



School  
Improvement  
Hub

## Case study

# Lighthouse Schools Partnership



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CST and ImpactEd Group are working together to collate examples of school improvement practices used by trusts, freely shared to help schools across the country. If your trust has work that aligns with our conceptual framework for trust-led improvement, please visit the website: [schoolimprovementhub.org](https://schoolimprovementhub.org) for details of how to work with us to develop and share a case study, and help all our schools to keep getting better.



# Trust-led school improvement model

The CST conceptual model for trust improvement is structured as a triple helix, consisting of three strands:

## Curate clear goals

Defining clear purposes, strategies and goals, so that the trust knows what it's aiming for and how to get there

## Build capability and capacity

Shaping the people, culture and capacity within the organisation, in order to create the conditions for sustainable improvement

## Implement improvement initiatives

The ongoing process of implementing improvement, iterating and refining as plans are enacted

The model outlines the key aspects of how a school-improvement process, strategy or model might be enacted within a trust. Rather than dictating areas for improvement, the conceptual model allows each trust to apply its own understanding of quality and its own improvement goals to each of the three strands. The model is intended to help trusts trace a pathway from the areas their improvement strategy intends to address towards a

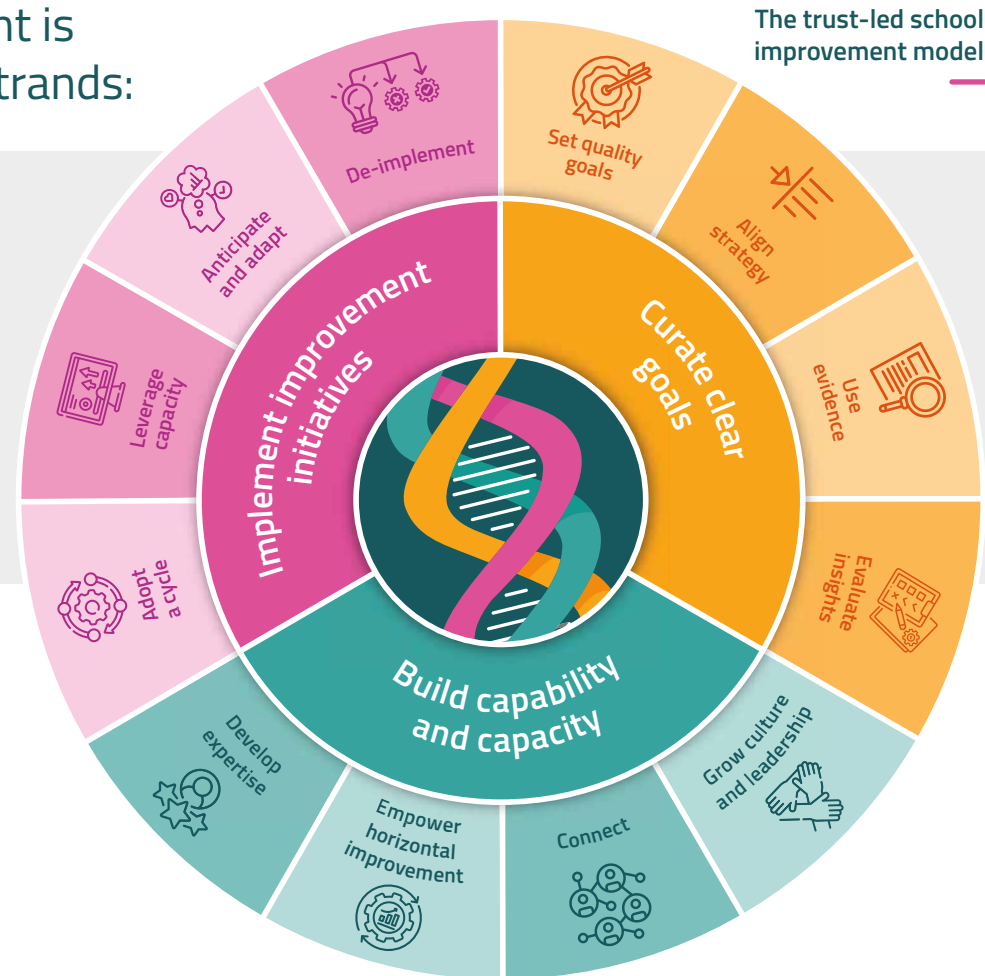
broader consideration of how they achieve their improvement goals.

