

Isos Partnership (UK) LLP

Review of the 'A good school for every Norfolk learner' strategy

Final

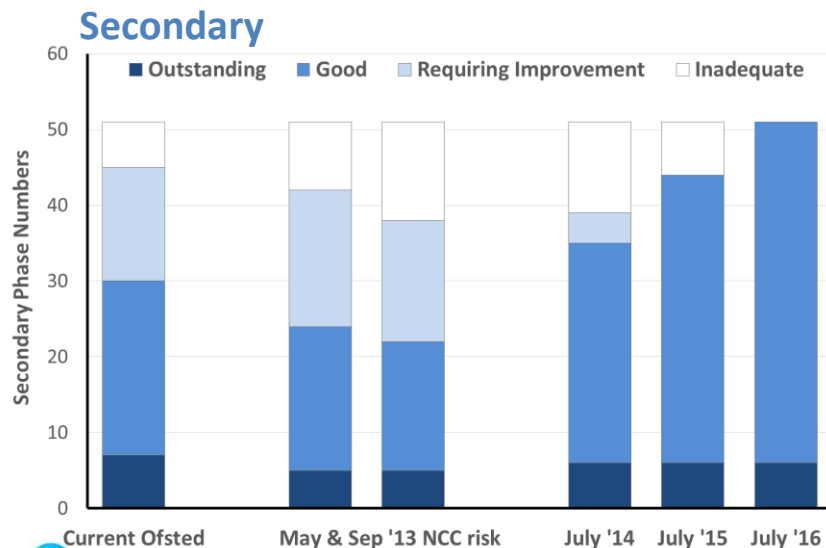
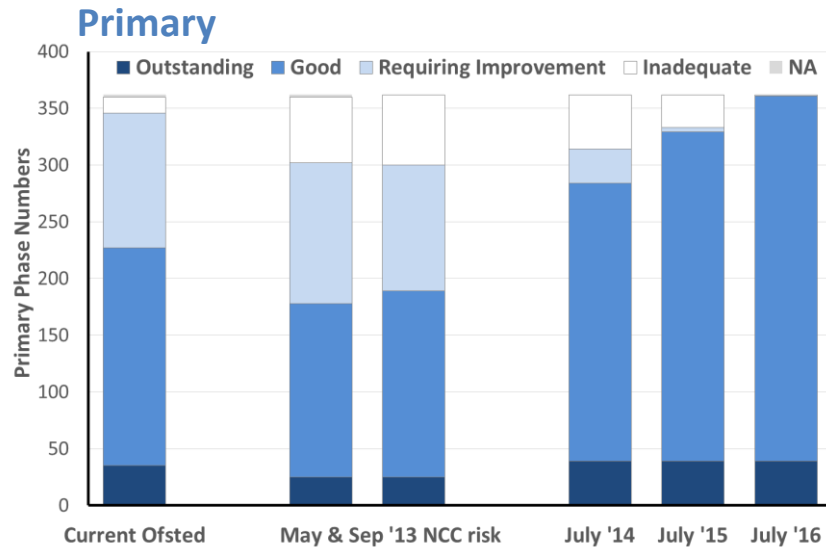
October 2013



- In June 2013, Ofsted inspected Norfolk County Council's arrangements to support school improvement under a new inspection framework and six areas for improvement were identified.
- The first of these areas was for the Local Authority to *'commission an external, forward-looking review of the strategies 'A good school for every Norfolk learner' and 'Norfolk to Good and Great' to identify how these could rapidly lead to better outcomes.'*
- Isos Partnership (UK) LLP was commissioned to carry out the external review at the start of the Autumn term 2013 and followed a method including analysis of the baseline data, the approach to assessing risk and key documentation alongside interviews with:
 - 25 school leaders (headteachers or chairs of governors) from schools engaged in the strategies, including 10 system leaders involved in implementation of the strategies themselves,
 - 11 local authority officers involved in designing and implementing the strategies.
- Isos formed a small team for the review, which drew on its Ofsted HMI, local authority and school improvement expertise.
- The main focus of the review was to identify **how** the strategies could **rapidly** lead to better outcomes – this focus was mainly applied to the primary phase given the large numbers engaged in the strategies. The review was forward looking and sought to articulate what successful implementation would look like.
- We are grateful to everyone who made the time to engage in interviews and for their openness and honesty. There was a strong desire to ensure the new strategies are implemented effectively and we hope this review helps achieve this.



