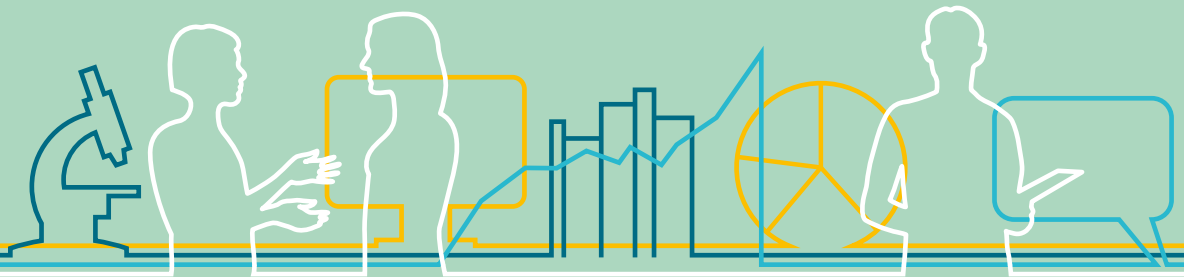


Report by Tony McAleavy and Anna Riggall

# The rapid improvement of government schools in England





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**Education Development Trust** Highbridge House, 16–18 Duke Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 4RU  
T +44 (0) 118 902 1000 E [enquiries@educationdevelopmenttrust.com](mailto:enquiries@educationdevelopmenttrust.com) W [www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com](http://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com)



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## Welcome to Education Development Trust

Education Development Trust, established over 40 years ago as the Centre for British Teaching and later known as CfBT Education Trust, is a large educational organisation providing education services for public benefit in the UK and internationally. We aspire to be the world's leading provider of education services, with a particular interest in school effectiveness.

Our work involves school improvement through inspection, school workforce development and curriculum design for the UK's Department for Education, local authorities and an increasing number of independent and state schools, free schools and academies. We provide services direct to learners in our schools.

Internationally we have successfully implemented education programmes for governments in the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia, and work on projects funded by donors such as the Department for International Development, the European Commission, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the World Bank and the US Agency for International Development, in low- and middle-income countries.

Surpluses generated by our operations are reinvested in our educational research programme. Please visit [www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com](http://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com) for more information.

## About the authors

**Tony McAleavy** is Education Development Trust's Research and Development Director, with corporate oversight of the educational impact of all Education Development Trust's activities and the Education Development Trust public domain research programme. Tony has worked extensively on school reform in many countries, particularly in the Middle East. He has an MA in Modern History from St John's College, University of Oxford.

**Dr Anna Riggall** is Head of Research at Education Development Trust. She oversees Education Development Trust's portfolio of international research and supports research activity across the business. She spent her early career teaching in Russia, southern Europe and the Caribbean and has worked as an educational researcher since the early 2000s. She holds an MA in Education and Development and a PhD in Education.

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## Acknowledgements

The project team would like to thank the 93 schools that took part in this research work and research associate, Amy Smail for her part in the data collection during the original research.

The team would like to recognise the contribution of Rachael Fitzpatrick who was an author of the UK research report.





## Introduction

This study investigates the experience of an unusually interesting group of schools. There are about 20,000 government-funded primary and secondary schools in England. They are all subject to inspection by the national schools inspectorate for England known as Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). According to Ofsted a very small proportion of the government schools have recently improved dramatically from a previous low baseline. Ofsted uses a 4 point scale to categorise school quality. Using Ofsted data we calculated that there were 360 schools that, in the previous two years or less, had moved from being graded by Ofsted as 'inadequate' (category 4) to being graded as 'good' or 'outstanding' (category 2 or 1, respectively).

The inspectors considered that these schools had been transformed for the better in a relatively short period of time. Ofsted is widely known for the robustness of its methods and teachers in England consider that Ofsted inspectors are difficult to please. So it is a great achievement when a school categorised as inadequate is, within two years, officially designated as good or outstanding.

We wanted to know more about what had happened in these schools. We contacted them and about 100 agreed to take part in our research through a survey and follow-up interviews. The aim of this study was to engage with the headteachers of these schools in order to better understand their view of the causes of transformation in the educational performance of their schools and to ascertain how they think improvements had taken place.<sup>1</sup>

The following report presents our findings. We consider this study to be important because it helps us to understand some of the practicalities of school improvement. Above all this research is a study into the characteristics of effective school leadership. We were particularly concerned to make sense of the leadership action that had taken place in these schools. This research study was borne of the desire to find out what it was that school leaders were doing and what took place in these schools during that 'turnaround'.

The findings are encouraging and provide grounds for optimism. It is possible to change for the better schools with a long history of chronic underperformance. At the same time this study highlights the complexities of school leadership in adversity and the often tough personal experiences of those who undertake the difficult role of leading change in an underperforming school.

This report has a significance beyond England because policymakers all over the world are wrestling with the problem of how to improve underperforming government-funded schools. We hope the findings will provide both practical insights and inspirations for anyone involved in the business of bringing about rapid school improvement.

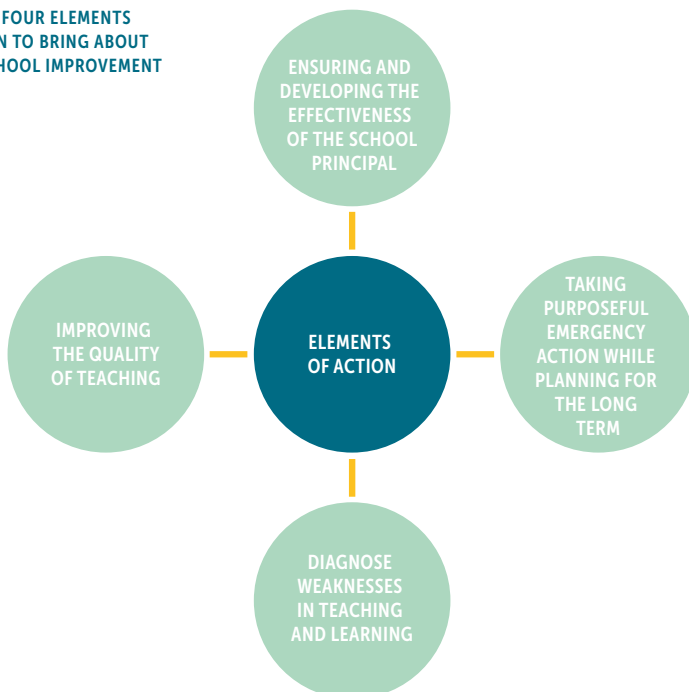
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<sup>1</sup>Details about the approach and methods can be found in Appendix 1.

## The components of school transformation

Our research into the experience of these schools suggested that there were typically four key areas of action that led to school transformation. These four elements are described in more detail in the sections that follow. There are many areas of overlap between the elements and they did not happen in the schools in a simple linear fashion. However, these four factors for change were found in almost all of the participant schools. In essence, all the elements are concerned with the power of the right school leadership. The transformation depended on the presence of an accomplished headteacher, with a good plan for change that centred on the short-term and long-term steps needed to improve teaching and learning.

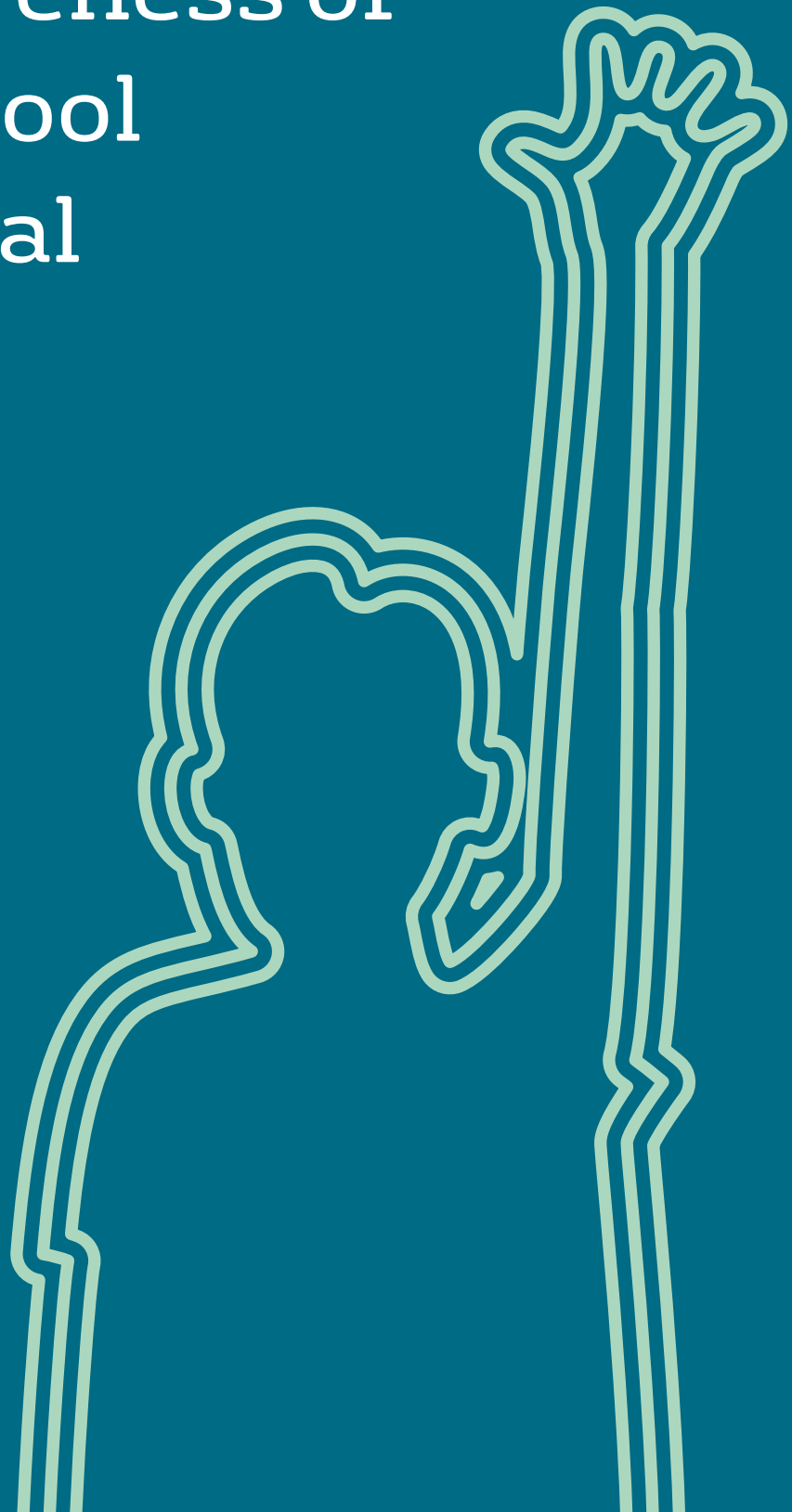
**FIGURE 1: FOUR ELEMENTS OF ACTION TO BRING ABOUT RAPID SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**





