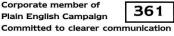# Getting to good

How headteachers achieve success

This report examines the key steps taken by headteachers in schools that have improved from satisfactory to good or better. It draws on evidence from good practice case study visits, headteacher focus group meetings and previous Ofsted survey reports, and offers guidance for headteachers and governing bodies in schools aiming for improvement.

Contents

Executive summary

> 'Unless we have headteachers who take on the difficult challenges of schools performance and adopt a no excuses culture, we are never going to make the improvements we need.' Sir Michael Wilshaw, HMCI, February 2012.[1]

Determined and resolute leadership from the headteacher is crucial to improving schools that require improvement. Those headteachers with a successful track record of leading schools from being judged 'satisfactory' to becoming good or better, share some common leadership characteristics. They are absolutely clear that improving teaching and learning is at the heart of what needs to be done, they communicate their high expectations of staff and pupils effectively, and they lead by example, modelling the behaviour they want from their staff.

These heads refuse to be distracted from their core purpose of school improvement and take decisive steps to ensure that their vision is not compromised by weak teaching or poor leadership within the school. No excuse for mediocrity is acceptable. They will accept nothing less than good behaviour from all pupils. They are not afraid to hold challenging conversations which often lead to staff leaving schools. Typically these headteachers take a more didactic approach while they first build the leadership capacity of senior and middle leaders within their school, including governors.

Often headteachers charged with improving schools previously judged satisfactory had inherited systems that were not fit for purpose. Too often the curriculum was a 'one size fits all' model which did not meet the needs of all the pupils. Performance management procedures frequently lacked impact. Where schools have remained stubbornly satisfactory it is fundamentally because the actions taken by leaders have insufficient impact on driving up the quality of teaching.[2]

Headteachers in improving schools know that to build capacity and sustain improvement they need robust management systems to hold staff to account for their leadership and teaching. For example, they use close measuring and tracking of pupils' progress and monitoring and evaluation procedures that are sharply focused on their priorities for improvement.

These heads also build up the effectiveness of their own governing bodies, often from a position of relative weakness so they become equipped to hold the school's leaders to account and influence the strategic development of the school. Building up capacity and shared ambition in this way means headteachers can move away from

[1] 'High expectation, no excuses – Sir Michael Wilshaw HMCI outlines changes to Ofsted inspection in drive to deliver a good education for all', press release (NR2012-08), 9 February 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/nr201208.
[2] A finding in the report *Schools that stay satisfactory* (110151), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110151.

a strongly didactic approach when the school has the capacity to sustain and build on its improvement. The staff in the schools visited in this survey had a 'can do' approach and genuinely shared responsibility for improvement; no one is making excuses for poor pupil outcomes any more.

Getting started: raising expectations

> Headteachers demonstrated professional courage by giving difficult messages unequivocally; they implemented non-negotiable actions early on… All the headteachers identified non-negotiable behaviour that they expected from staff in order to promote consistency.[3]

Communicating the vision

1. It was primarily the headteachers who drove improvement in the schools visited in this survey. Of the 12 schools visited, 11 had appointed a new headteacher no more than two years prior to the previous inspection where the school was judged satisfactory. There were some strong shared themes in their vision for improving their schools. They:

   - insisted that all pupils could achieve highly regardless of background

   - established a non-negotiable requirement for good teaching; satisfactory teaching was not good enough

   - accepted nothing less than good behaviour from pupils

   - expected teachers and leaders to improve their work and to be responsible for their own development

   - changed the curriculum so that it met the needs of all pupils.

Strengthening the environment for improvement

2. Headteachers established an effective senior leadership team with the right skills and attitude to drive improvement. In seven of the schools visited this resulted in senior staff leaving the school and being replaced.

3. They issued explicit guidelines on what constitutes good teaching and learning. In the early stages inadequate teaching was identified and headteachers were rigorous in eradicating it. This often resulted in the weakest teachers leaving. However, in all the schools visited there were teachers whose practice had previously been weak who had risen to the challenge and were now teaching good or better lessons.

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[3] *Sustaining improvement: the journey from special measures* (070221), Ofsted, 2008; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070221.

