



 **Pathways**

A Guide to Effective Collaboration

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About the author

Suzanne is the former headteacher of one of the UK's first government flagship National Teaching Schools and as leader of a large, successful primary school in London she led the school to outstanding status (Ofsted 2011). She followed this with the award of National Leader of Education in 2012. Suzanne has won many awards and accolades for her work and is the author of various publications.

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Who is this guide for?

This guide is mainly aimed at headteachers and Senior Leadership Teams, but those collaborating might also include middle leaders, other teachers, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and other educational organisations.

Acknowledgements

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Good quality collaboration

This guide aims to explain some of the different types of collaborative partnerships that can exist between schools and to clarify what National Teaching Schools do. It also provides tips and tools to improve collaboration between multi-school partnerships such as clusters of schools, teaching schools, federations, academy chains, etc.



Introduction

How can collaboration help to support school improvement?

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Helen Keller

In 2012, Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, delivered a speech to the Schools Network discussing the importance of partnerships between schools. He described such partnerships as “an opportunity for schools to work together to develop teaching and learning in ways which meet common and localised needs to support and challenge each other”. There are already many schools which collaborate on an informal basis, and according to the 2009 *Better Together* DCSF study¹ into collaboration, these partnerships provide a strong basis for the development of more formal and effective collaborative partnerships. This guide aims to support schools to develop these more lasting collaborations of “... clusters of schools accepting responsibility for self-improvement for the cluster as a whole”.²



Part 1: What does the research say?

Collaboration for school improvement

In 2006 the *NCSL commissioned research into the effects of collaboration for improving schools in complex and challenging circumstances. Ainscow, Muijs and West³ defined these schools as those that were “not well served by existing educational arrangements”. The study found that:

- There was strong evidence that collaboration widens opportunities for learners.
- There was strong evidence of impact on pupils’ attainment, achievement and engagement in some groups of schools.
- Collaboration needs to be strategic and is “not a straightforward option”.

This guide sets out to support any school which may be considering formal partnerships to take a strategic view of collaboration in order to effect school improvement.

Collaboration for professional development

Linked closely with school improvement is the opportunity for professional development of teaching practices. Teachers are used to sharing good practice both within and between schools. However, senior leaders will know that the success of this method is varied. David Hargreaves’ four ‘thinkpieces’ on a self-improving school system using effective inter-school partnerships identifies ‘joint practice development’ (JPD) as one of the most effective ways of improving teachers’ professional practice.⁴ He identifies three features of JPD thus:

- A **joint** activity, in which two or more people interact and influence one another.
- An activity that focuses on teachers’ professional **practice**, i.e. what they do, not merely what they know.
- A **development** of the practice, not simply a transfer of it from one person or place to another, and so a form of school improvement.

Collaborative partnerships of schools provide a vehicle for senior leaders to identify those who have strengths, talents, skills and the capacity to work with others, so that the sharing of expertise benefits all teachers across the network.



Examples of collaborative partnerships

There are many different types of formal and informal partnerships that have been formed to meet the needs of the schools. Some are formed through geographical links and others through specialisms. This guide cannot attempt to include all of them, but has explored three of the more established collaborations to provide an overview of the kinds of ways schools are working together to improve teaching and learning.

1. Teaching schools

This collaboration is formed of schools who work together within a teaching school alliance which can be cross-phase, such as feeder secondary schools or type (e.g. a special school). The alliance is formed by a lead teaching school and headteacher which must have an outstanding Ofsted judgement. The alliance will also be supported by strategic partners that may include HEIs or other specialist organisations. A common misconception of a National Teaching School is that it is only responsible for training teachers. However, this is only one (albeit important) area of its work. The remit of teaching school alliances crosses six areas:

- Initial teacher training (using *School Direct, *SCITT or other school-based training routes).
- School-to-school support.
- Succession planning and talent management.
- Continuing professional development (CPD).
- Designation and deployment of *SLEs. SLEs are middle or senior leaders who will support the *leadership* of an area of teaching and learning where it is needed in another school, i.e. they are strategic rather than the former Advanced Teaching Skills.
- Research and development.

