

# Characteristics of High Performing Schools

Miranda Bell and Philippa Cordingley



Centre for the Use of  
Research & Evidence in  
Education

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## Executive summary

### Context

The main aim of this project was to examine the characteristics of high performing Teach First (TF) schools, and to examine whether these differed between 'exceptional' and 'strong' schools. This study also aimed to identify what characteristics are specific to schools where TF is present. Four main areas were examined, which were:

- professional learning environment;
- leadership;
- teaching and learning; and
- relationships with students, parents and the community.

### Approach

To examine this, the study looked at six TF schools that were classed as 'exceptional' (reaching over 75% expected progress in both maths and English) and six TF schools that were classed as 'strong' (around the national average for both expected maths and English progress). There were also two non-TF (but TF eligible) exceptional schools that were recruited to the sample.

The methodology consisted of visits to each of the 14 schools. The data came from:

- interviews with both TF and non-TF teachers;
- group interviews with members of the SLT;
- focus groups consisting of three activities, with both TF and non-TF teachers;
- analysis of school documentation; and
- the analysis of an online student survey.

### Findings

A number of differences were identified between TF exceptional schools and TF strong schools. These are split into the four key areas below.

#### Professional learning (PL) environment

- Exceptional schools invested more heavily in mentoring and coaching training cross-school.
- Strong schools had less of a focus on formal coaching.
- Exceptional schools appeared to have a clearer focus on cross-school explicit pedagogical strategies linked to student achievement.
- Collaborative learning was more of a focus in exceptional schools, whilst being inconsistent in the strong schools.
- Exceptional schools appeared to invest more systematically in PL and to secure a higher buy-in to PL initiatives.
- Exceptional schools made more use of ASTs, as well as more extensive use of internal expertise.
- Subject knowledge appeared to be a higher priority within exceptional schools.
- PL in strong schools was more centrally led; there was less consistency in how much teachers felt in charge of their own PL.

#### Leadership

- Leaders were more aware of the importance of modelling learning in the exceptional schools, with most of the teachers being aware of their leaders' own PL, whilst this was an area that was still developing in the strong schools.
- Exceptional schools retained a higher number of TF ambassadors than strong schools, whilst most of the strong schools retained only a small number.

- Exceptional schools showed more extensive engagement in networked learning than strong schools.
- It was less clear what policies strong schools had for supporting TF teachers.

### **Teaching and learning**

- More teachers in the strong schools felt they could benefit from more support in behaviour management.
- More of the exceptional schools had whole school, cross curricular strategies in place to address and overcome learning barriers; teachers in half of the strong schools reported this as an area of development.
- There was evidence of less sharing of pedagogy and resources in the strong schools.
- All of the exceptional schools made use of group and peer learning, but this was seen as an area that could be developed in strong schools.

### **Relationships with students, parents and the community**

- Exceptional schools' leaders were more likely to work with outside organisations as a way to enrich the curriculum than strong schools.

### **TF and non-TF findings**

When comparing the characteristics of TF and non-TF exceptional schools, a number of characteristics were found to be evident in both. These included:

- a strong, whole-school, formalised focus on mentoring and coaching;
- good retention rates of beginning and trainee teachers;
- strong leadership of behaviour management;
- a whole school focus on teacher accountability; and
- extensive community networks and partnerships with local organisations.

### **Connections with other programmes**

All but one of the exceptional schools and four of the six strong schools were also involved with Teaching Leaders (TL) and/or Future Leaders (FL). Involvement with Teaching Leaders was much more prevalent. Neither of the non-TF exceptional schools were involved with either TL or FL. In the exceptional schools, strategies for TF, TL and FL were seen as being seamlessly connected through the school's systematic approach to growing teaching and leadership capacity.

## Eliciting Characteristics of High Performing Teach First Schools

### Purpose

The research was designed to explore the characteristics of high performing schools serving deprived communities. ‘High performing’ (HP) was defined as those schools where the number of students achieving at least expected progress in English and mathematics was above national average. Within the sample a further distinction was made between those performing well beyond national average (exceptional) and those closer to the national average (strong). Schools serving a deprived community were defined as those who have more than 50% of their pupils living in the lowest 30% of the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). However, as this research shows, all the sample schools evinced strong commitment to constantly improving practice as they continually focused on the best possible strategies to promote the achievement of their very vulnerable students. In that sense this report is just a snapshot in a constantly evolving larger picture.

The research was also designed to enable comparisons of characteristics of exceptional Teach First (TF) schools and exceptional Non Teach First (TFN) schools to identify what is specific to schools where Teach First (TF) is present. In the event, only two non TF schools could be recruited to the sample, and their data have therefore been used for illustrative purposes only. Teach First was also interested to explore the extent to which the characteristics attributable to Teach First and other interventions are reproducible across secondary schools, using the research evidence as guiding principles.

### Methods

Findings from an initial review of international research into HP schools (Appendix 1) shaped the development of the research framework (see Appendix 2) around four key areas: professional learning environment, leadership, teaching and learning, and relations with students, parents and the community. Best evidence from research within these four key areas was used to frame the research questions. For both the TF exceptional and TF strong categories, recruited schools had to have at least three *current* TF participants. TF exceptional schools had 40 current TF participants, strong schools 37. It was noteworthy however that the exceptional schools had 45 TF ambassadors on their staff between them. Strong schools had 24, of whom 14 were clustered in one school.

In total, fourteen schools were recruited: six TF exceptional, six TF strong, and two TFN exceptional.

**Table 1:** Recruited schools – the figure in the boxes represents the percentage of students achieving at least expected progress in 2011-12. The national average for English in that year was 72% and for mathematics 65%.

	TF exceptional		TF strong		TFN exceptional	
	English	Mathematics	English	Mathematics	English	Mathematics
1	86%	87%	76%	68%	91%	84%
2	84%	75%	69%	69%	87%	91%
3	98%	83%	66%	67%		
4	79%	84%	78%	70%		
5	85%	79%	71%	63%		
6	94%	93%	67%	66%		

A team of five researchers initially analysed key documentary evidence from the sample schools, including their SEFs, SIPs, reports to governors and analyses of staff performance etc. Each school was asked to facilitate a day's on-site data capture, including interviews with individual TF and non TF teachers and middle leaders, interviews with the Senior Leadership Team and a focus group discussion. Standard interview schedules and data capture tools for the focus groups were used by all the researchers. An online student survey was designed to gather students' perspectives, particularly in relation to the teaching and learning element of the research framework. All remote and on-site data were entered into a database, coded against the research framework to enable read across at the analysis stage. Schools were provided with individual reports, including the collated results of their student surveys.

## Findings

### Professional Learning (PL) Environment

Our research suggested that HP schools provide effective PL environments where teachers and leaders are supported and encouraged to continuously develop teaching and learning, making effective use of curriculum planning, assessment, progress-tracking and differentiated target setting where specialist expertise, coaching, peer support and co-construction and the use of observation and feedback are used effectively. PL and a sense of professional efficacy is rooted in collaboration and evidence and closely aligned with student learning.

