

School Partnerships for Impact Guide

School Partnerships Alliance

Laying the groundwork for enabling and promoting meaningful partnerships between different schools across the state and independent sectors



Produced in partnership with





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School
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The aim of this guide is to explore the work of existing school partnerships within the wider context of good partnering practice, to understand how they deliver extraordinary outcomes for young people, and to open doors for more schools to engage. In doing so, it provides a rationale for dedicating the time and resources needed to maximise the impact of collaborative relationships.

Partnership working in the education sector is not new and comes in many forms: from the sharing of resources, schools collectively addressing a shared need, to multiple schools collaborating, and long-term formal partnerships such as Multi Academy Trusts, and free schools. But if we, as a sector, really expect it to make a difference at a systems level we must give it a chance to seed – to test and refine partnership working – and focus on creating a common language and approach. In this way we will be able to define collaboratively and reciprocally the value of school partnerships and justify further support from government and others.

Looking to harness expertise across and beyond our networks is a key feature of S.P.A. and this is why we commissioned The Partnering Initiative to work with us on this document, seeking an external and expert perspective on how to best frame discussion around school partnerships and start to build a common framework. We are pleased that they will be working with us to further develop this thinking.

Taken as a whole, the education sector is powerful: it is resourceful, compassionate, and innovative in equal measure and this document celebrates and values all parts of the sector – working together – and learning from one another – to improve outcomes for all young people.

We are grateful to all those that contributed to this publication, through interviews, the sharing of research and projects, the testing and refining of language and adding to the debate.

Sue Riley
CEO, School Partnerships Alliance



About the School Partnerships Alliance

The School Partnerships Alliance (S.P.A.) is the membership organisation dedicated to researching, enabling and promoting meaningful partnerships between different schools across the state and independent sectors for the benefit of children throughout the national education system.

Our over-arching objective is to be a force for school improvement and the strongest pupil outcomes, informed by research and driven by impact.

We believe that school partnerships should:

- Support learner aspirations, academic outcomes, social enrichment and well-being
- Be focused on the sharing of resources and foster professional learning for staff
- Become a force of improvement in the whole system

To achieve maximum impact through school partnerships, we work to:

- Raise the profile and status of, and access to, partnership working
- Better understand and evaluate the impact of partnership working
- Equip partnership leads with a common language and framework that will help schools at every stage of partnership engagement and development

As a membership organisation, we seek to offer advice and guidance in developing and professionalising cross-sector partnerships providing expert-led training to develop the key competencies of partnership staff; bespoke support to establish, improve, evaluate or scale up partnerships; access to an active, supported community of peers, whether through the exchange of ideas or the contribution towards improving partnerships at system level; and recognition for pursuing meaningful partnerships.

By engaging in these opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from across the sectors, staff learn how to maximise partnerships to be as effective, innovative and impactful as possible for every pupil.



About The Partnering Initiative

Founded in 2003, The Partnering Initiative (TPI) is the longest established non-profit dedicated to unleashing the power of partnership for sustainable development. Born out of a collaboration between the University of Cambridge and the International Business Leaders Forum, it has been at the forefront of the drive towards all-of-society collaborative approaches for two decades, during which time it has worked extensively with the UN, business, civil society, government, academia and philanthropic foundations to maximise impact through effective partnering.

The S.P.A. has clearly defined principles, goals and ambitions, and is working to formalise the approach to cross-sector school partnerships and to develop an industry wide kite-mark or set of standards for partnerships across schools in the state and independent sectors. Acting as an Expert Partner to the S.P.A. in the early stages of the charity's activities, provides TPI with the rare opportunity to support the S.P.A. in embedding best partnering practice from the very start of its work with members, setting partnerships up for success and avoiding many of the most common partnering pitfalls.





Current context

TPI and the S.P.A. are conscious that the England and Wales education sector, and indeed the UK as a whole, is facing particularly difficult times. The energy crisis, cost of living crisis, funding gaps, recession, and the legacy of the Covid pandemic mean that many schools are already having to make difficult decisions about prioritisation within very stretched budgets.

We hope that this document will support the idea that partnership, in whatever form, should be a benefit, not a burden, and demonstrate that, even when resources are stretched, the benefits of partnering to pupils and schools, the innovative solutions and efficiencies partnering can create, and the potentially manifold return on investment, make partnering very much worthwhile now and in the long run. We hope it will give some insight into how the relationships built can support pupils, staff and schools.

Finally, to directly address concerns raised repeatedly in conversations with educators from both sectors, it is important to highlight the potential of cross-sector school partnerships to support greater social cohesion. In challenging times, when society is increasingly polarised, and disadvantaged or vulnerable groups risk becoming ever more marginalised, partnership between sectors has a key role to play in making connections, breaking down barriers, increasing understanding and underlining what unites us. It also provides innovative and inclusive solutions that reflect and celebrate our diversity.

Document purpose

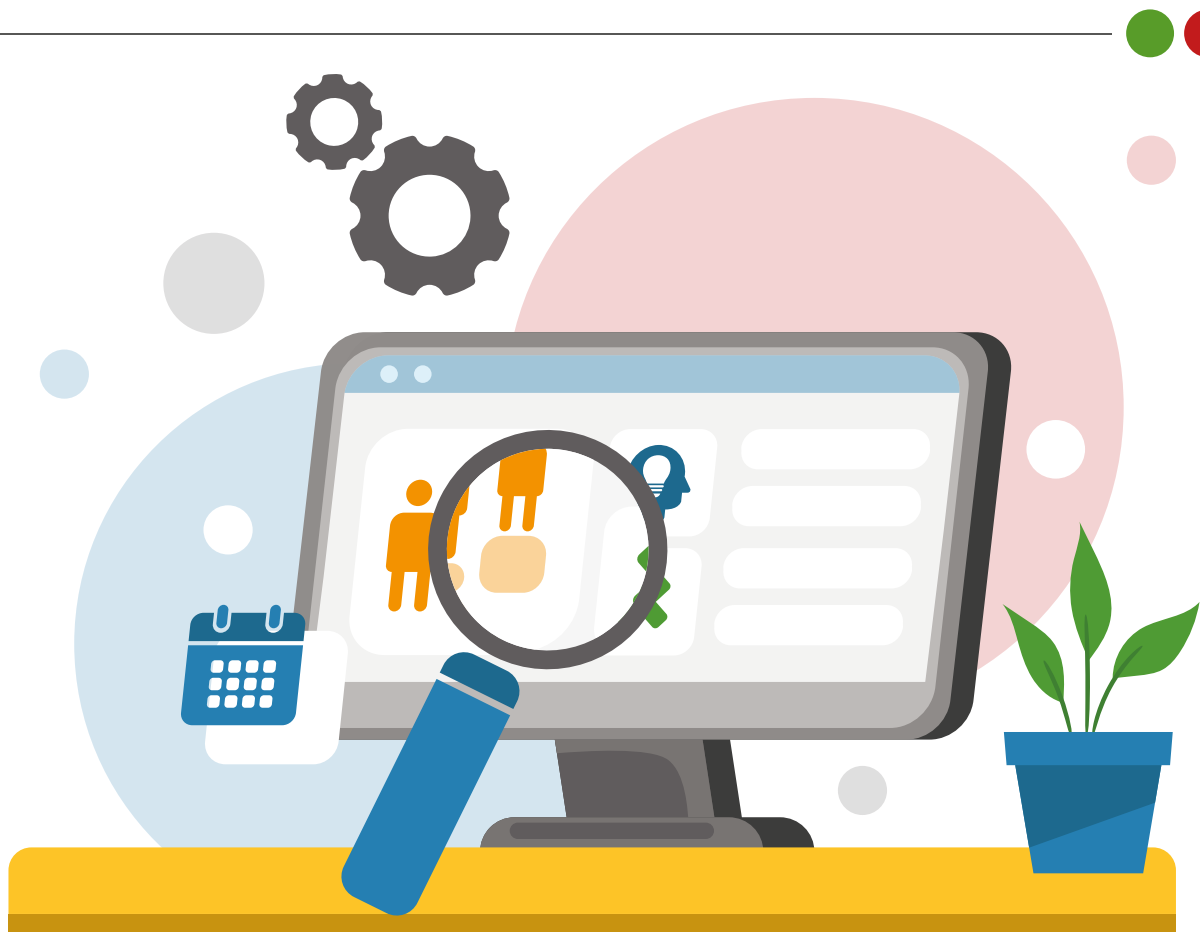
The School Partnerships for Impact document is based on an exploration of current practice in cross-sector school partnering and wider best practice in cross-sector partnerships. It brings together the perspectives and experiences of partnering professionals from across the UK education system and government, as well as key texts and previous research (see Section 8: Methodology for full details).

