

No school an island

The **RSA** in
partnership with



Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Foreword by Matthew Taylor: The Suffolk Journey	5
Ten key facts about Suffolk's children, young people and schools	7
Introduction	8
1. Building a movement for educational change	19
2. Strengthen capacity for leadership and collaboration	33
3. Enhance and enrich the quality of teaching and learning	46
4. Broaden horizons for growth, enterprise and well-being	57
5. Celebrate success and sustain momentum over time	70
Our recommendations	72
Endnotes	78

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Foreword by Matthew Taylor: The Suffolk Journey

The announcement by Suffolk County Council in summer 2012 of the RSA's Raising the Bar Inquiry marked a growing awareness among the Suffolk educational community that things had to change. The Council commissioned this report on the explicit agreement that the RSA had the final say over its contents. This independence has been respected throughout and has enabled us to explore issues and proposals without constraint.

At the heart of this report is our belief in the power of collaboration. Our approach is to combine devolution of responsibility and resources to schools with a stronger expectation that they commit to strong partnerships with:

- Other schools and early years settings in their pyramid where objectives and accountabilities are focussed on the attainment and progression of every child;
- Other neighbouring schools, organisations working with young people and the wider community where the objectives and accountabilities are focussed on the well-being of every child;
- Schools with a similar profile to themselves in 'families', where the objectives and accountabilities are focussed on the quality of teaching and learning and school improvement.

For this collaboration to make a difference it must be long term, substantive, focused and based on measurable aims. We have called this report 'no school an island' to signal the importance that we attach to the principle that publicly funded institutions must take both individual and shared responsibility for the interests of the children and young people of Suffolk. We believe that schools now need to open their doors more routinely and purposefully with a wider range of partners, engaging with employers to enable children and young people to have a richer understanding of, and engagement in, the world of work, and to involve the wider community, especially parents, in valuing education and raising children's achievement.

The principle of collaboration has also guided the process of the Inquiry. Instead of a conventional expert commission we opted for a more open, discursive and action-focused approach. Nine Inquiry solutions groups involving stakeholders from inside and outside the education system have powerfully shaped the conclusions of this report and – more importantly – they have started to turn their proposals into action.

A number of important insights gained from this process should inform next steps. There is the continued need for clarity and openness about performance, not just at the local authority level but in relation to every school. Being satisfied with existing standards is part of what

allowed Suffolk to fall so far behind. We believe strong progress can be made in the County, but at a time when all schools are striving to make further improvement, there can never be a return to complacency.

Progress cannot be made by imposing a quick fix imported from elsewhere. A strength of the solution group process has come from the opportunity to discuss what has worked in other systems and to refine these solutions so they fit the specific Suffolk context. The way forward must be stamped ‘designed for Suffolk, in Suffolk’. In future years other localities looking for ways to improve should be seeking to learn the lessons from Suffolk’s success.

When exploring successful improvement strategies there is a tendency to overlay a post hoc neatness on the process but, on closer inspection these success stories – from Ontario to London Challenge – turn out to have been multi-faceted and emergent. Achieving a step-change in performance will require effort and adaptation. Some ideas will work well, others will need to be refined. The work of the solutions group should not end with the publication of this report; indeed, their on-going role exemplifies the call for Raising the Bar to be seen not as a one off process but as a continuing campaign.

Just about everyone we have met over the last ten months seeks the same destination for Suffolk; for every child and young person to have the best possible chance to grow into successful, fulfilled and responsible citizens. We believe that our recommendations provide a strong and distinctive framework, but ultimately it is not further deliberation that Suffolk needs, but action. We are confident and excited about the progress that Suffolk’s schools and communities will be able to achieve in the months and years to come.

Ten key facts about Suffolk's children, young people and schools

- 1 Suffolk is home to 166,900 children and young people, 22.9 percent of the total population of 728,200.
- 2 The total population of Suffolk is predicted to grow by 14.6 percent by 2032. During the same period, the population of 0–19 year olds is predicted to grow by 6.1 percent.
- 3 5 percent of all primary aged children and 10 percent of all pupils at secondary school in Suffolk do not hold English as a first language. The average for England is 17 percent.
- 4 Approximately one in six children in Suffolk is born into poverty, lower than the national average of nearly one in three.
- 5 There are 268 first and primary schools, 17 middle schools and 46 secondary schools in Suffolk. Seven primary schools, two middle schools and 28 the secondary schools are Academies. There are four secondary Free Schools in Suffolk.
- 6 There are 10 maintained schools with sixth forms, 13 Academies with sixth forms, one sixth form college, 4 further education colleges and one 16–19 school.
- 7 Suffolk is ranked 148 out of 150 local authorities for attainment at age 11 and 142 out of 150 at age 16.
- 8 57 percent of Disadvantaged* pupils and 79 percent of Other** pupils in Suffolk achieved the expected level in both English and maths at age 11, compared with 68 percent and 84 percent nationally for each group.
- 9 27 percent of Disadvantaged* pupils and 56 percent of Other** pupils in Suffolk achieved five A*–C GCSEs or equivalent, including English and maths, compared with 39 percent and 66 percent nationally.
- 10 Currently (April 2013) 2.3 percent (241) of 16–17 year olds in Suffolk are in employment without any training opportunities associated with their job, while 4.8 percent (509) are not in any kind of employment or training.

* Disadvantaged pupils are defined as those in receipt of the Pupil Premium funds (Looked After Pupils and those who are FSM Ever6 (have ever been FSM in the past 6 years).

** Other pupils are those who are not in the Disadvantaged group

Introduction

Challenges and opportunities in a changing educational landscape

A period of rapid change is underway in the English education system, driven by national policy reforms to increase institutional autonomy and devolve greater freedom and responsibility to schools. The Coalition Government has sought to ‘set schools free’ from central and local government control, giving school leaders greater scope to innovate and learn from successful practice elsewhere.¹ By diversifying the types of institution in the education market place, it is claimed that parental choice will create competitive pressure on schools to improve their performance.² Meanwhile, faced with more demanding ‘floor targets’³ and a new Ofsted inspection framework,⁴ schools are under greater pressure than ever to raise ‘standards’, whilst also doing more to narrow the gap in outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁵

Educational debate about school reforms tends to become polarised between opposing camps.⁶ We believe it is more productive to assist schools and their partners to identify opportunities and navigate around obstacles in the evolving landscape. For schools, the reforms promise to give greater scope to share knowledge and build professional capacity through the expansion of academy chains, formation of new teaching school alliances and other strategic partnerships. Over time, it is envisaged that a deeper instinct for collaboration can be built from the bottom up, instilling a sense of shared responsibility and common purpose that can balance the competitive forces between institutions.⁷

But the scale and rapid pace of reform also creates new challenges, especially when set against a difficult economic climate which has led to significant cutbacks in public expenditure. Schools, colleges and local authorities will have to work together to find ways of managing the tensions that inevitably arise between competition and collaboration, between models of autonomy and accountability, and between the claims of freedom and fairness. A particular concern is that the burgeoning array of institutional models and strategic alliances will lead to fragmentation and incoherence in the system, with some schools becoming isolated or stuck in ineffective partnerships, lacking the resources to respond effectively if and when problems arise. As Robert Hill (2012) has argued, what is needed is some way of ‘knitting together’ the efforts of the various groups and organisations, in order to reduce duplication, share intelligence and learning, and ensure that no schools or pupils are allowed to ‘fall through the cracks and get left behind’.⁸

Through the introduction of a new pupil premium paid directly to schools, the government aims to ensure a greater focus on improving the educational outcomes and life chances of children from disadvantaged

family backgrounds.⁹ Under a new, more devolved funding system, it is up to schools to decide how to allocate their resources for the benefit of deprived and underachieving pupils.¹⁰ The scale of the challenge here is substantial: despite recent government efforts, only limited progress has been made so far in narrowing the attainment gaps between children from different socio-economic backgrounds. Pupils from poorer families (as indicated by eligibility for Free School Meals) are still on average some twenty points behind their classmates in tests at age 11, while there is a stubborn performance gap of 27 points at age 16.¹¹ Although individual schools and programmes have demonstrated some success in closing the achievement gap, the challenge now will be to learn lessons about what works and replicate this success across the system as a whole.

The coming period will also see the implementation of the *Raising of Participation Age* legislation, under which young people will be required for the first time to continue in some form of education or training until their 18th birthday.¹² One of the core aims of education in the twenty-first century is to support students to become independent learners, equipping them with the formal qualifications and flexible life skills that are vital for adult life and a rapidly changing world of work. Although *Raising of Participation Age* offers potential opportunities for young people to extend their learning, realising these benefits will depend on how far schools, colleges and workplaces are equipped to offer relevant skills, training and qualifications that motivate young people, as well as meeting the needs of employers and business.

Against this backdrop of sweeping structural changes, financial pressures and heightened expectations, schools are adjusting to a shift in roles and responsibilities, away from a traditional model of local authority provision and control.¹³ Importantly, the government has made it clear that schools are now responsible for their own improvement, with greater devolution of funding so that school leaders can decide what support they need. At the same time, they are expected to take the lead in supporting other schools and exercising collective responsibility for outcomes in their area.

While some parts of the country have a strong base upon which to build, other localities risk being left behind as their schools struggle to meet the increasing expectations being placed upon them. High performing and significantly improved areas such as London and Greater Manchester are well placed to take advantage of the new opportunities: concerted efforts over the last decade to build capacity and strengthen school partnerships have resulted in significant improvements in overall attainment at the same time as giving a particular boost for disadvantaged pupils, whilst achieving an impressive rise in the number of schools rated as 'good' or 'outstanding'.¹⁴ By contrast, areas where the organisational culture is weak and schools are significantly under-performing will need to take immediate and sustained action to strengthen leadership and build professional capacity. But regardless of current performance or ranking, no area can afford to be complacent; all schools and local authorities will need to continue to adjust and adapt to create the conditions for a genuinely self-improving school system.

The situation in Suffolk

The pressure to improve is particularly intense in parts of the country, such as the county of Suffolk, which are currently at the wrong end of the local authority league tables. The performance of Suffolk schools has followed an erratic course over the last decade, with average levels of attainment moving from being comfortably in line with or above national and regional averages, to a more worrying position close to the bottom of the national league tables.¹⁵ The picture for the last few years has been one of stubborn underperformance and poor pupil progression across key phases of learning. In the words of the county council, ‘Suffolk is stuck’: nationally it is ranked 142 out of 150 local authorities for attainment at age 16, and it is only four places from bottom in national tests of pupil performance at age 11.

The problem in Suffolk is three-fold: first, the data shows a pattern of systemic underperformance, with poor aggregate levels of pupil progress and attainment across the county. The percentage of pupils who progress by at least two levels during Key Stage Two is 7 percent lower than the national average in English, and 8 percent lower in Maths. This gap has remained similar since 2008, and goes across the ability spectrum.

Second, poor average attainment is combined with a wide gap in outcomes between children from lower-income families, as indicated by eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) and their peers:

- 49 percent of FSM pupils and 69 percent of non-FSM pupils in Suffolk achieved the expected level in both English and maths at age 11, compared with 55.9 percent and 77.2 percent nationally for each group.
- 25 percent of FSM pupils and 54 percent of non-FSM pupils in Suffolk achieved five A*-C GCSEs or equivalent, including English and maths, compared with 31.2 percent and 58.8 percent nationally.

Although the size of the attainment gap in Suffolk – 20 percent at age 11 and 27 percent at age 16 – is roughly equivalent to the national picture, the fact that both higher and lower income groups are significantly behind their national counterparts is further evidence of systematic underperformance across the county.¹⁶ Levels of attainment are also currently lower in other disadvantaged groups, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

- At Key Stage 2, 7 percent fewer Non White British pupils achieved Level 4+ in both English and mathematics compared with White British counterparts.
- At Key Stage 4, 3 percent fewer Non-White British students achieved 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics compared with Non White British. The most significant gap was for Black students where performance was lower than White students by 19 percent.

Worrying too is the higher than average proportion of young people who do not continue in education beyond age 16, and who fail to

complete post-compulsory courses in school or college. In preparation for *Raising of Participation Age* (to age 17 in September 2013, and to age 18 in 2015), Suffolk colleges urgently need to take further action to promote participation and retention, as well as working with employers to ensure that young people have access to high quality, relevant training. Currently 10 percent (2,500 young people in Suffolk) are in employment without any training or development opportunities associated with their job, while 6 percent (1500) are not in any kind of employment or training. Suffolk's 2008 Community Strategy set the ambition to be in the top quartile nationally for performance in learning and skills by 2028. It has made no significant progress so far towards this goal.

Comparing the performance of Suffolk schools with their counterparts in other parts of the country over the recent period, one is struck by the fact that there appears to have been an impetus for improvement in some of the large metropolitan areas (notably Greater London and Greater Manchester), which has been missing in Suffolk. This disparity in trajectories is particularly striking in the context of recent international trends, which show a marked improvement in performance of schools in large urban areas as compared to those in rural and semi-rural locations.¹⁷ As the most recent data from the OECD's 'PISA' study highlights,¹⁸ many large cities have managed to convert their social heterogeneity into an educational asset, by encouraging schools and students to take advantage of the wealth of cultural and social opportunities that are on offer.¹⁹ While the educational advantages of living in a UK city or urban area should not be overstated,²⁰ we believe that there are important lessons to learn from the success of the London and City Challenge programmes, starting with the key message that *all* schools have room for improvement.

Rural deprivation, isolation and identity

Suffolk's poor school performance and student outcomes appear particularly disappointing when judged against its relative prosperity and comparatively low levels of income poverty, material deprivation and worklessness, though it is important to remember that the headline figures conceal significant variations in rates of employment and living standards, in what is predominantly a low-skilled, low-wage economy.²¹ Research on rural deprivation shows that it has distinct characteristics, which are not fully captured in standard measures such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).²² Compared with urban areas, people on low incomes are more likely to be working and less likely to claim benefits, while those in poor health are less likely to access health services and so can be missed by statistical measures.²³ Many rural areas which otherwise have low scores on the IMD are classed as deprived in terms of barriers to accessing services. Sparse areas also suffer greater deprivation: a study for Suffolk Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) found that the rural share of deprivation in Suffolk was substantially larger than might be expected from the number of deprived rural areas.²⁴ Thus, although rural communities are perceived to have many strengths, in the form of low crime rates, higher levels of volunteering and 'social capital' and a stronger sense of community, they may also be internally polarised in terms of people's quality of life, living standards and access to services.²⁵

National research also highlights distinctive challenges for rural schools which may impact disproportionately on pupils at risk of low attainment, in the form of insufficient resources to recruit and retain specialist staff, support for special educational needs, English as an additional language and pastoral support.²⁶ Many Suffolk schools and colleges face problems associated with their rural location, due to social and geographic isolation, poor transport and communications infrastructure. Young people themselves have told us that a lack of public transport and its increasing cost (due to recent removal of the Explorer Card), compounded by a lack of internet access and poor mobile phone signals in some rural areas, prevents them from accessing the full range of learning experiences, as well as contributing to a sense of social isolation.²⁷ Analysis also points to features of the predominantly low-skilled, low-wage labour market which appear unfavourable to young people and may create disincentives to invest in post-compulsory educational qualifications.²⁸

Nevertheless, the fact that Suffolk has been outperformed by counties of a similar size and socio-demographic profile suggests that these area characteristics do not provide the whole story. As a report by Suffolk County Council (2010) on young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) concludes, besides ‘rurality’ and local economy, ‘it seems as if there are additional, unknown factors contributing to Suffolk’s lack of success in this area’.²⁹ Throughout the report and analysis that follows, we examine the interplay of factors operating at different levels (individual, organisational and wider cultural and structural factors) which contribute to Suffolk’s underperformance, and propose solutions for how the main barriers to educational engagement can be overcome.

Raising the bar

Faced with systemic school underperformance, wide gaps in attainment and a poor record of participation and retention in post-compulsory education, Suffolk County Council (SCC) has since 2009 introduced a range of measures to address the problem, with a differentiated approach over the short, medium and longer term. Over the medium term, Suffolk’s strategy of school improvement is providing targeted support to schools below the ‘floor standards’, together with additional support from the Learning and Improvement Service for schools at risk of falling below the floor. At the same time, and in the face of some continued local opposition, SCC has reaffirmed its commitment to completing the process of school reorganisation through which all areas are moving to a two-tier system, with a number of schools earmarked to close, merge or convert (eg from a middle to a secondary school). Evidence from Phase One suggests that the restructuring has had a positive impact on improving outcomes in these schools.³⁰ Most recently, the Council has put in place a ‘seven point plan’ for accelerating improvement, including detailed analysis of each school’s performance data against the national standards, a toolkit of what works in school improvement and individual meetings with headteachers and chairs of governors to discuss priorities for action.

Launched in June 2012, the **Raising the Bar** programme is driving efforts to raise educational attainment and aspiration across the county over the longer term and make the achievement of children and young people ‘a real, lived priority for Suffolk’.³¹ As part of **Raising the Bar**, the **RSA**

was commissioned in summer 2012 to conduct an independent inquiry, with the aim of providing new insight and analysis, impartial advice and external challenge to Suffolk County Council and Suffolk's Education, Community and Business Leaders, on how to achieve and sustain a significant improvement in attainment and learning outcomes for all children and young people.

Our goal, over the ten months of this Inquiry, has been to contribute to a fundamental change in the way that education is discussed, perceived and delivered in Suffolk, by involving local actors and school leaders in the process of designing long-term solutions. With a remit covering Suffolk's Education service, though not extending to wider children's services, the Inquiry has focused on three themes:

1. Reviewing current provision of support and challenge to schools, colleges and training providers, together with opportunities for collaboration and sharing practice;
2. Engaging employers and the wider community in defining capability gaps of students and developing a learning offer;
3. Building Suffolk as a learning county with high expectations and the potential to realise economic opportunities.

Although the Inquiry has explored some issues relating to the early years, and its focus on employer engagement is connected to post-16 learning opportunities, the central focus has been on schools and pupils aged 5–16, since this was where the data demonstrated particular underperformance.

Our approach

In undertaking this Inquiry we have sought to learn lessons from successful programmes elsewhere, whilst integrating this learning into the design of solutions which are appropriate for the specific issues and challenges in Suffolk. Informed by evidence from local and national research, we have sought to gain a better understanding of the underlying reasons for underperformance in Suffolk schools, by reviewing evidence of trends in pupil performance and progression over time, by commissioning papers on specific themes including the role of the local authority and the 'middle tier', and by conducting analysis of the Ofsted inspection reports for a sub-sample of the 35 percent of schools who are not yet rated as good or outstanding, covering each district in the county.

Rather than simply gathering evidence and formulating recommendations, we have adopted an approach which allows for greater involvement and collaboration by schools and local actors than is generally possible under a traditional mode of inquiry, and which recognises the fundamental role that people play as 'change makers' to inspire and motivate others, acting in both a personal and professional capacity as champions and advocates of change. Central to this approach has been our belief in the limitations of traditional policy-making models, which assume that experts, policy-makers or consultants can devise a fool-proof and fail-proof strategy to improve education outcomes. We subscribe instead to a design-based approach, which recognises that successful practices are designed and developed in response to local conditions, emerging and adapting over time.

As an integral part of the process, we invited stakeholders to lead and participate in a number of ‘Solutions Groups’, based around a number of key issues identified by local actors: leadership and succession planning; learning partnership; governors, quality of teaching, innovative curriculum design; Suffolk Baccalaureate; valuing parents; engaging employers; and mentors. Each of the **Raising the Bar Solution Groups** has been engaged in a design process – whether the design of a pilot to test ideas or a new service or approach to provision – which has required them to be rigorous in defining the problem, generating a number of possible solutions, and testing and reflecting to reach the best outcome. The proposals and recommendations in this report build directly on the work of the Solutions Groups, in some cases going further or making additional or alternative proposals based on evaluation of the wider evidence, but in all cases looking to involve and empower local actors to lead the process of educational and cultural change.

Suffolk County Council and the RSA launched a county-wide ‘**Call for Ideas**’ to inform the Inquiry’s actions and recommendations. The **Raising the Bar** online space was launched in autumn 2012, enabling members of the public to find out about the Inquiry, submit ideas and comment on other contributions. Unlike a traditional closed ‘call of evidence’, we aimed to create a more transparent, dynamic process that enabled participants to connect with each other’s ideas and contribute to the Inquiry’s ambition to stimulate cultural change. The Call for Ideas resulted in a total of 105 submissions, from a total of 89 contributors. A summary and analysis of responses is available as an annex to this report, and all comments are still available online. A selection of relevant comments which particularly informed our thinking are included throughout this report.

