

**Annual Enquiry 2005**  
**Case study**

# Pendle Small Schools Networked Learning Community

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## Impact of the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme

*“The SATs results arrived while we were visiting Kelbrook Primary School. Immediate celebration broke out on behalf of R, who had been recommended for withdrawal from SATs. We were told that he had been determined to be entered and gained Level 3 for English, Level 4 for science and Level 4 for mathematics. The school is convinced that he would not have had the confidence to enter the exams or have achieved such good results without the support he received as a result as his involvement in the pilot Reading and Writing Recovery Programme.”*

In becoming a networked learning community (NLC) in January 2003, Pendle Small Schools network identified three focuses for its enquiry – dyslexia, modern foreign languages and accelerated learning – to be rolled out in three parallel groups of three schools over three years. Our focus in this case report is on the dyslexia work, which the network established to provide additional support, usually by small group withdrawal from class, for pupils who were experiencing difficulties in reading, spelling and writing. The network has recently renamed the dyslexia project the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme to reflect the breadth of its aims more accurately. It was decided to target pupils from Year 3 in the programme, although some pupils from other year groups have also been involved. To date, 35 pupils have been involved, with another 12 to benefit in 2005-06.

In fact, the programme is even broader and more inclusive than its title suggests, since it included pupils who were identified with other specific learning difficulties such as dyspraxia and dyscalculia. The programme is co-ordinated by a consultant programme leader who was formerly a special needs outreach teacher. She has worked with teaching assistants in six of the nine schools in the network; the other three began the programme in August 2005. The programme was established with the original objective of raising standards by creating: ‘dyslexia-friendly schools and ultimately a dyslexia-friendly network’ (NLC Development and

Finance Plan, 2004-06; also see Figure 1). In doing this, the network was building on the existing very good provision for children with special educational needs, identified in recent Ofsted reports (Ofsted, 2003a, 2004a) for two of the network's schools. We found real evidence of pupil improvement, both academically in terms of reading, writing and spelling, and more generally in terms of the increased confidence and engagement of the children involved.

**Figure 1:** 'A spell to spell' leaflet



Three dyslexia-friendly schools  
 Three enthusiastic headteachers  
 One shared special educational needs co-ordinator  
 (With more than a smattering of dyslexia experience)  
 Six super support staff  
 One effective intervention scheme  
 An assortment of Year 3 pupils

For the purposes of this enquiry, we made visits to six of the nine primary schools in the network, observed classes, and conducted interviews with the programme leader, the network's co-leaders, headteachers, other teachers, teaching assistants and pupils from network schools.

## Impact on children: attainment

The networked schools provided us with a variety of achievement and attainment data, including collated assessments for the 35 children who have benefited from the first two years of the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme, some teaching assistant notes and other data. There are obvious constraints on how far we can extrapolate improved attainment from this data, not least because the programme has only been operating in three schools since 2003-04 and in another three for a single year. In addition, because the pupils targeted were in Year 3, augmented by some Year 2 and Year 4 pupils in the second year, it is too early to use external measures such as Key Stage 2 results to gauge attainment. However, we believe that the following data suggests that the programme has had genuine impact on the education of the targeted pupils, impact that was corroborated by the teaching assistants and class teachers we consulted in terms of attainment, achievement and increased confidence, motivation and behaviour.

## Network assessments

While the programme has used a range of assessment methods and resources, we will concentrate initially on network-level data (Brooks, 2002) from all of the cohorts and five of the six schools involved in the programme so far. This tracks the improvement in both cohorts in terms of reading age, spelling age and spelling quotient after 20 weeks of programme intervention. In each year, the process has been thorough and systematic. The first five weeks are spent assessing potential pupils in the target schools, followed by two weeks of training teaching assistants. The programme leader and teaching assistants work with the targeted pupils for 20 weeks before a final 4 weeks of assessment.

**Table 1:** Sample results for children on the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme

Cohort	Pupil	School	Initial chronological age (Y:M)	Subject	Initial score (Y:M)	End score (Y:M)	Progress (Y:M)	Progress ratio
Yr 4 (04/05)	IB	Roughlee	8:0	Reading age	6:2	9:9	3:7	8.6
				Spelling age	7:1	8:5	1:4	3.2
				Spelling quotient	90	97		
Yr 3 (04/05)	NH	St Philip's	7:5	Reading age	6:2	9:0	2:10	6.8
				Spelling age	7:5	8:8	1:3	3.0
				Spelling quotient	100	106		
Yr 2 (04/05)	OT	St Thomas'	6:1	Reading age	< 5	6:10	>1:10	4.4
				Spelling age	6:2	7:0	10	2.0
				Spelling quotient	95	100		
Yr 3 (03/04)	BH	Kelbrook	7:5	Reading age	<5	7:2	>2:2	5.2
				Spelling age	6:2	6:7	5 mths	1.0
				Spelling quotient	84	82		
Yr 3 (03/04)	HT	Salterforth	7:3	Reading age	<5	10:0	>5:2	12.4
				Spelling age	6:7	9:0	2:5	5.8
				Spelling quotient	95	109		

