations.
- 2.31 We agreed that proposals for collaboration must be founded on a compelling and **collective moral purpose**. Common purpose enables partners to address differences within collaboration as well as build on agreement.
- 2.32 We agreed that local **collaborations may take different forms**, with a recognition that partnerships that form organically around specific needs are often the most powerful. Evidence from our teaching schools, in particular, supports this view.
- 2.33 We agreed that effective collaboration must involve rigour. Partnerships with a purpose involve **evaluation and challenge**.
- 2.34 We agreed that our overall approach to collaboration within the County must be **transformative** – for every child and young person, for every school and for the whole system. That means every school leader has a part to play. No school, no child, should be left behind.
- 2.35 In the next sections, we set out our proposals for how we might achieve such a model of collaboration in North Yorkshire, starting with the need to establish a sense of common purpose.





3. Our collective moral purpose

- 3.1 Our work as a Commission was driven by a common purpose: to enable every child in our County to achieve their best, regardless of their circumstances or background. If we are successful, more children will achieve more; and the gap in attainment between children from richer and poorer backgrounds will be closed.
- 3.2 This shared purpose was critical to our work as a Commission. It ensured that we stayed focused on the key issues; and it established common ground on which to resolve areas of disagreement openly.
- 3.3 Based on this experience, as well as the wider research evidence, we believe that a collective moral purpose is critical to the success of wider collaboration across schools in North Yorkshire.

Bringing education to life

- 3.4 Enhanced collaboration between schools (and their wider partners) should make a tangible difference to the lives of young people. Otherwise it has no purpose.
- 3.5 As a Commission, we considered how young people might experience this difference. If schools and their partners are working together effectively, we believe that young people in North Yorkshire should experience:
- a joined up approach to their education, with attractive pathways to the right learning opportunities for them, wherever that may be, equipping them for successful lives and careers.
 - the highest quality teaching, inspired by the best teachers in our County.
 - an unflinching commitment from every part of our education community to nurture their ambition, build their resilience and enable them to achieve their best.
- 3.6 Overall, we want to equip our young people to compete with the best across the UK and beyond. We want to fire their ambition as global citizens of the future, confident to look beyond our County to seize opportunity wherever that may be.
- 3.7 To achieve this, as an education community, we must commit to a shared mission to underpin our collective purpose. It should be an explicit statement that sets out our common purpose, as well as defining the values and behaviours which will define how we work together.
- 3.8 The Commission proposes an overarching mission statement and four key areas of collaboration. These are set out on the next page.



Our mission

High-quality education transforms lives. It brings alive knowledge and skills and ignites enterprise and endeavour. It liberates the talent and ingenuity of everyone it touches.

Education is the driving force at the heart of our communities.

As educators, we are determined that every young person in our schools must have access to the right opportunities, experiences and support that they need to succeed.

That is why we commit to work together in a spirit of professional generosity in which the interests of young people always come first.



Our commitments: We will work together to...

...deliver the right opportunities and experiences for every child

We always put the interests of children and young people before those of school structures and organisations.

We ensure continuity of a high quality education experience, with smooth transitions between schools.

We support every young person to find a pathway that offers them the best opportunities and experiences, wherever those opportunities are to be found.

We share a moral responsibility for the well being of every child in our locality, especially those young people who find themselves at the margins of the education system.

...create a shared culture of professional development, innovation and transformation

We share our knowledge, skills and experience.

We collaborate to create opportunities for professional learning, which make our schools dynamic and exciting places to work.

We work together to identify and develop the leaders of the future to sustain our families of schools.

We encourage innovation to develop practice which is informed by evidence, where “what counts is what works”.

...build an environment of trust for effective challenge and support

We are transparent in our dealing with others. We share responsibility for upholding community confidence in education; we never seek advantage by denigrating others’ performance.

We challenge to support improvement, not to place blame.

We are honest about the need to tackle under performance.