Chapter 1

# Ensuring and developing the effectiveness of the school principal



# Ensuring the school leader was up to the job of driving a dramatic turnaround was key to successful rapid school improvement.

After a critical inspection a key question for the school board was: did the existing headteacher have the ability to lead the transformation of the school? The Inspection report often provided a very clear answer to this question because Ofsted reports always contain a judgement about school leadership. In some cases, the answer was manifestly 'no' and the governing body often negotiated a severance agreement with the headteacher who left the school. In about half the schools in the sample, the headteacher left the school in the aftermath of the critical inspection report.

In many of the other schools, where the headteacher was not replaced, he or she had in fact arrived at the school not long before the critical inspection report and was therefore not seen as part of the long-term problem by the inspectors or the school board. Some of this group of 'survivor' headteachers welcomed the critical inspection judgement. They told us that they received a certain degree of power and authority to effect change after the poor inspection result and that this had been lacking beforehand. The interviewees made it clear that Ofsted provided them with a mandate for change, and that was why they so much welcomed the inspection findings. Ironically, several of them were clearly pleased with the highly critical inspection findings because it made possible radical action. As one headteacher said:

*'Actually the Ofsted category enabled me, really, to push things through that I wouldn't have got away with without us being in that category.'*

Other headteachers agreed that the poor inspection judgement made rapid change possible. Whether the headteachers were new or were already at the school, the inspection enabled radical action but the success of these changes depended upon the effectiveness of the headteacher.

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## Effective headteachers need a framework for thinking about school improvement

The headteachers who participated in this study were almost all confident professionals with a plan of action based on strongly held views about how schools can be improved. They articulated clearly the approach they had taken to the improvement of their schools and the rationale for the changes. Each headteacher appeared to have, in effect, a theory about how to bring about change based on what they saw as the key levers for school improvement. While many individuals emphasised distinctive features of their personal approach, there was also a marked degree of consistency and agreement across the headteachers as to the components of the theory of change. Most of the participant headteachers

conceptualised the requirements for school improvement in a very similar way. This shared framework could be summarised as follows:

Teaching quality is the key. At the beginning of the improvement process, assess each individual teacher in terms of performance, attitude and capacity to improve. Put in place monitoring arrangements related both to student outcomes and the observation of teacher performance; use this as an internal accountability mechanism to both measure and incentivise good teaching. Support the teachers to develop their professional practice with the best possible professional development opportunities.

The momentum for improvement must come from the school's leadership. Initially there is unlikely to be sufficient distributed or shared leadership capacity in an inadequate school so the headteacher may personally need to take a relatively directive role. Over time this should change. Using a twin track approach, the headteacher should initially prescribe new ways of doing things while building the capacity of the whole school team so that in the long term responsibility for decision making is widely shared.

Two core responsibilities for school leaders are monitoring and motivation. Monitoring is not enough and by itself can be demoralising. It needs to be combined with motivation and the building of trust. Through positive feedback, improved school climate, excellent professional learning opportunities and 'open door' communications, leaders can greatly increase teacher morale and teacher motivation to do the best they possibly can.

Highly effective school leaders bring about transformation by building coalitions for change with the key stakeholders: teachers, students, school board members and parents. Parental support for change is vital. Schools considered inadequate have typically lost the trust of the parent body. There is a need to re-build trust through an energetic engagement with parents both collectively and individually. This is likely to involve frequent written communications, school events that bring parents in and let them see the changes that are taking place, high levels of 'school gate' visibility and systematic measurement of parental satisfaction.

**Highly effective school leaders bring about transformation by building coalitions for change with the key stakeholders: teachers, students, school board members and parents**

### **Headteachers responsible for school turnaround need both technical skills and strong personal qualities**

We asked headteachers what they had learned about leadership as a result of their experience in these schools. They made it clear that school leaders need technical skill in specific aspects of leadership and management. They talked about the importance of diverse technical matters such as defining the school vision, data literacy, monitoring skills and dealing with difficult human resource (HR) decisions. Their responses also emphasised the personal attributes required for the job of leading a school facing challenging circumstances. Headteachers repeatedly told us that while leading their school from inadequate to good, they learned the

importance of such personal qualities as resilience, a capacity for extremely hard work and a dogged relentlessness of focus.

Several themes emerged from their answers: the need for optimism, an emphasis on the importance of motivation and a willingness to seek out support from others. Many respondents made reference to the concept of **resilience**. Being a headteacher in a challenging school was tough and a headteacher leading the 'turnaround' needed considerable strength of character as well as technical skill. The following quotations give the flavour of how several headteachers pinpointed fortitude and persistence as essential characteristics of leaders engaged in school turnaround:

*'You need to be courageous and resilient with a relentless focus on standards.'*

*'You have to be resilient and committed to taking the necessary actions, however unpleasant, to bring about the necessary changes.'*

*'You need to be resolute in bringing in change where it is needed. You need total focus on what that change is and every action/ decision taken must take you further towards that change. You must share your vision with passion and conviction to bring all on board. And you must do it all with a warm smile!'*

*'You need to be determined, resilient and relentless. You have to be brutally honest whilst motivating people to improve. You have to always demonstrate a belief that 'we can do this' even on the darkest of days.'*

Being a headteacher in a challenging school was tough and a headteacher leading the 'turnaround' needed considerable strength of character as well as technical skill

## Headteachers need external support for rapid school improvement

Several headteachers in our study described how much they had valued mentoring relationships with experts from outside the school. In many cases they made it clear that the school transformation was only possible because of this external support. The sources of support were varied: for example, experienced friends, local authority advisers and executive headteachers. Some schools were part of formal collaborative networks with other schools and were able to access credible external support from the wider network.

## Post-inspection help from inspectors can be highly beneficial

In England receiving an inadequate inspection judgement is followed by post-inspection monitoring visits by inspectors. During these visits inspectors work with the school to assist staff to understand about the weaknesses and assess the efficacy of the reforms put in place to address these. Visits take place on a termly basis (three times per academic year). Headteachers often spoke highly of the benefits of these Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) monitoring visits that took place in the months after the inspection. The insights of individual HMIs were praised, as was the positive nature of these visits. There was a sense of alignment and joint endeavour between the heads and the monitoring HMIs.





*'We found working with the HMIs really useful. You know, people don't like HMIs in the school, they get very nervous about it. But the two we had were fantastic, they were really helpful. They were very good, very clued up, very strong, knew their stuff. They were inspecting us, clearly, but it was done with advice...'*

*'So I was very lucky because the HMI and I...were very aligned in our thought process around where the school needed to go. He was incredibly challenging and very much made me have to fight to convince him that the school was moving forward and to prove it...but that dialogue every few months with an external person who could see the difference that had been made each time he came back was really powerful. And it was really powerful for me as a leader to get that feedback.'*

Chapter 2

# Taking purposeful emergency action while planning for the long term



Based on our reading of the relevant literature<sup>2</sup> and this research we make the distinction between the ‘emergency leadership’ that schools in crisis need and a different style of leadership required to ensure for long term sustainable improvement.

This distinction was emphasised by many of our interviewees who described the need both for an immediate top down approach, and also a long-term more collegiate approach which involved a sharing of responsibility for school effectiveness with other staff and the school board (known in England as the Governing Body).

In the immediate post-inspection crisis, the priority was not distributed leadership, but basic levels of professional consistency

### The emergency phase: insisting on whole-school consistency based on new standard operating procedures

Many headteachers in our investigation described how they had adopted relatively directive styles of leadership in early stages of the school ‘turnaround’. In the immediate post-inspection crisis, the priority was not distributed leadership, but basic levels of professional consistency.

*‘So for every class, I’d done a class timetable and I issued it, and said, “This is what it’s going to be. I bought all new books for the children, this is what they’re going to be and we’re all going to do our literacy in these books, our maths in these books.” So it was very controlled...there was no choice.’*

*‘I think it was very much characterised by establishing – and I even want to say “imposing” – a consistency across the school... It was important to establish a sense of consistency... So, for example, where lessons weren’t well planned, there weren’t key objectives so we just insisted that every single lesson in the school started with a slide... that explained to students exactly what their learning was and how it fitted in.’*

During the ‘directive’ phase of the turnaround the focus was often on introducing consistent whole-school policies in such areas as lesson planning and behaviour management. Our interviewees placed a particular emphasis on the importance of systems for academic monitoring. Many of the headteachers interviewed established new monitoring and evaluation systems to improve the tracking of individual student performance.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for further details

## Talent spotting during the emergency phase

One feature of the early stages of transformation in many schools was the identification of the most able teachers in the school so that the headteacher could enlist these staff in the school improvement project. In schools with variable teaching quality, the best teachers were seen as the key resource. By winning the trust of these skilful – but often demotivated – staff, the headteacher set out to change the whole school culture and ethos. Often re-energising these staff emerged as an important priority.

