

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

# Southampton Leading for Learning NLC

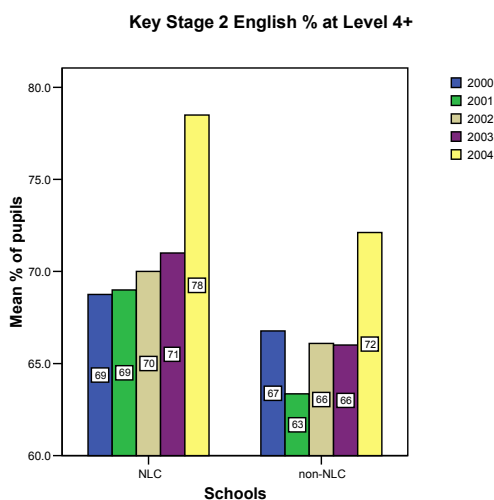
**Julie McGrane & Jane McGregor**



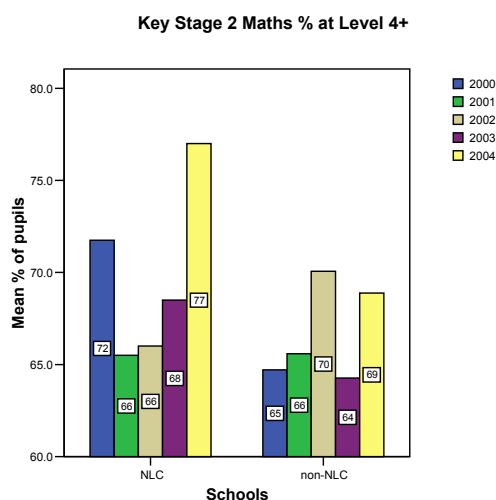
## Impact on children: attainment

This report is intended to address the question: ‘How have NLC teacher enquiry triads influenced pupil engagement and attainment, particularly in maths and English?’. Pupils, teachers, headteachers, local education authority (LEA) and Networked Learning Group (NLG) staff are convinced of the influence of Southampton Leading for Learning network’s focus on staff enquiry, pupil voice and talk in improving the personal development and achievement of pupils. This appears to be borne out by attainment data. Figures 1 and 2 show the network schools as a whole increasing their standard assessment tests (SATs) Key Stage 2 scores in English and maths between 2003 and 2004 and pushing these above the average for non-NLC schools, with a value-added points score of +1.3 (non-NLC schools = 0).

**Figure 1:** Percentage of pupils achieving Level 4+ in English at Key Stage 2 in NLC and non-NLC schools, 2000-2004



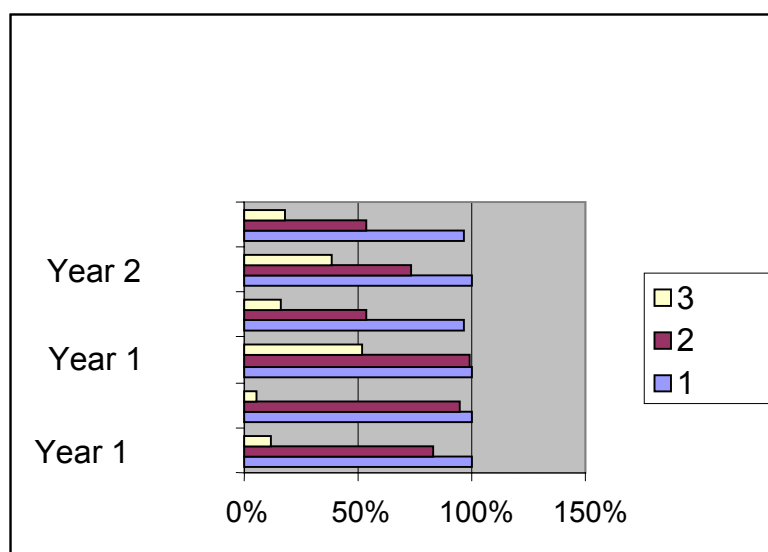
**Figure 2:** Percentage of pupils achieving Level 4+ in maths at Key Stage 2 in NLC and non-NLC schools, 2000-2004



DfES data shows an improvement across the board in English at Level 4+ and particularly for girls in Key Stage 2 maths. This network picture is reflected in individual schools, such as Kane's Hill Primary School where a 'dramatic impact on the outcomes of pupil learning' was noted in the NLG's Year 2 review (2004), especially in schools where standards had been low and progress poor. This is represented in appendix 1 on a scatterplot indicating the high value-added score of the school, which is run by one of the network co-leaders who has been very active in the NLC programme.