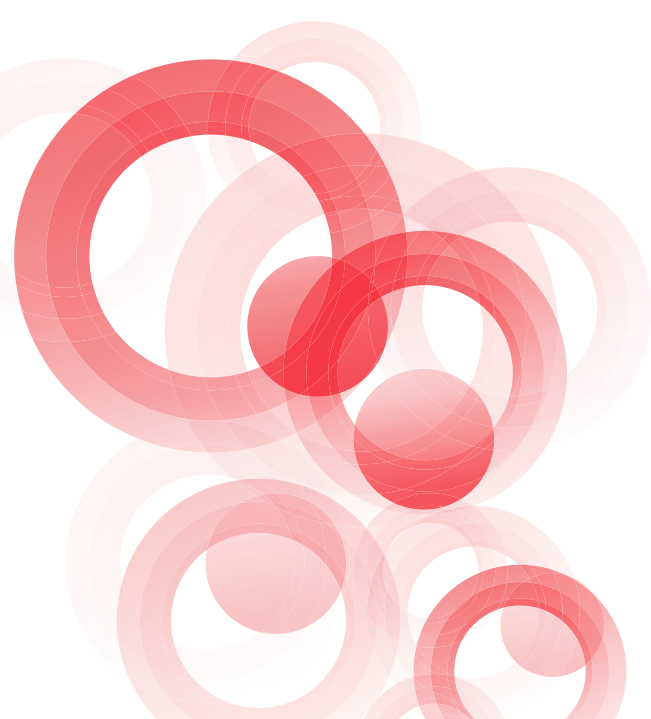
We believe that collaboration is stronger when it is reciprocal – where partners both give and receive support within a network.

...get the right skills in the right place

We respect and develop the professional skills of staff and leaders of those staff.

We seek to ensure we have our best people working on our biggest problems in the hardest places.

- 3.9 As a Commission, we recognised the tensions between these commitments. There is a obvious tension, for example, between the commitment to collaborate in order to support, whilst at the same time enabling honest and open challenge.
- 3.10 In the next section, we set out our proposals for addressing these tensions, building on a strong collective moral purpose to create a dynamic framework for local collaboration.





4. A framework for collaboration

Overview

School-led collaborations

- 4.1 We believe that every school in North Yorkshire should be an active member of a school improvement alliance or collaboration.
- 4.2 These may take many forms, shaped according to local context and driven by local need. They are often formed organically, and may be transitory or sustained, single phase or cross phase. They may be focused on a single issue of school improvement or have a broader improvement focus. They may be linked by a teaching school, a sponsor in the case of academies, or a diocese in the case of schools with a religious character. They may include schools beyond the County. Schools may be part of more than one alliance.
- 4.3 Alliances and collaborations are always school-led. They should be dynamic and exciting places to be. They create the space and opportunity for creative and innovative working between schools. They are how schools take ownership and responsibility for school improvement. They make a difference.
- 4.4 Such alliances and collaborations are where social capital is built up and where joint practice development is most likely to occur. They are an organic form of collaboration and, at their most effective, such alliances and partnerships are an engine of school improvement. The best transform young people's experience of education.
- 4.5 Many such collaborations exist already across our County and more are under development. That growth must continue.
- 4.6 However, reliance on these forms of collaboration alone is not sufficient to realise our collective ambitions. Not every school enjoys the benefits of being part of an effective collaboration, and as some partnerships and alliances grow stronger and transform performance, so some schools outside an alliance risk falling behind.
- 4.7 Equally, not all organic collaborations have had time to mature to the level of the best. Many do not yet have sufficient social capital to enable effective peer review and challenge to take place – some may not see this as their purpose. Yet, as we have seen, such rigour is an essential component of effective school improvement collaboration.



To create the environment in which local collaboration can flourish, we believe a small number of school-led Commissioning Groups is needed across the county



- 4.8 Finally, whilst we know that collaboration supports sustained school improvement, we need to know more about which types of collaboration work best in which circumstances. Objective evaluation of school collaborative models is required to make sure we are investing time and effort in partnership working that makes a difference.
- 4.9 For all these reasons, we cannot simply rely on the uneven growth of organic collaboration if we want every school to benefit. Where collaborative arrangements do not exist currently – or where they are immature – we need a means to nurture their development.

Commissioning Groups

- 4.10 To create the environment in which local collaboration can flourish, we believe a small number of school-led Commissioning Groups is needed across the County. As a starting point, we have proposed five such groups based on geographical areas, each with around 70 member schools. Commissioning Groups will be run on behalf of member schools by a small executive board of headteachers. These will be elected by member schools.
- 4.11 Commissioning Groups will ensure that schools themselves are leading the way on school improvement. (The detailed working of the Commissioning Groups is set out later in this section.)
- 4.12 The boards of Commissioning Groups will have three areas of responsibility:
 - **They will extend and facilitate school collaborations** to ensure that every school is an active player within a school improvement alliance or partnership which meets their needs. They will develop collaborations where they do not exist currently and evaluate existing collaborative practice to build on the best.
 - **They will provide (or facilitate) effective challenge** for all member schools within the Commissioning Group. They will have the information and capability to review school performance and to provide diagnostic consultancy.
 - **They will commission and/or broker support** for member schools, drawing on a commissioning budget to do so. This may involve, for example, commissioning a local school collaboration to support another school within the area. They will have specific responsibility for providing support to schools in challenging circumstances and will be able to call on a specialist support team in such cases.

