

Cabinet

Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	17 October 2018
	<p><u>Cabinet Member(s)</u> Andrew Parry – Cabinet Member for Economy, Education, Learning and Skills Lead Director(s)</p> <p><u>Lead Director(s)</u> Nick Jarman –Director for Children’s Services Andrew Reid – Assistant Director Schools and Learning</p>
Subject of Report	Defining the Relationship Between the Local Authority, Schools and Academies
Executive Summary	<p>This report sets out a proposed plan for a revised relationship between the Council and schools and academies across Dorset. The relationship is based on two levels of partnership: Family clusters of schools and a new school-led strategic School Improvement Board (SIB). Both are designed to bring about school improvement and will require the Council to start thinking about commissioning school improvement from within the school system itself. In other words, a school’s led system.</p> <p>The SIB will co-ordinate and identify area-wide priorities for school improvement, develop a shared vision, involve key players, promote effective communication, develop system leader capacity, link to other key priorities, and promote sustainability. The report requests that members support this key initiative by creating a new Strategic School Improvement Fund.</p> <p>Some 16 councils across the country have now moved to similar partnership arrangements for the delivery of school improvement (and in many cases, a range of other services). This strategy will put Dorset in the vanguard of key changes nationally.</p>
Impact Assessment: <i>Please refer to the protocol for writing reports.</i>	Equalities Impact Assessment: N/A (at this time). Use of Evidence: A consultation with headteachers took place on 09 July 2018. This has been followed up by presentations to headteachers on 20 and 27 September 2018. So far, the concept has received universal support; however, not all headteachers attended these events.

	<p>Budget: Annual grant of £100K to the Strategic School Improvement Fund.</p> <p>VAT implications may arise in relation to spending this money on academies or Multi-Academy Trusts.</p> <hr/> <p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council’s approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as: Current Risk: MEDIUM Residual Risk: MEDIUM</p> <hr/> <p>Outcomes:</p> <p>The desired outcome is a quantifiable improvement to Dorset’s schools.</p> <hr/> <p>Other Implications:</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the introduction of the new Dorset School Improvement Board (DSIB) as the key school-led strategic vehicle for commissioning school support in a mixed economy environment. This will mean effective partnership between stakeholders in relation to specific school improvement priorities can result in coherent support for schools that draws on the best quality and expertise from council and school-led providers. • Approve the creation of a new Strategic School Improvement Fund as a means of empowering the DSIB whilst demonstrating the Council’s commitment to the new strategy. It is recommended that the fund is allocated an initial budget of £100K in the first year. This funding would include the cost of providing an independent chair (£4.5K). Any further funding would need to come from the schools. • Approve the idea that all schools and academies in Dorset agree to be divided into a series of family clusters (or School Improvement Zones) based on the existing pyramid model. Each family cluster would be linked to a Teaching School Alliance (TSA) and a School Improvement Partner (SIP). Clusters will be subordinate to the DSIB and include all types of schools - with the aim of breaking down the barriers between academies and maintained schools. • Agree that the DSIB could ultimately facilitate the creation of a school-led partnership that has the potential to take on many of the functions currently delivered by the Schools and Learning service (school improvement, governor support, financial services, SEND, etc.). This could ultimately take the form of a joint venture company.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree that the Council will need to retain an important role in creating and nurturing the conditions in which capacity for increasingly school-led improvement can be sufficient to meet local need. • Agree that Family Partnership Zones (FPZ) should be realigned to converge with the school family clusters. • Agree that the School Improvement Service should re-configure as necessary in order to support the development of these family clusters. The role of partnership development is critical to the success of this project. • Agree that an offer could be made to Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole to join this initiative. This would require a pro-rata contribution to the Strategic School Improvement Fund.
Reason for Recommendation	To define better the relationship between the Council, schools and academies to bring about school improvement. To promote school authority in conformity with Government policy.
Appendices	Appendix 1: Dorset School Improvement Board Terms of Reference
Background Papers	N/A
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“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

Socrates

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report is a follow-up to the report entitled “The Relationship Between the Council, Schools and Academies” by the Director for Children’s Services, dated 07 March 2018. That report set out recommendations for taking forward the relationship between the Local Authority, schools and academies with the aim of improving standards across Dorset and to create a relationship which is mutually coherent and affable to the Council. This report now seeks to define exactly what this new relationship should look like.

1.2 In the March 2018 Members were asked to:

- Decide upon the relationship with schools which best suits the Council, its objectives and the communities which it serves and is affordable.
- Authorise officers to conduct a consultation with schools, academies, free schools etc to establish their needs and wants in terms of a relationship with the

Council.