In one school visited, the first priority was to rapidly improve the quality of teaching and learning because of the very low attainment of pupils when they left the school. The school is situated in one of the 10% most deprived boroughs in the country. Little was expected of pupils from the school community. The headteacher quickly established with staff and governors that this was totally unacceptable. The governing body were enthused by her vision for the school, but needed training and support to fulfil their role. The biggest challenge was for the teaching staff and school leaders. non-negotiable expectations of teaching and learning was established. Leadership at all levels was inconsistent at the time so it was necessary to take a didactic approach. Teachers found it uncomfortable, but it had the desired impact of rapidly improving the pupils' education. Monitoring and evaluation procedures were relentless in ensuring that all staff complied consistently with the requirements to improve learning. Performance management procedures were rapidly strengthened so that staff were rigorously held to account for their work. For some this was unwelcome and following challenging conversations they left the school.

4. Headteachers and senior leaders led by example. They demonstrated how they wanted inappropriate behaviour dealt with and raised expectations among pupils of how to behave.

5. The physical environment was improved. In six schools visited improving the environment for learning for teachers and pupils had reinforced for staff that although they were in a very challenging situation, they were valued.

6. In all the schools visited the headteacher changed the way staff and governors worked to ensure greater focus on the school's core purpose of improving teaching and learning and raising standards. In five schools the nature of staff meetings was changed so that they focused on developing teaching, where previously they had dealt with routine management issues. Headteachers also found ways of devolving the management of other issues such as finances so that they had more time to focus on the leadership of teaching and learning.

Courage not compromise

7. The leaders of these schools were not afraid to hold challenging conversations to ensure that high expectations were not compromised by weaknesses in the performance and the attitude of staff. In all cases this approach led to changes in attitudes across the whole school over time.

Moving to good

Holding to account

Monitoring and evaluation

8. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures were needed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and leadership. In the earliest

stages headteachers often had to carry this out with the help of a few senior leaders. Headteachers led senior leaders and governing bodies in drawing up school improvement plans that had systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluation embedded in them.

9. Overcoming weaknesses in middle leaders' ability to monitor and evaluate, particularly in the secondary schools visited, was a common issue. Common strategies to develop the skills required included:

■ the promotion of teamwork between departments, phases and faculties and the expectation that they would share good practice

■ senior leaders modelling for middle leaders through activities such as joint lesson observations and demonstrating how to conduct faculty reviews

■ developing middle leaders' ability to review their own effectiveness and identify areas for development, and incorporating this as part of their performance management

■ offering accredited training, such as middle leadership training and higher degree level qualifications, on the condition that this had an impact on whole school improvement

■ mentoring middle leaders, with mentors in turn held to account for developing the leadership skills of those they were mentoring.

In this secondary school, the headteacher and his senior team recognised that middle leadership was weak. Some department leaders did not know how to go about making the improvements to teaching and the curriculum that were necessary. First, departments were strengthened by making a member of staff of proven ability responsible for teaching. Then senior leaders taught middle leaders how to carry out departmental reviews of provision and achievement. In the first year, using the Ofsted subject survey reporting style, they modelled for middle leaders how the reviews should be carried out. In the second round of reviews, middle leaders were expected to carry them out demonstrating their ability to do this job. From this information senior leaders devised a tailored programme of middle leadership training. Those departments that have demonstrated the capability to conduct rigorous reviews and drive school improvement receive a lighter touch from senior leaders. Other departments receive a much more structured programme of support and challenge.

Checking pupils' progress

'The schools are rigorous in the way that they use target-setting, assessment and tracking to raise achievement. All have developed information and data systems that suit the needs of their school, either by modifying commercial systems or by developing their own. They continue to refine them, ensuring that data are simple, accessible, easy to understand and manageable. They are careful not to "drown in

spreadsheets". The schools also realise that assessment information is useless if it is not highly accurate and they have worked hard to ensure that teachers are able to estimate pupils' attainment very precisely.[4]

10. The quality of data and its analysis were improved. In all the schools visited headteachers identified early on that priorities centred on improving teaching and achievement, usually in English and mathematics. They needed better-quality data to pinpoint exactly where the weaknesses were in the progress of groups or classes. Following on from this they made middle leaders and other teachers responsible for understanding and analysing the data for pupils in their classes.

11. Procedures for tracking pupil progress were strengthened in the following ways.

- The reasons why teachers had to track progress were established. These were:

  – to ensure all pupils made the necessary progress to achieve success

  – to ensure that any additional help that they received had the desired impact on progress

  – to ensure that the marking of books and advice that pupils received had the desired impact on their progress.

- Common formats were agreed that all teachers were expected to use.

- Staff were trained to ensure that they could take the responsibility for the analysis of the information.

- Regular progress meetings quickly established the responsibility of staff at all levels for their pupils' achievement, overturning what one headteacher described as an 'excuses culture'.