*'There are great people at this school doing a great job in incredibly difficult circumstances. And actually what you are left with sometimes are the real brave people who stick with it through thick and thin. And so it is understanding how to find out those who are here, and are absolutely passionate, and have the skill set to drive the school forward, and out of special measures, and how you engage them back in the process, and how you particularly develop their love for teaching and the profession, and for educating children again.'*

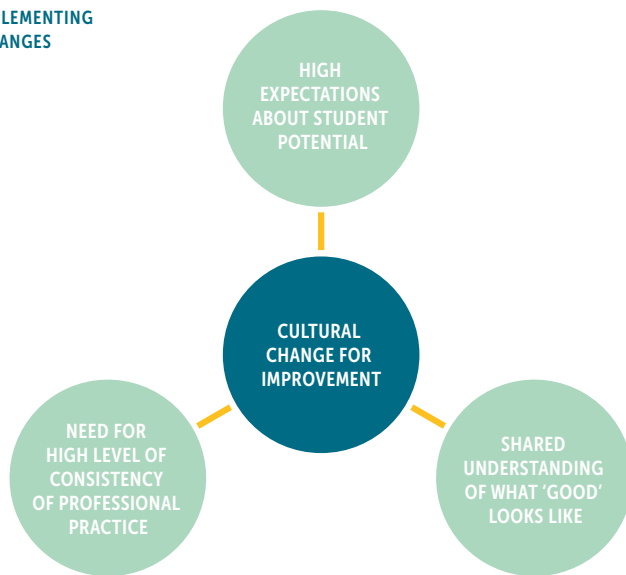
In schools with variable teaching quality, the best teachers were seen as the key resource

## An early emphasis on the need to transform school-wide cultural expectations

The headteachers in many of our schools considered that there was an urgent need to bring about a change in school culture. They typically did this in three ways:

- Setting new **high expectations** to ensure that all staff were approaching teaching all pupils equitably and without bias of any kind. A common barrier to better learning were teacher assumptions about student potential. In too many schools teachers assumed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds would be likely to underachieve.
- Developing a **shared understanding about what good teaching 'looked like'**. Teachers needed to aspire to better professional practice but needed to see for themselves better pedagogy through visits to other classrooms and highly practical professional development.
- Monitoring staff performance to ensure that there was a **consistency in professional practice** across the school. Headteachers communicated new expectations via new performance management arrangements. Through specific feedback after lesson observations or the scrutiny of students' written work it was possible to demonstrate in a very concrete way what was required as a result of the change in school culture.

FIGURE 2: IMPLEMENTING CULTURAL CHANGES



### The urgent need to rebuild the trust of the parents

Most of the headteachers interviewed for our research set about building a stronger relationship with parents through a new communications strategy. There was often a new spirit of transparency based on personal visibility on the part of the headteacher and open engagement through newsletters, workshops and parental satisfaction surveys. For primary school headteachers, 'school gate' visibility seemed particularly important. Headteachers personally welcomed parents as they dropped off their children in the morning and picked them up in the afternoon. This sent out an important symbolic message about the school as a place that valued the role of parents. Parental liaison about student-specific problems was often an improvement priority.

*'So right from day one I made sure that I was very visible so I did the gate every morning and every night and literally from the second that I stood on that gate I'd get parents coming to say, "I hope you're going to be different to the last headteacher because she wouldn't let us in".'*

By reaching out to both the most talented staff and the parental community, headteachers sought to build a strong coalition for change. Although some members of staff might have been resistant to the case for change, it was difficult for them to obstruct progress if the headteacher had successfully built such a coalition with both their peers and with parents.

For primary school headteachers, 'school gate' visibility seemed particularly important

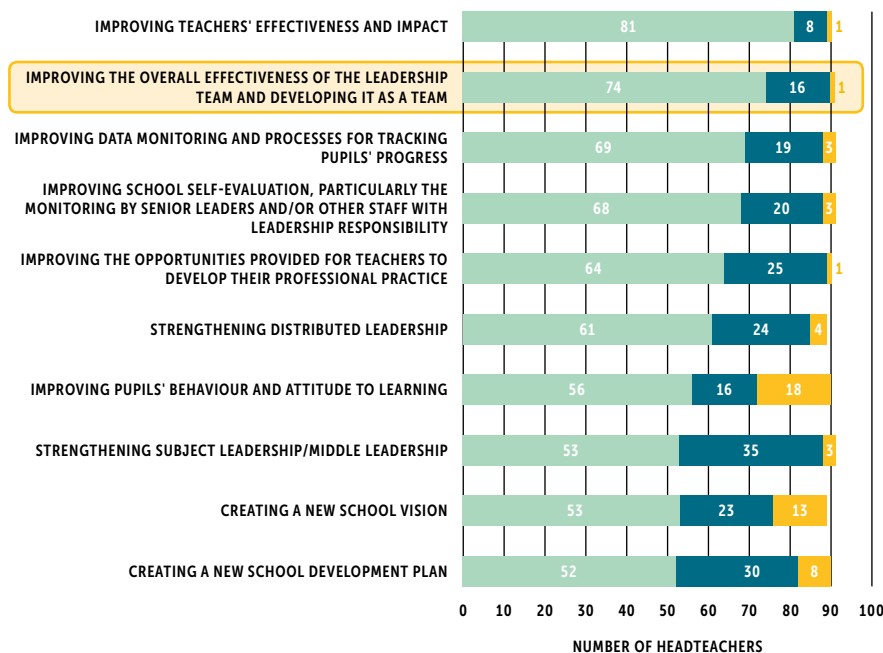
## Moving towards a more collective sense of responsibility

The directive phase was necessary but was not a sustainable approach for the long run. Schools, headteachers believed, need more than one ‘heroic’ individual leader. Staff at all levels must be competent and confident professionals. What was required was a strong, distributed approach to leadership involving all staff and the governors on the school board. Leadership was, therefore, not thought to be the sole responsibility of the school headteacher but the wider responsibility of teachers and the governing body. Building and sharing leadership with others was the preferred long term strategy to support sustainable school effectiveness. As can be seen in the figure below most participants had a fundamentally collegiate view of the nature of leadership.

**Building and sharing leadership with others was the preferred long term strategy to support sustainable school effectiveness**

**FIGURE 3: PRIORITIES ASSOCIATED WITH PARTICULARLY RAPID SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT (SURVEY)**

■ VERY IMPORTANT IN BRINGING ABOUT RAPID IMPROVEMENT IN THIS SCHOOL  
■ IMPORTANT IN BRINGING ABOUT RAPID IMPROVEMENT IN THIS SCHOOL  
■ NOT IMPORTANT IN BRINGING ABOUT RAPID IMPROVEMENT IN THIS SCHOOL



Headteachers set out to build the capacity of their staff. Most participants in our survey identified the following areas of action relating to shared leadership as priorities:

- improving the collective approach to monitoring and quality assurance used by the whole Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
- strengthening subject leadership
- distributing leadership across the school more effectively.

Some headteachers criticised the disempowering leadership approach of their predecessors. They described limited leadership capacity at all levels: weak

leadership team, weak middle management and a limited sense of responsibility on the part of more junior staff. The absence of an effective Senior Leadership Team and a wider sense of collegiate responsibility seriously constrained the schools' capacity to improve.

*'The head was really the only person who made any decisions in the school. So he hadn't trusted his senior leaders, and his senior leaders weren't trusting middle leaders, and all the things that happened from that. So you've got one person trying to lead the school.'*

In several cases headteachers thought that at the time of the critical inspection report the staff lacked a sense of shared or 'distributed' leadership. Teachers were disempowered and expected decisions to be made from above. This limited their sense of responsibility for problems, as well as the likelihood that they would take corrective action.

*'So [I] was very much trying to engender a culture in which they are not only "allowed to do that" but where they have accountability and therefore responsibility for what they do. That had never been the case... I spoke to all my staff in the first month and a half and everybody said, "Oh well, when senior leadership tell us what to do, we'll do it."*

*'I knew what I wanted but I couldn't get there initially...focusing leadership on one person is not healthy for anyone, least of all the organisation. I knew I wanted to distribute responsibility, but I had to get the right team in order to distribute.'*

Heads used different strategies to develop middle leaders, including identifying and promoting talented staff and sending staff to observe best practice at other schools. One headteacher put a training programme in place to develop middle leaders, considering this to be a vital element of the overall school improvement strategy. Subject leaders were typically given a more prominent role in the evaluation of academic performance in their respective subject areas.

One headteacher spoke powerfully about the need to have a different paradigm of improvement on the journey from good to great, compared to the model of reform that had taken the school from inadequate to good. The 'good to great' phase was all about empowerment and giving staff 'permission' to use their own judgement. The following testimony, from two different headteachers, makes the same point about the lifecycle of school improvement and the need to move from prescription to professional empowerment.