4.13 We explore the agenda and working arrangements for Commissioning Groups further in paragraphs 4.21 – 4.34.

An Education Partnership

4.14 As the final part of this overview, we believe that there must be a mechanism to connect intelligence and insights gathered from local school improvement activity with strategic decision-making at a County-wide level. To achieve this, we propose a sector-led Education Partnership at County level which brings together the leaders of the Commissioning Groups with local authority leaders.

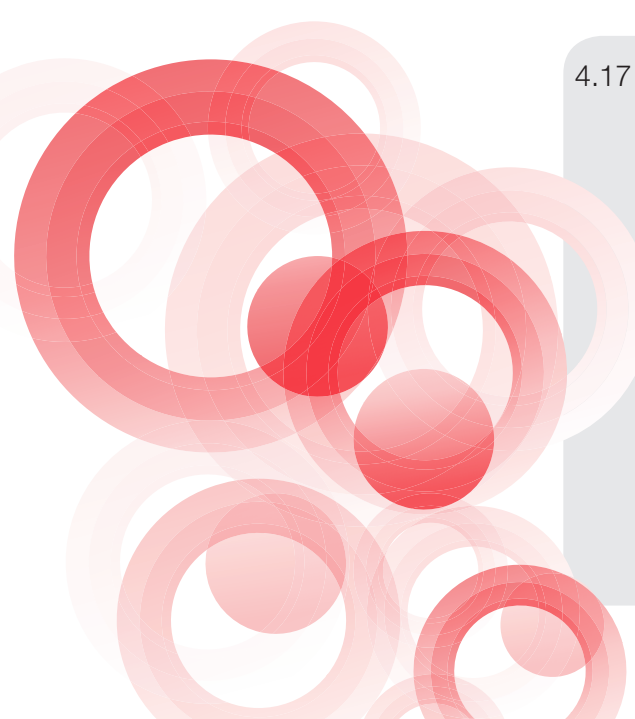
4.15 The Education Partnership's functions would include:

- Carrying out statutory duties and functions of the Schools Forum ensuring that resources are used and distributed wisely to support further improvement.
- Providing oversight and scrutiny of school admission arrangements and to consider any proposals for changes to school organisation arrangements.
- Approving strategic plans concerning special educational needs, 14-19 strategy, behaviour management, the education of looked after children etc.

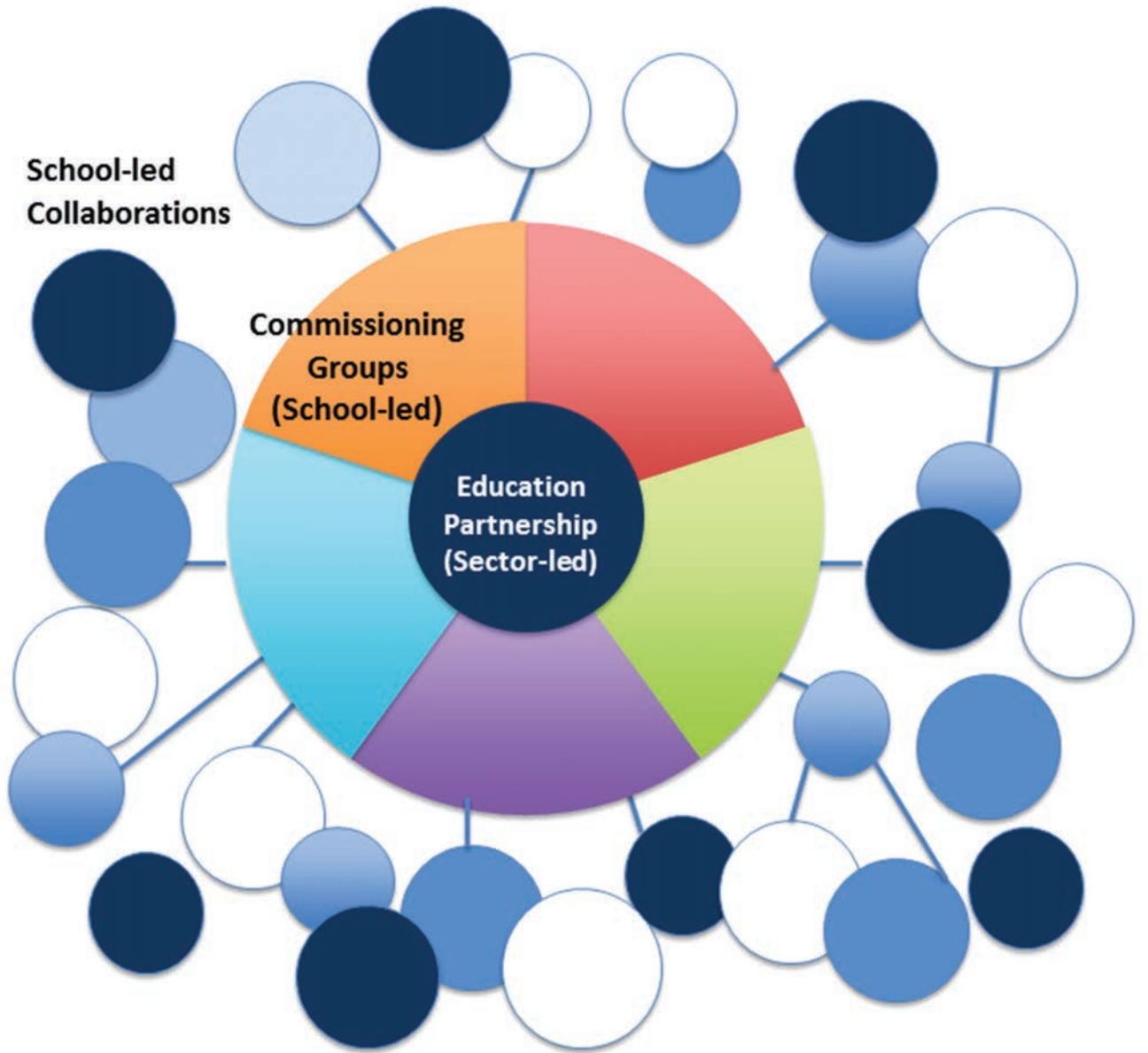
4.16 The Education Partnership will ensure the principle of sector-led is applied to the whole system, locating the education agenda within wider partnership arrangements – for example within the wider planning framework of the Children's Trust and Health and Well being Board. Crucially, it will continue to build coherence in a collective approach to school improvement, school organisation and school funding.