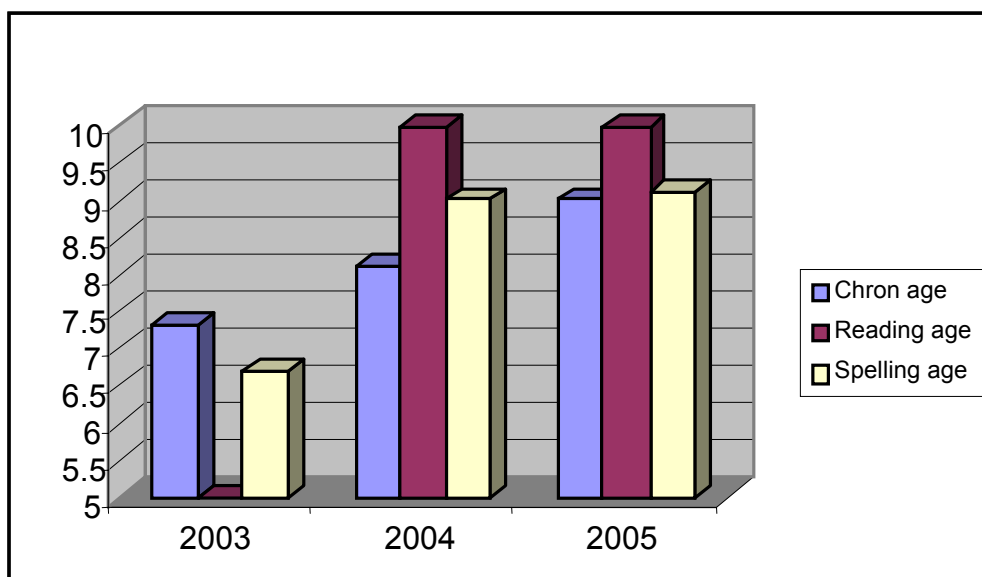
*Notes: A spelling quotient of 100 indicates that a child's score is in line with his or her chronological age.*

The progress ratio shows the pupil's improvement expressed as a proportion of the length of the intervention (20 weeks or 5 months). For example, pupil IB's reading age has increased from 6:2 (6 years and 2 months) to 9:9 (9 years and 9 months) over the 5 months of programme intervention. This indicates that 3 years and 7 months' progress has been made in 5 months, giving a progress ratio of 43 months over 5, or 8.6.

It seems clear from the above data that these pupils have made significant improvement in terms of their reading ages when compared to their chronological ages. Less improvement can be observed in terms of their spelling ages. In some cases, the standardised age-related results are close to or above the chronological age when we might expect that they would be significantly lower.

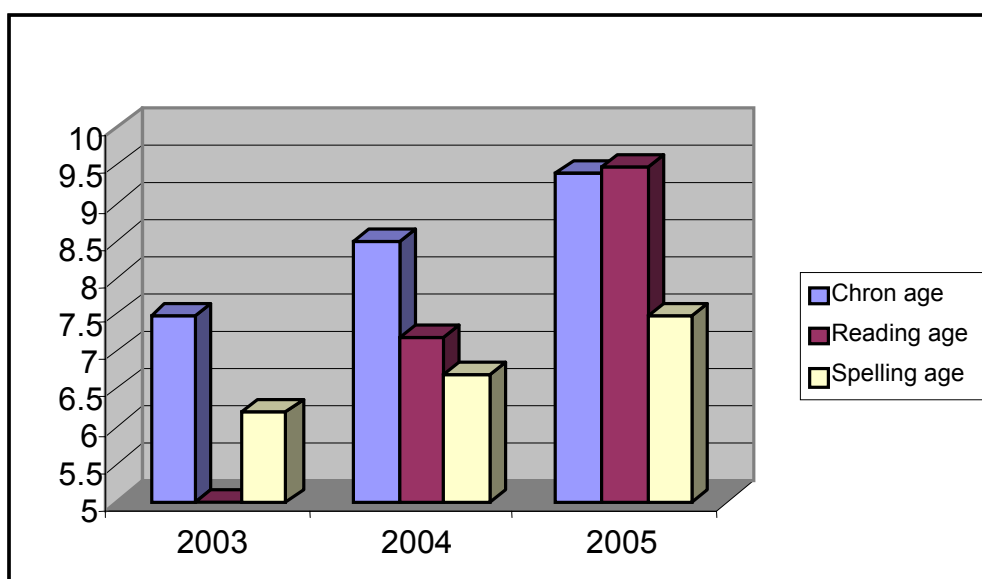
The following example adds data from the second year of the programme. When he was originally assessed, pupil HT did not score in terms of reading age and had a spelling age of 6:7, 6 months behind his chronological age. After the first year, his reading age had leapt to 10:0, well above his chronological age, and his spelling age was 9:0. In the second year of the programme, his reading age has continued to increase and his spelling age has stabilised at the level of his chronological age, even after much less direct intervention (Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Pupil HT progress, 2003-2005



