



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Freedom to lead: a study of outstanding primary school leadership in England

**Technical annex: twenty outstanding
primary schools – five years on**

Research report

October 2014

Isos Partnership

This is one of 19 case studies designed to reflect real-life examples of outstanding primary leadership. Together, the case studies provide the substance of a summary report: *Freedom to lead: a study of outstanding primary school leadership in England*.

This case study differs from the other 18 in looking at how primary schools in very challenging circumstances have fared in the five years since 2009 when all had been judged outstanding by Ofsted. The case study focuses on the 16 extant schools that provide for pupils to the end of key stage 2. It was constructed in three stages.

First, a draft narrative was produced using only the publicly available Ofsted reports and performance data pertaining to the schools, and information available on the web about such factors as change of headteacher.

Second, the draft study was sent to the 16 schools with an invitation to add to or correct the account of their evolution since featuring in the earlier study. Most provided additional information.

Finally, the case study was redrafted taking account of the inputs from schools.

The author wishes to thank all those schools that provided additional detail. Access to an earlier unpublished analysis by Ofsted of the *Twenty outstanding primary schools*, undertaken in 2012, is also gratefully acknowledged.

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Executive summary

In 2009, Ofsted published a study of 20 primary schools that had been judged outstanding on two or more occasions and had higher than average results despite serving a wide range of very disadvantaged communities. This new study follows up the subsequent performance and inspection trails of 16 of the 17 schools that provide for key stage 2 pupils, i.e. full range primary or junior schools.¹ The majority of these schools retain 'outstanding' status; the rest are 'good' schools in Ofsted inspection terms. The remaining school, Simonswood, was also outstanding at the time it closed in 2011.

The challenge for every outstanding school is to sustain its excellence. The universal strategy for doing this is 'continuous improvement'. The study indicates 10 factors that contribute to such an aim. But in reality many things can happen in a school to deflect it from its course. This study not only identifies features that are common to highly successful schools but some of the risks and how they may be anticipated or mitigated. The power of these factors is evident when they act in combination. The findings are consistent with practice in the other 19 case studies contributing to this research.²

¹ The three infant schools in the study serving very disadvantaged communities have had mixed fortunes. One has remained outstanding through interim assessment. A second has been inspected since the 2009 study and judged good with outstanding aspects, although its 2013 key stage 1 outcomes were in the top quintile for reading and writing and the second for mathematics. The third school has had at least two changes of headteacher and is the only one of the original 20 schools to be judged subsequently as requiring improvement.

² There are 19 other case studies in the *Freedom to lead* research published in September 2014 by NCTL and Ofsted.

Main findings

The prevalent factors that have contributed to sustaining - or regaining - outstanding quality and standards in this sample of schools included the following:

- a passion for excellence
- constant focus on the quality of teaching and learning, and reviewing progress
- leadership at all levels, including governance
- teamwork
- curriculum innovation and planning
- relationship with parents and the community
- professional learning and development
- succession planning
- partnership and federation
- system leadership.

The challenge

“For many schools, an inspection report which judges them outstanding brings with it an expectation that they will remain so. Thus, while one school professes ‘not to be in it for the external judgements’, others would identify with the headteacher who was ‘uneasy after the last outstanding Ofsted report’. She thought it might mark a point at which good staff began to leave, and decided to set the school on a new course by re-examining and developing the school’s vision. The outcome was a consensus that, to sustain success, they must move forward and be innovative. This has resulted in a new, more fluid curriculum and with new dimensions in the arts, creativity and ICT. The schools which adopt a ‘steady as we go’ approach are outnumbered by those that see change as a constant and innovation as a necessity.”

Ofsted, 2009, page 28 (ref 1)

The schools studied by Ofsted for the 2009 report were carefully identified, through analysis of the inspection reports and data of all outstanding primary schools, as being among the most successful in the country in very challenging circumstances. The sample contained 14 full range primary schools, three infant and three junior schools.

This case study comments on the leadership of the 16 extant primary and junior schools – which have key stage 2 performance data – using evidence from their inspection trails (summarised in Figure 1) and performance data (Annex A) to see how well they have sustained their excellence and whether there are any critical factors in doing or not doing so. The headline facts are summarised below.