The document looks at questions around the purpose, structure and benefits of school partnerships between the state and independent sectors. It aims to open the door to the basics of partnership for everyone, and to start to explore the more complex concepts and possibilities for those who are wondering where to go next.

It is designed for everyone at any stage of partnership, from beginners to experienced partnering practitioners, and it covers partnerships ranging from straightforward connections to complex structures. It is applicable for partnerships with limited or substantial resources, and with simple or far-reaching benefits.

The document is not designed to be the final word in cross-sector school partnerships, but to serve as an opportunity to share language, concepts and outcomes around the subject and to catalyse discussion and further exploration.

Through the spectrum of types of school partnerships, and examples of partnering benefits and challenges, we look at what is possible for each type, as well as the potential to engage in more transformational collaboration for those that have the desire and the resources to do so.



The document aims to present an overview of what cross-sector school partnerships are, their purpose, and what they can achieve that schools might not otherwise be able to achieve alone. It outlines the types of benefit that are created only through partnering, setting out the key reasons why schools should partner and commit precious time and resources to do so, in order to reap benefits for pupils, staff, and schools themselves beyond what would otherwise be possible.

As well as sharing the main types of partnerships and partnership benefits, the document asks what it means to partner strategically, explores some areas of existing best practice of cross-sector school partnership, and links to the latest partnering theory around the essential elements of a partnering relationship.

In order to show what is possible and illustrate the key themes above, examples of some partnerships, activities, success factors and challenges are explored through brief case studies.

The S.P.A. and TPI hope to work with those involved with school partnerships to create practical tools and guidance to follow this document and to support people at every stage of developing and managing partnerships.

Acknowledgements

The S.P.A. and TPI are grateful to all those from the education sector and government who generously shared their time, reflections and thoughts about school partnering, as well as the individuals who shared their own research. This has been tremendously helpful in building a picture of the current state and future potential of cross-sector school partnering. A full list of these schools and institutions is set out in Annex 2.

1 What is partnership?



School partnerships can be defined as: an ongoing collaborative relationship between schools, aligning their interests around a common vision and combining their complementary resources and competencies, to deliver benefit to each of the partners. This document focuses in particular on cross-sector partnerships, that is partnerships between state schools or trusts and independent schools. School partnerships can also include other types of organisations, such as universities, business or local authorities.

Partnerships are more than a quick one-off project, and usually require commitment from all partners to work together. School partnerships work best where there is a clear alignment of interests. Cross sector partnerships can deliver more, including greater innovation, through the complementarity and diversity of resources that different schools bring to the table.

There are many different forms of partnership working at different scales, geographies, levels of formality etc. Table 4 in Section 3 illustrates how these can range from simple two-way collaborations around shared resources, through to complex and ambitious long-term relationships. Levels of commitment and of benefits will vary, but for partnerships to last beyond the short-term, all school partners must gain value from their involvement, through school improvements and the progress of their children.

“Actually, our strengths come from our diversity. But then we need to work at keeping the links between our diverse structures.”

(Academy Trust interviewee)



Schools partner because by working together they can collectively deliver more to pupils, to staff and to schools as a whole. There are huge opportunities to benefit from collaboration – whether this is a simple sharing of resources or a complex integrated project which impacts the whole community.

However, partnering is challenging and resource intensive. Bringing together different types of schools from different sectors and enabling them to work together requires a significant investment of time. This is not only upfront in building the relationship and collectively designing activities, but also in ongoing maintenance.

Given this investment in resources, we need to be ruthlessly focused on benefits and added value – and not just one way, but mutual added value – to make sure that the collective benefits accrued for participating schools, teachers and pupils are

worth the effort. The next section sets out the types of benefit and added value that can be generated by school partnerships, and links these into a typology of partnerships which is explained in Table 4 in Section 3.

What does each sector bring to the partnership?

To maximise the added value of partnering across educational sectors, it is important to understand the resources that each sector brings to the partnership. While there are, of course, many overlaps, it is clear from conversations with interviewees from state and independent schools that there are also areas of resource and expertise which are seen to be particular strengths of each sector. The table below (Table 1) illustrates practitioners' perspectives on what each sector brings to the table.

School resources	
State Sector	Independent Sector
- Experience in teaching and supporting pupils from diverse backgrounds, and disadvantaged pupils - SEND provision & inclusion - Safeguarding practices - Use and tracking of data and data-driven interventions, impact measurement, monitoring and evaluation	- Resources (funding, additional teaching capacity, materials, transportation) - Facilities open in evenings or on Saturdays - Potential for a broader curriculum - Co-curricular activities (e.g. drama, sports)
Shared by both sectors	
Up to date and cutting-edge teaching methods and practice	
Classroom management practice	
Specific subject expertise	
State of the art facilities (e.g. technology, sport and performing arts)	
Governance expertise	

– Table 1 – Perspectives on school resources by sector



A note on 'collaborative advantage'

All types of partnership bring demonstrable benefit to partners and as the partnerships themselves become more involved, so the types of benefit, and the ways in which partnerships create them, will also become more varied. Part of the magic of partnerships is that, together, we can accomplish more than we can apart.

*We know that in bringing together our skills, experience, resources and funds we can ensure that partnerships can be more than the sum of their parts and 1 + 1 can equal 3 or more. We call this the collaborative advantage of partnership and it is represented in many of the examples of benefit included in the **Benefits of Partnering** table on pages 12 and 13.*

The benefits of school partnerships

School partnerships connect within and across sectors and share resources. These resources may be tangible, such as facilities and materials, or intangible, such as skills and experience, and they may be shared short or long-term.

Bringing schools together can offer synergies and economies of scale, and diversity can spark innovation, as Table 2 illustrates. The advantages of collaborating between schools and across sectors can bring benefits such as improved student wellbeing, academic attainment, and wider opportunities.

Most partnerships are designed to meet one or more of the **following aims**:

School improvement

Enhanced teacher capacity, knowledge and skills through delivering alongside teachers with different experiences, and teaching different pupil groups, as well as through sharing learning, knowledge and experience

Increased ability to deliver for pupils, through expanded curriculum, enhanced teaching capacity, access to additional resources, facilities and funds, or through shared teachers, outsourced teaching, pupil mentoring etc.

Reputational advantage, and the opportunity to demonstrate benefits to the community

Progress for children

Improved pupil wellbeing through co-curricular or extra-curricular activities, or mental health support

Improved pupil academic attainment through additional academic provision

Pupil personal and social enrichment through co-curricular activities; social opportunities, greater understanding of others, bridging social divides; or career or university preparation-related opportunities and building career skills such as mentoring, facilitation and leadership skills

“ Wellbeing should be high on our agenda at the moment, because children are feeling anxious, and they are suffering from mental health issues, then that is going to be a barrier to their learning and a barrier for them to be able to achieve. ”

(State school interviewee)

“ Benefits depend on local conditions, specific schools, size of partnership etc. No one size fits all model. It’s about using the strengths of specific schools and using that to plug the need for another school and vice versa. ”

(Department for Education interviewee)

“ To say that you’re a trained subject tutor, or to say that you’ve been part of an environmental project which had an impact on a town – those things do set you apart and working with other schools gives you the scale, or size of pupil pool, to do that. ”

(State school interviewee)

Whether or not they progress towards more complex forms of collaboration, all partnerships can bring benefits, as Table 2 illustrates. However, the more long-term and strategic the partnership, the more it can contribute to the schools involved, benefitting not only current pupils, but future generations of pupils too.