Similar, if less striking, patterns of progress are evident across all the pupils who have benefited from the programme. Pupil BH has also made considerable progress (Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Pupil BH progress, 2003-2005



It is difficult to collate progress rates meaningfully across both of the programme's cohorts because some children start with no scores and others have an end score for reading which is off the scale. Of the 11 children in cohort 1 who have been involved in the programme for 2

years, all continued to make progress in the second year, albeit generally at a slower rate than in the first year. This is to be expected following the often considerable progress that they made in the first year and as their reading and spelling ages approach their chronological age. Furthermore, there were varying degrees of intervention among cohort 1 schools in the second year of the programme. Progress ratings range between 0.6 (3 months) and 5.4 (27 months) for reading ages in the second year, with the exception of a pupil who stabilised after making 3 years and 5 months progress in the first year. The mean average progress rating for this cohort in reading ages in the first year was 5.4 (27 months) in 20 weeks. The corresponding mean average for spelling ages was 2.02 (10 months). In the second year, progress was understandably less spectacular, reducing to 11.5 months for reading and 4 months for spelling. Similar mean average progress ratings for the first year were evident in cohort 2, with ratings ranging from 19.5 to 24.5 months for reading and 7 to 10 months for spelling. While we must reiterate that we cannot attribute this progress to the programme alone: we know that all of the children involved began with reading and spelling ages significantly below their chronological ages and have since made significant progress in these and other areas.

## National data

Pupil HT also features in the target group of four pupils from Salterforth Primary School who have demonstrated improvement in their national curriculum scores as shown in Table 2.

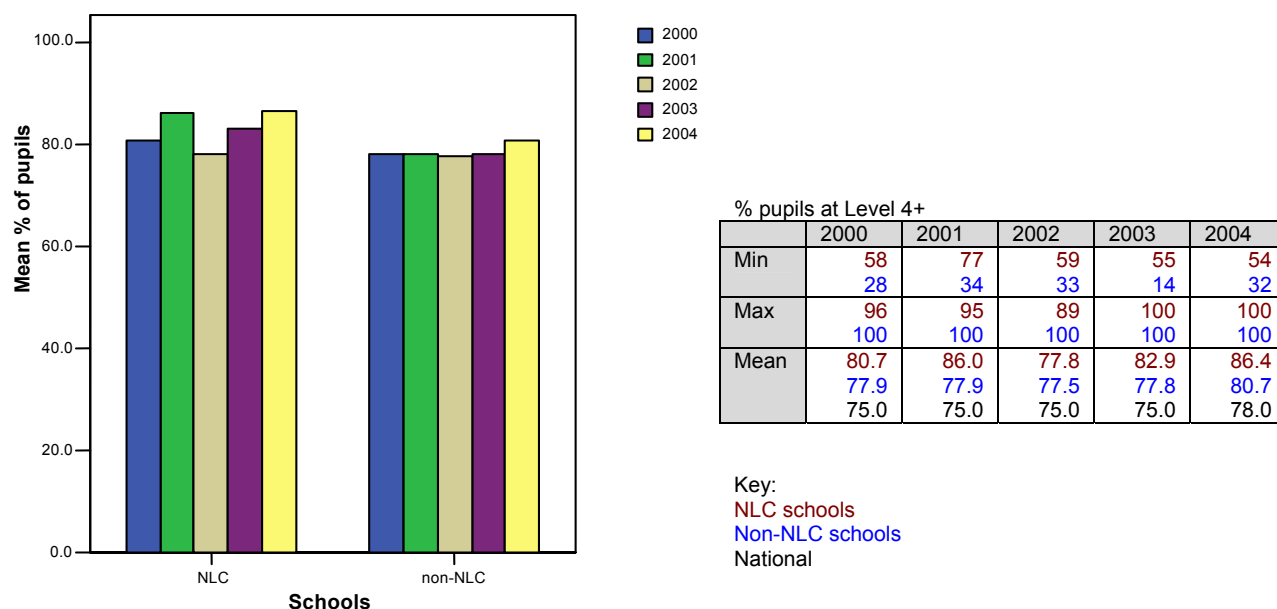
**Table 2:** National curriculum scores for four selected pupils from Salterforth Primary School

Pupil	Reading			Mathematics		
	KS1	Y3	Y4	KS1	Y3	Y4
HT	1	2c	2b	1	2c	2a
SS	1	2c	Absent	1	2c	2a
NE	1	n/a	3c	1	2c	2a
RL	1	2b	>2	1	n/a	2a

It seems clear that all these pupils are making progress, which staff at Salterforth Primary School attributed to their involvement in the programme. Certainly, in the class we observed at the school, we saw all the target pupils contributing confidently and responding well to questions.