- Fourteen of these 16 very disadvantaged schools exceeded the 2013 national average for the percentage of year 6 pupils attaining level 4+ in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The remaining two, although above the floor target, also had the greatest attainment gaps between disadvantaged children and the rest.
- Nine of the 16 schools exceeded the national average for combined level 4 national curriculum tests by 10% or more.
- Eleven of the 16 schools have remained outstanding in terms of their most recent inspection report or interim assessment. The remaining five schools were most recently judged to be at least ‘good’.
- The seventeenth school was outstanding at the time it was closed and a new school opened following the amalgamation of two former primary schools.
- Two of the six schools were still outstanding when reinspected in 2010 and 2011, but were judged good more recently.

- Four of the 10 outstanding schools have had a change of headteacher since 2009, in three of which there was an internal appointment.
- The headteacher has changed in four of the five schools judged good at their most recent inspection.

Figure 1. Current Ofsted status (April 2014) of the primary schools providing for key stage 2 children and included in the 2009 Ofsted report

School	Change of head since 2008/09	Last inspected (s5)	Interim assessment	Current status
St Monica's Catholic Primary School, Sefton	No	2014		Outstanding
The Orion Primary School, Barnet	No	2010		Outstanding
William Ford C of E Junior School, Dagenham	No	2010		Outstanding
Bonner Primary School, Tower Hamlets	No		2010	Outstanding
Berrymede Junior School, Ealing	Yes		2011	Outstanding
Gateway Academy, Paddington	Yes		2011	Outstanding
Michael Faraday, Southwark	No		2010	Outstanding
St John the Divine C of E Primary School, Lambeth	Yes		2011	Outstanding
St Sebastian's Catholic Primary & Nursery, Liverpool	No		2011	Outstanding
Shiremoor Primary School, Tyneside	Yes		2011	Outstanding
Welbeck Primary School, Nottingham	No		2011	Outstanding
Simonswood Primary School, Knowsley	School closed		2011	Outstanding, closed in 2011
Banks Road Primary School, Liverpool	Yes	2011 2014		Outstanding Good
Ash Green Community Primary School, Calderdale	Yes (associate head)	2013		Good
John Burns Primary School, Wandsworth	Yes	2013		Good
St Paul's Peel C of E Primary School, Salford	No	2010 2013		Outstanding Good
Cubitt Town Junior School, Tower Hamlets	Yes	2012		Good

Schools that have again been judged outstanding

A sustained passion for excellence heads a range of factors that are evident in schools that continue to be judged outstanding when reinspected. The first three examples illustrate most of the findings listed earlier.

St Monica's Catholic Primary School in Merseyside has had its full share of inspections under Paul Kinsella's continued leadership. Outstanding when inspected in 2008, it was inspected again in 2011 and judged outstanding on all the main aspects and most recently in 2014 where once again the school excelled. This is clearly a school that refuses to go off the boil. The head's leadership, passion and clarity of purpose – sustained over many years – clearly have much to do with the school's sustained success. Ofsted described leadership thus:

“The headteacher's vision, commitment and drive for improvement are at the heart of the school. He is passionate about the pupils, the community of St Monica's and its influence on the wider community. He is ably supported by senior and middle leaders. The governing body provides strong established support and challenge. Leaders and managers have ensured a shared view of the school's future throughout the whole school community and one that is evidenced in daily life. Everyone is ambitious for the pupils in this school.”

Ofsted, 2014

The components of success include:

- outstanding leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), with strong teamwork, effective assessment and successful involvement of families
- accurate self-analysis of performance, clear targets and timescales, effective action and continual improvement
- excellent teaching, checked continually and systematically
- rigorous appraisal and performance management with ambitious objectives linked to the school's priorities
- forward thinking in planning for the new curriculum
- a rich and rounded curriculum that provides fully for the affective (beliefs, attitudes and values) as well as the cognitive and other aspects
- strong community and international links.

Paul says he spends his life “thinking 18 months ahead”. He keeps abreast of Ofsted and Department for Education websites and developments in policy, constantly reflecting on how to represent national expectations in a dynamic curriculum for children. He invests in people, recalling the advice of his Auntie Mary, a former headteacher: “You are only as good as your staff and the caretaker!”