All schools can benefit from the work of designated teaching schools by contacting the nearest alliance in their area. A list of all designated teaching schools can be found at the National College for Teaching and Leadership website:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/docinfo?id=154985&filename=teaching-schools-designations.pdf>

Note that currently applications for National Teaching School status have closed with cohort 4 but it is still possible to join an existing alliance. Initial teacher training programmes such as School Direct and School-centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) are ongoing.

2. Federations

Federations are where two or more schools decide to form a collaboration. There are two types of federations (under the Education Act 2002), — ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ federations.

A hard federation is where the schools operate under a single governing body, but otherwise retain independence through individual funding and a unique reference number (URN). They can have coordinated Ofsted inspections, although the schools will be reported on individually.

A soft federation is, as the name implies, a less formal collaboration between two or more schools which retain their separate governing bodies. The individual schools’ governing bodies delegate responsibility to a joint committee and are responsible for monitoring the joint committee’s work.

Schools may decide to collaborate in this way for a variety of reasons, for example:

- Improvement of standards (particularly where one school has a weaker performance and is being supported by the stronger).
- Financial (i.e. economies of scale, such as with smaller rural schools).

Schools wishing to collaborate in this way must conform to a number of federation regulations. Guidance on this can be found here:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/doc/guidance%20on%20the%20collaboration%20arrangements%20maintained%20schools%20and%20further%20education%20bodies%20england%20regulations%202007.doc>

3. Academies and academy chains

There are three models of converter academies:

- Stand-alone
- Part of an Umbrella Trust
- Multi-Academy Trust

Stand-alone converters

The name is a little misleading as the DfE requires a school wishing to convert to academy status to work with another school to bring about an improvement in standards in either or both schools. The schools can be cross-phase. For example, a secondary and its feeder primary and the support can be reciprocal or one-way. Academies have more freedoms than maintained schools, such as the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff; freedom for delivery of the curriculum; and the ability to change the lengths of terms and school days.

Umbrella Trust

Each school in this collaboration will be an academy. Each school retains its own individuality and ethos whilst benefiting from the specialities of another school in the trust. For example, the use of specialist resources from a large secondary school, such as sports coaches, or a school business manager, could support small primaries in geographical proximity.

The Umbrella Trust could appoint members of the governing body throughout the trust and thus have shared governance or structure a joint procurement policy in order to reduce costs throughout the collaboration.

Multi-Academy Trust

A hard federation of academies is called a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). A MAT is a charitable company which operates more than one academy. MATs can operate schools in more than one local authority area, cross-phase and type. A single board of directors or trustees has legal responsibility for all the academies but can delegate some powers to a local governing body committee responsible for each academy in the trust. However, the directors of a MAT usually retain responsibility for aspects such as budgeting, curriculum and procurement, thereby ensuring consistency.

A group of schools can convert to a MAT or single schools can opt to join an existing MAT.

For more information:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-information-for-schools>



Part 2: Case studies

1 The National SCITT Primary Consortium:

A teaching school consortium under the SCITT programme.

Organisation:



Fact Box:

Number of schools in collaboration: 53

Location of collaboration:
National, divided into six geographical regions

Focus of partnership:
Initial teacher training

Management Board (MB):

To ensure consistency of ethos, each region has a headteacher representing a group of schools that are members of the management board, chaired by the academic manager. The board provides strategic direction and reviews the data, development of the course and progress of action planning based on strengths and needs of the consortium.

Regions:

Each region also has a lead mentor to facilitate and coordinate the mentoring within the region. Some of these regions, such as the South West, include rural schools which are geographically far apart and the lead mentors use expertise in the schools across the region to give trainees a full and rounded programme.

Teacher training:

The teacher training is predominantly based in schools with school-based training programmes supported by regional training in partnership schools in addition to two central training weeks at Nottingham University. In addition to their home school, regions use the other schools within the partnership to provide an alternative experience, key stage and mentor for six weeks in the spring term before returning to their host school. Mentors

from different schools also pair up in order to jointly observe trainees, thereby maintaining consistency of judgements. They also meet termly in regions in order to analyse and reflect on their mentoring practice and assessment; this provides excellent joint professional development.