Looking beyond the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme, we also took into account the network's Key Stage (KS) 2 results. While it is dangerous to draw too many conclusions from a comparison between a relatively small network (of small schools) and its relatively large local authority (Lancashire), taking English as an example, the network's schools have outperformed both other schools in the authority and national averages since 2000, and performance has been more consistent since the network was formed in 2003 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4:** NLC and non-NLC schools: percentage of pupils achieving KS2 English at level 4+, 2000-2004



It will be important that the network continues to monitor its results as the enquiry focuses become more embedded in its schools and, particularly, as the children who have benefited reach Year 6.

## Impact on children: achievement

### St Thomas' Primary School

At St Thomas' Primary School, a new-build school with approximately 120 pupils in a relatively affluent area, we spoke to 5 pupils who had been involved in the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme for 1 year, the class teacher of the 4 Year 3 pupils and the teaching assistant who had worked with a Year 2 pupil.

We were concerned initially to know if the withdrawal policy had disturbed the four Year 3 pupils. They responded that: "We look forward to coming out [of class]" and "Sometimes it's easier outside than in the classroom". Indeed, pupil J felt that involvement in the programme had had significant impact on his work in the mainstream classroom: "[It] feels writing is better in class too and maths ... We get help with writing – we're better in all subjects." His class teacher, who was also deputy headteacher, felt that all the pupils were significantly more confident in class as a result of the work they were doing outside the class with their teaching assistant and the programme leader, and their parents had also remarked on the improvement. He singled out J as having made particular progress.



*"J's really made a tremendous effort this year; his improvement has been superb and across the curriculum and his work's really caught up. And all of a sudden he's spelling 99 per cent of the words correctly every time - and his confidence, he feels more confident in terms of writing ... His whole persona's changed throughout the year, from someone who was quite withdrawn because I think he knew he had a lot of problems and areas where there were gaps in his learning and he's just starting to fill these gaps in and see, 'I can do this, it's not a problem to me any more'."*

Indeed, J will no longer have an individual education plan in 2005-06, something which his class teacher again attributed to the programme.

We also met pupil O, a Year 2 pupil who could only write one sentence in creative writing prior to her involvement with the programme, but is now able to write independently even when her teaching assistant is not present. Although she still has problems with spelling, there has also been a marked improvement in her handwriting and she can now compose stories on her own, achieving up to half a page of free writing in 20 minutes. It is interesting to note that the teachers also believe that this improvement in writing has led to direct improvement in other subject areas such as science. This was attributed to her huge increase in confidence. Previously, she was often unable to engage with lessons: "She used to literally shake in her chair," said her teaching assistant. Indeed, her teaching assistant suggested that the fact that she was able to respond shyly to some of our questions was further indication of how far she had progressed.

## Impact on children: engagement

### St Philip's School

In contrast to St Thomas' Primary School, the majority of pupils at St Philip's School in Nelson are of Asian-Pakistani background and most pupils speak English as an additional language. According to Ofsted, a quarter of pupils are at an early stage of learning English and 'the school serves an area of significant social and economic deprivation and there is considerable movement of families in and out of the area' (Ofsted, 2004b). We spoke to the teaching assistant working on the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme, who emphasised that these contextual factors add an additional level of challenge to working with children with dyslexia-related problems. The boys targeted for the programme, which has run for one year, all had behavioural problems. For example, pupil S was lacking in confidence and found it difficult to concentrate. This has changed as a result of this involvement in the programme: "Now he has an attention span of 30 minutes; before it was less than 5 minutes", reported his teaching assistant. As a result of the expertise she has gained from working on the programme, the teaching assistant believes that S's problems could derive from dyspraxia rather than dyslexia: "His reading's very good, he can recall the story, but then when he has to put pen to paper he'll say to me, 'Why does my brain not work?'". She is going to focus on his dyspraxia as a result. Despite these enduring frustrations, she was clear that he is now generally much better behaved in school, his attendance has improved and he has become much more confident in all lessons: "When he's done his work he goes around school showing everybody."

Similar progress has been made with the girls targeted for the programme in the school, who initially shared the boys' lack of confidence, if not their behavioural problems. We heard that all the girls now participate more in the classroom, with one girl in particular helping some of the other pupils in the class with reading. The class teacher told us that the girls targeted were now "a lot more confident with their reading, they're understanding and joining in with what

we're doing, with our shared work". The school's literacy co-ordinator was also clear about the programme's benefits for all the pupils involved.