Another network school with demonstrable quantitative improvements is Bitterne Park Church of England (CE) First School. Evidence of pupil impact is captured in both an enquiry report and in the school's progress data. Figure 3 is based on pupil progress data, estimated by teachers using test results. It shows a significant difference in pupils making three levels' progress in Year 1 maths between summer 2004 and spring 2005 (ie, moving from Level 1 to Level 2 or 3). Significantly, this group was the target class for Becky Froud, the lead teacher engaged in the triad enquiry into problem-solving skills in maths. This appears to provide clear evidence of a correlation between performance gains and enquiry-oriented pedagogic intervention.

**Figure 3:** Bitterne Park CE First School: Year 1 students' progress in writing, maths and reading by levels 1-3, summer 2004-spring 2005



The SATs data for 2002 to 2004 for the school showed that the percentage of students achieving Level 3+ in the maths test rose from 28 per cent to 33 per cent, and the school-wide analysis of 2004 results (recorded in the Year 2 evidence report) noted that: 'The new results show significant progress across all levels of attainment since the end of the spring term'.

## Impact on children: engagement

Pupils and teachers alike enthusiastically and consistently testify to improved engagement with, and attitudes towards, learning, manifested through the increased confidence and self-esteem of pupils.

*"Adelaide used to hate maths. She just wasn't confident about 'having a go'. The use of visualisation techniques to make pictures in her head, followed by the use of pictorial jottings truly liberated her. She is now able to relax and enjoy maths puzzles."*

Teacher, Mansel Infants School

The synergy of pupil involvement activities, through school councils, intervisitations and conferences with active enquiry into pupil talk and thinking skills appears to have moved pupil voice beyond rhetoric in the schools visited in this economically deprived area of Southampton. One interviewee in the externally evaluated interview described how:

*"...two colleague heads from the network last term and an LEA inspector in the summer who came and did monitoring with me all commented on the quality of the pupils' talk – that it's just amazing. They can't believe that we're sitting here in a socially deprived estate and children are able to communicate and work with each other so brilliantly. It's such a key feature here but that has directly come from our NLC work."*

At the pupil level, staff from three of the schools visited independently agreed that pupils were far more aware of their learning styles. They were both more confident and more collaborative, and were enjoying their learning more. There was a powerful consensus that being able to talk about their learning and employ a variety of techniques strategically to solve problems meant that the children were enabled to become more independent learners, with an understanding about their learning that they were able to articulate, even at the Foundation Stage. Consequently, relations and behaviour have improved.

*“Things have changed a lot for the children. I’ve noticed a dramatic change in them – just the way that they walk, their confidence, their behaviour, the way they speak to adults. It really has improved, well, it’s turned around really.”*

Teacher

One pupil, Charlotte, aged 11, observed in relation to maths:

*“I think that my problem-solving has greatly improved because I can now easily identify the units, operation and how to calculate the answer to the problem. I think the word problem-solving framework has been a great asset to my improvement in problem-solving. I am confident that my SATs results are higher than my mocks due to underlining and understanding the problem.”*

Year 6 pupil

The dimension of emotional literacy in learning was cited as an important contribution to attitudes, resulting from changes in practice arising from network collaboration and enquiry. It was here that the conjunction of pupil voice and pupil talk might be seen to come together as teachers and classroom assistants became more aware of the importance of understanding learning processes and children became more able to articulate them in ways adults would listen and respond to.

*“On an emotional literacy level, they have all improved ... They are more self-aware. You are teaching them to be independent learners, to find their own voice within themselves.”*

Teacher, Kane’s Hill Primary School

The network headteachers and lead teachers are clear in ascribing this change to the impact of research and training, the consistent adoption of whole-school learning policies that focus on developing skills such as communication, and a greater understanding among adults of what children can do.