To explore the characteristics of the PL environments in the sample schools, the researchers investigated the extent to which they included:

- effective mentoring and coaching;
- effective use of collaboration, peer support, co-construction, including via observation and feedback as both PL and school development tools;
- use of specialist expertise;
- focusing teacher learning on student achievement effectively;
- evidence tools for tracking impact of PL;
- a strategic commitment to the development of excellent subject knowledge; and
- teachers taking leadership of their own professional development (PD).

## Mentoring and Coaching

### Mentoring

Mentoring is a key part of the beginning teacher journey, including for NQTs and is highly specified for TF trainees, who generally have in-school subject and professional mentors, a HE based subject tutor and a TF mentor. Where the 12 TF schools in the sample did vary, appears to have been in the amount and level of training provided for the in-school mentors and in the perceptions of some teachers about the quality of their observations. In particular, the exceptional schools appear to have invested consistently in mentor training, not just for senior teachers and leaders. Several also provided additional mentors for specific purposes or projects. There was less mention of systematic, cross-school mentor training amongst the strong schools.

One exceptional school described their mentoring policy thus: *“The school invests heavily in mentoring. They retain a high number of TF graduates in leadership positions who are often selected and trained as mentors, along with other middle leaders and expert teachers – not just for what they can offer beginning teachers (BTs) but also because this helps them to reflect on their own ongoing practice. Mentor training uses external specialists. Mentoring time is ‘sacrosanct’ and timetabled. Progress is reviewed at least weekly. New staff, including middle leaders (MLs), are also mentored. Teachers feel the school is taking their development seriously. Mentor observation and feedback is prized”*.

Clearly, this school and others believed that mentoring is itself a learning process. In one school there is an established mentors’ forum which meets regularly to discuss best mentoring practice, while another group of three staff, led by a SLT member, have embarked on a research project to learn about the best ways of supporting mentoring.

In exceptional schools teachers felt strongly mentored: *“I was observed several times per term, with weekly mentoring meets with subject tutors, professional mentors and subject mentors”*.

Teacher perspectives from the strong schools indicated a less consistent approach: *“Anecdotally there seems to be massive inconsistency around observation feedback.....you should have a sense of whether it was good or not”*, and *“I have observed without training and it is difficult”*.

There was some difference in perception about coaching and mentoring: *“It is really more peer support that goes across the school”* and *“How much you make of that is down to you. There is inconsistency among departments at the moment...”*

## Coaching

Coaching is widespread in all the sample schools, particularly as part of the QA process. Again there appeared to be more emphasis on formal coaching training and designated coaches in exceptional schools, although this will change as more teachers engage with the OTP coaching module. Most schools across the sample used peer as well as expert coaching, although in some of the strong schools the amount of collaboration and ‘openness’ to informal observations of practice was reported to be inconsistent across departments.

One exceptional school had an active team of teaching and learning coaches, recently enhanced by the appointment of a team of research assistants. Another formally scheduled a number of coaching sessions for teachers with their HoDs every year as part of a continuous PL cycle. HoDs have had refresher coaching training and an external coach works with middle leaders. Most of the exceptional schools mentioned that their middle leaders and others had training in coaching. *“If you are stuck on something you go to a T&L coach in the first instance”*. By contrast, some strong schools’ coaching training was not systematic, for example: *“The school has created an audit of staff skills and calls upon those who are doing well in a particular area to become a coach”*. Or, in another case: *“Coaching is the most effective way to improve practice and it’s easy to provide”*. However teachers in another strong school said that leaders of the teaching and learning group and some ASTs had taken part in coaching training.

There was some indication from the strong schools that more formal coaching sessions based around professional development in pedagogy (as distinct from raising grades for inconsistently good teaching) were a recent development. *“We have a coaching programme to develop teachers’ practice....self directed, with a small trial last academic year. Those who didn’t do it were worried about time, some reticent, wanting to coach but not be coached....We are tweaking it”*.

### **PL focused on student achievement**

All the sample schools focused PL on student achievement, based on rigorous data analysis and other forms of intelligence such as student surveys. Progress for every child is at the heart of all these schools' PL. There was some evidence that PL in the exceptional schools tended to have a clearer focus on explicit pedagogical strategies linked to student progress than the strong schools, although this is changing as more strong schools move towards evidence-based, whole school pedagogical frameworks. For example, one exceptional school commented: *"The purpose of all CPD is to improve the quality of teaching and learning for the pupils. The school measures the impact of its statutory, whole staff INSET on pupil learning and progress"*. Whereas PL practice in some of the strong schools may be less clearly focused: *"We don't have a specific measure to show whether PD has had a particular impact on students. It's more about reflecting at the end of the year that students have improved and using that as evidence that training has helped. The focus this year has been on evidence-based teaching. Training on Hattie's research has boiled down to the 10 most effective methods"*.

There was evidence from the exceptional schools of considerable confidence in the capacities of their whole-school pedagogical strategies and the PL priorities which flowed from them to impact on student achievement. Some examples of this from different schools in this group include the following: *"All CPD is focused on improving practice to improve student achievement. The school has a pedagogic roadmap and staff are specifically asked to take an aspect of that as their focus in their personal development plans. So they might focus on differentiation, for example, if that has been identified as an area for development in relation to their students"*; *"There is a real focus on pedagogy and our teaching within CPD. Behaviour challenges pale into insignificance compared to other schools as there is so much more emphasis here on pedagogy, especially for TF and NQTs"*; and *"Teachers have to be equipped to get the best out of students. The focus is on how teachers are teaching so they know that what they are doing supports learning"*.

Strong schools were similarly focused upon student achievement but there was some evidence that in terms of PL this was not as consistent as in the exceptional group and that a systematic focus on student achievement was perhaps less consistently articulated, for example: *"The higher up you are the more accountable you become. Classroom teachers are judged on observation but HoDs are judged on data. An area of continued development for us is to be more nuanced and for student achievement to be more a driver"*; *"It's quite focused. We've had training on AfL for instance that's shown us the best way to assess pupil progress and identify areas for improvement [but] it's only now that we are focused on teaching rather than behaviour"*.

All schools used data to monitor student progress and identify issues or problems related to student achievement – whether for individual students or specific micropopulations. Interventions were usually quickly put in place for those students. In some of the exceptional schools, teachers' support needs were also identified in this way, rather than through performance management alone. These schools were able to directly link teacher PL to the achievement of specific groups of students.

### **Effective use of collaboration, peer support, co-construction, including via observation and feedback as both PL and school development tools**

Peer support was widely used as a learning process in the schools across the sample, and nearly all the teachers rated observation and feedback highly. One exceptional school described a *"culture of sharing good practice through departmental peer observations"*. Another said peer support is widespread.