Norfolk County Council (NCC) has set an ambitious trajectory to ensure that by summer 2016 every Norfolk learner attends a good or better school



- The goal for all schools to be judged at least good by Ofsted by the summer 2016 is rightly ambitious – there is not a goal for increasing outstanding schools.
- The Ofsted profile across primary and secondary phases is 63% and 59% at least good, respectively.
- NCC analysis in May 2013 assessed 51% and 53% of primary and secondary phases, respectively, as at risk of not being judged at least good by Ofsted - this presents a greater challenge than the Ofsted profile.
- Delivering the goal will be challenging – it means shifting half of the primary and secondary phase to at least good in less than three years.
- The trajectory is based on shifting half of the schools at risk of not being judged good to at least good over the next 10 months.
- In the primary phase the September 2013 NCC risk analysis indicates progress towards the goal - the secondary phase remains as challenging.

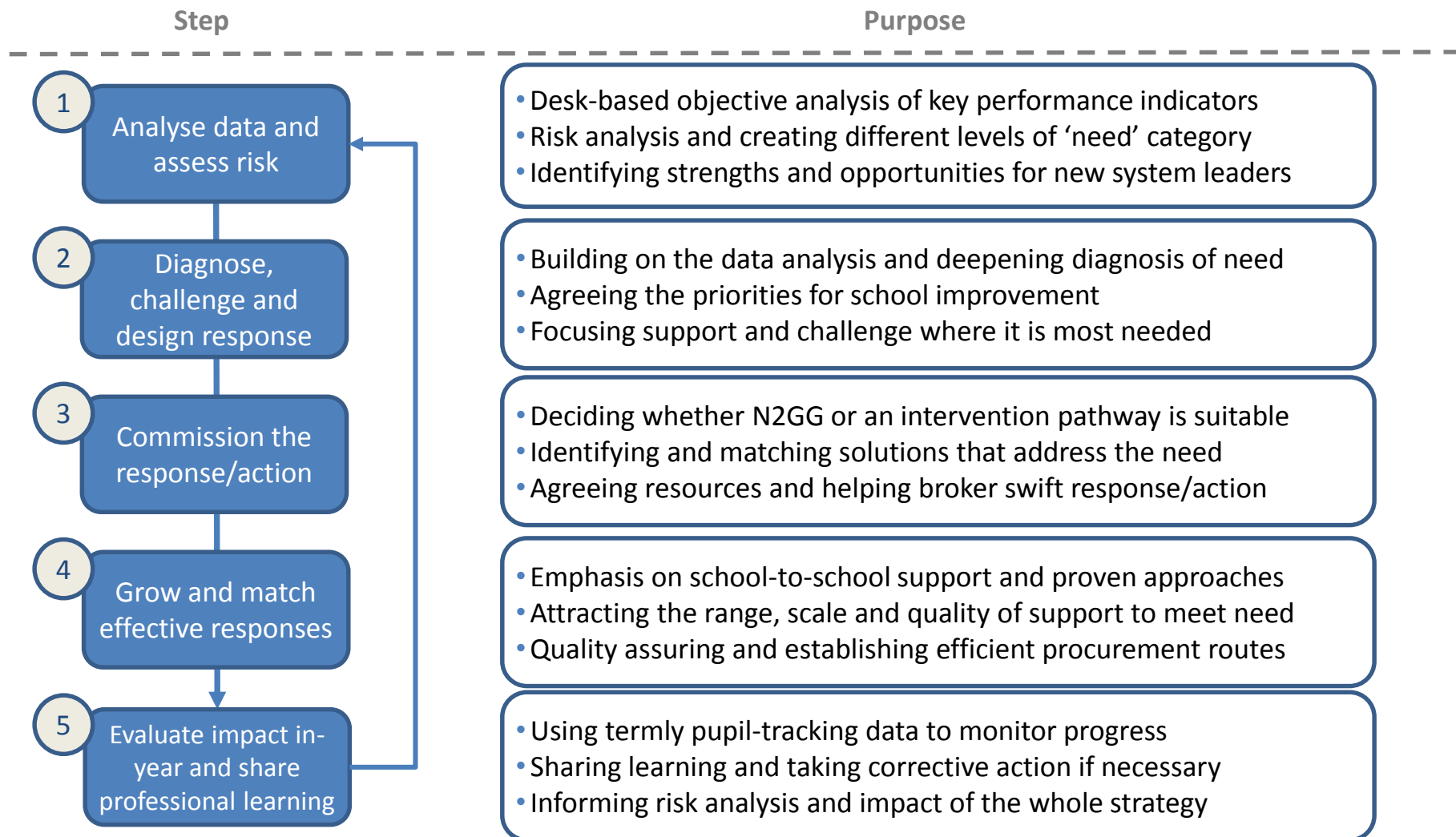
The ambition is powerfully captured in the strapline 'A good school for every Norfolk learner' which has sent a strong signal of intent to the education system