*“The impact in the classroom is about teachers engaging more often with pupils about what is going on in classrooms that works - thoughts and questions they raise - what works well and what doesn’t.”*

Headteacher, Bitterne Park CE First School

The classrooms observed in the schools visited were certainly visually rich and colourful, with much helpful material and prompts forming part of the display, which pupils appreciated. This enhanced awareness of classroom processes and possibilities and the subsequent influence on adult behaviour is illustrated by a teacher’s comment: “I am more aware now of allowing children the opportunity of thinking aloud and also modelling my own thinking aloud and the benefit this has for the children’s own learning and that of their peers”.

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

### Enquiry

Bridget Bugg has been headteacher for five years at Bitterne Park CE First School. Before her arrival, the school was underachieving: “We had to spend a lot of time focusing on literacy and other things began to drop off the end so we moved to a focus on numeracy”. At the same time, the school had become an active member of the network triad which included Mansel Junior School and Bitterne Park Junior School. Initially the triad engaged in considerable work around thinking skills, visiting the other schools and consequently developed a focus on thinking skills in maths, a focus that developed into an enquiry into problem-solving in maths led by now acting deputy headteacher Becky Froud. At the time, Becky was one of the two lead teachers found in each of the triad schools.

This enquiry triad has had an exceptional impact on Bitterne Park CE First School. The headteacher acknowledges that the school now uses a research approach in all that it does, describing the process as “empowering”. Her deputy comments: “As a result of the teacher enquiry, we are more

determined to try new things. I now look for evidence in everything I try and the school [is] now more innovative and reflective". This commitment to research and evidence-informed practice also demonstrates the developing reciprocity between school and network, something which could be described as an element of knowledge management. The school, for example, has a focus on Assessment for Learning and has contributed to networked learning through a focus on peer marking. Different schools are trying different things and feeding back half termly. Making this possible at school level, however, has required strategic planning.

*"We've managed the giving. We have a part-time teacher who can do all the cover so that helps with continuity and PPA time – reaped the dividends, we've got high-quality time. You can't do these things as an add-on."*

Headteacher, Bitterne Park CE First School

## Embedding strategy in practice

This strategic knowledge management is also evident in the reach achieved by some of the enquiry findings as they have travelled from school to network and back into classrooms. A teacher at Bitterne Park Junior School has incorporated some of the maths problem-solving and thinking skills strategies into her classroom. There is now, for example, always a problem on the board for Year 4 pupils to solve every morning as a settling exercise. Furthermore, the iterative processes evident in the network's strategic development are also apparent at school level. Adapting the maths problem-solving framework into a literacy context has had an 'extremely positive' impact on those students who implemented the suggested strategies, with one student scoring 100 per cent in both papers. Likewise, the significance of the enquiry activity at Bitterne Park CE First School for ongoing school strategic development is notable. Evaluation of the original enquiry focuses demonstrated what the school describes as disappointing scores at the lower end which pulled the average points score down. Consequently, the deputy head has created an intervention programme based on wave 3 to tackle this challenge.

The impact of the network's focus on student voice, thinking skills and oracy is evident in its schools. In the classrooms observed, there was much vibrant evidence, through displays, activities and pupil responses, of the use of elements such as Building Learning Power (BLP) schemata and pupil voice activities such as school councils.

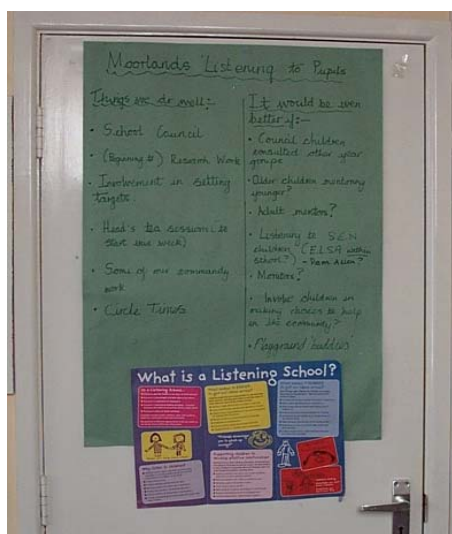




The head at Moorlands Infant School commented on how this had been embedded throughout the school: “The children are so much better at articulating their learning. They know about WALT (‘We are learning to..’) and WILF (‘What I’m looking for..’) in reception. They understand what they are doing”.