*'Rather than it being me, they do it. So we've kept the core of what we were about when we were in special measures but it's much more distributed. Whereas it was very controlled...what we're trying to do now is get staff to almost forget that and teach how they think is right because they've got the pedagogical understanding now.'*

*'I think the journey from good to outstanding is going to be very different to the journey that we've already been on because it isn't going to be about me driving it, it's going to be about distributing leadership, and about senior and middle leaders driving it and about teachers driving that agenda far more and them taking ownership of what they do.'*

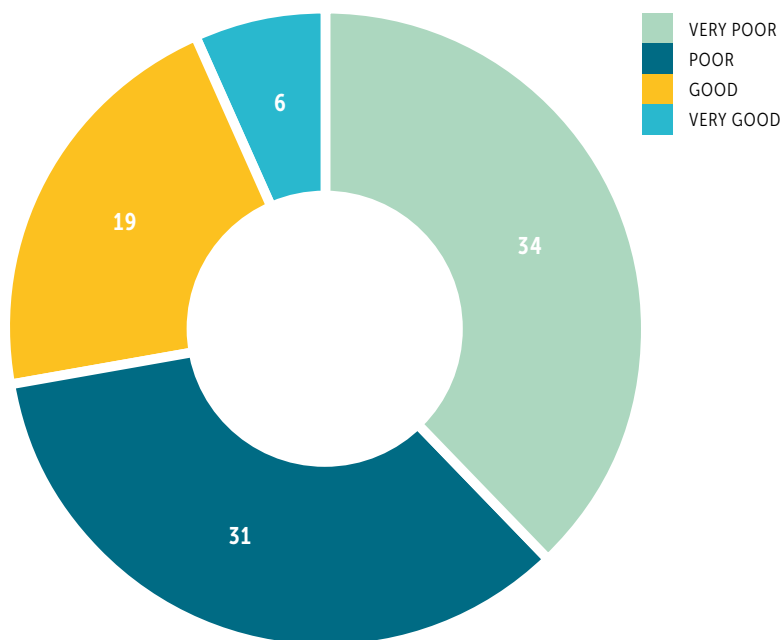
Heads used different strategies to develop middle leaders, including identifying and promoting talented staff and sending staff to observe best practice at other schools

## Building the capacity of the school board

The longer-term improvement strategy used by the schools often emphasised the importance of changes in the way the school board operated. In England schools are required to have a board of ‘governors’ with strategic responsibility for the effectiveness and development of the school. This non-executive ‘governing body’ is overseen by a Chair of Governors and typically has members from the local community with different professional backgrounds. The board holds to account the headteacher and the other employees of the school. The literature<sup>3</sup> suggests a connection in some circumstances between poor school performance and weak school governance at board level. Our survey inquired about the performance of the governors at the time of the inspection and in subsequent months. Participants were often critical of the quality of governance before the improvement process began. No headteachers judged their governing body at the time of the first inspection as *excellent*. The majority rated the governing body as *very poor* or *poor*. Interestingly, the majority of headteachers indicated that the Chair of Governors changed in the 12 months following the inspection that deemed the school inadequate. It is interesting that there was more turnover in the Chair of Governors than there was in headteachers after the first critical inspection report.

In England schools are required to have a board of ‘governors’ with strategic responsibility for the effectiveness and development of the school

FIGURE 4: HEADTEACHERS’ ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE



<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2 for more details



Almost all headteachers indicated that steps to improve the leadership capacity and functioning of the governing body had been taken since the critical inspection report. In most cases new personnel were appointed to the governing body and governors were engaged in specific tasks such as monitoring and evaluation and addressing confidence levels in the use of performance and financial information. In some cases, the original governing body had been disbanded and a special emergency governing board was created until such time a new, permanent, board could be put in place.

Almost all headteachers indicated that steps to improve the leadership capacity and functioning of the governing body had been taken since the critical inspection report

FIGURE 5: IMPROVEMENTS TO GOVERNING BODY

Steps taken to improve the governing body	No. respondents agreeing (n=90)
Appointing new personnel to the governing body	60
Engaging governors in specific tasks, such as monitoring and evaluation	59
Improving governors' skills and confidence in the use of performance and financial data so they can hold school to account and identify priorities	57
Increasing governors' presence in the school, including their involvement in classrooms and their level of contact with parents	51
Achieving greater clarity about the role of governors and the senior leadership team	47
Improving governors' links with key school leaders, including subject leaders	47
Improving communication between the chair and headteacher	42
Delegating specific tasks to governors, such as finance	21

Many headteachers considered that an improved governing body had contributed to rapid school improvement through providing a balance of 'support and challenge'. Several headteachers highlighted, in particular, the importance of governor support in monitoring, including data analysis and observation of lessons and meetings.

Chapter 3

# Diagnosing weaknesses in the teaching and learning



## In almost all schools in this study the development of teaching quality emerged as the central theme in the rapid improvement stories. This required a context-specific diagnosis of the weaknesses by the headteacher.

While the inspection report was a useful source of information for school leaders, their own assessment of the school was the most important part of their diagnosis. The role of the individual headteacher was vital because at this early stage there was little shared or distributed leadership. Our survey asked headteachers about what they considered the most important priorities for school improvement. The great majority placed 'improving teacher effectiveness and impact' at the top of the list, (see figure 3, p.20).

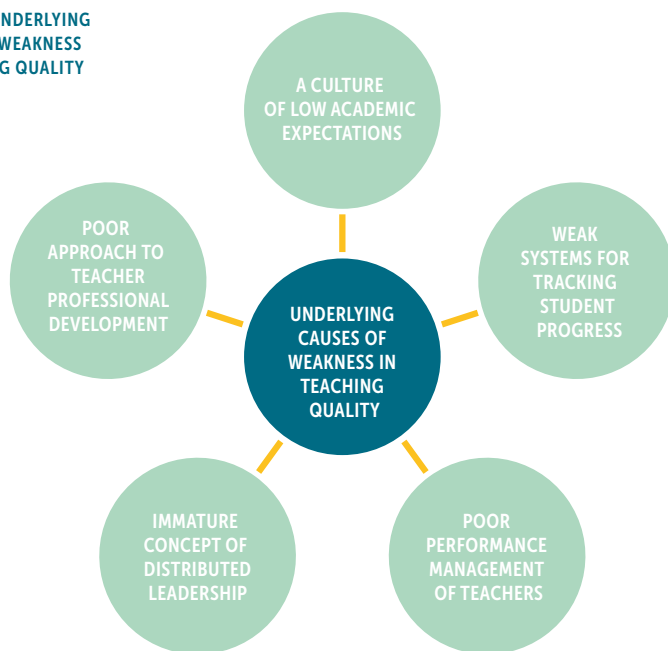
The headteachers involved in this study typically undertook a personal review of teaching quality in the aftermath of the inspection. Several began with a close examination of the data. Most followed up with an observation phase during which they visited classrooms, talked to students about their work and looked at examples of written work, observed the general life of the school and talked to parents. Their impressions were often negative, but there was also considerable complexity to what they saw. Some schools were in a chaotic and severely dysfunctional state, while others were outwardly calm and happy places but with a serious lack of quality in teaching and learning.

The details of the initial audit results varied, but consistently pointed to the prevalence of weak teaching. In a few cases the results of the baseline exercise were comprehensively disappointing in terms of teaching quality. One stated, for example, that teaching quality was 'absolutely appalling'. However, this completely negative view was unusual. In only a small minority of schools were the headteachers unable to find any examples of good-quality teaching that could be used as a model for others. The majority of headteachers identified a pattern not of universally weak teaching, but an unacceptable variability in teaching quality across the school. Headteachers set out to close the variability gap, ensuring that the best practice became the common practice.

As a result of an initial audit of teaching quality, headteachers formed a view of the underlying causes of any weaknesses. The exact mix of factors varied from school to school, but five themes emerged in many of the interviews, which are discussed in more detail over the next few pages.

The headteachers involved in this study typically undertook a personal review of teaching quality in the aftermath of the inspection

FIGURE 6: UNDERLYING CAUSES OF WEAKNESS IN TEACHING QUALITY



### Challenging a culture of low academic expectations

In many of the schools there was a fundamental problem of low expectations. Several headteachers identified a disproportionate emphasis on care rather than achievement as a reason for weaknesses in teaching and learning. For them the schools were often good at pastoral care and providing a safe environment for the children but lacked sufficient focus on academic performance. Challenging this culture of low expectations was identified as an important part of the improvement journey.

*'Our school has always had a high regard for children's well-being... But what I mean is the quality of the relationships between adults and children was always paramount... So that was [the school's] really big strength... It had a flip side though because I'm always wary of when you go to school and you hear that it's really lovely to work here and everyone's really great friends, that often kind of masks the fact that there has been no challenge or accountability.'*

Our interviewees felt that there was often a link between the failure to place sufficient emphasis on academic outcomes and a sense that the teachers had low expectations for student academic outcomes because of the prevalence of social disadvantage at the school. One headteacher described a conversation with a particularly bright girl in Year 11 (aged 15-16), which the head described as epitomising the school's low expectations and the failure to encourage a culture of ambition and aspiration among students:

*"What university are you looking to go to?" "Oh no, I'm going to do hairdressing" and I said, "Oh, you've got a love of hairdressing?" "No but I know I'll be able to get on the course and it'll give me a job."*

Several headteachers identified a disproportionate emphasis on care rather than achievement as a reason for weaknesses in teaching and learning



## Addressing weak systems for tracking student progress

The headteachers saw accurate data about student performance as an essential precondition for school effectiveness and improvement. Many described how monitoring and evaluation was poor when the school was categorised as inadequate by the inspectors. In some cases, there was no suitable data. In other schools, data was being collected but was not being effectively used by teachers.