- The analysis of tracking information was transparent. This often meant that middle leaders and teachers met together with senior leaders to discuss progress openly.

  In one school visited, each department previously had its own assessment system and information was not shared or routinely used by teachers to plan lessons. A whole-school tracking system was introduced and staff trained to use the information effectively so they could be held accountable for pupil progress. A clear assessment cycle is now embedded, with the senior management team responsible for teaching and learning as well as assessment to ensure that the use of data is an integral part of the evaluation of teaching and learning.

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[4] *Twelve outstanding secondary schools – excelling against the odds* (080240), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080240.

Pupil progress is reviewed at key points during the year and interventions identified at every level. A summer term examination review results in an in-depth analysis looking at lessons to be learnt; for example, near misses and action points for the forthcoming academic year. Similar reviews are held after mock examinations. Targets are set for individual pupils. These are moderated and agreed with class teachers. Groups of pupils with similar needs are identified and additional support is provided and quickly assessed for impact. Strategy and line management meetings are timetabled with fixed agendas firmly focused on reviewing progress and the impact of interventions for every year group. There are clear lines of accountability at every level and challenging professional discussions ensure there is no complacency and high expectations are maintained.

It is the quality and detail of the assessment information coupled with consistently challenging discussions which are making the difference here. The whole community knows that in order to raise attainment no pupil can slip through the net. Pupils themselves have a very clear understanding of their targets for improvement and appreciate this tight focus on addressing specific areas of weakness.

In another school a recent change in the way middle leaders and staff in their teams are held to account for the progress of pupils has maximised the impact on pupil progress and made the process much more efficient. The headteacher was concerned that faculty heads were spending considerable time preparing reports on progress for meetings with senior leaders, but that they had limited impact on pupils. He devised a procedure adapted from the successful leadership activities of a national business partner. Faculty heads now meet together with senior leaders. Individual pupil assessment information is projected for all to see across all subjects. Each faculty head in turn has to explain why some pupils have not made the progress they could and the measures that have been taken to improve progress. This is particularly challenging if pupils are making good progress in some subjects, but not in others. This has fostered a corporate responsibility, breaking down faculty barriers. In turn faculty heads are successfully adopting this approach in their team meetings.

Performance management and professional development

Establishing effective performance management

12. Schools often manage to improve from inadequate because they take steps to eradicate inadequate teaching and obvious under-performance. However, many schools have remained stubbornly satisfactory because school leaders have been 'unable to sustain improvements in teaching and learning, or to ensure

that new policies in this area are followed consistently'.[5] Improvement stalls because performance management and professional development are not sufficiently focused on the individual needs of staff to ensure that the school builds the capacity for continued improvement. In schools that improve across a broad front – rather than addressing one weakness only to slip back somewhere else – the capacity for good performance is built up over time.

> On occasions, the schools sampled seem to lack any strategy for improving teaching. In (one) example, the school has a successful strategy for eliminating poor teaching by individuals. However, having achieved that it evidently lacked a strategy for converting satisfactory teachers into good ones so that 'actions lead to some improvement, but this could be more rapid'. Meanwhile, some teachers gave inspectors the impression that they did not know what actions were being taken.

> In this respect, the weakness tends to highlight problems with the school's professional development programme. Comments about ineffective promotion of better teaching often identify the existence of good or even outstanding practitioners in a school and point out that the strategies for sharing good practice are missing.[6]

13. Headteachers in this survey described the performance management systems they inherited as merely enabling staff to rise up the pay scale without having to demonstrate an improvement in effectiveness. In five schools visited, staff had been found to be overpaid. This included staff with leadership positions who did not meet performance management targets, teachers who received incremental pay awards for good-quality teaching but who only performed at a satisfactory level and staff who were paid for roles that they no longer held. A much more rigorous approach involving the sharpening up of performance targets was quickly established.

> Performance management is rigorous and systematic reviews are carried out with each teacher at regular times during the year with a sharp focus on pupil achievement in this school. There were many difficult professional discussions and sometimes unpopular decisions had to be made in the early days as the impact of raised expectations about the quality of teaching and greater teacher accountability began to hit home. Several teachers left, realising that they were not able to reach the high expectations or commit to the increased demands. Challenging conversations still take place but they now happen in a situation where everyone is clear about their responsibilities and they also know that effective support is available to help them improve. The outcomes of performance management are linked to progress up the pay scales to

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[5] *Schools that stay satisfactory* (110151), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110151.
[6] .*Schools that stay satisfactory* (110151), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110151.

ensure that all movement up the scales is based securely on outcomes and performance.