*“Their attitudes towards their learning are just fantastic because the 4 Rs have been used in the classrooms. If you go into the classrooms now you’ll see WALT, TIB [‘This is because..’] and WILF; that happens in all the classrooms. You’ll see consistency in the classrooms and that’s a key word if you’re a head. The learning policy – the implementation of that – is having the impact of seeing motivated children, creative. We’re getting there and it’s fantastic. The results, the attitudes, the calmness in the school – that’s what we’ve been striving towards – and as a network the impact of some of the inputs really have had that direct impact. And they’re so confident, that’s one of the key things.”*

Head, Moorlands Infant School



This network-wide focus on pupil voice has grown from other strategic network activity explored later, but its impact on staff and pupils is felt significantly at school level, although to differing degrees. At Bitterne Park CE First School for example, staff have made a move to include students in interviews for teaching posts while other schools such as Bitterne Park Junior School, Moorlands Infant School and Kane’s Hill Primary School are paying significant attention to the development of student councils and other aspects of pupil voice.

There is a belief in schools across the network that in addition to helping to achieve new things, one of the benefits for a school of being in the network is its role as an accelerant. According to Bridget Bugg, for example, younger teachers would not otherwise have gained the confidence

they did from working with other teachers, seeing other schools and receiving high-quality training, although some headteachers did not see the point in giving young teachers such high-quality training. At Bitterne Park Junior School, for example, the headteacher explained that although the school council predates the NLC, it has moved faster than it might otherwise have done. It has moved significantly towards impacting on learning and not just the physical environment. Kathryn Bevan-Mackie, a senior teacher at Bitterne Park Junior School, is able to describe how engaging in research that was focused on capturing perceptions about classroom climate (the tool which arguably helped to accelerate the pupil council work) had informed her own practice. This is just one example of how a network-wide initiative has affected change in individual classrooms as it has been adapted and modified to meet local and context-specific needs.

## Network characteristics

### Context

Southampton Leading for Learning is made up of 10 schools in Southampton (4 primary and 6 infant), serving an urban area which is in the highest 10 per cent for economic deprivation in England. The population is substantially white working class and the free school meals entitlement has remained constant at 18 per cent over the last 5 years, reflecting a stable demography. However, attainment of pupils as measured by SATs has increased in both maths and English, and adults enthusiastically describe positive changes in pupil achievement and engagement which they ascribe to the network. The schools and the LEA created time and motivation to build ownership of a detailed plan for its NLC. From the outset, its plans were strategically built on an enquiry model. It is

this enquiry-orientated practice that appears to have been the catalyst for impacting on pupil outcomes, while also creating an evidence-base to inform each iteration of network activity.

When this cluster of schools came together to become an NLC in September 2002, there was already a belief in the importance of collaboration around a local agenda, such as the need to improve oracy and the relatively poor maths skills pupils displayed on entry to school.

*“Getting teachers to work together is the way forward. We used to do it and I’ve never found a better way. [It’s not] someone officially saying we’re going to let you do this and we’re not even going to tell you what ‘this’ is ... I’ve been really proud to be a part of it.”*

Eric Gower, LEA inspector

Although the title of NLC has only existed for the last three years, the concept was thus not something new to Southampton. Being able to identify aspiration in the concrete terms offered by the levels of learning would, however, have been less likely without the experience of being in an NLC. Eric Gower explained:

*“If you’d come to Southampton five years ago we’d have been tilling the ground. It’s hard to give it a profile because it is not a thing. NLC gave us an envelope to put things in. They helped give us a specific focus.”*

