

NCAS CONFERENCE 2017

Enabling School Improvement: research into the role of local authorities in supporting local school improvement systems

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Bournemouth, 12 October 2017



Our Isos Partnership evidence base

- Work with 30+ local authorities, including developing school/LA partnerships
- 2012 report for DfE and LGA on the future role of the LA
- 2014 follow-up 'temperature check' for DfE
- Reports for DfE and National College - leadership of teaching school alliances, primary system leadership, SEN funding, A-level class sizes, post-16 funding, and how schools work together to close gaps in attainment
- Three-year National Teaching School evaluation (led by Nottingham University). Robert Hill's national academy chains report 2011/12

2012 – three responsibilities for the local authority in education

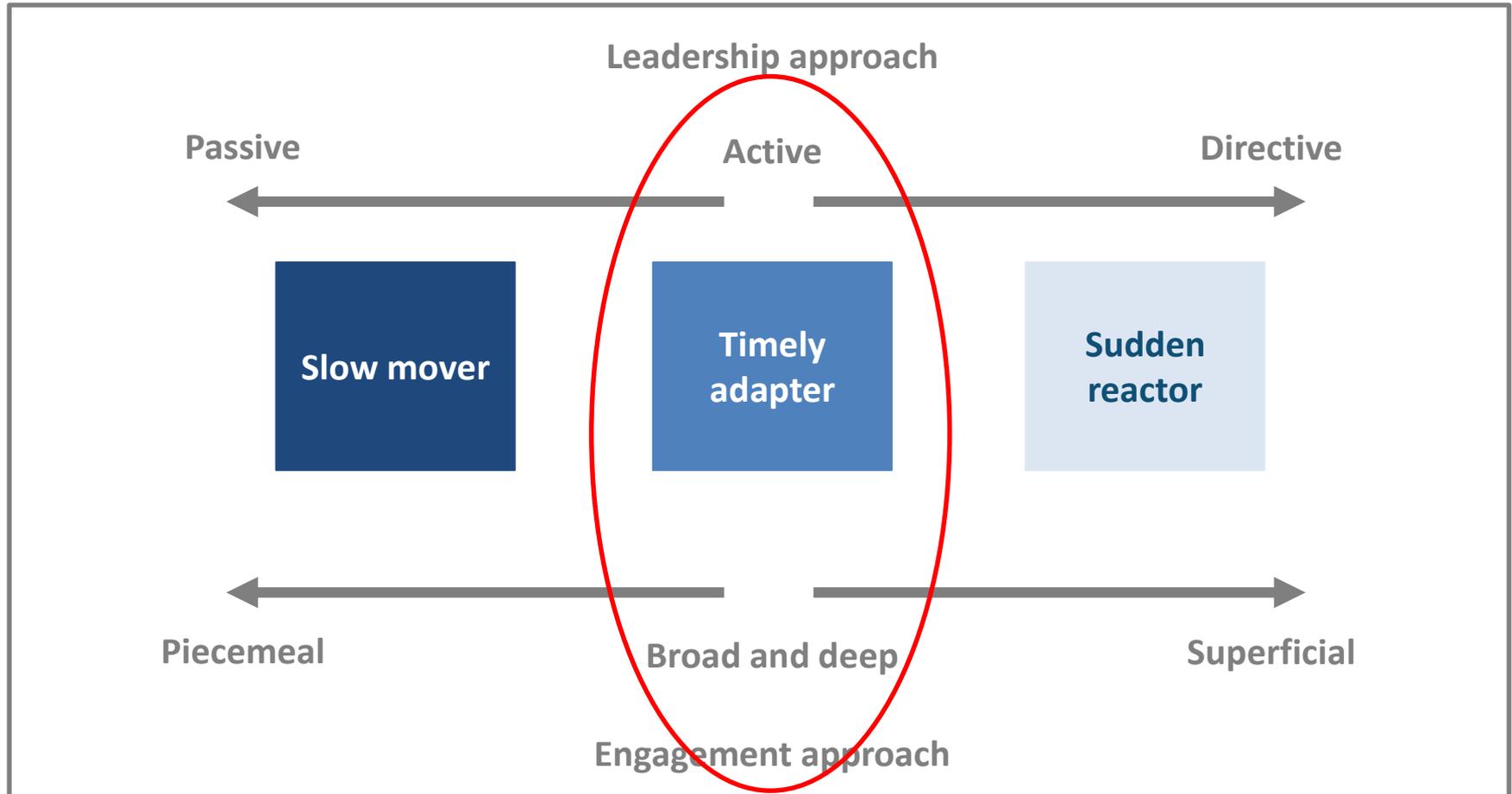


Champion – of educational transformation, moral purpose, democratic mandate to ensure good outcomes, vision

