



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

# Teaching Schools Evaluation Research Brief

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## Research Brief

This Research Brief reports the findings from a two-year study (2013-15) into the work of teaching schools and their alliances commissioned by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). The broad aim of the study was to investigate the effectiveness and impact of teaching schools on improvement, and identify the quality and scope of external support that are required to enhance these. This was achieved through combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis derived from three research activities: case studies of 26 teaching schools alliances (TSAs), a national survey of the first three cohorts of 345 TSAs, and secondary research and analysis of national performance and inspection results.

## Background

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 100 teaching schools across 97 TSAs<sup>1</sup> were designated by September 2011, followed by the designation of a second cohort of 86 TSAs in March 2012 and a third cohort of 126 TSAs in February 2013. By January 2015 there were 598 teaching schools across 486 TSAs in England.

## Methodology

This evaluation used a mixed methods approach to examine the ways in which teaching schools and their alliances were formed and developed over time and how and why (or why not) they were making a difference to improvement within the locality and/or beyond.

## Case studies

Our methodology involved 18 case studies of cohorts 1 and 2 TSAs and 8 case studies of cohort 3 TSAs (n=26). These alliances were led by teaching schools in contrasting socioeconomic contexts, in different phases and sectors, of different sizes and types, of different urban/rural locations, with different governance structures, and with different legacies of collaboration and partnership.

A longitudinal approach was used to baseline, track and capture the changes and developments of the 18 cohorts 1 and 2 TSAs. The research team paid three two-

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<sup>1</sup> One alliance may be led by more than one teaching school.

day visits to each alliance during the life time of the project and interviewed senior and middle leaders in the teaching schools, their strategic partner schools and organisations, as well as schools that received support from or within these alliances. There were also two-day visits to the eight case study cohort 3 TSAs in the spring term of 2015.

## Surveys

Two online surveys were developed and carried out with the first three cohorts of TSAs (n=345) in the autumn term of 2014 (October-December): one for middle leaders of teaching schools and the other for senior leaders of teaching schools and their strategic partner schools. The surveys sought to explore the characteristics of TSAs, their key areas of change and development as perceived by these two groups of participants, and the extent to which involvement in the teaching school work may relate to improvement in aspects of teaching and learning in *participants' own schools*.

A total of 149 school leaders from 127 TSAs (cohort 1: n=35; cohort 2: n=47; cohort 3: n=45) responded to the senior leader survey, representing a response rate of 37%. Where survey results are presented, we focus on responses from the **127** senior leaders of teaching schools alliances. This is because the proportion of responses from strategic partner schools was too small, making it difficult to draw statistical inferences in the analysis. The same applies for the middle leader survey, where the response was too low for it to be statistically meaningful or valid.

## Secondary analysis

The NCTL commissioned a separate investigation<sup>2</sup> using the National Pupil Database, propensity score matching (PSM) and multilevel modelling techniques to explore whether there was a relationship between being part of a TSA and improved pupil outcomes at Key Stages 2 and 4.

## Findings

The evidence suggests that there are considerable variations in how TSA membership is defined and perceived, what participation in an alliance means in terms of extent of engagement, how each TSA partnership operates, and how each TSA seeks to fulfil the assigned teaching school priorities. However, irrespective of these variations, almost all TSAs in this evaluation reported their continuing

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<sup>2</sup> The analysis was led by Professor Daniel Muijs (2015) and his report is published independently from this evaluation.

commitment to develop and deepen the scope and impact of their partnership work aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. Commitment, educational values, passion, resilience, hope and vision were identified as key qualities that drive leaders in partnership development. The evidence also points to a range of shared challenges, most of which are related to the sustainability of teaching schools, level of engagement of other schools and organisations in the alliance, and tensions between competition, autonomy and collaboration.

The concept of teaching schools has benefited from and contributed to a much wider educational debate about the nature of collaboration between schools as a means of providing effective professional development to teachers and as a mechanism for improving schools. In this report teaching schools' impact in improving schools is drawn from two sources of evidence: *perceived impact* reported by participants of case studies and surveys, and *measured association between educational outcomes and participation in the teaching schools initiative* as identified in the secondary analysis led by Professor Daniel Muijs.