As a vital complement to the county-wide **Call for Ideas** and **Raising the Bar** on-line space (see box), the inquiry has benefited from the active engagement and contributions of over 500 young people to ‘**Shout Out Suffolk**’. Conceived, developed and overseen by a group of RSA Suffolk Fellows, this innovative project has enabled young people to share their knowledge, ideas and inspiration through focused activity groups and an on-line ‘virtual scrapbook’ over a six-week period in February and March 2013. Eliciting 568 responses, these conversations and discussions have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the issues facing young people in Suffolk.

In addition, the Inquiry has drawn upon a research methodology based on social network analysis, originally developed in the **Change Makers** programme led in Peterborough by the RSA in partnership with the City Council. This approach has been trialled in and around the Lowestoft area to help identify a broader group of local actors than the ‘usual suspects’ and to investigate their experiences, perceptions of and barriers to wider community engagement.

Our starting point

At the heart of this report is our belief in the power of collaboration to meet children’s needs and improve their well-being and outcomes. For us, there are a number of important senses in which ‘no school is an island’.

First, we are conscious of the tremendous value that is released when schools open their doors to collaboration, allowing pupils and teachers to benefit from a wider range of resources and assets (see Figure a). Strong partnership working, both within and across schools, and with external partners and organisations, can make a significant difference to the quality of teaching and learning in each setting, enabling professionals to develop new skills and expertise through peer review and evaluation, whilst giving pupils the chance to access a greater range of learning opportunities. What is more, the practical experience of working alongside both students and teachers in other settings helps foster a stronger sense of moral purpose and shared responsibility for the learning of children and young people in schools beyond one's own. In the words of Michael Fullan, chief architect of Ontario's highly successful education reforms, it is the combination of these two important factors that gives collaboration 'the power to make the ordinary extraordinary'.³²

Furthermore, we believe that no school is an island in another, even more profound sense. While the school has a vital role to play, a child's learning and development does not begin and certainly does not end inside the school gates. The most important factor in children's lives is the care and support they receive from their parents or carers, beginning in the early years of life and continuing throughout their school career and beyond. Parents have skills and capacities that teachers and educators need to recognise and value by supporting parents' active engagement in their children's learning. At the same time, schools need to be aware of how difficulties in pupils' home life, including changes in family circumstances or problems caused by material deprivation and financial hardship, can create stress and pressure which can impact negatively on their learning and development (see Figure b). Throughout the report, we discuss how schools can work in more creative and collaborative ways with parents and the local community to support children's needs and enrich their learning.

Figure a: A model of how collaboration enhances educational resources and relationships

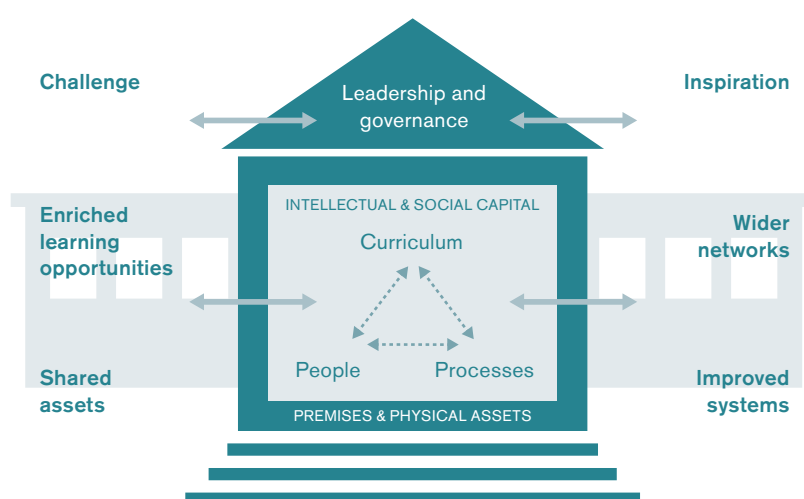
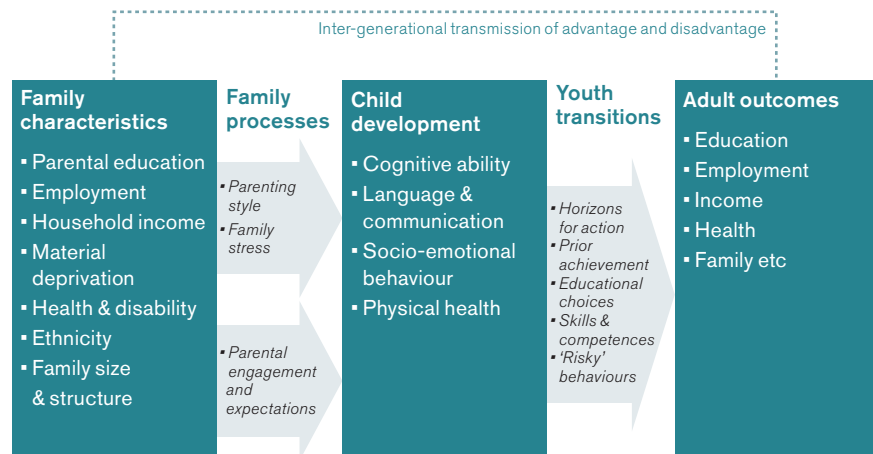


Figure b: The influence of family factors and processes on children's development and learning

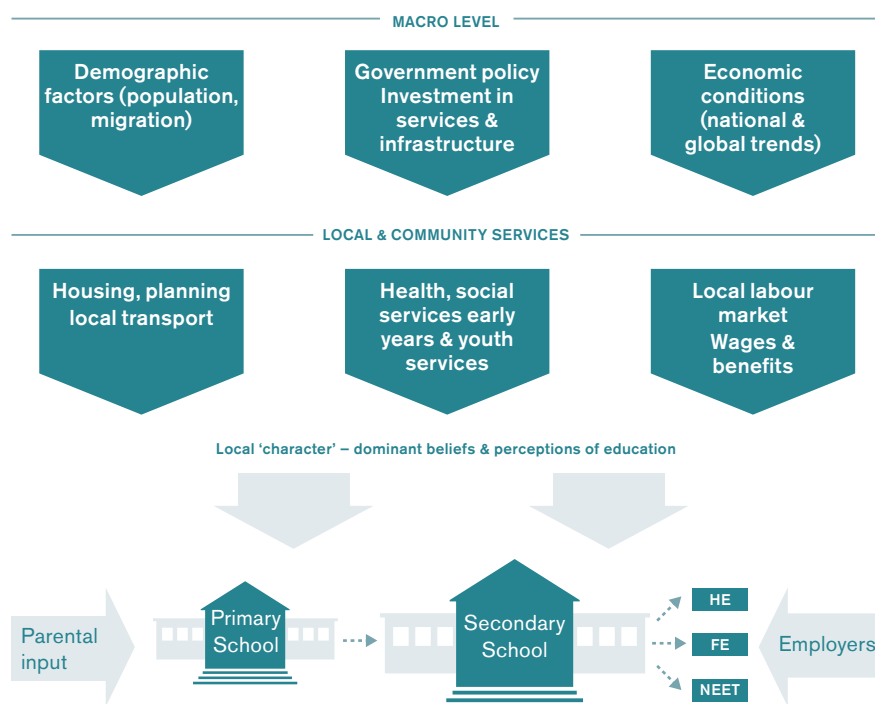


Source: Adapted from Feinstein et al. (2004) *A model of the inter-generational effects of parental education*.

As children grow older, the influence of peers, friendship groups and wider networks becomes ever more important. By forging connections with a wider range of groups and organisations, schools can help broaden young people's horizons and give them the practical knowledge and experience that is needed to realise their goals. Employers too can play a vital part in expanding young people's knowledge of what is possible and achievable, by engaging with schools and colleges to bring the world of work alive in the classroom and lecture hall, as well as providing opportunities for work experience and work-based learning. In chapter 4, we set out proposals to encourage and facilitate this engagement, beginning in the primary school, by creating a learning framework for citizenship, enterprise and employability and setting up a simple, single mechanism to connect business and education.

The thread running through the report is the child's journey, from the early years into primary and secondary school and then on to the next stage of learning in early adulthood. Importantly, children and young people, together with their families and schools, do not operate in isolation, but are influenced by features of the wider social environment. As represented in Figure c, policy aimed at promoting educational achievement and tackling educational disadvantage 'needs to simultaneously address a whole series of factors at different levels'.³³ Individuals and institutions at the 'micro' level are shaped – and in some important ways constrained – by 'macro' level factors, including the state of infrastructure such as transport, housing and communications, demographic characteristics such as the number of families and children moving into or out of an area, as well as conditions in the local labour market and broader economic and fiscal climate, all of which are influenced, to a varying degree, by the policy priorities and funding decisions made by national government, regional bodies and local councils.

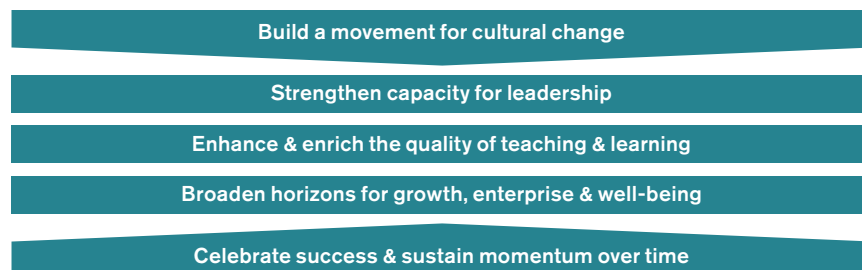
Figure c: A multi-level model of structural and cultural factors influencing children's schooling & education outcomes



It follows that any strategy for school improvement and narrowing the gap needs to be integrated with local and national strategies to promote economic growth and to tackle related issues such as the availability and quality of housing, accessibility of local transport and standards of living. Although it is beyond the scope of this Inquiry to do more than touch on this wider set of policy issues, understanding the range of factors operating in the Suffolk context is a vital part of making the case for change and finding solutions to the problems of systemic underperformance and poor progression.

Structure of this report

During the course of this Inquiry we have developed five key themes, to help integrate the different strands of activity and create a coherent structure for this report. These themes reflect lessons from successful school reforms elsewhere about the steps needed to bring about change across the whole system, to improve outcomes for all learners and for the most disadvantaged in particular.³⁴



Placing the quality of teaching and learning at the centre of the process of school improvement, this approach reflects our core belief in the power of collaboration to improve outcomes for children and young people. We begin in the next chapter by looking at ways to inspire and motivate all relevant actors and organisations to take part in a movement for educational change.

1. Building a movement for educational change

In coming to terms with the problem of low attainment in Suffolk schools, there has been growing recognition that more radical action is needed to meet the scale of the challenge. In the words of SCC chief executive, Deborah Cadman, what is required is not a series of piecemeal reforms, but a concerted, community-wide ‘movement for educational change’.³⁵ Building on existing activity, the **Raising the Bar** programme is already having an impact, giving local leaders a more prominent place in the formation of strategic priorities and the design of solutions. Nevertheless, while some important initiatives are underway, the current and planned activity does not yet amount to a strategy of action that is capable of transforming educational outcomes across the county. To achieve a step-change in school performance and student outcomes, Suffolk schools and Local Authority need greater clarity about three core areas: diagnosing the underlying reasons for poor school performance; knowing what makes a difference to improve outcomes; and understanding how to bring about change in the culture of professional and pupil learning.

Diagnosing the problem

Data shows that there is a system-wide problem of underperformance in Suffolk schools: poor aggregate levels of pupil progress and attainment are combined with wide gaps in educational achievement between disadvantaged groups and other pupils, leading to poor rates of participation and retention in post-compulsory education and training. Within the county, there is still a tendency to attribute low attainment to individual factors, particularly ‘low aspirations’ by parents and young people. And yet, there is no evidence that pupil or parental aspiration in Suffolk is lower than anywhere else in England; and in any case, local and national studies demonstrate that personal aspiration explains very little of the attainment gap.³⁶ Research shows that the quality of teaching in schools and classrooms is the single biggest school-level factor affecting student performance and school effectiveness.³⁷ The key question, then, is what is holding back improvement in the quality of teaching in Suffolk? Here, we need to look at features of the organisational culture in Suffolk schools and wider environment, which have resulted in a lack of challenge for individual teachers and a lack of impetus for wider improvement, compounded by a lack of leadership and collaborative capacity to work together to share knowledge and evidence about effective practice.

Clarifying what makes a difference

Second, as well as being more explicit about the nature of the problem, greater clarity is needed about how to address it. The situation in Suffolk calls for an integrated strategy to transform school performance, narrow the socio-economic gap in children's learning and broaden young people's horizons for employment and adult life. Our proposals to achieve these goals are based on a model of evidence-based practice and collaborative professional development, which has been shown to be most effective in improving teaching and learning. Now, more than ever, schools need to work together to make best use of the knowledge and resources that are available in the system. A collaborative approach enables teachers to improve their practice in ways that other types of training typically fail to do, as well as giving students the chance to enrich their learning and develop a wider range of skills and competences. The experience of the London and City Challenge programmes shows that this type of approach has the potential to bring about a marked improvement in overall performance, whilst offering greatest benefits for learners from deprived social and family backgrounds. Hence, the recommendations in this report focus on creating the conditions and infrastructure for effective school partnerships, in order to build professional capacity and expertise and thereby drive improvements in educational achievement.

Making it happen

Third, we need to clarify what steps should be taken, and by whom, to bring about the change in professional and organisational culture that is required to transform learning outcomes across the county. Achieving a genuinely community-wide and community-led movement is not something that can be solely engineered from above. Rather, we need to look to local leaders inside and outside of schools to act as champions of change, inspiring and motivating others to take action and become more deeply involved.

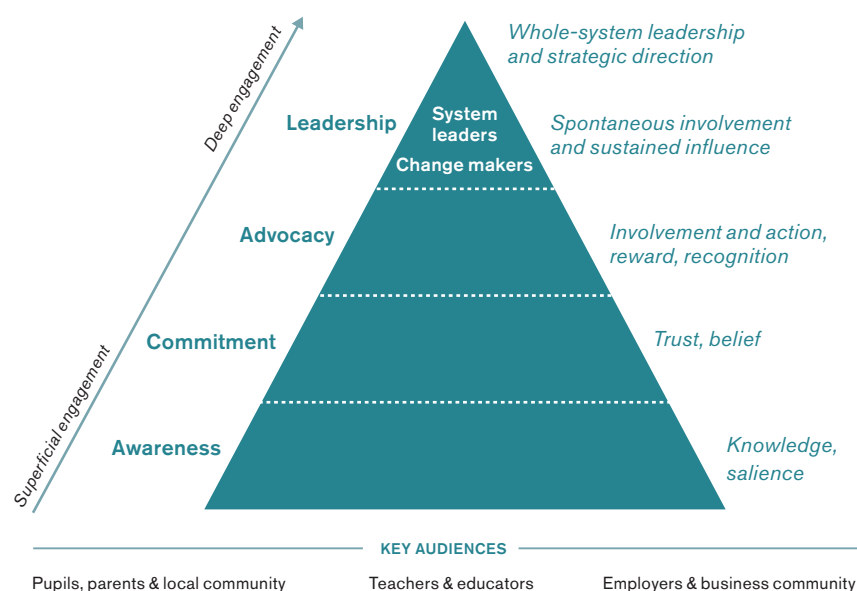
In subsequent chapters, we offer our diagnosis and proposed solutions in relation to key aspects of the problem: strengthening leadership and governance; improving the quality of teaching and learning; and broadening young people's horizons for employment and adult life. In this chapter, we begin by outlining a model which identifies the main steps to engagement, differentiating between general levels of awareness, incentives to involvement by individual actors and institutions, and deeper forms of engagement, based on a sense of collective commitment and shared responsibility. Making the case for more far-reaching educational change, we conclude by setting out proposals for two strategic learning partnerships to help stimulate new thinking and encourage more radical ways of working.

1.1 A model of engagement

Any campaign for cultural and educational change needs to start by setting out the steps needed to build involvement amongst key audiences. As illustrated in Figure 1a, achieving sustained action over time means moving from a position of limited awareness to a deeper level of engagement.³⁸ The first step is to get people to at least be aware of the issue or problem – demonstrating that it has some salience and relevance to their

lives – before trying to establish that it is something that both can and should be addressed, overcoming scepticism, fatalism, inertia and other barriers to active involvement. Achieving this initial level of engagement calls for acceptance of the basic facts or evidence in question, as well as a belief that it is possible to make a difference.

Figure 1a: A model of how engagement is built



Source: Adapted from the Ipsos-Mori model of engagement, in Castell and Thompson (2007) 'Understanding attitudes to poverty in the UK', York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Once a baseline of awareness and acceptance has been established, the next step is to build individual and collective commitment to addressing the problem. A sense of reward or recognition for having committed one's time and energy is important, to create motivation, prevent fatigue or 'burn out' and help sustain action over time. When people are fully engaged and committed, they move from being followers to leaders, acting as champions and advocates of the process to persuade others to become involved. Conventionally, 'advocacy' is regarded as the highest level of support an idea or policy can enjoy. In the Suffolk context, we suggest that there is a still deeper level of engagement which comes when people move from thinking of themselves as leaders and change makers in their particular school or community, and start taking the lead in promoting action across the county as a whole. Thus, the final step in the process as we see it is for people to move from being school or community leaders to become 'system leaders'.

We believe that this model provides a useful tool for identifying the steps needed to reach and mobilise each of the key audiences in the Suffolk context: students, teachers and educators; parents and members of the local community; and employers and local businesses:

Step One: Are members of the community aware of systemic under-performance in Suffolk schools? Do they accept that this

is a problem in their local area and are they committed to taking the action needed to address it?

Step two: Are members of the community aware of systemic under-performance in Suffolk schools? Do they accept that this is a problem in their local area and are they committed to taking the action needed to address it?

Step three: Are there opportunities for local leaders and ‘change makers’ to design solutions and act as champions of change? Are local leaders empowered to act as system leaders, providing strategic direction for the whole county?

Inevitably, people in Suffolk are at different places along this journey. At each level, there is more that can be done to stimulate engagement and provide meaningful opportunities for participation. A model of campaigning provides a helpful way to think about the task: the campaign will need to appeal to different sources of motivation for different actors, looking to incentivise change where necessary by aligning with individual or group interests, whilst appealing wherever possible to common values and shared interests, to provide a stronger and more stable basis for action. Over time, the goal should be to shift from orchestrating a campaign to building a movement, which means creating the space for local actors and groups to come together and take action in their own way. Ultimately, it is to be hoped that a campaign for educational change that is initially led by the Local Authority with input from schools and colleges will naturally evolve into a bottom-up movement, led by schools and the community, driven by a collective commitment to give every child and young person the best possible start in life and an impatient demand to make it happen.

Barriers to awareness and acceptance

The launch of this inquiry in summer 2012, together with a set of initiatives under the **Raising the Bar** banner, has already contributed to raising general levels of awareness and engagement in Suffolk. Our contacts with parents, local residents and employers, as well as teachers, headteachers and governors, have indicated a rising awareness of the general problem of low attainment and poor student progression. But while this basic level of engagement has generally been achieved, there are still some significant barriers to be overcome at the level of ‘acceptance’ (see Figure 1b). The most pressing issue here appears to be a sense of complacency amongst those who do not believe that change is needed, or who are willing to accept a merely adequate outcome (‘satisficing’), rather than aiming at the best possible levels of improvement.³⁹

While information and publicity will be part of the campaign to raise basic awareness of the problem of school underperformance, taking a purely informational approach is unlikely to bring about a change in behaviour, especially where there are other barriers to overcome, such as scepticism, inertia, distrust or denial of the problem. These attitudes need to be tackled head-on; otherwise there is a danger of securing only superficial agreement amongst key constituencies, which is likely to hamper further efforts to improve performance. Inspiring and motivating

action means making a compelling case for change to inspire and motivate action, whilst also providing real and concrete examples of how successful improvements can be achieved to combat fatalism and denial.