There was a strong sense from all the exceptional schools that collaboration in itself is recognised as a key *learning* process. In one exceptional school a Head of Faculty said that all administrative issues

were dealt with through email, so that designated faculty time could be dedicated to a collaborative focus on teaching and learning. The same school described its culture as collaborative and it had structured opportunities for collaboration ranging from PL communities to promoting teaching and learning talk at lunchtimes. Another exceptional school put a 'heavy emphasis' on collaboration at all levels: *"Plenty of departmental time is given to PL....we maintain our high performance through collaborative learning"*. One school gave an example of collaborative observation when teachers in Year 7 observed each other so that they could develop consistent routines for their students. Another had set up cross school advisory groups (in addition to collaborative INSET days, workshop programmes, faculty time etc) where staff worked together on cross-curricular aspects of teaching and learning. Most exceptional schools made a point of ensuring that TF teachers shared cross-school PL opportunities with other BTs and NQTs rather than in a TF group or 'clique.' A TF teacher commented: *"Training has been best when all the early years teachers are together, run by different people"*.

There was less consistency around collaboration amongst strong schools. In one school, for example, some HoDs used the annual reviews to draft their SEFs and action plans as collaborative activity. But the amount of collaboration involved was inconsistent in other departments: *"For the English department that has been collaborative, all sharing the development of the SEF and action plan – 'what do we need to do based on this review?'. Other departments are less collaborative"*. One strong school described the purpose of INSET days as to 'inform' teachers about specific teaching and learning approaches such as AfL, independent learning and building learning power. Then it was up to individual departments to develop and employ the strategies in light of their own context. It was not clear how consistent this was across departments.

Where practice is not consistent across departments (along with the fact that the number of TF ambassadors is very low) the opportunity for collaborative PL is inevitably lower. Given the strength of the evidence about the effectiveness of collaborative PL, all schools might wish to explore ways of increasing collaborative PL within departments

### Effective use of specialist expertise

Some schools are very quick to take advantage of new initiatives and to make effective use of them to increase their specialist PL. Examples across the sample include the ITP and OTP programmes. Teachers on these programmes share their learning with their colleagues both informally within departments and more formally at scheduled PL sessions. Other examples include networking, including through Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders, where there is expertise to be 'plugged in to'. One strong school had recently joined the Challenge Partners Network and all schools also seemed to make use of exam boards and Ofsted trained reviewers.

Exceptional schools were more likely to mention their links with universities, through TF, School Direct and other initiatives, as important sources of external specialist expertise. They also made more use of ASTs. One exceptional school (the highest performing of the sample) had a large number of ASTs because they had 'jumped' for the programme as soon as it was announced. They regarded it as a *"fantastic retention strategy for keeping outstanding teachers here rather than moving on to SLT"*. ASTs are expected to be mentors in the school and are fully timetabled internally and externally. This particular school is highly selective about its use of external expertise: *"Staff are a very critical audience with high expectations, so we don't bring in too many externals. They have to be inspiring"*.

All exceptional schools made extensive use of their staff's expertise through structured workshop opportunities, with a specified minimum attendance as part of the annual PL cycle. They also used observation, and teaching and learning coaches, as vehicles for enabling the embedment of new learning from specialist expertise. They used performance management and learning walks to maintain an audit of key staff strengths and make these visible and accessible throughout the school.

One school targeted specialist courses to cater for individual and specific PL needs to support career development in leadership or other aspects of professional practice. Staff in this school rated the level of specialist input highly.

There was some evidence that exceptional schools may also make more regular and more specific use of external expertise on a more sustained basis than 'one off' inputs at INSET days etc. This may also be linked to their extensive community partnerships. Examples of other expert inputs used on a more sustained basis, largely by the exceptional schools, include the Literacy Trust, National Science Centre, SEN and EAL experts, Institute of Physics, local primary schools and the Princes' Teaching Institute.

TF teachers at one strong school said they *"would like more expert input sometimes – and would like more sharing activities with experts in the school"*. At another strong school, teachers said: *"We have expertise in the school which I think is not tapped into"*. This may be because the opportunities for expert input are not sufficiently widely known and understood. For example at one school a senior leader said: *"Within the school there is no databank but I know who is good at what. People are generous – some staff are not so keen but most will accept someone in"*. Senior leaders at another strong school said *"We buy into some programmes e.g. OTP, formalise that a bit and give them extra training"*. There are no ASTs at this school but *"we do encourage teachers with strong practice to share informally. We sometimes buy in external consultants e.g. Pixel on data use, and we use consultants for review to make sure lesson observations are strong"*.

Examples from some strong schools about use of specialist expertise were quite thin: at one the head is mentored by another HT; professional development every Tuesday includes workshops by teachers who are consistently outstanding; there are sometimes national speakers at professional training days; and curriculum areas can make use of exam boards. At another, staff said there were whole school foci on (e.g.) AfL or literacy. *"Strategies are offered at workshops, then it is up to you if you go away and use them"*.

Five out of the six strong schools retained very few TF ambassadors on their staff. By contrast most of the exceptional schools made full use of TF ambassadors' expertise as mentors and/or leaders

### **Evidence tools for tracking impact of PL**

Very few schools consistently directly tracked the impact on their students' learning of various PL initiatives. In one exceptional school, where the delivery of the Spanish curriculum was changed after professional development in phonics with local primary schools, the positive impact on student learning was quickly evident in progress levels. In most schools, data and evidence (such as student voice, staff surveys, attainment data, homework, class work etc) was used extensively mostly to identify gaps or issues, which then became the springboard for planning and for PL initiatives. Through continuous data monitoring it was thought to be evident whether such initiatives had been successful in achieving their aims or not. More schools in the sample as a whole are turning to teacher inquiry as a means of collaborative PL and of focusing interventions more closely on specific groups of students, with benchmarking to enable impact to be tracked.

All the sample schools made extensive use of data as a means of tracking student progress – but not necessarily linked to teacher learning. For example one strong school said: *"In terms of attainment it is very difficult to narrow down what has made the difference to pupils. If we do the things we know are right then they will have cumulative impact. Some people might want more causal impact but we don't worry about that. Fundamentally we believe that if we improve teaching and learning then results will go up"*.

Exceptional schools tended to have higher buy in to PL initiatives because the SLT and MLs made it clear that this is what was expected – that is, there appeared to be less voluntarism when it came to

cross-school priorities. So, for example, school foci (e.g. on AfL or literacy) were rigorously followed up in departments and their impact tracked via QA for all teachers and lesson observation databases. Although the strong schools made extensive use of evidence in relation to progress and attainment, it was not clear from the available evidence to what extent these were linked to PL interventions.

It is clear from the number of schools where teacher inquiry was becoming more of a PL focus that those responsible for PL are aware of the importance of using evidence to measure the effectiveness of PL. Overall, teachers did not consider this to be a strength. Some schools have close links with universities who can support teachers in designing their inquiries and in collecting and analysing data. But some did not appear to have such productive links.

### **Strategic commitment to the development of excellent subject knowledge**

There were some variations across the sample in the ways in which subject knowledge was regarded by teachers and/or supported by schools. All TF recruits were supported by TF in the development of their subject knowledge.

