

**Research project for Academies Division,
Department for Education and Skills**

**REPLICATING EFFECTIVE
SCHOOL PRACTICE AS A TOOL
TO IMPROVE THE WEAKEST
SCHOOLS**

October 2005

1. This report extends the earlier study of the role of federations in turning round the weakest schools (Federation: a cost-effective way of turning round the weakest schools DfES Report, 11.04; Seminar 3.05 - “the Federation Study” hereinafter). The **Federation Study** focused on a particular type of federation: not voluntary associations or communities of practice, but situations in which highly-effective lead schools take over very weak schools which, over a long period, have proved resistant to other efforts to improve them. The main conclusions were:
 - 1.1. that such take-overs (tentatively termed “support federations”) have the potential to bring about significant improvement in a cost-effective way;
 - 1.2. that support federations operate a standard, recognisable model for bringing about improvement. The Study offered a matrix (Section 3.2) summarising that model, reproduced and extended here as section 4;
 - 1.3. that lead schools shared a number of key characteristics: the Study proposed a list of these characteristics and turned them into a set of criteria for identifying potential lead schools.

In proposing that support federations become a significant part of the national strategy for improving the weakest schools, the Federation Study raised a number of issues, foremost among them the question of agency: which body should have national strategic oversight of very weak secondary schools, and thus who should require a particular school to be taken into a support federation, and with which lead partner school? This question remains on the table.

The current study (“the Replication Study”) adopts the language of the Federation Study: support federation, as defined above, and lead school and partner school(s) for the members of the federation.

It is the firm belief of all interviewees that all schools, lead as well as partner, have made more rapid progress in federation than they would have alone.

2. The **Replication Study** extends the investigation into the improvement methodology of support federations (1.2) by examining how the very good practices of the lead school are used to raise standards in the partner school and, in particular, by asking questions about the balance between replication and co-construction:
 - 2.1. Replication is taken to mean wiping the memory of the partner school and re-programming it - stopping its practices and replacing them with those of the lead partner. The presumption is that the practices of the partner school are diverse and ineffective, whereas those of the lead school are consistent and effective.
 - 2.2. Co-construction: school improvement programmes tend to reduce in impact as they are disseminated away from the pilot group, unless they are “co-constructed” (Stringfield and Datnow, 2000) - the design team in the lead school works with the partner school to create the most effective interaction between the programme design and local circumstances. This is a hard trick to bring off - a model which balances fidelity with flexibility.
 - 2.3. This brief study involved discussion with key players in five successful support federations and with officers of DfES and NCSL, and scrutiny of paperwork, during August and September 2005.

3. Findings

3.1. Although it is an over-simplification, it could be said that **principles and basic standard operating procedures (SOPs) are replicated, more sophisticated elements of practice are co-constructed or customised.**

3.2. Three inter-connected aspects of the lead school are invariably replicated:

3.2.1. leadership is replaced, for three reasons - firstly the support federation takes overall leadership away from the partner school; and secondly it is a fair assumption that the leadership of the partner school has been part of the problem and is unlikely to form part of the solution; and thirdly, unless effective leadership is secured, all subsequent investment may be wasted. There is no random "cull": the lead school audits the leadership of the partner school to identify individuals with promise who can be made to work the new way. A head (and often at least one other leader) in tune with the expectations and improvement methodology of the lead school is appointed, either from the leadership group of the lead school or by the recruitment of a like-minded person.

3.2.2. All lead schools recognise that central to the sorry state of the partner school are disorder, loss of confidence, and low and diminishing expectations. Every lead school therefore said that the one thing they replicated in addition to leadership was their ethos, which they went on to describe in two ways:

- behavioural ethos, the bringing of order, purpose and respect to an unruly setting by replicating the zero tolerance approach to behaviour management of the lead school, from day 1 (see 3.5.1);
- high expectations, challenging the culture of low expectation and powerlessness which invariably pervades every aspect of the partner school, staff and leadership as well as students. Everyone is inducted into the culture: in some federations, all new teachers work at the lead school for a week. Key values representing high expectations might be:
 - we encourage and celebrate achievement

- consistency
- we focus on the core business: we stop people going out of school all the time and get rid of the “everything but” culture of the partner school
- we empower our people within a framework of rules
- accountability follows empowerment
- we base decisions and actions on data and self-evaluation.

3.3. Because, at the point of federation, partner schools tend to suffer from the same complex of characteristics (see Annex), all support federations work quickly to establish four vital and inter-connected platforms. These are procedures and routines - standard operating procedures (SOPs) in the language of high reliability - to ensure basic competence and consistency. They are designed to operate simultaneously at school (management) level and at classroom (teacher) level (Hopkins and Harris 1997).