*'In terms of teachers' use of data it was nowhere, absolutely nowhere... there wasn't any moderation so there wasn't an opportunity to check that, there were inconsistencies....there wasn't a sense that this is ongoing live stuff which, you know, today's data inform what you do tomorrow.'*

*'There wasn't a lot of assessment of teaching. Data was being gathered, but it wasn't actually accurate. So there was a perception that children would leave Key Stage 2 (age 7-11) with a certain grade and they weren't then achieving that.'*

*'I think that things had been, it was all very friendly but no data, no performance management, nothing, no systems in place.'*

*'The data was really poor. So I came in with a mission basically. And within my first fortnight, I had done lesson observation on maths because the data was the weakest for maths.'*

The headteachers saw accurate data about student performance as an essential precondition for school effectiveness and improvement

## Improving performance management of teachers

At the beginning of the improvement journey headteachers in most of the schools were concerned about the inconsistency and variability of teacher performance. The mechanisms to deal with this issue were weak. There was insufficient monitoring of the work of teachers through lesson observation, work scrutiny and data analysis. Without this monitoring it was not possible to be systematic about giving teachers feedback relating to their professional performance. Many heads had a strong sense that there should be a small number of 'non-negotiable' characteristics of all teaching across the school, but that this was an unrealistic aspiration unless effective performance management systems were put in place. One headteacher talked about the need to focus 'relentlessly on the quality of teaching'. This was only possible through more systematic performance management.

*'The systems weren't in place. There was no paperwork...there was no performance management. I sat down with the previous headteacher for about an hour when he gave me the keys but he told me that all the teachers were outstanding but no lesson observations have ever been carried out!'*

## Challenging an immature concept of distributed leadership

Some headteachers criticised the leadership approach of their predecessors. They described limitations at all levels: weak Senior Leadership Team, weak middle management including subject leaders and a limited sense of responsibility on the part of more junior staff. The absence of an effective senior team and a wider sense of collegiate responsibility seriously limited the schools' capacity to improve.

*'The head was really the only person who really made any decisions in the school. So he hadn't trusted his senior leaders, and his senior leaders weren't trusting middle leaders, and all the things that happened from that. So you've got one person trying to lead the school.'*

Teachers were disempowered and expected decisions to be made from above. This limited their sense of responsibility for problems, as well as the likelihood that they would take corrective action.

*'I wanted to be somebody who had distributed leadership, because you can't do it all by yourself and so it was about giving people ownership, allowing, empowering them, allowing them to be risk takers.'*

*'I spoke to all my staff in the first month and a half and everybody said, "Oh well, when senior leadership tell us what to do, we'll do it."'*

## Improving a poor approach to teacher professional development

Headteachers often observed that at the time of the critical inspection judgement, the school had weak professional development practices. There was little sense of any professional dialogue about teaching taking place within the schools, and few teachers were involved in coaching or mentoring relationships. One headteacher described teachers as being fundamentally isolated and rarely involved in discussions about effective pedagogy. None of the schools appeared to have effective collaborative relationships with other schools that would make joint professional development possible. Some headteachers commented on the isolation of the schools themselves, with few systems in place to inject new ideas from outside.

*'Nobody came out and nobody came in... professional development wasn't really considered.'*

*'My analysis of why we got to that position was largely to do with the fact that this was a staff that hadn't had any professional development invested in them for a long time. They had just been doing the job that they had always done, were told that they were doing okay at that job... Never mind any sort of exposure to... any new pedagogy or different ways of working, going out into other schools and seeing how they were acting.'*

None of the schools appeared to have effective collaborative relationships with other schools that would make joint professional development possible

Chapter 4

# Improving teaching quality



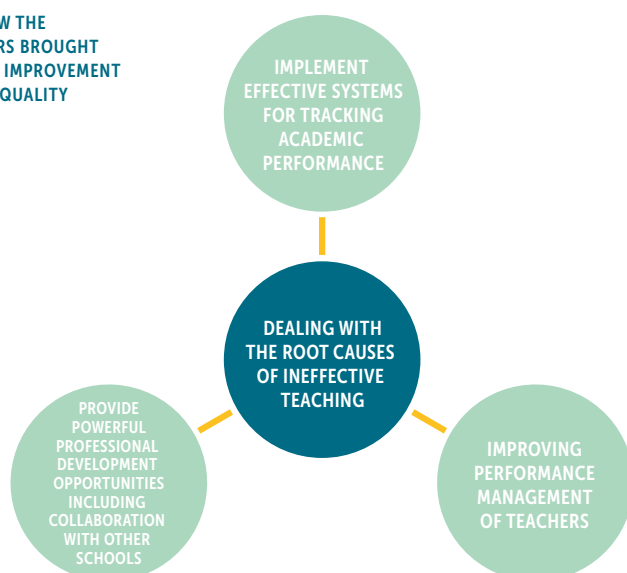


# The most important aspect of work for the headteacher as the leader of the improvement process was addressing the quality of teaching in school.

This was a complex problem that required complex and multi-dimensional solutions. Action on several levels was needed. We identified three key leadership responses:

- implementing effective systems for tracking academic performance
- improving performance management of teachers
- provision of powerful professional development.

**FIGURE 7: HOW THE HEADTEACHERS BROUGHT ABOUT RAPID IMPROVEMENT IN TEACHING QUALITY**



Rigorous monitoring and evaluation by school management of student outcomes emerged strongly from our literature review as one of the key characteristics of the highly effective school

## Implementing effective systems for tracking academic performance

Rigorous monitoring and evaluation by school management of student outcomes emerged strongly from our literature review as one of the key characteristics of the highly effective school. The importance of this factor was further reinforced through our research into these schools. There was virtual unanimity in the schools about the central role of improved monitoring in rapid school improvement.



Almost all headteachers in the survey stated changes had been made to monitoring and evaluation at their school since it was judged to have serious weaknesses or placed in special measures. The headteachers were convinced that the changes in monitoring were pivotal in the transformation of the schools. To a remarkable degree, virtually all the schools had followed the same formula. Improving data systems relating to the tracking of individual students was seen by headteachers as one of the essential reforms that had made possible rapid improvement. The provision of much-improved student level data was also identified as an important change that made possible more purposeful discussions at the school board and governors as well as school managers often played a direct part in the monitoring processes.

Improving data systems relating to the tracking of individual students was seen by headteachers as one of the essential reforms that had made possible rapid improvement

### Improving performance management of teachers

The majority of headteachers who took part in our research survey identified the improved performance management of teachers as a major component of school transformation. Specific areas of management action that they had taken in the field of teacher performance management included:

- readiness to take robust action when staff performance was deemed poor
- reviewing and reforming the nature of teacher observations
- improving the way in which teachers are given feedback on their performance
- ensuring that performance management systems placed a priority on the evaluation of teaching and learning quality.

Teachers in the focus group discussions we conducted often commented on the transformation in the culture of personal accountability:

*'Everyone's got performance management targets and priorities, and middle leaders also have clear quality assurance programmes they've got to put in place. We also obviously have mid-year review and all the things that give quality assurance.'*

*'It was quite intense, you got used to being watched and monitored.'*

The headteachers we interviewed repeatedly talked about the importance of having 'courageous conversations' with individual teachers whose performance was not yet acceptable. It was, of course, difficult to tell colleagues that you found their professional performance disappointing but the headteachers in these schools recognised that this was an important part of their job.

*'I've got one today I'm meeting a teacher after you because his performance isn't adequate, it's not good enough for the kids and so the first conversation will be he needs to be thinking about what he's doing.'*

While our group of transformational headteachers were prepared to confront underperformance they also recognised that applying pressure was not enough. There needed also to be a strong link between performance management and improved professional development. The headteachers that we interviewed understood that challenge without support was likely to be counter-productive.

While the rapidly improving schools typically developed more robust internal accountability systems there was also an emphasis on the importance of motivation. Headteachers frequently commented on the low level of staff morale in the year following the inspection that deemed the school to have serious weaknesses or be placed in special measures. Many headteachers described how morale hit rock bottom or was very low immediately after the critical inspection, although the majority also described how morale improved when changes were made. Typical comments included:

*'Some staff were grieving, some were angry, some were disbelieving. I needed to bring staff together for a common purpose.'*

*'It took over a year for some members of staff to regain their morale and confidence. They needed constant reassurance that what they were doing was good enough.'*

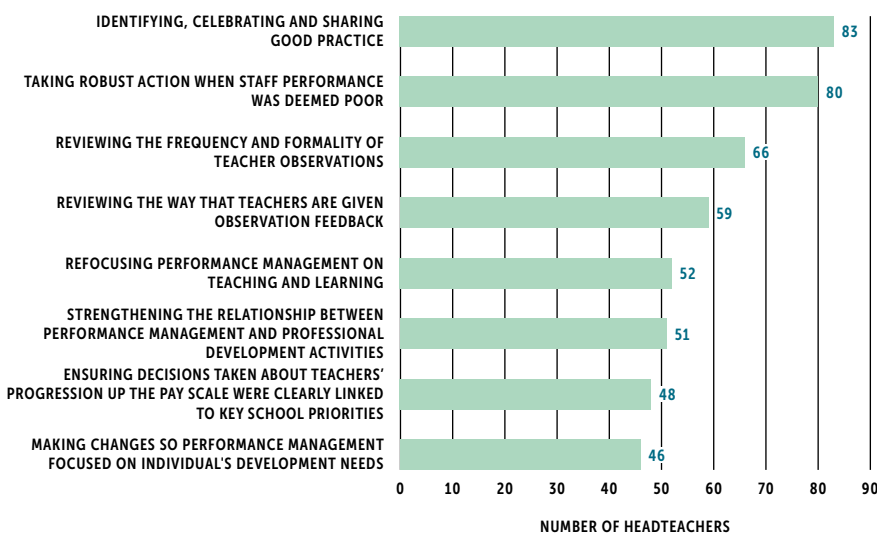
*'Morale was very low to begin with and the workload extremely high.'*

Morale began to improve as teachers started to see the benefits of the new systems. With, for example, improvements in behaviour and better communications with parents, teachers were able to focus more on teaching and job satisfaction increased. The school commitment to professional development was also an important aspect of the improvement in motivation. More teamwork at every level provided new opportunities for mutual support.