Getting good teaching through performance management and professional development

The quality and extent of professional development are not only key to school improvement but also a significant factor in retaining staff. The first step in taking over an underperforming school may be to embark on a process best termed 're-professionalisation'. One headteacher speaks of 'professionalising staff so as to develop a community that focuses on the core issues: teaching and learning, and achievement and attainment'.[7]

A significant investment in staff training and development was a key factor in the rapid and continuing improvement in provision and outcomes. The schools highlighted the importance of personalised professional training to develop skills, confidence and capacity in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning, curriculum leadership and management.[8]

14. Schools had a coordinated approach to collecting evidence to inform their evaluation of the quality of teaching over time. All schools visited were taking a more consistent view of teacher performance over time. Large secondary schools visited had devised comprehensive spreadsheets which clearly showed the degree of effectiveness of different teachers. All information from lesson observations, samples of pupils' work, analysis of examination results, data on pupils' progress, and discussions with pupils relating to each teacher was held centrally and used to plan future monitoring work. This had the following positive results.

■ Performance management targets were sharply focused on the individual's development needs.

■ Teachers received consistent feedback on their progress towards targets for improvement.

■ Weaknesses in practice were returned to and therefore not overlooked.

■ There was robust evidence to tailor professional development programmes for teachers.

■ Teachers had the confidence to take risks as they understood that one-off monitoring activities would not jeopardise the overall judgement of their quality of teaching.

■ Teachers were rewarded appropriately for their effectiveness.

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[7] *Twelve outstanding secondary schools – excelling against the odds* (080240), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080240.

[8] *Sustaining improvement: the journey from special measures* (070221), Ofsted, 2008; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070221.

15. Schools had different programmes to develop teaching depending on the ability and experience of the teacher. These programmes had a number of common features.

■ Recruitment and induction were much more rigorous and structured. Eleven of the schools visited talked about how it was crucial to appoint the right people that shared the school's vision. Only very strong candidates were considered even where there was a pressing need to replace staff. The senior leaders of these schools would not make permanent appointments of people they were not confident were of sufficiently high quality. Some of them had personally covered gaps in teaching as a result. Induction procedures ensured that teachers quickly learnt and adopted the school expectations for teaching and learning:

> Recruiting the right staff was essential. In six schools the high priority afforded to recruiting the most appropriate staff for their specific needs was one of the most important factors leading to improvement.[9]

■ Different programmes of professional development were devised for groups of teachers depending on their effectiveness. For example, in three schools, teachers whose teaching was satisfactory worked with their line manager to draw up an action plan that balanced a personalised support package with intense monitoring of their work.

■ Mentoring and coaching were effective in improving teaching and learning in eight schools visited. Teachers worked alongside more expert colleagues, increasingly taking a lead role and demonstrating better teaching.

■ Peer and team teaching, particularly for more effective teachers, were extremely successful in piloting and leading improvements to teaching in seven schools visited. One headteacher explained that this was not an ad hoc arrangement. Senior leaders strategically identified and arranged groups of no more than three teachers to work together on projects, with the expectation that these teachers would lead the roll-out of the initiative.

A set of non-negotiable expectations for teaching and learning established by the headteacher as a 'preparing for quality learning: staff self-check list' has helped to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers benefited from regular opportunities to reflect on their practice, for example by inviting other teachers into their classroom to observe as critical friends. The assurance of open, non-threatening dialogue led to meaningful reflection and improvement. Teachers regularly meet to discuss pupil performance, work samples and achievement, and the school has moved to shared planning, moderating and marking. These types of discussions

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[9] *Sustaining improvement: the journey from special measures* (070221), Ofsted, 2008; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070221.

have promoted a professional learning community and have led to some innovative teaching and learning.

- Headteachers were unanimous that in order for teachers to appreciate what good and outstanding teaching looked like, best practice had to be shared and celebrated.

- Teachers were expected to take responsibility for their own performance and development.

The headteacher had to start from scratch as performance management prior to 2010 had no impact on school improvement or professional development. It was merely the statutory procedure by which staff were rewarded financially without having to demonstrate any significant improvement in practice. Robust procedures for quality assurance and performance management had to be introduced. At first, senior leaders had to model how to conduct performance management meetings for other leaders. Objectives for staff were sharpened up considerably and moderated by senior leaders to ensure consistency.

A bespoke programme to develop the quality of teaching was established. Following the monitoring and evaluation of teachers' ability they were matched to appropriate programmes. For some this would be to improve teaching to satisfactory, for others to improve from good to outstanding. A lessons study model, where small groups of teachers work together to plan and teach, has proved to be a very powerful means of improvement, particularly benefiting staff who want to improve from satisfactory to good.