Benefit of partnering	What is it, how is it created and why is it useful ?
● Relationship building: ● Connecting with other schools, building relationships	Created when schools begin to partner, this is about building trust, relationships and social capital. It lays the foundations for contributions to all aims, by building the potential for future collaborative action, and for co-created solutions to emerge.
● Community impact: ● Amplifying impact of schools in the community and building reputation	Schools play a vital role in the communities they serve, not just as educators but as local employers, by providing support and guidance for families, and through sharing their resources and facilities, amongst many other aspects of community life. By working together, local schools can amplify their impact in community development, strengthen the connection which comes from being part of a community, and clearly evidence the role they play.
● Complementarity: ● Bringing together essential complementary resources	Partnerships can bring together diverse and complementary resources that are each essential pieces of the solution jigsaw puzzle. This is key to cross-sector school partnerships. Resources may be tangible – facilities or funding for example – or they may be intangible, in the form of knowledge, skills and experience.
● Diversity: ● Creating more representative and inclusive solutions, and breaking down social barriers	School partnerships can help every school be better equipped to create true and lasting benefit for all pupils, across geographies, social, ethnic or religious backgrounds, inclusive of neurological diversity and the full range of abilities, educational needs, gender and sexual identities. This happens through bringing together the widest range of pupils, teachers and schools, with different types of experience serving different pupil groups, to study together, work together, and design activities and partnerships together. This helps to break down stereotypes and create greater awareness and understanding – as well as drawing on the richness of perspectives, needs and experience in diverse groups, to generate inclusive solutions. Diversity in the partnership is key to generating innovative solutions, as seen in the next benefit type.

– Table 2 – Benefits created through cross-sector school partnerships



Benefit of partnering	What is it, how is it created and why is it useful ?
● Innovation: ● Combining diverse thinking and approaches	Partnerships offer an opportunity for jointly creating new, more effective approaches that deliver greater benefit and impact. The stronger and more equitable the relationship, and the greater the diversity of experience and knowledge represented within the partnership, the more space there is for innovative solutions and ideas to be co-created. Some innovative solutions to issues around geography and isolation might come in the form of digital projects and networks that can connect pupils and teachers across geographies and help efficiently disseminate knowledge and new ideas.
● Shared learning: ● Collective learning and capability-building	Exchange of knowledge and experience allows partners to learn from each other, as well as collectively develop good practice to share more widely. Shared learning and knowledge are key benefits of partnering, for pupils, teachers and schools, contributing to pupil attainment and enrichment, to teacher capacity building, and to schools' ability to deliver more for their pupils in future, all supporting school improvement. For partnerships between schools, this applies at three levels: ▪ Extended learning opportunities for pupils ▪ Learning and knowledge sharing between teachers and at schools' level ▪ Sharing learning with the outside world
● Synergy and economies of scale: ● Aligning resources or activities and exploiting synergies	Working in partnership - particularly in more complex partnerships with a shared strategy and aims, pooled funds and combined resources - allows schools to increase the degree of benefit and impact from the resources available (or achieve the desired impact with fewer resources). Partnerships create efficiencies and economies of scale through coordinated action, sharing common resources or services, avoiding duplication of tasks, creating common financial funds, and speeding up knowledge sharing and exchange of ideas. This allows schools to do more, create more sustainable benefit for their pupils, and reach more pupils than they could otherwise. It also enables schools to better support specific groups, or types of activities, that might not be possible for a smaller number of pupils (for example mental health support, SEND provision, LGBTQ+ groups, environmental projects or specific music or theatre activities).



Examples

Shared learning across partnership

Heads of department from across the Cheltenham Education Partnership's ten schools regularly meet to discuss matters of mutual interest and propose collaborative projects.

The Southwark Schools' Learning Partnership (SSLP) runs an Aspiring Leaders professional development programme for teachers. Taking advantage of online technology, the programme, now in its third year, consists of three 90-minute twilight sessions with guest speakers from across the globe and concludes with an in-person opportunity to converse with experienced leaders and fellow participants. Past programmes have been for aspiring middle leaders and aspiring senior leaders, with this year's focus on aspiring pastoral leaders. The cost of speakers is split between three independent schools who take it in turns to host the finale.

The Enquiring Teacher Partnership (ETP) is a partnership project between the seven Guildford Educational Partnership Schools, Royal Grammar School Guildford (RGS Guildford), City of London Freeman's and Epsom College to allow teachers, individually, or in groups, to engage in year-long action research in their school, or across schools. The project provides a launch training day, twilight sessions, and five coaching points with an external coach. Project participants or groups each attend a presentation evening and produce an article at the completion of the project; these are published in a journal.

Synergy and economies of scale – innovative

To address gaps in teaching provision for specific subjects, a partnership between local primary, junior and senior state schools, and RGS Newcastle, recruited specialist partnership teachers in Maths and Physics, with funding from a range of sources including local and national foundations, charities and businesses. The teachers, recruited through RGS Newcastle to benefit all the schools in the partnership, had 60 to 80% of capacity allocated for partner schools, and were able to offer daytime classes as well as after school clubs and webinars, and some CPD work in partner schools. Based on the success of the first two years, the partnership has recruited a Robotics teacher for the current academic year.

Digital innovation and resource s

ExpertEd: Live! is a programme of live events that aims to bring expertise from business and academia into schools and to inspire pupils to ask questions and aim higher. Each live webinar follows the format of a short talk from an expert in their field, followed by an open Q&A session. Originally developed by the OPEN Learning Partnership, the programme is supported by and delivered to local area partnerships in seven regions.

Colet Mentoring is an ambitious large scale peer-to-peer academic mentoring programme created in partnership by St Paul's School and Ed Tech Start-up EasyA, with the support of St Paul's Girls' School. Through the mobile app, mentee pupils from primary to GCSE can connect with mentors (A-level or equivalent) within the local and wider community of schools to receive free academic support. Schools can register an unlimited number of mentees and also provide mentors. All STEM subjects are supported and pilots are running in Latin and Greek. Teachers can supervise activities via a portal.



Benefits to pupils, teachers and schools

Benefits – benefit to teachers and schools

These partnerships offer a forum for teaching staff to meet and work with peers across schools, with a wide range of benefits. In addition to exchanging knowledge, sharing learning, and jointly increasing the quality and breadth of teaching provision for all schools; teachers have the opportunity to pursue continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and further their own career development.

Building from these exchanges, teachers can co-create opportunities for their pupils based on their pooled knowledge and experience, offering activities quantitatively and qualitatively superior to what they could offer in isolation.

The Enquiring Teacher Partnership offers a unique opportunity for primary and secondary phase teachers to engage in action research and share knowledge with others doing the same, benefitting the schools across the partnership, but also more widely across the education sector through the publication and dissemination of their research.

Benefit to recruitment for an expanded curriculum

The partnership was able to secure funding which individual schools could not have secured alone. This innovative form of recruitment meant schools across the partnership had access to specialised teaching they would not have otherwise been able to afford and might have had difficulties recruiting for individually. This addressed issues in recruiting teaching staff for specific topics, and benefitted pupils in schools across a region through an expanded curriculum and increased GCSE choices.

Sharing beyond local geographies

This recurring series of events aims to benefit schools beyond the group of partners. It offers access to, and active engagement with, thought-provoking specialist content on topics outside of the standard curriculum, which schools might not have access to individually.

The mentoring programme offers a potentially far reaching, self-sustaining and replicable model for educational support. It mutually benefits an unlimited number of pupils, of any age and from any background and geography. The mentoring is offered at no expense to participating pupils with schools paying a nominal sign up/subscription fee to cover costs. There is minimal time investment from teachers. It is based on the principle of mutuality – mentees benefit from support they would not have access to otherwise, while mentors gain experience and confidence, and develop their own learning with tutor support. These innovative examples demonstrate the power of partnerships to bridge geographies and offer valuable learning opportunities far beyond the partnership itself. These have the potential to increase pupil motivation and engagement, and can also support wellbeing.



Examples

Innovative projects providing emp

The Bath student parliament is a unique programme developed through a partnership of 12 schools. A long-term partnership aiming to inspire lasting change in the community, and hosted in turn by the partner schools, it allows pupils elected by peers to come together in six subcommittees to develop and implement ideas around key areas of concern to the students.

The West London Partnership, between 10 state and independent schools, holds an annual Model United Nations conference- a student debating activity which follows the format of a United Nations assembly. Delegations take the role of individual countries and work together in committees to debate and resolve a range of different topics, some focused on complex current day issues and some looking at recent historical events. The event is aimed at years 10-13, and any school can register a delegation.