In at least four of the exceptional schools, subject knowledge was regarded as very important across the school– and the schools consistently used subject specialists to support subject knowledge development: *“[We] are a participant in the Princes Teaching Institute’s schools programme. The programme is designed to encourage inspirational teaching by providing structure and a network of support to subject departments eager to improve their subject provision... Not many schools are involved in the programme. It’s the only thing that attempts to build subject knowledge”*; *“Where there are gaps internally, the school uses an external AST...subject teachers are also partnered with teachers in other schools. We have applied for funding to develop English, maths, science subject knowledge and have a partnership with the Institute of Physics to develop subject knowledge”*. There is also a focus on using specialists with students: *“98% of lessons here are taught by subject specialists. There is very little second subject teaching. This is a big part of the success of the school: people are teaching what they love”*. In other exceptional schools teachers generally felt subject knowledge to be important: *“It’s vital to give depth and breadth, if you don’t know your subject how can you teach it?”*; *“Subject knowledge excellence is imperative. The teacher needs to break down knowledge for someone else”*.

Teachers in some schools- and more usually in the strong schools- put subject knowledge fairly low down their list of PL priorities. Although one strong school did make use of the PTI, leaders said they felt that they tended to take subject knowledge for granted. In one strong school, teachers said that PL *“tends to be geared towards teaching in general, not particular subjects”*. Although the school does use specialist coaching to support teachers who may have weaker subject expertise. In another strong school, teachers felt that subject knowledge was a low priority and that clear training opportunities should be available for developing subject expertise rather than leaving it solely to the teachers themselves.

Teachers in one strong school believed excellent subject knowledge to be key to effective teaching and learning but a number felt that it was not a major priority for the school in terms of individual staff. Some non TF teachers had undertaken their own subject learning. One teacher did not feel subject knowledge was critical: *“Subject knowledge gives you confidence – but it’s all about how you transmit it”*. In another strong school a senior teacher commented that TF were very strong on developing subject knowledge *“[but] TF teachers need to reflect on the way their subject knowledge can be married with teaching and learning”*. Comments in this school included one teacher who said there was no support for developing subject knowledge – *“although you can ask others within your department”*; *“If you are weak you have to research the area yourself”*.

Other teachers were more ambivalent. In one strong school, a teacher remarked that although he did not have good subject knowledge it had not impacted on his teaching 'so far;' he acknowledged that he needed to develop his subject knowledge but said he thought regular marking and assessment was more important. In another strong school: *"Good subject knowledge gives you the ability to inspire and enthuse students. There are no systems that help you with subject knowledge. It is left to the teacher to sort"*.

### Teachers taking leadership of their own professional development (PD)

There appeared to be consensus across the sample that schools believed teachers taking the lead when it came to their learning was desirable. In the exceptional schools group there was more evidence of a two-pronged approach: on the one hand teachers were required to participate in sustained PL around whole-school foci such as literacy or marking and assessment and to embed learning into practice; on the other, teachers were encouraged to identify additional and individual PL priorities as part of a personal PD plan, usually (but not wholly) linked to the performance appraisal system and focused on student achievement targets. TF teachers felt that they were able to identify areas for development and gain support from the appropriate mentor or tutor.

In one exceptional school, teachers rated leading their own PD consistently highly: *"We get lots of choice over what we do"; "There is a strong focus on this in the school at present – and inquiry is also becoming a key focus"*. Another said that CPD days (whole days, twilights and breakfast sessions) are planned to meet the needs of staff and often lead on from each other: *"We refine sessions after feedback from staff"*.

SLT in another exceptional school explained that *"the CPD policy makes it mandatory for teachers to undertake a certain number of CPD experiences. They are free to choose their own focus, usually within the general ambit of the school's pedagogical framework"*.

Teachers in this group of schools were generally enthusiastic: *"If you pursue your interest then it opens doors...I have been able to take on autonomy as Head of Year....the school is good at using PL to push people forward. If you don't put yourself forward things don't happen....it's commonly known that you have to be proactive."* An example of this from another school involved a TF teacher who identified public speaking as an area for development, because he wanted to "inspire his pupils". Teachers variously commented that *"the appraisal system makes you feel in charge"*, *"the HoD and the SLT push you but also take on board what you want and encourage you"*.

Amongst the strong group of schools, there was evidence of teachers enthusiastically leading their PD, but with less consistency in the schools. For example, *"I'm completely in charge: I seek out practitioners via social media and blogs....However in terms of the whole school I would say it is very led from the top, very centrally led"*. Teach First teachers in strong schools said: *"TF gives me the feeling I'm in charge...[but]I find the school-wide calendar of CPD events less useful"*. Teachers in another strong school felt that this was "extremely desirable" but that the school had not got to this point yet. Comments from other strong schools included *"CPD in school is directed – everyone receives the same. Sometimes it is what you wanted anyway"*.

TF participants and ambassadors alike appeared to place considerable value on the benefits of the highly structured learning environments in the exceptional schools.

### Leadership

Leaders in HP schools establish effective systems of leadership and management. They promote and participate in teacher learning and development; establish goals and expectations for student learning; plan, co-ordinate and evaluate staffing, teaching and the curriculum and work

collaboratively both within school and with external partners. They focus on developing leaders and provide vision, values and high expectations together with a strong sense of moral purpose. HP leaders set, monitor and evaluate new initiatives and focus on the provision of a relevant and attractive curriculum.

To explore the characteristics of leadership in the sample schools, the researchers investigated the extent to which school leaders:

- both lead CPD and are seen to engage in PL themselves, thus modelling PL as leadership and providing progression pathways for TF teachers;
- ensure that CPD is aligned with curriculum development;
- rigorously select good quality staff with transparent clarity about standards of professional practice;
- make effective use of data and evidence in their planning;
- have a strong sense of moral purpose;
- have strong systems in place which enable them to make effective use of TF skills, teaching expertise and subject knowledge;
- model support for collaborative PL at all levels;
- have experience, skills and enthusiasm for partnership development and brokering learning across schools;
- understand, develop staff skills and support them in effective behaviour management strategies; and
- use performance management as a means of collective PL and accountability.

### **Leadership of and engagement in PL**

Leaders in all schools across the sample paid a great deal of attention to PL, usually with a designated SLT member with lead responsibility for the school. In most exceptional schools leaders both deliver workshops and participate in those delivered by others; they also regard the lesson observation process itself as PL for themselves. At some exceptional schools senior leaders are well aware of the importance of making their engagement in learning visible – they participate in in-school PL activities plus Ofsted training, MA and PhD programmes, NPHQ. MLs are trained in teaching leader sessions to develop their own capacity.

One exceptional school articulated their involvement in PL as follows: *“As people join the leadership we set the parameters for how to act – much revolves around our learning too, attending courses and leading courses”*. Teachers in a further exceptional school said: *“Leaders come along to whole school INSETS and are involved in full participation as well as leading sessions. SLT is a strength. They all have a teaching load and the emphasis on teaching and learning is at the heart of the school, it is everybody’s primary responsibility which is unusual these days”*. In another school from this group many SLT members are undergoing NPQH (Assistant Principals programme) and are mentored by the Principal or other Principals from the Teaching School Alliance, a collaborative inter-school association. Most teachers seem to be aware of the CPD their leaders are undertaking.

