



Department
for Education

National Leaders of Education (NLE) Standards

With research commentary

February 2020

Contents

Research commentary	3
Introduction	3
Research-base	3
NLE standards	5
Standard 1. Professional credibility	5
Standard 2. Problem solving and influencing for improvement	5
Standard 3. Capacity building and knowledge transfer to ensure sustainability	6

Research commentary

Introduction

This paper presents the rationale and underpinning evidence for the National Leaders of Education standards (NLE standards).

We recognise the need for greater clarity in the system surrounding the expected knowledge and attributes of NLEs, who are designated by the department to deliver its [school improvement \(SI\) support offer](#). Responding to this, we have identified three key standards that, as drivers of school improvement, all NLEs are expected to uphold and which have a specific focus on the challenges of supporting struggling schools.

The function of the NLE standards is to set out the department's expectations of NLEs, which are aligned closely with a suite of existing standards and frameworks, including:

- Teachers' standards
- The Early Career Framework (ECF)
- Headteachers' standards

The impact of school leadership is widely recognised, with Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, (2019) highlighting it as central to the success of most school improvement efforts. The role of an NLE is, at its core, to support other school leaders and to grow their effectiveness in raising standards. In addition to the qualities needed to influence and increase the capacity of others, NLEs must use their expertise as an excellent school leader to assist struggling schools to progress more quickly (Hill & Matthews, 2010).

Research-base

To establish positive working relationships and to initiate impactful long-term change within the supported school, it is vital that the NLE possesses the specific interpersonal abilities, as well as professional credibility, to gain the trust of the leader to whom they are providing support. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2019) claim that there are personal leadership resources such as resilience, emotional intelligence and optimism, which are common in outstanding leaders. NLEs must be able to fuse these with professional competencies including problem solving, critical thinking and domain-specific knowledge, to navigate the sensitive role as a system leader (Dimmock, 2016; Robinson, 2009).

Strong school leaders will draw on a range of practices, but key to making decisions is the leader's understanding and diagnosis of the school's needs (Day et al. 2016). As strategic leaders, NLEs will reflect upon their own professional successes and challenges. From their breadth of experience, NLEs will have cultivated a comprehensive understanding of a range of evidence-based school improvement methods¹, which – shaped by their own research and reflection – are deftly deployed in the most appropriate setting and in a timely manner (Dimmock, 2016, Day et al., 2016). This awareness of the most relevant school improvement strategies, and the significance of their prioritisation, will inform the tailored

¹ When identifying programmes of support, NLEs will be expected to apply the department's **list of national programmes**. Where a relevant national programme is not available, well-evidenced programmes from other providers with a proven track record should be identified.

guidance that NLEs provide to the supported school.

For an excellent leader, it is imperative to be adaptive in their approach to school improvement. NLEs must work collaboratively and flexibly with the supported leaders, to encourage creative and dynamic thinking when identifying credible interventions, which respond to the specific context of their school; including phase, type and socio-economic circumstance.

NLEs will be contextually sensitive: being responsive to, rather than dictated by, the context of the supported school (Day et al. 2009, Day et al. 2016). In particular, it is essential for NLEs to identify 'opportunity gaps' within the setting of the supported school, to equip the supported leader with the tools they need to address these areas of concern. Applying their knowledge of the most impactful, evidence-informed leadership practices, NLEs will build the capability of the supported leader. Helping them to recognise which combination of core practices – such as setting direction and shared vision; building relationships and developing staff; developing the school environment, and evaluating teaching practice – should be applied and when, the NLE will empower the supported leader to drive forward improved outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2019). In sharing their expertise on the stages of school improvement, NLEs will mobilise the supported leader to set an ambitious vision for their school, which strives for equitable outcomes for all pupils (particularly those facing educational disadvantage) and promotes positive cultural change (Ishimaru and Galloway, 2014., Sharp et al., 2015, Day et al., 2009).

Cordingley and colleagues (2015) suggest that effective leaders will engage with professional development for themselves, as well as investing in the professional development of their teaching staff. As accomplished leaders of school improvement, NLEs will assist in analysing the development needs of the supported leader and help them to identify appropriate, evidence-informed CPD, which strengthens the leadership of the supported school: building the capability of the supported leader to take ownership of their school's improvement strategy.

Although the continuing development of school leaders is significant, it is paramount to the transformation of the supported school that it grows teachers who are 'active agents' in their own professional development (Schleicher, 2011) and who are equipped to assist in tackling the school's current and future challenges. NLEs will empower supported leaders to increase the leadership capacity of their staff, by engaging critically with evidence-based CPD programmes and selecting those that support their wider organisational priorities (Cordingley et al., 2015). By encouraging the supported leader to make links between professional development and the impact of CPD on pupil attainment and progress, the NLE will assist them in forging a challenging and impactful educational culture – emphasising the importance of continuously monitoring its effectiveness (Cordingley et al., 2015).