- Assuming there is a critical mass of schools which can agree upon the kind of relationship wanted, instruct officers to bring a further report which synthesises and defines very clearly the relationship wanted by all parties.
- Authorise officers working where required with the Regional Schools Commissioner, to encourage smaller rural schools to federate as maintained schools or convert to academies to join/become Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), in order to improve economies of scale and sharing of expertise and resources.
- Wherever a headteacher is leaving or retiring from a small school, instruct officers to promote actively federation or joining a MAT; and that the policy henceforth becomes the default position of the Council.
- Accept the principle that sharing of risk and responsibility between the Council and schools needs to be rebalanced.

1.3 A workshop was held on 09 July 2018 to look at how the Local Authority can take forward its relationship with schools. The workshop was facilitated by The Staff College (the professional development arm of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services) and was attended by those head teachers who had expressed an interest at an earlier event held on 29 January 2018. It was clear from the views expressed at this event that schools are open to change and see the need to make better use of resources in order to set the conditions for school improvement. Some cynicism does, however, remain and it is abundantly clear that change must lead to tangible results and will require the full support of all parties.

1.4 The conversation with schools has been focussed around the ideas put forward in the seminal paper by David Hargreaves (2010): *Creating a Self-Improving Schools System*. This paper advocates a self-managing, self-improving schools’ system based around a series of ‘family clusters’. These are groups of schools that work within a partnership that is officially recognised by the Council. Further work at the strategic level has subsequently built on this to establish a new Dorset School Improvement Board (DSIB) and provide a broad consensus on the direction of travel the Council might wish to take.

1.5 This initiative is not about bringing schools into Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). It is only concerned with school improvement and does not touch on governance and finance. It will, however, aim to break down the barriers between schools and academies and bring economies of scale where appropriate. Schools can opt out of these arrangements.

1.6 The Academies Act 2010 confirms that the local authority has no statutory powers of intervention in academy schools but is expected to refer any concerns it may have to the Secretary of State. Additionally, under the Education Act 1996, the local authority is expected to secure “efficient” primary, secondary, and further education in order to meet the needs of the local population. There is also national recognition that local authorities have a strong strategic role as champions for parents, families and vulnerable pupils. The aim is that the new partnership is empowered by the academies themselves to act in the interests of school improvement. This ability to work with academies has the potential to enhance greatly the scope and value of school improvement across Dorset.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Approve the introduction of the new Dorset School Improvement Board (DSIB) as the key school-led strategic vehicle for commissioning school support in a mixed economy environment. Effective partnership between stakeholders in relation to specific school improvement priorities can result in coherent support for schools that draws on the best quality and expertise from council and school-led providers.
- Approve the creation of a new Strategic School Improvement Fund as a means of empowering the DSIB whilst demonstrating the Council's commitment to the new strategy. It is recommended that the fund is allocated an initial budget of £100K in the first year. This funding would include the cost of providing an independent chair (£4.5K). Any further funding would need to come from the schools.
- Approve the idea that all schools and academies in Dorset are divided into a series of family clusters (or School Improvement Zones) based on the existing pyramid model. Each family cluster would be linked to a Teaching School Alliance (TSA) and a School Improvement Partner (SIP). Clusters will be subordinate to the DSIB and include all types of schools - with the aim of breaking down the barriers between academies and maintained schools.
- Agree that the DSIB could ultimately facilitate the creation of a school-led partnership that has the potential to take on many of the functions currently delivered by the schools and learning service (school improvement, governor support, financial services, SEND etc.). This could ultimately take the form of a joint venture company.
- Agree that the Council will need to retain an important role in creating and nurturing the conditions in which capacity for increasingly school-led improvement can be sufficient to meet local need.
- Agree that Family Partnership Zones (FPZ) should be realigned to converge with the school family clusters.
- Agree that the School Improvement Service should re-configure as necessary in order to support the development of these family clusters. The role of partnership development is critical to the success of this project.
- Agree that an offer could be made to Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole to join this initiative. This would require a pro-rata contribution to the Strategic School Improvement Fund.

3.0 Timing

3.1 The conditions for change now exist. To date, 16 local authorities have entered into partnerships and Dorset could be in the vanguard of a change that is set to be the most significant since the 1988 Education Reform Act – leading the way in the South-West. Momentum is building – leading to the formation of the Association of Education Partnerships (AEP) on 14 September 2018. This new organisation provides the opportunity to learn from those Local Authorities that have already entered into a partnership arrangement. At the same time LGR provides a useful context within which to take forward the family cluster model for schools.

3.2 The DSIB came into existence on 20 October 2018 and the next meeting is 22

November 2018. There is potential for real momentum to be achieved if the creation of the Strategic School Improvement Fund was to be announced at this meeting. Following on from this schools would be invited to a meeting to confirm the revised cluster arrangements in February 2019. The new structure would then come into effect on 01 April 2019.