There was some evidence that leaders' PL practice was perhaps at a more evolving stage in some of the strong schools. For example: *"An intensive programme of development for Middle and Senior leaders has been started. During the last year, senior leaders have undertaken a coaching for leadership programme based on situational leadership.....Next September (2013) MLs will follow suit with coaching"*.

And in others, staff perceptions of leaders' engagement in CPD were less consistent: *"There is not much of a push from SLT for practice to have to change. We go to briefings but there is no pressure to take up new strategies, it is left to the individual"; "I don't think the senior team model themselves that way. The HT did reorganise roles a few years ago...which has been good...very good at helping us but not so much themselves. SLT are good at professionally moving people on"*.

### **CPD aligned with curriculum development**

In all schools across the sample there was some evidence of PL centred around curriculum development, mostly relating to the introduction of new, or changed curricula. By its nature, this was mostly centred in departments, but there is some (although it is relatively slight) evidence that CPD linked to curriculum development was more prevalent in whole-school PL in the exceptional group of schools.

A few examples of this include groups of staff working together on whole school curriculum issues such as PSHE, planning links between key stages to ensure stable transitions, sixth form training in subject areas, and integrating literacy across the curriculum. CPD aligned with curriculum development in strong schools tended to be department-focused, one exception being the introduction of project-based learning in Year 7. Otherwise, these teacher comments are typical: *"The school's CPD programme is in a transitional phase, with new roles being created and new strategies, designed to align PD more closely with curriculum development"; "Opportunities for individuals to focus on curriculum areas is down to the department"; "CPD often includes an opportunity for us to consider how to apply what we are learning to our own specialism. Sometimes we sit in departments for training"*.

### **Rigorously select good quality staff with transparent clarity about standards of professional practice**

All schools in the sample employed rigorous selection procedures, with the emphasis on good to outstanding teaching. Candidates were generally not interviewed if their lesson observations fell short of these targets. There was some evidence from the exceptional group of schools that new recruits were also expected to explicitly buy in to the schools' moral purpose and values and to the schools' teaching and learning foci. One school in this group with a substantial allocation of Schools Direct recruits had recently adopted the TF recruitment and selection model in order to ensure such buy in. Most of the exceptional schools were extensively involved in initial teacher education, and saw it as an important route for recruitment. One, for example, had appointed an SLT member with specific responsibility for early years PL. These schools supported training teachers via a number of routes, including TF and Schools Direct. It was also noteworthy that four of the six schools in the exceptional sample retained high numbers of TF ambassadors on their staff, whereas all but one of the strong group appeared to retain very few.

### **Effective use of data and evidence in planning**

Assessment, recording and reporting cycles were well established in all of the schools. They used data rigorously for monitoring, planning and intervention purposes, and a focus on the progress of the individual child was evident in all schools across the sample. Most schools also used other forms of evidence such as student voice and teacher surveys. Several teachers in the exceptional group identified scrutiny of evidence as one of the ways in which PL was linked to 'accountability' –which they felt enhanced rather than constrained their PL. From the available evidence it seems possible

that schools in the exceptional group may be using data more extensively to focus hard on teaching quality and individual accountability than some of the strong schools.

Comments from this group included: *“The SIP/SEF are owned by everybody, not just SLT. They work their way through with increasing levels of detail....the quality of learning and teaching, including student survey responses, exam outcomes, internal progress data, attendance levels, punctuality, hard edged outcomes....staff are held to account from data...”*; *“Heads of Department are set targets by governors to meet exam results and value added....individual teacher’s value added is also looked at.”*

### **Strong sense of moral purpose**

All of the sample schools were committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for the very vulnerable students they recruited from the deprived constituencies which they served. There is a clear sense of moral purpose underpinning the work of all of the sample schools. This also underpins the very high expectations of staff and students in the schools. Leaders at one exceptional school explained that the school’s strong moral purpose – the belief in a ‘full entitlement’ for each child - made it *“a ruthless organisation....the moment there is a dip things get tough....for example we have just had a whole school marking review....nothing is allowed to slip”*. At another, *“equality is a big...value...if it’s good enough for our child it’s good for all”*. One leader in a strong school said *“that is why I am here after 11 years in the school ...we talk about it all the time....social and cultural capital needs to be included”*. The emphasis on developing social and cultural capital was also evident in the opportunities which the schools create for their students: *“We not only check academically what [they] are doing but we also check what else they are doing...encourage them to join a science club, for example”*; *“The aim is to raise achievement and to create a sense of community, belonging and pride amongst students and their families”*.

### **Strong systems in place to make effective use of TF skills, teaching expertise and subject knowledge**

All the schools recognised the contributions brought to the school by TF teachers. However the extent to which their talents were put to immediate or effective use varied. One exceptional school said that *“all TFs have an inner confidence that we tap into. Second year TFs are used as mentors for NQTs. Some mentor 6<sup>th</sup> form students about the experience of university and UCAS preparations”*. Another said: *“We throw a lot of support at TF to ensure we get the best out of them....they are encouraged to input into departmental planning and curriculum planning. They are more up to date on cutting edge stuff...”*

At another exceptional school there has been a large turnover in staff and the SLT have been keen to develop TF NQTs into new roles as the school’s development planning has evolved. *“Most TF teachers want to stay at the end of their two years and most do”* a SLT member commented. One TF NQT will have joint responsibility with her head of department for developing the curriculum in the coming year. Sixteen TF participants have been appointed for September 2013 and the school already has significant numbers of TF teachers on its staff. The schools recognise that *“TF recruits will always be well prepared, have their eyes wide open and have access to academic support networks”*. Schools with TF recruits encourage integration and collaboration with other beginning teachers. According to one exceptional school: *“There are systems in place to make effective use of all staff, not just TF. For TF to be effective they need to integrate right across the board, including with the other start up routes. But we do have to factor in their expectations. They often make outstanding progress and the school needs to challenge them...the school has to provide headroom for their ambitions”*. The same school had come to recognise that *“high achievers can hit a wall with difficult children...they need a clear and developed notion of humility in their mission....the important thing that makes the difference is understanding the need to devote time to the individual child”*. TF

teachers in this school were given additional responsibilities in their second year and usually promoted to leadership positions by the time they entered their third year.

A TF ambassador in another exceptional school said that the initial support from TF was invaluable, *“but once in school then it is all about the school; you have to buy in to the school’s moral values, pedagogical frameworks and systems”*. TF recruits in other exceptional schools concurred: *“...the support from individuals comes from the ethos of the school...all beginning teachers have structured contact with each other and mentors at least twice a week...”*; *“[this school] is a meritocracy. My previous school was also a TF school, but did not really allow ambitious people to take the lead – experience was more important and the school was more hierarchical”*; *“The school has the structures, support and imagination in place to develop beginning teachers and TFs”*.