4.17 In summary, then, we propose a three-part approach:

- To nurture and support school-led collaborations, formed by school leaders in response to specific school improvements needs. Every school should be part of at least one such collaborative group.
- To form geographical Commissioning Groups to ensure there are mechanisms for evaluation and review within collaborations, to help collaborations diagnose need and to commission and broker support. They will be a catalyst for new school-led collaborations where none exist currently.
- To form a single, County level Education Partnership to locate the work of school improvement collaborations within the wider education agenda.



4.18 This diagram illustrates this three-part approach.



4.19 It is important to stress that we see this model as a starting position only. To succeed, the model must be dynamic. As concepts of collaboration develop and mature, roles within the system will change. Schools-led collaborations will become more sophisticated and develop the characteristics of a self-improving system. Commissioning Groups (and the Education Partnership) will become increasingly strategic in nature – with consequent changes to their roles, remits and size. As the model moves towards maturity over a period of years, relationships will re-calibrate and the system will be driven increasingly by what happens within school collaborations.

4.20 In the remainder of this section, we will set out each component of the three-part approach in our starting model in more detail.

What does effective school-led collaboration look like?

4.21 As we have described already, effective school-led collaboration for school improvement takes many forms. Local partnerships and alliances should be both engaging and challenging places to be – and they should always make a measurable difference. They are engines of change.

4.22 Whilst collaborations take many forms, we believe they should exhibit some common characteristics of effectiveness. To this end, we believe every school should be an active member of a school improvement alliance, collaboration or partnership which:

- shares the commitments and behaviours articulated in the collective moral purpose set out in section three.
- is committed to an evidence-informed approach.
- seeks opportunities for shared approaches to professional learning.
- has a robust mechanism for evaluating and reviewing performance within the collaboration.
- has clarity of purpose, clear leadership and makes best use of resources.

4.23 We see it as the role of Commissioning Groups to evaluate and develop the quality of collaboration in their areas so that every school is in a worthwhile alliance that makes a difference.



Each Commissioning Group will have 70 to 80 schools as members. Member schools will elect a small executive board of headteachers equal to around 10% of their membership



What will a Commissioning Group look like?

4.24 We see Commissioning Groups as catalysts for change and transformation. They are critical to our proposals. That is why we considered carefully how they might be structured and resourced, how their remit might develop, and what conditions might be necessary to enable them to succeed.

Governance of Commissioning Groups

4.25 As described above, we propose the formation of five cross phase Commissioning Groups based on geographical areas. [We also discussed the merits of forming two additional County-wide Commissioning Groups, specifically for secondary and special schools. This is discussed further at paragraph 4.40.]