The Ofsted inspection in 2011 highlighted the following as the key strengths of the programme:

- The high-quality central and regional-based training delivered by knowledgeable and inspirational speakers which enables trainees to have a good understanding of different aspects of education, such as how to manage pupils' behaviour and how to teach pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- The system of joint observations which enables the provider to make accurate assessments of the trainees against the standards and which provides an accurate basis to judge trainees' achievement.

Drawbacks and challenges:

- Size of partnership across wide geographical area makes regular access difficult, and so deep understanding of each school's work and ethos is a pitfall.

“The will to surmount this has been strong and almost all heads have spoken about the gains made from the collaboration.”

Professor Philip Hood (Academic Manager).

Benefits:

- Sharing learning and expertise with peers across the partnership.
- Collaboration both between schools and also between beginner and experienced teachers in research projects such as the Esmée Fairbairn funded portraits project.

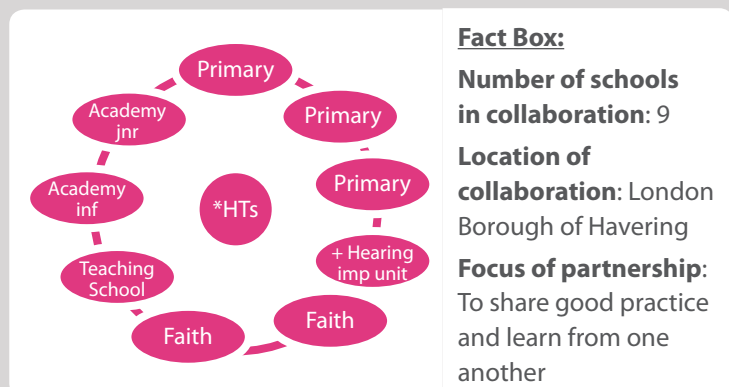
“Underpinning it all is a sense of a ‘family’ of schools working together because they believe in a particular process, in this case giving beginner teachers the best possible start.”

Professor Philip Hood (Academic Manager).

2 The Upminster and Cranham Cluster

Partnership: A collaboration for school improvement.

Organisation:



This partnership was developed from an established informal network of schools. The headteachers from the schools already met half termly, to provide leadership support to each other. The group allocated each headteacher to be a delegate at local authority strategy meetings (i.e. funding forum, health and safety, etc.). The delegate would report back to the whole group, thereby maximising time spent out of school.

In 2012, as the local authority shrank, the group decided to develop the partnership to a more formal collaboration. The schools in the collaboration are individually very different (see model above). They started by looking at the direction the group wanted to take, the needs and strengths of its network and the national initiatives that were common to all the schools in the group. The partnership, although consisting of a wide range of schools with their own strong individual identities, is one strongly built on openness and trust. For example, they use a shared e-repository for depositing key information, completed actions, templates, etc.

Current focus:

A major action for the group was the preparation for the implementation of the new curriculum. The partnership used the strengths of its middle leaders to support those less confident, and coordinated a series of networking meetings, which all staff from the partnership attended. The headteachers agreed the aims of the meetings and shared this with the staff involved in order that they had a common purpose.

Drawbacks and challenges:

- Time allocation for meetings.
- Joint INSET days – difficult to allocate with time pressures but also with individual school *SEF needs.
- Accountability for own school versus competing demands of partnership.

Benefits:

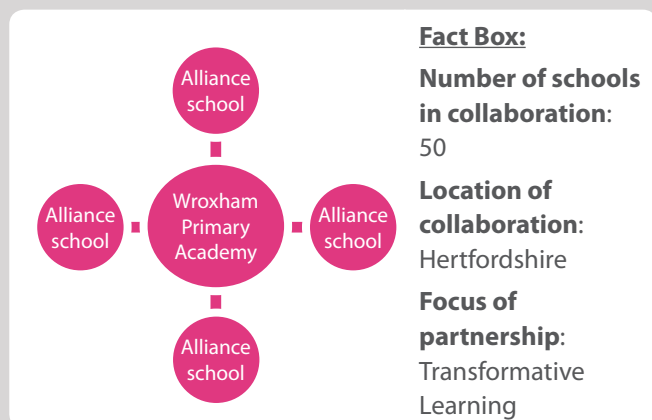
- The opportunity to genuinely share work so schools are not duplicating effort.
- The sense of 'not-alone-ness'. You can see that everyone is facing the same challenges and getting a sense of how colleagues are overcoming them or how they are learning to live with them.
- Being able to have an impact beyond your own school and give that opportunity to staff within your schools.
- An absolutely invaluable bridge that takes you beyond your own school community and opens up a whole new world of learning from others – but in a truly equal fashion.

The headteachers in this collaboration were eager to state that the benefits 'far outweighed' any challenges.



3 The Wroxham Teaching School Alliance

Organisation:



The Wroxham School is a one-form entry primary academy with a nursery in Hertfordshire. Wroxham was designated as a teaching school in July 2011 and was judged outstanding by Ofsted in May 2013.

Wroxham has established a Transformative Learning Alliance that comprises 50 primary and secondary schools. The ethos of the alliance is built upon the leadership principles examined within *Creating Learning without Limits* (2012), co-authored by Alison Peacock, the headteacher of the Wroxham School, with colleagues from the University of Cambridge.

The alliance offers:

- Sustained professional learning opportunities in primary mathematics, working in partnership with NCETM (the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics and NRICH (see <http://nrich.maths.org> for more information). Key stage 2 results for schools participating in this project will be analysed in the autumn term.
- Leadership and Language for Learning.
- Research study groups for headteachers and senior leaders across the alliance. These groups are free for alliance members to attend and are led by a consultant headteacher.
- A Research Lesson Study project in partnership with the National Teacher Enquiry Network. This project has focused on improving teaching through a close focus on improving outcomes for specific targeted children. Three participating schools have been inspected in the last year and each school improved an Ofsted grade or retained outstanding status.
- Intensive support for schools, brokered by the teaching school.

→ School improvement through a combination of coaching and SLE support.

→ Ongoing professional learning and engagement with research.

In September 2013, the teaching school was the appropriate body for primary newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in the alliance. By September 2014, the alliance will support and mentor 20 School Direct and SCITT teachers in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire and the University of Nottingham.

The headteachers of three further primary schools have remained in post following sustained coaching from one of the consultant headteachers who is a strategic partner within the alliance. These headteachers are all colleagues who had previously considered resignation. Since September 2012, the five primary schools that the teaching school has worked most closely with have all improved when inspected by Ofsted. Two schools have moved from serious weaknesses to good and three have moved from satisfactory to good.

Reference:

Swann, M., Peacock, A., Hart, S. and Drummond, M.J. (2012) *Creating Learning without Limits*. Open University Press.

Drawbacks and challenges to Wroxham (lead teaching school):

Low/no capital funding means that space in such a small school is limited so that:

- there is difficulty in hosting large numbers attending conferences and training
- the school has run out of office space due to the extra staff that have been employed (consultant headteacher, an SLE and additional admin staff).

Benefits:

- High-quality professional learning for the school's own teaching teams.
- Raised performance/attainment due to 'open house' sharing of learning.
- Children are used to explaining their thinking and learning due to the many visitors.

“The benefits of working in collaboration with a wide variety of schools are huge. The prime benefit has been for our own school.”

Alison Peacock (Headteacher of The Wroxham School)

Achieving effective collaboration

There are three steps to ensure that your partnership starts, then builds on secure foundations:

Stage 1: Trust

It is essential that all partners in the collaboration feel secure and that even if one partner is the driver in the relationship, all input is valued. Time pressures in schools mean that any partnership meetings need to be purposeful and productive so that the core business of teaching and learning remains the focus for all schools. Therefore, any partnership needs to ensure that they:

- commit to a common set of values and goals
- are open to sharing policies, protocols, resources
- adhere to confidentiality within the group
- ensure that agendas are purposeful and actions are minuted and shared in a timely way
- are accountable in terms of commitment to the group.