Each of the strands then breaks down into further components. The "Building capability and capacity" strand, therefore, breaks down into the following components:

- Develop expertise
- Empower horizontal improvement
- Connect
- Grow culture and leadership

And the "Implementing improvement initiatives" strand breaks down into the following components:

- Adopt a cycle
- Leverage capacity
- Anticipate and adapt
- De-implement



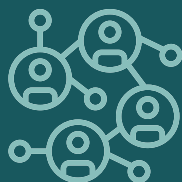
# Case study: Lighthouse Schools Partnership



This case study highlights the following components in the conceptual model:

## Connect

Build connections across the organisation



## Leverage capacity

Match improvement initiatives with capacity to deliver



## TRUST OVERVIEW

**Trust:** Lighthouse Schools Partnership (LSP)

**CEO:** Gary Lewis

**Founded:** 2016

**Schools:** 26 primary schools and four secondary schools, across North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset

**School sizes:** The largest primary has capacity for 650 pupils; the smallest five take fewer than 100 pupils. Gordano School, the largest secondary, has more than 2,000 pupils

**Percentage of pupils receiving free school meals:** 9.49%

**Percentage eligible to receive pupil-premium funding:** 11.04%

**Percentage of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities:** 8.52%

**Pupils speaking English as an additional language:** 4.47%

**Key stage 2:** 67% per cent of pupils achieved at least the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (combined)

**Key stage 4:** 52% achieved at least grade 5 in English and maths

**Attainment 8:** 50.17

**Progress 8:** +0.15

**Ofsted:** At the start of the 2023-24 academic year, eight LSP schools were judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted, and 20 were judged 'good'



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***Neil Lankester, director of school improvement  
Lighthouse Schools Partnership***

## BACKGROUND

**Lighthouse Schools Partnership (LSP) was set up with six schools in September 2016. These first schools were all in the Portishead area, with central trust services provided from Gordano School.**

During the 2017-18 academic year, LSP recorded the largest increase in size of any academy trust, growing by 167 per cent – from six to 16 academies. All 10 schools that joined the trust were rated either 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted before their conversion.

The Regional Schools Commissioner for the South West encouraged the trust to take on further schools. In her January 2018 annual review, she wrote: "I am pleased with the progress your trust has made...and the plans you have put in place to continue development."

By Easter 2020, the trust had grown further, to 23 schools. It eventually reached 30 schools in the 2023-24 academic year.

Following this period of rapid growth, senior leaders realised that they needed to re-examine their model of management, in order to develop strong schools at scale. From 2024, therefore, the trust has set a three-year strategy, and is working with its schools to help them align themselves with this plan.

In the early days of the trust, there was a much looser arrangement between schools and the central team," says Neil Lankester, LSP director of school improvement. "Over time, our concept of being a trust has evolved. So we've been working towards coherence more recently, and are taking steps in our curriculum and teaching to enable this to happen.

"We want to align our curriculum, so that long- and medium-term plans are agreed across the trust. We believe that teachers and leaders should have the option to create lesson-by-lesson planning and resources that meet the needs of the pupils in their classrooms. We want to empower our leaders to implement the curriculum effectively in the context of their own schools. What we don't want to say is, "Here's the handbook and every resource – we will monitor if you are adhering to it."

"We need to draw on the expertise we have in the trust to make the best curriculum model, the best approach to pedagogy, the best approach to inclusion."



## WHAT DOES EDUCATION LOOK LIKE AT LIGHTHOUSE SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP?

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**Trust growth has led the central LSP team to develop its framework for education, including curriculum, pedagogy and inclusion.**

At primary level, shared planning based on the Oak Academy model was introduced during the Covid pandemic. However, headteachers were able to choose to opt out of this planning, creating a barrier for school improvement.

Secondaries, meanwhile, remained more autonomous, with the trust CEO largely serving as the line manager for the schools' headteachers. This was because there was already greater alignment across some areas of the curriculum, as well as more capacity and greater expertise available. Additionally, the secondaries engaged in peer review, with annual quality-assurance reviews.

As part of its three-year strategy, LSP is now putting in place a trust-wide framework with shared curriculum, ensuring the same sequence of learning across all schools. The trust's three-year planning document states: "Curriculum commonality allows us to: have a mutual understanding of what we want pupils to know and achieve in each area of our curriculum; work collaboratively to share and learn from our best practice at scale; share planning and support workload; grow our leadership capacity and benchmark our expectations of pupil achievement."