Governance is an evident strength of the school and the chair is a national leader of governance. Totally committed to supporting and improving the school, the governing body hold the school robustly to account within a mutually respectful professional relationship and will not hold back if they need further clarification or explanations of issues. They also seek external verification of the school's performance to inform their views further. They share the vision and ambition of their headteacher, are actively involved in the school's daily life, and are very supportive (abstracted from the 2014 Ofsted report). Naturally the school has made progress on the only issue in its previous report – improving attendance – and is responding to the recently identified challenge of increasing the proportion of more able pupils that achieve the higher levels in writing.

This school provides a model of many years of sustained excellence. If there is an issue for governance, it must be a concern for risk assessment and succession planning.

The Orion Primary School is another that has maintained its outstanding status. Reported (2010) as having a continual excited buzz that is infectious and invigorating, the headteacher, Chris Flathers, is described as inspirational and, like St Monica's, the school is at the heart of the community and held in high esteem by pupils and parents. "I can't keep my child away, even when she is sick" was a sentiment echoed by many parents. Again, it is the motivational drive of the headteacher that is the "overarching element" that makes this school so successful.

"Passion, drive and a belief that nothing is too good for these pupils lie at the heart of the school's continued success and improvement. The headteacher communicates his high expectations persuasively to staff and parents and together they work with determination to improve the opportunities and learning for the community and the federation. A positive and trusting climate has been established where everyone is working together to make the school even better. As a result, staff morale is high and a strong sense of teamwork helps promote the quickening of pupils' progress."

The headteacher "is very well supported by his enthusiastic staff and governing body, who continually evaluate and look for ways to innovate and improve. Their care, support and guidance make an outstanding contribution to the lives of the pupils and to the confidence and esteem of the community. The school's capacity for sustaining these improvements is outstanding."

Ofsted, 2010

The culture of pupil empowerment, a feature of many other highly effective primary schools, is much in evidence.

"In lessons, pupils work with pride and enthusiasm, and drive themselves to succeed. They make rapid progress because their lessons are fun, stimulating and relevant to their lives and experiences . . . Pupils develop impressive social skills

and work supportively together, with a genuine interest in each other's ideas. This, together with good and improving standards in the acquisition of basic skills, means that they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives."

Ofsted, 2010

The school – and the federation with Goldbeaters – has benefitted from the long-term stability of outstanding leadership. Chris has led the school for 14 years. While his two deputies at Orion remain the same since the 2009 review, "other talented staff" he says "have gone on to become headteachers and deputies elsewhere". The inspection report on Goldbeaters (2012) – a much improved school – says that "a knowledgeable, experienced and dedicated *federation* governing body supports the school well. Unafraid to question leaders, they share in equally high expectations".

The Orion Primary School is expanding rapidly and set to double in size. There is a shared centre for all the children in the federation which includes a theatre, dance studio, recording studio and floodlit Astro turf pitches. Chris and his leadership team are dedicated to making learning special. Their goal, he says, is "to provide all our socially challenged children with a better chance in life".

William Ford C of E Junior School in Dagenham also sustained its outstanding status when inspected in 2010, prior to the headteacher Mandy Short's departure. The report was unequivocal about the quality of the school.

"Pupils achieve highly. Well-above-average results are obtained by the end of year in English, mathematics and science, which show a degree of consistency over several years. High percentages of pupils reach higher levels in national tests. Pupils thrill in their learning and thoroughly enjoy school. They take their studies very seriously. Their very mature attitudes, combined with outstanding teaching and a stable staff, contribute very significantly to the pupils' excellent progress. The staff's passion for the school and its pupils, the excellent opportunities provided for them and the respect it trains the pupils to have for all people produces very well-rounded pupils. The staff's high aspirations, very hard work and high quality of their care reap a culture of success."

Ofsted, 2010

The fundamentals of leadership that account for the school's success include:

- an ethos and culture of high expectations that have been thoroughly embedded by the headteacher and the leadership team
- a deeply committed, loyal, stable and hard-working staff
- assurance of high quality through well-developed systems for monitoring progress and the quality of teaching and learning
- excellent systems to ensure consistency in planning

- very good team working in different year groups
- a governing body that is both supportive and challenging and actively monitors the school's work.

William Ford C of E Junior School has subsequently been amalgamated with Village Infant School to become an all-through 3–11 primary school.