Convenor – bringing leaders together, connecting to best practice within and beyond the system, facilitating partnerships

Commissioner – bringing the strategic picture, intelligence and data, enabling and commissioning support and development

2014 - three types of transition that local systems were experiencing



2017 - LGA-commissioned research project on the role of the LA in school improvement

AIMS OF THE PROJECT

1. summarise **key issues** for local school improvement systems
2. describe **different local approaches** to school improvement and partnerships
3. explain the **conditions** that the research team believe are necessary to develop effective local school improvement, and **how LAs can help to develop**
4. **share learning** with authorities, partners, schools, and academies
5. provide a **contribution to the current debate** about the future role of LAs in school improvement

2017 - LGA-commissioned research project on the role of the LA in school improvement

1

Visit 1 to sample of 8 local systems across the country
Discussions with schools and academies, LA staff and elected members, and other stakeholders

2

Team reviewed lessons and learning. Development of interim messages

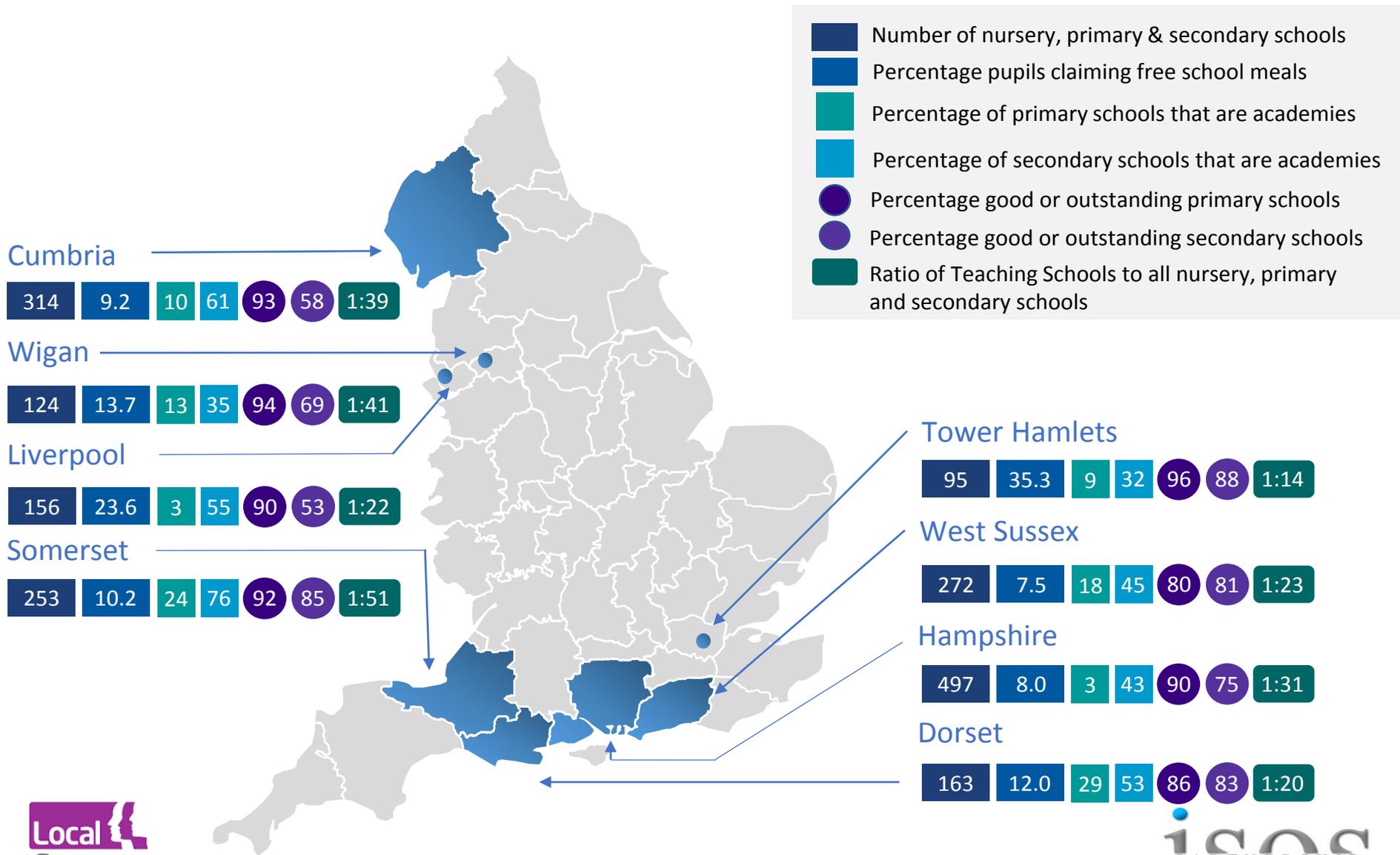
3

Visit 2 to sample of local systems: test interim messages; pursue specific issues in more depth; gather further evidence

4

Case studies on 8 local systems
Developed main report for October publication

Context of participating local areas



Our report highlights some key messages from our visits

Local systems at
different stages

All developing local
strategic partnerships

Critical period for
funding

Importance of the LA
role

The importance of the right conditions...

“In education, ‘what works?’ is not the right question because...

everything works somewhere and nothing works everywhere

...So what’s interesting, what's important in education is

‘Under what conditions does this work?’ ”

Dylan Wiliam (2006)

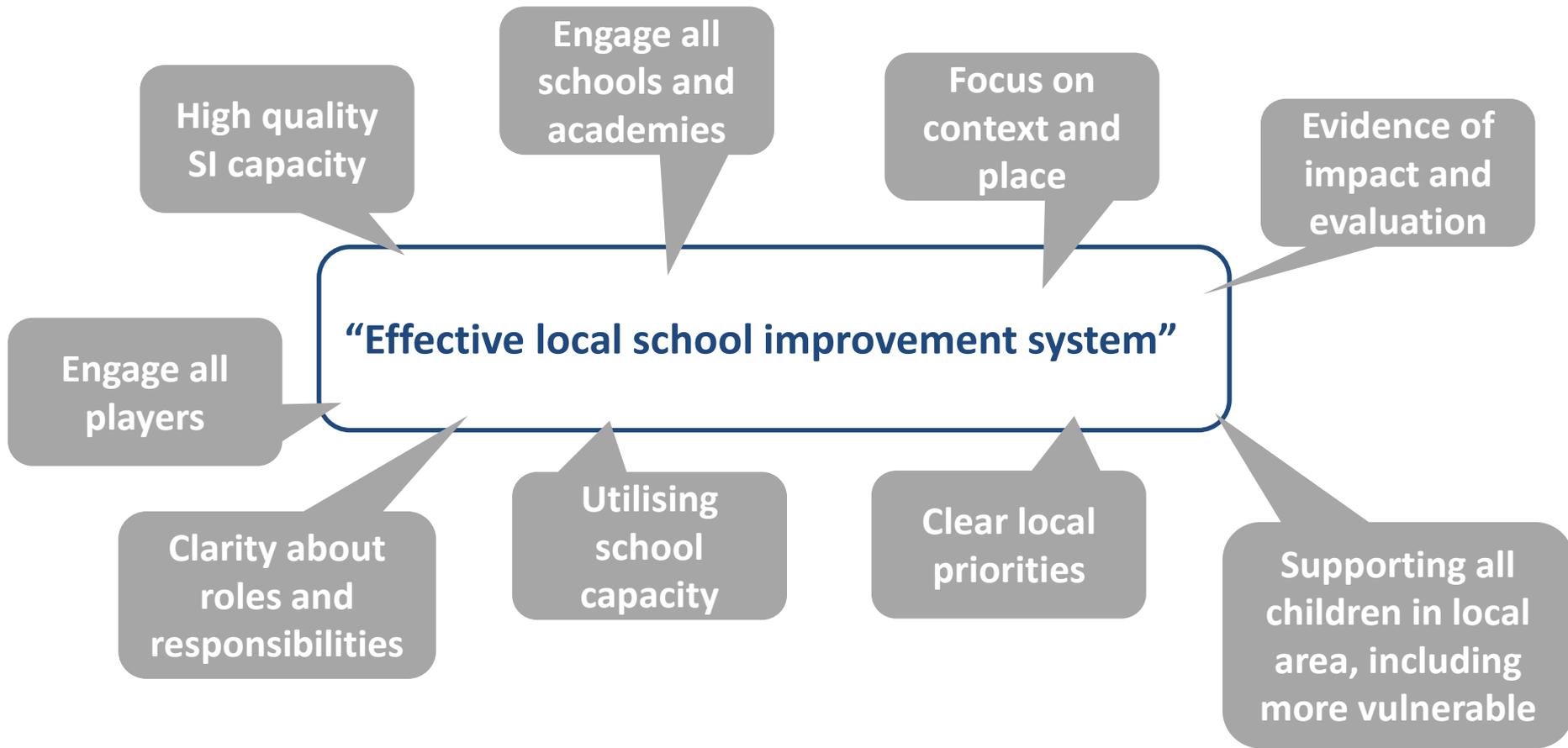
Our nine conditions...