Another positive impact is that outstanding teachers, some at an early stage of their career, have been identified and encouraged to take on leadership posts within the school. As a result, good practice is shared effectively. Performance management is supported by a spreadsheet detailing the assessment of each member of staff. This compiles information from lesson observations, work samples, data about pupil progress, examination results and the targets that have been set. This provides a means of assessing the impact of the training programmes as well as the teacher's performance.

16. In order for the performance management of teaching to be effective the quality of leadership at all levels had to be strong and consistent. Performance management of middle and other leaders was rigorous to ensure that they could effectively manage the performance of their teams. This was done in several ways.

- Senior leaders modelled expected practice and rigour in their reviews of middle leaders. They demonstrated in practical steps what performance management meant and how it should be carried out. All schools visited had

established a clear policy and guidelines to support performance management.

- Senior leaders ensured that targets set for staff were sharply focused and consistently challenging. In one school senior leaders moderated all staff targets. In two schools, a senior leader observed performance management meetings led by middle leaders.

- It was made clear to middle leaders that when setting targets the evidence to evaluate them was to be agreed with staff. Headteachers in eight schools reported that at the early stages staff made assertions about their performance that were not backed up by the evidence. This resulted in them not receiving the performance pay rise they expected. Now that staff understood the rigour of performance management better this rarely occurred.

> From the start the priority in this school has been to encourage staff at all levels to take responsibility for their own performance. The school identified the necessity to improve the leadership of middle leaders, specifically the heads of faculties. Training has led to consistently effective leadership across the school. This involved leaders embarking on a detailed analysis of need that resulted in individual action plans that were incorporated into the management of their performance. Tailored training programmes that mixed group and individual activities were devised. This has been successful in ensuring that staff share a corporate responsibility for school improvement. Senior leaders are now confident that faculty heads are successfully driving improvement within their faculties and modelling the good practice they have learnt with their teams.

A curriculum fit for purpose

17. A common need in all the schools visited was to ensure that the curriculum better met the needs of pupils, rather than being a 'one size fits all' model. The following were common features of the curriculum in all schools visited.

- Successful achievement in English and mathematics was at the heart of the curriculum. The secondary schools visited were becoming increasingly successful in ensuring that different faculties took responsibility for literacy skills development.

> Traditionally, the literacy skills of pupils have been a weakness and attainment on entry to the school low. Successful steps have been taken to ensure that all teachers, regardless of their subject, take responsibility for teaching literacy skills. For example, a literacy marking scheme is used consistently across the school. Literacy packages are adopted in subjects such as science and PE to improve the quality of pupils' work. Monitoring and evaluation procedures have ensured that all faculties comply with requirements. In addition, the lengths of sessions and timetables have

been refined to give greater opportunity for pupils to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills.

- Timetables and session times were altered to maximise learning in lessons, for example by changing the length of lessons and extending the school day.

- Different pathways offering courses and qualifications that met the needs of pupils of different abilities were offered in secondary schools. These included good-quality vocational routes as well as traditional academic subjects.

- The three 11 to 16 secondary schools visited gave very good, unbiased guidance on the further education courses and careers that could be embarked on if pupils chose particular vocational or academic courses of study.

- The primary schools visited met statutory requirements and took account of guidance, but shaped their curriculum so that it better met the needs of pupils.

The headteacher and his team took some dynamic first steps to refocus staff on the priority to improve teaching and learning and to strip out of the curriculum activities that did not support this. Staff were busy working on a range of initiatives which had little impact on improving teaching and learning and distracted them from their core purpose. Starting with an audit of existing provision a set of non-negotiable requirements of the curriculum was established. Central to this was the need to strengthen the curriculum for English and mathematics and to develop creativity, independence, problem-solving and investigation skills. The curriculum was enriched by regular first-hand experiences such as school visits and the excellent development of the school grounds as an outside classroom. Central to the development of the curriculum was including pupils in identifying what they wanted to learn about. When planning the next topic or theme teachers now consult pupils about what they already know about it and what they would like to learn.

Each topic ends with a tangible product where pupils demonstrate their learning. This has really helped to strengthen links with parents and raised their expectations of what their children can achieve. They report how much they enjoy the regular opportunities they have to come to school to see their children's work. Recent examples include the life-size Anderson shelter built by pupils in the school grounds; the high-quality art gallery replicating the work of a range of artists; the book on human rights entitled *Every Child Counts* published professionally; and the Tudor banquet. All work is of the highest standard and demonstrates that while literacy and numeracy skills are central to the curriculum, pupils have very well-developed skills in a range of other subjects.