Figure 1b: Barriers to acceptance and basic engagement with the problem



Barriers to collective commitment and shared responsibility

Beyond the difficulties presented by a lack of awareness, complacency or denial of the problem lies a more deep-rooted set of barriers to engagement. While it may be relatively straightforward to motivate interest and involvement by one set of actors or institutions (providing that have the right incentives), achieving whole-system change calls for the mobilisation of multiple audiences and organisations, often with competing interests and agendas. As David Hargreaves has written, a self-improving school system depends upon a collaborative network of partnerships and strategic alliances between schools. This entails building collaborative capacity progressively from the bottom up, starting with 'a small group of schools in deep partnership, expanding to a much larger group – an alliance, federation, trust, chain, local authority etc – and from there potentially to a whole region and nation'.⁴⁰ Over time, it is envisaged that a collaborative network could naturally instil a sense of shared moral purpose and collective commitment to work for the success of every child and young person, rather than simply those students in one's own school or partnership. And yet, as Hargreaves also recognises, there are forces and tensions operating in the system which may pull against this collective impulse:

'At present many inter-school partnerships are based in a relatively small cluster of schools and I find that in many local authorities a form of tribalism is emerging, as these clusters become parts of larger groups, in the form of chains, teaching school alliances, faith schools within a diocese, and so on'.⁴¹

Our interactions with a wide range of stakeholders in Suffolk have highlighted positive examples of partnership working on which to build. But there are significant challenges here too, not least of which are the pressures exerted on schools through a system of public accountability, which creates an imperative to focus on their own teachers and pupils, as well as pressures of competition for esteem and parental choice with other schools in their locality.

These external pressures on schools to attract resources and protect institutional reputation are compounded by inequality across and within communities. In Suffolk, as in other rural areas, communities are perceived to have many strengths, in terms of high 'social capital' and a strong sense of identity. But they also tend to be internally polarised in terms of people's living standards, access to services, and quality of life.⁴² Certain aspects of the Suffolk 'character' may create additional barriers to engagement, if a strong sense of attachment to one's local school or village prevents schools from working more closely with other schools or partners outside of local clusters and accustomed relationships.

Thus, as well as building trust and acceptance from the bottom up, there is also a need to think about the change that is needed from the top down. Trusted local leaders will have a powerful role to play in making the arguments for new ways of working on the ground, convincing those with lingering doubts about the positive benefits for children's learning (and also pointing out the negative consequences of inaction), whilst helping to overcome initial teething troubles and other difficulties that inevitably arise during the process of change. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to rely on a 'heroic' model of leadership; local actors, however committed, cannot be expected to bring about whole system change through their individual efforts alone, in the face of powerful forces exerted by institutional structures and embedded organisational cultures or pressures emanating from wider policy and structural arrangements.

1.2 Creating the conditions for cultural and educational change

Our analysis has drawn attention to a number of features of the professional and organisational culture within Suffolk which urgently need to be challenged. To transform the culture of learning across the county, we believe that Suffolk schools and local communities must come together to achieve the following goals:

- **Connect and collaborate more routinely and systematically** with people, ideas and practices across and beyond the county, fostering a culture that is outward looking, open-minded and ready to learn from others;
- **Challenge learners and teachers to set high expectations** for themselves, their peers and colleagues, driving out complacency in performance and generating an organisational culture in which practices are not just shared but genuinely interrogated and improved;
- **Innovate and implement effective practice** based on the best available evidence, harnessing people's skills and expertise, encouraging them to design and develop their own solutions,

building on established knowledge and contributing to a growing evidence base about what works to improve student outcomes.

- **Create a more inclusive educational culture**, which empowers individuals and groups from all social backgrounds and helps create a sense of common purpose across different (and partially competing) institutions.

Throughout the report and analysis that follows, we look for innovative ways to stimulate new thinking, share knowledge and evidence about best practice, challenge established ways of working (where these are shown to be less effective) and encourage the creative design of solutions. We conclude this section by setting out proposals for two new strategic partnerships at a county-wide level to act as a catalyst for educational and cultural change.

1.3 Cultural change in outlook

Having diagnosed a problem in professional outlook and organisational culture within Suffolk, what can be done to achieve a more positive and dynamic set of attitudes and more demanding expectations about school performance?

We suggest that an important way to create impetus for improvement would be for Suffolk to negotiate **a long-term strategic partnership with a London Borough**, which would help to broaden horizons across the county, stimulate new thinking and show that significant change is both necessary and possible. In making this suggestion, we recognise that a London local authority may not at first glance appear an obvious choice of partner for a county characterised by its rural and coastal setting. Whilst there is much that Suffolk could learn from its ‘statistical neighbours’ – those local authorities with a similar socio-economic and demographic profile to its own – our intention is deliberately to provoke a more radical shift in outlook, exposing schools to ideas and approaches which can help move the county out of its comfort zone.

Crucially, there are important lessons to learn here on both sides: although the performance of schools in Suffolk and Greater London have followed a rather different trajectory over the last decade, it is important to stress that there are many areas of strength and high performance in Suffolk, and much room for continued improvement in every London borough, meaning that there are significant learning opportunities in both directions.

In our view, a reciprocal arrangement between Suffolk and a London borough would offer mutual benefits at three levels. First, it would allow teachers in both locations to acquire a broader range of professional knowledge and expertise. To facilitate joint working and the sharing of ideas, schools in Suffolk and London should be encouraged to work together in ‘families’ (see page X), allowing staff to take part in peer review, coaching, mentoring and evaluation with colleagues in other settings. Although a scheme of this kind would naturally require investment of time and energy as well as some financial costs, there is good evidence to show the mutual benefits for all parties – and indeed particularly for those who act as coaches and mentors.

Second, a strategic partnership would help strengthen leadership and organisational capacity by allowing for a sharing of knowledge and

Cluster heads visiting schools outside Suffolk (some Ipswich heads did this and produced report on their findings). Coaching for teachers on capability has worked well.

Headteacher

expertise at all levels of leadership. As part of the new arrangement, we recommend that a **future leaders exchange programme** be established, in which participating schools would identify an existing member of staff with outstanding leadership potential, offer an internal residency at their school and agree to release their own nominated member of staff to take up a residency at another school in the network. This would allow for more intensive periods of learning and development earlier in their career, offering a chance to broaden their professional experience in preparation for future leadership posts.

Third, a two-way programme of cultural and educational activity would offer significant opportunities to enrich students' learning, broaden young people's horizons, and boost pupil outcomes. Through visits, field trips and exchanges, as well as joint project-working and on-line interaction, students in both areas would benefit from a wider range of educational resources, including experiencing contrasting rural-urban settings, linking up students with similar interests and forging relationships with young people from diverse backgrounds. Connections with employers in both areas could also broaden pupil's work related learning opportunities.

Practically, as a way of reducing travel time, Suffolk would be advised to join up with a Borough in East London. More inspirationally, we believe that there is a tremendous amount for Suffolk to gain from forging links with one of the six London boroughs who hosted the London 2012 Olympic Games, as a further way of capitalising on the spirit and legacy of the Olympics, which remains an important symbol of national pride due to its organisational success, collective endeavour (especially on the part of the volunteers who acted as Games Makers), as well as the extraordinary personal ambition and achievement of the athletes.

Transforming embedded attitudes is not something that will happen overnight, especially as there are likely to be pockets of resistance or reluctance to accept new ways of working. While there will be many distinctive features of the contexts in which schools operate within Suffolk and London, we suggest that one of the most powerful lessons will be a greater awareness that the similarities in teaching and learning in both places will far outweigh the differences. These shared experiences will help reinforce teachers' sense of professional identity, whilst helping to drive improvement through fostering a more positive, outward looking set of attitudes and dispositions.

R1: Stimulate new thinking and ways of working through a new strategic partnership between Suffolk and a London Borough

In order to stimulate new thinking and create the impetus for more radical change, Suffolk should negotiate a long-term strategic partnership with an east London Borough, to be jointly funded by both local authorities and through external funding. Based upon a programme of cultural and educational exchange and work-related learning, this would create valuable reciprocal opportunities for enriching pupils' learning, deepening teachers' professional understanding and strengthening the capacity for leadership in both areas. As part of the new arrangement, we further recommend that a future leaders exchange programme be established for early and mid-career teachers identified as having outstanding leadership potential.

1.4 Change in County-wide leadership

For school performance in Suffolk to be turned around, headteachers, college principals and other local leaders need to move from focusing overwhelmingly on their particular school or community, to leading and championing action across the whole county. Some outstanding headteachers, principals and governors are already taking the lead here, including those involved in the Inquiry Solution Groups. Although the County Council has issued a clear statement of intent that Suffolk headteachers must become the system leaders of the future, there is still a tendency for schools to look to the Local Authority to set the strategic priorities and, crucially, provide the resources to fund them. What has yet to be realised is the aspiration for these highly experienced headteachers to assume a more strategic role as genuine system leaders, not only providing targeted support when called for on a time-limited basis, or more sustained leadership within a single alliance, but on-going leadership and strategic direction across the whole system.

In conversations with primary headteachers who had raised results faster than the national and Suffolk averages, we were struck by the energy and dedication of a new generation of headteachers, restless for improvement, and relentless in their focus on a small number of strategies to improve outcomes. One headteacher, two years in post, described how she made sure that ‘all performance management conversations were professional, not personal’. Another had developed a new relationship with a local secondary school to provide subject-specific support. Each strategy was working for their context. The challenge for Suffolk is not so much replicating the strategies, as scaling up the attitude that these headteachers embodied.

This leads to some fundamental questions about the role of the Local Authority. The education White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010), set out the view of the coalition government that local authorities should no longer see themselves as ‘running’ schools or providing education services. Instead, they should see their role more in terms of commissioners (ensuring a strong supply of strong schools, with every child – particularly the most vulnerable – having access to a school place) and champions of parents’ interests, and the welfare of children. School improvement is seen primarily as the responsibility of schools themselves, with local authorities expected to facilitate the transfer of inadequate schools to academy status. Authorities might choose to still provide improvement support services but it should be on the basis of these services being marketed and traded. The recent RSA Academies Commission went further still, recommending that ‘over a transitional period of no longer than three years, all local authorities devolve current school improvement resources to school partnerships and no longer hold these at the centre’.⁴³

Although the Council’s school improvement strategy is already partly built on school to school support approaches, these are very much led through the Local Authority.⁴⁴ The danger is that SCC may still be sustaining a kind of compliant dependency with schools and headteachers, where many schools (including Academies) welcome the cushion of local authority ‘bailout’ where needed, but lack genuine commitment to shared accountability and cross-county educational success. The RSA’s Inquiry background paper suggested that ‘[the council] appears strong on direct

intervention to support visible failure, but weaker on facilitating peer to peer intervention and collaboration'.⁴⁵

The Council's current plan for a new learning partnership with schools is already attempting to address this issue. As the basis of the partnership, it has offered to share the discharge of some of its continuing statutory responsibilities for schools with all schools in Suffolk regardless of their status as maintained schools or Academies. We believe that this development could be the foundation of a more radical shift in responsibilities to schools for delivering school to school improvement, collaboration and challenge.

It is time for schools to accept that they cannot keep looking to the local authority to drive change or provide the resources to make it happen. Schools now need to take ownership for the process of improving school performance and accept shared responsibility for raising the achievements of every child and young person in the county. Rather than narrowly focusing on 'my school and my children', the goal must be for a county-wide commitment to 'our school and our children'.

To stimulate the cultural shift from school leader to system leader and from local authority improver to local authority broker, we recommend that **a new Suffolk Partnership for Excellence in Learning (SPEL) be established between schools in Suffolk and the local authority, to be in place by April 2014**. Importantly, this would signal a new relationship between schools and the local authority, away from the traditional model based on compliance and dependency, and towards a genuinely school-led model of improvement. Such a model would reflect the new financial reality in an increasingly devolved system, which is that the power to commission services and fund initiatives now lies overwhelmingly with schools.

The new SPEL would play a **leadership and intervention role** around three key functions:

1. Creating and reviewing Suffolk's education strategy, priorities and targets

The SPEL would need to formulate a long-term vision for learning in Suffolk, agree strategic priorities for whole-system improvement, and set annual and longer-term targets. It would also need to create a review process, with an element of external moderation.

2. Driving system-wide improvement

The SPEL would take overall responsibility for improving performance across Suffolk's schools and narrowing the gap in children's attainment and post-school destinations, leading all the functions outlined in Figure 1c below, growing the capacity for Suffolk's schools to support each other to improve, and commissioning expert external support where necessary.

3. Creating a culture of purposeful collaboration

The SPEL would build a sense of collective commitment and shared responsibility for student achievement across all schools, whilst providing a mechanism for joint accountability for the system of school-led improvement between headteachers and the local authority.

Root and branch review of Suffolk County Council's education strategy and policies, based on data analysis not ideology – if Suffolk schools' data shown that there is a negative or minimal/no impact of a strategy or policy, then it should be abandoned.

Governor

At present, schools do not have a regular and structured opportunity to contribute to prioritisation of work and use of resources other than through Schools' Forum and a few consultative groups, such as the Admissions Forum. The new SPEL would significantly extend opportunities for all schools to participate in shaping Suffolk's educational priorities. To avoid duplication, it should bring together or replace existing cross-Suffolk forums with a view to stream-lining decision-making structures over time.

Achieving the requisite sense of collective purpose and commitment necessitates a **broad, inclusive membership**: the SPEL must be open to all schools and education providers for children and young people in Suffolk, both those which are maintained by the Local Authority (including early years settings and colleges) and those independent of its control, including academies and fee-paying independent schools in the county. We further believe that it is crucial for all member organisations to have a sense of **ownership** over the new enterprise and a stake in its success. One way to achieve this would be to establish the new SPEL as a social enterprise company limited by shares, which would be 80 percent owned by schools and 20 percent owned by the Local Authority (following the model established by 'Hertfordshire for Learning', for example).⁴⁶ As share-holders, schools would have a real stake in the company, as well as making a modest contribution to its financial reserves, while the joint ownership between schools and Local Authority would ensure that both sets of partners were jointly accountable for its success.

To achieve the goal of school-led improvement, we recommend that the activities and resources for school improvement, including SCC staff resources, should be devolved to the new SPEL over an appropriate time-scale, allowing time for the new partnership to be set up and established.

Operationally, it is proposed that the new schools company be led by a managing director and a supporting management team, with a steering group providing strategic direction and oversight to ensure the successful delivery of the strategy. As well as being more directly responsive to the schools using and commissioning services, the management and board of the new partnership will be held to account by the Local Authority, which retains its statutory duty to promote the education and learning of children and young people in Suffolk. An element of **contestability** will be essential to ensure that the management team are reviewed critically and objectively; the SPEL should be given a three year period to establish itself and achieve agreed outcomes, after which SCC should retain the right to explore options for inviting other organisations, public, private or voluntary, to take on this improvement role.

Once functions were delegated to the SPEL, the role of the Local Authority would be diminished, but far from residual. The recent DfE/ LGA-commissioned action research from the ISOS Partnership proposed three school improvement-related roles for the local authority. The evaluation of the City Challenge suggested eight key elements for school improvement strategies.⁴⁷ Combining these models, we have created a conceptual framework through which to consider Suffolk's future school improvement strategy, which could form the basis of more detailed discussions between SCC and a 'shadow' SPEL during the autumn term of 2013.

Schools need to know whether they are under or out performing their socio-economic profile of their students – by looking at these parameters, it becomes very clear which schools are under performing or ‘coasting’ and which ones are out performing their context.

Governor

Figure 1c: A new framework for Suffolk’s school improvement strategy

Key Elements of School Improvement (Hutchings, 2012)	SPEL leadership and intervention role		Local Authority support and challenge role:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ creating and reviewing education strategy, priorities and targets ▪ driving system-wide improvement ▪ creating a culture of purposeful collaboration 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ convening partnerships ▪ making and shaping effective commissioning ▪ champion of children, parents and the community 	
1. Developing a shared mission and vision	Working with all schools, pupils and governing bodies to create a shared mission and vision.		Ensuring community informs vision, and securing their active support Connecting vision to wider county aspirations (eg Growth Strategy)	
2. Capturing intelligence about school performance	Analysing attainment data and other early warning performance signals (for example reduced rolls) to determine intervention priorities		Complementing attainment data with local hard and soft intelligence about children and young people, changing demographics and labour market data	
3. Trusting and empowering school leaders	Building capacity through Local and National Leaders in Education, local Academy providers and other middle and emerging leadership opportunities		Challenge function through external moderation of annual review Connecting successful system leaders to wider LA strategic development opportunities	
4. Extending the roles of high performing schools	Building the capacity through Teaching School Alliances, holding Academies to account for their system leadership commitments, and other opportunities		Challenge function through external moderation of annual review	
5. Deepening partnerships for improving schools	Leadership of ‘families of schools’ model (see chapter 2) Leadership of Challenge Fund (see chapter 3) Developing two-way partnerships with providers of sponsored academies in Suffolk		Leadership of federation strategy (transferred to SPEL over time)	
6. Using experts for poorly performing schools	Pre-academisation intervention in schools in Ofsted categories and below floor standards		Brokering of executive headship Leadership of the academisation programme (both transferred to SPEL over time)	
7. Accessing a range of specialist support	External stimulus through the Challenge Fund Employing Commissioning cohort of specialist advisers, according to identified needs.		Maintenance of Specialist support for broader children’s services issues, employed where relevant to school improvement	
8. Celebrating progress and success	Publication of annual review Leadership of annual awards event		Ongoing Press and PR support, including through annual review and awards event	

At a later stage, the SPEL and Suffolk County Council may agree for additional responsibilities, such as place planning, Special Educational Needs and home-to-school transport, to be devolved to the SPEL. In the first instance (eg for the initial three year period), the SPEL should focus solely on ensuring that its vital school improvement function is carried out successfully.

R2: Foster a county-wide change in leadership through a new school-led Suffolk Partnership for Excellence in Learning (SPEL)

We recommend that a new Suffolk Partnership for Excellence in Learning (SPEL) be established between schools and Suffolk County Council by April 2014, with a broad, open membership to provide a forum for all schools, regardless of status, to set a vision for whole system improvement, determine strategic priorities and foster shared commitment and joint accountability for the learning of every child and young person in the county. To achieve a genuinely self-improving school system, we further recommend that activities and resources for school improvement (including SCC staff resources) be devolved over time to the SPEL, with the aim of making services more responsive to the needs of schools, whilst strengthening the oversight function of the Local Authority.

Get it into your 'political' heads that achievement and aspiration are about a lot more than 'standards' in a few subjects. Are you asking parents what their measures of success for their children are? Or young people?

Parent

1.5 Setting challenging targets and strategic direction

A key first step for the SPEL will be to lead and mobilise schools to develop a compelling vision and identify longer-term strategic priorities to transform the culture of learning in Suffolk. These priorities will then need to be translated into targets to drive action and improvement, which must reflect the shared aspirations of Suffolk's schools and communities. Whilst it would run against the spirit and philosophy of our approach for the RSA to set the County specific targets for improvement, we believe that the longer-term educational aspirations could include a range of broader qualitative measures, with a stated timeframe over which significant progress is expected to be achieved. For example, the SPEL could adopt the following set of aims that by 2016:

- Suffolk will have created a highly effective 'self-improving school system' which is influencing the approaches of other localities in England and internationally.
- Pupils in Suffolk will be more engaged in their learning, as reported by pupils themselves through an annual survey which captures the voice of children and young people;
- Children and young people will demonstrate significant improvements in their well-being;
- Every school will have evidence to show how robust partnerships with at least one other school has contributed to improved outcomes;
- Suffolk will have nationally regarded collaborative practice focused on closing the gap in attainment between disadvantaged and other pupils;
- Suffolk will have a national reputation for the quality and depth of its partnerships between employers and educators.

All these goals are measurable, although the SPEL would need to commit to establishing baselines against each goal as soon as possible. At the same time, the SPEL will need to work with its schools to set some ambitious but achievable targets for improvement to attainment and Ofsted ratings. The suggestions below are based on current national measures of performance and would need to be reviewed when proposed changes to accountability are finalised. Going beyond the standard criteria, we suggest that the SPEL should explore additional, alternative measures of performance which may be more relevant to the county's context and ambitions.

Accountability measure	Current performance	2016 aspiration
Percent of Y6 pupils achieving L4 English and Maths	74 percent; 5 percent lower than national average	At least 85 percent and above national average
Percent of disadvantaged Y6 pupils achieving L4 English and Maths	57 percent; 11 percent lower than national average	At least 70 percent and above national average
Percent of Y11 pupils achieving 5 A*-Cs including English and Maths	51 percent; 8 percent lower than national average	At least 65 percent, and above national average
Percent of disadvantaged Y11 pupils achieving 5 A*-Cs including English and Maths	27 percent; 12 percent lower than national average	At least 50 percent and above national average
Percent of schools currently rated at least 'good' by OFSTED	69 percent; 5 percent lower than national average	At least 85 percent and above national average
Percent of schools currently rated 'outstanding' by OFSTED	19 percent; 2 percent lower than national average	At least 25 percent and above national average

2. Strengthen capacity for leadership and collaboration

Teachers need to know exactly what is required of them. Head and deputy need to regularly monitor teaching, check with the teacher they understand the feedback, and put training in place to improve quality further’.