4.0 Background

4.1 The 07 March report sets out the backdrop to the need for a new strategic partnership between the LA and all local schools. The DSIB will provide a fulcrum around which a holistic school improvement model can develop and evolve. Such a partnership has the potential to:

- Jointly form the vision for local school improvement.
- Provide a sense of strategic cohesion which will mitigate against the risks of fragmentation.
- Provide the opportunities for local school improvement through commissioning, brokering, and evaluating support.

4.2 **Levels of Partnership.** Three levels of partnership have been identified:

- **Level 1: School-Level Family Clusters.** Family clusters exist for peer review, mutual support, joint practice development and moderation, leadership and staff development opportunities, and to enable efficient procurement of school improvement support. Within Dorset this represents an evolution of the existing pyramid structure.
- **Level 2: Local Area or District-Level Alliances.** Alliances allow 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.
- **Level 3: Strategic Partnership.** At the strategic level partnerships 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.

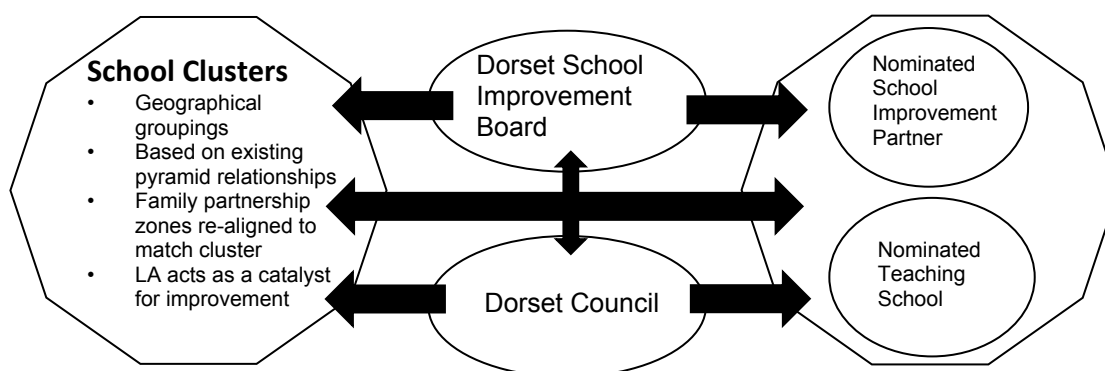
4.3 **The Role of the Local Authority.** Local Authorities, acting in their roles as the ‘glue’ in the system, have a pivotal role to play in establishing and facilitating partnerships. The practical support is required in relation to the leadership of meetings, providing funding to enable release time for school leaders to chair or lead partnership groups, and providing capacity from existing advisory staff to develop the work of local partnerships by pooling intelligence, brokering support, and coordinating activities. At the same time there is an important role part for small local clusters of schools, particularly in the primary phase. These clusters can provide for some of the immediate school improvement needs of schools through shared training and development or peer review. The Council must start to play a key role in convening these small clusters of schools across Dorset.

4.4 **Possible Future Developments.** The DSIB should be seen as the first step in what

could, over time, be a series of changes to the relationship with schools. School improvement is the start. Once this is seen to be effective other functions could become school-led. The evolutionary process can be thought of as a 3-stage process:

- **Stage 1: Local Authority Internal Commissioning.** Dorset currently works within a traditional model, where local authorities commission and provide most of the services from their own teams. It is an extremely effective strategy but does not always encourage the concept of schools as self-managing, self-improving organisations.
- **Stage 2: A School-Led Self-Improving System.** This is where local authorities commission services to support schools. For some local authorities this commissioning is almost entirely from their own schools. Most of these local authorities seek to provide for all their schools, not just those causing concern. The key change here is that the local authority commissions school improvement activity from within the school system itself.
- **Stage 3: Setting up a Joint Venture Company.** This option involves a local authority handing over the commissioning role to an overarching partnership body. There is some discussion over the merits of setting up a company limited by guarantee as the delivery vehicle for school improvement. The key benefit of establishing a legal entity of this nature is that this signals a new venture, different from the past. Success depends on the quality and value of their work to schools and it is for this reason that it is likely to be too early to make this leap in Dorset.

4.5 **A New Model for Dorset: School-Led Self-Improving System.** Stage 2 is the next stage in this evolutionary process for Dorset (noting that this could easily evolve to Stage 3). Under this option the Council would concentrate on establishing Level 2 – providing the links between Level 1 school clusters and facilitating the interplay with Level 3 (the DSIB). The new model would contain the following components:



4.6 The fundamental difference with where we are now will be the shift of focus away from the Council to a school-led system where the Council operates as a partnership broker and facilitator. The school improvement service will continue to monitor all schools, but it will do less to 'fix' schools. The vision is for the schools themselves to do this whilst the school improvement team concentrate on developing partnership at Level 1 and evaluating/feeding back the success of activity resulting from decisions made at the DSIB. The matching of teaching schools and School Improvement Partner schools to clusters is a fundamental component of the new system. As the DSIB grows and matures there will be scope for the partnership to play an increasing

role in school improvement with Council run provision reducing in tandem.