The findings on impact are twofold. First, there is compelling evidence of the strides that teaching schools and their alliances have made in developing the necessary relationships, social and intellectual capital and collaborative activities to improve the professional practice of teachers and schools leaders within and beyond TSA partnerships. Second, as yet, the quantitative evidence of the success of TSAs in driving improvement in terms of raising pupils' academic outcomes in individual schools across the alliance partnership is limited.

The report concludes with nine key evidence based observations:

- 1. There is a sustained appetite from eligible schools to apply to become a teaching school as part of this national initiative. However, there continue to be variations in teaching school representation across geographical regions and school sectors.**

Secondary and academy schools are over-represented among teaching schools compared with primary and special schools. Although primary and nursery schools' participation remains lower proportionally, both have seen a relatively higher increase in the last two years. Special schools have been consistently well represented in the national population of teaching schools since 2012.

Schools in areas away from major cities remain less well covered by alliances. Although proportionally schools in rural settings have seen the highest growth in gaining teaching school status since 2013, alliances led by rural schools were relatively fewer. Geographical separation and individual schools' cultures of self-sufficiency in particular were perceived to be barriers to school to school collaboration in these settings.

There are considerable variations in the numbers of teaching schools in different local authorities. Some areas have no, or very few, teaching schools, despite the existence of relatively high numbers of schools judged to be 'outstanding'. In contrast, in other areas the low representation is related to a limited number of 'outstanding' schools in the locality.

Taken together, the data raise issues about

- i) the preferred optimal number and distribution of teaching schools nationally and within different regional areas; and
- ii) the strategies that should be in place to promote school improvement effectively in areas where there is an urgent need but where there are few 'outstanding' schools that are eligible or willing to become teaching schools.

**2. Leadership credibility, trustworthiness and resilience are paramount in building and leading a teaching school alliance. Leading a TSA is perceived unanimously as a worthwhile but hugely time-consuming enterprise.**

Almost all of the senior leaders of teaching schools and directors of TSAs (92%) reported in the survey that running the TSA on a day to day basis required a lot of resilience. However, a strong altruistic mission and a commitment to make a difference to the learning and life chances of all children played a key role in their decisions to lead a TSA.

The capacity to carry out the teaching school leadership roles after designation is perceived to be particularly challenging by leaders of small urban and rural teaching schools.

In order to meet the demands of TSA development, all case study teaching schools have invested in expanding staffing capacity. However, many continue to find capacity a significant challenge. Eighty percent of senior leaders of teaching schools reported in the survey that limited resources and capacity are persistent challenges to the effective delivery of TSA work.

The skills needed to be an effective leader of a TSA are perceived as being different to those required by other system leadership roles. In working as an executive headteacher for example, it was felt that there are clear management and executive levers that can be used with tight accountability. However, in contrast, leading a TSA requires more capacity for influencing, engaging, building relationships, working in partnership, and potentially facilitating people to take more risks.

**3. Specific governance and accountability arrangements vary across alliances and most have experienced considerable changes over time.**

Almost all case study TSAs had established layered governance structures. The most common form involved a single core steering group that provided the overall strategic direction and decision making for the TSA, supported by a strategic group which reported to the steering group and a small number of operational working groups responsible for specific streams of work relating to the six core areas of responsibility for teaching schools.

Although there has been greater involvement over time from strategic partner schools, local authorities and higher education institutions (HEIs) in the strategic and operational management of some case study TSAs, the majority still continue to be primarily driven by the teaching schools themselves.

**4. There is no single concept of a teaching school or an alliance. The nature, forms, operating structures and priorities of partnerships vary considerably. They are influenced by TSA leaders' values and visions, different individual cultures and prior histories of partnership and collaboration between schools within and across regions.**

The extent to which teaching schools were able to engage and develop new partnerships was shown to be influenced by their previous partnership histories. When forming an alliance, strategic partners tended to be schools and institutions from existing collaborative partnerships who shared similar educational values and philosophies. Overall, the membership of these core groups remained relatively stable compared with the 'ordinary' and 'associated' alliance members.