Nine conditions to develop an effective local school improvement system

1. A clear and compelling vision for the local school improvement system
2. Trust and high social capital between schools, the local authority, and partners
3. Strong engagement from the majority of schools and academies
4. Leadership from key system leaders
5. A crucial empowering and facilitative role for the local authority
6. Sufficient capacity for school-to-school support
7. Effective links with regional partners
8. Sufficient financial contributions (from schools and the local authority)
9. Structures to enable partnership activity

1	Clear and compelling vision	LA needs to co-ordinate and provide strategic push. Role for the LA as objective facilitator. Opportunity to focus on place and local context. LA can help to get roles clear.
2	Trust and high social capital	LA needs to model effective relationships and partnership working. Local democratic mandate can help to sustain relationships founded on shared desire to find solutions.
3	Engagement from majority of schools and academies	LA needs to be the honest broker. Compelling vision can get schools on board. LA role to reach out to schools, academies and MATs with offer for all local children.
4	Leadership from key system leaders	LA has opportunity to engage key leaders and facilitate discussions. Development of system leadership capacity can be a key purpose of local school improvement system.
5	Crucial convening and facilitative role for the LA	LA able to bring the intelligence from across the local school improvement system, utilise existing expertise and capacity, and support evaluation processes.
6	Sufficient capacity for school-to-school support	LA needs to support the local partnership to identify local capacity and broker from outside where needed. LA can help map future capacity, encourage school leaders, and commission system leader development programmes.
7	Effective links with regional partners	LA needs to engage effectively with regional and sub-regional partners on behalf of and alongside the local school improvement system.
8	Sufficient financial contributions	LA needs to support the development of the partnership with funding and/or capacity.
9	Structures to enable partnership activity	LA needs to work with schools to develop a multi-tiered structure that will work in their local context. LA can ensure that local school improvement system is high quality and credible.

What do we mean by “an effective local school improvement system”?



What are the key challenges we have seen to the development of effective Local School Improvement Systems?

Supporting conditions not in place

- **Lack of confidence of LA** to take on and claim this new role
- **Lack of LA capacity**, or advisory capacity already diminished beyond the point of no return
- **Fragmentation has taken place and suspicion engrained**, key players looking after their own organisations
- **No driving force of school leaders with LA to develop a new vision for this changed landscape.**