Inspiring primary school pupils a

Music Flood is a partnership of schools and music organisations working together to provide inspiring musical opportunities for young people in South Oxfordshire. Primary School Music Week is a week of musical activity led by Radley College and its partners for primary schools in the area, involving more than 2,000 children. It includes performances and workshops in primary schools across the locality, with college pupils and local and international professional musicians working with the local community to offer a wide range of musical experience. The week culminates with a mass performance in the local market square for the benefit of the whole community.

Combining resources and pooling funds

OX14 Learning Partnership, a group of six state and independent schools, provides a comprehensive set of resources to support inclusion, mental health and wellbeing of pupils and staff. Support to pupils includes: online yoga classes; early intervention groups on mental health and wellbeing topics; materials for assemblies, talks and workshops, including mindfulness, managing stress and anxiety, bullying, sex education, consent, and self-esteem. Support for staff includes workshops on mental health and safeguarding. Webinars on supporting mental health and wellbeing in pupils are also offered directly to parents. Finally, the partnership provides safeguarding support, self-harm awareness training, and an LGBTQ+ inclusion group working across the six schools.

Combining resources to provide unique and in

Lumina Tutoring was founded by Harrow School in response to lost learning during the first national lockdown. It brings together six virtual schools and ten independent schools to provide weekly one-to-one tutoring for children in care. Drawing on a pool of over 50 expert teachers, the programme matches tutors closely to the needs of pupils across the primary, secondary and further education age range. Pupils can access a broad range of opportunities and enrichment, including the Lumina Summer School, the use of Harrow School's facilities and a weekly after-school club.

As part of the Chrysalis programme in partnership with 12 state schools, Highgate School with local council virtual schools to provide the Chrysalis Accelerator. This supports children who are in care or have a social worker, providing bespoke sessions for personal development, raising aspirations, and offering careers support. Over the course of a year, pupils cover topics such as robotics, creative writing, art, architecture, mindfulness, conservation. They also develop life skills and soft skills such as first aid, orienteering, and confidence-building.



Benefits to pupils, teachers and schools

Powering citizenship experiences

These partnerships provide pupils in each school with opportunities to feel heard and share their views. Delegate pupils learn from each other in a unique position of responsibility and simulation of real-world decision making and governance. This helps them to develop life skills, citizenship skills, and active engagement with politics and global issues. These types of events would be unaffordable or logistically impossible for individual schools. The scale of the pupil pool and the diversity of experience from across schools allow unique insights and growth.

Engaging the community through music

The event brings together teachers and musicians to benefit as many primary school pupils as possible across a locality. The aim is to encourage a love of music, provide novel musical experiences, and to work with peers to put on an uplifting and inspiring performance for their community.

Supporting wellbeing and mental health

The partnership aims to provide opportunities for staff and pupils to challenge, inspire and support each other. It supports the mental health and wellbeing of pupils, staff and parents by using a whole school/partnership approach.

By combining their resources, the schools can fund and coordinate a far wider range of support activities and groups than they could manage alone. The partnership offers a comprehensive range of support topics, and covers each in depth, including CPD provision for schools to boost their own safeguarding capacity and mental health provision. This level of dedicated and inclusive support can only be offered by working together.

Inclusive opportunities for young people in care

Lumina Tutoring aims to improve educational progress and enrichment for young people, especially those facing disadvantage, in their local community and beyond.

The Chrysalis Accelerator project aims to build a culture of high aspiration and self-confidence, as well as narrowing the gap in educational attainment between children in care and their peers. It also offers an opportunity to develop creativity and a sense of community.

These programmes draw on the resources of independent schools and partnership networks to provide a sustained and targeted support framework to young people who would otherwise not have access to this level of support, and who often face educational disadvantage. The programmes support pupils to develop the skills needed to reach their potential and succeed in education and in future careers. They also build greater confidence, and an opportunity to connect with other young people in similar situations.



Benefits should be mutual

The kinds of benefit may vary for different pupils or schools. For example, some pupils might benefit from specialised or expanded academic provision, a wider range of co-curricular activities, or career or university preparation-related opportunities. Others might have the opportunity to enhance skills through mentoring, facilitation and project leadership. In turn, these can provide evidence of skills or interests outside of the set curriculum, helping with university admissions and job seeking. All pupils benefit from a better understanding of children from different backgrounds and breaking down social barriers, as well as from wellbeing and mental health support.



Complementarity and mutual benefit

The Copthall and Mill Hill school partnership (see case study on page 24) combines the schools' different resources, networks, facilities, and academic and co-curricular expertise, resulting in an expanded and enriched curriculum for both sets of pupils, as well as a wider range of social and co-curricular opportunities which include but are not limited to access to careers fairs, visiting lecturers, debating, access to sports facilities and STEM workshops.

Together the schools offer a far more diverse and rich experience than each school could offer alone, and in the process, staff working alongside have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and experience.

“ We wanted the same thing for our young people, we wanted them to have the best opportunities and to be able to experience a wide variety of things. The experience that my students were getting from it might have been different from the experience that their students were getting from it. But it was bounded in that same kind of clear vision and understanding that we are a community and that we will be living together, and therefore we need to ensure that the young people are living and working together. **”**

(State school interviewee)

“ Partner schools “have to not feel [...] that this is somehow all outreach, it's all independent schools bottling stuff and giving it away, rather than being involved instead in a mutuality of esteem.” “Reciprocity of esteem has to be absolutely hardwired into the organisation in that [...] you don't have a discourse of support from wealthier schools to less wealthy schools, you have an absolute reciprocity of approach, even if schools on one side have more resource. **”**

(Independent school interviewee)

“ Partnering creates space and capacity to do the things that can therefore go on and make the difference. And that's why I think capacity and collaboration go hand in hand as long as you get the ethos and the values right. **”**

(Academy Trust interviewee)

“ Given resource constraints, schools need to ask, is this going to have the impact we want it to have, that justifies the cost or resource? Or what else could be done with this resource? ”

(Department for Education interviewee)

Some school partnerships may historically have appeared one-directional, with the independent sector creating benefit for the state sector by sharing facilities or capacity, in exchange for demonstrating public benefit. However, this approach is limiting, and does not reflect current good practice. As set out above, both sectors bring strengths and resources to partnerships, which in turn offer benefits to schools and pupils.

Assessing benefits and impact

Assessing the benefits of school partnerships is important:

- To ensure that the resources invested are being put to best use
- To gauge whether the impacts of the partnership activities align with what was hoped for
- To evaluate whether the approach taken was the optimum way to achieve the desired results
- To check whether benefits are mutual and all partners are gaining from the collaboration

At present, much of the evidence of partnership success is either anecdotal (e.g. comments and notes of appreciation, letters from parents) or at output level (e.g. number of events, attendees). Even many long-established partnerships are only measuring participation levels or sharing simple post-event surveys. Consequently, there is a lack of data on what works best, making it difficult for schools to make informed decisions.

For schools to commit resources to partnering, they need to be certain that this will support the life chances of their pupils as much or more than other resource investments. School governors may also want evidence of return on investment. For the independent sector, there is pressure to demonstrate that they are adding value to the wider education system. More robust evidence on processes, and the impacts and effectiveness of different types of partnership, will help to define what works and what does not and will avoid wasted time and resources.

Impact measurement is likely to be more light touch for simple two-way partnerships, but its importance increases with the resource investment and complexity of the partnership. There is wide agreement that state schools, being more data-driven than independent schools, are stronger on metrics and monitoring, evaluation and learning. Leading on impact evaluation is therefore a key area of value that state sector partners can bring to a collaboration.

“ State sector colleagues really understand how to use data to achieve impact and how to measure impact. They understand how to target disadvantage, they understand how to work with the kids who we really want to help, they understand what it looks like on the ground, particularly in Britain’s most disadvantaged communities. ”

(Independent school interviewee)

3 Types of cross-sector school partnerships



Cross-sector school partnerships can range from informal one-to-one relationships through to multi-org

Table 4 (below) identifies four main types of partnership: connection, collaboration, alliance and integration, wh to clarify the variety of partnerships, and the benefits and added value they can create.¹ The table illustrates the l as the implications for levels of trust and equity.

 Type 1 Connection - A school shares its available resources and facilities for the benefit of its partner  Type 2 Collaboration - Two or three schools collectively address a shared need or opportunity by combining resources	
EXAM	
A state school shares its new theatre with a local independent school on an ongoing basis. An independent school offers its swimming pool to local state schools on an ongoing basis.	A co-educational state school and an all-boys independent school put on a play together, collectively providing the numbers and diversity of pupils necessary. Three schools come together to hire teachers in specific subjects to work across all schools.
BEN	
Recipient school receives clear, tangible benefit. Sharing school fulfils desire to contribute to communities and builds reputation.	All schools benefit as their common or complementary needs are addressed by the partnership.
	