Governor

Turning around the performance of Suffolk schools calls for an integrated strategy, which is capable of achieving significant improvements in overall attainment, at the same time as narrowing the gap in outcomes between children from richer and poorer families.⁴⁸ Collaborative working is an essential element of such a strategy: by empowering teachers to share knowledge about successful practice and challenge established ways of working where these are less effective, collaboration offers benefits and opportunities to all learners, whilst giving particular advantages to students from less privileged backgrounds.

Strategic leadership and governance are essential if the full benefits of collaboration are to be realised. Headteachers, governors, and senior leaders all have a vital role to play in setting the strategic direction to motivate and inspire improvement in teaching practice. Indeed, research shows that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.⁴⁹ The challenge for Suffolk here is two-fold: first, to build capacity for leadership and governance at all levels in order to drive school improvement; and second, to deploy this capacity to ensure that every school partnership is focused on achieving its core purpose and improving outcomes for children.

2.1 Strengthen leadership and governance

Diagnosing the problem

Our analysis of a sub-sample of Ofsted inspection reports for Suffolk schools, covering each district in the county, highlighted some important strengths in leadership and management, including the positive role that Local Leaders in Education are playing in helping leaders and managers to provide a stronger lead within the school. But while improvements are being made, the reports also highlighted a number of weaknesses. Common themes included low expectations of pupil performance, poor systems for monitoring and evaluating pupil performance and lack of depth in the capacity of the leadership team:

Poor systems for monitoring and evaluating:

Systems for monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of teaching and learning have been ineffective and are not sufficiently rigorous.

Less progress has been made in standardising procedures for monitoring pupil progress and currently not all staff understand how to use this information to raise achievement.

To improve, the school needs to develop and implement a whole-school marking policy, ensuring that target setting and marking procedures consistently give pupils a clear understanding of their next steps for learning.

Lack of depth in leadership capacity:

School leaders do not hold middle leaders fully to account for the standards achieved in their subjects, and some endemic weaknesses have been tolerated for too long. Pockets of good leadership are evident in some subjects, such as science, but this is not the case in English or mathematics.

The school now needs to improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels by reviewing and revising the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team so that it is more effective in driving school improvements.

Any satisfactory or inadequate teaching must be immediately challenged and measures for improvement put in place straightaway.

Governor

Suffolk is already taking steps to address these weaknesses through coaching, mentoring and training: at primary level, the learning improvement service is brokering targeted school-to-school support for underperforming schools and peer coaching between headteachers. At secondary level, groups of head teachers are forming strategic partnerships, such as the Kesgrave-Farlingaye Teaching School Alliance of two lead schools and seven partner schools in Ipswich and Haverhill. Wider partnership working is also being facilitated across the Eastern Region through the Open Schools East website, where schools share knowledge about effective practice. But while stronger leadership is being developed within parts of the system, there is still a need to build greater depth in leadership capacity and foster a more challenging, innovative and collaborative culture across the county as a whole.

Conversations with headteachers and governors in Suffolk have revealed two common frustrations. First, the difficulty in attracting high quality teachers to apply to Suffolk schools, especially in secondary subjects; and second, the perception that too many teachers in Suffolk have only ever taught in the county, leading to an inward looking professional culture. This impression certainly appears to be born out in analysis of characteristics of Suffolk teaching staff. The data shows that the majority of newly qualified teachers (58 percent) were recruited from the East of England, while over three quarters (77 percent) of Suffolk headteachers were already teaching in the county before obtaining their current post.

Our proposal for a **new strategic partnership between Suffolk and an East London Borough and future leader exchange programme (R1)** promises to create additional opportunities for outstanding early and mid-career teachers to extend their professional experience and acquire a broader range of knowledge and expertise. Participating schools would identify an existing member of staff with outstanding leadership potential,

offer an internal residency at their school and agree to release their own nominated member of staff to take up a residency at another school in the network. In the first phase of the programme, we suggest that priority be given to schools in the Suffolk network in more isolated parts of the county and those in areas with higher levels of deprivation, recognising the well-established difficulties that can arise in recruiting excellent candidates in these localities.

As we discuss further in the next chapter, a combination of incentives is needed to attract high quality teachers and headteachers to Suffolk schools and to retain and develop outstanding future leaders.⁵⁰ In terms of recruitment, recent government policy on teacher education has been heavily focused on improving the quality of new recruits and expanding school-based routes into the profession. These initiatives potentially provide opportunities for Suffolk schools to **widen the pool of talent, for example, by investing in the salaried element of the School Direct programme**, as a way of encouraging outstanding recent graduates and career-changers to consider teaching in Suffolk schools. At the same time, the County Council should take advantage of opportunities to promote the attractiveness of Suffolk as a place to live and work throughout the wider region and nationally, **looking to attract dynamic leaders, mid-career teachers and subject specialists to the county**. Building on plans in the Suffolk Growth Strategy to promote the growth of high quality jobs in the county,⁵¹ Suffolk council should seek to maximise opportunities presented by the economic growth strategy to attract a broader range of teaching recruits to live and work in the area, through a marketing campaign which emphasises the attractions of location, high environmental quality and relatively low house prices.

R3: Widen the pool of talent by investing in teacher recruitment and School Direct

We recommend that Suffolk schools widen the pool of talent by investing in the salaried element of the School Direct programme, as a way of encouraging outstanding recent graduates and career-changers to consider teaching in Suffolk schools. At the same time, the County Council should take advantage of opportunities to promote the attractiveness of Suffolk as a place to live and work throughout the wider region and nationally, looking to attract dynamic leaders, mid-career teachers and subject specialists to the county.

Governors as Change Makers

Governors too have an increasingly important role to play as system leaders and change makers in a more devolved and collaborative school system. Our analysis here indicates that there is much room for improvement in each core area of governance defined in statute: giving strategic direction; acting as a critical friend; and ensuring accountability.

Lack of impact and strategic direction:

Insufficient attention has been given to the way that the pupil premium is spent and the governing body has not been involved in planning strategies to improve outcomes for these students.

Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses but have had little impact on bringing about improvement in performance at Key Stage 2.

Lack of challenge:

Governors are too dependent on senior staff providing them with information about how well the school is doing, and, as a consequence, have not been able to set their own challenging targets.

The governing body does not challenge the school with enough rigour.

Lack of capacity to hold the school to account:

The governing body does not have a firm understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It does not hold staff fully to account for the school's underperformance.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Think about ways to recruit bright, willing and young governors to governing bodies so that they bring with them fresh and relevant experiences of the modern education system as well as recent experiences of starting work and developing a career.

Governor

These findings correspond with feedback to the Raising the Bar inquiry, which suggests that governors could do more to challenge and support schools to improve their performance: governors have told us that they lack confidence to question schools and headteachers, while headteachers report that governors are often reluctant to provide rigorous challenge. Interestingly, the findings of a survey of educational 'change makers' in Lowestoft conducted for the inquiry indicate a fairly widespread perception amongst both governors and other respondents that they lack influence in improving school governance. Many governors in the survey also reported themselves as having surprisingly low levels of expertise in improving the governance of schools or in enhancing teaching.

A number of initiatives are underway in Suffolk to improve governors' skills and capacities, through focused training and coaching to improve critical questioning skills, and a leadership conference planned for summer 2013 by the Governors Solutions Group. In addition, Suffolk Governors' Services are providing fifty places for chairs (or aspiring chairs) to participate on a national leadership development programme, in collaboration with the Eastern Leadership Centre. Outstanding governors are also being encouraged to apply to the National Mentor programme, under which they will receive £25 per hour to provide support to other chairs across the country. Although these initiatives provide a useful springboard for activity to improve governors' capacities, we believe that further action is needed to ensure that governing bodies are more strategic, more challenging and have greater capacity to hold headteachers to account.

As an immediate step, all governing bodies should develop or refresh their **Code of Governance**, setting out both the school's core vision and strategic plan. This is an opportunity to consult with staff, pupils, parents and the wider community to renew or refresh their core vision and strategic priorities, and then devise a sustainable strategy to achieve the school's

Let's consider the potential of bringing together Chairs of Governors (initially) across Pyramids or Clusters to share ideas and good practice.

Governor

broad ambitions over the next three to five years. A useful framework to follow is the *Draft Recommended Code of Governance* developed by the Wellcome Trust.⁵² Drawing upon support and advice from National and Local Leaders of Governance, schools should look in particular for ways to strengthen strategic direction, capacity to ask challenging questions and internal and external accountability. We recommend that these then be **submitted for peer review, linking up with other governing bodies to act as a critical friend**. As part of this process, all governing bodies should be asked whether their existing size and composition is providing the strategic direction and clear lines of accountability that are required for good governance. Schools should be encouraged to consider whether a smaller and more focused governing body would provide a sharper focus on improving outcomes, make it easier to attract high quality volunteers, and be better placed to hold the school to account.

Second, the new Suffolk Partnership for Excellence in Learning (SPEL) should take responsibility for the existing Governors' Forum. It should set clear expectations, captured in ambitious targets, about improving the quality of governance across the county, as part of a drive to increase the proportion of schools which are good and outstanding. Third, we believe that Suffolk County Council should oversee a programme of active marketing and recruitment, advertising positions as chairs of governing bodies, as a way of recognising the strategic importance of the post and ensuring proper scrutiny of the prospective candidates.⁵³

R4: More challenging and strategic governing bodies

Governing bodies in Suffolk schools need to be better equipped in each of the core areas of governance: giving strategic direction; acting as a critical friend; and ensuring accountability. We recommend that all governing bodies be encouraged and expected to build capacity through processes of peer review and mutual challenge. The new SPEL should set ambitious expectations about improving the quality of governance across the county, as part of a drive to increase the proportion of schools which are good and outstanding to be in line with the best, not settling at average.

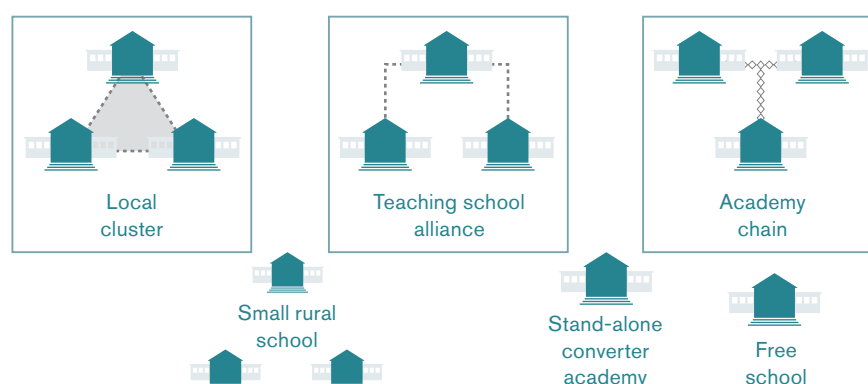
2.2 More challenging and purposeful school partnerships

A guiding principle of this report is our belief in the power of collaboration to make a difference to children's outcomes, both by allowing for the sharing of knowledge and evidence about what types of teaching practice are most effective, and also because of the potential to challenge established ways of working – the set of cultural attitudes and behavioural norms that become embedded within an institution over time, which can prevent schools from embracing more effective practice. Forming loose arrangements with other schools is not enough to improve outcomes. To realise the full benefits of collaboration, schools need to be ready to challenge their partners, offering and being open to constructive feedback rather than simply offering soft forms of advice.

As in other parts of the country, the pattern of collaboration in Suffolk is hugely varied. Historically, informal networks and clusters have been concentrated at a local level, evolving organically out of existing relationships and personal contacts. This picture has become even more complex

in the last few years (see Figure 2a), driven by changes in national government policy, with the opening of three new Free Schools and the rapid increase in the number of Academies, with an associated proliferation of governance arrangements through academy trusts, chains and federations.

Figure 2a: A diverse local school system



There are some strong models of partnership working already established in Suffolk, such as the Bury partnership, and Gislingham and Palgrave CEVCP federation, together with some emerging examples of excellent practice. These and other school partnerships are demonstrating effective ways of working together to improve outcomes for children and young people. Across the county, however, there is much more that could be done to ensure that all collaborations and partnerships, both new and established, have a clear sense of strategic direction and purpose.

As a first step to strengthen collaboration in Suffolk, we believe that all schools and groups of schools should undertake a partnership review, to **audit their working relationships with other schools and providers, and consider whether existing arrangements are 'fit for purpose'**. Each cluster or partnership will need to determine whether it has a clear focus on delivering collective needs, while individual members should ensure that the partnership is aligned with their own strategic aims and priorities. On this basis, schools will be able to make an informed and strategic decision about whether existing partnerships should be maintained, strengthened or terminated; and whether new forms of working are needed to meet the learning needs of pupils and professionals alike.

Schools will be greatly assisted in this task if they conduct the partnership audit in tandem with a review of their own strategic plan, which should provide explicit information on the steps that the school will take to build new partnerships, strengthen existing ones (or decide to terminate where necessary) and ensure the long-term viability of the school. These should then be submitted for peer review, linking up with other governing bodies to act as a critical friend. Key questions for peer reviewers include:

1. Does the school have the resources it needs to be viable over the medium to long term (beyond 2014-15)?

Encourage governing bodies to hold joint training sessions and joint strategic direction discussion meetings with other governing bodies to share 'hands on' best practice and learn from each other.

Governor

2. Are the school's existing partnership arrangements helping it to maximise its human, physical, intellectual and social capital and resources for the benefit of learners?
3. What other partnership arrangements has the school considered? Would new governance structures offer stronger strategic leadership and increase the drive to improve performance?
4. Do partnerships have shared goals and accountability mechanisms?

Both reviews should aim to be completed by January 2014, in preparation for the establishment of the new SPEL in April 2014, which should then take on responsibility for monitoring and overseeing school partnerships, to encourage and prompt schools to develop more effective arrangements.

One potentially useful way to gauge how well partnership arrangements are working on a district or county-wide basis would be for the SPEL to undertake a social network analysis of all the school and learning partnerships which operate across the area. This would provide a map of both the spread or coverage of networks, and also provide an overview of how much time and resources are being invested in partnership working across the county, spotlighting areas of school isolation and also flagging up potential over-population of groupings. An analysis of this type would establish a useful baseline for monitoring and evaluation, charting the development of alliances and networks over time and highlighting both the strengths (particularly around 'hubs') and areas of weakness that need to be addressed at an individual and collective level.

R5: Critical Review and Audit of Partnership Arrangements

To strengthen new and existing partnerships, we recommend that all schools and groups of schools undertake a partnership review to audit their working relationships with other schools and providers and determine whether arrangements are 'fit for purpose'. This should be conducted in tandem with a peer review of each school's strategic objectives and resources, with each governing body acting as a critical friend to provide objective feedback and challenge. Together, these reviews will enable schools to make an informed and strategic decision about whether existing partnerships should be maintained, strengthened or terminated; and to decide whether new forms of working are needed to meet the learning needs of teachers and pupils alike. We further recommend that the new SPEL should undertake a social network analysis to map the coverage of networks and provide an overview of how well partnership arrangements are working.

2.3 Shared accountability for pupil outcomes across transitions

One of the most important relationships to get right at the local level is the cross-phase partnership or 'pyramid' that brings together a cluster of 'feeder' primary or middle schools with a secondary or upper school. The transition to secondary school is a key point in a child's education. Pupils who start secondary school working below Level 4 in English and maths often struggle to access the curriculum, and typically fail to make as much progress as their peers. Children from disadvantaged families are more

Primary level education has a very important role to play in engaging children in learning and lack of success in this strongly affects levels of achievement at Secondary Level.

Parent

likely to be in this group.⁵⁴ We welcome the Government's recent announcement that they will give extra funding to secondary schools to help to improve literacy levels in Year 7. To make the most of any new funding, we believe that primary and secondary schools need to work more effectively together in 'pyramids'. To work well, any pyramid structure needs to agree mechanisms for joint leadership from each setting, along with regular management meetings, subject liaison, coordination of curriculum content and careful moderation of assessment. Above all, the leaders of every pyramid must be clear about its core mission and purpose, which is to ensure pupil progression and continuity of learning across transitions.

Establishing effective cross-phase collaboration is a particular priority in Suffolk given the changes enacted through the School Organisation Review (SOR), through which particular areas are being restructured from a three tier to a two tier system. In all parts of the county, but especially where the SOR is still to be completed, pyramids are a hugely important way to give reassurance to parents and families that pupils are getting the right support to move successfully across phases of learning. The Lowestoft Pyramid has made particular progress over the last few years, ensuring that results have improved faster than the national average at Key Stage Two.

At present, we are concerned that not all pyramids are working as effectively as they could, with greater attention needed on tracking pupil progress and ensuring consistency in learning outcomes. To help strengthen these relationships, we suggest that feeder primary (and middle) schools and their receiving secondary (and upper) schools agree to monitor pupil outcomes, to highlight any difficulties that particular individuals or groups of pupils have in settling in. At the end of the first term of year seven, the receiving secondary school should report back to primary feeders and each governing body on their assessment of incoming pupils' general development and well-being. This report should highlight any major difficulties pupils have experienced in adapting to the new setting and any cases where the level of attainment reached at the end of Key Stage 2 seems to have significantly fallen away. By studying the evidence together in this way, schools in the pyramid will be enabled to have an open and honest conversation about the reasons for any difficulties, and should commit to taking whatever action is needed on both sides to address them. The development of the middle years baccalaureate (see chapter 3) could provide an important stimulus for cross-phase collaboration.

R6: Support every child's journey through effective cross-phase partnerships and shared accountability for outcomes

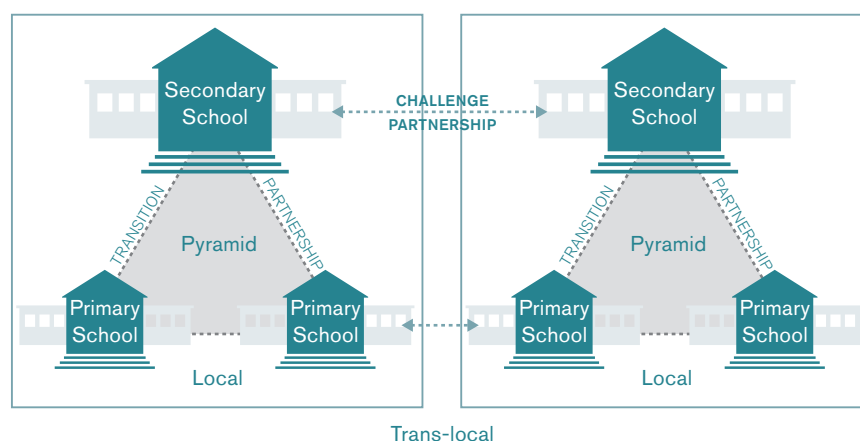
Primary and secondary schools need to work more effectively together in 'pyramids' to ensure that pupils make successful transitions across phases of learning. To help strengthen pyramid relationships, we recommend that feeder primary (and middle) schools and their receiving secondary (and upper) schools agree to monitor pupil outcomes in their first term of their new school and produce a report for governors in each school, which highlights any difficulties that individuals or groups of pupils have in settling in. By studying the evidence together in this way, schools will be enabled to have honest and open conversations and agree joint processes to improve coordination and support.

2.4 Foster a culture of critical reflection and peer review through ‘families of schools’

For any programme of education reform to be successful, schools must be prepared to look afresh at their existing practices, making an honest and open assessment of progress. This is not as simple as it sounds, as it is often easier to identify new priorities than it is to make the decision to *stop* doing activities or processes which may have been in place for many years. Having a critical friend can be a highly valuable way of helping schools to look afresh at what they do by making the ‘familiar unfamiliar’ and by helping to challenge and question established practices which appear ineffective. In line with this principle, we believe that every Suffolk school should be encouraged to look beyond their traditional community boundaries and also across county borders, to broaden horizons for what it is possible to achieve and to utilise the very best practice that is emerging in other parts of the country.