*"They have benefited from this small, intensive group work and the attention that [the teaching assistant and the programme leader] have also been giving them. They know that they have had that time in which to talk, to learn, to develop and that also has a knock-on effect on their confidence."*

## **Roughlee Church of England Primary School**

Roughlee Church of England (CE) Primary School has a different set of challenges, being a small village school with 24 pupils and 2 classes. We met two pupils involved in the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme, which has run for one year. They were very positive about their involvement. Prior to it they had not liked coming to school, whereas now they look forward to it because they "can do more stuff". They both felt that they are now better at reading, which makes mainstream classes easier and writing in other subjects such as science less difficult. They also do their homework now and are proud of their work. As with some of the pupils in the other schools we visited, they now feel confident enough sometimes to offer support to other pupils. We also observed the children participating fully in the school's leavers' assembly rehearsal, reading their poems independently and with confidence. Both the school's teaching assistant, who leads on the programme internally, and the programme leader were convinced that they would not have been able to do this without the support of the programme.

The pressures on space at Roughlee CE Primary School, which has only two classes, infant and junior, mean that withdrawal for programme support is to the mezzanine above the junior classroom. The school's teaching assistant speculated that the fact that there was no stigma attached to withdrawal – in fact children who stay downstairs sometimes feel slightly jealous of those being withdrawn – may be related to the necessary flexibility of being a very small school: "In our school I think they become more individual [...] When we withdraw them we make them special." One child with quite acute behavioural problems was said to be benefiting enormously from the one-to-one, personalised attention of the programme: "He's the star up here. ... I don't think they feel that pressure of being different, if anything the children want to do it". The network's co-leaders feel that this is crucial to the programme; children in all the schools value working in this way with the programme leader and teaching assistants. They feel that other children recognise the value of the programme group and see it as an integral part of the way children work in their schools to develop a variety of skills.

## **School processes: what contribution has the network made?**

### **Enhancing the role of teaching assistants**

At the school level, we found that through the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme, the network has provided funding that has enabled it to establish structures, models and resources to support teaching assistants in sustaining the programme's provision for children with reading, writing and spelling difficulties. After two years in which it has operated in six of the network's nine schools, there are signs that involvement in the programme has substantially increased confidence and leadership capacity among teaching assistants. This was a conscious decision in setting up the programme: "We wanted something that was systematic, structured and multi-sensory and that provided a centrally structured programme for teaching assistants to work from" said the programme leader. A very early report on the Pendle Small Schools network drew attention to the significant contribution being made to the dyslexia-related work by support staff and highlighted the value placed on the contribution of non-teaching staff to

the network (Networked Learning Group (NLG), 2003). The development of the programme seems only to have increased the respect shown to the teaching assistants, who have begun to take on specific leadership roles in it. We observed this in all the schools we visited.

As we have already seen, Roughlee CE Primary School demonstrated flexible and imaginative use of both its restricted space and limited staff numbers; the school has two teachers and a teaching assistant. Roughlee CE Primary School is part of the second cohort of the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme, and the teaching assistant has taken on considerable responsibility in leading the programme. The size of the school means that pupils cannot be withdrawn far from the classroom although, as we have seen, the school has succeeded in making this appear to be a privilege rather than a stigma. The school's teaching assistant was clear about the difficulty of sharing ideas in small schools and explicit about the contribution the network has made in countering this: "I've brought things from the network and thought 'I could use that with x' ... [I've] taken things out and added them to other schemes."



She also underlined how isolated support staff can feel: "You don't go on many courses ... you very rarely get to talk about what you do at school." The programme has begun to address this, taking all 12 teaching assistants working on the programme at that stage to a special needs exhibition in May 2005. More than one of the teaching assistants we spoke to felt that being valued in this way had increased their self-belief as professionals. One of the network's co-leaders saw the exhibition visit as an example of the network's impact in encouraging staff to look beyond their immediate environment: "People are looking outside now, looking at the wider picture ... They've not been directed to do it either." There are also plans to extend the developing staff exchange programme to support staff and office staff. As a result of these kinds of initiatives and of the investment the network has made in them, the teaching assistants we met appear to be central to the programme's continuing success.