4.26 Each geographically based Commissioning Group will have around 70-80 schools as members. Member schools will elect a small executive board of headteachers equal in size to around 10% of their membership (ie 70 schools would elect seven board members). Boards must include school leaders from primary and secondary phases and also special schools. Elected terms will be for at least two years, with board members able to stand for re-election. The board will elect a Chair and Vice Chair – both of whom will be expected to commit dedicated time to lead the Commission for which their school will be reimbursed. The Chair's commitment is expected to take 1-2 days per week.

4.27 Several members of our Commission expressed support for three year terms of office for the boards of Commissioning Groups. This is an issue we would like to explore with colleague headteachers in further discussion about this report.

4.28 Groups may choose to invite 2-3 non voting standing observers into their boards, as non executive advisers. These might be school governors, for example. This is in addition to the specialist staff support that boards will need to do their work.

Resources

4.29 As well as their role in evaluating and developing local collaboration described above, Commissioning Groups also have a pivotal role in providing challenge within the system, and in commissioning support for local schools and/or groups of schools.

4.30 To fulfil these roles, Commissioning Groups will need:

- resource to release headteacher time to shape and focus the work of the Commissioning Group.
- access to high quality data and intelligence on the performance and context of schools in their area, with the analytical capacity to interpret such information rapidly.
- a protocol for data-sharing between schools.
- resource to manage the day to day “business” of the Commissioning Group – for example in brokerage support to local schools.
- market intelligence of where the best sources of support are to be found to broker against the needs of local schools. (This means an effective system of knowledge management and examining our IT capability to support such a function.)
- a commissioning budget.

4.31 These requirements will be met through re-direction of local authority resources – both funding and people. In some cases, this might involve the devolution of resources to Commissioning Groups, for example by decentralising school improvement funding to provide local commissioning budgets. This might also involve the allocation of local authority school improvement staff to an individual Commissioning Group to provide additional capacity to develop the group’s programme of work.

4.32 In other cases, local authority staff may work centrally to provide a common service to all Commissioning Groups. The provision of high quality data, for example, might be best delivered through a single data team, which supports the data requirements of all groups.

4.33 These considerations will be the subject of an implementation plan, to be developed after consultation on this report has been completed.

Remit

4.34 Commissioning Groups are free to develop the strategies they think best suit the context of their geography, within the terms of their remit. Their remit is clear.

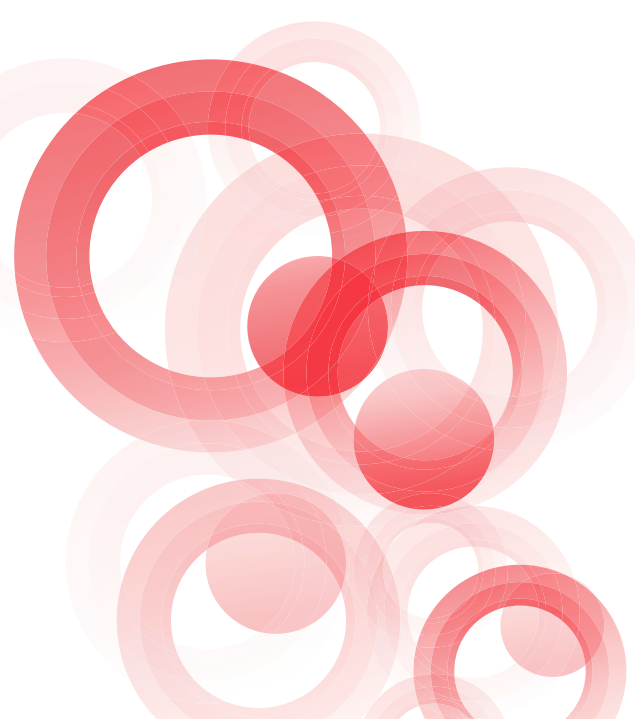
- *They are founded on the collective moral purpose set out in section three.*
- *They are focused on school improvement, with a goal of ensuring that every child in their area attends a school that is good or outstanding.*
- *They have a facilitation function to nurture and build collaborative working by:*
 - *fostering new collaborations where they are needed around specific school improvement priorities.*
 - *enabling every school in their area to become an active member of a school improvement alliance or collaboration.*
 - *evaluating the effectiveness of local school-led collaborations and develop the intelligence as to where capacity is being created.*
- *They have a challenge and support function to ensure that all schools are good and outstanding. They review school performance data and ensure that every school in their area benefits from external challenge – directly via the Commissioning Group where necessary, or through robust arrangements in a school-led collaboration wherever possible.*
- *They provide diagnostic consultancy to help schools and collaborations plan improvement.*
- *They commission and broker the support that the schools in their area need to become (or remain) good and outstanding. They use their commissioning budgets for this purpose.*
- *They have specific responsibility to work with schools facing challenge, working with the local authority when necessary to deploy specialist support to secure rapid improvement where necessary.*