Effective governance

18. In seven schools visited governance had previously been weak because governing bodies did not hold school leaders to account or effectively monitor the work of the school. They had been content to take the word of the headteacher at face value, or had not been sufficiently well trained to know the questions they should be asking. As one headteacher reported, 'In the early stages I had to model the questions that the governors could ask. Following my headteacher's report I would say, "Now you might want to question me about this." I would then give them questions that they should ask.'

19. In 11 of the 12 schools visited the headteacher reported that governors are now much better trained to ask challenging questions; in five schools they were described as being at the helm of strategic development. In all schools visited the governing body actively took part in monitoring and evaluation activities. They all took full responsibility for procedures such as recruitment, staff capability and finance so that the headteacher was able to spend more time on leading teaching and learning. At the last inspection governance was judged good in 10 schools and outstanding in two schools. The following were common steps taken to strengthen governance.

-   Headteachers, supported by local authorities ensured that all governors were fully committed to the role. In some cases this led to individual governors deciding to resign.

-   Governors embarked on structured training programmes, often provided by the local authority, to strengthen their role.

-   Partnerships between governing bodies from different schools were established to share good practice.

-   Governing bodies worked alongside headteachers on school improvement. Usually they were allocated specific aspects of school improvement to check and report on.

> In 2008 the governing body in this primary school needed to improve its monitoring and challenge of this school. Since then governors have been actively recruited for their specific and relevant skills. Members of the governing body are linked to cohorts of pupils and follow them through the school. Every governor visits the school regularly to observe lessons. In this way governors have a deep understanding of the performance of individual year groups and their challenges. For example, as a result of a series of visits to the Early Years Foundation Stage, funds were made available to improve outdoor provision. Governors' roles are reviewed annually which ensures that members of the governing body add to their skill set and give a fresh eye to a new responsibility. Governors have been trained in the use of assessment tracking data to ensure they can ask challenging questions of school performance.

In a secondary school, the governing body presents an excellent model of governance, having previously been inadequate. The chair of governors describes that judgement as a 'wake-up call'. One important step taken was to strengthen the leadership of the governing body. The local authority co-opted a highly experienced school governor who led by example and taught other governors what their role was and how business should be conducted. The chair of governors and headteacher modelled for governors the questions they should be asking to hold the school to account for its work. Governors also benefited from training and support from the local authority that equipped them with the knowledge and skills to carry out the role effectively.

Now governors have very high expectations of themselves. They are linked closely to departments and direct and plan which leaders will report to them on improvements to teaching and learning. School leaders have quickly learnt that these meetings are demanding and that they must come well prepared with the evidence to back up any assertions about school improvement. Middle leaders appreciate how much governance has strengthened. They welcome governors' greater visibility around the school and the effective challenge and support they offer.

Sustaining improvement: good and beyond

Consistency of approach is a characteristic shared by all 12 schools. They are truly corporate cultures, with staff and usually pupils working for each other sensitively and cooperatively. Pupils do not receive mixed messages or perceive staff to have vastly different values. They see common purpose: adults who are working in pupils' interests, who like being in the school, who care for it and are ambitious for its future.[10]

20. This ethos came through very strongly in all the schools visited. Staff saw themselves on a journey to excellence; they said that they worked hard but relished the challenging and supportive climate in which success was celebrated. The schools were effective in building capacity for sustained improvement. The following characteristics were common features of these schools.

A learning community

21. The schools in the survey described themselves as learning communities with staff as lead learners.

In one school visited, many meetings include opportunities for members of staff, including those who are less experienced, to share their 'magic

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[10] *Twelve outstanding secondary schools – excelling against the odds* (080240), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080240.

moments'. This develops a shared understanding of what good and outstanding practice looks like and it boosts confidence. Staff say that everyone is 'working together, not trying to do it all yourself or expecting someone else to do it'. They say that everyone is encouraged to be reflective and flexible and is always reviewing their practice and provision so that needs are better met. The school has a number of short-term sharply focused working parties which all teachers can join, thereby harnessing their interests, enthusiasm and specialisms.

Greater pupil and parental engagement

22. In all the schools visited headteachers recognised the importance of fostering stronger partnerships with pupils and parents. This had benefited pupils' achievement and their well-being. In seven schools attendance was now average or above when previously it had been low. In all the schools visited behaviour was now judged to be good or better.