LEVEL OF C	
FUN	
Limited or no funding requirements.	Some funding may be required. Funding often shared but typically mostly comes from independent school partners.

¹This typology was generated through interviews with school partnership focal points and informed by significant research of Tom Arbuthnott and Dr Margaret Hunnaball (see Methodology).



Organisation collaboration between schools and other stakeholders.

which are differentiated by aims, structure and outcomes. These categories are not exclusive or restrictive, but aim to show links between increasing complexity and ambition, and the level of resource input and potential benefits, as well as the level of funding required.



Type 3 Alliance – A collaborative partnership, broader in ambition and scope. Combining diverse resources in an ongoing, multi-school partnership



Type 4 Integration – Longer term, formal partnerships (some involving non-school stakeholders) to improve the potential for all children to thrive at school and beyond

EXAMPLE

Multiple state and independent schools sharing resources and expertise to provide Oxbridge prep activities, GCSE Astronomy and Latin.

A free school has been set up with an independent school as lead educational partner alongside a local business partner. This was in response to local need for improved sixth form provision.

BENEFIT

Significant benefits shared by all participating schools. Increased potential to unlock added value through the partnership.

Significant societal benefits through the schools' strong links with the local community. Pupils from the state and independent schools work together on several projects that could not be run by the schools alone.

COMPLEXITY



FUNDING

Potentially significant funding requirements, equitably (not necessarily equally) shared across partners. Possible additional outside funding through fundraising.

High level of funding required with input from all partners. Large proportion of funding often drawn from a variety of sources, including but not limited to legacy funding from the independent sector, outside funding from business or government, widescale fundraising.

– Table 4 - Types of cross-sector school partnerships



Type 1 Connection - A school shares its available resources and facilities for the benefit of its partner



Type 2 Collaboration - Two or three schools collectively address a shared need or opportunity by combining resources

RESOURCES

Facilities provided by sharing school. Necessary resources such as transport often supplied by independent school. Limited personnel required. Independent schools may nominate a designated coordinator or focal point.

Shared resources, although often the largest share is provided by an independent school. Personnel from all partners required for coordination and delivery, although typically the independent school may have more designated human resource.

STRUCTURE

Minimal set-up requirements. Ideally the agreed principles of the arrangements will be captured in writing to avoid confusion and to help with continuity as staff move on. Headteachers of schools aware of activities taking place.

Informal partnership with limited set-up requirements. Likely to include some level of written agreement around activities and principles but more formal arrangements, including MOUs may not be necessary. Capturing information on ways of working and points of contact helps to support the continuity of the relationship and activities.



NATURE OF THE

Trust around activities but possible distrust around motives

Power often with lead or funding school

An offer made by one school, on that school's terms

One school leads (often the independent school)

Limited communication

Lower levels of reciprocity and mutuality

Headteacher agreement necessary but involvement not vital



Type 3 Alliance – A collaborative partnership, broader in ambition and scope. Combining diverse resources in an ongoing, multi-school partnership



Type 4 Integration – Longer term, formal partnerships (some involving non-school stakeholders) to improve the potential for all children to thrive at school and beyond

RESOURCING

Significant resourcing may be required, preferably provided on an equitable basis. Facilities often provided by independent schools based on practicality – e.g. facilities already open at weekends/evenings. Significant personnel requirements as all schools share the delivery of subject provision and have a nominated focal point. Joint coordinator may be employed, financed equitably by all schools to manage logistical, legal and other requirements.

High level of resourcing required, and high level of pooling of resources, guaranteed for a prolonged period. Significant personnel requirement sometimes includes a shared team of teaching and support staff.

STRUCTURE AND SET UP

Formal partnership with a clearly defined structure and significant set up requirements. Structure will include a clear joint strategy, equitable leadership arrangements and agreed principles, ways of working and activities, often captured through an MoU. These partnerships often create legal compliance and safeguarding requirements. Headteachers fully involved in strategic decision making for the partnership.

Formal partnership incurring comprehensive structure and set up requirements. Will include legal requirements and be supported by defined governance structures, often including a Partnership Board and shared governance. Local and regional leaders often involved.

RELATIONSHIP



Very high levels of trust stemming from transparency, equity, shared goals and joint implementation

Power is evenly distributed among partners

Co-designed by all partners

Joint governance/integrated leadership

Open communication within the partnership, and project communicated externally

Integrated and mutually beneficial approach

Significant level of leadership and involvement from headteachers is vital

– Table 4 - Types of cross-sector school partnerships

Type 1 - Connection: shared swimming pools



More than half of independent schools which have swimming pools share them with local state schools, opening the facility on a weekly basis to allow swimming tuition for pupils who would otherwise not have access to it. This supports local schools in achieving the primary curriculum focus on teaching the essential skill of swimming, which many children otherwise leave primary school without.



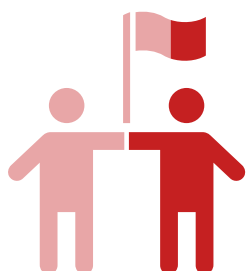
Type 2 - Collaboration: Copthall and Mill Hill Schools

The Copthall and Mill Hill Schools partnership was established to enable students and staff to develop “improved academic results; an enriched educational experience beyond the curriculum; professional development opportunities; opportunities to engage with a community larger than that contained in the schools’ own walls.”

The two schools regularly “[share] governance and leadership skills and expertise; share staff knowledge, expertise and resources to improve subject knowledge and pedagogy; and share facilities to enrich the educational experiences of pupils”. Benefits to pupils, through combining complementary resources, include an expanded curriculum and a wide range of co-curricular enrichment activities. The two schools also share a careers programme made available for all their students, including university lectures, visits from speakers, career fairs, networking events, and Oxbridge and Russell Group university programmes.

The joint ethos, school philosophies, and strategy underpinning the partnership, and the benefits for pupils, staff and schools, are celebrated by both schools through their websites and publications, and captured in a vibrant shared branding for the partnership.

Type 3 - Alliance: York ISSP



York Independent State School Partnership (ISSP) brings together ten state/academy secondary schools and three independent schools. The partnership began in 2006 when Bootham School approached York City Council Educational Services to discuss sharing activities between schools across the city. Funds were secured to develop a cross-sector partnership, starting with a programme of master classes for the most able pupils across York to provide academic challenge through opportunities which schools cannot provide alone.

Partnership agreements are reviewed annually, and resources and power are shared equitably, with a central partnership coordinator funded jointly through equal contributions from each school. The central coordinator works directly with school coordinators through half-termly meetings, and with the headteachers' strategic group. Meetings are open to all partners, with a core cross-sector group of six. This shared coordination and decision-making structure ensures parity and trust within the partnership. Teaching is provided by both state and independent schools, and events are hosted by both sectors as appropriate. Boarding schools host weekend and evening events, and summer schools are hosted by a state school with excellent STEM facilities.

York ISSP's successful annual master classes have provided academically challenging learning for pupils across the city, led by teachers from across the partnership. As the partnership and relationships evolved and grew more established and robust over time, the range of activities, benefitting pupils, staff and schools also expanded significantly. An initial focus on individual success has shifted to a more cohesive collegial approach over time, and specifically in response to the isolation of lockdown. Activities now include twilight training sessions for teachers, one-off conferences for pupils on leadership and global citizenship, presentations and lectures on a wide range of subjects designed to stimulate enquiring minds, a Maths excellence club for gifted mathematicians, with the support of the University of York, and a residential autumn course combining intellectual exploration with outdoor education challenges. The partnership offers a popular Latin GCSE course to pupils from maintained schools where it is not on the curriculum, and more recently a GCSE Astronomy course.

Through government funding the partnership extended its focus to enhanced Maths teaching in six primaries, and a Year Six transition primary project: 'Widening Horizons' modelled on the masterclass programme. York ISSP's latest project, in conjunction with the University of York and the Company of the Merchant Adventurers of the City of York, is an innovative Business and Enterprise project designed for 40 Year Ten pupils from across the city to build a business - from identifying a need, to designing a product, to marketing it - which will culminate in a presentation to York business leaders at the Merchant Adventurers' Hall. Sessions will be held both at the University and in situ at a number of York businesses, where pupils will be mentored in real life settings.