Some strong signals of intent

- 1 Increasing local authority intervention through the use of formal powers and that 'good enough' will no longer be tolerated
- 2 Strong focus on system leaders, school-to-school support and that the main source of capacity for improvement will come from schools themselves
- 3 Recognition that all the answers do not lie within Norfolk and that schools should also look afar for evidence of effective practice
- 4 New leadership in the local authority is already showing an unwavering determination to see the change through, backed by new resources
- 5 More open acknowledgement of past weaknesses by the local authority and increasingly among schools
- 6 Clear emphasis on the governing body responsibility for school improvement



The strapline is underpinned by a strategy which we have understood to consist of a cycle of five connected steps

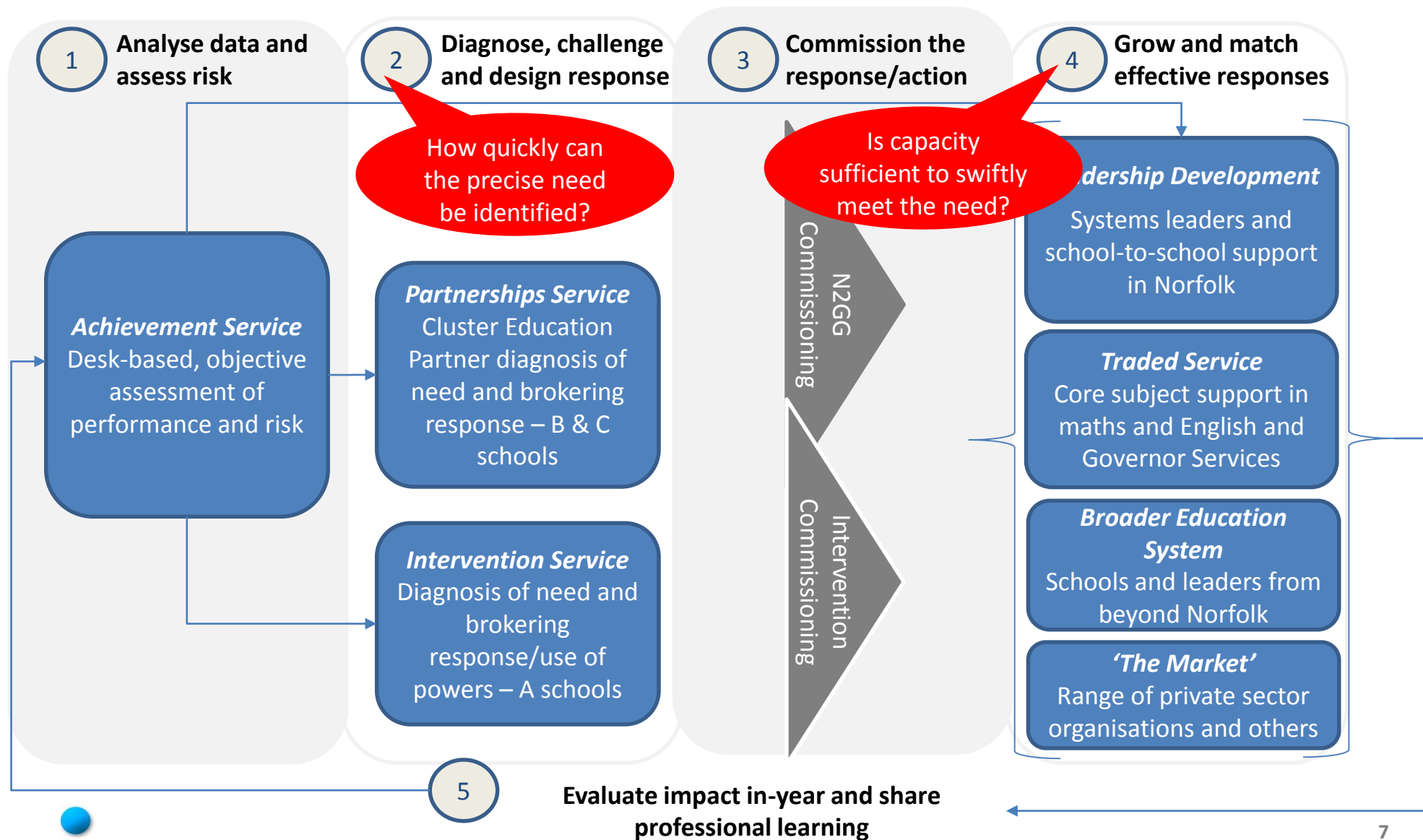


Steps 1, 3 and 5 are potential strengths in the way they are designed to address those at risk of being inadequate along with those requiring improvement

Step	Potential Strengths
1 Analyse data and assess risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The segmentation of schools looks sound and is based on high quality data• The desk-based approach provides an objective starting point for all schools• The differentiation of schools into categories should inform effective prioritisation• The identification of schools on the cusp of good has the potential to create momentum• Some progress is already evident between the primary May to Sep risk assessment
3 Commission the response/action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two clear pathways of intervention and N2GG for schools at risk of being inadequate or requiring improvement, respectively• Emphasis on the role of system leaders and schools to provide the response• A move away from using some of the capacity associated with the 'old system' that had become discredited in the eyes of schools
5 Evaluate impact in-year and share learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on strengthening governance, through the use of IEBs for schools in intervention, and through the audit and school improvement responsibility for governors in N2GG• Potential for the Cluster Education Partner (CEP) role to ensure NCC maintains dialogue with all schools with the potential to strengthen the challenge for N2GG schools• Action plans and termly pupil-tracking for individual N2GG schools has the potential to provide important targets and progress checks for schools and aggregated across NCC



Steps 2 and 4 are critical to making the cycle work swiftly and these carry the greatest risks to ensuring rapid impact



Step 2 needs to ensure that the analysis at step one is understood and swiftly used as the basis for challenge and precise diagnosis for action

A new Cluster Education Partner (CEP) role is being implemented this term. The role is essential for ensuring step 2 is effective and the following success criteria must be met during implementation of the new role:

- The quality and credibility of the CEP personnel must be noticeably different to the previous Improvement Partner role – schools should report a step-change in effectiveness and consistency
- The CEP must demonstrate strong influencing and negotiating, analytical, coaching, facilitating and problem solving skills – schools will see the CEP as a ‘critical friend’ and value the challenge
- The CEP role must be of comparable quality between clusters and there are standard systems and processes underpinning the approach - quality is not sacrificed to simply fill vacant posts and instead the roll-out is more gradual, starting with the clusters with the schools with greatest need
- The CEP role must have strong connections to steps 1, 3 and 5 in the cycle – they should make the whole cycle work and within these steps connect to the intervention team and system leaders
- The CEP must ensure that headteachers (as well as chairs of governors) are clear about their own responsibility for driving the school improvement and held to account appropriately, including consequences for disengaging from any high quality support made available
- The CEP role must work effectively regardless of the type of school (i.e. maintained, academy or free school) and the approach should be implemented with this in mind
- The CEP must provide momentum to alternative governance and structural solutions such as federations, especially for small schools, as part of ensuring sustainable and lasting school improvement.



Step 4 needs to ensure that there is sufficient school-to-school and system leader capacity available to address the needs of schools

System Leader and school-to-school deployment is already happening across Norfolk – the challenge going forward is about scaling up and matching this capacity to the numbers of schools being targeted in steps 1 and 2. Success will look like:

- Strong schools should be providing support to others tailored to phase and context as the first choice
- School improvement experts will be working together as a partnership to transform Norfolk's schools
- The types of support available via N2GG will be clear to schools and the range of support must be constrained to those proven actions that will drive up standards
- The strong emphasis on warning notices will be matched with effective support for improvement and there will be clear sanctions for those schools that do not embrace the high-quality support
- There will be a strong focus on improving teaching within the offer and priority is given to the Improving and Outstanding Teacher Programmes
- The role of Teaching Schools in and outside of Norfolk will be at the heart of the capacity and along with their partner schools will be the engine for improvement
- There must be a strategy for building the number and quality of home-grown National, Local and Specialist Leaders of Education, including a bold ambition for growing outstanding schools
- Current system leader capacity will be deployed effectively within Norfolk so that the most is made of local system leader capacity
- System leaders will be supported, not overly directed, to ensure learning is shared, communication and approach is consistent where needed – tracking data should be used to evaluate impact of system leaders.



The communication of the strategy should capture where the strategy now is and move on from a signal of intent to translating what is changing in practice

Translating the strategy into practice and 'living the behaviours'

- 1 Pace – 10 months to impact on the first wave of schools targeted as part of N2GG
- 2 Credibility – significant change in personnel and this is no longer an 'old boys' network'
- 3 Outward looking – support is being drawn from London and elsewhere
- 4 System Leadership – it is an expectation, not an option, for good and outstanding schools in Norfolk to help drive the improvement
- 5 Focus – the offer of support is based on a few proven approaches to improving the quality of teaching and leadership

Immediate action

1. Quickly refresh communication strategy

- Promote the strategy positively as a high challenge, high support approach, and shift the narrative on from 'intent' to 'action' and clarifying how it will be different in practice
- Continue to promote the approach as led by school for schools and establish a school-led steering group to monitor implementation and lead the communication to other schools
- Set out a single strategy document in about 500 words and get schools to help write it – this should include outcome targets that would mirror the trajectory for all schools to be at least good

2. Strengthen step 2

- Ensure the definition of the new CEP role and the recruitment exceeds the success criteria herein
- Actively promote federation or executive leadership models for small primary schools in intervention and N2GG with a clear rationale of the benefits for schools needing improvement

3. Strengthen step 4

- Strengthen the focus on improvement in teaching – build momentum through targeting the Improving and Outstanding Teacher Programmes
- Strengthen the role of Teaching Schools and Outstanding schools - encourage more to get involved with supporting other schools
- Sharpen the recruitment and deployment of home-grown system leaders to ensure efficiency and quality while attracting new capacity from outside Norfolk

Fast implementation of these actions will help address the concerns raised by Ofsted