Outstanding schools whose performance has been sustained

Half the schools in this study have not been reinspected in the last five years because risk analysis, undertaken through Ofsted's data-based 'interim assessments', indicates that they have sustained their high levels of performance. Responses from their headteachers tell us something about the reasons for the sustained success of these schools.

Bonner Primary School in Tower Hamlets has sustained its extraordinary performance, with consistently well over 90% achieving the benchmark combined level 4 or above, and was featured in Ofsted's *Reading by six* report. Bonner has subsequently been designated a teaching school along with the secondary school it feeds, Morpeth School. The headteacher, Martin Tune, highlights three priorities since 2009.

- "School partnerships: we have eight primaries in our cross-phase teaching school alliance of 13 schools. I have worked in five London schools as a local leader of education. One, which was in special measures, has now been judged 'good'. We are also heavily involved in initial teacher training, research and development and continuing professional development, which has included hosting 300 Norwegian headteachers this year.
- Expansion: in January 2013 we opened a second site in Mile End (London) with a 60-place nursery and two classes in each of the primary years, starting with reception and year 1. The challenge was to try and replicate our methodology, high expectations and ethos in a different building. A second site has meant a serious revision of our structure but created a new source of energy.
- Review and development: We constantly review the key characteristics of our school and regularly refer back to the 2009 report.

Results at **Michael Faraday**, another school where the headship has not changed, are above floor targets. Little further information was available on this school.

Changes of leadership or key staff have the potential to unsettle even highly effective schools and affect their performance, at least until the new vision, ethos and team dynamics are established. The risk can be reduced by succession planning, for example when there is an impending change of headship, and attention to building leadership capacity. Gateway and Shiremoor schools are among those in which succession planning has been a deliberate policy.

Gateway Academy has sustained its strengths. The deputy headteacher was appointed to the headship and the school's outstanding performance has been sustained. The school became an academy in 2013 and has the highest value-added score of all

schools in this study. Succession planning had been a strong feature of Gateway and the outgoing headteacher continued to work more widely in education and maintained a connection with the school. Under the leadership of Louisa Lochner, the school has maintained its exceptionally high standards in a complex and very disadvantaged community, where social and economic issues face many families. Sarah Hacker, the chair of governors, describes how leadership meets the challenges of the present while retaining a vision for the future.

“The leadership of the school is characterised by an ability to identify and respond swiftly to the challenging needs of the school community, such as the impact of changes to housing benefit, while continuing to explore and implement a strategic view of the future, which has involved a change to academy status.”

Succession planning was also much in evidence **Shiremoor Primary School**, first a national support school and subsequently a teaching school in North Tyneside. The previous headteacher, Helen Clegg, put ‘succession planning’ at the top of her agenda, which ensured that when she retired the head of school (previously the deputy headteacher) was in place, taking on more of the running of the school in readiness for a successful transition. The assistant head had been able to work as acting deputy, and other members of staff were primed for new management posts. This ensured a very smooth transfer of responsibility for all concerned and provided stability for staff, pupils and parents.

The school’s position as lead school in a teaching school alliance ensured that possibilities to innovate were still at the forefront of the agenda whilst also allowing further opportunities for staff and school enhancement as the education landscape changed. The new headteacher, Barbara Slider, already had a sound knowledge of the school and alliance activities, and she was well placed to work with staff to continue to move forward at pace, with ICT being the first priority and the continued improvement of parental engagement a further focus. Both aspects are developing well. Growing leadership capacity remains fundamental to school development.

Barbara gives a personal account of her experience.

“As the new headteacher, I was able to move on more swiftly than fellow new heads who have moved straight from the classroom to dealing with the myriad responsibilities of headship. I believe that the head of school model supported this transition. I know that internal appointments are not always the best thing for a school but, in our case, the school has been able to maintain core vision, values and ethos whilst re-energising other areas that were in need of fresh development.

It has been a challenge to work with a very young management team, and it is proving very difficult to bring in new teachers of any quality. Governance has been strengthened by new appointments and much more focus and rigour in meetings.

Parents are more engaged owing to a host of new initiatives. The catchment remains challenging and we have to maintain a constant focus on standards.”

Opportunities for leadership capacity building increase with the size of organisation. This is particularly true where primary schools are federated or part of larger groupings where cross-school roles can be created, as in the next example.