Type 4 - Integration: Feltham College



Feltham College is a pioneering sixth form establishment offering a distinctive model of post-16 education. Based at Reach Academy, Feltham College has its foundations in a six-year teaching and learning partnership with independent schools Hampton School and Lady Eleanor Holles (LEH). Education, business and health service providers come together “to broaden choices for local young people and offer them transformative opportunities” at Feltham College. Founding partners are joined by partners from across sectors, including Kingston University, East London Arts & Music Academy, Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and award-winning restaurant chain Bocca di Lupo. Vocational partners enhance the experience of Feltham students through their careers expertise, mentoring and work experience placements, while Hampton and LEH teachers directly support A level provision.

Feltham College aims to be “a centre of academic and vocational excellence at the heart of the town, playing a key role in rejuvenating a historically deprived area that has experienced significant pandemic-related job losses”. The Children’s Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, said: “Feltham College Sixth Form Partnership is an excellent example of what can be achieved when the state and independent education sectors come together. All educationalists are united in their passion to help young people thrive and succeed and this is the very essence of what Feltham College is all about – uniting resources and expertise to support young people who deserve every opportunity to fulfil their hopes and ambitions.”

Partners hope that their innovative approach could provide a helpful blueprint for other areas of the UK seeking to boost their post-16 provision.



Type 4 - Integration: The Schools of King Edward VI in Birmingham

King Edward VI Foundation, Birmingham, consists of a multi-academy trust and foundation charity supporting 13 schools and over 11,000 pupils across the city, as well as a teacher training centre through the King Edward's Consortium.

With its original school dating back to the sixteenth century, the Foundation has a guiding mission "To make Birmingham the best place to be educated in the UK". Two independent schools and eleven state maintained academies, both selective and comprehensive, work together to "raise aspirations, providing opportunities and giving confidence alongside excellent academic standards".

The CEO speaks of the diversity in the Foundation: "Our thousands of young people and their families, our colleagues and our governors represent the richness of our city's history, culture and experience". The Foundation is proudly committed to advancing equality of opportunity for all of its pupils and employees. Cross-foundation activities encourage open-mindedness and create a love of learning in pupils. These include "passionate and well-informed student sustainability societies" and other activities that help instil a sense of community.

The two legal entities of the Foundation work closely together as one organisation through a series of joint advisory groups, while ensuring legal separation and accountability to appropriate regulatory bodies. These groups give advice to the foundation charity and academy trust boards and committees. The foundation charity, through its historic endowment, financially supports the academy trust through donated services and secondments equivalent to hundreds of thousands of pounds a year.

4 Partnering strategically



Cross-sector partnership between schools has the potential to offer huge benefits, as discussed in Section 2: Why partner? However, partnering at a level beyond Type 1 (see Table 4) is resource-intensive, and comes with both direct and opportunity costs. A strategic, rather than an ad hoc or purely opportunistic approach to partnering therefore becomes more important as the scope and complexity of the partnership grows. This should help to maximise impact and ensure that efforts and resources invested in partnering not only bring clear benefits, but also align with and support plans for school improvement and pupil progress.

It can be very tempting to identify exciting opportunities or interesting connections and be drawn into becoming involved or collaborating without pausing to consider both the potential benefits and costs. This kind of opportunistic approach can spread energy and resources too thinly, without considering whether the proposed partnership will maximise benefits to pupils. For maximum impact, it is important to have clarity over how a planned partnership will support strategic objectives.



“Every partnership project initially is going to be co-designed, basically by a couple of people sitting in a room, hopefully from both sectors who are settling on what do we want to achieve and how do we do it?”

(Independent school interviewee)

“It feels like the starting question is often ‘what can we do with the money we have’. You want the question instead to be ‘what can we achieve and how; how can we get what we want for the kids?’”

(State school interviewee)



Considering the following questions will help to ensure that partnerships are strategically aligned with the school's improvement aims and needs:

Is partnering the right approach?

- Does the school have clear aims for change/improvement?
- Is there a clear role that partnering could play in supporting these aims?
- What type of partnership would be most appropriate? (e.g. between similar types of school, with different types of school, with a university, business, or other type of organisation)
- What are the potential barriers to working in this way? How might these be overcome?
- What are the perceived risks and costs? Do these outweigh the expected benefits? Remember to include the opportunity costs – i.e. what else could the resources/time/money be spent on, and would this have greater anticipated value and impact?

What kind of partnership will be most appropriate and impactful?

- Is there already an existing partnership that would fit these criteria, which the school could join?
- If not, who would be the best potential partners to approach?
- Are there any other potential stakeholders who should be included in some way, if not as partners? What roles might they take?
- What kind of activities will the partnership undertake in order to achieve the aims? And at what level will the partnership operate? (See Section 3: Types of cross-sector school partnerships)

Partnerships, especially Types 3 and 4, have the opportunity to set ambitious and far-reaching strategies which look at all levels of partnership benefit, and ensure that activities and partnering decisions contribute directly to these aims.



Setting integrated aspirations for strategic partnerships:

The Cheltenham Education Partnership (CEP) has a set of clearly stated, wide reaching, strategic aims. Not only does it aim to provide outstanding educational opportunities to young people regardless of social and economic background, and to provide stimulating professional development and updated knowledge, understanding and skills for teachers, but it goes further. The partnership states its vision for a culture of collaboration across the education sector, and a town-wide partnership collaboration, encouraging links with and welcoming new partners from other sectors including the arts, charity and government.

CEP puts these aspirations into practice through a wide-ranging ongoing programme of activities, which is communicated clearly and effectively through a joint website reflecting a strong partnership identity. The partnership continues to look outward and build its presence across Cheltenham/Gloucestershire as its members become increasingly involved with community-wide projects. For example, collaborating with Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce, Gloucestershire Local Enterprise Partnership, CyNam, and Cheltenham Borough Council to identify opportunities for bridging the gap between local businesses and schools in the interest of supporting young people towards achieving their career aspirations. CEP is also represented on the newly established 'Cheltenham Cultural Board' and is building strong ties with those involved with the prestigious Golden Valley Development.



Developing a Theory of Change for school partnerships

A Theory of Change (ToC) defines long-term aims, and then maps backward to identify changes that need to happen to enable these aims. These changes are mapped visually in pathways of outcomes, each linked to others in a logical chain. Activities and outputs are linked to these outcome pathways. Thus a ToC starts from the hoped-for end result (the goal) and sets out a map showing how planned interventions will support this outcome. Working together with partners to develop a ToC which everyone can sign up to, not only strengthens the partnership, but also provides clear measures of success and supports a strategic approach to partnering.

Laying the groundwork for strategic partnering - developing a Theory of Change for school partnerships

In order to ensure that all partnering activities of a wide network of schools are set up to contribute most effectively to their strategic aims, and create most impact, Royal Grammar School in Newcastle has developed a theory of change. This ToC articulates a long-term impact goal (raising attainment and aspiration amongst disadvantaged children in a region), and four outcome pillars, focusing on continued professional development, outcomes in STEM, literacy, and cultural and social capital. Activity streams feed into these pillars. The ToC not only allows the school to plan strategically and make decisions around resource investment, it also supports the school in articulating its mission and vision more clearly and compellingly, and lays the foundation for meaningful and useful evidence gathering and evaluation.



School partnerships often originate in relationships; either through individual relationships between staff and heads of school, or through connections between the schools themselves. These relationships underpin the essential foundations of any successful partnership, and are worth the effort and commitment needed to maintain them, as well as an understanding of how they contribute to the health and subsequent impact of the partnership and its activities.

In jointly planning partnership activities, each partner learns more about the other and it becomes clear what each can contribute to the partnership and how each can gain. As the relationships grow, so the strength of the partnership grows alongside it, and in turn the partnership becomes more sustainable and its aims more attainable.

In building the relationships, and understanding all partners' essential roles, the foundations are laid for equitable benefits and greater value for all partners².

In a complex partnering relationship there may be multiple interconnected elements that are likely to change over a partnership's lifetime, so it is important to regularly check in on the health of the partnering relationship, alongside evaluation of the partnership's accomplishments and purpose.