3.4. The four key platforms are behaviour, management (systems), teaching and curriculum and it is explained to partner school staff that these are the main set of levers to raise achievement, which is the aim of the whole improvement programme. Hopkins (2002) made it clear that one reason for the failure of efforts to improve weak schools is the “a la carte” approach: federations tackle all of these platforms, simultaneously.

3.5. The first two - behaviour and management (systems) - are introduced from day 1 and imported from the lead school: the partner school memory is wiped and re-programmed. The reason is that, without them, there is disorder and none of the more sophisticated measures will ‘take’:

3.5.1. the behavioural platform is an approach to behaviour management characterised by predictability: all staff apply absolutely consistent rules and routines of conduct and dress, and equally consistent tariffs for their infringement, inside the classroom and beyond. This system is explained to all staff before the term starts and to students on day 1. The system is explained as well as described - we need order so that ... but not negotiated. High levels of reinforcement and monitoring ensure compliance.

3.5.2. the management platform provides systems to ensure smooth running, so that teachers can spend the maximum time teaching: these are generally unsophisticated but their failure has a corrosive effect: electronic registration, rationalisation of meetings structures, ensuring bells work and lesson changes are reliable, timetables are understood and displayed, dining systems are civilised. Managers walk the school and intervene directly, for example, ensuring the disciplinary codes are followed and entering lessons frequently.

3.6. The aims of this very rapid set of replications are:

3.6.1. the rapid establishment of order, system and smooth running where previously there were disorder, diverse systems or no system;

3.6.2. to effect a very rapid rise in expectations, thereby persuading stakeholders, especially staff and pupils, that change is possible, real and beneficial. The false dawn the partner school has 'enjoyed' will have persuaded it that things cannot and will not change, from which it is but a short step to the prevailing myths of adequacy and uniqueness that characterise these schools - there are no other schools with the unique blend of disadvantages we have; when people come to realise this, they will see we are not doing too badly.

3.7. Work also begins on the other two platforms - teaching and curriculum - on day 1; these have elements that are replicated, but more is co-constructed because these are more complex and sophisticated aspects of school practice. The principles and basics are replicated but the detailed practice co-constructed.

3.8. The teaching platform comprises a set of expectations of teachers - how they will plan and deliver lessons, and how they will treat students. Basic SOPs are replicated: students will be greeted at the classroom door and their names will be used; clear objectives will be displayed for each lesson; ten features of a good lesson are displayed in all classrooms. A very rapid audit of teacher competence takes place, resulting in an analysis which is a variant on the following (table 1). Weak and blocking teachers are identified and appropriate action initiated.

Table 1: Audit summary: teacher competence

Teacher	Grade *	Evidence base
AB	2	OfSTED 04; SMT 13.10.05
CD	4	OfSTED 04; LEA review; SMT 26.9.05, 10.10.05
EF	3	?? weak evidence - need to confirm

1: reliably good or better teaching

3: satisfactory with better classes, frequently unsatisfactory

2: reliably satisfactory teaching

4: weak and/or unwilling to change

The more detailed aspects of practice are likely to be developed in partnership:

- what makes a good lesson at xxxx school - a policy for teaching
- what lesson planning format will be used.

From the very outset, the lead school ensures that strengths in the partner school are recognised and built on. One federation programme began with a session for all partner school staff, run by the lead school and entitled “what [name of partner] School knows”. The lead school thereby demonstrated to the partner school just how much intelligence it had about its strengths and weaknesses and about how to take improvement forward, and thereby gave it confidence to collaborate in its own improvement. While auditing practice and practitioners in the partner school, as well as identifying weaknesses, the lead school also identifies and grows areas of strength. Individuals whose strengths have not been recognised are acknowledged and brought out, sometimes blinking, into the light.

Observation programmes begin immediately to reinforce the expectations and identify strengths and weaknesses.

3.11 Like teaching, the curriculum platform also comprises a rapid, replication element and a longer-term component that is co-constructed.

3.11.1 the immediate introduction of grade enhancement strategies to raise achievement in the current Y11: new courses, revision classes, hoovering up coursework, Saturday classes, Easter schools,

mentoring individuals. These are mainly achieved through replication, including the transfer of schemes of work in some cases

3.11.2 beginning an immediate review of the appropriateness of the curriculum for the upcoming Y10 - the range of courses and pathways - and for early intervention in basic skills in KS3. This is more heavily co-constructed.

3.12 All schools interviewed said that, while these platforms are being established, an audit of needs is conducted, and anything that was needed is imported: professional development programmes, subject reviews, performance management systems, staff feedback questionnaires, subject schemes of work.