- *They evaluate the effectiveness of local school-led collaborations and develop new collaborations where they are needed around specific school improvement priorities. They ensure that every school in their area is an active member of a school improvement alliance or collaboration.*
- *They are members of the County-wide Education Partnership, where they account for the use of their commissioning budget – and hold others to account.*
- *Through the Education Partnership, they influence school finance and organisation policy so that it is compatible with school improvement planning.*

4.35 To succeed, Commissioning Groups must add value to schools. To do that they must be ambitious for what a self-improving system can achieve.

4.36 An ambitious Commissioning Group should enable school leaders to work together to think creatively about what it means to be “good or outstanding” in their own context – and how they can get there. It should facilitate school alliances to look outward to the evidence of effective schools systems from around the UK, and the world. It should be a catalyst for transformation.

4.37 Whilst Commissioning Groups have an important role in the early identification of schools that need particular support, we need to prevent the new groups from being immediately overwhelmed by the urgent needs of such schools. For this reason, the Commission was keen to see our local authority having a specific and key role in respect of those schools where there is serious underperformance – that is, schools rated as category four by Ofsted or performing below recognised floor standards and therefore at serious risk of receiving such an adverse judgement. In fulfilling such a role the authority would also enable coherent communication with Ofsted and the DfE.





We are clear that there are substantial benefits to be gained from creating geographically-based Commissioning Groups which are mixed phase



4.38 We recognise the tensions in the remit of the Commissioning Groups. These are difficult roles. Commissioning Groups must engage with member schools in a developmental role at the same time as ensuring that there is rigour in evaluation and review between schools. For the Chair and Vice Chair especially, there is the challenge of balancing their commitment to the Commissioning Group with their responsibilities for their own schools. These are without doubt challenging leadership roles for which we need our best school leaders to step forward.

Secondary and special schools

4.39 Whilst we are committed to the concept of geographically-based mixed phase Commissioning Groups, we debated at length whether two additional groups should be formed:

- a County-wide Commissioning Group of which every secondary school is a member, in addition to their area Group, which would take on the challenge and support functions outlined above.
- a similar County-wide Commissioning Group for special schools.

4.40 We are clear that there are substantial benefits to be gained from creating geographically-based Commissioning Groups which are mixed phase. There are good examples of existing local school-led collaborations which are cross phase. However, we can see disadvantages too. The scatter of special schools, and to a lesser extent secondary schools, means that Commissioning Groups have far fewer of either in their areas than primary schools. Their ability to ensure rigour of evaluation and challenge between schools, therefore, may be diminished. In addition, there are phase-specific issues (for example, subject leadership in (say) English and maths) that might benefit from a County-wide approach. For these reasons, as a Commission, we had strong sympathy with the idea of secondary-specific Commissioning Group in particular.

4.41 At the same time, we recognised that the formation of secondary and/or special-specific Groups might also add additional layers of complexity. That is why we propose to put this question to school leaders as part of the consultation process on our report.

What will the Education Partnership look like?

- 4.42 We have proposed the creation of single Education Partnership body, with County-wide remit. We see this as a strategic board which brings together the Chairs of the Commissioning Groups and senior leaders from the education and local authority community.
- 4.43 Like Commissioning Groups, we do not propose that the Partnership should be created as a separate legal entity, nor that it should become a committee of the local authority. We see it as an autonomous organisation accountable to the whole education community of North Yorkshire. However it would need to be constituted in a way which fulfils the statutory guidance on the composition of Schools Forums.
- 4.44 In many ways, such a partnership body would be the natural candidate to inherit the work of our Commission, forged in the same spirit of professional partnership for a common purpose. It would continue to champion a spirit of collaboration and keep alive our collective moral purpose.
- 4.45 The potential functions of the Partnership might include:
- to monitor progress in achieving our collective ambition for all schools in North Yorkshire to be good or outstanding.
 - to build capacity in the system for innovation in school improvement, embracing and generating new opportunities for school to school support.
 - to carry out statutory duties and functions of the Schools Forum ensuring that resources are used and distributed wisely to support further improvement.
 - to provide oversight and scrutiny of school admission arrangements and to consider any proposals for changes to school organisation arrangements.
 - to approve strategic plans concerning special educational needs, 14-19 strategy, behaviour management, the education of Looked After Children etc.
- 4.46 We propose that the Chairs of the newly formed Commissioning Groups should have the opportunity to shape the final terms of reference for the Education Partnership.