Teaching school alliances in our evaluation differed in size, scope and composition. Since designation, in the majority of case studies there had been a greater mix of schools joining their alliances from different phases, of different types and with different Ofsted categories. About 80% of the TSA leaders in the national survey also reported this greater mix over time, with more than a third (40%) in strong agreement.

Membership continues to be a fluid concept in almost all alliances, and therefore developing mature and effective partnerships remains an evolutionary and dynamic journey. Most of the case study TSAs could be described as loosely connected and overlapping sets of different partnerships (or groups of schools and institutions) that focus on different aspects of the teaching school work.

Over time most case study alliances have become less concerned about partners leaving the TSA and more focussed upon retaining the commitment of those who share the same values, who have complementary expertise and capacity and,

more importantly, who are willing to work together in the partnership to achieve the shared visions, values and goals. This has implications for the use of TSAs to drive school improvement across the system as it seems that forming and developing alliance partnerships require participant schools to have a willingness to engage and embrace similar values.

**5. The alliance partnerships benefit from the development of other school-to-school partnerships and institutional networks. Almost all teaching school alliances in our evaluation are now reaching out and linking up with local authorities and other TSAs within and beyond the locality.**

Teaching schools had different motivations for collaborating with other TSAs and local authorities. However, irrespective of the differences, it was perceived to have become *imperative* that they form wider collaborative partnerships in order to join up capacity and thus increase resources to improve the effectiveness of their work and to achieve impact on a greater scale. Close to 90% of the TSA leaders reported working collaboratively with neighbouring TSAs, local authorities and other school networks and partnerships in the national survey. They did not see their role as leading the system in isolation from other partners. Seventy-seven per cent of survey respondents reported agreement that ‘teaching schools and their alliances alone could not achieve a self-improving system.’

While many set out on a competitive footing in their first year as a teaching school, in part perhaps fuelled by eagerness to set out their own offers and in part the competition posed by other alliances and providers in the locality, this has been gradually replaced by a greater confidence in the benefits of collaboration. In the national survey, 86% of the TSA leaders reported joining up capacity and resources with other TSAs or school networks in order to scale up the provision of support.

This change is also evidence that successes and challenges in early developments had enabled TSAs to become clearer about their **identity**, their **mission**, and **strategies** to improve practice and standards.

**6. Teaching school alliances and multi-academy trusts<sup>3</sup> (MATs) serve different purposes, and their organisational structures and accountability arrangements differ. However, both are perceived to be important in promoting school improvement.**

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<sup>3</sup> There are different types of relationships between MAT and TSA nationally. There are cases where the whole TSA is one whole MAT. In other TSAs, there is representation from one or a number of MATs. In this evaluation, we have identified examples in the latter case. However, because we have limited first-hand data from MATs that are ‘alliance members’ of our case study TSAs, the focus of our analysis has been placed on MATs that are led by our case study teaching schools.

MATs were perceived by case study TSAs to rest upon *tight* partnerships. Their work on school improvement across trust schools benefits from clearly defined governance and accountability structures. These enable them to foster consistency in approaches to pedagogy and standards. The current policy movement gives the lead schools the confidence to have medium- and long-term plans for improvement within MATs.

In contrast, TSAs are perceived by case study schools to be built on *more fluid* partnership governance and accountability. They represent a diverse pool of expertise where partner schools 'give and take' for the improvement in their own schools. Their development relies on 'like-minded people' working together to develop collective and collaborative intellectual and social capital through working together to support and improve standards within and/or beyond the alliance. They are seen as a vehicle for professional relationships across a range of settings and as having opened doors to further development and improvement opportunities.

Evidence from the case studies shows that TSA partnerships are perceived to help to break down the barriers of isolation between schools. Their collective expertise enables individual schools to respond to change and reform more confidently. MATs can work alongside TSAs and benefit from the wider pool of expertise and teacher and leadership development opportunities provided by TSAs. In the national survey, more than half of the senior leaders of teaching schools and Directors of TSAs (58%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that 'multi-academy trusts have a greater impact on school improvement than teaching school alliances.'