Most of the heads pursued a 'support and challenge' approach to staff development. Almost all the heads had sought to identify and use the school's existing best practice as a key resource for improvement, (see figure 8 below). The great majority positively cited activity involved in identifying, celebrating and sharing good practice, indicating that this had a strong impact on the rapid improvement of the school. Survey participants also highlighted increased staff accountability: the second-most frequently mentioned activity was taking robust action when staff performance was deemed poor.

More teamwork at every level provided new opportunities for mutual support

FIGURE 8: CHANGES TO STAFF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT



## Provide powerful professional development opportunities for teachers including collaboration with other schools

Almost all headteachers in our survey identified improved professional learning as a significant part of the transformation story. The key was to make professional development for teachers an integral part of the life of the school rather than a 'bolt on' extra. Most schools established new in-house professional development programmes. Teachers typically met at least once a week either as a whole staff or in teams to focus on some aspect of professional development. Sessions were often 'democratic' in that all teachers, including younger teachers, were invited to share their expertise. In addition to professional development staff meetings teachers planned collaboratively and visited each other's classrooms regularly. Less experienced and weaker teachers entered into coaching relationships with more experienced staff. Subject coordinators were expected to lead professional development activities in their specialist areas. This in-house provision was seen as much more powerful than sending teachers out to external training courses. Making best use of internal school resources, particularly the coaching expertise of expert practitioners, was widely used as a tool for school improvement. In many of these schools, teachers often observed each other in a friendly and confidential setting outside the much more formal performance management system of lesson observation.

*'We sort of buddied teachers up in a way so that they could observe each in a sort of risk-free environment to see what learning looks like when you're an observer.'*

Beyond the school, headteachers looked for professional development opportunities through collaboration with other schools. Teachers were encouraged to visit other schools with a reputation for excellence. Expert teachers from other schools were invited to run workshops. Some schools systematically benchmarked their own approaches with those used by other outstanding schools.

*'Within the region at the time there was only one outstanding secondary school. So, myself and my senior team spent some time over in that school talking to them about what they were doing, the way they were doing things, kind of soaking up a bit of their ethos. We got their head of science to come and do some work for us.'*

School-to-school collaboration was not just about support; it was also about subjecting school performance to challenging benchmarking and tough peer-to-peer accountability. Seeking out best practice externally was a good antidote to professional complacency as well as a mechanism for professional learning.

*'I think the whole business of working with other schools is also vital. It's a way to ensure that there is that challenge, that can really only come from other schools. We've all got to be outward facing and use the best schools to challenge each other.'*

**Making best use of internal school resources, particularly the coaching expertise of expert practitioners, was widely used as a tool for school improvement**

Chapter 5

# Illustrations of rapid school improvement



## This section presents vignettes, taken from the case studies which were compiled from survey data, interviews with headteachers and visits to schools (which included interviews with the Board of Governors and groups of teachers)<sup>4</sup>.

These vignettes showcase features important to this particular group of headteachers who had been so instrumental in bring about rapid improvements in their schools. They illustrate how leaders implemented emergency leadership and how they imposed their directive approaches. They show how professional development was transformed at pace to bring weak teachers closer to understanding and being able to enact excellent teaching. They show also the range of tactics employed to address weak teaching – from supportive, developmental coaching approaches to tough warnings being issued to staff who did not respond to support and continued to fall below the expected standards of teaching.

### Case study 1: Emergency leadership in action

**In this case study a driven and confident new headteacher transformed the way staff viewed their work and created a positive climate for improvement.**

This primary school was underperforming at the time of the critical inspection report. Pupils in England take part in a national assessment at the end of primary schools when they are 11 years old. Results at this school were below the minimum expectations on all measures; literacy, numeracy and writing. The initial impressions of the new headteacher were not positive following an audit of the school.

*'It was a pretty damning report because the first page just says, "Achievement is inadequate, teaching and learning are inadequate, leadership and management are inadequate."*

The new head placed an emphasis on transparency and communications. At the start of her first term she organised meetings for staff and parents to explain and reassure. She also instigated a number of changes with immediate effect. These included:

- a new open-door policy towards parents
- an emphasis on clarity in communicating her expectations to staff, parents and pupils

**'It was a pretty damning report because the first page just says, "Achievement is inadequate, teaching and learning are inadequate...'**

<sup>4</sup>See appendix 1 for details about the methods

- instigating a new system of teacher observation and feedback which was focused on teaching quality
- reorganising staffing arrangements to ensure that capacity was where it was needed most
- being directive about the curriculum time for different subjects: providing teachers with timetables and telling staff 'This is what it's going to be'
- putting in more systematic support for the large number of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) that were in the school
- building capacity in the governing body, providing them with information and encouraging challenge.

The head's initial approach was directive, but staff welcomed the new clarity about expectations.

*'It was much more consistent. Everybody knew where they were going. It was hard work having everything be brand new, and it was, "here's your presentation policy, here's your behaviour policy, these are my expectations, this is what I want to be on your displays" but everybody was on the same page. It was very clear what was expected. I'd never seen a presentation policy before, or a marking policy. I found the clarity really helpful.'*

The headteacher was not complacent about the changes. She had a clear understanding of the need for both 'quick wins' and longer-term capacity building amongst staff to take the school beyond 'good'. The challenge she sees now is to move away from the quite prescriptive structures that were required initially and to encourage staff to develop and use their professional judgement in order to move from good to outstanding.

## Case study 2: The importance of having authority to effect change

**A series of dramatic events led to a profound crisis at this secondary school. When Ofsted arrived the result was an 'inadequate' inspection judgement but the school eventually emerged much stronger.**

The headteacher at the time had been given the role on an interim basis as a short term solution to a serious leadership problem. When she looked back on her period as acting headteacher, she highlighted how acutely she lacked the authority needed to drive change.

*'As acting head, you have no mandate to make changes and the staff don't see you as having the mandate for change.'*

The momentum for improvement increased considerably when she was formally appointed as headteacher after the inspection and was able to take advantage of the new authority this brought. She turned her attention to addressing issues of inconsistent quality of teaching within the school.

**'As acting head, you have no mandate to make changes and the staff don't see you as having the mandate for change.'**

Professional development had not been given much attention historically. This changed dramatically – every Wednesday part of the day was dedicated to joint professional development and planning and there could be no excuses or reasons for staff not participating. Some subject areas were stronger than others with teachers and pupils performing better in these disciplines. Through the new joint professional development and planning sessions they tried to 'bottle' this good practice and then 'to germinate it amongst the rest of the staff'.

Teachers told a positive story about how a school that had lost its way had been transformed by



the collaborative efforts of the school team. The interview with staff in this school revealed how professionally isolated they felt before the inspection. They said the school was characterised by an absence of whole-school approaches and a high degree of inconsistency. They emphasised the strong sense of collective action and the importance not just of senior

leadership action, but of whole-staff commitment to change. Teachers also had a sense of the sequence of improvement building on the first phase focus on consistency and whole-school systems. Next-phase improvement required a different emphasis, with teachers being encouraged to innovate, take risks and take control of their professional learning.

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### Case study 3: Working with other schools to support improvement

#### **The transformation of this school is a story of school partnership and very strong and determined leadership.**

A secondary school with a long-term history of student underperformance allied itself after the critical inspection report with another, much more successful, local school. Eventually the school became an academy and the schools were linked within a multi-academy trust, with the partner school as the academy sponsor. (In England academies are government-funded schools that are free from local authority management; they are often part of a wider organisation known as a multi-academy trust).

The new head initially arrived to provide interim support but was appointed to the substantive post. He considered the inspection report to be an accurate reflection of what the school was like. His overall judgement in retrospect was that:

*'When I came, everything was appalling. There was nothing that wasn't appalling.'*

The headteacher greatly valued the resource that was available from the partner school, from which he had come. The schools shared a common executive principal who visited weekly.

*'I had the huge advantage that I was coming from [school name] which is an outstanding school. I'm about five miles away and obviously I could draw on a lot of expertise there.'*

The new head made it clear to the staff at a very early stage, and in a very direct way, that he held some of them responsible for the mess the school was in.

*'I think the good ones could see, welcomed it because pretty brutally, if they are teaching a good lesson in their classroom and then next door there is chaos and carnage and that person is being paid the same salary, if not more, so I think the good staff responded straightaway.'*

Initially this headteacher took a highly directive approach with robust methods for dealing with staff underperformance. In the interview he explained his philosophy regarding weak professional performance.

*'I think I've probably moved on 30 staff... If people aren't delivering and they've had every support possible, I can't honestly keep paying their wages, that's not fair because they are not doing their best for the students.'*

As the improvements were made his methods have changed, and now he takes a more collegiate approach with a much greater degree of delegation. For him, distributed leadership was the ideal but it required a capable team to delegate to.

*'I knew I wanted leadership to be distributed, but I had to get the right team in order to distribute!'*

The chair of the governing body characterised the head's leadership style as 'collaborative':

*'He's very clear on what he wants and what he expects, but he does it in a very collaborative way, he's really inclusive.'*

The headteacher was emphatic about the need for schools in special measures not to be obsessed with the inspection criteria. A preoccupation with 'what Ofsted (the inspectorate) might think' was not the answer. Instead he wanted the focus to be on what is right for the students. The chair of the governing body very strongly endorsed this view.