All the teaching assistants we spoke to reported having very good relationships and good communication with the programme leader. As with the pupils involved in the programme, teaching assistants told us that they now feel confident enough to apply the expertise they have gained from the programme to other areas of their work. Some are now training to be teachers or higher-level teaching assistants, and all valued the faith that the network had shown in them: 'We used to wash paint pots, now I have been given trust to teach' (Network traffic light

survey, 2004,). There was also evidence of good communications between schools within the network, and a teaching assistant support network has been established where they meet regularly to share ideas and resources, although the facts that teaching assistants work variable hours and have to be extremely adaptable in responding to unforeseen problems in small schools present constant challenges. As a result, the teaching assistants are beginning to feel confident enough now to operate with much less active support from the programme leader. Some teaching assistants feel sufficiently confident to begin to take on a consultative role in order to support others working on the programme. Certainly, the programme leader is convinced that the teaching assistants' involvement is vital to the programme's sustainability: "It's owned by support staff now." The programme's impact is perhaps most succinctly characterised in the following observation made by one of the network's teaching assistants to one of the governors at Kelbrook Primary School and included in a presentation she made to the special educational needs governor's committee meeting in April 2005.

*"The most exciting thing about the project for me is not just the fact that I am responsible for helping to improve the learning and attainment of my group of children on the dyslexia programme, not just the responsibility I have for teaching them, nor the responsibility I have for assessing them and then working out the next steps, which I really appreciate, but the fact that I can use the knowledge I have gained on the programme to help other children in the class and in other classes that I work in. All children seem to be gaining from the skills I have learnt through the programme, and I can use them on a one-to-one basis, in a group, in my in-class support at whatever age. It's amazing."*

### **Continuing professional development (CPD) and involvement of all staff**

The network's success in enhancing the contribution made in schools by support staff has been mirrored by the involvement of all staff in network activity. One of the ways this has been achieved is by using the network itself as a primary resource for what one of the network's headteachers described as "low-cost, high-impact CPD" in opposition to externally run courses.

*"By doing it this way, you find out how does that teacher in that school do it, how do they manage, what skills have they got that maybe I could pick up on or utilise. And it's the dialogue you can have ... it's just about making the links."*

Headteacher, Holy Trinity Roman Catholic (RC) Primary School

It was clear from the focus group discussion we held with staff from St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Kelbrook Primary School and Salterforth Primary School that this emphasis on training is valued by staff, not least because involvement was extended to staff members such as site supervisors and secretaries and because it allowed staff from different schools to get together and share experiences. It was also obvious that the very enthusiastic staff valued the mutuality and support they received from the network. Benefits they mentioned included opportunities to meet other professionals and be part of a big team, being able to talk informally, having the confidence to contact other schools for advice or resources, and feeling less isolated and insular. They felt that, although their schools' headteachers had a longer history of collaboration, something that was being strengthened further by their continuing involvement in the network, all staff members were now much more aware of what was going on in other schools and themselves collaborating at multiple levels. Indeed, teachers were forming new sub-networks, such as the group sharing planning and resources at Foundation Stage. Most of these benefits were also reflected in the network's own staff survey, with professional development heading the list of network impacts, which also included meeting new people, sharing ideas and improving their own learning.

Inclusion and spreading ownership were conscious objectives of the network's approach to adult learning: 'Heads were aware that there was a middle tier of leadership which was not being given the opportunity to lead' (Network Spring Enquiry Report, 2003). The network's co-leaders are convinced that this objective has been met, and distributed leadership was a key element of their successful bid to become a Primary Strategy Learning Network. The network's co-leaders cited the Chinese week that the network held in February 2005, in which middle leaders took on considerable responsibility, as an example of its approach to distributing leadership. It also showed how funding allowed the network to translate its members' enthusiasm into reality, as they would never have been in a position to host such an event without NLC funding. The Chinese week further increased the feeling of community in the network, for example by breaking down barriers between the Year 5 pupils from different schools who were involved.

## Network characteristics

### Context

The Pendle network in Lancashire has been in existence in various forms since 1983. It existed initially as a small schools cluster, which grew and retracted before reforming as part of a small schools' initiative in 2000. Its inception as a networked learning community in January 2003 with nine schools gave it the means and independence to embark on a series of research projects and the impetus to use these and other network activities to extend its reach beyond the relatively small group of headteachers plus a few others who had worked together previously. The network's ethos seems to focus on pupil learning in a broad sense, aiming 'to improve the learning environment and opportunities for the children in our network and therefore continue to raise standards in our schools' (NLC Development and Finance Plan 2004-06). We now want to draw out what we think are some of the characteristics of the network.