In Liverpool, **St Sebastian’s Catholic Primary School and Nursery** continues to achieve well above national and local authority averages on outcome and progress measures, and 35% of pupils achieve level 5 or better combined results. The senior leadership team includes two deputies appointed since 2009. Both began their teaching careers at the school, rising to become assistant headteachers across the federation and then deputy headteachers. They are described thus by Dennis Hardiman, executive headteacher of this school and its federated partner, St Cuthbert’s.

“The two deputies are dynamic, inspirational and forward looking; exemplary classroom practitioners with outstanding teaching and learning at the forefront of a new ‘Creative Challenge curriculum’ devised by staff and reflecting our children’s communities and family aspirations. The emphasis on the highest standards in difficult circumstances drives the federation senior leadership team to empower our staff and pupils. An open, professional exchange provides shared vision and the best opportunities for our children. St Cuthbert’s has a completely new set of teaching staff; staff teach across the two schools according to need. Federation sharing of good practice facilitates the professional development of staff and we share with many other schools. For our children, ‘only the best will do’.”

A high calibre incoming headteacher can rise to the challenge of keeping an outstanding school on course, as in the next two examples. The job at Berrymede was further complicated by school expansion and staffing turbulence.

The headteacher has changed at **Berrymede Junior School** since its last inspection but the school, one of the most disadvantaged as well as having a very high proportion of children with English as an additional language (EAL), comfortably exceeded the national averages on key attainment and progress measures in 2013. The school has faced significant additional challenges, as recounted by the headteacher, Lubna Khan.

“Its size has increased to four forms of entry. Eleven staff have been absent on maternity leave in the last three years and several experienced senior staff have retired. Increased mobility means that 25% of the current year 6 are pupils who have joined the school recently.” These are factors that can affect the performance of a primary school. The school has mitigated their effects as far as possible by:

- “continuing to be aspirational, innovative and to have high expectations

- rigorous recruitment procedures for new staff, with a focus on high calibre and on subject specialisms in the light of the new curriculum
- CPD and the development of middle managers and senior leaders
- a continued emphasis on the holistic development of our students through high standards of teaching and learning, emotional literacy, global learning and development, restorative justice practice and the UNICEF rights respecting agenda, with the school being a lead school for many of these initiatives.”

St John the Divine C of E Primary School in Kennington has also sustained its excellence with a different headteacher, Catherine Warland, achieving 96% (2012) and 90% (2013) level 4+ passes in reading, writing and mathematics. The school also tops the group for level 5, with 45% attaining combined level 5 or better passes in 2013.

It is well established that headteachers and schools which share their expertise with less successful schools, such as those judged as inadequate or requiring improvement, brings reciprocal benefits to the ‘home’ school. Bonner and Shiremoor are among those described earlier that have grown into ‘system leadership’ roles.

Welbeck Primary School, Nottingham, is another school whose outcomes remain consistently high, as a result, the school claims, of their “consistency and relentless determination to succeed” as well as their work in partnering other schools. Like St Paul’s Peel, recruitment and talent management have been fundamental to their continued success. Key ingredients are “mentoring, coaching and support for all staff” which has “enabled them to develop the confidence and skills to achieve their potential and has strengthened the whole school team”. Professional and leadership development continue to enhance the contribution of staff and school support commitments further develop their capability.

Carol Norman, the headteacher, attests to the reciprocal benefits to Welbeck of partnering other schools.

“In 2009, I became a national leader of education and the school a national support school. This was instrumental in sustaining an outward-looking, aspirational and highly effective school. Developing and delivering intensive support programmes for schools in categories has ensured that we continually self-evaluate and quality assure our own work. We also improve by opening our own practice to the scrutiny of other professionals.”

The school-to-school support element is also an integral part of leadership development. “Ensuring staff develop professionally, have ambition and can contribute to school improvement” in Welbeck and elsewhere “has been essential”. “Developing middle and senior leaders and extending opportunities to practice their skills” has provided “stability

for the school as well as enabling it to maintain its drive for excellence". Carol hopes she has embedded sufficient capacity and ambition to sustain success after she has gone.