These principles are important to state (see **Tool 1**) and can be summarised in an agreement such as a Memorandum of Understanding (see **Tool 2**).

Stage 2: Audit of strengths and needs

Any partnership will have common needs as well as those specific to the individual school. Concern that the group needs will compete with that of the individual school may result in a lack of commitment. Therefore, it is important that once the partnership has agreement of its principles of working, an audit should be undertaken against the agreed goals of the group. The audit works best if:

- it is undertaken by a trusted third party professional
- it uses a common set of criteria used with each member of the partnership
- it is not judgemental but factual
- it is then analysed for strengths and areas for development
- it is shared openly with the group.

See Partnership Aims Audit, Partnership Audit and Audit Analysis (**Tools 3–5**).

Stage 3: Action planning

As with any good school improvement plan, the audit analysis should lead to a partnership action plan. The action plan should:

- link closely to the partnership goals
- include all partners in the collaboration
- clearly identify leaders from across the partnership to take ownership of the action and record this information in a chart or spreadsheet
- ensure that progress is regularly reviewed
- be flexible in order that adaptations can be made in view of unplanned and unpredictable situations that arise in the day-to-day running of the school.

See Partnership Action Plan (**Tool 6**).





Part 3: Tools for effective collaboration

Tool 1: Principles Exemplar

Principles of Partnership Work

Through our school partnership we have the opportunity to work together professionally to share good practice and to learn from one another by focusing on key aspects of our work.

Headteachers and senior leaders in the partnership have created a Partnership Action Plan to show how we can build on these principles with some focused activities. We have also created an audit to show the range of partnership work undertaken and how that contributes to the *xx (insert number)* values that our collaboration can promote.



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Tool 2: Memorandum of Understanding Exemplar

Memorandum of Understanding

(insert name of collaboration)

This collaboration has been formed to support *(insert numbered/bullet pointed foci of partnership, i.e. joint professional development/teacher training)* across the partnership.

All schools in the collaboration are committed to:

(insert numbered or bullet pointed list of agreed commitments e.g. supporting the professional development of all schools in the partnership).

All schools in the collaboration undertake to support the partnership in the following ways:

1. Ensure the attendance of the headteacher or senior leader at *(termly/half termly)* meetings.
2. Contribute to the development of the partnership strategy and action plans.
3. Share *(CPD/JPD)* opportunities aligned with the partnership action plan with the collaboration.
4. Contribute to agreed projects where appropriate by negotiation.
5. Contribute to the development of new initiatives agreed by the partnership.

All schools in the collaboration will receive:

1. Support from the other schools in the partnership.
2. The opportunity to involve staff in *(CPD/JPD)*.

All schools in the partnership will commit to a *(insert agreed term of collaboration e.g. two years)* in the first instance, with xx *(insert number)* term's notice if they wish to withdraw from the partnership.

School name:

Signature of headteacher:



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Tool 3: Partnership Aims Audit

Partnership aim	Strengths	Through which forum?	Needs	Who can help?
<i>e.g. Collaboration has effective provision for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities</i>	<i>e.g. Speech and language therapist</i>			
			<i>Training for TAs</i>	<i>Maryland Special School</i>
<i>e.g. Collaboration meets every teacher's professional needs and development</i>				



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Tool 4: Partnership Audit

Name of school	Potential strengths offered to partnership	Potential development needs	Notes
Burford Teaching School	SLE for maths	Specialist support for pupils with autism	Eight new pupils admitted to Year 8 from out of borough. Support needed for both teachers and TAs



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Tool 5: Audit Analysis

Area of need	Provider of support	Additional notes
Higher-achieving maths enrichment for Upper key stage 2	SLE for mathematics from Burford Teaching School Alliance	SLE to work with maths leaders across the alliance to put together programme of CPD for Upper key stage 2 teachers. Impact to be measured through progress made from baseline to end of term assessments
High proportion of families needing support (pupils issues varied – include school refusers, those with emotional difficulties from family break-ups, bereavement)	Home-school support worker to be employed across the partnership	*SBM at Marygreen Academy to research funding streams. Schools to pool funds for salary and training. Marygreen to lead on application and interview process with St Mary's RC and Fairsmead Primary HTs as selection panel members