4.7 Advantages. The key advantages of this model are:

- The basic infrastructure is already in place: Dorset already has pyramid structures and now has a new (as yet untested) DSIB that is entirely school-led. It is in many ways a small change, but it has the capacity to make a huge difference.
- The existence of the DSIB allows the barriers between schools and academies to be broken down.
- Putting the focus on family clusters of schools (and evaluating them as clusters) will put new energy into this system. Clusters will be encouraged to celebrate their unique geographical locality and nominate staff to be responsible for activities across the cluster. There are real opportunities for economies of scale that can result from this approach.
- It sets the foundations for schools and the Council to move into more formal partnership arrangements (legal entities).
- The move fits perfectly with both LGR and the beginning of the movement to create more educational partnerships across the UK.
- Both the schools/academies themselves and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) want this to happen.

4.8 Disadvantages. The disadvantages are:

- Change of this nature requires resources both in terms of the Dorset School Improvement Team and money. For this reason, it is requested that members agree to fund a new Strategic School Improvement Fund.
- Partnerships need sustained effort to work. Once started, this work will need to remain at the top of the agenda to succeed.

5. Summary.

5.1 Effective partnerships in relation to specific school improvement priorities can result in coherent support for schools that draws on the best quality and expertise from the LA and school-led providers. An example of this is the work undertaken between Dorset County Council, the Jurassic Math's Hub and South Coastal Teaching Schools Partnership to develop a strategic, system-wide map of support for maths improvement¹. This strategy gives a much better definition to the structure required to facilitate this type of approach.

5.2 Dorset Council will always need to retain a role in creating and nurturing the conditions in which capacity for increasingly school-led improvement can be sufficient to meet local need. However, this strategy is an important starting point in terms of allowing schools to take charge of their own school improvement journey.

¹ <http://www.jurassicmaths.com/2016/09/the-wessex-school-improvement-partnership/>

APPENDIX 1

Dorset School Improvement Board: A Schools-Led Partnership

Terms of Reference

Vision & purpose - The Schools-led partnership will work to:

- Ensure that every child and young person attends a good and outstanding school.
- Develop the leadership role of successful schools with proven good capacity to expand system leadership across the country through sharing good practice and promoting school improvement.
- Ensure that a transparent and consistent strategy to drive school improvement is promoted to schools.
- Identify and collectively respond to priorities and opportunities across Dorset.
- Secure a consistent approach to monitoring and evaluating the impact of all partners' work.
- Embed a self-improving system, driven by school leaders and involving all stakeholders, which is underpinned by a culture of shared responsibility and accountability.

The Role of the Schools-Led Partnership

The Schools-led partnership will:

- Review school standards through a robust analysis of school performance data to identify priorities and schools causing concern.
- Develop a culture of supportive challenge, shared responsibility and professional challenge.
- Work to identify and deploy resources and sources of improvement expertise, locally, regionally and nationally. Collaborate to raise achievement outcomes, which narrow, and ultimately close, attainment gaps, particularly for the most vulnerable.
- Work in partnership with school leaders to ensure that they can access the most effective support to drive their school improvement priorities and enable them to draw upon the expertise across schools.
- Identify and broker the most effective resources to support individual schools, e.g. from teaching schools, NLEs and MATs etc. resulting in robust improvement plans with clear impact measures to effect rapid improvement.
- Offer support to identified priority schools regardless of academy/LA status.

Responsibilities of the partnership members

- Members will be nominated by their group and will contribute on behalf of their group as system leaders.
- Members are expected to attend each meeting or to send a substitute. Substitute members will have full voting rights when taking the place of the ordinary member for whom they are designated substitute.
- If a member fails to attend two consecutive meetings, the Chairperson will write to the relevant group to bring it to their attention.

Role of Board Members

- Provides their views on the collective priorities for Dorset
- Encourages/nurtures opportunities for collaborative working to ensure high standards in all Dorset schools.
- Provide and/or broker school-to-school support for schools where appropriate.
- Provides regular updates on the impact of any school improvement support work against the agreed priorities for the partnership.

Frequency of Meetings

- The partnership will meet half-termly (in addition to one meeting to review results and confirm priorities at the beginning of each academic year). Meetings will be two hours in length.

Membership

- The Board will appoint an Independent Chair to chair meetings and facilitate the partnership working.
- Membership seeks to represent expertise across all key stages.
- If there are any gaps in expertise, a suitable candidate can be co-opted by agreement, but the Board (for instance, for a project / timescale).

Minutes of Meetings

- The minutes of meetings will be published and circulated via Dorset school networks such as teaching schools and associations.