Lesson plans will be available for schools to use – though schools that have been rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted will not be obliged to use them. Larger schools may have capacity to develop their own lesson plans; smaller schools are less likely to. The aim, therefore, is that the trust’s lesson plans will serve as a model of best practice for some schools, and as a much-needed resource for others.

Whenever it rolls out a scheme of work across all schools, the trust will also consider the full range of needs. For example, roughly a third of its schools teach in mixed-age classes, which presents particular problems in terms of how to deliver the curriculum in a way that keeps all pupils engaged. So the trust network of subject specialists will ensure that it has considered how to implement any given scheme of work in a mixed-age group.

LSP is clear, however, that individual schools will maintain a level of deliberate delegation within this new model:

“For me, too far would be: ‘Here are six lessons, six resources, and you have to deliver that with no amendments and no contextualisation to your children,’” says Mr Lankester. “Schools need to refine how they use resources to meet their needs. We want them to be able to customise them.”

The trust is also doing a lot of headteacher CPD work, to help all heads understand what effective school improvement looks like, and how to ensure effective quality assurance when working with a school-improvement partner from the trust.

“That, in my view, is the job of the trust,” says Mr Lankester. “To be there to support the headteacher, in order that they can focus on implementation.”



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***Neil Lankester, director of school improvement, Lighthouse Schools Partnership***



# How does this work in practice?

## A closer examination of building connections and leveraging capacity

### LEVERAGING CAPACITY: Curriculum and CPD at scale

#### 1. Curriculum and CPD

Five LSP schools have 100 pupils or fewer. One has only 50 pupils and three teachers. The headteachers of these schools or federations therefore don't have the capacity to create a curriculum for every subject in the school.

Instead, they draw on the expertise of 30 schools working at scale.

LSP is currently in the process of rethinking its curriculum design, and specifically its history and humanities curriculum. This process needs to take in the requirements of its bigger and smaller schools: there will be a curriculum for single-form implementation, as well as for mixed-age classes working on a two-year rolling programme for curriculum delivery.

But the school with 50 pupils actually teaches in a three-year mixed-age cycle. On school-improvement visits, members from the trust central team have therefore been working with this school to tailor the curriculum for the specific needs of this school and its class structure.

There is a similar process when it comes to trust CPD. LSP commissioned White Rose Education, which produces the maths resources used by its schools, to deliver maths CPD to all the teachers in the trust. The trust maths network, which holds three meetings a year with all the maths leads in the trust, then picked up the CPD baton. It used its meetings with the maths leads as an opportunity to consider and discuss ideas introduced at the White Rose session.

The maths network also works with the maths lead in each small school – who may simply be the headteacher – to ensure that the new techniques and strategies discussed at the CPD session are properly implemented at school level, in a way that suits each school's individual needs.

The trust's decisions are research-based: in particular, the central team studies any relevant reports produced by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), considering how best to implement the





findings within the trust. They then take their ideas to the trust-wide learning networks, who look at how best to tailor the recommendations to the needs of each school.

During school-improvement visits, the central team then has a conversation with an individual school's senior leadership team: "These are what the recommendations are. You've had discussions about them with the learning network. Let's now think about the next steps."

These visits are also used to direct school leaders to further reading. For example, a school thinking about its reading curriculum might be directed to *Reading Reconsidered*, by Doug Lemov, Colleen Driggs and Erica Woolway. And the central team will always guide headteachers to any relevant EEF studies that they should be considering.

In all subjects, headteachers, subject leaders and middle leaders come together in network groups, in order to share best practice and learn from one another. Those schools that have been identified as higher-risk receive more central support; those at lower risk receive fewer days of school-improvement support.

"It's about using our capacity in the best way," says Mr Lankester. "If our school-improvement team is at the centre playing Whack-a-Mole, it wouldn't work at scale. We have to have cohesion in the trust to draw upon our best expertise."

## 2. Cascading CPD

Whole-trust CPD is not just about ensuring that headteachers and subject leads are well-trained; it is also about ensuring that the learning that the heads receives trickles down to all the teaching staff.

So, after the whole-trust White Rose Education CPD session mentioned above, headteachers and maths leads followed up their work with the trust maths network by running sprints of CPD for the rest of the teachers in their schools.

As well as developing curriculum skills, therefore, the trust works with headteachers to help them design CPD for school staff. A trust-wide, one-size-fits-all model cannot work here: the needs of a school with 600 pupils are very different from those of a school with 50 pupils. And so the central team offers a range of options, working with headteachers to help them consider which might be the best fit for their school.

