



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

# **The teaching schools evaluation:**

**Emerging issues from the early  
development of case study teaching  
school alliances**

**Research brief**

**March 2014**

**Qing Gu, Simon Rea, Robert Hill  
Lindsey Smethem & John Dunford  
– The University of Nottingham**

# Contents

Overview	3
Governance of teaching school alliances	3
Leadership of teaching school alliances	4
Business management	4
Delivery of the 'Big 6'	5
Initial Teacher Training and Continuous Professional Development/Leadership Development	5
School-to-school support	5
Specialist Leaders of Education	5
Succession planning & talent management	6
Research and development	6
Development of teaching school alliances	6

## Overview

This interim report is the first publication from the two-year study (2013-2015) on the evaluation of teaching schools commissioned by the National College for Teaching and Leadership. The report provides a summary of the emerging issues from the *early development* of case study teaching school alliances.

In November 2010, the Schools White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' set out the UK Government's plan to establish a national network of teaching schools as part of the policy aim of developing a self-improving school system. The first cohort of 97 teaching school alliances were designated in September 2011, followed by the designation of a second cohort of 86 teaching school alliances in March 2012 and a third cohort in February 2013. By November 2013, there were 357 teaching schools and 301 teaching school alliances in England.

The broad aim of this project is to gather robust qualitative and quantitative evidence for understanding the effectiveness and impact of teaching schools, and the quality of external and internal support required to enhance these. This will be achieved through case studies, a national survey of teaching schools, and secondary research and analysis of national performance and inspection results.

This report summarises learning from the first visits to 18 case study teaching school alliances in the summer term of 2012/13. The research team interviewed people with a wide range of roles and responsibilities within each teaching school, their strategic partners, and a number of schools that have received support from the teaching school. In this report, special attention is given to themes that help to provide a baseline description of how the lead teaching schools have established their roles, their alliances, and their initial work against the 'Big 6' (the six strands of the teaching school remit).

## Governance of teaching school alliances

We found a range of governance arrangements operating in the case study teaching school alliances. The extent and depth of the distribution of responsibilities and clarity of accountability arrangements differed. There were examples of layered governance in 15 case study teaching school alliances which illustrate the models described by Rea & Hill in their work for the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) (2012). Involving key strategic partners in the formal governance of the alliances was found to have helped to spread the workload, increase a sense of ownership, and deepen the partnership between the core alliance members. It also enabled the teaching school alliances to play to the strengths of the strategic partners and, through this, enhance their chances of other schools joining them.

There is variation in the extent and depth of school governor involvement from the sample of case study alliances. In some teaching school alliances, governors are

formally involved in the progress and direction of the teaching school alliance, although the most common arrangement is for the head of the teaching school to provide updates to his/her governing body.

## Leadership of teaching school alliances

Building and leading a teaching school alliance is seen as a hugely time consuming, but worthwhile enterprise by the case study teaching school alliances. For all the teaching school heads or executive heads in our sample, their leadership is driven by a strong altruistic mission to support other schools and, through this intervention, make a difference to the learning and life chances of all children. Their leadership practice demonstrated five essential elements: i) *Building a clear vision and a sense of direction* within the alliance; ii) *A sustained focus on and strategy for developing people*; iii) *(Re)structuring the organisation* of teaching school alliances in order to establish necessary work conditions for their strategic development; iv) *enhancing effective teaching and learning* within the alliance through leading and developing the teaching school's remit; v) *Building, developing and deepening partnerships* within (and beyond) teaching school alliances, in order to create the necessary social capital for collective learning and development.

The main leadership concerns include: i) succession planning for the leadership of teaching school alliances; and ii) the increased risks, through the new Ofsted framework, of losing their 'outstanding' designation and, as a consequence, the infrastructure for support collapsing.

## Business management

The ways in which the case study teaching school alliances are managing their finances vary. So far, a minority of teaching school alliances have set up a separate company to manage the finances, whilst the majority are still holding the money in school accounts. Arrangements for charging schools for services also vary considerably amongst the case study teaching school alliances. Most alliances are charging on a 'pay as you go' basis with no membership fees attached. However, a minority are using a club membership system (partners pay an annual fee for being part of the alliance); whilst others are using a combination of the two. Some alliances offer discounts to alliance partners for professional development and training programmes. Some activity is also being provided free of charge.

Sustainability, of what are currently quasi-business models, is a challenge for almost all the teaching school alliances in this evaluation, with scarce resources of time and money being used by them to sustain and develop the teaching school alliance work. The most significant perceived risk is the reduction and uncertainty in funding to teaching schools and especially the potential end of the central start-up funding.