In the strong schools the picture was less clear. TFs were valued and their contributions recognised: *“She makes a huge contribution to the department....she’s had a lot more cutting edge training than us”*; *“being a TF mentor has made it clearer to me what the school is looking for...observing and suggesting ideas has made me more aware of the skills that are needed to be an effective teacher”*. One strong school said that TF trainees had needed more support than they anticipated.

One strong school described their relationship with TF as longstanding (5+ years) yet had only two TF ambassadors on the staff. By contrast, four of the six exceptional had 12, 18, 7 and 8 TF ambassadors. Of the six schools in the strong group three had two TF ambassadors, one had one, one had three and one had fourteen. A TF recruit at one strong school remarked: *“There’s not really much in the way of progression. They’re not really interested in fast tracking us. I can’t see being here in the long term – I don’t feel I fit”*.

### **Support for collaborative PL at all levels**

Schools described a variety of collaborative models, ranging from senior and middle leaders working together during weekly meetings to collaborative departmental or faculty planning. Collaboration also extended to pastoral issues: for example one exceptional school had a group of staff working with SLT on a playground problem. Staff at this school believe that SLT work collaboratively with colleagues “all the time”. SLT members at another exceptional school said that they deliberately ‘tried’ to model collaboration. They cited examples of changing the SDP following suggestions from staff; cross-school working groups on issues such as pay policy; and making HoD meetings less businesslike and more focused on teaching and learning. Staff at this school felt that the real collaborative strengths lay with middle managers. Examples from other exceptional schools included SLT/teacher behaviour working group, cross school teaching and learning advisory groups, SLT leading and taking part in collaborative CPD. One strong school described using TF expertise to help SLT learn collaboratively in workshop settings.

One TF NQT in an exceptional school said that there was a general awareness that colleagues were all outstanding teachers: “I can go and observe anyone”. In another school senior leaders supported middle leaders in leading PL communities, focused on an aspect of teaching and learning. Teachers in one strong school described the culture as non collaborative and ‘top down’ but others were generally positive about their SLT’s leadership of collaborative PL: *“This is shown by the QA process – the emphasis is on doing it together rather than having it done to us. Observations are supportive and support is provided according to different needs”*.

### **Understand, develop staff skills and support them in effective behaviour management strategies**

All of the sample schools had explicit behaviour management policies, usually involving rewards as well as sanctions. Senior leaders at most schools were confident about their policies and considered that staff were well prepared to manage behaviour. Two exceptional schools explicitly articulated behaviour for learning rather than control per se and highlighted their emphasis on specific,

engaging pedagogies as a reflection of their approach to engendering learning behaviours. One school recognised this as a strength of TF teachers, whilst all the TF teachers in the sample indicated that they were confident about their current strengths in this area: *“TF teachers tend to want to get to know their students more as a means of pre-empting behaviour problems and there is evidence of their success in combining a mix of knowledge of their students’ circumstances, appropriate task differentiation and effective use of AfL in creating good teaching and learning environments”*. There were no particular differences between the sample groups: some schools had strong support teams in place to help with behavioural issues and work in school with students who had been temporarily banished from their classrooms in learning behaviour support centres or other designated zones, others had monitors or prefects. Some trained new or beginning teachers, including TFs, in the school’s behaviour management strategies. Generally staff across the sample rated highly the support they got from SLT in relation to behaviour management: *“We have a simple, clear emergency rota for every lesson...it reduces behaviour problems and is really consistent”*; *“We have had training sessions on what works with particular students and with the whole class. We have a buddy system whereby a particular student can be sent to another teacher to work”*. One TF trainee described how her HoD worked as her LSA for two lessons each week to help with a challenging class. At another school an IRIS camera was used by mentors to provide real time support and guidance on behaviour management during class.

Across the sample, student perceptions of behaviour problems varied between subjects, but as a general rule about a quarter to a third of students in most schools identified daily disruptions in lessons as a problem. There appears to be a slight mismatch between leaders’ perceptions of behaviour management in school and that of the students.

### **Performance management (PM) as a means of collective PL and accountability**

All schools had effective PM systems in place and all were used both to identify areas where PL was required and to set targets in relation to student achievement for which teachers were held to account. In most schools PM was used to identify particular strengths as well as areas for development. There were no discernible differences in approaches to PM between the schools in the sample.

## **Teaching and Learning**

HP schools have an explicit and continuous focus on quality in teaching and learning processes. They are inclusive and place high expectations on all their students. They have a broad range of curricula to engage and support students, personalised to accommodate individual aptitudes and needs. CfBT’s research also revealed that HP schools have systems in place which mean that leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of all the teaching staff. They operate an evidence-based approach to what is happening in classrooms. If staff teach less than very well, arrangements are in place to offer support. At the same time, such schools have a collegiate culture in which teaching and classroom management ideas are shared and problems acknowledged without fear of blame.

To explore the characteristics of teaching and learning in the sample schools, the researchers investigated the extent to which teachers:

- share learning intentions and success criteria;
- develop positive relationships with their students;
- understand and apply effective behaviour management strategies;
- understand and apply strategies to overcome learning barriers such as low literacy levels or specific learning difficulties;

- make effective use of learning resources;
- make effective use of strategies such as peer tutoring, collaborative learning, challenging tasks which build individual progress, the development of thinking skills, assessment for learning and making connections between in-school learning and students' lives; and
- have consistently high expectations of their students.

### **Learning intentions and success criteria**

Well over half (and often significantly more) students from all the sample schools agreed that they were clear about the learning intentions behind every lesson. Teachers in all schools across the sample said that they shared learning intentions, many making it clear that this was an expectation of the school. Students mostly reported positive relations with teachers, with variations between subjects in most schools but with no discernible patterns of difference between the two groups of schools in the sample. Teacher qualities which students commented positively on most frequently were humour and approachability. Feeling comfortable asking for help or explanations was very important for the students. Teachers in all schools believed that the development of positive relationships with students was fundamental to successful learning: *"It's most important. It makes a massive difference in terms of motivation and behaviour for learning"*. In one strong school TF teachers commented: *"Not many teachers stay after the two years, so students become wary- they want to see that you have invested in them"*. In schools where TF teachers are less likely to remain at the end of their two years, students are clearly aware of the discontinuity, which might be why TF teachers do need to go the extra mile to ensure positive and trusting relationships with their students, including turning up at school and community events and taking a genuine interest in their students' lives and families.

Students, staff and SLT across all the sample schools were also generally positive about the quantity, quality, variety and use of learning resources, many of which were shared across faculties or across schools via the VLE. One TF teacher in a strong school commented on the need for greater sharing and more effective quality control of resources. A teacher in another strong school also complained about a lack of sharing. Finally, all the schools put high expectations of each student at the heart of their mission. Students (with some variations between subjects) consistently felt that teachers had high expectations of them.