The **Families of Schools** approach developed in the City Challenge provides a useful model for Suffolk. As illustrated in Figure 2c, ‘families’ are not clusters in the traditional sense of ‘pyramids’ or ‘feeder’ schools, but instead group schools together in different areas but with similar pupil intakes.⁵⁵ By looking at schools serving similar populations, it then becomes possible to identify core strengths in each setting, as well as spotting differences and anomalies which highlight specific areas for development. Adopting the model in Suffolk would give teachers a chance to share their skills and talents, broaden their experience and above all, raise expectations about what can be achieved in their own classrooms. The strength of this approach is that it allows school leaders to elicit best practice through interrogation of data from partner schools they are not in direct competition with. This can then be used as a platform for identifying areas for improvement in every school, encouraging continuous evaluation and increasing pupil attainment.⁵⁶

Figure 2b: Model of transition and challenge partnerships between schools at a local and trans-local level



The SPEL should co-ordinate the matchmaking arrangements so that every school is linked with the most appropriate partner schools. Each family of schools will then need to set clear objectives and agree shared

improvement plans for the family as a whole. Joint working will be significantly eased if families have a powerful conversation when they first convene about how much time, energy and resources each member school is able to commit to making the relationship work.

As well as scrutinising the comparative performance data, digging more deeply to identify strengths and weaknesses in each setting, each family of schools will need to take the time to gather the richer intelligence that can only be gained through mutual, structured observation.⁵⁷ Significant gains for each school can then be made by reflecting upon their observations and debating differences in practices, as a way of challenging established activity and stimulating new thinking.

The **Raising the Bar Solutions Group on 'families of schools'** has been driving the development of the model, consulting widely with school leaders about their preferences for participation and gathering evidence and examples of focused collaborative working. This process has already brought together headteachers from over fifty schools to identify priorities for action, discuss potential groupings and develop a new toolkit of resources, which have been distributed to all schools. Building on this momentum, the next steps for the Solutions Group will be to establish trial groups of schools. Although this rapid progress is impressive, we believe that the model of 'families' would be far more effective if it includes schools from neighbouring authorities, as well as schools from the East London borough partnership. This will provide the critical mass for schools to be connected with enough schools which are as similar as possible contextually.

R7: Foster challenge and peer review through 'families of schools'

Building on the momentum achieved by the RtB Solutions Group and initial trialling of the model, the families of schools model should be developed from September 2013, looking to include schools from neighbouring counties and the East London borough partnership. With leadership from an extended group of headteachers and other change makers, the pilot will build capacity across the county and evaluate its effectiveness at key stages. Based on the principle that all schools in Suffolk have scope for and are capable of improvement, the pilot should set clear goals for what each family of schools will achieve, connected to improvements pupil progress and overall outcomes.

2.5 End school isolation through small-school federations

An important priority at the local level is to strengthen leadership in schools with more limited resources and prevent schools from working in isolation where they may struggle to meet pupils' full range of needs. Isolation is a particularly pressing issue in the Suffolk context because of the high number of small rural schools, which are vulnerable to closure due to insufficient revenue and unsustainable costs. As of May 2012, there were 3 schools with under 25 children on roll, 16 schools with under 50 pupils and 57 schools with fewer than 100. The majority of these schools (44 out of 76) were not at the time of writing (April 2013) in or looking to find a formal partnership arrangement. Concerns about the long-term viability of these schools have been heightened in the context

*Too many of
us are working in
isolation to achieve
common goals;
let's get together
and work smarter.*

Governor

of current funding pressures, together with changes as a result of the new simplified funding formula for schools that have taken away the curriculum top ups which previously offered some protection to small schools. While the minimum-funding guarantee offers protection for a limited period, the bottom line is that small schools will be vulnerable to closure if and when this is removed.

While the financial reality urgently needs to be confronted, it is just as important to recognise the significant potential benefits for pupils' learning and teachers' professional development offered by federation and other formal partnerships. Research by the National College has examined the impact of different types of federation (academy, faith, cross-phase, performance, and size) on student outcomes, finding a positive impact for 'performance' and academy federations (there being too few faith or size federations to create a meaningful sample).⁵⁸ The strongest effects were achieved by 'performance' federations, where higher performing schools partner lower performing schools, with benefits being found for both partners. The research demonstrates that successful federations offer mutual benefits in the form of purposeful leadership, increased collaboration, improved efficiency and high-quality continuing professional development (CPD). These findings correspond with Hill *et al's* study (2012) on the impact of academy chains, which found that positive effects on teaching and learning were associated with the use of rigorous performance management, consistent models of best practice for school management and quality assurance, through more focused and high-quality governance and the use of effective school improvement practices, including peer-to-peer collaboration across the group.⁵⁹

Suffolk County Council has endeavoured to give clear information and advice to all maintained schools, focusing particularly on small schools, about the benefits of federation and the process of entering into formal partnership. Through regular meetings and recent events, schools have received strong encouragement to think about their own organisational capacity and long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, not all schools in Suffolk are yet convinced that it is the right option for them.⁶⁰ In some cases, resistance to federation may reflect anxiety about the loss of a school's distinctive identity or concern that a change in leadership (eg a new executive head) could distract attention away from the needs of children in their local school. In the Suffolk context, we have also heard evidence that some of this misgiving may be due to a fairly widely held perception that small schools would actually lose out by federating because they would have to forfeit part of their block grant.

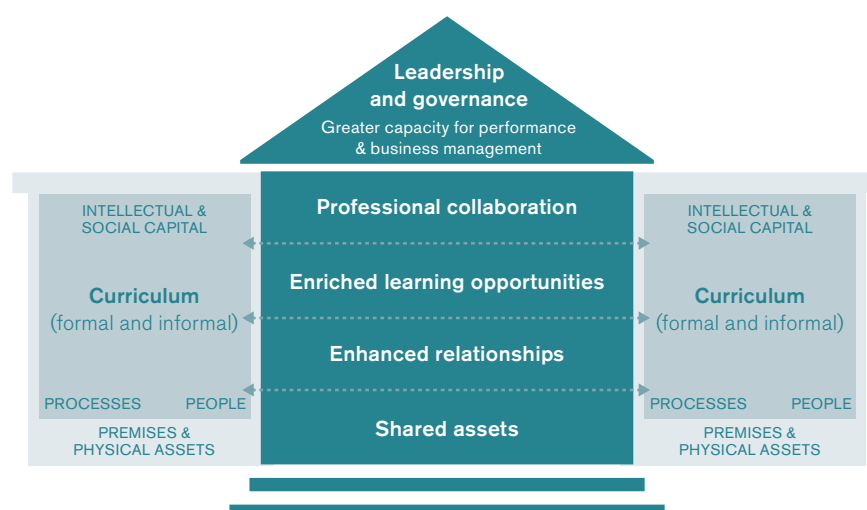
While it is natural for parents and local residents to express concerns and reservations about changing to a new system, it is important to offer reassurance about the real (rather than perceived) implications of federation. Contrary to popular belief, schools which enter a federation will not have to give up their lump sum allowance (currently worth £114,000 per school in 2013–14). This funding is assured, because federated schools retain their own budget and allocation of formula funding. Indeed, the model of federation offers greater scope for flexibility than is often realised, since it is up to each federation to decide how much it wants to integrate school staff and finances. This flexibility means that partner schools in a federation can still retain aspects of their

distinctive character and identity (such as their school uniform), while also benefiting from access to a broader range of resources (physical, human, intellectual and social) which will enrich the life of pupils and the wider community. In our view, this combination of benefits makes the case for small-school federation overwhelming, enabling small schools to overcome problems of limited resources and isolation, whilst at the same time allowing them to retain important aspects of their unique character and distinctive identity.

As illustrated in Figure 2b, the benefits for pupils' learning that come from stronger leadership capacity and teachers' professional development are particularly compelling. Research focused specifically on issues facing small, rural schools has found that many headteachers express concerns over feelings of isolation due to their geographic location, which are often compounded by their heavy workload.⁶¹ The fact that most small school headteachers have significant teaching commitments places considerable additional demands on their time above and beyond their leadership role, making it hard to access professional development opportunities for themselves as leaders, and to ensure that members of staff have the support they need. We believe that no school can afford *not* to have a headteacher with the time and capacity for leadership. The significant advantage of a formal partnership arrangement is that it can significantly increase the resources and capacity for leadership, allowing a headteacher or executive head working across the federation to devote *all* of her time to the demands of leadership, rather than being squeezed by classroom duties.

As a further incentive to federate, Suffolk County Council and the Schools Forum should explore options for giving a grant to small schools and those in more isolated rural areas working in partnership, which schools could use to invest in their technological infrastructure or computer hardware, to facilitate joint working across the two sites.

Figure 2c: Mutual Benefits of Small-School Federation



Many schools have developed strong links with parents and families, providing effective forms of communication and information between home and school. Nevertheless, we believe that there is more that could be done to enhance the school's openness and democratic accountability and to ensure that parents' voice is heard, especially when schools enter into a formal partnership or 'hard' federation with other schools.

R8: Federation for Small Schools

We recommend that any small school with a roll lower than 100 pupils should enter a federation. Schools would be well advised to begin the process as early as possible, to allow for greater time to find an appropriate school partner and work together to establish strong relationships, maximise resources and ensure a smooth transition to the new partnership. While the County Council should continue to provide information about the federation process, the new SPEL will be well-placed to coordinate advice and guidance about how federated schools can achieve cost-savings, as well as organising 'match making' events to assist schools with finding appropriate partner school to meet the learning and wider needs of their pupils.

R9: Promote parental voice through a parent and community council for every school, especially those in a trust or federation

In recognition of the value of parental involvement, we suggest that every school should establish a parents' council, with representatives from the local community, which should be given specific responsibility for engaging with the school leadership to '*support pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development*'.⁶² Although important for all schools, we believe that establishing a parent and local community council will be especially beneficial in the case of schools which enter a formal Federation or Multi-Academy Trust, as it will help promote parents' voice and protect the distinctive identity of each federated school.

3. Enhance and enrich the quality of teaching and learning

Achieving a step-change in school performance depends above all on improving the quality of teaching.⁶³ Teachers must be equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students, focusing on improving the ‘basics’ of literacy and numeracy, whilst also broadening and enriching children’s learning inside and outside the classroom. A combination of incentives are needed to attract, retain and develop the entire teaching profession, the challenge being to ensure that all of Suffolk’s teachers and support staff get better at what they do.⁶⁴ Importantly, developing the capacity of teachers and school leaders cannot be accomplished just by focusing on the qualities of individual members of staff. Building capacity across the whole system depends on changes in the organisational culture in every school, so that all staff are encouraged to become more innovative, more outward looking and better informed – that is, more ready to learn from others and draw on evidence about effective practice – as well as being more sensitive to the needs of the children and families in their care.

Diagnosing the problem

Improving the quality of teaching clearly needs to start by addressing identified weaknesses in teaching quality, including improving the use of marking and feedback, which studies have shown is the single most effective way of improving school performance.⁶⁵ Concerns about the quality of teaching were recurrent throughout the Ofsted inspection reports sampled for the inquiry. Drawing on a sub-sample of schools rated as inadequate or requiring improvement (previously labelled ‘satisfactory’), our analysis identified a number of common issues around inconsistent quality, lack of differentiation and inadequate use of information to meet pupils’ needs and poor use of marking to provide feedback to pupils and students.

Inconsistent quality:

There are pockets of good teaching but this is not sufficiently widespread to ensure that pupils make sufficient progress, particularly in their writing.

Ofsted's new inspection regime has rightly placed an increased emphasis on the quality of teaching – this is absolutely fundamental to 'raising the bar' and needs to be the top priority.

Community member

Lack of differentiation to meet learners' needs:

Not enough attention is paid to providing high-quality challenges to the most-able pupils. Where this happens, the most-able pupils often complete tasks early and are left with nothing to do.

The main reason that teaching is not good is that this information [about how well pupils are doing and progressing] is not always used well in class. This means that what is taught is sometimes too easy for some pupils and too hard for others.

Poor use of marking and feedback:

Where teaching is weaker, marking is not helpful to pupils and assessment information is not used to inform lesson planning. In turn, the work set does not match the learning needs of pupils of different abilities. There is no common approach to planning lessons across the school and plans do not have enough detail about what the pupils are to learn.

In too many instances, marking is too brief and does not explain to students how they have made their mistakes or what they need to do to improve. Poor presentation is not challenged enough and, although spelling errors are pointed out, students are not shown how to spell words correctly.

Action is being taken by the Learning Improvement Service to address these weaknesses by brokering targeted support for the schools with lowest levels of attainment and pupil progress. Although this package of support is an essential first step to improve the quality of teaching in schools targeted for improvement, we believe that it must be accompanied by a wider package of action to transform the culture of professional learning across the County, by motivating, challenging and inspiring teachers to develop their professional expertise.

3.1 Challenge and inspire teachers through collaborative learning and a new 'Suffolk Teacher' identity

Since September 2012, teachers in England have been assessed against a revised and shortened set of Teacher Standards, which clarify the professional characteristics that a teacher should demonstrate and continue to build on at each stage of their career (from Newly-Qualified Teacher (NQT) to mid-career teacher, or a more experienced practitioner).⁶⁶ While the new Teacher Standards provide a useful baseline of expectations, we believe that schools in Suffolk could go further in challenging teachers not just to meet the standards but to surpass them. In particular, we suggest that it would be useful to define what good and outstanding teaching looks like in the Suffolk context, recognising the demands that come from working in a large, rural and coastal county, and responding to the particular cultural and organisational challenges identified through this inquiry.⁶⁷

To challenge and inspire Suffolk teachers to develop their professional expertise, we recommend that the Suffolk-based teaching schools work

with local academy providers and higher education institutions, to define the specific knowledge, skills, experiences and understanding that teachers should be able to demonstrate at different stages of their career. For example, some of the distinctive competencies for Suffolk teachers might include the following:

- **Ensure effective, purposeful partnerships within and beyond the classroom** with support staff, other teachers and professionals, and community organisations to promote pupils' learning, achievements and well-being;
- **Challenge teachers to set the highest expectations for themselves and their colleagues**, driving out complacency in school performance;
- **Demonstrate a critical understanding of effective, evidence-based practice** and a positive motivation to draw on established knowledge to inform and improve their own practice;
- **Be aware of the distinctive characteristics of rural deprivation**, recognising that poverty is more likely to be hidden in rural communities, and that local residents are more likely to be polarised in terms of their quality of life, living standards and access to services;
- **Recognise and value the knowledge and experiences that pupils, their families and the local community** bring from outside the school to enrich curriculum development and learning experiences, and understand the barriers to engagement.

These 'Suffolk core teacher competencies' could then form the basis of **a new, shared understanding about what good and outstanding teaching looks like, which could help foster a sense of common identity for Suffolk teachers, as well as informing a new framework of professional development.** The SPEL would be well placed to promote these competencies across the county, as part of a concerted campaign to foster a professional culture that is more challenging, collaborative, innovative and inclusive.

Strengthen programmes of professional development

Recent government policy on teacher education has been heavily focused on improving the quality of new recruits and expanding school-based routes into the profession. As discussed in chapter 2, we would urge Suffolk schools to embrace the opportunities presenting by new school-led programmes of initial teacher education, such as School Direct. However, a programme of active recruitment will make only a limited contribution to overall standards of performance, at least in the short to medium term. The most important and sustainable way to improve the quality of teaching for the whole profession will be to strengthen programmes of professional development.

Here, we suggest that the new Suffolk core teacher competences form the basis of **a new framework for professional development, which incorporates the principles of collaborative learning and 'joint practice development' (JPD).** Rather than simply sharing tips or information, JPD entails on-going collaboration between two or more teachers, based around practical activity such as structured observations and

Any teacher in Suffolk should have the chance to take part in a reflective task that is informed by the principles of Action Research (Plan, do, review).

Teacher

critical feedback by peers or pupils. These principles are important, because research shows that the most successful programmes of teacher learning and continuous professional development (CPD) – those which have been shown to have tangible positive impacts – are collaborative.⁶⁸ By contrast, traditional approaches to CPD, typically based on transferring knowledge from an expert presenter to a largely passive audience, have been shown to be far less effective.

A recent study for the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) highlights the mutual benefits of a collaborative approach to professional development, based on the principles of JPD.⁶⁹ As the study reports, teaching school alliances around the country are developing a range of approaches incorporating joint planning, peer review and evaluation of activities in pairs or triads, as well as training pupils to participate. One of the schools involved in the study is the Kesgrave-Farlingaye teaching school alliance in Ipswich and Haverhill, whose participating teachers developed their own teaching practice as a result of the lesson observations and training on outstanding practice received through JPD. We believe that a similar shift in emphasis and mindset now needs to take place across the county, moving away from thinking about professional development as something that typically happens outside the classroom during the five scheduled INSET days each year, towards seeing it instead as being fused into the daily activity of teaching. The ‘families of schools’ model (R7) provides an important opportunity to do this, linking up schools with similar pupil profiles to act as a critical friend and partner for effective, collaborative professional learning and development.

Commitment to a Masters level qualification

As a further part of its commitment to on-going professional development and learning, we recommend that the new SPEL should **set an aspiration and a commitment to support all Suffolk teachers to pursue a Masters level qualification**, which should incorporate the Suffolk core teacher competences. While initial teacher education provides teachers with the key knowledge and skills to succeed in the classroom, a master’s degree builds on these by encouraging teachers to be critical and reflective, to try out new techniques and to evaluate their success on classroom performance. Teachers who study at master’s level typically lead by example: a 2008 report into professional development showed that teachers with a postgraduate qualification were more confident in helping and supporting their colleagues and were engaged more effectively with other staff in professional discussions.⁷⁰ In the Suffolk context, we believe that there will be particular value in giving teachers the space to take risks and adopt more innovative approaches to education, underpinned by a clear commitment to the use of evidence and robust methods of evaluation, as discussed further below.

Celebrate excellence in teaching

Finally, judged against the core competences of the Suffolk Teacher identity, we recommend that **outstanding teaching should be rewarded and celebrated through new Suffolk Excellence in Teaching awards, presented annually at a Suffolk-wide event** (see chapter 5), with an expectation that the winning teachers would act as ambassadors for teaching in Suffolk,

representing the county at national conferences and by speaking at other relevant events and platforms.

R10: Promote and celebrate professional expertise through a new Suffolk Teacher identity and annual Suffolk Excellence in Teaching awards

To challenge and inspire teachers to develop their professional expertise, we recommend that a new set of 'Suffolk core teacher competences' should be developed by the teaching schools and wider partners. These will set out the specific knowledge, skills and experiences that Suffolk teachers should be able to demonstrate at different stages of their career, as part of a new 'Suffolk Teacher' identity. These core competences should then form the basis of a new framework of professional development, which incorporates the principles of joint practice development (JPD). Taking the lead in promoting the Suffolk Teacher identity, the SPEL should set an aspiration for all teachers to pursue a Masters level qualification, which should further develop the core competences. Judged against these standards, outstanding teachers should be rewarded and celebrated through awards for Suffolk Excellence in Teaching at an annual event.

Research projects should be organic, come from teachers, related to the raising the bar agenda, and increasing outcomes in core subject areas.

Teacher

3.2 Embed a culture of innovative, evidence-based practice

Alongside a more outward-looking professional culture, there is a strong case for developing a climate in Suffolk schools which is more conducive to the use of evidence and research. Studies from other fields show that the use of research depends not just on practitioners' attitudes and motivations, or their research-related knowledge and skills, but also on the extent to which they are supported by leaders and managers to share knowledge and have time and opportunities for critical inquiry and reflection.⁷¹ Of particular importance in education settings is that the use of research and evidence needs to be embedded into policies and practices for school self-evaluation, professional learning and collaborative inquiry.⁷² Although engaging in research and development is one of the core components of teaching schools alliances, there is more that can be done both in Suffolk and nationally to realise this goal by supporting and strengthening capacity for research use.

Our proposals in chapter 2 to establish new 'families of schools' (R7) and the recommendation above on collaborative professional development (R8) are designed to encourage a more open and reflective culture of learning and collaborative inquiry. As a further step to transform the culture of professional and pupil learning in Suffolk schools, we recommend that the SPEL should establish and oversee a new **Challenge Fund**, with the aim of providing seed funding for innovative learning partnerships with a strong research component. Grants should be awarded to projects focused on achieving significant improvements in overall outcomes, or those which are specifically designed to boost the learning and development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Applicants should be encouraged to use the funding to lever in third party funding from businesses, charities and other grant-making bodies who will be attracted to supporting the development of well-designed, well-researched and innovative educational projects. The Challenge Fund should connect with the effort and learning from the Education Endowment Foundation, which is taking a similarly rigorous approach at a national level.

To qualify, schools will need to form partnerships with at least two other education providers, with special consideration given to those applications which make a connection to a partner outside Suffolk. The fund would be open to schools and providers within the East London Borough working in partnership with Suffolk schools. By fostering effective, evidence-based working in ‘triads’, the goal would be to extend collaboration still further by encouraging each original school or provider to facilitate and share their learning amongst a wider group in the future.