The external knowledge, expertise and perspective that NLEs provide to struggling schools makes them an invaluable mode to accelerate improvements in standards and outcomes. In the most challenging contexts, NLEs must motivate and inspire the school leader, so they and their staff recognise that alternative improved outcomes are achievable (Cordingley et al. 2015). Day et al. conclude that 'sustainable transformation of a school is the outcome of effective leadership'. Drawing on their significant experiences of school improvement, NLEs will develop the capabilities of the supported leader. They will mobilise the leader to set clear direction and common values for their school, forging a positive organisational culture that reverberates beyond the boundaries of the classroom (Leithwood et al. 2019), is identifiable for their teachers, pupils and parents (Ofsted 2019); and sustains well beyond the NLE's deployment.

NLE standards

Standard 1. Professional credibility

- National Leaders of Education demonstrate secure knowledge of all aspects of educational and school leadership and management practice. The standards are set out in the Teachers' Standards and the upcoming Headteachers' Standards. The underpinning evidence is set out in the Early Career Framework and upcoming National Professional Qualification Frameworks.
- NLEs demonstrate a strong track record as leaders in their own schools of applying evidence-based practice in all areas to create an excellent quality of education and high standards for all
- NLEs remain abreast of credible developments in educational and school leadership research and its application to practical leadership challenges
- NLEs have a clear and comprehensive knowledge of wider available sources of support and expertise across the system which can assist schools requiring improvement

Standard 2. Problem solving and influencing for improvement

- NLEs are able to apply their knowledge of educational and leadership practice to identify and analyse complex or persistent problems and barriers which limit school effectiveness or efficiency
- NLEs are able to design well-targeted plans for improvement, which are based on reliable diagnosis. Plans will be realistic, appropriately sequenced, suited to context, identify risks and barriers, optimise the deployment of resources available and make effective use of appropriate wider sources of support
- NLEs are able to evaluate progress in implementing improvement plans, identify impact and show the necessary honesty and courage to reshape them where the need to do so becomes apparent
- NLEs need to demonstrate strong interpersonal skills to win the trust and confidence of headteachers and other school leaders, in order to influence their practice. They need to challenge constructively, delivering hard messages at times as well as empowering leaders and imparting a sense of ownership

Standard 3. Capacity building and knowledge transfer to ensure sustainability

- NLEs strengthen school leadership by ensuring that leaders articulate an ambitious vision and create a strong and positive culture, which shape all aspects of the school's provision
- NLEs ensure that leaders (i) focus on improving teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise to enhance teaching of the curriculum and (ii) set and implement high standards of behaviour in the school.
- NLEs apply their expertise to enable leaders to shape well-planned, coherent, evidence-informed and relevant professional development for teachers
- NLEs set an expectation that resource deployment in the school is driven by the curricular and pedagogical needs of the school

References

- Cordingley, P., Higgins, S., Greany, T., Buckler, N., Coles-Jordan, D., Crisp, B., Saunders, L., and Coe, R. (2015) 'Developing Great Teaching: Lessons from the international reviews into effective professional development'. Teacher Development Trust
- Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Harris, A., Leithwood, K., Gu, Q., Brown, E., Ahtaridou, E., and Kington, A. (2009) 'The Impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes'. Nottingham: DCSF
- Day, C., Gu, Q., and Sammons, P. (2016) 'The impact of leadership on student outcomes: how successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference', *Educational Administration Quarterly* 52(2), 221-258
- Dimmock, C. (2016) 'System leadership for school improvement: A developing concept and set of practices', *Scottish Educational Review* 48(2), 60-79
- Hill, R., and Matthews, P. (2010) 'Schools leading schools II: the growing impact of National Leaders of Education'. Nottingham: NCTL
- Ishimaru, A M., and Galloway, M K. (2014) 'Beyond Individual Effectiveness: Conceptualizing Organizational Leadership for Equity, Leadership and Policy in Schools' 13(1), 93-146
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., and Hopkins, D. (2019) 'Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited', *School Leadership and Management* 40(1), 5-22
- Macleod, S., Sharp, C., Bernardinelli, D., Skipp, A., and Higgins, S.(2015) 'Supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils: articulating success and good practice'. London: DfE
- Ofsted (2019), Education inspection framework
- Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., and Lloyd, C. (2009) 'School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why'. Wellington: Ministry of Education
- Schleicher, A. (2011). 'Building a high-quality teaching profession: lessons from around the world'. Paris, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development



Department
for Education

© Crown copyright 2020

This publication (not including logos) is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

To view this licence:

visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

email psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

write to Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London, TW9 4DU

About this publication:

enquiries www.education.gov.uk/contactus

download www.gov.uk/government/publications

Reference: DfE-00049-2020



Follow us on Twitter:
[@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk)



Like us on Facebook:
facebook.com/educationgovuk