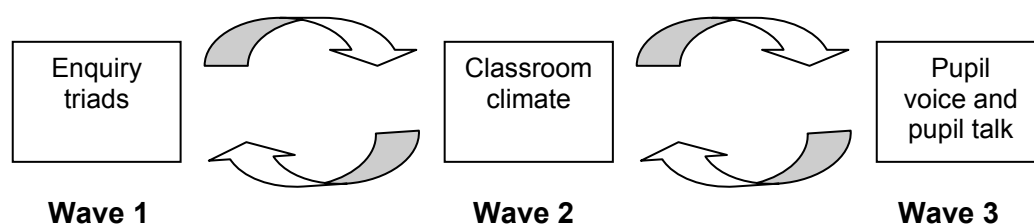
## Development and enquiry

When Kathryn Bevan-Mackie described her involvement with the Hay-McBer software Transforming Learning (TL) above, she was not explicitly aware that she was involved in an NLC development and enquiry (D&E) group. However, her involvement indicates the value of programme-wide investment in D&E. Like most of the networks involved in this D&E group, the TL group acted as a tool to bridge what Vygotsky describes as a ‘zone of proximal development’. The network had begun to realise that pupil voice was the next logical iteration of its work, but it acknowledged the benefits of using an enquiry methodology to help engage teachers in understanding what this looked like operationally. An extract from its submission document demonstrates how TL would endeavour to elicit pupil talk about classroom climate, involve pupils in peer support, and enable teachers to take an action-enquiry approach to further understanding their classrooms and build further leadership opportunities for those leading activity in school.

In creating a timeline of research activity, it would appear that this classroom climate work constituted a second wave of action enquiry. Unlike many schools where it can be argued that: ‘When we speak of an innovative school, we mean one that tries one new thing after another without making any of them work’ (Runkel, 1984), these waves of enquiry are connected and the process is iterative with feedback and feed-forward mechanisms (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Structure of wave-enquiry approach



It is unlikely that TL would have had such a profound effect on activity or that teachers who engaged with the software would have felt so confident in breaking away from its prescribed usage had they not learned about the process of action research in the first iteration of network enquiry. A group of teachers at Moorlands Infant School, for example, moved away from using the TL software and introduced video into their classrooms in order to watch and analyse the dynamics and nuances of classroom climate with colleagues and pupils.

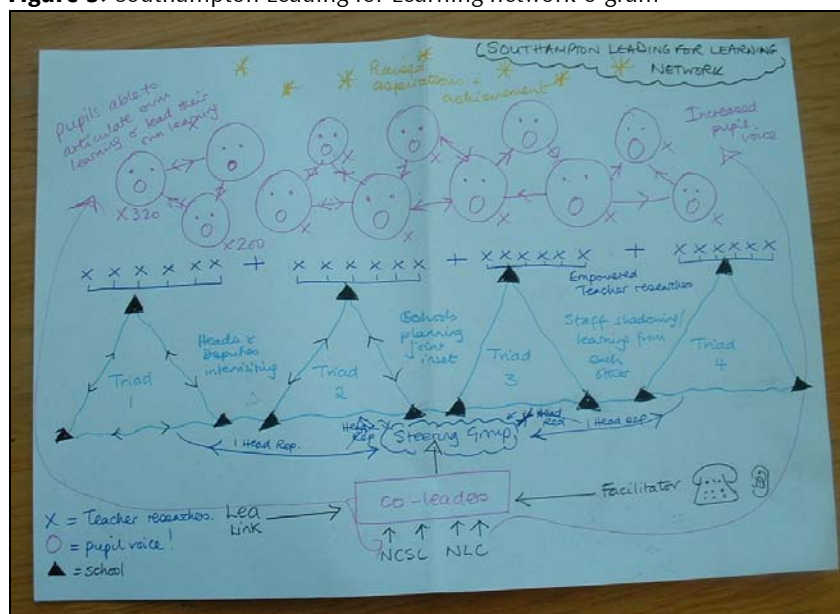
### Enquiry triads

From the network's conception, members had configured themselves around triads of schools, but the network quickly realised the benefits of extending engagement beyond the core groups of headteachers. Consequently, enquiry groups emerged in each of the enquiry triads (wave 1). The action-research triad structure has been hugely successful for the network. The process of enquiry for participants and the impact evidence in these reports has been part of an iterative process which has moved the network to its current focus on pupil voice. The triads were focused on:

- time to talk: cross-curricular opportunities for children to talk
- problem-solving skills in maths
- enhancing children's talk and raising self-esteem through drama and discussion
- developing independent learning

From the outset, each school within the triad identified two teachers to be lead teachers (LTs), thereby creating the capacity of six enquiry practitioners in each of the four triads. From the teachers' perspective, the involvement of headteachers ensured they had support within their schools to develop their skills and would be given time to share progress with other staff (see Figure 5 of Southampton's network-o-gram). As with each of the triads, the two LTs in each school would have triad-generated but network-aligned focuses for their enquiry. After identifying this, LTs were given training in enquiry methodologies and in leading learning from a higher education institution (HEI) associate. The perceived benefits have led the teachers involved to advocate this model to others.