**7. Teaching schools have become increasingly confident in their strengths in developing, broadening and deepening activities and aspects of the six core responsibilities (i.e. the 'Big 6') that have formed the unique identities (or 'selling points') of their TSAs.**

Initial Teacher Training (ITT), followed by CPD and school-to-school support (StSS), continue to be the key strands of teaching school work for the majority of TSAs in our evaluation.

Initial Teacher Training (ITT)

School Direct (SD) is perceived to have provided major opportunities for TSAs to work with universities in the delivery of high quality ITT. However, capacity continues to be perceived by case study TSAs as a significant challenge in terms of coordination, finding training placements with effective mentoring, contacting schools and arranging the placements, and interviewing prospective students. Recruitment can also be a challenge both in terms of the number of applicants



and their qualities. The pressure to fill places needs to be balanced with a commitment to quality. Investment in candidates does not always convert into successful trainees.

Success in ITT is perceived to support improvement in newly qualified teacher (NQT) recruitment. Almost a third of the TSA leaders reported 'very significant' changes relating to an improved supply of good quality NQTs in the survey. Results of the case studies show that this is of particular importance for schools that can often struggle to recruit teachers given the nature of their challenges.

The majority of the case study TSAs continue to emphasise the importance of working with universities in the delivery of high quality ITT. Some expressed concern that, otherwise, TSA ITT practice might lack depth, especially in terms of lack of engagement in challenging reflective practice and supporting inspiration and innovation.

### Continuing professional and leadership development

Providing bespoke continuing professional development (CPD) and leadership development programmes for schools and clusters of schools is seen as the main strength of the TSA offer. Most TSAs in this evaluation are actively developing new approaches to market and deliver their CPD and leadership development programmes. Although coaching was considered by the majority of the case study TSAs to be a critical part of teacher and leadership professional development, clear evidence of bespoke leadership coaching was found only in a small number of case studies.

The experience of working in a TSA gives staff more opportunity to develop their leadership roles by having increased opportunities to work beyond their own school. As yet, however, much of the CPD and leadership development offer continues to be in the form of short courses. Most of the CPD provision is not yet joined up with the research and development work or joint practice development (JPD) across the TSAs.

Strategic planning, informed by regional and local data, is perceived to be necessary to help improve the economies, efficiencies and impact of the provision of CPD and leadership development programmes. With more providers offering CPD courses, the CPD market seems to have become overcrowded and schools are finding it more difficult to sift the options. This has particular implications for teaching schools' future development given that the provision of a chargeable CPD offer has been key to the business model of most alliances.

The results of the case studies and the national survey show that most alliances understand the continuum of professional development from new entrants to the

profession into NQTs, through CPD for serving teachers, and on into leadership development, and that they appreciate the benefits of being fully involved in selecting and developing their own staff.

Rigorous approaches to monitoring and evaluating the impact of CPD and leadership development programmes are yet to be fully developed. The results of the case studies show that this is because, at least in part, there are inherent practical difficulties in baselining, tracking and understanding the impact of CPD on the quality and outcomes of teaching and learning and participants' career trajectories. As yet, few have developed structures and quality assurance mechanisms that effectively connect the developments and impacts of different strands of work on this continuum. ITT, CPD and leadership development tend to be designed, operated and monitored separately by different teams in the case study TSAs

#### Talent management and succession planning

Succession planning is seen to be embedded within CPD and/or the Leadership Development strand and is not, therefore, managed as a separate element of the Big 6.

A minority of the case study TSAs are now working with local authorities to share data and intelligence. Others have conducted audits to identify talent. However, for almost all case study alliances, this is an area needing further development. There are few examples of formal strategies for succession planning across TSAs, and little evidence yet of successful approaches to workforce planning within and across alliances.

#### Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs)

SLE work is generally seen as embedded within StSS and not as a separate strand. In some TSAs, there are examples of SLEs working in mixed teams (with other SLEs, National Leaders of Education and Local Leaders of Education) contributing to a wide range of StSS work. Where SLEs are deployed in teams, there is more evidence relating to the effectiveness and impact of support.