### Learning and enquiry

One of the network's co-leaders was clear that the existence of an explicit enquiry structure was very important to the network's success: "One of the reasons for going into NLCs was for the research element because it was something we were not doing. We were doing all these projects but we weren't doing anything with them" (network co-leader and headteacher, Kelbrook Primary School). The Reading and Writing Recovery Programme epitomises the systematic approach Pendle has adopted to its enquiry focuses as an NLC. A report by Liverpool Hope University' (Liverpool Hope University, 2005) into links between NLCs and higher education institutions (HEIs) noted 'the quantity and quality of practitioner enquiry based activity it engages in' and refers to Pendle as 'a model of its kind' and 'a classic example of teachers gaining professional development through researching their own practice'. This has been achieved without formal HEI support so far, although the network is keen to begin to work with an HEI. The most tangible result of the enquiry-led approach so far may be what is described in the network's own enquiry report as the emphasis now being placed on learning rather than subject content: 'Everyone is delighted that the focus is now back on learning' (Network Spring Enquiry Report, 2003). All teachers surveyed by the network recently felt that their own learning had improved as a result of belonging to the network: "The NLC has allowed people's inspirations to take off and spread" (headteacher, Kelbrook Primary School). Influential members are convinced that the opportunities for adult learning that the network has created have had a direct impact on pupil learning, claims that were corroborated by the impact of the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme on both the adults and children involved.



*"I think the greatest impact has been that word 'learning' because it's just totally changed here, and I think it's true of all our schools, the way in which people perceive what they're being taught. Before, we were being told what to do, so you were absolutely in awe of anybody who was an expert, and experts were outside your school, not within your schools, even though we all knew we'd got them. But the emphasis was on learning, which delighted us because we're teachers, not people who deliver subjects. [...] I think the biggest impact has been on adults, and that's obviously impacted on the children greatly, because they've gone out and learned from other people."*

Headteacher, Kelbrook Primary School



It was also apparent to us that operating with small groups on the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme has enabled the network to adopt, almost by instinct, a more personalised approach: 'Pupils have a lot to tell us about their experiences of learning' (Dyslexia project outline report). For example, three network schools have revised their handwriting schemes because of the success of the programme's handwriting element. The network's focus on learning has enabled the network to uncover previously untapped sources of expertise to provide effective in-house, collaborative training and development, such as the secretary at St Thomas' who is a French speaker and has a key role in the modern foreign languages project. There is no reason to imagine that she could have taken on such an influential position without the shift towards a broader conception of learning that came with the creation of the networked learning community.

### Overcoming isolation through building community

The isolation of small schools has been one of the themes of our enquiry.

*"If you're not careful, you get isolated; you don't know how you're doing ... [The network] has given us the confidence to say: 'Yeah, what we're doing people think is pretty good.' In the past you would never get that feedback ... you're in total limbo, you don't know how the school down the road's doing, never mind people the other side of Pendle. And that's what staff really need."*

Headteacher, Holy Trinity RC Primary School

The same headteacher also felt that the schools' commitment to the network went much deeper than had been the case in clusters the school had been involved in previously, an opinion that was echoed by others. Indeed, the strength of the relationships that have been built up between schools in the network was noted in Holy Trinity's Ofsted report (Ofsted, 2003b), where the developing links with St Philip's, a school in a significantly more deprived area, were singled out. There was evidence that the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme has directly contributed to this feeling of integration, not only for children but for parents too: "In a small school you think you're the only one with a child with these problems and when

you meet other people ... then you realise you're the not the only one going through all that", said the headteacher of Salterforth, who is also a network co-leader. We heard evidence from network members and a parent governor at Kelbrook Primary School that the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme has been one of the means by which such parental isolation has been overcome. This was one of the explicit objectives of the programme.

*"We are developing workshops for parents so that they can understand and address the needs of their children as we have a significant amount of research information which supports our philosophy that a partnership with parents to create strategies which transfer to and from home has a remarkable impact on how children with dyslexia cope with their 'special gift'."*

NLC Development and Finance Plan, 2004-06

Building community in this way is how the network has overcome the potential isolation of its constituent schools. The deputy headteacher at St Thomas', a recent appointment, felt that "there is good community between the schools", and we saw nothing to contradict him. We have already noted the high degree of mutual support evident in the network, which has effectively destroyed any lingering sense of competitiveness between small schools existing in neighbouring areas. This high level of mutual support was also confirmed by a headteacher.

*"Someone coming in to help you during Ofsted takes the pressure off you completely ... I know that if something absolutely desperate happens on the morning, I'll get help from the networked learning community colleagues – fantastic."*

Headteacher, Holy Trinity RC Primary School

There is some evidence that the network is beginning to take on a larger role in the local community. The interest in and success of events such as the Chinese week have underlined to the network's leaders the importance of publicising the network to the local community and perhaps even looking to local business for sponsorship to help sustain network activity. There is also interest from the local authority, which has increased its support for networks and networking during the lifetime of the networked learning community and is happy to assist in the dissemination of its work. The network's collective strength has played an important role in this transformation: "The local education authority (LEA) listens to networks but not to individual schools" said the headteacher of Holy Trinity RC Primary School. Members of the network also highlighted the crucial role played by its critical friend, who is also an LEA adviser. The network's co-leaders have presented to networks and local authorities throughout the country and are key members of Lancashire's strategy for networked learning.