3.13 Once platforms are established, the subsequent development phase is characterised by increasing levels of co-construction and customisation. Since the ultimate purpose is to help the partner school become a self-managing and self-improving organisation, the underlying purpose of the federation is capacity building - such as through strategic planning and professional development. As the partner school's confidence and success grow, it begins to take control of the improvement agenda - but the lead school retains its oversight and challenge role, ensuring that expectations remain high, that messages are not distorted, and that the focus on the key levers for improvement is not blurred. Some federations described themselves as having symptoms of adolescence, with the "growing adult" developing independence and coming into conflict with the "parent". It remains to be seen how constructive these conflicts will be for both partners.

3.14 Section 4 expands and refines the improvement model for support federations presented in the Federation Study.

Annex 1

The Federation Study listed some of the attributes of the partner school (Appendix: from Reynolds, Hopkins, Potter and Chapman, 2001). The list included, at whole-school, including leadership, level:

- lack of the competences needed to improve
- unwillingness to accept evidence of failure
- blaming others - pupils, parents, LEA ...
- fear of change and of outsiders who embody it; a belief that change is for other people
- hence controlled by change rather than in control of it
- dysfunctional relationships, with cliques
- goals that are not plausible or relevant
- lack of academic focus
- passive about recruitment and training

- and at classroom level:

- a timetable that is not an accurate guide to academic time usage
- inconsistency, including some high-quality teaching
- pervasive low expectations
- low levels of teacher:pupil interaction about work
- pupils perceive teachers as not caring, praising etc.
- high noise levels and lots of non-work-related movement
- lots of negative feedback from teachers

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4: THE PROCESS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT BY SUPPORT FEDERATION

	Behaviour & attitudes	Curriculum	Teaching & Learning	Leadership & Management	Environment
<p>Platform-building phase²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>acknowledge failure</i> ▪ <i>face up to problems</i> ▪ <i>prepare action plan</i> ▪ <i>gain commitment</i> ▪ <i>raise expectations</i> ▪ <i>restore leadership and sound management</i> ▪ <i>establish basic competence through SOPs: key 'platforms' of behaviour, management, teaching, curriculum</i> <p>[One month]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ get students off the streets and into class ▪ replicate zero tolerance system ▪ SMT patrol during lessons - stop nomadism ▪ all staff patrol between lessons and meet/greet classes ▪ identify and exclude blockers/ringleaders ▪ clarify and insist on uniform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ intensive tactical approaches to grade enhancement in Y11: Easter revision classes, mentoring, revision guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ standard operating procedures for eg lesson starts, managing poor behaviour, marking ▪ establish 10 features of the good lesson ▪ audit teaching, identifying lead and weak teachers and blockers ▪ confront weak and blocking teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ replace leadership team ▪ confront partner school with realities ▪ re-shape (slim?) SMT with clear roles related to key areas eg T&L ▪ establish accountability and management lines for subject/year heads ▪ draw up action plan to raise achievement through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ data management ○ curriculum review ○ teaching quality ○ etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ clean-up campaign ▪ immediate removal of graffiti ▪ small-scale refurbs - quick wins
<p>Development phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>implement action plan</i> ▪ <i>raise morale/self-esteem</i> ▪ <i>building capacity for increased autonomy</i> <p>[9 - 12 months]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ monitor and reward good attendance ▪ establish support unit to head off exclusion ▪ improved consistency and quality of teaching create a culture of learning ▪ extend reward system to include effort, progress ▪ increase ceremonial (e.g. prize-giving) aspects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ introduce multi-GCSE and voc courses ▪ make KS3 curriculum more appropriate to needs of learners with low basic skills ▪ thorough review of SoW 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ define the good xxx school lesson ▪ use lead teachers to buddy/coach ▪ establish critical mass of <u>satisfactory</u> teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ create extended leadership group with AHT roles for T&L, assessment etc. ▪ build year head roles to focus on progress as well as welfare ▪ establish M&E procedures, especially for lesson observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ increase the amount of work on display ▪ suiting of rooms ▪ establishment of a rolling programme of dept refurbishment
<p>“Progress towards excellence”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>emergence from spec. measures</i> ▪ <i>restoration of self-management and self-improvement</i> <p>[Open-ended]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ involvement of student voice improves attitudes and commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ establish different KS4 pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ use expert teachers to build critical mass of <u>good</u> teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ extend lesson obs into fully-fledged QA system, with work scrutiny, annual dept reviews etc 	

Notes:

There may be a “parent and community links” column, but the actions taken are not so clear-cut or consistent between schools

