



## Developing a self-improving school system in North Lanarkshire



### Rationale

*'The driving goal is not illusionary short-term gains but sustainable success.'*

Ainscow (2015), page xi

Although there is both a need and a value in having policies, structures and programmes to which all North Lanarkshire schools are required to adhere, it is vital that inflexible, narrow 'solutions' to improvement are not imposed on schools. Schools, and the local communities which they serve, are unique and often complex. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach, therefore, will ultimately fail in meeting the needs of every individual school and pupil across North Lanarkshire.

In a self-improving school system, schools are empowered to find their own solutions, with the role of the local authority offering appropriate support and resources to facilitate ongoing and sustainable improvement. This, however, does not mean schools are left to their own devices. On the contrary, a self-improving school system establishes a high level of mutual support and accountability between establishments and prevents schools from becoming isolated and inward-looking.

North Lanarkshire is committed to the pursuit of excellence by all schools rather than 'islands of excellence'. It is absolutely vital that successful schools become the key to success in helping other establishments bring about transformational change in themselves. For this to happen, effective practice and success need to be shared and knowledge needs to be continually moved around.

*'Within schools and the communities they serve, there are untapped resources that can be mobilised in order to transform schools from places that do well for many children and young people so that they can do well for them all.'*

Ainscow (2015), page xii



### Organisation of the North Lanarkshire self-improving school system

The self-improving school system within North Lanarkshire will be made up of all schools and establishments across all sectors. This network of self-improving schools will be organised into 'families' of six which will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised every two years. Families will be

connected by similar characteristics such as school roll and SIMD data. Each family will be supported by a lead Head Teacher from within the group.

School family groups will meet a minimum of twice a term and the entire network will come together twice each session for the Self-Improving Schools Forum. This gathering will provide the opportunity for school leaders to hear about and share effective practice and to support and encourage each other on their improvement journey. The self-improving schools network will also be supported by Twitter, allowing each family group to post news and items of interest relating to school improvement.

In May/June of each year, families will split into two groups of three Head Teachers to facilitate annual Professional Review and Development.

Within families of schools and the vision of system leadership, there will be scope for leaders *at all levels* to come together.



### **School family group meetings**

During the initial year of North Lanarkshire's self-improving school system, each family group will identify three shared priorities. Related challenge questions from *How Good Is Our School? 4* will be selected and specific tasks linked to these will be incorporated into a concise action plan. Challenge questions will be explored and addressed through group members visiting each other's establishments (learning walks), engaging in professional dialogue and sharing ideas and resources.

Family groups, under the direction of the lead Head Teacher, will have the opportunity to post on Twitter to allow effective practice, knowledge and expertise to be continually shared. The central objective of North Lanarkshire's self-improving school system must not be lost: effective practice transfer, leading to ongoing improvement across all establishments.



### **The role of the *Continuous Improvement Service* within the self-improving school system**

The Continuous Improvement Service endeavours to be a flexible and proactive team, dedicated to providing support and challenge within a self-improving school system. Each of the six localities within North Lanarkshire has a small team of Continuous Improvement Officers who provide support and challenge to schools on a proportionate/needs basis.

Within their localities, Continuous Improvement Officers work collaboratively with the CLD Manager, Additional Support Needs Manager and Psychological Services to form a *Support Around The School Team* (SAST). Each SAST allows expertise, resources and local knowledge to be pulled together, better assisting schools and centres in meeting the needs of children, young people and their families.

Although the Continuous Improvement Service does not have any jurisdiction over individual school family groups, officers will, on request, be available to attend family group meetings and will also assist in pointing groups in the direction of useful resources and contacts.



## Support for school family groups

It is anticipated that, once established, school family groups will be largely self-supporting. Nevertheless, in addition to the CIS, other outside support is available:

- The biannual self-improving schools forum will provide a valuable opportunity for family groups to come together in one venue to share effective practice and engage in high-quality professional dialogue. The forum will also provide a captive audience for inspiring keynote speakers.
- School family groups will be encouraged to identify and approach other partners to support them on their improvement journey such as Head Teachers from other local authorities, visiting academics, health professionals and individuals from the business world.
- The Education Scotland website contains an extensive and comprehensive bank of resources which school family groups can utilise. Given the direct link between HGIOS4 and the family group action plan, it will be relatively straightforward to source pertinent Education Scotland materials and resources.
- It is hoped that a vibrant Twitter community will quickly become established, allowing ideas to be spread, resources shared and prevent individual schools from feeling isolated.
- The School Improvement Working Party will continue to meet on a regular basis and will be open to feedback and input on how to further develop and support the NLC self-improving school system.



## Evaluating impact and success

- In June 2016, a small selection of challenge questions from HGIOS4 will be adapted into statements to support school family groups in evaluating the impact of the self-improving school system.
- A short Survey Monkey questionnaire will be sent to all Heads of establishments in June 2016 to gather feedback on the initial year of the self-improving school system and support the School Improvement Working Party in identifying and shaping next steps.

The School Improvement Working Party remains committed to learning lessons from effective self-improving school systems from across the United Kingdom and beyond and to accessing and disseminating relevant research and literature to inform and further develop the model within North Lanarkshire. The current members of the School Improvement Working Party are:

**Graeme Young**, Head Teacher, St Bartholomew's Primary School (Chair)

**Robert Colquhoun**, Head Teacher, Brannock High School

**Joe McAvoy**, Quality Improvement Manager

**Michael McKenna**, Head Teacher, St Andrew's High School

**Carrie Nicol**, Head Teacher, Berryhill Primary School

**Tony Rooney**, Head Teacher, St Aidan's High School



## Further reading

Ainscow, M. (2015) *Towards self-improving school systems*. Oxon: Routledge

Hargreaves, D H. (2010) *Creating a self-improving school system*. Nottingham: National College for Leadership of Schools

Hargreaves, D H. (2011) *Leading a self-improving school system*. Nottingham: National College for Leadership of Schools

Hargreaves, D H. (2012) *A self-improving school system in international context*. Nottingham: National College for Leadership of Schools

Hargreaves, D H. (2012) *A self-improving school system: towards maturity*. Nottingham: National College for Leadership of Schools

