

This briefing note has been written by the Director and Assistant Director of Children's Services. It describes the work we have recently initiated and will be working on in the coming months and it has been agreed with school improvement officials at the DfE. It is intended for use by: Norfolk schools, LA staff and school improvement teams; teacher and headteacher association representatives; and DfE officials working with Norfolk.

Developing a Partnership for School Improvement in Norfolk

1. In recent years Norfolk LA has developed a rigorous and effective approach to school improvement. We have seen significant improvements in most schools across the County. The special school system is especially strong and there are significant strengths in the post 16 sector in many of our schools and in the 6th form Colleges and most of the FE Colleges. Across the primary and secondary sector the number of schools graded as good or outstanding continues to grow, attainment has risen and attendance has improved. The number of schools in Ofsted categories of concern remains fairly small and the quality of leadership, governance, teaching and learning continues to rise. The County and its schools have embraced change enthusiastically. The National Strategies offered good structure and many aspects provided effective techniques to bring about change. The County also embraced the need for structural change when it was felt that it could aid improvement including the development of a group of Academies, federations and very effective school partnerships.

2. We have recently restructured our teams to focus even more effectively on educational achievement and improvement and at the same time the national context has changed beyond recognition. There is no longer a national strategy for improvement and local areas are invited to develop their own local school improvement strategies. The context for this in the White Paper (The Importance of Teaching) and the Education Acts (Academies 2010 and Education 2011) are setting new expectations for a more autonomous school system but with new commissioning and challenge roles for the LA.

3. Despite much success a number of real challenges remain;

- Too many schools still have achievement levels below the national floor standards.
- While we remain good at turning schools around there are still too many that run into difficulties and require additional or special measures to bring about the required improvements.
- Overall results still remain at or marginally below national averages on several key performance measures especially at KS2.
- Our clusters are often good and several are excellent but there is still a huge variation in the effectiveness and impact of clusters. Schools frequently help each other very effectively. We have a very good County Headteacher system and we have developed very effective local partners in learning. However, we have not had a systematic enough approach to

using the expertise in our outstanding schools and in outstanding aspects of good and satisfactory schools.

- We have done some excellent work in developing leadership at senior manager and governor levels but the issues created by a high volume of turn over of school leaders are very challenging.
- Despite there being many very successful small schools too many of them are struggling to meet the demands of operating in a more system leadership role and are vulnerable as financial circumstances become more difficult, particularly in areas where pupil numbers are declining.

4. In recent years we have pressed the DfE to give more recognition to some of the challenges in bringing about system change in large rural areas. We had previously asked for a rural challenge for Norfolk along the lines of the London City challenge but unfortunately without success.

5. We have now had a very positive series of meetings with the senior DfE officials responsible for school improvement policy and for monitoring overall performance for this part of the country. They have identified that some close partnership work in this area could be of significant mutual benefit. For us, it enables us to access national expertise and perhaps some resources and for the DfE it gives the opportunity to examine whether some of the successful methods developed in some of the City Challenges carried out in recent years are transferable to rural counties.

6. While we have had significant success in transforming many of the schools in Norfolk there have been others apparently, and stubbornly, immune to sustained improvement. The new government's support for the development of self-supported and sustainable improvement chimes well with the changes we have made in our restructuring. We have long recognised the benefits of school to school support and we welcome appropriate support from colleagues with national expertise in developing this. To this end the DfE have identified two advisers who will work in partnership with us to examine the capacity of the local system to engage more effectively in school to school improvement, to develop teaching schools and a network of "facilitation" schools (linked to and supporting the hub teaching school in outreach work with other schools across the system).

7. Ann Berger is the primary adviser currently allocated to work with us and Heather Flint is the secondary adviser. They will work closely with school improvement staff in Terry Cook's team and Terry will be the point of reference for all of this work. Ann and Heather will report directly to Colin Seal at the DfE, and Colin will meet with Lisa Christensen and Fred Corbett on a regular basis to review our mutual learning from the partnership working.

8. Initial visits to any Norfolk school by DfE colleagues will be through the LA, and DfE advisers will always be accompanied by LA advisers on initial visits. Subsequent visits may be arranged directly with some schools but the advisers will always let the DfE and the LA know of any visits they are making. DfE advisers will be arranging some opportunities for headteachers and for LA staff to visit successful schools that have been through the City Challenge programme.

9. DfE advisers will be supporting the LA and schools in identifying the good and outstanding schools with the capacity to support other schools, to become Teaching Schools, and those with the capacity to become Facilitator Schools. The LA will be working closely with these schools as they will be vital to the development of Initial Teacher Training and will help us support the development of further Teaching Schools when this initial programme of joint working comes to an end. To support this, the LA will create or commission a range of high-quality, local, collaborative services that will be available to schools on a 'paid-for' basis. This Integrated Education Advisory

Services team, led by David Orsborne, will complement the work of Terry Cook's Education Achievement, Improvement and Governance team.

10. The DfE Advisers will be key points of reference with the development of National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and also the Local Leaders (LLEs). We will work in partnership with the Advisers and with National College colleagues to recruit and develop as many such leaders as possible. Where relevant we will also continue to develop our own partnerships with school leaders to carry out school improvement work in cohorts of schools not directly under to initial focus for the DfE advisers i.e. those schools below floor standards.

11. DfE and the LA will share data to ensure that agreed perspectives of schools develop, and that any schools in "concern" groups will be known to each other. The LA's key responsibilities for supporting the improvement of schools are not changed by this programme of work. Responsibility for action plans to bring about improvement rests with the LA and with schools.

12. Our ultimate aim is to develop a strong county-wide network of Self Supporting Schools that is sustainable. To do this, the county boundary won't be a barrier. We will encourage networking across the country where it gives support for improvement in Norfolk Schools. The Integrated Advisory Services team will be one vehicle by which this will be promoted and enabled.

13. Where despite all best endeavours schools appear unable to bring about sustained improvement the DfE expects more radical solutions to be considered, such as the school becoming a Sponsored Academy. If such a structural solution is being considered, whether initiated by the Governing Body, the DfE or the LA, Norfolk County Council advisers and officers will work closely with the school to ensure that the best possible outcome is achieved for the pupils, the school and for neighbouring schools.

14. The architecture of a Self Improving School System rests on four main building blocks identified by David Hargreaves, and our school improvement work will use these four building blocks as key to our work::

- capitalising on the benefits of clusters of schools
- adopting a local solutions approach
- stimulating co-construction between schools
- expanding the concept of System Leadership

15. The Schools Forum has earmarked some resources to support this work. It will be essential that they are involved in understanding how that resource is being used and how it can be used to draw down DfE resources as they become available.

16. The Local Authority will be briefing groups of school leaders about this approach in the early part of the Summer Term.

If you need further information about this please contact

**Lisa Christensen (Director of Children's Services) or
Fred Corbett (Assistant Director of Children's Services) – 01603 223492 or by email
fred.corbett@norfolk.gov.uk**

Or

**Terry Cook (Head of Educational Achievement and Improvement) – 01603 307778
or by email terry.cook@norfolk.gov.uk**