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Tool 6: Partnership Action Plan

Partnership aim	Action/Objective	Named responsibility	Review date	Action/Notes
Collaboration has effective SEND provision	INSET day to be organised for joint CPD	Greensbury Special School *DHT	October half term	Provisional date agreed as xx/xx. All schools to send this date out to parents in their usual way by xx/xx. Greensbury DHT to provide programme for the day by xx/xx. All partners to bring evidence of impact to review meeting in October
	Online course to be purchased and completed by all TAs supporting SEND pupils	SENCO at St Mary's RC	5 th January	Resource reviewed by all school's SLTs and agreed. *SBM at St Mary's to purchase resource on partnership's behalf (bulk buy purchase saving of 25%). SENCO to arrange series of training sessions at St Mary's and explain baseline/end of term assessment process. All Partners to bring evidence of impact to review meeting in January

*Glossary

SCITT: School-centred Initial Teacher Training

This programme enables graduates to undertake their training to qualified teacher status within a school environment. Some programmes, but not all, also award a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) qualification. The programmes cover primary, middle and secondary age ranges and are undertaken in a school consortium. The entrance requirements and funding availability is the same as for PGCE courses and applications are also made through UCAS Teaching Training, (formerly *GTTR).

<http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options/school-based-training/school-centred-training>

School Direct:

There are two routes for School Direct teacher training, both undertaken in a school environment:

- **Unsalariated** is for graduates who want to undertake training in a school environment. They may be eligible for a bursary of up to £20,000 or a scholarship of £25,000 to support them while they train.
- **Salaried** is an employment-based route for experienced graduates with at least three years' work experience. They will earn a salary while they train.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options/school-based-training/school-direct.aspx>

SLE: Specialist Leader of Education

SLEs are outstanding middle and senior leaders in positions below the headteacher, who have at least two years' experience in a particular field of expertise and in leadership. SLEs must have the capacity, skills and commitment to support other individuals or teams in similar positions in other schools, and be able to recognise outstanding leadership in specialisms.

<http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/index/support-for-schools/specialist-leaders-of-education-programme>

Commonly used terms

HT: headteacher

DHT: deputy headteacher

SBM: school business manager

NCSL: National College of School Leadership now renamed as National College for Teaching and Leadership

SEF: self-evaluation form

GTTR: Graduate Teacher Training Registry now replaced by UCAS Teacher Training



Further reading

Pathways Guide to Lesson Observation

Pathways Guide to Effective CPD

Sources that underpin many of the principles in this guide:

NCSL (2005) *A study of hard federations of small primary schools*.

Hargreaves (2012) *A self-improving school system: towards maturity*. NCSL.

Arnold (2006) *Better Together: Schools in collaboration: federations, collegiate and partnerships*. EMIE at NFER.

Buck (2012) *Green Shoots*.

Ainscow, Muijs and West (2006) *Using collaboration as a strategy for improvement: schools in complex and challenging circumstances. What makes the difference?* NCSL.

Swann, M., Peacock, A., Hart, S. and Drummond, M.J. (2012) *Creating Learning without Limits*. Open University Press.

<http://www.essex.gov.uk/Business-Partners/Primary-schools-excellence/Options-for-collaboration/Pages/Default.aspx>

<http://schoolgovernors.thekeysupport.com/school-improvement-and-strategy/school-organisation/federation-collaboration/collaboration-between-secondary-and-primary-schools>



Endnotes

- 1 Todman, Harris, Carter and McCamphill (2009) *Better Together*. DCSF © Eastern Leadership Centre 2009.
- 2 Hargreaves, D. H. (2010) *Creating a self-improving school system*. National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.
- 3 Ainscow, Muijs and West (2006) *Using collaboration as a strategy for improvement: schools in complex and challenging circumstances. What makes the difference?* NCSL © NCSL, 2006.
- 4 Hargreaves, D.H. (2012) *A self-improving school system: towards maturity*. NCSL.