However, in some TSAs SLEs continue to work in isolation. Their roles are not yet embedded in the provision of StSS across the TSA.

In the final year of the study, more creative ways of deploying SLEs were observed in the majority of the case study alliances: their expertise was used to support the development of ITT and CPD programmes. However, as yet, SLE deployment directly addressing StSS work continues to be a challenge for most case study TSAs. This raises the question of whether the identification and

designation of SLEs are driven by capacity building needs; and also, whether the deployment of SLEs follows a systemic approach which utilises, coordinates and brokers SLEs from across the alliance so that they work in mixed teams with other system leaders from different schools.

### School-to-school support

Every case study TSA in this evaluation has examples of effective StSS work that have led to improvements in a supported school. There is also evidence from the case studies which shows that StSS work provides opportunities for leadership development.

Positive relationships with local authorities are perceived by most case study TSAs as important, particularly in relation to sharing data and intelligence for maintained schools and to commissioning support. Seventy-six percent of the TSA leaders reported in the survey that their TSA's strategic developments were aligned with the school improvement priorities of the local authorities. The results of the case studies show that where this is working well, there is evidence of more sustainable impact. There is also evidence suggesting that brokerage with other TSAs across localities is emerging.

Data are perceived to be critical to enhance the impact of StSS work, in terms of both enabling the support work to be brokered and demonstrating the impact of the support that has been provided. For the majority of case study TSAs, more systematic quality assurance mechanisms and evidence of progress outcomes and sustainable impact are yet to be developed.

Caution needs to be exercised in attributing impact of improvement to the TSA StSS only, especially when the supported schools are also part of MATs, federations or other forms of partnerships and benefit from other sources of support.

### Research and development

Some case study alliances (both primary-led and secondary-led) are yet to develop this strand of work, whilst others (an increasing majority) have been proactively promoting R&D in schools within and beyond their alliances. Less than half of the surveyed TSA leaders (47%) reported substantial changes relating to increased use of research evidence to inform and improve teaching and learning within their alliances. Inquiry-led joint practice development across schools at this stage is emerging and/or developing.

HEI partnerships are perceived by the majority of the case studies and surveyed teaching schools to have provided promising R&D opportunities.

A major challenge continues to be securing the time and active involvement from class teachers and other schools. Achieving a school-wide and alliance-wide understanding of research in a school context is still to be developed in the majority of case study alliances.

**8. The sustainability of the Teaching School initiative is seen as a continuing challenge by almost all teaching school alliances in our evaluation. Ongoing funding support and clearly defined accountability measures are perceived to be essential for capacity and infrastructure to be sustainable.**

Almost all the senior leaders of teaching schools and directors of TSAs in this evaluation believe that teaching schools *can* play and *are* playing an active role in building and developing a school-led self-improving system. However, the reliance on single teaching schools and single alliances adds to a perceived sense of vulnerability.

The majority of the TSA leaders lamented that the current accountability framework for individual schools, in particular Ofsted inspections, took very little account of their work as TSAs. Although an Ofsted judgement was not the sole reason for de-designation as a teaching school, a failure to sustain an 'outstanding' outcome did trigger a designation review. The potential impact of a negative Ofsted inspection of the teaching school on the whole alliance was cited as further evidence of the vulnerability of the current teaching school model. As of October 2014, around 5% of teaching schools have been de-designated.

Over time there has been sharper understanding of the '*true cost*' to the teaching school of running a TSA. The reduction and the potential eventual end of core funding is perceived by the large majority of teaching schools as the most significant risk to their sustainability. In the national survey 87% of the TSA leaders reported that the financial models of their TSAs are not sustainable without central funding. Whilst such a concern can be seen in teaching schools across all phases, alliances led by infant, special and primary teaching schools, because of their limited capacity, appear to have faced a greater sense of financial vulnerability.

Given that most of these developments of the teaching school initiative are still in their infancy but have begun to show promising impact on teacher and leadership development, it is felt that it has become even more important that the government continues to invest in TSAs so that the partnerships and infrastructures can be embedded to support greater and more sustained and sustainable impact on improvement.