Outstanding to good

The perception by many schools that it is harder to sustain a school as outstanding as it is to become outstanding – in an ever more demanding school system – is given some weight by the fact that nearly a third of the schools in this sample were judged good at their most recent inspection. All the schools had previously been judged outstanding in two or more consecutive inspections. Four of the five schools in this position have had a change of leadership since the previous survey in 2009. This section explores what can be learned from being judged good rather than outstanding.

Banks Road Primary School, Liverpool, educates children from a very disadvantaged mainly White British community in which more than half the pupils are eligible for free school meals – twice the national average. The school sustained its outstanding status when inspected in 2011. At that time, inspectors reported that:

“The headteacher’s and senior leaders’ thoughtful and inspirational management continues to underpin the success of the school. The extremely stable team of highly effective staff is totally committed to equality and diversity, celebrating the individual qualities of each pupil and their family. Teamwork is strong and monitoring and evaluation procedures undertaken by all staff successfully drive improvement.”

When inspected again in 2014, numbers at the school had increased by 25%. Several staff had left since the previous inspection; a new headteacher – Glen Hartford – had been appointed and the senior leadership team had been restructured. These changes are characteristic of primary schools where a headteacher retires who has worked with staff and community to bring about and sustain an outstanding primary school over many years.

Two of the key ingredients of Banks Road’s success in 2011, stability and teamwork, can take time to re-establish. Yet the 2014 report, which judged leadership and management to be good, commended “strong teamwork at all levels” and the high regard in which the committed headteacher and senior leadership team are held by staff, who are reported as saying: “They” – the headteacher and senior leaders – “support us to the full but also hold us to account. We feel valued here.” The school’s outcomes and progress measures at key stage 2 were exceptionally high in 2013 and the school is clearly doing very well under its new leadership. The recommendations for improvement mainly related to doing more to develop the spoken language of younger children in the school to better prepare them for writing. This is something to which some of the other case study schools, such as John Donne and Newstead, commit a lot of resource and energy.

John Burns Primary School

Sometimes it is difficult to reconcile inspection findings with headline performance data. The best leaders are not deterred by set-backs such as a disappointing inspection outcome. An example is the inspection report on John Burns Primary School dated May 2013.

The key stage 2 results that same summer were excellent, with 91% of pupils attaining the combined level 4 or above and 32% combined level 5 and 100% of children making expected progress in each of the three areas of reading, writing and mathematics. The inspection reported that pupils achieved “average standards in English and mathematics by the end of year 6” whereas Ofsted’s data dashboard (2013 results) shows attainment in English grammar, punctuation and spelling to be in the top quintile both for similar schools and for all schools. Attainment in mathematics was in the top quintile for similar schools and the second for all schools. While the school feels that it should have maintained its outstanding status, it is no less committed to – as the headteacher says – “raising aspirations, providing opportunities and living up to our motto of ‘Giving our best. Achieving our highest’.” The school has good reason to be proud of the results its children achieve.

Julie Davies, headteacher since 2010, and three of her senior leaders who were at the school when it was previously inspected in 2007 believe the school “has moved forward dramatically” since then. They are upbeat about the continued quality of their school and its exceptional achievements.

St Paul’s Peel C of E Primary School in Salford continued to be judged outstanding when inspected in 2010 and in two focused inspections after that. But the school was judged good in a subsequent section 5 inspection in May 2013. The reasons for it not being outstanding related to a slight blunting of the sharp edge of performance with a call by inspectors for:

- more pupils to make better than expected progress
- more teaching to be outstanding with a small amount requiring improvement
- more rigorous checking of the quality of teaching.

The analysis infers that dynamic leadership by the headteacher is not enough unless leaders at other levels all play their part. On ‘leadership and management’ the report says:

“The headteacher provides the school with infectious and dynamic leadership. It sets the tone for the whole school. At its root is the headteacher’s unwavering determination to provide every child, regardless of background or ability, with a solid foundation for future success and happiness. Teamwork across the school is strong in pursuit of the headteacher’s fundamental beliefs.

Occasionally, however, management does not match the outstanding quality of leadership. For example, checking on the quality of teaching, although regular, lacks the necessary focus on pupils' progress to identify sharply where it could be improved further. This acts as a brake on turning good teaching into outstanding teaching in order to drive up achievement at a faster pace."