The large majority of parents and carers are proud that their children come to this primary school and fully trust that the changes and decisions that are made are in the interests of their children. The children are also very proud of their school. The headteacher set out to engage parents through improving channels of communication: issuing regular newsletters; offering a range of opportunities for parents to join in school life, from one-off events to regular activities; organising and developing training opportunities for staff and parents to develop communication about the curriculum and support children's learning at home; consulting on school development and asking open-ended questions to gather parents' views; introducing learning journals for homework.

The pupils have been involved through: suggestion boxes; circle time; school council; class and key stage assemblies; a buddy system; playground friends; helping to establish rules; and acting as monitors. Pupils share responsibility for their own learning. At the start of a new topic they are asked 'What do I know?' 'What do I want to know?' They know what they are learning because the purpose of lessons is made clear, and marking and the setting of personalised targets are used effectively to help them see how well they are doing and what they are aiming for.

Pupils in a secondary school now have an influential role in shaping teaching and learning. The headteacher reported that in 2010 pupils were generally apathetic and passive in lessons, in part due to uninspiring teaching. They now regularly report to and attend the teaching and learning innovation staff meetings. Individual pupils take responsibility for linked work with different subjects and for aspects of the school's work such as behaviour management. They take part in lesson observations and recruitment of staff, and their contribution is appreciated by the whole community.

Corporate responsibility

> As capacity was built, greater involvement in decision-making developed a sense of collective responsibility. This was a successful strategy for team-building. In all the schools there was a tangible sense of achievement, particularly from staff who had been at the school for several years.[11]

23. 'We are all in this together' was a strong ethos in all the schools. It not only resulted in a better education for pupils, but helped to retain staff, who enjoyed the environment in which they worked because they felt challenged and valued for their contribution.

> The collaborative approach in this school means that everybody knows what is going on around the school and contributes. Leaders are approachable and their style is all about encouraging, rewarding and fostering a sense of belonging. Staff say that leaders 'push people to strive for better and support everyone'. There is an ethos of trust and respect and belief that people will get it right. Staff feel that it is fine for them not to know something, knowing that they will receive the support of their colleagues. One teacher said that being at the school at this time has pushed her as a teacher and improved her practice. Now she is a learner too and the pupils realise that. Teachers welcome the trust and freedom to become enthusiastic and inspirational teachers through building on pupils' interests. Staff say that morale is as high as it has ever been.

Nurturing leadership at all levels

24. A common view of headteachers was that once staff were trained and working effectively in school, they would try their best to retain them by providing opportunities to further motivate them. In eight of the schools visited, staff in their first few years of teaching had leadership responsibilities because they had demonstrated that they were good or outstanding teachers. In this way headteachers and governing bodies were succession planning by developing middle and senior leaders for the future. One headteacher described this as 'growing your own'.

> The school strongly believes in recruiting, developing and retaining staff. Consequently, staff are confident and feel valued for their contribution. The 'Skills Teachers' and the 'Leaders of Learning' schemes give staff from the newly qualified teachers upwards opportunities to take responsibility for leading improvements to teaching identified in the school improvement plan. This is an excellent opportunity to develop leadership at all levels and to empower the individual. However, this is by no means a soft

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[11] *Sustaining improvement: the journey from special measures* (070221), Ofsted, 2008; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070221.

> opportunity. Through performance management procedures staff that benefit from these roles have to demonstrate that their work has had the desired impact. In the past, staff have lost these roles because they have not met school requirements.

25. Headteachers understood the importance of changing their leadership style as staff demonstrated greater capacity. In the early stages this tended to be didactic, as headteachers impressed on staff what was expected and had fewer leaders who were able to share the responsibility for improvement. Over time, decisions about how to make school improvements became more corporate and consultative as headteachers were able to share the responsibility for improvement.

> The leadership style of senior leaders in this school has changed as leaders at all levels demonstrate greater capacity. Now, there is a much more collegiate style to school improvement, with teachers making recommendations for change and trialling them in their classes before leading the improvement for all staff. The headteacher now monitors and checks that leaders are fulfilling their responsibilities successfully while exploiting opportunities to develop leadership skills still further. For example, the headteacher supports another local school and members of her staff have been able to lead training and share best practice there.

The background to this survey

The context

26. Ofsted announced in January 2012 that 50% of primary schools and 46% of secondary schools judged satisfactory at their previous inspection were found to have improved to good or outstanding at their latest inspection. However, 2,423 or 46% of primary schools and 474 or 49% of secondary schools had remained satisfactory.[12] Analysis of inspection statistics showed that schools serving deprived families had improved from satisfactory more slowly than schools serving more affluent families.