5. Resources

- 5.1 As an authority, North Yorkshire invests heavily in supporting its schools. Funding allocated to school improvement by the County Council from its own budget far outweighs the funds that are derived from the Dedicated Schools Grant with the agreement of the Schools Forum. Currently, around £4.5 million is committed to school improvement from the Council budget, within a total budget of just over £6 million. This is indicative of our authority's long-standing commitment to invest in education.
- 5.2 Looking forward we recognise that all local authorities face a period of financial challenge and that savings will be required. As a Commission, we approached our task with that reality in mind. That is why we have made proposals which add no additional cost and which enable required savings to be made in local authority budgets without a detrimental impact to school improvement activity.
- 5.3 Our proposals do, however, imply change in the way that resources are managed and deployed. In general terms, implementation of our report requires much greater devolution of resources closer to schools themselves. We think that is the best way to unlock the potential of local school collaboration and secure greater impact for every pound invested in school improvement.
- 5.4 Specifically, we are proposing that:
- there is a shift in school improvement funding, with a budget devolved to each Commissioning Group to support our collective drive to ensure that all schools are good or outstanding.
 - some local authority staff work directly with Commissioning Groups, providing additional capacity and capability to school leaders to enable them implement a sector-led improvement agenda effectively.
 - a greater proportion of school improvement funding is channelled into local school-led collaborations as they are commissioned to take on improvement work via Commissioning Groups.
- 5.5 We recognise that this may mean significant change for local authority teams in particular. Local authority staff within the Commission have approached such discussions with a spirit of openness and professionalism. Every member of the Commission – whatever their professional role – has demonstrated an equal commitment to improving outcomes of the children and young people of North Yorkshire as the over-riding priority.

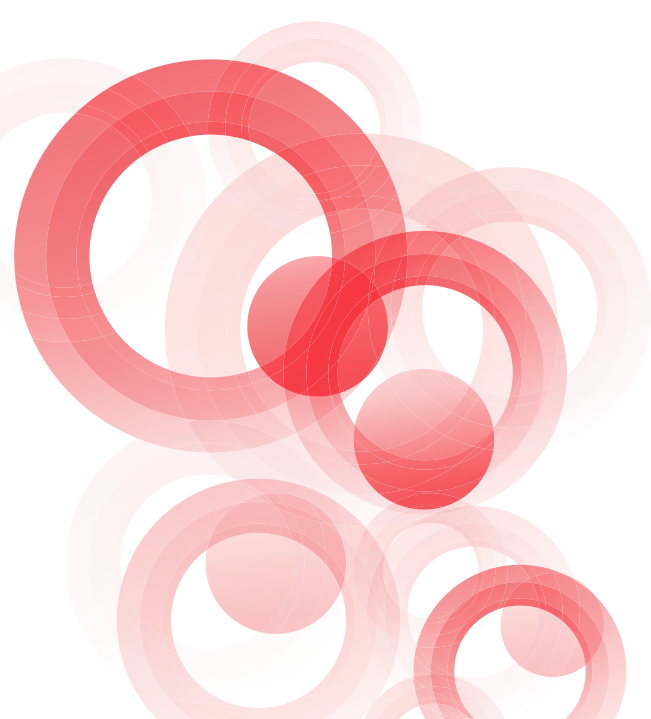
6. Conclusion



We look forward to hearing colleagues' views and continuing the journey together to ensure every young person has access to the right opportunities, experiences and support



- 6.1 As a Commission we were presented with a significant and wide-ranging question. The task of developing a collaborative system of school improvement which ensures that all our schools are good or outstanding is both complex and challenging. It is a challenge we are ready to take on.
- 6.2 In the time we have had available for our Commission we have not been able to address every aspect of the question in detail. Consequently we have focused our attention on the areas that we felt to be most important – to create a culture and infrastructure for collaboration in North Yorkshire, which has the power to transform education and ensure every young person can attend a good or outstanding school.
- 6.3 In producing our report, we do not see this as the end of a process, but rather as the first step in a longer journey. Whilst we have had the privilege of being able to kick-start the debate on the future of school collaboration in North Yorkshire, this is a conversation for every school leader in our County.
- 6.4 We look forward to hearing colleagues' views and continuing the journey together to ensure every young person in North Yorkshire has access to the right opportunities, experiences and support that they need to succeed.