Ofsted, 2013

The school recognised the need for strong leadership at all levels to drive excellence, stating:

"We have recently appointed a deputy and two assistant headteachers from within the staff to strengthen and invigorate the management structure. These leaders have a prime responsibility to check quality and drive improvements. The school is committed to collaborative leadership and to developing professional training modules within its 'Family of Schools'.

The evaluation of governance inferred that governors were doing many of the right things but that they were not in a position to spot or act to remedy the variations in the quality of teaching. Inspectors reported the governing body as:

- being exceptionally supportive of the school
- using information astutely to evaluate the performance of the school against other schools both locally and nationally
- knowing the quality of teaching in the school and becoming increasingly effective in holding leaders and managers to account for the rigour with which they check its quality and drive up its impact on improving achievement further
- understanding fully the operation of performance management
- taking part in regular training to keep themselves abreast of developments and to hold the school to account for its effectiveness.

The school is resolved to continue to innovate and embrace change. This vision does not waver.

The 2013 inspection report on **Ash Green Community Primary School** near Halifax is complimentary about leadership in which the associate headteacher followed the departing executive headteacher into a single headship of this school on two sites.

"Resolute leadership of the school is untiring in striving for the best. Leaders and managers share a clear vision and well-formulated plans for development. The aspirations of the headteacher are supported by an able deputy and assistant headteachers. The headteacher and team of leaders monitor the quality of teaching effectively. They regularly watch lessons, examine pupils' work and accurately check data on pupils' performance. Information gathered is used to

improve teaching and resolve the weaker aspects, although issues remain in teaching mathematics.”

Although the report is positive in saying that “the quality of teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding in its impact on pupils’ progress and achievement over time”, the factors that detract from the school being outstanding are:

- teaching is not consistently outstanding
- pupils’ achievement in mathematics is not as strong as in reading and writing
- pupils are not taught to form their letters correctly or to write in a fluent joined-up style.

Although there is strong and capable leadership, and governors who “have a clear view of how the school is performing and rigorously hold the school to account”, it is still possible for something like handwriting to be overlooked.

Cubitt Town Junior School on the Isle of Dogs is one of the most challenged of the schools in the ‘twenty outstanding primary schools’ sample. Over 70% of children are eligible for free school meals and the EAL proportion is almost as high. Results are around national averages and inspectors described pupils’ achievement as good. The points for improvement in the inspection report were to:

- increase the proportion of outstanding teaching, with effective marking and full engagement of pupils in their learning
- replicate strengths in English and mathematics in other areas of the curriculum
- ensure that middle leaders fulfil their roles in raising achievement in their subject areas.

The report hints at work in progress after a change of headship. “The headteacher has made a significant positive impact on improving pupils’ progress and raising attainment in the short time since her appointment. Development planning is detailed and thorough, with clear success criteria. It builds on rigorous and accurate monitoring of provision and outcomes and has resulted in improvements, apparent in the good teaching and learning observed and in tracking data that show pupils’ good achievements.”

But then comes: “Middle managers understand their roles but some are demonstrating more effective skills than others. For example, not all are monitoring teaching rigorously in their areas.” But, the report indicates, “The school’s continuing professional development is well placed to support middle managers’ further improvement . . .”

This adds up to “a good school” which “is not yet outstanding because initiatives to improve teaching, learning and the curriculum further are not fully implemented across the school.” Clearly it is moving in the right direction and developing leadership at all levels.

Conclusions

The messages from this downstream review of the set of outstanding schools in very challenging circumstances schools five years after they were surveyed include the following.