While there are many differences between education and other sectors when it comes to partnering, there are also many common factors. TPI's work across sectors over the past 20 years has highlighted four key elements which are integral to the partnership relationship³: Trust and transparency, power and equity, mutual benefit, and co-accountability. In this document we focus on two of these, reflecting the emphasis placed on their essential importance by those interviewed for this document: trust and equity.

²Adapted from PhD thesis by Dr Margaret Hunnaball

³The SDG Partnership Guidebook – The Partnering Initiative



The importance of a strong partnership relationship

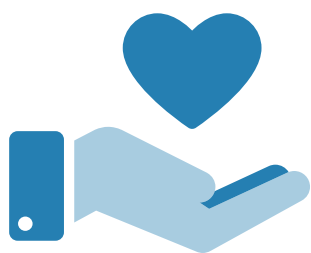
The examples of Types 3 and 4 partnerships in Section 3 of this document, demonstrate the importance of a strong partnership relationship. Their ambitious and successful collaborations are based on high levels of trust, equity and mutual benefit. When all partners bring key resources, have a seat at the decision-making table and feel committed, then great things can happen:

York ISSP: *As the partnership and relationships evolved and grew more established and robust over time, the range of activities, benefitting pupils, staff and schools, also expanded significantly.*

Feltham College: *"We have a long-standing and rich partnership with Hampton and LEH and are excited to see this grow and flourish".*



Trust



High levels of trust in partnerships make almost every element of effective partnering easier. If we trust our partners, we are more likely to share learning and knowledge, to keep each other informed of upcoming challenges, and to take early and constructive action when problems arise. The higher the level of trust in a partnership, the more commitment there will be to finding solutions to problems and moving forward, and to avoiding the unconstructive ‘blame game’.

Trust within a partnership takes time and effort to build, but it can be lost very quickly. Research into school partnerships shows that there is a strong correlation between the type of partnership (as set out in Table 4) and the level of trust. In Type 1 partnerships, there may be trust in the planned activities, but distrust in partner motives and a suspicion around lack of transparency. For example, state schools may suspect that an independent school reaching out to them is actually hoping to identify their brightest pupils to offer bursaries or scholarships – resulting in the state school losing some of their best pupils. In Type 2 partnerships, there is generally increased trust in partners regarding their motives as well as trust in the delivery of the joint activities. More complex and collaborative Type 3 and 4 partnerships simply won’t work without the high levels of trust engendered by transparency around individual and collective resources, barriers, needs and aims, as well as around equity in decision making and mutuality of benefit – to individual partners as well as to the partnership as a whole.

A partnering relationship often starts from a basic level of trust and mutual understanding, with structures and systems in place to support the partnering relationship and protect against the effects of future staff turnover. With open communication, transparency, and continued equitable collaboration, trust can build over the life of the partnership, to support increasingly ambitious and impactful aims.

“ It’s important to keep communication lines open, and maintaining the momentum and relationship, so that changes of staff don’t mean we’re then repeating old mistakes. ”

(State school interviewee)

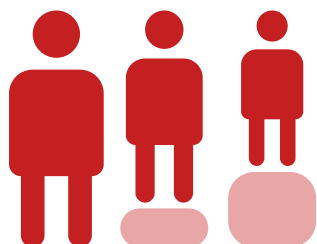
“ Rather than outreach, start at a joint planning phase; the relationship comes first. As the conversation grows, each understands what can be gained by working together. ”

(State school interviewee)

“ It starts with mutual trust and understanding with like-minded headteachers really wanting to work together. And then you have to put the structures and systems underneath it to ensure that could continue once those people disappear. ”

(State school interviewee)

Equity



Power dynamics are healthy in a partnership when there is a strong sense of equity: that is when all partners can contribute their resources, skills and experience, and can fully engage in activities and decision-making on an equal basis. While **equality** means each partner is given the same resources or opportunities, **equity** means recognising that each partner has an essential role to play in the partnership, but all have different circumstances, and some may need additional support to fully participate in and commit to the partnership.

Within school partnerships, perceived power imbalances may result in concerns about school autonomy. With few exceptions, because of the resource imbalance between state and independent schools, the independent school will tend to be seen as the more powerful partner. Where a relationship is built on the state sector receiving “handouts” from the independent sector, in terms of resources, the partnership is unlikely to be successful or sustainable. Ensuring reciprocal use of resources strengthens the relationship and the sense of equity.

As with trust, there is a correlation between power balance and the type of partnership (see Table 4). For Type 1 partnerships, power is generally with the lead school – which in most cases is the independent school. Power is more evenly shared in Type 2 partnerships, although the lead school still tends to have more power. In Type 3 and Type 4 partnerships, power is, by necessity, more evenly distributed.

As Table 1 on page 9 demonstrates, the state and independent sector bring different and often complementary resources, which is one of the drivers of cross-sector partnership. It is essential to recognise and acknowledge the skills and resources that each partner brings, in order to understand the value of each sector in the partnership. Although independent schools are usually better funded, enabling more sophisticated use of digital resources and greater opportunities for personal development, for example, state sector schools often have more robust approaches to monitoring and evaluation, including impact evaluation, and more extensive experience of working with disadvantaged children. To work together on an equitable and sustainable basis, partners must recognise these strengths, their own and those of the other sector, and not regard funding as the only source of power. In doing so, they can shift the inherent power imbalance that state schools feel, and support reciprocity and mutual benefit.

For any partnering relationship that has the ambition to move beyond simple resource sharing, it is important that structures put in place – such as decision-making, governance, financing and management structures – offset rather than reinforce existing power imbalances.

“It’s difficult because you have a world in which you have this very serious resource imbalance. But at the same time, you have this very important need for reciprocity. And it’s trying to come up with a design that squares a circle between those two things.”

(Independent school interviewee)



Some school partnerships have found ways to put in place a range of funding and management structures to counterbalance the inherent power imbalance and increase equity. For example, each school putting in a certain amount of money, which in turn pays for a coordinator who can undertake further fundraising; a shared governance structure where all decisions are taken collaboratively; teachers from both sectors taking the lead on joint activities, and teaching in each other's schools – building mutual understanding and the respect of the pupils.



Fostering equity through equal ongoing strategic input

One partnership of several state and independent schools supported equity and equal distribution of power within the relationship through regular meetings of school heads, with equal input into decision making and strategy. The regular meetings are attended at minimum by a core group of six schools, with representation from state and independent sector. This ensures the schools across the partnership have equal input into the strategic direction, and a real sense of ongoing ownership of the shared strategy, as well as the ability to jointly evolve the thinking and priorities underpinning the partnership over the course of each academic year. As well as ensuring equity around decision making, the meetings help to build strong relationships across partners – an essential part of any successful partnership.



Ensuring equity through pooled funds

A cross-sector school partnership ensures equity in the relationship through the use of pooled funds to recruit a part-time coordinator from outside any of the partner schools. Although they may not contribute an equal amount, each partner contributes to the pooled funds. The coordinator ensures the smooth running of the partnership by working with individual school coordinators and heads at both the strategic and practical levels. By employing a coordinator who works for the partnership, rather than for one of the partners, the partnership supports equity in decision making and reduces the time investment required day to day from individual schools.

6 Common partnering obstacles



Interviewees raised several common obstacles which might either discourage schools from partnering or prevent partnerships from being as effective as they could be. Table 5 summarises the challenges raised, together with some thoughts about possible ways forward – based on TPI's extensive experience of working with partnerships.



Resourcing – how can a school justify spending money or dedicating personnel time to partnerships when school running-costs are high and/or staffing issues are a concern?



Start small and keep it simple. Benefits can be gained from collaborating, without investing a lot of resources. Look at some of the examples mentioned here and explore options with potential partners. Be clear about your needs and your limitations. Starting to build relationships with partner schools may open up opportunities for now or later.



Lack of support from government – absence of clear guidance or material support.



Look for opportunities for joint advocacy and a common message about the opportunities and importance of partnerships.

Consistent impact measurement could help to make the case for support by demonstrating partnerships' value in education.



Ideological opposition to the independent school system sector/cynicism around partnering.



Try to bridge the gap through shared experiences, values, and ambitions. There is often more that unites than divides, especially around the subject of child wellbeing.



Benefits seen as one-sided: some independent schools are not aware of their own potential benefits beyond the "feelgood factor".



Share case studies of partnerships which have generated benefits for all and illustrate the potential of cross-sector working. If one partner is more ambitious in their partnering aims than the other, it may be time to invite other, more like-minded schools to join.