The large majority of the case study TSAs have not set up a separate company. The most common practice has been to establish a teaching school budget so that the schools are able to keep their teaching school funds separate from the main school budget.

There are a few case study alliances that have established or are in the process of establishing separate, not-for-profit companies to manage the funding for the teaching school.

Teaching school alliances have divided views on the charging of membership fees. Although the majority do not charge fees, a small number do and others have begun to consider a variety of membership options.

**9. As a school-level initiative, there is evidence from those responding to the surveys and interviews of perceived positive impact on standards and improvement at individual, school, and local and regional levels. However, the levels of impact vary and the measured overall effects on pupil outcomes are more evident in teaching schools themselves than in alliance schools.**

There is clear evidence from the case studies and the national survey that engagement in the teaching school programme is perceived to have made important contributions to teacher and school leader growth and development in both teaching schools and many schools in their alliances.

For **teaching schools**, six areas – mostly related to *teachers and teaching* – were perceived by a majority of teaching school leaders responding in the national survey as having improved ‘a lot’ and ‘very significantly’:

- teachers’ commitment to professional development in their own schools (68%)
- leadership of teaching and learning in their own schools (54%)
- the school’s climate and culture of the school (53%)
- the ways in which teachers teach (52%)
- quality of teacher recruitment in their own schools (52%)
- teachers’ commitment to their own schools (50%)

These results provide promising evidence that supports the primary focus of the teaching school initiative on developing teachers and school leaders. However, it is notable that in almost half the cases respondents did not report such strong effects – which also points to variations in such perceived impacts on teachers and teaching within and across TSA.

Four areas of change that were identified<sup>4</sup> by participating senior leaders as having had the most positive impact on pupil achievement in their teaching schools were:

- Opportunities for high quality professional development (75%) and senior and middle leadership development especially (22%)
- Sharing of good and outstanding teaching practice and collaborative working through networks and partnerships (28%)
- Recruitment and retention of 'better quality' and 'excellent' trainees and NQTs (18%)
- Development of enquiry-based approaches to teacher learning (18%)

For **schools in alliances**, a majority of the leaders of the teaching schools responding in the national survey identified three areas of change and improvement:

- i) extended collaborations and sharing of best practice within their alliance, including:
  - shared commitment to sharing best practice (79%)
  - extended collaboration beyond senior leaders (involving middle leaders, teachers and students) (76%)
  - more effective use of outstanding teachers for professional development across partner schools (69%)
  - a shared commitment to high standards for academic performance across partner schools (68%)
  - improved expertise amongst teachers to design, implement and monitor innovative practices across the alliance (i.e. "joint practice development across partner schools") (61%)
  - increased collective capacity for school improvement across partner schools (60%)
- ii) leadership development in terms of the improvement in responding senior leaders' ability to diagnose and make decisions about changes needed for improvement in their own schools (58%) as well as in other schools (64%). However, more than half (62%) reported that there were 'partial' or 'no' change in relation to

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<sup>4</sup> Responses to an open-ended question: "List **up to three** areas of change relating to you and your school's involvement in the TSA that you consider have had the most positive impact on pupil achievement in **your school**" in the survey

‘increased numbers of staff moving on to senior leadership posts within and outside the alliance.’

- iii) supply of good quality NQTs (61%). Although there is no objective evidence of differences in the relative quality of teachers trained through different ITT routes at this early stage, and a longitudinal tracking of teacher performance and career progression would be needed for this, the perceptions of the majority of the case study alliances are that school-led ITT works well.

Working collaboratively with neighbouring TSAs, local authorities, higher education institutions and other system leaders (NLEs and LLEs) and service providers to support teachers and schools within and beyond the locality was one of the most celebrated achievements reported by the vast majority of the TSAs in the case studies and the national survey. Although the local and regional partnership structures have developed at different paces and to different maturity levels, where they are becoming established there is clear evidence of impact – through the provision of CPD, but mostly, school-to-school support work.

The research suggests that the effective operation of partnerships relies on system leaders who are outward-facing and forward-looking and who have the ability to influence and lead the system through collaboration.