In designing and implementing the fund, particular consideration should be given to providing additional support for primary schools and smaller education providers in making applications, as they may lack the confidence, capacity or expertise to apply. With support from research partners, successful applicants would need to show that they have developed a robust methodology and evaluation framework, demonstrating that their idea has the potential to contribute to the evidence base on school improvement and help build lasting change.

R11: Establish a new Challenge Fund to provide seed funding for innovative, evidence-based practice

To encourage effective, evidence-based partnerships across Suffolk and beyond, the new SPEL should establish and oversee a Challenge Fund to provide seed funding for innovative joint working with a strong research component. With expertise and support from experienced researchers, successful applicants will need to show that they have developed a robust methodology and evaluation framework, demonstrating that their idea has the potential to contribute to the evidence base on school improvement and help build lasting change.

3.3 Effective, collaborative use of the pupil premium

Children from deprived family backgrounds face a much higher risk of educational disadvantage and poor outcomes. As is now well established, gaps in children’s development arise in the earliest years of life, before they even start school.⁷³ The gap then widens at each subsequent phase of learning, resulting in significant inequalities in outcomes at the end of formal schooling.⁷⁴ Young people from relatively advantaged backgrounds (those who have never been eligible for free school meals) are more than twice as likely to achieve 5 A*–C GCSEs at age 16 than those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in their school career.⁷⁵ This gap in educational achievement then has long-term effects on young people’s outcomes in employment and adult life.

Transforming the life chances of poorer children demands an integrated strategy that combats multiple sources of disadvantage at the same time. In recent years, government policy has focused even more explicitly on the role that schools can play in combating early disadvantage and narrowing the attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged and more families. In April 2011, a new pupil premium was introduced to provide additional support for looked after children and those from low-income families.⁷⁶ It is up to schools to decide how best to allocate any additional resources,⁷⁷ though they must publish information on-line

about how it is spent and what impact it is having on attainment, as well as being held to account through the new Ofsted inspection framework.⁷⁸

Recent national research shows that some schools are making good use of the additional money, for example, through investment in targeted support and careful monitoring of outcomes. But it also shows that other schools are still spending the pupil premium indiscriminately on interventions that are not having any meaningful impact, without a clear audit trail for where funding has been spent or without coordinating their pupil premium spending with other planning, as part of the school development plan.⁷⁹ To help ensure that every school makes the best use of resources, the Sutton Trust and Education Endowment Fund have developed and revised the Teaching and Learning Toolkit, an accessible summary of educational research which provides guidance for teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.⁸⁰

Research for the National College (2011) has examined whether school-to-school support by national leaders of education (NLEs) has helped to close the gap in pupil attainment. The findings show that the sampled schools demonstrated smaller gaps in attainment between their pupils eligible for FSM and their peers nationally, and that the attainment of FSM pupils was also above national averages. It further shows that the rate of improvement in schools supported by national support schools for at least a year saw more rapid increases in attainment by FSM pupils than that achieved nationally. Indeed, in the sample of 164 primary schools, the rate of improvement of FSM pupils was four times the rate of improvement of FSM pupils nationally across the same period.⁸¹

To foster a more collaborative and evidence-based culture in Suffolk schools, **we recommend that new and existing school partnerships explore options to 'pool' a percentage of their pupil premium to design joint approaches to narrowing the achievement gap.** This could happen through cross-phase pyramids, 'families of schools' or other collaborations, providing that the clear focus and priority is on the use of evidence-based approaches and robust tracking and monitoring of outcomes.

The effective use of pupil premium should also be seen as an important part of efforts to create a more supportive and inclusive school environment. One of the key tasks for schools is to encourage the take up of free school meals by families who may be eligible, by ensuring that all staff in the school, including front office staff and lunch time supervisors, are seen as welcoming and supportive, and are able to handle queries from parents or allocate meals to children in a sensitive and non-stigmatising way.

R12: Effective, collaborative use of the pupil premium

As part of a coordinated drive to create a more inclusive and collaborative culture in Suffolk schools, **we recommend that school partnerships explore options to 'pool' a percentage of their pupil premium to design joint approaches to narrowing the achievement gap.** This could happen through cross-phase 'pyramids', 'families of schools' or other collaborations, providing that the clear focus and priority is on the use of evidence-based approaches and robust tracking and monitoring of outcomes.

*As a parent,
I would like to see
a curriculum that is
innovative in terms
of content and
delivery ... which is
flexible and capable
of being adapted
to the needs of
individual students,
and that encourages
them to take a hand
in shaping their
own learning.*

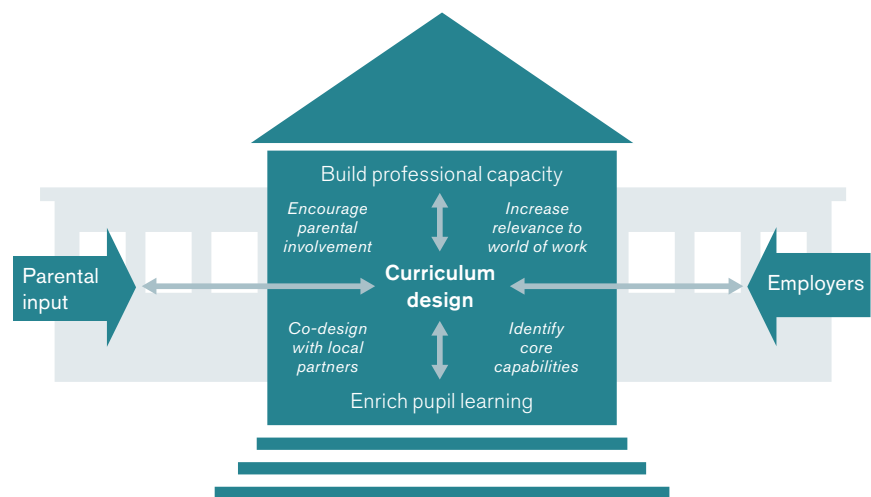
Parent

3.4 Innovative curriculum design to enrich teaching and learning

One of the most powerful messages we heard from contributors to the Call for Ideas was the desire to enrich and enhance the range of activities and learning opportunities available to children and young people in Suffolk. Contributors wished to see more creative learning on offer both inside and outside the classroom, as well as extending opportunities for families and members of the wider community to be engaged in the life of the school. As one contributor expressed it, ‘education is a life-long joy that should be made to reach out to all’.

The proposed new national curriculum, which will be introduced from 2014, offers a unique opportunity for schools to collaborate to create a rich curriculum offer that engages all pupils, challenges them to achieve their potential and enriches their lives, as children and adults. Although the slimmed down national curriculum is focused on the ‘core knowledge’ to which all young people should be guaranteed access, this core entitlement should form just one part of a locally-generated curriculum which has equal status to the national curriculum, and constitutes a framework of knowledge, competencies and attitudes.

Figure 3a: Enriching learning through innovative curriculum design



The RSA believes both that teachers should lead any curriculum redesign process and that this should be done through a genuine partnership with individuals and institutions in a school’s community – to create a curriculum designed by, with and for a locality. This approach can build a high quality curriculum that is outward facing, flexible and responsive to the particular needs and aspirations of students and their communities.⁸² There are a growing number of off-the-shelf curricula that schools can buy, and some may be appropriate for some aspects of a school’s curriculum. The value of curriculum design, however, is that the process through which a school decides and designs its own curriculum, whilst time-consuming, demands that they think about their aims, ethos, and partnerships with the wider community – all key building blocks for successful schools. Proposals for an innovative curriculum design

The National Trust Website has a list called ‘50 things to do before you’re 11 and three quarters.’ It would be great for schools to develop their own list of opportunities that they aim to provide children during the time they spend in the school.

Community member

programme for Suffolk are being led by the **Raising the Bar Solutions Group on ‘Innovative Curriculum Design’**, which has engaged with a wide group of headteachers and local leaders in education (LLEs) across the county to refine and develop their thinking. Four Suffolk schools are currently engaged in the pilot programme for Grand Curriculum Designs, with teachers from each school taking the lead in designing an innovative new curriculum for their own setting.⁸³ The group is also working actively with schools using the curriculum design model and web-based applications to structure the process of design from its inception with staff through to the first draft of a new curriculum approach.

In preparation for the revised National Curriculum, the Group is developing a route map for schools to help them navigate successfully through the statutory changes. In principle, the revised National Curriculum will allow more scope for teachers to exercise their professional judgement both over what is taught and how to teach it.⁸⁴ In practice, however, many teachers currently lack the skills and confidence to lead curriculum design, and will need support to understand the key principles and processes of designing a high quality curriculum. In light of this, the Solutions Group plans to publish specific curriculum guidance for Suffolk Schools, which will help teachers to understand the benefits of innovative curriculum design for learners. Building on the work of the core group of schools and headteachers engaged in developing the curriculum design programme, the Solutions Group is committed to exploring how pupils themselves can engage in the design process.

More challenging for schools will be the task of facilitating engagement by parents and the wider community in innovative curriculum design. Parents can often feel frustrated at their perceived lack of influence in schools, or believe that schools do not listen to their views or value their input.⁸⁵ The chance to work together to create and design curriculum projects offers an important potential way to break down barriers to engagement between schools and wider partners. Although there are successful models of innovative curriculum programmes which reach out to parents and the local community, it is important to recognise that teachers may lack confidence in promoting this kind of parental involvement; and so are likely to need support from colleagues or external advisors with specialist expertise to enable them to do this.⁸⁶ The engagement of employers in curriculum design processes and inclusion of their framework into all Suffolk schools’ curricula, as encouraged in chapter 4, could also catalyse wider involvement from parents and other members of the community.

This is not an attempt to create a single ‘Suffolk Curriculum’. Individual schools, regardless of size and governance arrangements, need the space to combine the highly local, county-wide, the national and the global into a single curriculum offer that enables all of their pupils to succeed. However, through stronger and more effective collaborative arrangements, there may be opportunities for elements of schools’ curricula to be co-designed and, with careful use of technologies, perhaps even co-delivered with other schools, so that as many pupils as possible benefit from teachers’ specialist subject knowledge and broader expertise.

R13: Innovative Curriculum Design to enrich pupil and professional learning

To inspire and motivate teachers to achieve the highest standards, the new SPEL should encourage every school to participate in a programme of Innovative Curriculum Design. With leadership from the teaching school alliances, in partnership with a local Higher Education Institution, this can help drive school improvement by positively influencing teaching and learning. Informed by the learning from the Grand Curriculum Design pilot, curriculum leadership needs to be recognised as the keystone and central vehicle for schools to improve learning outcomes for all children and young people.

If adopted by schools, the Suffolk Baccalaureate could be used to close the gap between the classroom and the workplace by teaching young people the skills needed to be successful in today's tough employment market, and especially local industries.

Councillor

3.5 Suffolk Baccalaureate: Valuing the whole educational experience

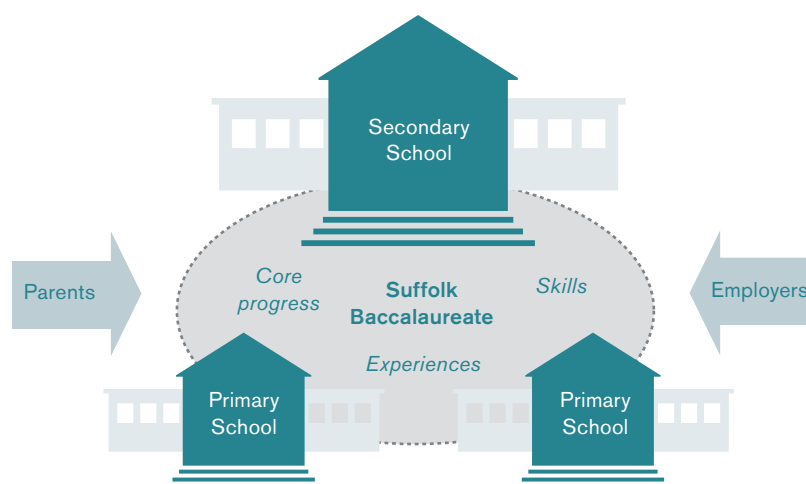
While a programme of curriculum design offers an important mechanism to drive school improvement, there is still more to be done to connect such a programme with engagement by parents, employers and other local community partners, and to capture and accredit the whole experience of pupils' learning and achievement, in and out of school. We believe that an important way to achieve this is through a new Suffolk Baccalaureate, which bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical experience. As part of this Inquiry, a group of schools in and around Haverhill have been working since October 2012 as a **Raising the Bar Solutions Group**, with the aim of developing a leading edge, inclusive baccalaureate that accredits a whole educational experience. The new Suffolk Baccalaureate for pupils aged 9 to 14 aims to improve rates of pupil progress and support successful transition between settings, by providing a common language and platform to facilitate working across different phases of learning and different educational institutions. As one year 6 pupil has commented, 'This is really exciting! It will be a record of me getting better as a person!'.

As the Suffolk Baccalaureate Solutions Group has set out, the 9–14 Baccalaureate will use the Modern Baccalaureate platform developed by Archbishop Sentamu Academy in Hull to provide a personalised web platform for pupils, based upon three core areas of learning:⁸⁷

- **Qualifications and attainment** (Core Progress) in all domains of learning, from academic and vocational through to skills for learning, skills for employment and skills for life;
- **Experiences** (Honours) that build confidence and character, leading to a whole education experience;
- **Skills** (Passport) that build competencies for work and life.

The new Baccalaureate will allow learners to own their web space and upload evidence to meet ambitious criteria in the three core areas. At the same time, it will provide a comprehensive pupil-based learning profile that will provide a cohesive link between learners, parents, teachers, employers and the wider community (see Figure 3b). In this way, it connects curriculum design with pupil, parental and employer engagement, and creates a canvas for pupils, teachers, parents, mentors and employers to have a more sustained and rounded conversation about learning and achievement.

Figure 3b: Creating a common learning platform through the Suffolk Baccalaureate



Building on the pilots that are currently underway in the Samuel Ward pyramid and across the Castle Partnership, the **Raising the Bar Solutions Group** should continue to raise local and national awareness and recognition for this work, looking to engage a wider group of Suffolk schools in the development of a Suffolk Baccalaureate that covers the 9–19 age range. Pilot schools should be empowered to be lead developers and to use the Suffolk Baccalaureate as a platform for engaging with a wider group of partners, including parents, employers and members of the local community.

Taking advantage of the flexibility of the ModBac platform, schools should be encouraged to adopt a common set of competences for the baccalaureate and a new **learning framework for citizenship, enterprise and employability**, which is currently being developed by the Engaging Employers Solutions Group. Our hypothesis is that, if schools engage with employers during the design of the Baccalaureate, employers are more likely to sustain a commitment to give this accreditation the status it deserves when making recruitment decisions. In the next chapter, we consider the additional steps that are needed to build engagement on all sides – by educators, employers, parents and the local community – and secure an entitlement for all pupils to engage with the world of work.

R14: Develop and expand the Suffolk Baccalaureate to foster a broader set of competences and wider educational engagement

We believe that a Suffolk Baccalaureate could provide a highly useful platform for engaging with a wider group of partners, including parents, employers and members of the local community. Building on the encouraging progress to date with a 9–14 Bacc, pilot schools should be empowered to be lead developers for the new Suffolk Baccalaureate, looking to engage a wider group of Suffolk schools in its development, implementation and expansion to a 9–19 framework. Taking advantage of the flexibility of the ModBac platform, schools should be encouraged to adopt a common set of competences for the baccalaureate and a new learning framework for citizenship, enterprise and employability.

4. Broaden horizons for growth, enterprise and well-being

Our focus throughout this report is on finding ways to promote children's well-being and transform their life chances, by enriching their learning experiences and significantly improving their learning outcomes. Children and young people need to be equipped to become independent learners, acquiring both the formal qualifications and flexible life skills necessary for adult life and a rapidly changing world of work. In this chapter, we consider the vital contribution that parents, local community organisations and employers can make to supporting children's development and learning throughout the school years, whilst broadening their horizons for the future. Rather than simply 'raising aspirations', the goal is to ensure that every young person has the practical knowledge and clear understanding to make strategic choices about their education and future career, as well as the support they need to get back on track in the event of setbacks and disappointments. Above all, schools, parents and wider partners need to respect and value pupils' increasing capacity for leadership throughout the school years, giving them space to exercise their growing sense of autonomy and independence.

4.1 Recognising the contribution of parents

Parents are the most important 'educators' of their children. What matters most to children's learning and early development is the care and support they receive at home, through the focused attention of parents, carers and wider family on talking and playing with them and building their awareness and understanding of the world around them.⁸⁸ Toddlers and pre-schoolers benefit particularly from having access to a wide range of stimulating and enriching activities, such as having books read to them, library visits, painting and drawing, and singing nursery rhymes.⁸⁹ The positive effects of the home learning environment are enhanced when parents and early years educators work together to create a mutually reinforcing set of rules and boundaries for children at home and in pre-school, based on shared aims and a continuity of care.⁹⁰

Suffolk's range of programmes and interventions to support parents and vulnerable families are currently being reconfigured. Although an analysis of these programmes was beyond the scope of the Inquiry, we suggest that Suffolk should develop an integrated strategy designed to promote early years development and prevent and compensate for early disadvantage. This should prioritise investment in interventions which

Parental aspirations and beliefs are key to children's achievement. If you want to raise standards for children, help even the least confident parents feel welcome and empowered in schools.

Parent

strengthen parent-child relationships, leading to more stable attachments and improved emotional, language and cognitive child development. Building on the strong evidence base of the importance of early years development, the **Raising the Bar Solutions Group** on 'Valuing Parents' is currently pursuing funding for an action research project with parents, as part of the *Fulfilling Lives: A Better Start* initiative, which aims to deliver a step change in developmental outcomes for babies and young children from pregnancy to age three.

When children start or move school, parents and teachers together can help children adjust to a new setting, as well as aligning expectations and fostering shared values about the importance of education. Many schools have developed strong links with parents and families, establishing effective forms of communication and information between home and school. Nevertheless, we believe that there is more that could be done to enhance the school's openness and democratic accountability and to ensure that parents' voice is heard, especially when schools enter into a formal partnership or ('hard') federation with other schools. To this end, we propose that a new parent and community council be established in every school, but particularly those in a Federation or Multi-Academy Trust, which would enable local people to play a more active role, as well as helping to protect each school's distinctive identity (**see R9**).

As a champion of children and families, Suffolk County Council needs the assertiveness to be both a constant supporter and occasional challenger of parents. Recognising the vital role that parents and schools can play together in promoting children's learning and well-being, we believe that SCC could lead a powerful, impactful campaign to make **Raising the Bar Every Parent's Business**. Such a campaign could have the following themes:

- Every child deserves love, care and support from their parents to meet their needs and promote their well-being, beginning in the earliest years of life.
- Parents have rights and responsibilities: a right to be treated fairly by schools and the education system and have their voices valued and respected; and a responsibility to do as much as they can to support their child's learning and development.
- Early years providers need to work in partnership with parents to create a mutually reinforcing set of rules and boundaries for children at home and in pre-school, based on shared aims and continuity of care.
- Schools, teachers and support staff need to work in partnership with parents to ensure that children adjust well to new settings and achieve good progress across phases of education, through tailored support to meet their different needs.
- Parents of older children need access to a range of advice and guidance, to help meet the needs of young people during adolescence and to promote positive transitions to adulthood and independence.

Although the evidence of beneficial effects is less clear when it comes to parental involvement in the life of the school (as compared to their involvement in children's learning at home), we believe that there is a

strong case for examining what works to improve children's outcomes throughout the school years. Our proposals for a new **Challenge Fund (R11)** and for schools to **pool their pupil premium money (R12)** will create a timely opportunity to investigate which parental engagement strategies are most effective in improving children's outcomes, especially projects aimed at engaging 'harder to reach' groups – those parents and families at particular risk of social exclusion and poor outcomes.

The **Raising the Bar Solutions Group on 'valuing parents'** has highlighted the success of the Achievement for All (AfA) programme in changing home-school relationships in the case of parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Structured conversation with parents is an important strand of the programme: this involves teachers spending quality time with the parent and child in up to three structured conversations per year to discuss the progress the child is making and coming up with agreed solutions.⁹¹ Key to its success is the equality of parent, teacher and child in the conversation. Findings from the national evaluation show that the greatest success was achieved where schools formed a collaborative relationship with parents, involving a **two-way exchange of information, ideas and concerns**.⁹² Schools involved in the pilot expressed determination to involve the most 'hard to reach' parents, and were extremely creative and flexible in the approaches they used in this regard.