**Figure 5:** Southampton Leading for Learning network-o-gram



## Alignment of pupil and adult learning

The enquiry process adopted in Southampton models how effective a clearly defined pupil learning focus can be in terms of pupil engagement and achievement when it is closely aligned with a focus on adult and leadership learning. There are indications, for example, that the benefits of collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) and involvement with external expertise have been significant in network development and embedding the results of action enquiry in classrooms and schools. The network has developed strong and important links with an HEI in the process of its development, which can be traced back to the early training commissioned by the network. Chris Chapman from the University of Warwick, who was approached when local links proved unfruitful, has been an invaluable source of expertise and critical friendship. Expertise external to the network (e.g. Guy Claxton's Building Learning Power programme) has been mobilised to support school-based activity, for example, to provide content for programmes and to support coaching, classroom observation and enquiry. It was acknowledged that this helped to build confidence, which was lacking, especially in relation to writing among the lead teachers and learning support assistants particularly. It has also instilled a greater understanding of leadership and learning, both individually and collectively, and has encouraged trust and high expectations among network members. The NLG Spring enquiry 2004 noted that: 'Over time it is clear that this initial involvement of external expertise and the impact on professional confidence have influenced an increase in practitioner-led activities within schools and across triads'. This engagement has proved proactive and needs driven. For example:

*"As a result of the research findings, each triad of schools has shared either joint day closures and/or joint twilight staff meetings to develop staff to enable them to take pupil learning further along an identified path. Gervaise Phinn [for example] led work with all teaching and support staff on the importance of developing 'child talk' and the planned opportunities for this. This was open to two members of the other seven schools and other colleagues from Southampton."*

Year 2 Annual review activity record

Writing for external audiences also appears to have created an opportunity for professional accountability as well as building the profile of its work within the wider system. Outputs of this nature are clearly valued by the network. Two experiences identified in its external evaluation have clearly been favourably viewed. The first was an invitation to contribute to National Association of

Head Teachers (NAHT) primary leadership papers outlining how network members had established and developed teacher researchers across the network. The second was an invitation to share the network's work at a CPD conference for all Southampton headteachers and LEA officers. One of the triads and a co-leader led a workshop that was attended by approximately 30 people, including Southampton's director of education. The Year 2 Annual review activity record notes that questions from the floor indicated the high level of interest in the work and its impact, particularly from secondary colleagues.

## Distributed leadership

The links between leadership (as a process of influence) and learning (as change) are manifest in the means by which the triad enquiries have been carried out and the results embedded in (some of) the schools. There is an overt desire for the outcomes of the research to move beyond school impact to network impact. The way in which enquiry contributes to distributing leadership was recognised by headteachers and lead teachers, particularly in relation to teachers at different stages of their careers: the enquiry into areas of need meant that all were able to contribute equally. This had a big impact on the lead teachers taking part, the magnitude of which surprised some. The headteacher at Moorlands Infant School noted: "It is the leadership qualities that have come through. The teachers involved are more confident, presenting at conferences and so on". The NLG Spring enquiry 2004 acknowledged that:

*"The professional dialogue between LTs and headteachers has served to explore and challenge views of leadership. This has emerged through the shared training between the headteachers and the LTs and has generated a culture of professional respect and confidence within the network."*

For individual teachers, the benefits of enquiry were clear.

*"I'm now much more critical of my own actions. I used to be anxious about one teacher observing me, but I now realise I've got 30 observations going on all the time. It's made me so much more aware – they actually know what's going on – [we need to] allow children to take more control."*

Teacher

## Conclusion

The confidence engendered by the supported enquiry process and the notion of equipping individual teachers to enact consequent changes in their classrooms has had an influence on how some at the beginning of their careers viewed themselves and were viewed by others: "It's been the most amazing experience that's impacted on my career", said one teacher. There was general agreement that training through the network has had a big impact and the resource implications had been well-thought-out, as was evident at Bitterne Park CE First School. Similarly, the LEA inspector was clear that comparatively modest funding had made a significant difference to change in schools *and* classrooms.