Evidence from Daniel Muijs’ (2016) independent statistical analysis of pupil outcome data during the three year period studied from 2012 to 2014 shows that teaching schools significantly outperformed comparator schools at both Key Stages 2 and 4 and in all three cohorts (cohorts 1-3). Effect sizes varied but reached up to 5% of total variance at Key Stage 2 and up to 4% of total variance at Key Stage 4, and a third of school level variance in some cases at both Key Stages. The effect size is large enough at the school level to be notable. This important finding counters a common misconception that being a teaching school has a detrimental impact on that schools’ results.

However, Muijs’ independent analysis shows that this is not the case for alliance schools or strategic partner schools overall. The analysis of pupil performance data at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 provides no clear evidence that engagement with teaching schools as alliance members or strategic partners was associated with greater improvement in pupil outcomes compared with other similar schools that did not engage with TSAs. Nonetheless, the time that the teaching school programme has been running is relatively short and this may also explain the lack of any notable statistical effects on the performance of alliance members and strategic partners. In addition, evidence from the current evaluation and elsewhere suggests that level of engagement of both strategic partners and alliance members varies considerably between and within alliances.

The data used for Muijs' (2016) statistical analysis did not distinguish level of engagement so any impact on highly engaged schools could be diluted in overall programme assessment by more shallow school partnerships.

To date, the evaluation suggests that as a school-level initiative, it is teaching schools (with most exposure to and most experience of activities of a TSA) that show the most positive impact of being involved in an alliance TSA, both in terms of ability to continue to promote improved pupil outcomes (as shown in the analysis of pupil outcome data) and in perceptions of impact on school improvement processes (as shown in case studies and the national survey).

## Summary

Taken together, the analysis shows that almost all TSAs had entered a new phase of development towards the end of the period of this study. In this phase, there are greater, more extensive, more focussed collaborations emerging between schools within a TSA. There are also increased strategic collaborations beyond the TSA – with local authorities, HEI partners and other school networks across and beyond the locale.

We have learned from this evaluation that leading inter-school partnerships requires cognitive and emotional leadership and management qualities and skills, integrity, commitment and resilience. The level of inter-personal relationships and trust between leaders of partner schools are likely to be paramount in determining the extent to which relationships between schools grow, develop or fail. In short, it is about the **individual and strategic alignment** of organisational priorities, needs and interests as well as their expertise, skills, resources and capacity to **pursue a shared moral purpose**. Evidence from our case studies shows, it has taken almost all TSAs one to two years to become clearer about who they are (i.e. identity), what they are for (i.e. mission) and how to achieve their aims (i.e. action).

However, the picture is variable and fluid. As one of a number of government initiated innovations, designed to achieve a 'self-improving' school system, teaching schools and their alliances have taken on a challenging role. It is clear that, within the system, there are many different, dynamic and complex relationships and partnership infrastructures. There is a widely perceived need to join up relationships, resources and capacity to produce a coherent and systemic approach to school-to-school support, and through this, enhance sustained and sustainable impact on school improvement within a locale or region. Our analysis suggests that effective accountability structures that promote improvement and collaboration are a must condition to support TSAs in their endeavours to grow. Success also requires social and collaborative capital that harnesses local knowledge and expertise in order to



make a systematic and systemic difference to the quality of teaching, learning and achievement.

Thus, teaching schools and their alliances *can* make and *have* made a marked difference to the sharing of good practice among schools and to enhancing the professional practice of many teachers and school leaders within and beyond alliance partnerships. In this sense, the teaching school model clearly has an important role to play in driving forward a school-led 'self-improving' system. However, as yet, the lack of measured overall effect on pupils' academic outcomes within TSAs suggests that caution should be exercised in making claims concerning the potential contribution of the teaching school model to raising attainment in schools across the partnership. With so many changes taking place in education policy, and schools generally being involved in many different partnerships, it would be difficult for many alliance schools and evaluations to tease out which change, and which partnership, makes the most difference, and thus be able to consider being part of a teaching school as the only or primary factor that determines impact.



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