1. Outstanding schools that continue to outperform the rest will not normally be inspected. It is eight years since some of these schools were inspected, but their outcomes for pupils, progress measures and value added remain high and the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged children and others is generally low.
2. Outstanding schools leave nothing to chance. They not only demonstrate high quality, consistency and expertise in meeting all the pedagogical requirements but invest a lot of time and thought in developing their workforce and drawing parents, carers and the rest of the community into the process of educating their children.
3. It is notable that the leaders of schools that sustain their outstanding quality over the years do not exhibit any diminution of passion, vision or commitment. They continue to infuse the school with their energy while also building effective teams that share the vision and promote the school's culture, values and expectations consistently.
4. The biggest risk to schools' outstanding status comes from a change of headship or key staff. It always takes time for a new head to bring about cultural change, establish their role in the team-working of the school and earn the trust of colleagues and the community. There is some evidence that previous outstanding status is more secure where there is internal succession but also examples of schools that have remained outstanding when an external applicant has been appointed to headship.
5. An evident risk is that of losing focus or concentration on the things that really matter, particularly ensuring that teaching is always at the top of its game. Some of the components of effective teaching and learning emerge frequently in recommendations for improvement, including:
 - getting children from all backgrounds up to speed in the early years foundation stage and key stage 1
 - consistently good and outstanding teaching
 - marking and feedback that is not only contributing to learning but combined with giving time and support to children to act on the feedback
 - ensuring that all senior and middle leaders are effective leaders of learning
 - collaborating closely with parents and the community.
6. Related to point 4, to remain outstanding it is advisable for school leaders to have access to professional challenge in addition to the monitoring, challenge and support undertaken by governing bodies. The governing bodies of schools that recede from

outstanding to good are not lacking in commitment or rigour. The inspection reports are invariably complimentary about their understanding of what being a governor entails and their diligence in fulfilling the role. But governors cannot necessarily see nor expect to see something a headteacher has overlooked in terms of standards, techniques and professional processes. This is where having a professional critical friend or peer reviewer can be helpful.

7. Having all quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation measures in place will not preserve a school's excellence unless these processes are used in a smart way. Classroom observation, for example, should focus more on what and how well the children are learning than on what the teacher is doing, on reflectivity as much as activity, on the quality of dialogue, questioning, responding and feedback, and on the whole picture as well as the engagement and progress of individual children.

8. In schools where parents and communities may have low aspirations and little regard for education, or where cultural differences can impede communication, the schools in this study have demonstrated the extra importance of building a close relationship with parents and the community and the impact this can have on children's learning, behaviour and attendance. A primary school that is not in the true sense a community school – whether an academy, maintained, voluntary or free school – is unlikely to be an outstanding school.

ANNEX A. Summary of key stage 2 performance data (2013)

School	Total on roll	% pupils with English not as first language	% FSM during past 6 years	% Level 4 reading, writing and maths		% Level 5+ reading, writing, maths	% expected progress in reading	% expected progress writing	% expected progress maths	APS	% Level 4 reading, writing, maths (2013)		KS1-KS2 VA score	
				2012	2013	2013	2013	2013	2013	2013	2013	Disadvantaged pupils	Other pupils	2013
England - all schools		18.1	26.8	75	75	21	88	91	88	28.4	63	81	100	
Ash Green CPS	449	0	62	72	78	15	98	98	95	28.2	69	93	100.5	
Banks Road PS	236	4.1	53.7	68	92	21	96	96	96	28.6			101.5	
Berrymede Junior School	333	83.8	68.2	71	81	13	90	98	97	28.2	81	82	100.7	
Bonner Primary School	498	75	54.2	95	97	32	98	100	100	30.9	95	100	101.3	
Cubitt Town Junior School	355	65.1	70.4	71	73	15	77	91	91	27.8	66	95	99.1	
Gateway Academy	708	95.6	66.1	84	82	27	94	98	99	29.3	81	85	102.3	
John Burns Primary School	208	32.7	51.4	83	91	32	100	100	100	29.6	100	82	101.3	
Michael Faraday	393	39.2	43.6	68	68	30	91	84	84	27.5	58	76	99.7	
St John the Divine C of E PS	218	93.9	54.5	96	90	45	93	83	93	30.9	82	100	99.7	
St Monica's Catholic PS	441	1.5	38.9	90	81	21	83	91	89	29	81	81	100.3	
St Paul's Peel CofE	323	2.2	51.8	86	78	14	97	94	78	27.9	74	86	99.3	
St Sebastian's Catholic PS	253	18.4	40.6	90	88	35	92	100	92	29.6	85	92	100.8	
Shiremoor Primary School	403	5.5	51	85	89	11	93	96	93	28.1	87	94	100	
The Orion PS	543	67.3	53.4	89	89	20	96	93	95	29.4	90	86	100.7	
Welbeck Primary School	292	45.3	48.1	88	88	35	92	96	88	28.9	88	89	99.6	
William Ford CofE PS	355	38.6	40.3	93	88	32	86	98	99	30.4	80	95	101.3	



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