Appendix 1: Membership of the North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement

Simone Bennett	Headteacher	Christ Church CoE VC Primary School
Gail Brown	Headteacher	Crayke CoE VC Primary School
Paul Bowlas	Headteacher	Holy Trinity CoE Junior School
Diana Clegg	Chair of Governors	Askrigg VC Primary School
Jane Douglass	Headteacher	Castleton and Glaisdale Federation
Don Parker	Headteacher	Askwith CP School (Teaching School)
Kathy Thompson	Headteacher	Kellington Primary School
Keeley Ungerechts	Headteacher	Alanbrooke CP School
Ian Yapp	Headteacher	Riverside CP School
Yvonne Limb	Headteacher	Springwater School
Catherine Brooker	Headteacher	Stokesley School
Andrew Cummings	Headteacher	South Craven School
David Read	Headteacher	Scalby School
Rosemary Rees	Chair of Governors	Settle College
Richard Sheriff	Headteacher	Harrogate Grammar School (Teaching School)
Carl Sugden	Headteacher	King James's School
Sue Adsett	Lead Adviser	0-11, Quality and Improvement Service, Children and Young People's Service
Janet Bates	Principal Adviser	11-19, Quality and Improvement Service, Children and Young People's Service
Debbie Bell	Senior Lead Adviser	Early Years, Quality and Improvement Service, Children and Young People's Service
Carolyn Bird	Assistant Director	Prevention and Commissioning, Children and Young People's Service
Pete Dwyer	Corporate Director	Children and Young People's Service
Joan Hewitt	Interim Assistant Director	Quality and Improvement Service, Children and Young People's Service
Claire Tiffany	Education Development Adviser	Behaviour and Attendance, Quality and Improvement Service

Advice and support was provided by Anton Hodge, Assistant Director – Strategic Resources, who also attended all sessions of the Commission.

Appendix 2: List of expert witnesses

During the period of our Commission, we spoke with the following expert witnesses:

Vicky Beer	Executive Principal, The Dean Trust, Ashton on Mersey School, Greater Manchester National Leader of Education
Professor David Hargreaves	Wolfson College, Cambridge
Nick Hudson	Regional Director, Education Learning and Skills, Ofsted
Pat Smart	Executive Headteacher, The Federation of Greet and Conway Primary Schools, Birmingham National Leader of Education
Nick Weller	Executive Principal, Dixons Academies Group & Chief Executive of the Bradford Partnership National Leader of Education

Commission Sessions:

Session 1: 20 September 2013

Session 2: 24 October 2013

Session 3: 21/22 November 2013

The North Yorkshire Commission for School Improvement was facilitated by:

Jane Creasy and Peter Addison-Child.



Appendix 3: Examples of joint practice development in North Yorkshire

The Harrogate and Rural Teaching Alliance (HART): Joint Practice Development is embedded in a number of programmes delivered by the HART Alliance. It is built upon a framework which transfers practice through strong collaboration between schools; and particularly in cases where opportunities for collaboration within small schools might be limited. All of the programmes recognise that practice transfer must be supported by good CPD, which ensures that the right competencies are in place before practice transfer can begin. Another key principle is that of 'self-evaluating classrooms' based on action research. The range of programmes is diverse, but JPD is embedded in such programmes as the NQT programme, Moving from Good to Outstanding Teaching and Learning, "Life After levels" and Self Evaluation Challenge Partnerships.

The Red Kite Alliance: Joint Practice Development takes place at all levels within this large and diverse partnership of secondary schools which has the added dimension of crossing the borders of different local authorities. Much of the JPD at a management level is based upon the principles of "shared task, shared solutions" whilst drawing upon diverse talents across the partnership. Examples include JPD to introduce tablet technology into the schools, Peer Review of School Self Evaluation and research projects on closing the gap. At the level of individual staff, and teaching and learning, the principles of JPD are embedded. Teaching Method Groups draw upon a culture of openness, have their foundation in professional competency and knowledge, and operate by placing teachers into triads to transfer their practice.

King James's School: Co-coaching involving all teachers is at the heart of 'practice transfer' at King James's School. It has been a steady journey from sharing good practice, to practice transfer, with a measurable impact on outcomes for students. It began in 2009 with a voluntary Teacher Learning Community which had only moderate impact, and mainly within a group of already willing and engaged staff; this was preaching to the converted. This moved to a compulsory co-coaching model for all staff in 2010/11. There has been a gradual strengthening the link between the coaching focus, the CPD on offer (the skills to do the job) and the necessity to reflect the outcomes from the co-coaching focus in Performance Management. In 2013 the project can now demonstrate that teachers have responsibility and accountability for their practice transfer. There is still a need to push staff further to focus on their 'blind spots' and a requirement to better match the coaching partnerships to get the best from them.