### **Understanding and application of effective behaviour management strategies**

A significant minority of students across the schools believed that their lessons were regularly disrupted by low level behavioural issues (e.g. 'talking' and 'rudeness') but the majority, nevertheless, were positive about their teachers' skills and competence in dealing effectively with such disturbances. All TF teachers appeared to have acquired considerable confidence in their behaviour management, emphasising the importance of positive relationships. Two (in exceptional schools) stressed the need to promote behaviour for learning. Several TF teachers in both groups of schools said that they would have benefited from a greater degree of support in behaviour management in the early months of being in school. This was more marked in the strong schools. Teachers variously described behaviour management systems as "patchy" across departments, support as "short term" and having problems with the "escalation of sanctions". Many teachers in both groups described resourceful approaches such as: "ten minute work slots", "restorative conversations", and "use of kinaesthetic activities".

*Although TF provides excellent training in behaviour management during the summer institute, it may be worthwhile briefing in school TF professional mentors about the importance of developing supportive strategies with their TF participants on behaviour management for specific classes or groups of students. Less support in developing positive behaviour management strategies may mean that the struggle for control initially militates against some TF participants experimenting with higher risk teaching and learning strategies.*

### **Understanding and application of strategies to overcome learning barriers such as low literacy levels or specific learning difficulties**

While most students across all schools in the sample believed that their teachers were good at helping struggling students, evidence from school documentation, and interviews with teachers and SLT was more variable between the groups. More schools in the exceptional group had whole-school, cross curricular strategies in place, particularly with regard to literacy. Teachers in one such school had had extensive CPD in literacy: *“throughout all lessons, using key terms and subject specific vocabulary which are embedded in lesson plans; in a whole school literacy mark scheme and through activities in lessons”*. Another school, with a strong cross curricular focus on literacy had also delivered extensive training for Teaching Assistants, with demonstrable impact on student learning. Whole school PL was now focused on other identified learning difficulties such as Autism and ADHD. In addition to the whole school strategies, interventions for groups of students were in place. Most TF trainees at these schools believed that they were at least ‘doing ok’ in this area. Teachers described classroom practice and made it clear that they were well supported by SEN specialists. One strong school had a clear cross-school literacy focus, and was well resourced. However in some of the strong schools the emphasis on literacy was targeted more on specific interventions for students with low literacy levels than on cross-curricular, whole school strategies, although these were evolving in some cases. Teachers (both TF and Non TF) in three schools identified overcoming learning barriers as an area of ‘weakness’ in their practice, or an area of ‘need’ in the school or in ‘need of development’. One school policy was also evolving towards more whole school interventions: *“We have redeveloped the school’s literacy policy...to help staff see how all curriculum areas support literacy. Every second Wednesday students are requested to come to subject-specific intervention time....great idea but not brilliantly managed....next year will be better when students understand the system”*.

### **Making effective use of strategies such as peer tutoring, collaborative learning, challenging tasks which build individual progress, the development of thinking skills, assessment for learning and making connections between in-school learning and students’ lives**

Over the sample as a whole there was evidence of considerable expertise in and enthusiasm for AfL, which was widely practiced across the schools. At the other end of the spectrum, while there was general acknowledgement of the value of developing thinking skills and independent learning, there were varied levels of accomplishment in these strategies expressed by teachers, according to their experience. For example, one TF trainee considered that thinking skills, overcoming learning barriers and independent learning skills were areas of practice for development. By contrast, a more experienced TF colleague at this school considered himself to be competent in these areas. A number of TF teachers in other schools suggested that these were areas they wanted to develop. Two of the exceptional schools had made headway with thinking skills on a school wide basis through the introduction of philosophy for children.

All of the exceptional schools made use of group and peer learning. The picture was patchier in the strong schools. At one school teachers in one department felt they could make better use of group

work, whilst in another department in this school collaborative work was the norm. Teachers in two schools said they did not make much use of group work (although other colleagues said they did) because of behaviour problems.

Evidence about teaching and learning from the two groups seems to indicate that most of the exceptional schools were more prescriptive when it came to identifying and promoting effective pedagogy. There was also evidence that some of the strong schools were moving closer to this approach. Teaching and learning policies or frameworks in these exceptional schools explicitly articulated evidence-based good practice and usually contained plenty of suggestions for (e.g.) starters and plenaries, questioning, peer and self assessment etc. One school framework operated under six key areas: planning for progress, AfL, differentiation, dialogue, literacy, engagement. Teachers in these schools are expected to apply these in their daily practice and there is a shared understanding among staff of what constitutes quality learning and teaching, reinforced through QA, learning walks and other forms of monitoring and feedback.

In the strong schools group, this emphasis on shared pedagogy may be less well embedded, although it is moving in that direction. In one school the latest SIP contains strategies to enhance challenge and differentiation; in another a new teaching and learning policy is being rolled out *“largely as a consolidation of what we hope is already happening, but formalising it”*.

TF and non TF teachers in another school felt that strategies for learning were introduced but not always followed up or evaluated. There was a tension between the school’s drive to raise attainment quickly and the creation of specific strategies for teacher learning. However the school is putting changes in place to address this issue. There is a new professional studies programme for new teachers. *“We are driving toward ‘this is our teaching and learning’. This is what we expect to see in our classrooms”* and *“We are launching the ten drivers next week”*.

It is possible that TF participants’ own intellectual strengths may be inhibited by different school norms, particularly if the school offers limited or variable opportunities for collaborative learning which is one of the principal tools for reinforcing quality and depth. It might be worth considering extending the TF input across the group of beginning teachers in some TF schools, focusing on effective teaching strategies on which TF participants would be able to work collaboratively with other beginning teachers and sharing expertise with departmental colleagues.

Given the extent and reliability of research in the effectiveness of strategies such as developing thinking skills and of the importance of students learning independent learning skills, there was surprisingly little evidence of schools embedding these approaches, especially in the strong group. Once TF participants start at a particular school, notwithstanding ongoing expert input from TF, they are inevitably influenced by the school’s own learning processes and priorities.

### **Relationships with Students, Parents and the Community**

HP schools build relationships with students, parents and the community

To determine the nature of the schools’ relationships the research explored the extent to which the schools:

- involve parents/carers in their students’ learning;
- design student learning experiences which align with their experiences of home and community;
- engage in system leadership; and
- work in partnership with external agencies and community organisations.

### **Parents/carers involvement in their students' learning**

Across the sample, all schools except one (strong) school, for which it is an area for improvement, went to considerable and effective efforts to involve as many parents as possible in their children's education. Around two thirds of students in these schools agreed that their school took pains to involve their parents. Along with the conventional parents' evenings, schools ran events, adult learning workshops, coffee mornings, newsletters, and facilitated regular contact opportunities with teachers and pastoral workers etc.

### **Student learning experiences which align with their experiences of home and community**

Most teachers said that they consistently tried to make links between their students' learning and their home and community contexts. All were aware of the importance of doing this to secure engagement and sustain interest. Several used sport, for example as a reference point. There was a strong emphasis on careers linked to learning and to roles in the community. External sponsors such as local firms helped to contextualise learning in the world of work and/or creativity. Only one (strong) school experienced difficulties: teachers said that they didn't think they knew enough about the students' backgrounds to make such links. One TF teacher in an exceptional school said that this was still an area for development for him. It was clearly also important for most schools to try and expand their students' horizons at the same time, so school trips and other external events and points of reference were an important part of the mix.