The first of any school-based CPD sessions would then be attended by a member of the trust central team, who would subsequently do some quality-assurance work. After this, they would work again with the headteacher, to help plan out the next session.

The aim is to equip each headteacher with the skills to be an effective school-improvement leader. Among the trust's stated delivery goals is to "ensure that our staff have the right skills to raise standards further, deliver good teaching and learning, and disseminate best practice in order to grow leaders that can lead, succession plan and talent manage future leaders".



## BUILDING CONNECTIONS: Learning from others, in order to maximise resources

### 1. Learning partners

When the current director of inclusion joined LSP, she conducted an audit of inclusion practices across its schools. What she found was that, in some schools, pupils with SEND needs tended to be overreliant on adults to access learning. Teaching assistants were deployed on a one-to-one basis, rather than working flexibly to support pupils across the class. This model was neither justified by the research evidence nor financially viable.

So the trust decided to pilot the learning-partner model of using teaching assistants, instead. This model involves allocating teaching assistants – or learning partners – to a class, year group or phase, rather than to a specific pupil. The learning partner then works in partnership with the class teacher to meet the needs of the class and supplement the teaching.

The only time learning partners would work with individual pupils would be if they were specifically directed by the teacher to support children with EHCP or SEND needs. In these cases, the learning partner would offer the minimal amount of support necessary. The aim is to encourage pupils with SEND to become independent learners, rather than relying on the teaching assistant for help.

The director of inclusion asked for volunteers to pilot the model, and the headteachers of three

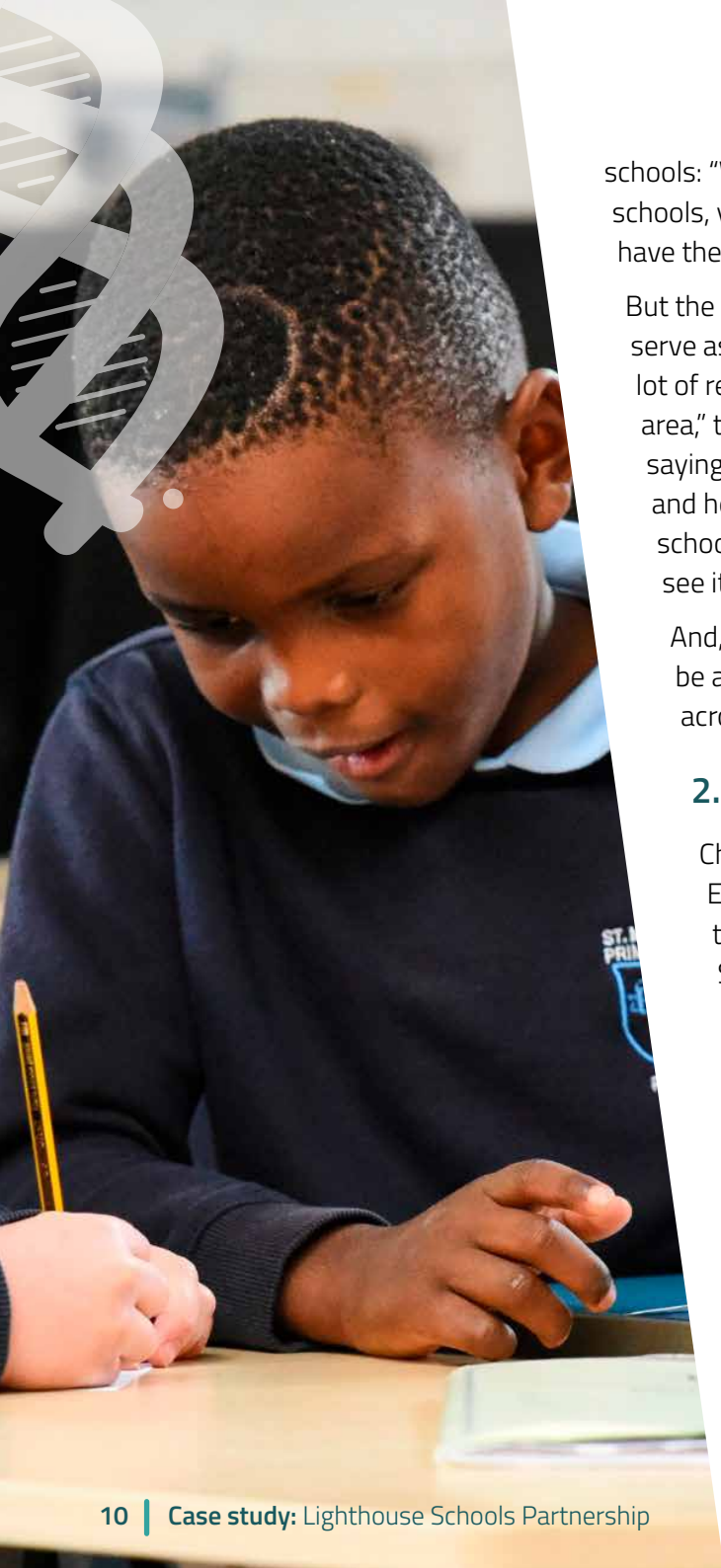
LSP schools, all serving different contexts, offered to take part. The trust delivered CPD sessions to school leaders, teachers and the learning partners. These looked at the model itself, as well as how to persuade different stakeholders that the new model was worth trialling. The trust also ran a session for parents and carers at each of the three schools.

