

Helping policymakers deliver on their promises: a guide to delivering at scale by Charlotte Jones and Matt Davis

School improvement at scale: getting results from a school-led delivery model



Foreword

A new delivery infrastructure

The concept of school-led improvement is firmly embedded within the English education system, providing a compelling philosophy for how schools change and raise standards. It puts the onus on autonomous schools, leaders and practitioners to lead improvement locally, collaborating to use their best expertise, practice and resources for the benefit of all schools in an area. In other words, school partnerships – from structures like Teaching School Alliances to agents such as Local Leaders of Education – are England's new delivery infrastructure for school improvement. It's an infrastructure based on lateral support, peer-to-peer collaboration and highly decentralised decision-making.

The school-led system at scale

We see two challenges emerging if this locally led system is to deliver results at scale. Firstly, policymakers will always need to deliver national priorities: at-scale initiatives that tackle systemic challenges or deliver new political commitments. So how can policymakers use this highly decentralised, lateral infrastructure to deliver on national-level promises?

Secondly, the impact of school-led improvement so far has been inconsistent. At Education Development Trust we have been privileged to work with leaders and teachers who deliver tangible differences through the school-led system. However, we know from conversations with practitioners across England that there is a challenge in replicating smaller-scale successes so that every school is supported and improved through this approach.

Getting beyond the theory

In part, these weaknesses are a result of a lack of research and analysis in this area. While schools are committed to the approach and there is a lot of innovative theoretical thinking about the school-led system, little is known about the practicalities of implementing this vision. For us, there is an urgent need to get beyond the theory. This is not just a concern for practitioners and those working out 'in the system'. We know that policymakers are passionate about schools as delivery partners, but they tell us it's a challenge to remodel their delivery systems to fit the new school-led landscape.

How change happens at scale

Scaling this approach so that the benefits are felt consistently and universally has become an important next step for the English school system. If we have moved beyond initiatives such as the National Strategies, where large-scale 'outside' support helped provide common frameworks for improvement, what can government now do to effect change at scale? If all the resources and expertise are to be found within schools themselves, who ensures that local efforts are aligned to shared national priorities?

This handbook aims to cut through complexity, offering a framework for implementation that will drive results as well as system-wide learning. At the heart of the new framework is a radical redefinition of delivery roles (see table 1).

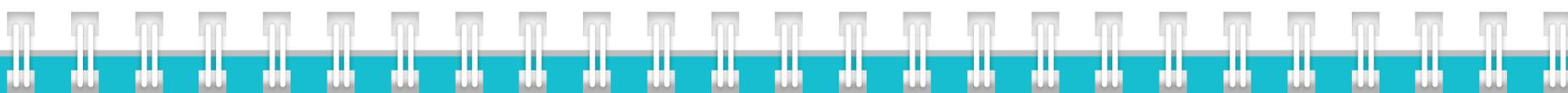
The aim of this handbook

Our aim is to draw attention to the implications of this shift, asking new questions about delivery at scale and sharing a proven framework for making change stick. It is the product of an ongoing dialogue between the authors and experts at Education Development Trust, who have worked together over the past five years to design, deliver and reflect on school-led delivery models across England. We continue to trial these approaches on a range of programmes, and invite partners and colleagues to join us in the debate and improvement of the ideas.

**Anna Searle, Director,
Education Services Group**

TABLE 1: REDEFINITION OF DELIVERY ROLES

| Role | Level | From | To |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Stewardship and coordination | Policymaker or contractor level | A management role – top-down delivery of targets and intervention packages | A lean team, providing vision and direction; facilitating cycles of improvement; catalysing and scaling best practices for the benefit of the whole system |
| Change agent | Schools – local level | Recipients at the end of the delivery chain – receiving packages of support to tailor to school need | Schools as co-creators of content and leaders of collaborative learning |



Introduction



Towards school-led delivery models

Stories of success

The school-led system is based on the idea that to 'unleash greatness' in our schools, teachers and leaders use their professional autonomy and capacity to share their expertise with fellow professionals, helping them improve. Who better to help than someone who has recently overcome the same challenges? Powerful stories of change are emerging, including the London Schools story and the National Leaders of Education initiative, about which we have written elsewhere.

Education Development Trust has been working with policymakers and practitioners to test, scale and continuously improve approaches to school-led delivery, so we've seen first hand how well the new delivery infrastructure can work.

Getting results – local area transformation

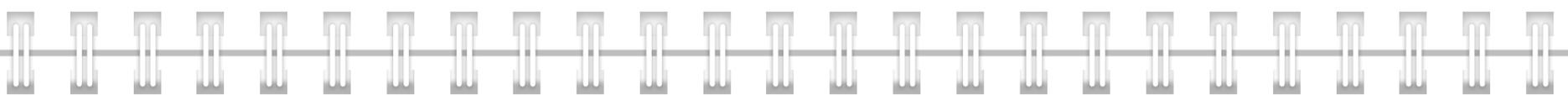
We have had the pleasure of working with committed teachers, schools and system leaders around – and beyond – England who are driving results through school collaboration. For example, in Cumbria we're working with a range of inspirational system leaders, supporting them to strengthen school collaboration through new cluster-based structures. In Haringey and Essex, we are helping educators drive results at scale by assisting them create brand new portfolio leadership roles that coordinate local system resources against common objectives. Central to their success has been a recognition that the school-led system often needs to be built afresh: they have successfully negotiated new roles, new accountabilities, new practices and new relationships.

New directions – national priorities and the school-led system

Inspired by successes to date, policymakers and commissioners are now looking to deliver national policy objectives – and large-scale programmes – using the same school-led principles. The philosophy is the same: school-based staff provide the delivery capacity, the delivery model and the local expertise to drive change and improvement at scale, working across networks of peer schools.

Education Development Trust has been supporting governments in England and Wales to trial this approach over the past five years. In Wales, we have supported the government to reach 55% of schools with a new curriculum support package, using networks of school partnerships. And a school-led delivery mechanism

has been central to recent and current initiatives in partnership with the Department for Education, including delivering the new Accelerate (Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund) programme; the National Languages Programme; Closing the Gap: Test and Learn; the Core Maths Support Programme; and Future Teaching Scholars.



Getting results at scale

Delivery challenges in a school-led system

Tuning the school-led system to deliver

In the past, national education reform programmes drew on new public management principles to deliver large-scale results. For example, the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy in the 1990s and early 2000s led systemic change from a large central team. Priorities, targets and interventions in literacy and numeracy were managed through a regional infrastructure, and cascaded to local authorities and ultimately down to schools and teachers.

But in a school-led, highly decentralised system, the delivery philosophy fundamentally shifts (see table 2).

How can the school-led system deliver national reform priorities and programmes?

With no commanding centre, a new set of questions comes into view:

- How do we get the system aligned and tuned to deliver, so that all schools focus on clear national improvement priorities?
- What are the key drivers, structures and conditions for whole system improvement, while respecting school autonomy and empowerment?
- How do we ensure coherence and quality in the same way that programmes such as the National Strategies achieved in the past?

To answer these questions calls for much closer examination of the changing roles, accountabilities and relationships involved in a school-led system. In the next section we explain these changing roles.

TABLE 2: DELIVERY PHILOSOPHY SHIFTS

| New public management | School-led system |
|---|---|
| Top down, centrally implemented | Locally owned |
| Delivery chains | Networks, partnerships, ecosystems |
| Accomplishing objectives, driving performance | Solving focused problems, cycles of improvement |
| A methodology with a route map | A way of doing things that provides a compass |
| Control | Connect |



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