Overcoming trust barriers – there can be significant suspicion around motives and the perception that independent schools want to partner to boost their image, or to poach promising pupils through bursaries and scholarships.



Look at the experiences of other schools which have partnered successfully and share these with potential partners.

Demonstrate good faith and transparency in your motivations, taking time to build strong relationships.



Inequality in resourcing

– independent school staff will often have more time and resources available, state school colleagues are likely to be coordinating partnerships in addition to their usual role, not as a part of it.



Build the concept of equity (not equality) into your partnerships, sharing resources to enable state schools to participate.

Pool sufficient resource to employ a fundraiser or manager for the partnership.



Fear of failure

– all schools are accountable, whether to the government and public, to a Board of Governors or to fee-payers.



Risk-aversion in education, as a high-profile sector, is inevitable. It may take a culture and mindset change to see failure as an opportunity to learn, not as something to be avoided.

While working to build comfort around sharing challenges, as well as successes, look for informal or 'safe' opportunities to learn from others' experiences.

– Table 5 - Common obstacles faced by cross-sector school partnerships

“ When public resources are so stretched, and state schools have been underfunded for years, there's the feeling that independent schools might not understand how hard they have to work at state schools. [Independent schools] are seen as being from a completely different world. **”**

(Academy Trust interviewee)

“ Historically, the independent sector defined public benefits through bursaries. But basically, what that enabled was a mindset where what you did is you pull up the drawbridge, you paid to bring people from the outside inside, but you didn't actually take what was inside and apply it outside. **”**

(Independent school interviewee)



Sharing learning with the outside world

Sharing learning with the outside world is also an important aspect of the development of cross-sector schools partnering. Telling the partnering story is hugely valuable, whether this focuses on learning and knowledge about the achievements and challenges of the partnering process itself; or about the impacts of different types of intervention on pupil learning and wellbeing; or a sharing of innovation and new solutions developed within the partnership. It can help to inspire others to catalyse new ideas, and to avoid re-inventing the wheel or making the same mistakes. This in turn elevates the level of impact and innovation across the sector, a clear benefit for all. Sharing the learning from challenges is as important as successes but is often more difficult to do.



There is strong evidence of effective and impactful cross-sector school partnering across England and Wales, with almost all built on strong relationships and recognition of individual and collective needs and shared goals, and with the aim of collaborating to achieve more than schools could do individually. In the case of the more complex Type 3 and 4 partnerships these are not only built on strong relationships but also on clear strategic thinking, where there has been much time and thought from some key individuals around how to harness the resources and skills of the education sector to deliver high levels of strategic impact.

There are also many associations and forums in which this topic is explored. What is missing, however, is one single platform or focal point for all school partnership professionals to build a common and accessible language and set of principles and building blocks around cross-sector partnerships of every level and type.

The fragmented nature of discussion and language, and the lack of consistent impact measurement, means that how to partner well can still seem like alchemy to many and makes it more difficult to share a clear way forward for those who are doubtful about the role of partnering across state and independent sectors.

The S.P.A. seeks to create professional standards around partnering for the whole education sector, to find a commonality of language, make clear the driving forces, and identify ways to overcome restraining factors, individual and collective, across the state and independent sectors. It seeks to provide accessible guidance to those just starting out, to support partnering professionals at every stage of partnering, and to provide space to share and build on strategic approaches for those who already have significant experience.

In doing this, the S.P.A. can develop a professional network, able to share their learning with colleagues both within and outside their own schools and partnerships, and support schools in replicating and growing the important work already happening. Such networks have been established across other sectors in recent years and their impact, through sharing language, principles, tools, approaches and guidance, has been visible and substantial.

There is tremendous potential within the education sector to replicate this approach and build on the experience already in the sector and beyond, for the benefit of all.

Through the researching and writing of this report, it has become clear there is a demand and need for tools, guidance, examples and other resources around cross-sector school partnerships.

Summary next steps:

- Sharing this document and presenting and testing findings.
- S.P.A. will work with TPI and schools on the co-creation of a Partnering Toolkit jointly identifying areas for tools and guidance, what already exists and what needs to be created or built from.
- S.P.A. will continue to look beyond education, to the third sector, business and wider networks to extend our understanding and impact of school partnerships.

This document is based on an exploration of current practice in cross-sector school partnering, including:

- Background reading and studies of current research (see reference list in Annex 1)
- Review of over 40 examples of current school partnerships
- Three scoping interviews with key S.P.A. stakeholders
- Nine interviews with focal points from school partnerships (see Annex 2 for full list)

The document also draws on The Partnering Initiative's experience of working with cross-sector partnerships over the past 20 years.



Alliance partnership	Combines diverse resources in an ongoing, multi-school partnership.
Co-curricular	Complementary to the normal course of study.
Collaboration	Cooperation.
Collaboration partnership	Two or three schools collectively address a shared need or opportunity by combining resources.
Complementarity	Each brings different qualities which add to or complete the other.
Connection partnership	A school shares its available resources and facilities for the benefit of its partner.
Cross-sector (school) partnership	Partnerships between state schools and independent schools or trusts.
Equity	Recognising that each partner has an essential role to play in the partnership, but all have different circumstances, and some may need additional support.
Extra-curricular	In addition to the normal course of study.
Integration partnership	Longer term formal partnerships to improve the potential for all children to thrive at school and beyond.
Outreach	Social responsibility.
Oxbridge	Oxford and Cambridge Universities.
Partnership	An ongoing collaborative relationship between schools, aligning their interests around a common vision and combining their complementary resources and competencies, to deliver benefit to each of the partners.
Public benefit	Charities are required to have purposes for the public benefit – they must be beneficial for the community, or a section of it.
Reciprocity	Mutual exchange.
Resource imbalance	Unequal resources, such as money, staff time, facilities etc.
Synergy	Two or more organisations working together to produce a combined effect which is greater than their separate efforts.
Theory of Change	A Theory of Change starts from the hoped-for end result (the goal) and sets out a visual map showing how planned interventions will support this outcome.



AGBIS	Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools
BSA	Boarding Schools Association
COBIS	Council of British International Schools
CPD	Continuing professional development
GDST	Girls' Day School Trust
GSA	Girls' Schools Association
HMC	Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference
IAPS	Independent Association of Prep Schools
ISA	Independent Schools' Association
ISBA	The Independent Schools Bursars Association
ISC	Independent Schools Council
ISI	Independent Schools Inspectorate
ISSP	Independent state school partnership
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual identities
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
S.P.A.	School Partnerships Alliance
SEND	Children with special educational needs and disabilities
SOH	Society of Heads
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
ToC	Theory of Change
TPI	The Partnering Initiative

Annex 1 - Key documents consulted



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Annex 2 - Full list of interviewees

Schools and institutions consulted in interviews

Department for Education

Independent Schools Council

King Edward VI Foundation

Larkmead School, Abingdon

Learning Partners Academy Trust

London Academy of Excellence, Tottenham

Norwich School

OX14 Learning Partnership

Royal Grammar School, Newcastle Upon Tyne

School Partnerships Alliance

Thurston College

York Independent State School Partnership



In *Independent-State School Partnerships: An initial review of evidence and current practices*, the authors identify a set of key features of effective ISSPs, emerging from their primary research.

Emerging features of effective ISSPs:

- A mutually agreed and shared focus on ambitious student learning outcomes linked to effective pedagogy and an enriched curriculum, bringing benefits to all partners
- Consensus on long- and short-term purposes, goals and approaches with clear governance and accountability
- Skilled facilitation which is sensitive to context and that can build commitment and trust between all parties
- Learning leadership that is committed to bridging cultural differences and building mutually respectful relationships
- A commitment to participation and continuous learning by all staff
- Engagement of students, families and communities
- A focus on evaluation and impact
- Adequate resources to sustain the work, with dedicated staffing, time, clear processes and good communication

Additionally they outline several success factors identified through secondary research.

Emerging factors contributing to successful ISSPs:

- Commitment and direction from headteachers and senior leaders
- Consensus around common aims and objectives
- Support for the project secured from all staff
- Benefit for all schools involved, in an equal relationship
- External support, e.g. from a local authority
- Funding to initiate new partnerships, or in some cases to enhance the work of existing partnerships



School
Partnerships
Alliance

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