Findings from AfA and other successful programmes can help inform schools' strategies for engaging with other vulnerable and hard to reach groups of parents. As the **Valuing Parents Solution Group** has usefully highlighted, a set of guiding principles could help schools to improve strategies for parental engagement, as well as emphasising the features of a supportive, inclusive school environment. These principles need to be bold enough to challenge parental behaviours and expectations, whilst avoiding an un-evidenced 'deficit model' of parental engagement in Suffolk. Above all, any changes to education in Suffolk should be seen as new opportunities to embed support for parents and parental involvement into the fabric of Suffolk's education system.

R15: Campaign to make raising the bar every parent's business

As champions of children and families, Suffolk County Council should lead a powerful, impactful campaign to make **Raising the Bar Every Parent's Business**, which shows how parents, schools and early years providers can work together to meet the needs of children and promote their well-being. As the most important 'educators' of children, parents have a responsibility to do as much as they can to support their child's learning and development, as well as having the right to be treated fairly by schools and the education system and have their voices valued and respected.

4.2 Wider community engagement to enhance children's learning and well-being

As children grow older, the influence of peers, friendship groups and wider support networks becomes increasingly important. The need for support from enablers outside the school was a common theme raised by

contributions and discussions with young people as part of *Shout Out Suffolk*. Although many young people mentioned the role of family and teachers, there was also strong emphasis on other forms of social support, such as that provided by career advisors and curriculum enrichment activities provided by members of the local community.⁹³ In the words of Peter, aged 17:

'It's with opportunities and the support of people and friends that would make young people feel appreciated and help them move forward. Community projects happen very rarely and I think they would motivate people to get involved and in the local community and help young people have firmer ideas of what they want to do in the future'.⁹⁴

One of my ideas is a concentrated effort on risky endeavours – sometimes academic, sometimes manual, sometimes vocational, sometimes physical – which can fail or, excitingly, via which their participants can achieve more than they ever thought possible.

Employer

Examples of the types of involvement that young people wished to see included community arts projects, extra-curricular activities (eg singing classes, community choirs, 'Learn something new' sessions), as well as support with university applications and careers advice, including clearly outlined career opportunities and alternatives to university. As young people have also told us, a narrow focus on 'meeting targets' can often be to the detriment of wider learning.⁹⁵

To facilitate broader engagement in children's learning, more needs to be done to break down barriers to collaboration between schools and other organisations and groups in the local community. A common theme expressed by the learning 'change makers' in Lowestoft was that many voluntary and community groups are keen to work more closely with schools and colleges in the town, to support curriculum enrichment activities or provide other kinds of specialist support. At present, many local groups encounter difficulties in making connections with schools, and as a result can feel excluded from the life and work of the school. Further action is therefore needed to prevent school isolation and stimulate partnership working across traditional boundaries, as well as 'knitting together' the variety of institutional structures and alliances that are emerging in the new educational landscape.

In light of the significant potential benefits for children's achievement, enjoyment and well-being, we suggest that a **new children and young people's board for achievement and well-being should be established in each locality in Suffolk**, to provide a forum for sharing knowledge and enhancing communication at a local level. An inclusive forum of this type would help strengthen networks by bringing together representatives from every school in the locality with their counterparts working in local voluntary organisations, charities, community services and other professionals providing mainstream and targeted services for children and young people. As such, it would provide a regular opportunity for schools to take part in a structured conversation with other groups and organisations in the local area, as well as creating a 'match making' space for networking and forming connections, which will then foster deeper engagement between organisations.

The participation of schools, colleges and other education providers, including early years services, will be crucial to the success of these local partnerships, though without assuming that schools necessarily have to lead their organisation. We suggest that District and Borough Councils

could take responsibility where appropriate for convening and facilitating local boards (circulating membership and arranging meeting venues etc). In the first instance, we suggest that representatives from the district and borough councils consult with local groups and providers to agree the most appropriate local formations (which may not be at district level), whilst also challenging local areas to look beyond and work across traditional boundaries or territorial dividing lines wherever possible.

R16: Children and young people's board to support achievement and well-being in every locality

In light of the significant potential benefits for children's achievement, enjoyment and well-being, we suggest that a new children and young people's board for achievement and well-being should be established in each locality in Suffolk, to provide a forum for sharing knowledge and enhancing communication at a local level. With input and administrative support from District and Borough Councils where appropriate, the boards would provide a regular opportunity for schools to take part in a structured conversation with other groups and organisations in the local area, as well as creating a 'match making' space for networking, which will then foster deeper engagement between organisations.

We need to break down the barriers between school life and the wider world. If our young people are to make the transition to adult life effectively they need to be exposed to different professions and services in an informal and positive manner.

Community member

4.3 Broadening young people's horizons for action

Recent education policy in England has placed much emphasis on 'raising aspirations' to increase achievement, particularly amongst disadvantaged pupils. Schools are encouraged to work with both parents and students as a way of 'narrowing the gap' in pupil outcomes and improving the relative life chances of young people from deprived family backgrounds.⁹⁶ But the fact that there are marked gaps in educational attainment between students from relatively more advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds does not mean that there is a corresponding gap in individual ambition or in people's belief in the importance of education. New research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has challenged the assumption behind such an approach: it demonstrates that individuals from all social backgrounds have a strong sense of the value of education and high personal aspirations for the future.⁹⁷ As the authors argue, the problem for pupils is not 'where am I going', but 'how do I get there'? The important difference lies not in what young people want to achieve, but in their knowledge of the specific steps needed to make it happen, and access to the kind of support and social networks that are linked to success.⁹⁸

In line with the national evidence, recent research in Suffolk shows young people have high aspirations but often do not know how to realise those ambitions,⁹⁹ a finding which was also evident in the contributions to Shout Out Suffolk. Interestingly, the younger children who took part, including those of primary school age, demonstrated higher or more positive career aspirations than their older counterparts. As the authors conclude, 'there was no apparent lack of ambition in most of the groups we spoke to and in the responses generated by social media'. But whilst young people expressed a broad range of career ideas and inspirations, 'many lacked knowledge of the specific qualifications actually required to achieve their career aspirations'.¹⁰⁰ Thus, rather than 'raising individual aspirations', we suggest that it is more accurate and more useful to

The greatest need in my view is for entrepreneurial youngsters to have the opportunity to develop those skills within a recognised learning framework that involves micro and small businesses.

Employer

think in terms of broadening *horizons for action*, recognising that young people's actual, pragmatic decisions about which particular course or educational pathway to follow, and which types of work to pursue, are influenced by differences in educational provision and local labour markets, as well as by their familiarity with particular sectors and fields of work.¹⁰¹

4.4 An entitlement for every learner to engage with the world of work

Developing the broad range of skills and competences needed for both personal growth and economic well-being is an urgent priority in Suffolk. At present, poor rates of progression and participation in further and higher education are compounding the relatively low levels of educational attainment at age 16.¹⁰² The recently published economic growth strategy for Suffolk identifies significant opportunities for increased growth and productivity through the projected rise in high value jobs in sectors such as energy, ICT and biotechnology in the region.¹⁰³ However, there is concern that the local population do not yet have the right skills and attributes to secure this employment.¹⁰⁴ The challenge for Suffolk is therefore to 'move skills from a growth barrier to a growth stimulus',¹⁰⁵ making sure that 'local people can take up local jobs and local businesses have the skilled workforce they need to grow'.¹⁰⁶

Core competences for adult life and work

It follows that schools and employers need to work more closely together to equip students with the formal qualifications and flexible life skills they need for employment and adult life. Faced with a rapidly changing world of work, young people need to become independent learners, ready to adapt their skills and knowledge throughout their future career. To assist educators and employers in this task, the '**Educator and Employers' Solutions Group**, has brought together representatives from business and education to develop a new learning framework for enterprise and employability. With input from young people and external experts, the group have identified the main skills and attributes that should inform such a framework, identifying four main competencies:

- **Communication**
- **Responsibility**
- **Initiative**
- **Teamwork**

These competences take into account Suffolk's existing work on the 'Employability 4 Life' Charter, as well as drawing on the National Curriculum aims of *Successful Learners; Confident Individuals; and Responsible Citizens* and aligning with parts of the CBI's Employability Framework. As discussed above, we would encourage schools to adopt a common set of competences for the **learning framework** and the new **Suffolk Baccalaureate (R14)**, which offers a useful and highly flexible platform for engaging with a wider group of partners, as well as giving important recognition to students of the full breadth of their achievements and experiences.¹⁰⁷

A new learning framework for citizenship, enterprise and employability

The work of the **'Educators and Employers' Solutions Group** is already making an impact, with the key recommendation for **a new learning framework** being incorporated into the recently published Suffolk Growth Strategy.¹⁰⁸ We strongly welcome plans to develop and implement the framework, which will help foster a shared understanding between schools, employers and learning providers about the skills needed for work. For employers, the new framework aims to give greater clarity regarding the most useful help they can provide. For schools, it will help embed work-related activities in the curriculum, giving them a higher status and increasing the likelihood that teachers will give them the necessary time and resources to be carried out successfully.

Furthermore, we believe that the proposed new learning framework can help foster the skills, knowledge and competences for adult life in a broad sense, preparing young people to be **active and responsible citizens, as well as proactive and entrepreneurial members of their community**. We see the capacities and dispositions of citizenship as being intimately linked with the skills and attributes for enterprise and employment, recognising that being an innovative and creative social entrepreneur is an important way of being an engaged and responsible citizen, and that all organisations (and especially local charities and voluntary groups) benefit from such skills.

A progressive entitlement from the primary years up

The chance to engage with the world of work in a meaningful and age-appropriate way should be seen as a core entitlement for all learners. To embed this entitlement, **pupils need earlier, richer and more empowering engagement with the world of work:**

- **Earlier** – so that pupils have a basic awareness and understanding of the world of work, before they leave primary school, making the most of new curricular freedoms
- **Richer** – more substantive, sustained and meaningfully connected to a school's curriculum offer
- **More empowering** – so that pupils and their parents play an active part in shaping the opportunities to engage with the world of work

Schools should be encouraged to provide earlier exposure to and familiarisation with a wider range of occupational sectors and fields of employment, to ensure that children and young people have a more informed understanding and a better grasp of the economic opportunities in Suffolk, as well as making sure that they have the practical skills and knowledge they need to pursue careers in a specific job or sector.¹⁰⁹

Including younger children in the framework is particularly important, since opportunities to make the connection between what is taught in the primary curriculum and the wider world of life and work are too often missed. Discussions with school and business leaders in Suffolk show genuine enthusiasm for the goal of greater engagement with work for primary age pupils. Laying strong foundations in primary schools could help develop stronger and deeper work experience opportunities at the secondary and tertiary stage. Following discussions led by the Educator and Employers Solutions Group, we propose a model that allows for progression in pupil's awareness of and engagement in the world of work from the primary years up, based on three broad stages of learning:

Age 7–11

- Pupils should understand the basic nature of work: this might include the difference between employment and self-employment, patterns of working hours (eg full-time or part-time), and the broad range of skills (mathematical, scientific, enterprising etc) needed for particular jobs.
- Teachers should make connections between different areas of the curriculum and different types of work, drawing on well-known popular examples (eg from television programmes) as well as real life, to expand children's awareness and understanding.
- Pupils should have direct engagement with one or more employer, understanding the nature of their business and the work they do.
- Pupils should have the opportunity to think about and discuss their own career aspirations.

Age 11–14

- Pupils should be exposed to and become familiar with a broad range of career options, with talks from parents, invited speakers and representatives from local businesses.
- Schools should build on pupils' initial interests, through encouraging them to research employment opportunities on-line and in their own locality.
- Pupils should derive knowledge about jobs from visits to different types of workplace.
- Through research and structured career advice, pupils should gain a deeper knowledge of the range of options available in a particular sector, as well as gaining practical information about entry routes into different career pathways.

Age 14–16

- By age 14, pupils should have a clear understanding of the entry routes into their preferred (or emerging) career pathways, including the type and level of formal qualifications and broader skills needed to realise their ambitions.
- Work-related learning should be integrated into the school curriculum, to ensure it is an integral part of the school day rather than being seen as an optional extra.
- Through specially tailored, professional careers advice, pupils should have practical knowledge about next steps and alternative options, depending on grades achieved in public examinations.
- By age 16, students should have a clear understanding of the entry routes into different academic and vocational pathways, including knowledge about different courses and institutions of further and higher education.

Careers advice

Since September 2012, schools have been given a new legal responsibility to secure access to independent and impartial careers guidance for all pupils in years 9 to 11. In theory, this means that schools will be free to decide what careers provision to make available in accordance with pupils' needs. Importantly, schools need to recognise that careers advice is high skilled professional work, which involves recognising and responding to young people's preferences (and partly tacit dispositions), whilst providing accurate and detailed understanding of the local and regional labour market and relevant occupational fields. In fulfilling their legal duty, schools may be well advised to consider specialist providers who are forming 'wrap around' offers of careers information, advice and guidance, work-related learning and workforce development for teachers. Whichever provider they choose, the priority for schools must be to integrate work-related learning across the school culture and curriculum, to ensure it is an integral part of the school day rather than being seen as an optional extra.

Furthermore, we strongly believe that schools should extend provision for professional, structured careers advice to the lower secondary and primary phase. One of the key goals for the transition years (aged 9–13) is to prevent a premature abandoning of options during the transition from primary to secondary school, when children tend to go through a process of narrowing.¹¹⁰ The SBA (2010) *Aim Higher Suffolk Report*¹¹¹ affirmed national and international research, which shows that the majority of young people's ideas about future educational paths and careers tend to be fixed by the age of 11. In Suffolk, 88 percent of Year 7s had decided (for the time being, at least) their chosen occupation. Although some narrowing is an inevitable part of maturity, as children let go of fantasy careers (such as princess or world king) and start to focus on more realistic options, not all dream careers are fantasies. Schools should therefore look to maintain and manage children's ambitions during the transition from primary to secondary school, focusing on 'keeping pupils' aspirations on track'.¹¹²

Research in Suffolk has also demonstrated a clear parental demand (over 80 percent) for earlier careers advice and access to work-related learning opportunities. However, nearly half of all secondary schools reported that they provide little or no information or opportunities at Key Stage 3. Given that many parents report a lack of confidence in their own ability to provide appropriate advice – one in five parents feel out of their depth advising their children about careers, and almost a third say they only feel comfortable talking about jobs with which they are familiar – it makes sense for schools to draw on the breadth and range of parental experiences by inviting parents and other members of the local community to come into school to share their knowledge more widely.

Brokering engagement between employers and educators

As outlined in chapter 1, a campaign to promote greater engagement needs to start by assessing existing levels of awareness and acceptance, as well as showing how potential barriers can be overcome. As with other partnerships, meaningful employer-educator engagement is a two-way relationship, which may call for a shift in attitudes and behaviour on both

sides: teachers and school leaders need to commit to integrating work-related learning through the whole curriculum, rather than seeing it as an addition to their core business; while employers need to recognise the value of sustained engagement for their own sector and business.

Although the current baseline of education-employer engagement in Suffolk has not been assessed, there is consensus from both sides that levels of engagement are unsatisfactory. Research shows that 43 percent of employers nationally have no links with schools or colleges, highlighting the need to build a stronger case for engagement. National studies also show that those employers who are connected with schools and colleges report benefits in the form of improved retention, increased staff motivation and value derived from work by students on their placement.¹¹³ These benefits need to be communicated more widely, to emphasise the mutual benefits of engagement for employers and local communities.

Encouragingly, employer engagement certainly appears to be valued by the vast majority of schools: 85 percent of secondary head teachers in a recent study believed it was either ‘very or extremely beneficial to have a business partnership’. What is more, there is some evidence that employer motivation to develop partnerships is growing: local analysis indicates that over a third of employers increased their engagement with schools in the past year.¹¹⁴

Despite these positive signs, further action is needed to address practical constraints and move from general awareness to sustained action and commitment on both sides. Meaningful engagement is time consuming and hard work, which can make it difficult to sustain interest and commitment over time. Many schools say they would like to engage more with local employers, but are unsure of where to start; while too many employers who attempt to contribute find the system complex or impenetrable.

A new mechanism for employer-educator engagement

Over the next few years there is an opportunity to develop a new approach to engagement between employers and the learning community, especially if this work is aligned to schools’ curriculum development programmes. The UK’s vulnerable economic situation, and its implications for the Suffolk economy, means that poor educational performance is increasingly recognised by all sides as a critical risk factor to the county’s overall prosperity. Our contacts with employers during the Inquiry shows a willingness to build far more productive partnerships that help schools to understand what employability really involves.

Recent analysis by Essex County Council has identified a number of factors associated with successful coordination of employment engagement at district and county level.¹¹⁵ At the top of the list is the importance of sharing knowledge and information, in the form of employer contacts and local databases, and having the capacity to coordinate employer engagement and keep track of activities and outcomes.

In partnership with schools, businesses, work related learning providers and key employers and sectors, **the Educator and Employers Solutions Group is developing a new brokering mechanism, which aims to provide a simple and easily accessible way for employers to contribute to the development of young peoples’ employability skills.** The goal is to provide

The current employer engagement agencies and networks compete against one another, run similar programmes at varying cost and varying quality and compete for funding.

Employer

Employers experience multiple contacts. Schools miss out often on valuable opportunities simply because they were unaware of them or were last to shout. The work on the ground is more complex and confusing than it ever has been in our 20 years of working in the field.

Employer

a single point of contact, so that educators can access quality-assured work-related learning programmes, and match schools up with employers who are willing and able to support and enhance their activities.¹¹⁶ As endorsed in the Suffolk Growth Strategy, a brokering mechanism would support employers and schools to work together more effectively, helping to streamline existing systems and procedures, enabling parties to connect easily and cheaply, whilst bringing together and building upon models and examples of existing good practice.

The ‘U-explore’ platform developed in Waveney provides a useful model for the brokering service. Developed in partnership with eight high schools, Lowestoft college and Sixth form college, Waveney District Council, and Job Centre Plus, ‘U-explore’ is an on-line platform which can be accessed by young people to develop their own personal profile and search from ‘job banks’ giving information relating to over 1,600 possible jobs, including recommended qualifications and skills levels. Similarly, Business in the Community has created a useful ‘Business Class’ model, which groups schools and businesses in a local cluster and helps forge strong relationships. Building on our proposal for local CYP boards for achievement and well-being (R16), we suggest that relationships could usefully be established between schools and local businesses at a borough and district level, looking to group businesses by sector as well as by locality, and bringing students together across the district with a particular interest in that sector.

Although some funding may be required to meet the initial start-up costs of the new venture, the goal should be to create a brokerage service which is wholly or largely self-financing. One example of a viable system is the ‘Make the Grade’ brokerage system run by the Ahead Partnership, cited in the Heseltine report as an example of best practice, in which funding responsibility is shared between a secondary school, an anchor business and a corporate sponsor.

R17: An entitlement to earlier, richer and more empowering engagement with the world of work

To give pupils earlier, richer and more empowering engagement with the world of work, Suffolk schools should integrate work-related learning activities across the whole school and ensure that they are embedded in the core curriculum. Building progressively from the primary years up, this entitlement for pupils should be based on a new learning framework for citizenship, enterprise and employability, which will help prepare young people to be active and responsible citizens, as well as proactive and entrepreneurial members of their community. We further recommend that Suffolk schools and county council support the development of a new brokerage service to connect business and education, consisting of a small team supported by an online facility, which would provide a single and personal point of contact for educators, employers and young people.

4.5 A strategic, pupil-led approach to mentoring

In making the transition to adulthood, as young people have told us, in addition to support from their parents and teachers, they value the chance to engage with other members of the local community, who offer different types of experience and career advice. We believe that more can be done

We are keen to see mentoring and work-related learning provision expanded in the county, some sort of common framework and common evaluation to measure impact alongside a longitudinal study.

Employer

to assist young people to make strategic choices about their education and future career, as well as provide the support they need to get back on track in the event of setbacks and disappointments. Above all, schools, parents and wider partners need to respect and value pupils' increasing capacity for leadership throughout the school years, giving them space to exercise their growing sense of autonomy and independence.

Finally, beyond the formal support of schools and other professionals, and the personal support of families, young people can benefit from the input of a different kind of community resource through programmes of mentoring. As young people have told us, they value the different types of experience and advice that community organisations. A wide range of local actors – whether those involved in local businesses, charities or voluntary groups – should therefore be encouraged to play an active role in promoting learning and education as mentors. The Raising the Bar Inquiry has already created some momentum, helping to attract pupils to BT's online mentoring scheme. There may also be hidden opportunities for mentoring relationships in the county (for instance, 'sole trader' businesses who may lack capacity to take a full work placement; or second home owners with useful contacts and networks who wish to support young people in Suffolk).

