

Essex School-led Improvement System

A partnership document between Essex County Council, Essex Primary Heads Association, Association of Secondary Heads in Essex, Essex Special Schools Education Trust and Essex School Governors Association.

Vision

To establish a new system in which schoolsⁱ improve themselves by working in partnership with each other in a school-led improvement system which supports children and young people 0–25 to achieve their highest aspirations in education and employment.

We believe every Essex school should be part of a formal school partnership with a number of other schools. The type of partnership is less important than its ability to share practice and capacity, hold schools within the partnership to account in mutually reinforcing ways, and enable schools to access the support they need. Within these partnerships schools will work together and share best practice through joint practice development and a system of peer reviews. System Leaders will play a key role in enabling schools in the partnership to improve towards outstanding. A self-managing, self-improving school system will become established where co-operation and trust with structured and planned improvement are driven by school leaders, and where every school in the partnership benefits and standards are continuously raised. This will help build on Essex's already strong position in terms of the high proportion of schools judged good or outstanding, and enable Essex schools to own and develop their own future.

The Essex school-led improvement system will deliver:

- ❖ Every child within a partnership to be able to attend a school which is at least good and improving
- ❖ Improved outcomes for all children 0–25 years and ensure that there is no ceiling on the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils
- ❖ Access to economies of scale through brokering (bought-in services) and bulk purchasing
- ❖ A culture in which Headteachers have aspirations for all the children in the partnership and the county of Essex to achieve their highest outcomes
- ❖ Ongoing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning through teachers teaching each other and developing new practice together
- ❖ Improved practice through informal and formal continuing professional development at all levels, including governors
- ❖ An accurate evaluation of its best practice and its areas for improvement with clear plans to bring up its weakest areas
- ❖ Clusters that are responsible for their own improvement and that of others by using regular external challenge; leading to cohesion, confidence and skills through networking with colleagues

Core principles

1. Schools will be in improving and mutually responsible partnerships that will be accountable to an agreed body

Partnerships provide a forum for collaboration, using combined strengths to sustain and develop school improvement and peer review to identify areas for improvement; and where schools will agree to be held responsible for the commitments that they have voluntarily made to each other through a formal agreement.

2. The Partnerships will be deep and tight with high ambition

Partnerships recognise and celebrate strengths and aspires to excellence for each of the schools that is underpinned by high levels of trust and transparency, clear governance arrangements and ambitious long-term plans and shares combined expertise, knowledge, skills, energy and enthusiasm.

3. The partnership will have shared values and a common moral purpose

These will respect each school's individual ethos, culture, values and identity.

4. The type of partnership is less important than its effectiveness

Partnerships may be SLIS-funded clusters, multi-academy trusts, or other groups of schools or academies. What is important is the ability of the partnership to be effective in improving schools and act in ways described in this vision, and that all schools in Essex are actively involved in at least one effective partnership and in peer review. The system will also learn from and actively engage with other examples of groups of schools from across Essex, for example in Basildon, Harlow and Tendring; and current ASHE triads.

5. Teaching School Alliances will form an integral part of the school-led improvement system

They will play a fundamental role in providing school improvement resources to the partnerships.

6. There will be an expectation by governors that schools will support each other and expect Headteachers to actively participate within the partnership

This will be achieved by governors actively engaging in the work of the partnership and themselves seeking to be more effective in governor collaborative working to ensure outcomes for children across the partnership further improve and by releasing staff to work across the partnership in order to support and challenge the schools and ensure all are working towards achieving the highest outcomes for all the children.

7. Partnerships will have strong governance evidenced through formal partnership agreements

These will be driven by strong governance with the highest ambition for the partnership and support and develop excellence between members through robust professional challenge that will impact positively on all members of school communities.

8. School Leaders will facilitate teachers working across the partnership collaborating with other sectors where appropriate, to develop outstanding practice

Schools will work in a close and supportive alliance to share best practice and provide the opportunity and encouragement to leaders at every level, for professional development is the heart of sustaining success.

9. The partnership will operate in a climate of trust and openness in order to enable all schools to continuously improve

Schools will openly share and analyse each other's data and information gathered from other sources and support continuous improvement by providing contextualised and regular external comparison, identifying key areas of strength and areas for development across the partnership.

10. There will be systems to evaluate the impact of the work of the partnerships

By monitoring and evaluating the work within the partnership, support and intervention can be adapted to meet the changing needs of the schools and ensure maximum impact. Partnerships will keep the health of each of their schools and the maturity and effectiveness of their partnership under regular review.

11. A School-led Improvement System Project Board will co-ordinate and review the development of the partnerships and over time will hold them to account

The Board will be responsible for the health and sustainability of the School-led Improvement System and use tools such as a cluster healthcheck to understand how effectively each cluster is working. The Board will oversee the delegation of the pump-priming funds to the SLIS clusters. The Board will set the vision for the system, help to co-ordinate support, and provide a County overview. The Board will provide a link to other key stakeholders. The Board will enable partnerships and clusters to share effective practice and help broker support for schools.

12. Heads and senior leaders will operate as system leaders to improve outcomes for all children/young people in the partnership and grow further system leadership capacity across the partnerships

Heads, senior leaders and governors of all the schools in the partnership will take responsibility for the outcomes across all the schools and the partnership as a whole. Heads, managers and governors in the maintained and non-maintained sector in the partnership will take responsibility for school readiness and transition into school by developing effective systems and relationships with the Early Years sector across the partnership.

13. The development of the Schools-led Improvement System will be a joint undertaking between schools and the local authority

Local authority staff will support the development of the partnerships, for example through the work of the LA commissioners.

14. Partnerships will be self-funding and sustainable

Partnerships will establish ways to achieve their purpose through self-funding, after any initial pump-priming funding where applicable.

ⁱ Refers to all schools either maintained or academy