### **Working in partnership with external agencies and community organisations**

There was more evidence amongst the exceptional schools that leaders see working with outside organisations, in education, industry and the local community, as a way to enrich the curriculum of students. For example, a partnership with a construction company means that some Key Stage 4 students in one school have the opportunity to include real-life elements in their learning. This school also has major international business partners, which include VISA Europe, DLS Piper and Deloitte, and links with London Universities such as the University of the South Bank and London School of Economics. All students have the opportunity to undertake 'internships' at various businesses, charities and arts organisations. Another school has extensive links with creative and arts organisations and a range of other external agencies including the United Nations. At another school all of the SLT is involved in the community: companies sponsor various student projects, for example and the school has close links with voluntary organisations and local agencies, including New Scotland Yard.

### **Non TF Schools**

Only two non TF schools were recruited to the sample, both in the exceptional group, both serving highly deprived areas and both with a majority student population of EAL students. These schools share many of the characteristics of some of the TF exceptional schools, including:

- a strong, whole-school, formalised focus on mentoring and coaching;
- a school wide culture of collaboration and 'open door' policy, with staff recognising the potential of PL for making a difference to teaching and learning;
- sustained CPD to embed practice consistently across the school;
- documented whole school pedagogical practices and techniques and systems for ensuring that they are followed;
- a whole school focus on leadership development;
- strong support for and good retention levels of beginning and trainee teachers;

- strong leadership of behaviour management;
- extensive community networks and partnerships with local agencies/organisations/businesses; and
- leading other schools' learning/supporting other schools as well as learning from them.

In particular, these non TF schools share with the TF exceptional schools a whole school focus on teacher accountability which is carried through at senior levels and is consistently applied across departments and faculties.

### **Schools engagement with multiple programmes (Teach First, Teaching Leaders, Future Leaders)**

All but one of the exceptional TF schools were also engaged in the Teaching Leaders programme, and one was in addition engaged with Future Leaders. Four of the six strong TF schools were also engaged in a leadership programme – three Teaching Leaders and one Future Leaders. From data collected during school visits and documentary analysis, it is clear the exceptional TF school leaders consciously configured teacher training and leadership training programmes in their schools to form a whole school strategy to develop teaching and leadership capacity internally. Three of the exceptional TF schools made explicit reference to these programmes as strategic priorities. These SEF extracts exemplify reasons for and benefits from engagement:

- Leadership is outstanding although the leadership team is undergoing significant changes. One Vice Principal took early retirement and three Associate Vice Principals were appointed in September 2012 (two via the Future Leaders scheme) to strengthen and broaden the team's capacity.
- We have recently, through the Future Leaders Programme, appointed an Associate Vice Principal – Director of Teaching and Learning.
- We currently have colleagues on the Teach First, Teaching Leaders' and Future Leaders' Programmes and participate in regular training sessions. We also host regional training.
- We actively encourage colleagues to pursue leadership roles and currently have colleagues on various Leadership programmes including: Future Leaders; Equal Access to Promotion; Aspiring Leaders; Strong Leadership Development; Outstanding Leader; Outstanding Facilitator; H2H (for new HoDs) and Teaching Leaders.

In another exceptional school a recently appointed assistant head with responsibility for teaching and learning had come through the Teach First route.

Interestingly, neither of the exceptional TFN schools were engaged in Future Leaders or Teaching Leaders either. Both had developed their own in school programmes for teacher and leadership development. In one of these, for example, the Teacher Development Team is led by two assistant heads and forms one of three core strategic and operational teams in the school, which has designed its own middle leader training and development programme.

## Extent to which the characteristics attributable to Teach First and other interventions are reproducible across secondary schools.

One of the things we know from research into transferring and scaling up of particular practices is that the amount of actual change involved for any particular school is an important factor. TF may have reason to be encouraged by the fact that practice in the strong schools was evolving. More schools are developing school-wide teaching and learning policies and the systems to monitor their implementation. More are also focusing part of PL on sustained cross school pedagogical themes.

In terms of PL, TF teachers already have a strong sense of their own efficacy. In the exceptional schools, collaborative PL was typically structured into the schools' learning cycle, but in some strong schools many teachers wanted more collaboration

The foundations are present in all schools: they all want to achieve the best possible outcomes for all their students and they have already shown that they are prepared to make substantial changes to achieve this, if necessary. For example, it was apparent from the documentary evidence at a number of exceptional schools that notwithstanding supportive QA and extensive support systems, if teachers continued to fall short of required standards they left the school. Moral purpose had to go hand in hand with ensuring that students only got the best. This was not as evident in the strong group, which may help to explain the departmental variations and cross school inconsistencies in some of these schools.

There is some evidence across the sample that the more schools invest in TF (and other early teacher) support, the more likely they are to capitalise on that investment by making good and early use of the skills, leadership and commitment which they bring to the job. Equally, there was evidence from some TF participants that if this does not happen they do not stay at the school.

## Conclusion

The clarity of the distinctions between the two groups of schools were surprising to the researchers. Some similarities and distinctions were to be expected and are highlighted in the evidence on which the research framework was based. For example, there was a significant degree of variability and lack of consistency between departments in the strong schools, (e.g. in terms of collaborative pupil learning) whereas in exceptional schools key policies were consistently applied across the school. Many of these distinctions relate to how far schools feel able to support and pursue systematic modes of working and to underpin them with both tools and the development of shared understandings. Since strong schools often have pockets of such practices they have strengths on which to build. It is important to note therefore that many of the Strong schools saw some of the practices of exceptional schools, such as focusing on critical thinking skills and adopting more complex pedagogies as "the next challenge".

But it is also important to note that some distinctions, such as the extent to which specialist expertise was seen as important or not, were more marked. For example, in a number of strong schools leaders and teachers firmly believed that it is pedagogic expertise *rather than* specialist (subject) expertise that matters. Similarly attitudes towards leadership seemed to the authors to differ between the two groups of schools. In exceptional schools the development and use of talent at whatever age and stage of development was seen as a major driver of quality and an issue to be pursued and nurtured with care and attention. By contrast, in strong schools attitudes to leadership tended to be more traditionally hierarchical and experience based. These more marked distinctions were rather less expected and development of these approaches in strong schools might require a re-evaluation and refinements to current beliefs and modes of operation.

The research was undertaken specifically to enhance Teach First's understanding of the contexts in which its participants and ambassadors work and the ways in which their support and preparation is dependent upon and or complemented by work in schools. It was designed chiefly to have a formative role so the size of the sample is modest and the design is intended to be illustrative rather than definitive. But the clarity of the portraits and distinctions seems to have a wider relevance and is therefore offered to the education system to inform further reflection, research and analysis. It is our hope that it provides helpful and practical information about the journey from being a strong school to becoming an exceptional one.

CUREE Ltd  
4 Copthall House, Station Square, Coventry CV1 2FL  
☎ +44 (024) 7652 4036  
✉ philippa.cordingley@curee.co.uk  
📧 @PhilippaCuree