27. The main challenge for leaders in schools that required improvement was that they were insufficiently effective in leading teaching from satisfactory to good, or in ensuring that monitoring and evaluation were driving consistent improvement to teaching.[13] In 94% of the schools whose overall effectiveness had improved to good from satisfactory, teaching and learning had also improved to good. The current survey set out to evaluate the successful actions taken in those schools that had improved to good or better.

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[12] *Schools that stay satisfactory* (110151) Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110151.
[13] Findings in the report *Schools that stay satisfactory* (110151), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110151.

Methodology

28. For the purpose of this survey 12 good practice visits were made to schools in June 2012. Half of the visits were to secondary schools and the other half were to primary schools. Two of the secondary schools were academies and one of these was part of a hard federation with a high-performing secondary school.[14] Eleven of these schools were judged satisfactory overall at their previous inspection. One of these schools was previously issued with a notice to improve, but teaching and leadership were judged satisfactory. At the last inspection, 10 of the schools were judged to be good overall and two were judged outstanding. In all cases teaching and leadership were judged to be good or better.

29. During the good practice visits inspectors gathered evidence from discussions with the headteacher, other leaders, teachers, parents, pupils and members of the governing body. They observed lessons, scrutinised pupils' work and examined school records and policies, particularly those associated with teaching, tracking progress, performance management, school self-evaluation and development, monitoring and evaluation. Previous inspection reports and national assessment data were examined.

30. In April 2012, 13 headteachers attended two focus group meetings. In all cases their schools had been judged satisfactory at the previous inspection and good at the last inspection.

31. Schools were selected that served a spectrum of communities from those that experienced a high degree of social deprivation to others in more affluent areas.

32. In all the schools visited and those represented at the focus meetings, the headteacher had been in post since the previous inspection and had led the improvement resulting in the good judgement at the last inspection. In 11 of the schools visited the headteacher had been in post no more than two years prior to the previous inspection. This latter characteristic was not a criterion for selection for this survey, it was simply the observed pattern in the schools that were selected.

33. Individual good practice case studies for each of these schools visited can be found in the Good Practice section of the Ofsted website at: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/goodpractice.

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[14] The term 'federation' describes collaborative leadership and governance arrangements between schools. There are two main types of federation: hard federations have a single governing body, while soft federations retain a separate governing body in each school, but have joint governance through committees with delegated powers.

Further information

Leadership of more than one school (100234) Ofsted, 2011;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100234.

'Schools stuck in satisfactory', HMCI announcement, January 2012;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/NR2012-03

Schools that stay satisfactory (110151) Ofsted, 2011;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110151.

Sustaining improvement: the journey from special measures (070221) Ofsted, 2008;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/070221.

Twelve outstanding secondary schools – excelling against the odds (080240) Ofsted,
2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/080240.

Twenty outstanding primary schools, (090170) Ofsted, 2009;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090170.

Annex A: Contributing providers

Further information about the good practice in each of the schools used to illustrate this report is available by following the hyperlinks below.

Providers visited with hyperlinks to good practice examples

School	Location
All Saints CofE Primary School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120212.	Hammersmith and Fulham
Brookside Primary School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120226.	Oxfordshire
Dronfield Henry Fanshawe School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120225.	Derbyshire
Ecclesfield School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120223.	Sheffield
Highfields Science Specialist School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120224.	Wolverhampton
Highlands School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120227.	Enfield
Jubilee Park Primary www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120193.	Sandwell
Mendell Primary School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120229.	Wirral
St Benedict Biscop CofE (F) Primary School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120208.	Staffordshire
St Clement Danes CofE Primary School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120228.	Westminster
Stockland Green School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120211.	Birmingham
Woodside High School, A Business & Enterprise Specialist School www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120222.	Haringey

Schools represented at the focus group meetings attended by headteachers

School	Location
Chorlton High School	Manchester
Harrytown Catholic High School	Stockport
Highlands School	Enfield
Hounslow Town Primary School	Hounslow
St Andrew's CofE Voluntary Aided High School	Croydon
Johnson Fold Community Primary School	Bolton
Malbank School and Sixth Form College	Cheshire East
Malvern Primary School	Knowsley
Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Engineering College	Skelmersdale, Lancashire
Pinner Wood School	Harrow
Roundthorn Community Primary School	Oldham
St Aidan's Church of England Primary School	Blackburn with Darwen
William Stockton Community Primary School	Cheshire West and Chester