As part of this inquiry, the **Mentoring Solutions Group** has considered how to develop a coherent, targeted approach to mentoring for all age groups across the whole county. As a first step towards strengthening and coordinating the plethora of mentoring schemes, it has proposed a categorisation exercise to map the different types and purposes of mentoring. These could then be hosted on a platform, where students and schools can easily see what provision is available, making use of the platform for employer engagement. We welcome the proposal to adopt the following model used by the Australian Youth Mentoring Network (whilst recognising that these categories will inevitably, and usefully, overlap).

Focus areas	Mentoring to assist young people to:
Social and emotional well-being	Increase their self-esteem, self-efficacy and resilience by actively supporting their social and emotional well-being. The focus includes improving both the young person's life skills and the positive connections they have with their community.
Individual talents and leadership	Further develop their individual talents and/or leadership skills in a specific area (eg sports, photography, drama) in order for them to reach their full potential.
Identity, culture and faith	Grow in their understanding of their faith/culture and cultural identity. The programme actively supports young people to be proud and confident of their identity and culture and to be able to exercise this in their community.
Youth justice and crime prevention	Avoid anti-social and offending behaviours by encouraging connectedness with positive elements in their community and increasing protective factors.
Education and employment	Positively engage in and maintain their participation in education, training and employment. These programmes assist young people to develop a vision for their future and provide support to achieve their education, training and career goals.

Building on these useful first steps, we believe that the most important principle for any mentoring scheme is for the potential beneficiaries of such a scheme – the young people concerned – to be in the driving seat of designing and developing what it entails. With appropriate advice and support (preferably with young people determining what advice would be most useful for them), and guided by the evidence gathered by the Solutions Group on the key factors for effective mentoring,¹¹⁷ young people should be tasked with mapping different types of mentoring and consulting with their peers to identify what would be most attractive and useful. What is more, rather than adopting a traditional model of school or local authority as commissioner, students themselves should assume the role of commissioner, holding a (delegated) budget. In this way, the process could be genuinely empowering, giving young people control over resources to ensure that the types of mentoring available meet their needs.

R18: Empower young people to design and commission an effective cross-county approach to mentoring

To develop young people's capacity for leadership and provide a valuable resource for other young people across the county, a group of young people in Suffolk, probably based in post-16 colleges, should be charged with designing a cross-county approach to mentoring. The work carried out by students should be accredited, possibly as part of a BTEC module, or an Extended Project Qualification. The approach should be informed both by evidence about current provision, and also by the views of their peers and other pupils. If possible, the mentoring programme should connect with the employer-engagement mechanisms described above.

5. Celebrate success and sustain momentum over time

Transforming education outcomes is not a goal that can be achieved overnight. Many education reforms fail or falter because they are not given the time to succeed. Crucially, the process of ‘raising the bar’ in Suffolk will not be completed either with the publishing of this report and recommendations, or the response from Suffolk County Council that will follow. The capacity for continued improvement must be embedded within the new structures proposed here, but above all in a new set of cultural attitudes, beliefs and expectations about what it is possible for schools and communities to achieve.

Just as people need the right incentives to become involved at the outset, so too do they need reward and recognition for their efforts and contribution. This is one of the important lessons to emerge from successful school improvement programmes in the UK and elsewhere: acknowledging and celebrating success has a real and tangible impact on people’s motivations and hence on sustaining momentum and progress over time.¹¹⁸ To provide a chance to celebrate and publicise the county’s achievements, we suggest that SCC and the SPEL, in collaboration with community, corporate and media partners, should **host an annual Suffolk Change Makers event** for pupils, parents, staff and teachers, school governors, employers and other partners in the local community. With input from pupils themselves in designing and promoting the awards (including voting in key categories), the event would provide a chance to showcase innovative practice and effective partnerships and celebrate schools’ individual and collective successes in rapidly improving performance.

Awards for outstanding achievement and leadership at all levels could be given in a variety of categories, including awards for **Young Entrepreneur of the Year**, to celebrate young people’s emerging talents for enterprise; the **Suffolk Excellence in Teaching** awards, to inspire and motivate teachers to continue to improve their professional learning and practice; and **Suffolk Business Partner of the Year**, to celebrate the employer or business which has made the biggest contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people across the county. To help foster wider engagement, recipients of awards should be encouraged and expected to act as ambassadors for teaching and learning in Suffolk, representing the county at relevant events and conferences across the country.

The process of reflection and renewal will not be wholly celebratory, of course. Openness and candour are needed about the challenges that

remain, as well as acknowledging the progress that has been achieved to date. As our proposal for a new Suffolk Partnership for Excellence in Learning (SPEL) emphasises, leading and renewing the process of change is a challenge that schools must take up for themselves, to avoid falling back into previous patterns of reliance on the local authority, and to embed capacity and drive continued improvements over time. Thus, as well as setting county-wide goals and strategic objectives, schools need to take shared responsibility for monitoring progress in meeting the key targets and renewing the strategy for transforming school performance.

R19: Annual ‘change makers’ awards to celebrate outstanding educational achievement and collaboration

In partnership with community, corporate and media partners, Suffolk County Council and the SPEL should host an annual Suffolk Change Makers event for pupils, parents, staff and teachers, school governors, employers and other partners in the local community. With input from pupils themselves, the event should showcase innovative and effective partnership working and celebrate schools’ individual and collective successes in rapidly improving performance. Awards could be given in a variety of categories including Young Entrepreneur of the Year, Excellence in Teaching and Suffolk Business Partner of the Year, to celebrate those who have made the biggest contribution to improving learning outcomes across the county.

To achieve this, the SPEL should undertake an annual review and evaluation of the progress that has been achieved in improving school performance and the challenges across the county that still need to be overcome. Such a process should be seen as a genuine opportunity for reflection, based on honest and critical appraisal of what has gone well, and what parts of the strategy need to be refreshed or revised. Building on the partnership audit and strategic review by school governing bodies proposed in chapter 2, the annual review will provide a useful opportunity for schools and education providers to review their working arrangements with other partners, looking to strengthen existing arrangements or forge new relationships to achieve their individual and collective goals and shared strategic priorities.

R20: Annual review and self-evaluation to renew and refresh the strategy for school improvement

To renew and refresh the county-wide strategy for school improvement, the SPEL should undertake an annual review and evaluation of progress. Led by schools rather than the local authority, the annual review should be seen as a genuine opportunity for renewal and reflection, based on honest and critical appraisal of what has gone well, and what parts of the strategy need to be refreshed or revised.

Our recommendations

R1: Stimulate new thinking and ways of working through a new strategic partnership between Suffolk and a London Borough

In order to stimulate new thinking and create the impetus for more radical change, Suffolk should negotiate a long-term strategic partnership with an east London Borough, to be jointly funded by both local authorities and through external funding. Based upon a programme of cultural and educational exchange and work-related learning, this would create valuable reciprocal opportunities for enriching pupils' learning, deepening teachers' professional understanding and strengthening the capacity for leadership in both areas. As part of the new arrangement, we further recommend that a future leaders exchange programme be established for early and mid-career teachers identified as having outstanding leadership potential.

R2: Foster a county-wide change in leadership through a new school-led Suffolk Partnership for Excellence in Learning (SPEL)

We recommend that a new Suffolk Partnership for Excellence in Learning (SPEL) be established between schools and Suffolk County Council by April 2014, with a broad, open membership to provide a forum for all schools, regardless of status, to set a vision for whole system improvement, determine strategic priorities and foster shared commitment and joint accountability for the learning of every child and young person in the county. To achieve a genuinely self-improving school system, we further recommend that activities and resources for school improvement (including SCC staff resources) be devolved over time to the SPEL, with the aim of making services more responsive to the needs of schools, whilst strengthening the oversight function of the Local Authority.

R3: Widen the pool of talent by investing in teacher recruitment and Schools Direct

We recommend that Suffolk schools widen the pool of talent by investing in the salaried element of the School Direct programme, as a way of encouraging outstanding recent graduates and career-changers to consider teaching in Suffolk schools. At the same time, the County Council should take advantage of opportunities to promote the attractiveness of Suffolk as a place to live and work throughout the wider region and nationally, looking to attract dynamic leaders, mid-career teachers and subject specialists to the county.

R4: More challenging and strategic governing bodies

Governing bodies in Suffolk schools need to be better equipped in each of the core areas of governance: giving strategic direction; acting as a critical friend; and ensuring accountability. We recommend that all governing bodies be encouraged and expected to build capacity through processes of peer review and mutual challenge. The new SPEL should set ambitious expectations about improving the quality of governance across the county, as part of a drive to increase the proportion of schools which are good and outstanding to be in line with the best, not settling at average.

R5: Critical review and audit of partnership arrangements

To strengthen new and existing partnerships, we recommend that all schools and groups of schools undertake a partnership review to audit their working relationships with other schools and providers and determine whether arrangements are 'fit for purpose'. This should be conducted in tandem with a peer review of each school's strategic objectives and resources, with each governing body acting as a critical friend to provide objective feedback and challenge. Together, these reviews will enable schools to make an informed and strategic decision about whether existing partnerships should be maintained, strengthened or terminated; and to decide whether new forms of working are needed to meet the learning needs of teachers and pupils alike. We further recommend that the new SPEL should undertake a social network analysis to map the coverage of networks and provide an overview of how well partnership arrangements are working.

R6: Support every child's journey through effective cross-phase partnerships and shared accountability for outcomes

Primary and secondary schools need to work more effectively together in 'pyramids' to ensure that pupils make successful transitions across phases of learning. To help strengthen pyramid relationships, we recommend that feeder primary (and middle) schools and their receiving secondary (and upper) schools agree to monitor pupil outcomes in their first term of their new school and produce a report for governors in each school, which highlights any difficulties that individuals or groups of pupils have in settling in. By studying the evidence together in this way, schools will be enabled to have honest and open conversations and agree joint processes to improve coordination and support.

R7: Foster challenge and peer review through 'families of schools'

Building on the momentum achieved by the RtB Solutions Group and initial trialling of the model, the families of schools model should be developed from September 2013, looking to include schools from neighbouring counties and the East London borough partnership. With leadership from an extended group of headteachers and other change makers, the pilot will build capacity across the county and evaluate its effectiveness at key stages. Based on the principle that all schools in Suffolk have scope for and are capable of improvement, the pilot should set clear goals for what each family of schools will achieve, connected to improvements in pupil progress and overall outcomes.

R8: Federation for Small Schools

We recommend that any small school with a roll lower than 100 pupils should enter a federation. Schools would be well advised to begin the process as early as possible, to allow for greater time to find an appropriate school partner and work together to establish strong relationships, maximise resources and ensure a smooth transition to the new partnership. While the County Council should continue to provide information about the federation process, the new SPEL will be well-placed to coordinate advice and guidance about how federated schools can achieve cost-savings, as well as organising 'match making' events to assist schools with finding an appropriate partner school to meet the learning and wider needs of their pupils.

R9: Promote parental voice through a parent and community council for every school, especially those in a trust or federation

In recognition of the value of parental involvement, we suggest that every school should establish a parents' council, with representatives from the local community, which should be given specific responsibility for engaging with the school leadership to *'support pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development'*. Although important for all schools, we believe that establishing a parent and local community council will be especially beneficial in the case of schools which enter a formal Federation or Multi-Academy Trust, as it will help promote parents' voice and protect the distinctive identity of each federated school.

R10: Promote and celebrate professional expertise through a new Suffolk Teacher identity and annual Suffolk Excellence in Teaching awards

To challenge and inspire teachers to develop their professional expertise, we recommend that a new set of 'Suffolk core teacher competences' should be developed by the teaching schools and wider partners. These will set out the specific knowledge, skills and experiences that Suffolk teachers should be able to demonstrate at different stages of their career, as part of a new 'Suffolk Teacher' identity. These core competences should then form the basis of a new framework of professional development, which incorporates the principles of joint practice development (JPD). Taking the lead in promoting the Suffolk Teacher identity, the SPEL should set an aspiration for all teachers to pursue a Masters level qualification, which should further develop the core competences. Judged against these standards, outstanding teachers should be rewarded and celebrated through awards for Suffolk Excellence in Teaching at an annual event.

R11: Establish a new Challenge Fund to provide seed funding for innovative, evidence-based practice

To encourage effective, evidence-based partnerships across Suffolk and beyond, the new SPEL should establish and oversee a Challenge Fund to provide seed funding for innovative joint working with a strong research component. With expertise and support from experienced researchers, successful applicants will need to show that they have developed a robust methodology and evaluation framework, demonstrating that their idea has the potential to contribute to the evidence base on school improvement and help build lasting change.

R12: Effective, collaborative use of the pupil premium

As part of a coordinated drive to create a more inclusive and collaborative culture in Suffolk schools, we recommend that school partnerships explore options to 'pool' a percentage of their pupil premium to design joint approaches to narrowing the achievement gap. This could happen through cross-phase 'pyramids', 'families of schools' or other collaborations, providing that the clear focus and priority is on the use of evidence-based approaches and robust tracking and monitoring of outcomes.

R13: Innovative Curriculum Design to enrich pupil and professional learning

To inspire and motivate teachers to achieve the highest standards, the Suffolk Partnership for Excellence in Learning (SPEL) should encourage every school to participate in a programme of Innovative Curriculum Design. With leadership from the teaching school alliances, in partnership with a local Higher Education Institution, this can help drive school improvement by positively influencing teaching and learning. Informed by the learning from the Grand Curriculum Design pilot, curriculum leadership needs to be recognised as the keystone and central vehicle for schools to improve learning outcomes for all children and young people.

R14: Develop and expand the Suffolk Baccalaureate to foster a broader set of competences and wider educational engagement

We believe that a Suffolk Baccalaureate could provide a highly useful platform for engaging with a wider group of partners, including parents, employers and members of the local community. Building on the encouraging progress to date with a 9–14 Baccalaureate, pilot schools should be empowered to be lead developers for the new Suffolk Baccalaureate, looking to engage a wider group of Suffolk schools in its development, implementation and expansion to a 9–19 framework. Taking advantage of the flexibility of the ModBac platform, schools should be encouraged to adopt a common set of competences for the Baccalaureate and a new learning framework for citizenship, enterprise and employability.

R15: Campaign to make Raising the Bar every parent's business

As champions of children and families, Suffolk County Council should lead a powerful, impactful campaign to make Raising the Bar Every Parent's Business, which shows how parents, schools and early years providers can work together to meet the needs of children and promote their well-being. As the most important 'educators' of children, parents have a responsibility to do as much as they can to support their child's learning and development, as well as having the right to be treated fairly by schools and the education system and have their voices valued and respected.

R16: Children and young people's board to support achievement and well-being in every locality

In light of the significant potential benefits for children's achievement, enjoyment and well-being, we suggest that a new children and young people's board for achievement and well-being should be established in each locality in Suffolk, to provide a forum for sharing knowledge and enhancing communication at a local level. With input and administrative support from District and Borough Councils where appropriate, the boards would provide a regular opportunity for schools to take part in a structured conversation with other groups and organisations in the local area, as well as creating a 'match making' space for networking, which will then foster deeper engagement between organisations.

R17: An entitlement to earlier, richer and more empowering engagement with the world of work

To give pupils earlier, richer and more empowering engagement with the world of work, Suffolk schools should integrate work-related learning activities across the whole school and ensure that they are embedded in the core curriculum. Building progressively from the primary years up, this entitlement for pupils should be based on a new learning framework for citizenship, enterprise and employability, which will help prepare young people to be active and responsible citizens, as well as proactive and entrepreneurial members of their community. We further recommend that Suffolk schools and county council support the development of a new brokerage service to connect business and education, consisting of a small team supported by an online facility, which would provide a single and personal point of contact for educators, employers and young people.

R18: Empower young people to design and commission an effective cross-county approach to mentoring

To develop young people's capacity for leadership and provide a valuable resource for other young people across the county, a group of young people in Suffolk, probably based in post-16 colleges, should be charged with designing a cross-county approach to mentoring. The work carried out by students should be accredited, possibly as part of a BTEC module, or an Extended Project Qualification. The approach should be informed both by evidence about current provision, and also by the views of their peers and other pupils. If possible, the mentoring programme should connect with the employer-engagement mechanisms described above.

R19: Annual 'change makers' awards to celebrate outstanding educational achievement and collaboration

In partnership with community, corporate and media partners, Suffolk County Council and the SPEL should host an annual Suffolk Change Makers event for pupils, parents, staff and teachers, school governors, employers and other partners in the local community. With input from pupils themselves, the event should showcase innovative and effective partnership working and celebrate schools' individual and collective successes in rapidly improving performance. Awards could be given in a variety of categories including Young Entrepreneur of the Year, Excellence in Teaching and Suffolk Business Partner of the Year, to celebrate those who have made the biggest contribution to improving learning outcomes across the county.

R20: Annual review and self-evaluation to renew and refresh the strategy for school improvement

To renew and refresh the county-wide strategy for school improvement, the SPEL should undertake an annual review and evaluation of progress. Led by schools rather than the local authority, the annual review should be seen as a genuine opportunity for renewal and reflection, based on honest and critical appraisal of what has gone well, and what parts of the strategy need to be refreshed or revised.

Endnotes

1. Department of Education (2010) *The Importance of Teaching*, Schools White Paper: DfE.
2. *Ibid.*
3. The government assesses mainstream maintained secondary schools' performance against defined "floor standards". The Department of Education recently announced the phased introduction of a new floor standard for primary school attainment. From 2014 the floor standard will rise from 60 percent to 65 percent of pupils achieving a good Level 4 in the 3Rs ('good' is defined as achieving the top third in the mark range).
4. Ofsted (2013) *Framework for Inspection*: Ofsted.
5. Ofsted (2012) HMI Annual Report 2011/12: The Stationary Office.
6. Benn, M. (2012) *School Wars*; Sturdy, E. and Freedman, S. (2007) *Choice? What Choice? Supply and demand in English education*: Policy Exchange.
7. In a series of reports for the National College, David Hargreaves has outlined a 'mature' model of the self-improving school system, at the heart of which is a collaborative network of strategic alliances. In this model, collaborative capacity is progressively built from the bottom up, starting with 'a small group of schools in deep partnership, expanding to a much larger group – an alliance, federation, trust, chain, local authority etc – and from there potentially to a whole region and nation'.
8. Hill, R. (2012) *The Missing Middle: The case for School Commissioners*: RSA, p. 22.
9. HM Government (2011) *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: a strategy for social mobility*: HM Government.
10. Previously, schools received a large number of specific grants from central government which from 2011–12 have been rolled into the Dedicated Schools Grant, with a reduction in the number of factors used in local funding formulae from 37 to 10.
11. DfE (2012) *Department of Education Statistical First Release 2011–12*.
12. From summer 2013, the first cohort of young people will be required to continue in post-16 education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17. From summer 2015, all young people will be required to continue in education or training until their 18th birthday.
13. The rapid rise in the number of Academy schools, particularly at secondary level, has accelerated changes already underway in the traditional role of the local authority, with a significant reduction in the overall amount of control that LAs have over schools, as well as affecting the level of support they can provide directly for schools and other services (HMI's Annual Report 2011/12).
14. Hutchings, M. *et al.* (2012) *Evaluation of the City Challenge programme*, Research Report DFE-RR215: Department of Education.
15. Although changes in the system of assessment and inspection over the last decade mean that direct comparisons are problematic, nevertheless Suffolk schools and local authority were generally regarded as performing well against national benchmarks and compared to regional and statistical neighbours prior to 2007.

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17. Historically, large cities have been seen as experiencing greater educational challenges than less urbanised areas, due to concentrations of high levels of social and material deprivation and the clustering in inner-city schools of high proportions of children and young people from socially marginalised and culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds. More recently a different picture has emerged internationally from the OECD's PISA study, demonstrating that in many countries student scores in urban areas are far higher on average than in rural and semi-rural settings.
18. The OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a collaborative effort among the Member countries of the OECD to measure levels of pupil attainment in a standardised way for young people at age 15.
19. OECD (2012) *Are large cities educational assets or liabilities?* PISA In Focus 17, June 2012.
20. Indeed, the United Kingdom, along with Belgium and the United States, is actually one of the exceptions to the general trend, being a country where the performance of students in large urban areas drags down rather than boosts the overall country scores. The UK's diversion from the general trend can be attributed to the fact that while some of the large metropolitan areas (notably Greater London and Greater Manchester) have seen significant improvements in both overall performance and outcomes for disadvantaged groups, these gains are yet to be replicated across the board.
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