*"I have a conviction that targeted funding (not necessarily huge) makes a huge difference. It would have happened on a much smaller scale, but not to this extent."*

Eric Gower, LEA inspector

Funding or not, the network is committed to sustaining its efforts to continue the positive impact for students and adults in its care. The headteacher of Bitterne Park CE First school said: "The triads served their purpose and are now less significant as the network refocuses around classroom climate and school councils". There is a commitment to redressing what some felt was an underestimation of pupil capabilities or what one head called a "cotton-wool culture of low expectations". The challenge has been set. In order to reach more teachers, there was a relaunch with all teachers in all schools. And what do they hope to achieve in the future?

*“It’s been a bit of an explosion. We’ve got to be careful, manageability will have to be key, [but we are sure] pupils will be more confident, [be able to] articulate their learning more effectively, be empowered and that children will be learning in a more exciting and relevant curriculum. “*

With the evidence presented here, that does not seem beyond the realms of possibility.

## Methods and sources

Key Stage 2 (KS2) statistics comparing NLC and non-NLC schools

KS2 statistics from Bitterne Park CE First School and Kane’s Hill Primary School

Fischer Family Trust data for network

Year 2 evidence report

NLG Spring enquiry 2004

NLG Year 2 review

‘Brainstorm on the work of NLC on learning’ in Year 2 review by Kane’s Hill Primary School, Moorlands Infant School and Mansbridge Primary School

‘Impact of Involvement with NLC’ in Year 2 review by Bitterne Park CE First School

Interviews, observations and focus groups at:

Bitterne Park CE First School (interview A)

Kane’s Hill Primary School (interview B with class teacher and pupil)

Moorlands Infant School (interviews C and D with headteacher and pupil members of school council)

Bitterne Park CE Infant School (interviews E, F and G with headteacher and attendance at staff meeting)

Telephone interview with LEA inspector (interview H)

Photo evidence linked to interviews

External evaluation interviews

NLG Submission document

Scatterplots (appendix 1)

## Appendix 1: Scatterplots

### Southampton Leading for Learning Network

#### Schools visited

Bitterne Park CE Infant School, Bitterne Park Junior School, Kane's Hill Primary School and Moorlands Infant School

The plot in Figure 6 shows how Kane's Hill Primary School (red square) and Bitterne Park Junior School (blue triangle) compare with the rest of the schools (black circles) in the network (n= 4) for Key Stage 2 data.

**Figure 6:** Comparison of three NLC schools by average value-added points score for KS2 results, 2004

#### Value Added by Average Points Score: Key Stage 2 results - 2004

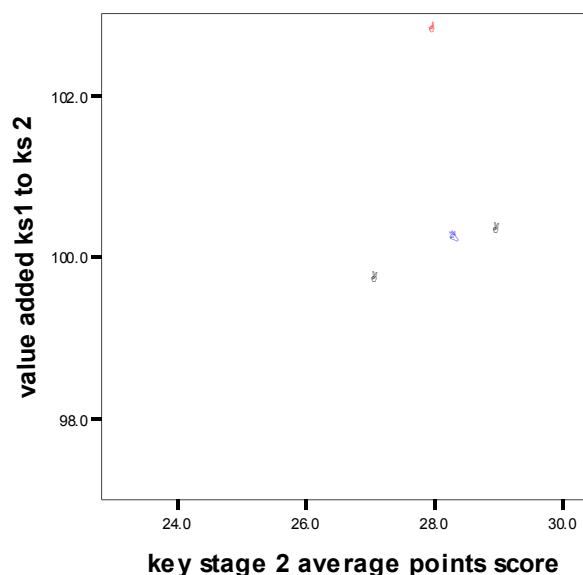


Figure 7 shows how these NLC schools (red) compare to the non-networked schools (blue, n=34) from the same LEA (Southampton).

**Figure 7:** Comparison of NLC and non-NLC schools by average value-added points score for KS2 results, 2004

**Value Added by Average Points Score: Key Stage 2 results - 2004**