## Delivery of the ‘Big 6’

In almost all of the 18 case study teaching school alliances, there is good progress in the delivery of initial teacher education, continuing professional development and leadership development, and school-to-school support. Those that previously were training schools, or have been involved in school centred ITT, have found their experiences helpful to these aspects of the teaching school work.

## Initial Teacher Training and Continuous Professional Development/Leadership Development

The quality of the ITT and CPD/Leadership Development provision is seen as having the potential to act as a magnet to attract more schools to join the case study teaching school alliances. School Direct is a major motivator for almost all the teaching school alliances in this evaluation. Feedback from our initial visits suggested that alliances had few difficulties filling primary places, although there were challenges recruiting in priority subjects for secondary places. The Improving Teacher Programme (ITP) and the Outstanding Teacher Programme (OTP) are well established across almost all the case study teaching school alliances. The impact of these programmes on participants’ and facilitators’ professional learning and development, and then on teaching and learning in the classroom, will be an important part of the evidence base for the evaluation. The coaching approach has been welcomed by the schools and the trainees.

## School-to-school support

**School-to-school support** is perceived, by almost all the case study teaching school alliances, as a bespoke and practitioner led response to local need. This contrasts with a perception from the alliances of an “off the shelf” method of delivery from previous local authority training and support, and is welcomed by the supported schools that we spoke with for this study. Major challenges are related to capacity for teaching school alliances to manage the demand, or lack of demand in the local/rural area, and relationships with some local authorities.

## Specialist Leaders of Education

There is clear evidence that some excellent work, which contributes to school improvement, is being carried out by the Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) recruited and deployed by the case study alliances. The SLE role is providing valued and attractive leadership development opportunities and experience for excellent middle and senior leaders, beyond their employing school. However, recruiting SLEs can be a challenge. In some case study alliances, there has been a lack of enthusiasm from alliance schools. SLE deployment can also be a challenge. This appears to be more acute in the primary sector, and smaller schools, where there are fewer resources

available to buy in external expertise. Some case study teaching school alliances commented that SLEs' work entails a challenge of applying skills used in one context to another. Systematic assessment of the impact of SLE deployment is not straightforward. Evidence is needed to understand whether, and the extent to which, SLEs are acting as system leaders in the delivery of their role.

## **Succession planning & talent management**

There is clear evidence of talent management and leadership development in the case study teaching school alliances. The teaching school work is perceived to have provided new opportunities to develop and retain outstanding colleagues within the teaching school and their alliance. However, it has also proved to be a challenge to develop and implement a succession planning strategy in a short timescale for the case study teaching school alliances. There is, also, a challenge for all teaching school alliances, as part of their standard leadership development practice, to follow the example of the best chains and create a structure/system that provides opportunities for emerging and aspiring leaders to have assignments, lasting from a few weeks to a whole term or a school year, in other schools to complement formal training and, through this, translate their vision into action.

## **Research and development**

The development of research and development work varies across the teaching school alliances in this evaluation. For some, research and development is seen as generally underpinning all aspects of the 'Big 6', rather than being a discrete aspect of the teaching school alliance work. Partnerships with higher education institutions were perceived to have provided promising research and development opportunities for them. For others, this is an area for further development. Research and development is time consuming and can seem initially daunting for teachers. It is felt that there is a need to continue to steer research and development towards evidence-based teacher inquiry and joint practice development and see it not as an add-on but as part of the mainstream school-to-school improvement.

## **Development of teaching school alliances**

All the teaching school alliances in this evaluation have progressed since their designation and are working to develop and/or deepen partnerships within and beyond their alliances. Such development is driven by a clear sense of direction, shared values, and recognition that all partners have talents, experience and skills to share, regardless of their particular Ofsted grading. However, the ways in which the case study teaching schools interpret what constitutes the 'membership' of a teaching school alliance vary. The scope and depth of different partners' engagement in the teaching school activity also vary significantly. Relationships with the local authorities and the balance between

collaboration and competition with neighbouring teaching school alliances appear to be the major challenges for some, to date.

In the second phase of the evaluation, our intended approach is to track the development of the 18 case study teaching school alliances, and also, to engage in the examination of the performance and impact of all teaching school alliances through a national survey, and secondary research and analysis.



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

© University of Nottingham [2014]

**Reference: DFE-RB332**

**ISBN: 978-1-78105-306-5**

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

[marguerite.adewoye@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:marguerite.adewoye@education.gsi.gov.uk) or [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

This document is available for download at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)