Nonetheless, there was a degree of pushback: some members of staff saw it as a controversial change, scaling back a vital resource. The learning partners themselves did not always welcome the change to their working hours and patterns of working. Others, however, cautiously welcomed the change.

During the course of the pilot, the trust will run focus groups with pupils, asking whether they feel supported and engaged in lessons. And staff will also discuss how the collaboration between learning partners and teachers is working in practice.

In order to ensure that this innovation is grounded firmly in evidence, the trust has asked ImpactEd to evaluate the pilot and its effect on all stakeholders. The ImpactEd researcher overseeing the study believes that the central team is keen to secure staff buy-in, before rolling it out to more





schools: “When you push something down across schools, you really want to have confidence in it and have the evidence.”

But the trust also hopes that the pilot schools can serve as models for others in the trust. “There are a lot of relatively small, rural schools, all within a certain area,” the ImpactEd researcher said. “The trust is saying: ‘Here’s how you can make use of limited staff, and here’s how it’s working successfully in another school down the road, with pupils like yours. You can see it there.’”

And, if the pilots are successful, the trust will then be able to roll it out, as its preferred approach across all schools.

## 2. Mixed-age classes

Changes in the local-authority funding model for EHCPs mean that a number of schools in the trust have seen their budgets suddenly reduced. Several schools have therefore needed to make large reductions to their budget for next year, and approached the trust to say that they are having to reduce staff numbers.

In November 2023, when the trust’s finance team collected all the schools’ budgets, it looked at which of them were having to go through a change-management process. The central team then had a meeting with the heads involved, looking at how to make reductions to their budget in a realistic way, while still maintaining high standards.

A couple of weeks later, a trust school-improvement partner then went out to each of the schools, to find out what options the headteachers were considering.

One LSP primary, a two-form entry school with falling rolls, reported that it was considering a number of options. One was to put senior leaders in the classroom full-time. Another was to introduce mixed-age classes from Reception to Year 2. The third was to deploy the learning-partners model, along with mixed-age classes at key stage 1.

The trust’s team considered the strengths and challenges of each of these different approaches. It itemised the curriculum support that it could put in place for mixed-age classes, and the support it would offer if the school opted for a learning-partner model. It explained the quality-assurance measures it would use for any change.

In the end, senior leaders opted for a mixed-age key stage 1 class. At this point, the trust was able to offer access to its AB curriculum cycles for mixed-age classes. But it was also able to point staff to a nearby trust school that used the same key stage 1 mixed-age model, and was achieving excellent results with it.

LSP believes that immediate access such ready-made exemplars – with a similar demographic of pupils and the same strategies and teaching methods in place – are a key strength of the trust.

“The school up the road has a similar number of pupils and the same curriculum,” Mr Lankester says. “We all go to the same headteacher meetings. So then a headteacher thinks: what can I learn from them, because we have that commonality across the trust?”

## Key points

- A shared curriculum framework, with a range of lesson plans, will be introduced as part of a three-year trust strategy
- All individual lesson plans will remain optional for 'good' or 'outstanding' schools
- CPD is delivered across the trust and then cascaded down, with headteachers given central support to become school-improvement leaders in their own schools
- Smaller schools are provided with trust-wide support and resources, including access to subject networks, whether for CPD or for subject-specialist working
- Schools are encouraged to visit other schools in the trust, as a model for how they might implement change
- Central support is targeted according to need. High-risk schools receive high levels of support; lower-risk schools receive less

## Resources

- [LSP school-improvement strategy](#)
- [LSP school-improvement model](#)
- [LSP three-year curriculum plan](#)