## Conclusion

We think that we have uncovered convincing evidence that small schools are particularly well suited to sustaining network activity once ownership has reached a critical mass, as it seems to have in Pendle. All the staff we talked to spoke of the network counteracting the isolation felt at all levels in small schools, and there is something about small schools' necessary flexibility in terms of juggling staff, classes and space that may make them more open to networking and collaboration.

*"It becomes apparent to me from going to a lot of the network events that small schools in some ways are leading the way, through necessity maybe ... A lot of the really successful networks are small schools. If you're a bigger organisation you don't need to reach out as much."*

Headteacher, Salterforth Primary School

Roughlee CE Primary School is only the most striking example of the benefits of collaboration in that the network has allowed it to transcend some of the limitations of being a two-class small school: "The schools sell it as a special thing ... it's this flexibility that perhaps you do have more in a small school", said a teaching assistant from Roughlee CE Primary School.

Allied to this is a very real sense of moral purpose operating across the network where colleagues, governors, parents and pupils are all valued for the contribution they make to the success of the network: "There is a higher moral ethic that works within network schools ... It is a relationship but it's not just between the two or three of us ... It is throughout the network", agreed the network co-leaders. This is represented in microcosm in the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme, where the network is helping teaching assistants to improve the school experiences of children who would otherwise not receive such a personalised approach. The success of the programme, along with the moral impetus behind it, has directly led to the network's focus on its more able pupils in its successful bid to be a Primary Strategy Learning Network: "It's not inclusion for the lower ability children, it's inclusion for the higher ability children that's sometimes the most difficult thing to do", said the headteacher of Kelbrook Primary School.

We would like to end with the suggestion that this enquiry should be only the beginning of an investigation of the network's impact on pupil learning, perhaps as part of collaboration between the network and an HEI. Our one reservation about the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme is that it has been dependent on NLC funding so far in that the programme leader's post has been funded directly by the network. This is not to say that we believe that the programme will not have an enduring impact or that teaching assistants are not capable of sustaining the advances they have made, rather that it is too early in the life of the programme to be making more than preliminary assertions about its impact on the pupils who have been involved. There is very encouraging evidence of collaboration and even emergent leadership among the teaching assistants working on the programme, and there is a conviction common to all the people we questioned on the subject that the network will find the means to sustain its current activity even as it transforms itself in part into a Primary Strategy Learning Network. However, in our judgement the Reading and Writing Recovery Programme has demonstrated significant impact on the motivation, behaviour and achievement of the pupils involved, as well as early evidence of improved attainment.



## Acknowledgements

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## Methods and sources

### Interviews

Reading and Writing Recovery Programme leader  
Headteacher, Kelbrook Primary School (network co-leader)  
Headteacher, Salterforth Primary School (network co-leader)  
Headteacher, Holy Trinity School  
Teaching assistant, St Philip's School  
Literacy co-ordinator, St Philip's School  
Year 3 teacher, St Philip's School  
Year 2 pupil, St Thomas' Primary School  
Year 3 pupils, St Thomas' Primary School (3 pupils)  
Teaching assistant, St Thomas' Primary School  
Deputy headteacher, St Thomas' Primary School  
Year 3 pupils, Roughlee CE Primary School (two pupils)  
Teaching assistant, Roughlee CE Primary School  
Parent governor, Kelbrook Primary School

### Class observations

Reading and Writing Recovery Programme class, Salterforth Primary School  
Leavers' assembly rehearsal, Roughlee CE Primary School

### Focus group

Staff from Salterforth Primary School, Kelbrook Primary School and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

### Data sources

Assessment data - schools  
Salterforth Primary School data  
NLG network profile  
NLC Development and Finance Plan 2004-06  
NLG Spring Enquiry report, May 2003  
Network Spring Enquiry report, 2003  
Networked Learning Communities and Higher Education Links Project Interim Report 2, March 2005, Liverpool Hope University  
Dyslexia Project outline report  
'Our PSLN in a nutshell' summary  
Network traffic light surveys, 2004 and 2005  
'What the Network has done for you' (Pendle Network internal survey)  
Staff exchange questionnaire  
History of Pendle Small Schools  
Ofsted reports for network schools

### References

Brooks, G, 2002, *What Works for Children with Literacy Difficulties? The Effectiveness of Intervention Schemes*, Nottingham, DfES; available at: [www.dfes.gov.uk/research/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/)  
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NLC Development and Finance Plan, 2004-06

Ofsted, 2003a, Kelbrook Primary School Inspection Report, 6 May 2003

Ofsted, 2003b, Holy Trinity RC Primary School Inspection Report, October

Ofsted, 2004, Salterforth Primary School Inspection Report, 8 March 2004

Ofsted report, 2004b, St Thomas' Primary School Inspection Report, 17 March 2004