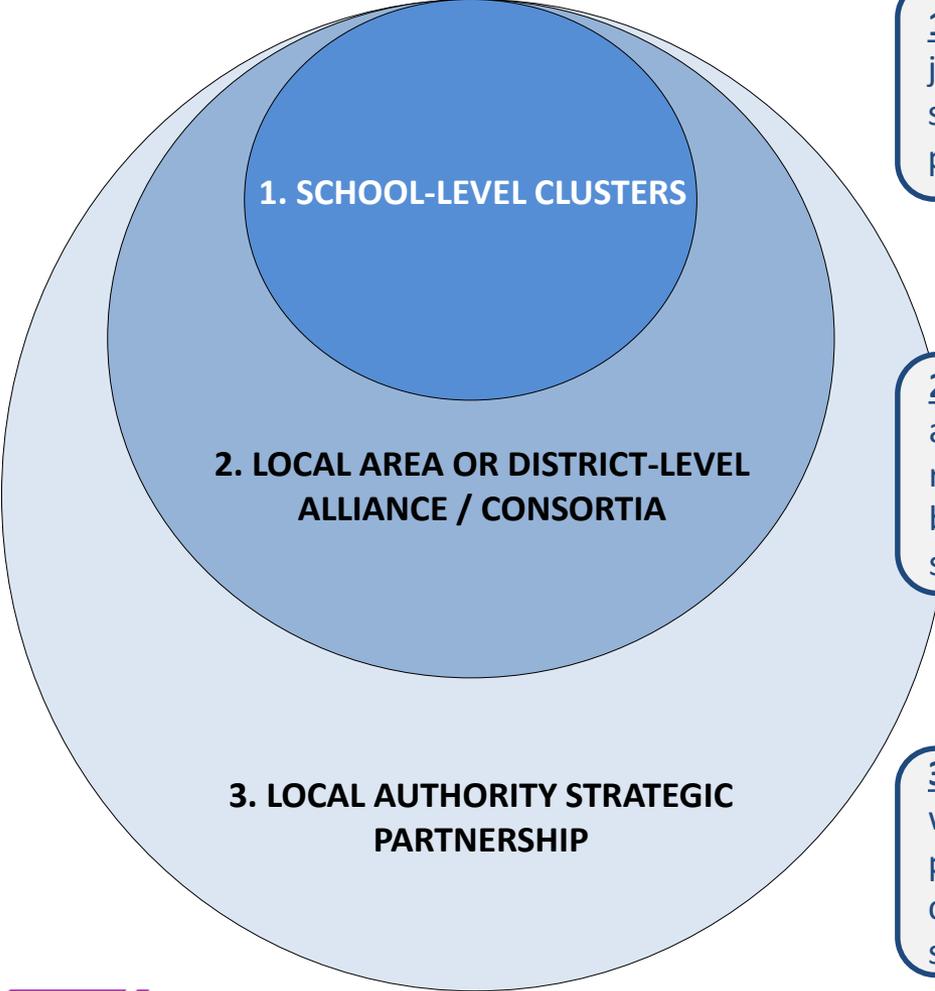
Lack of capacity to work with schools

- **School level capacity stretched beyond acceptable levels** to be able to work with others
- **“schools-led” being defined as “schools-only”** with resulting pressure on schools

Lack of partnership capacity or activity

- **Lack of finances** to co-ordinate support and support schools
- **Lack of capacity and time** to make the partnership structures work
- **Lack of quality assurance and evaluation**, uncertainty about what works and why

Partnership structures at three different levels



1. SCHOOL-LEVEL CLUSTERS

1. School-level clusters...for peer review, mutual support, joint practice development and moderation, leadership and staff development opportunities, and to enable efficient procurement of school improvement support

2. LOCAL AREA OR DISTRICT-LEVEL ALLIANCE / CONSORTIA

2. Local area or district-level alliances...co-ordination across a number of clusters, sharing data and intelligence, reviewing the health of clusters, support and challenge, brokering and deploying support for vulnerable schools, system leader development, monitoring and evaluation

3. LOCAL AUTHORITY STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

3. Strategic partnership...to co-ordinate and identify area-wide priorities, develop a shared vision, involve key players, promote effective communication, develop system leader capacity, link to other key priorities, and promote sustainability

Sustainable partnerships for the future?

Positive reasons for considering school-owned companies...

- Hard-wires partnership working into a formal structure
- Partnership should endure beyond existing personnel and relationships
- Formal status can bring credibility with schools and external partners
- Creates an entity to employ staff and enter into contracts
- Enables more transparent conversation with schools about what it costs to deliver certain services

Potential challenges to consider...

- Apparent complexity of transition process
- Whether new formal structure will deliver transformation in school improvement support or end up being 'more of the same'
- Future costs of school improvement support – will schools be willing to pay?
- Will local system have the capacity to deliver the support and have credibility with schools?

Thank you



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