Two focus group sessions were held with both teachers who had been at the school before the critical inspection report and those who had joined subsequently. The staff who had been there before the arrival of the new head told a story of transformation. According to these teachers, the school had changed beyond all recognition. One recalled how physically unsafe it was before the special measures judgement.

Relationships with angry parents were so problematic and school site security so poor that teachers would resort to hiding from angry parents.

All the teachers liked the headteacher's philosophy and the fact that he saw the challenge as not to please the school inspectors but to ensure that students did well during their 'one shot' school education. Teachers particularly valued the new head's commitment to their professional development and many commented on improved relationships with parents. They referenced increased attendance at parents' evenings and a shift towards parents asking questions about outcomes for the children rather than making complaints about bullying or poor behaviour.

*'I think also when parents contact your class, a lot of the conversations with parents were about behaviour but now it's about progress. Now parents are more interested in progress. Before it would be about behaviour and detentions and so on...'*

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## Case study 4: 'I can't help you unless I see you teach'

**In this primary school there was a substantial emphasis on improving the standard of teaching through coaching.**

The headteacher worked with the school as an adviser shortly before it received the inadequate judgement, but was asked to take the position of head after the inspection and the departure of the previous headteacher. She rapidly came to the view that the school had been largely focused on the pastoral care of the pupils while placing insufficient emphasis on academic achievement.

When the school went into special measures, there was a shared understanding by both the new head and the existing teaching staff that there was a need to create a more constructive professional climate.

The head emphasised that as part of the improvement plan she wanted to transform staff expectations of the children. She had a passionate concern about the need to take action to break the link between poverty and educational underachievement. For the head, the key mechanism for achieving this transformation was to improve the quality of teaching through coaching. The starting point was not a 'deficit model' but a positive 'development model'. There was a strong focus on how to help each individual teacher recognise their particular personality type and action that might build professional self-esteem. She put great store in the concept of 'catching them doing it right', identifying existing good practice and making this into personal common practice.

Teachers corroborated the beneficial impact of this approach to coaching. They felt that the lesson observations and feedback were all part of the new head trying to develop their teaching and find ways to increase consistency and make their lives easier. Emphasis was therefore placed on providing positive and constructive criticism as a means of improving the quality of teaching throughout the school. This was also considered to be a 'no blame' approach, in order to make teachers more open to being observed.

In addition to providing coaching to teaching staff, measures were also put in place to ensure consistency across lessons and make sure all core subjects were being taught effectively, with a particular focus on English and maths.

In terms of the replicability of the approach, the head considered that the fundamentals would 'travel' to other schools but would require 'tailoring' and contextualisation. She was confident that the essential strategy of focusing on teaching and raising standards could be applied across all schools.

*'I think the approach is replicable. I'm now helping other schools. The solution needs to be tailor made to that school and its issues. With very high expectations. You focus on teaching and learning and it's about raising standards.'*

With regard to the sustainability of the changes, the head considered that keeping focused on children's outcomes was crucial, combined with an emphasis on training the next generation of leaders.

**'I think the approach is replicable. I'm now helping other schools. The solution needs to be tailor made to that school and its issues.'**

*'It's sustaining it and reinforcing it and keeping them focused on the right things, and the quality of teaching continues now. I mean I think the last round of observations showed that about 80 per cent of lessons are outstanding. But I'm old now... so my priority is to coach up the next generation of leaders. Or coach up people to take over. That's going quite well as well.'*

The chair of the school board approved of the head's measured approach to change and the strong emphasis on coaching.

*'I suspect that many of the teachers didn't know what a good lesson was before [the new head] came but by linking with [other school name] they were able to go and see what an outstanding lesson was.'*

## Case study 5: Modelling excellence

**The headteacher in this secondary school set out to convince staff that it was possible to make a dramatic improvement in only 18 months.**

There was a sense of great urgency and energy about the approach of the headteacher. Even before she formally started work at the school, she instigated a development plan to ensure measures to improve were being put in place as soon as possible after the school went into

special measures. The head identified weak leadership within the school and corroborated this with teachers by requesting staff to complete a survey to identify areas for improvement. Through this urgent audit process an agenda for action was agreed based on a consensus that the school needed much improved accountability systems.

The headteacher had considerable presence and excellent communications skills. Teachers

mination  
den rules

each question carefully  
twice to make sure  
you understand what is  
being asked.

Remember 1 minute a mark  
I should only spend 9  
minutes on each 9 marker!

Stay  
Positive!

Take in a  
quiet place  
with all resources

Practice  
Practice  
Practice

Practice  
Practice  
Practice

REVISION  
CARDS

Plan  
Ahead!

Plan in  
advance

Take in a  
quiet place  
with all resources

**NOTES ON TAKING NOTES**

- Sit near the front of the classroom to reduce distractions.
- Listen for information not found in the assigned reading.
- Include only the most important information.
- Arrange your notes as you compile them.
- Take note of the teacher's gestures and verbal cues.
- Write neatly. If you can't understand your notes, they're worthless.

**THE ART OF MAKING BIG IDEAS**

**BITE-SIZED**

Lastly, don't worry about what you have done or what you are worrying won't do. The only thing that is that you are doing is that you are trying.

Ignore questions you don't understand through the process of the question.

Remember  
Always

If you have time, check your work a second time.



recalled in a somewhat awestruck way how she had initially presented the agenda for action to the whole staff for the first time. There was an intense clarity and conviction about her analysis and the route map she offered staff.

*'Do you remember the first time we were in the hall when she spoke to us all, and at the end of it I was like, "Oh, wow!" "This is what we need to do bam-bam-bam." And you're like, "Oh right, it's clear."*

The head was concerned about dealing with underperformance. The school set out to benchmark almost every aspect of practice against an external measure of excellence. Every head of department had a link with an outstanding school in the area. Specialised peer reviews were conducted with challenge provided by an outsider from a school with distinctive expertise. One teacher described this system of expert peer reviews.

*'The other thing we had as well was reviews. We've reviewed every area and we've been paired up with an outstanding school so we've had outstanding schools and leaders working with us to look at what we've got in place, audit it and see what we need to change.'*

An emphasis on more distributed leadership sat alongside the focus on teaching quality. The head believed that increasing the extent of distributed leadership was essential if improvements were to be sustainable. She considered that the previous head had not trusted his senior leaders, who in turn did not trust their middle leaders. Discussions with teachers suggest that the head was successful in persuading staff that transformation was possible. One teacher indicated that the head provided not only clear focus but also the support and resources needed for improvement.

*'The support of the staff was one reason why I love working here, because even though it's a very difficult time for everybody, all of the teachers and the senior leaders seem to work together and support each other.'*

Creating a quality-assured, robust and accessible student tracking system was a top priority for

the headteacher from the outset. She wanted to ensure all staff were actively engaged in measuring pupil progress. Distinctive features of her approach included the immediate introduction of 'data breakfast meetings', at which student progress was discussed during brisk early morning discussions. The data system she introduced centred on two distinct areas: achievement data (that occur every half term with every department, head of department and their staff) and pastoral data (relating to attendance, absence, punctuality, behaviour including callouts and exclusions with pastoral managers). The student tracking system was the centrepiece of the head's new accountability system.

**'The support of the staff was one reason why I love working here, because even though it's a very difficult time for everybody, all of the teachers and the senior leaders seem to work together and support each other.'**

*'So I meet with every department four times a year for the data input and we know exactly where every single child is, at the moment now, from a "progress made" perspective. So we hold the department and the teachers to account for every single child.'*

The commitment to look outside the school for excellent examples of practice did not stop within the teaching staff. The chair of the school board described the narrow insular perspective of the board before the arrival of the new head.

*'The governing body had never been outside the school, I'd never been outside the school... so we never really got an opportunity to look at where we were and say things like "Why don't we just do this?", you know, "why don't we do that?"'*

He was a huge admirer of the new headteacher, describing her as 'fantastic'. Although the chair of the school board remained in place after the critical inspection, he brought about very substantial changes to the membership of the board. He also talked enthusiastically about

his visit to observe the governing body of an outstanding school, which was much more data literate.

Rigorous data collection, professional development programmes and a keenness to look outside the school for models of excellence all contributed to increased accountability. It was

clear from discussions with teachers that they believe the new accountability system brought significant benefits.

*'There was a clear focus; she knew what needed to be done. And so people were well aware of what it was going to take to make ours a good school.'*

## Case study 6: Using lesson observation to support teacher development

**This primary school was judged inadequate after a period of weak and rapidly changing leadership. There was a long previous history of underachievement. The new headteacher described how the school had failed to achieve a good inspection grade for 30 years.**

The new headteacher's preliminary audit indicated that none of the teaching at the time was good. The perceptions of the school, from those inside and outside, were not positive. The headteacher relayed a powerful anecdote that captured the low standing of the school in the eyes of both parents and staff. He explained the reaction of one of the school's teaching assistants when her own daughter failed to get a place at her school of choice and was instead allocated a place at the school where she worked:

*'One of my Teaching Assistants always says to me that when her child got a place here she just burst into tears. And I always think that is a really good example of how the school was: it was portrayed as very much a failing school, and the last on the list that you would want to ever send your child to.'*

The focus group of teachers considered that when the new headteacher was appointed things began to change for the better. They were particularly impressed by the clarity of thinking and the emphasis on supportive leadership and staff development through coaching.

The headteacher was well versed in thinking about organisational change. This provided a theoretical framework for change management. He stopped using inspection grades in internal lesson observations because of the demotivating consequence of repeatedly telling a colleague that their performance was 'inadequate'. Instead he focused teachers on supportive, developmental conversations as a result of observations rather than judgements of teaching quality. Teachers responded well:

*'People became less scared of observation because it was developmental, it wasn't judgmental.'*

**'One of my Teaching Assistants always says to me that when her child got a place here she just burst into tears. And I always think that is a really good example of how the school was...'**

Teachers were given more information about the school and the pupils too. Teachers talked about attending many more meetings during the school day to ensure participation, being involved in meetings more, having more focused meeting on data. The chair of the school board reflected positively on these changes by saying

that it helped teachers to engage professionally in decision making.

Both the Chair of the board and the focus group of teachers reflected on the next phase of challenges for the school. One teacher described how 'brilliant' the headteacher was at the 'big picture stuff' that had been essential for the first phase of the reform. The question was, now

that aspects of 'the big picture' were sorted, what next? Both the teachers and the governor suggested that it was important that the school's improvement should not be too key-person dependent because the current headteacher might well move on at some point. The challenge was to ensure that changes were embedded and underpinned by a truly collegiate approach.





# Appendices

## A1: Approach and methods

The research progressed in steps; each built upon the data and analysis derived from the previous step. These steps are described below in Figure A1.

FIGURE A1: DESCRIPTION OF METHODS

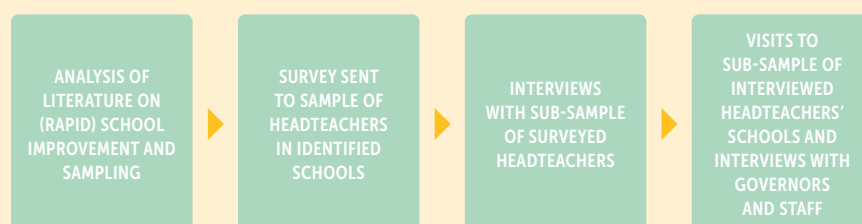


Table A1 below, shows the characteristics of all sample schools and those schools that responded to the survey.

TABLE A1: CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY SAMPLE

	Total	Responses	Rate
<b>Phase</b>			
Primary	306	74	24.2%
Secondary	54	19	35.2%
<b>All schools</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>25.8%</b>
<b>Category</b>			
Notice to Improve	69	20	29.0%
Significant Weaknesses	51	7	13.7%
Special Measures	189	48	25.4%
New sponsored academy (assume SM)	51	18	35.3%
<b>Current overall effectiveness</b>			
Outstanding	20	5	25.0%
Good	340	88	25.9%
<b>School type</b>			
Community school	140	36	25.7%
Academy converter	34	9	26.5%
Academy sponsor led	98	29	29.6%
Voluntary aided school	38	9	23.7%
Foundation school	21	3	14.3%
Voluntary controlled school	29	7	24.1%

Following the survey, 16 participants were selected to take part in interviews and six schools were invited to participate in additional case study work.

**The guiding question for the research was:**

How do head teachers in rapidly improving schools explain the changes that have taken place in their schools?

**The study sought to:**

- Explore the extent to which these headteachers operated in keeping with the theoretical framework derived from the literature, and determine how they prioritised each factor (if applicable) and how factors were thought to work together
  - Explore what actions headteachers took in the area of each of the factors highlighted in the literature
  - Find out the extent to which a theory of change guided headteachers' school improvement actions (consciously or otherwise)
  - Identify any other factors headteachers might think are important for rapid school improvement – in addition to those captured in the literature
  - Investigate how much other stakeholders, particularly school governors and teachers, agreed with the headteachers' analysis of how the improvement had taken place
  - Conduct in-depth case studies of a small number of schools that had changed dramatically in a short space of time (as measured by Ofsted judgements).
- 

## A2: The drivers of rapid school improvement

**Key factors in rapid school improvement: a theoretical framework**

The literature suggested eight elements that, if addressed in a weak school, will support improvement. These are described in Table A2.

While much of the literature acknowledges that there are clear factors associated with school improvement, some authors refute this suggesting it is a weak reductionist approach. For some, the order of events matters as much as the factors or elements that need to be addressed. For example, a paper published by Ofsted called 'Getting to good'<sup>5</sup> has been influential in the UK and puts forward a three-phased approach. The **getting started phase** focuses on clarifying or setting a school vision, establishing the attitude and skills for improvement, and clarifying what good teaching looks like should come first. The second, **moving to good phase** prioritises adapting monitoring and evaluation systems; revising performance management systems and the data which support them; and changing the curriculum to ensure that there is enough focus on literacy and numeracy, that timetables are giving pupils enough opportunities to learn in core subjects, and that the school offers a variety of learning opportunities and meets statutory requirements. The last element of this second phase is ensuring that the governance is supporting school improvement. Most centrally this involves training governors so they have the skills and behaviours required to challenge the school. The third and final phase is **sustaining the improvements**, which includes working towards becoming a learning community, establishing greater engagement with parents and nurturing leadership at all levels in the school.

Some scholars have also questioned the usefulness of the notion of 'factors'. For example, Huberman<sup>6</sup> was sceptical about the authenticity of reducing school improvement to isolated elements. Instead he preferred the notion of scripts or scenarios which accommodates the relationships between factors as much as the factors themselves. Among his findings from a three-year study was that success 'often occurred at places where administrators exerted strong and continuous pressure on teachers'.<sup>7</sup> School leaders had to be centre stage and stay there for some time. Scenarios in which successful strong leadership came and went resulted in poor longer-term results for school outcomes. He acknowledged that other, less autocratic leadership scenarios could work – ones that relied less on this bossy leadership – but concluded that these were 'poorer bets'.<sup>8</sup> The difficulty of adopting this 'bossy' stance was that it created a tension between the needs of the leaders driving the change and the needs of the teachers carrying out the change. Teachers experience the 'demands of the innovation [the reforms introduced by the headteacher] on their present skills and the way they run their classes'.<sup>9</sup> Success relied on teachers being helped to meet the demands of the innovation.

Our survey and interview tools explored both factors and the relationship between factors.

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<sup>5</sup> Ofsted (2012). <sup>6</sup> Huberman (1983). <sup>7</sup> Ibid. <sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.27. <sup>9</sup> Ibid.

TABLE A2: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

<b>Leadership</b>	<p><b>Leadership is at the heart of all other factors – it is <i>the</i> key driver<sup>10</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach to (or style of) leadership is important – bossy/autocratic is good<sup>11</sup></li> <li>• Quality of leadership is central<sup>12</sup></li> <li>• New school leaders are often required in weak schools<sup>13</sup></li> <li>• Lead by example<sup>14</sup></li> <li>• Developing middle leadership and work towards distributed leadership<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Vision and ethos CIPR</b>	<p><b>School leaders set the vision and ethos for the whole school<sup>16</sup></b></p>
<b>Governance</b>	<p><b>School leaders revise the governance support provided to the schools<sup>17</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training for governors<sup>18</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring and evaluation (M&amp;E)</b>	<p><b>School leaders revise monitoring and evaluation<sup>19</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rigorous M&amp;E systems in place<sup>20</sup></li> <li>• Focus M&amp;E on teaching and learning<sup>21</sup></li> <li>• Ensure systems are in place to use the data produced<sup>22</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Curriculum<sup>23</sup></b>	<p><b>School leaders revise and streamline the curriculum<sup>24</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus curriculum on literacy and numeracy</li> <li>• Revise and focus timetables to ensure pupils receive the learning opportunities they need</li> <li>• Meet statutory requirements</li> <li>• Offer pupils a variety of attractive pathways</li> </ul>
<b>Staff performance management</b>	<p><b>Connect performance management to data and track pupil progress<sup>25</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document performance management</li> <li>• Focus performance management on clear targets for improvement</li> <li>• Remove automatic pay progression scales and link pay to performance</li> <li>• Provide teachers with clear and consistent feedback on quality of teaching</li> <li>• Personalise professional development across the school</li> <li>• Celebrate good practice and success</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching</b>	<p><b>High-quality teaching<sup>26</sup></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop teachers (often through coaching and mentoring, training, performance management and sometimes collaboration with other schools)<sup>27</sup></li> </ul>
<b>School environment</b>	<p><b>New school buildings are often required<sup>28</sup></b></p>
<b>Relationships beyond the immediate school</b>	<p><b>Build better relationships with parents and the school community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enter into formal or informal partnerships with other schools<sup>29</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> Ofsted (2012); Hutchinson et al. (2015). <sup>11</sup> Huberman (1983). <sup>12</sup> Matthews and Sammons (2005). <sup>13</sup> Ofsted (2012); Matthews and Sammons (2005). <sup>14</sup> Ofsted (2012). <sup>15</sup> Ofsted (2012); HMle (2010). <sup>16</sup> Ibid. <sup>17</sup> Ofsted (2012). <sup>18</sup> Ibid. <sup>19</sup> Ibid. <sup>20</sup> Ibid. <sup>21</sup> Ofsted (2012); HMle, 2010. <sup>22</sup> Ofsted (2012). <sup>23</sup> Ibid. <sup>24</sup> Ibid. <sup>25</sup> Ibid. <sup>26</sup> Huberman (1983); HMle (2010); Hutchinson et al. (2015). <sup>27</sup> Ofsted (2012); HMle (2010); Hutchinson et al. (2015). <sup>28</sup> Ofsted (2012). <sup>29</sup> Ainscow, Muijs and West (2006); Armstrong (2015).

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Education Development Trust Highbridge House, 16–18 Duke Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 4RU

T +44 (0) 118 902 1000 E [enquiries@educationdevelopmenttrust.com](mailto:enquiries@educationdevelopmenttrust.com) W [www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com](http://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com)

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